WRITINGS OF P DODDRIDGE

by P. Doddridge

A collection of theological writings, sermons, and essays by P. Doddridge, compiled for study and devotional reading.

44 Chapters

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Chapter 1

01.00. Practical Discourses on Regeneration

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PRACTICAL DISCOURSES ON REGENERATION. BY PHILIP DODDRIDGE, D.D WITH A MEMOIR OF THE AUTHOR.

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INTRODUCTION.

PRACTICAL Discourses on Regeneration are among the most vital wants of this age. Although for the last century much has been written on this great doctrine, nothing has fallen under our observation so popular, so plain, so scriptural, and so practical, as the following production of Dr. Doddridge.

These Discourses were prepared with great care by their excellent author, and delivered on Sabbath evenings to his own flock at Northampton; which embraced, let it be remembered, about forty young men, of his Academy, most of them candidates for the Christian Ministry. They attracted the attention of members of other congregations—"a great many such persons of different persuasions and communions making up a part of the auditory." They were 6attended with uncommon diligence to the last, and long before the series was finished, were earnestly requested for publication. The request grew more importunate at the close. Strangers from a distance joined in it, including several ministers--believing that what had proved so beneficial in the hearing, would be no less so in the reading, both at home and abroad. "I thought myself bound in duty," says Dr. Doddridge, "at length to comply; which I was the rather encouraged to do from the several instances in which I had reason to believe the Divine blessing had in some measure attended these sermons from the pulpit, and had made them the means of producing and advancing the change they described and enforced." This was in 1741. It was the period of the "Great Awakening" under the labors of Whitefield, Edwards, and others in this country, the effects of which were felt so powerfully at the time, in breaking up old systems of formalism, and inveterate habits of ungodliness; and which, with all its incidental excesses and evils, has been the main instrument in moulding the evangelical religion of this land, to this day. The impulse then given, the ideas then set forth, with the demonstration and power of the Spirit of God, are yet at work among us for good. It is well known that Drs. Watts and Doddridge shared in this impulse with a vital sympathy. They were in communication with Edwards for years. Northampton in old England and Northampton in New England, were centres of kindred ideas and feelings. And what was the Great Doctrine, which above all others was made prominent in the preaching of that time of God’s power? What was that fundamental and fruitful Truth, which, before unknown, or inoperative because misunderstood, or neglected, now shook society to its centre, and cleared away old and worthless foundations, in order to rear anew the Spiritual Temple of the Most High? What but this very Doctrine of Regeneration, to the discussion of which the following pages are so wisely and yet so warmly devoted. The same great Truth, which in the age 6of Christ and his Apostles swept away the false hopes of hereditary profession—"the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God"—became again the Ruling Idea of the Age of Revival. So testifies the historian of "The Great Awakening." Speaking of this period he says, "The history of religious opinions and practices shows, that the most important practical idea, which then received increased prominence and power, and has held its place ever since, was the idea of the New Birth." "This doctrine of the New Birth, as an ascertainable change, was not generally prevalent in any communion, when the revival commenced; it was urged as of fundamental importance by the leading promoters of the revival; it took strong hold of those whom the revival affected; it naturally led to such questions as the revival brought up, and caused to be discussed; its perversions grew into, or associated with such errors as the revival promoted; it was adapted to provoke such opposition, and in such quarters, as the revival provoked; and its caricatures would furnish such pictures of the revival as opposers drew."The Great Awakening. By Joseph Tracy, Boston, 1842, p. ix. Preface. When it is said above that the doctrine of the new birth was not generally prevalent in any communion before the beginning of the Great Revival, we must understand that while held as a part of an orthodox creed, it was not generally preached, and consistently applied. In some communions, as, for instance, in the Church of Rome and in the Church of England, the doctrine of Baptismal Regeneration prevailed. In New England the scheme of church membership, called

the "Half-Way Covenant," had been generally adopted, with an effect almost equally fatal. Men of sounder views in Congregational and Presbyterian churches--to say nothing of the Lutheran, and Dutch and German Reformed--found their evangelical teaching on this point unpalatable to those who had been trained to believe that by baptism in infancy they were brought into covenant with God. These and similar causes had lulled conscience asleep as with stupefying opiates, and "the form of godliness" to a great extent had supplanted its "power." The scriptural doctrine of the New Birth struck at the root of all these forms of error. It was mighty through God. It became the leading idea of the age. "Ye must be born again," flashed from every pulpit, and penetrated every heart. This great idea must in like manner take possession of our age, or Formalism will return. It must breathe into our countrymen the breath of a new life, or we shall become like the dry bones in the Valley of Vision. It must be set forth in our pulpits with all possible scriptural plainness; guarded from all perversion, on the right hand and on the left; fortified at every point by the testimony of God; and pressed to its genuine and resistless applications. All this must be done before the Church of Christ can rise again in her original beauty and vigor, or spread to her predestined greatness and glory—as the joy of the whole earth.

J. N. B.

Philadelphia, Dec. 13, 1854.

01.01. Discourse 1

DISCOURSE I. OF THE CHARACTER OF THE UNREGENERATE.

Ephesians 2:1-2. And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins; wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience.

AMONG all the various trusts which men can repose in each other, hardly any appears to be more solemn and tremendous, than the direction of their sacred time, and especially of those hours which they spend in the exercise of public devotion. These seasons take up so small a part of our lives, when compared with that which the labors and recreations of them demand; and so much depends upon their being managed aright, that we, who are called to assist you in the employment and improvement of them, can hardly be too solicitous, that we discharge the trust, in a manner which we may answer to God and to you.

If this thought dwell upon the mind with due weight, it will have some sensible influence upon our discourses to you, as well as on the strain of those addresses which we present to the Throne of Grace in your name, and on your account. We shall not be over-anxious about the order of words, the elegance of expression, or the little graces of composition or delivery; but shall study to speak on the most important subjects, and to handle them with such gravity and seriousness, with such solemnity and spirit, as may, through the Divine blessing, be most likely to penetrate the hearts of our hearers; to awaken those that are entirely unconcerned about religion, and to animate and assist those, who, being already acquainted with it, desire to make continual advances—which will be the case of every truly good man.

It is my earnest prayer for myself, and for my brethren in the ministry of all denominations, that we may, in this respect, approve our wisdom and integrity to God, and commend ourselves to the consciences of all men. 2 Corinthians 4:9. It is our charge, as we shall answer it another day to the God of the spirits of all flesh, to use our prudent and zealous endeavors, to make men truly wise and good, virtuous and happy: but to this purpose, it is by no means sufficient to content ourselves, merely with attempting to reform the immoralities and irregularities of their lives, and to bring them to an external behavior, decent, honorable, and useful. An undertaking like this, while the inward temper is neglected, even when it may seem most effectual, will be but like painting the face of one who is ready to die, or laboring to repair a ruinous house, by plastering and adorning its walls, while its foundations are decayed. There is an awful passage in Ezekiel to this purpose, which I hope we shall often recollect; (Ezekiel 13:10-14) "Wo to the foolish prophets--because they have seduced my people, saying Peace, when there was no peace; and one built up a wall, and lo, others daubed it with untempered mortar: say unto them that daub it with untempered mortar, that it shall fall:—Thus saith the Lord God, I will even rend it with a stormy wind in my fury: and there shall be an overflowing shower in mine anger, and great hailstones in my fury to consume it: so will I break down the wall that ye have daubed with untempered mortar, and bring it down to the ground, so that the foundation thereof shall be discovered, and it shall fall, and ye shall be

consumed in the midst thereof; and ye shall know that I am the Lord."

If there be any, in one body of Christians or another, that abet men's natural disposition to flatter themselves in a way that is not good, by encouraging them to hope for salvation, because they were baptized in their infancy; because they have diligently attended on public worship, or merely because they do nobody any harm, but are rather kind and helpful to others; or because their faith is orthodox, their transports of affection warm, or their assurance confident; I pray God to awaken them by the power of his grace, before they are consumed, with their hearers, in the ruins of their deceitful-building.

Those of you who are my stated hearers can witness for me, that in this respect I have delivered my own soul. Ezekiel 33:9. It has been the steady tenor of my doctrine among you, that our hope and confidence must be in Christ, and not in ourselves; and that, if we desire to be interested in the righteousness he has wrought out, and in the blessings he has purchased by his sacred blood, we must be experimentally acquainted with the work of God's renewing grace upon our souls, curing the inward distempers of our degenerate hearts, and transforming us into the image of his holiness. That is what we are taught in Scripture to call by the name of Regeneration; and considering how much the subject is neglected by some, and I fear I may add, misrepresented and disguised by others, I apprehend I shall profitably employ an evening hour for several succeeding Sabbaths, in giving a larger account than I have yet done, of the scripture doctrine on this important subject and its various parts.

It shall be my care, in the series of these discourses, as God shall enable me, to speak the words of truth and soberness; (Acts 26:27) and I entreat you to have recourse to the law and to the testimony, (Isaiah 8:20,) that ye may judge of the truth and weight of what I say. I desire not to be regarded any farther, than I produce evidence from reason and scripture; but so far as we are disregarded while we have the concurrent testimony of both, our hearers must see to it; and their danger will then be proportionable to the importance of those truths, which their negligence, or their prejudice, engage them either to reject, or to overlook. The plan, on which I intend to proceed in the course of these lectures, is this: I will endeavor to describe the character of those whom we may properly call persons in an unregenerate state. I will describe the nature of that change, which may properly be called regeneration, or conversion. I will show at large the absolute necessity of this change, and the consequent misery of those that are strangers to it. I shall endeavor to prove the reality and necessity of the Divine influences on the mind, in the production of such a change. I shall describe some of those various methods, by which God is pleased to operate in the production of this holy and important work. I shall propose some advice to those who are already awakened, as to the method in which they are to seek renewing and converting grace. After which, I shall conclude these discourses with an address to those who have experienced this happy change, as to the manner in which they ought to be affected with such a series of sermons as this, and the improvement they should make of what they hear and what they have felt agreeable to it.

I should be peculiarly inexcusable, if I entered upon such a subject, without earnest and importunate prayers to the Fountain of light, grace, and holiness, that while you hear of this important doctrine, you may have that experimental knowledge of it, without which such discourses will indeed seem obscure and enthusiastical, according to the degree in which they are rational and spiritual. I shall only add that these lectures will take their rise from a variety of texts,

which I shall not, according to my usual method, largely open and dilate upon, but only touch on them as so many mottoes to the respective sermons to which they are prefixed. As I intend not philosophical essays, but plain, practical, and popular addresses, I shall begin,

First, With describing the CHARACTER OF THOSE WHOM WE MAY PROPERLY CALL UNCONVERTED AND UNREGENERATE PERSONS. It is absolutely necessary that I should do this, that you may respectively know your own personal concern in what is further to be laid before you in the process of these lectures.

Now you have the general character of such, in the words of my text; and a very sad one it is. They are represented, as dead in trespasses and sins, utterly indisposed both for the actions and enjoyments of the spiritual and divine life; as walking according to the course of this world, a sad intimation that it was the state of the generality of mankind; nay, according to the prince of the power of the air, that impure and wicked spirit, who works, or exerts his energy, in the children of disobedience, that is, in those who reject and despise the gospel; in which it is implied, and a dreadful implication it is, that the course and conduct of those, who reject the gospel, is according to the desire and instigation of the prince of darkness: they are going on as the devil himself would have them, and choose that path for themselves, which he chooses for them, as leading them to most certain and most aggravated ruin. And who are these unhappy persons? Surely there must be some of them among us: for who can flatter himself, that in so numerous an assembly, the course of all is different from that of the world: and that all have happily triumphed over the artifices of that accursed spirit, who is, by God's righteous permission, become its prince, while it continues in its apostate state? I shall however think it a very happy point gained, if I could convince any of you, who are justly liable to that conviction, that you are the men; if I could, as it were, render visible to your eyes those subtile, yet strongly complicated chains, in which Satan is binding you, and by which he is drawing you on to eternal ruin; that you might recover yourselves out of the snare of the devil, who are led captive by him at his will.

I am now to describe the character of unregenerate men; but I cannot pretend to do it in all the variety of circumstances which may attend it. I shall therefore mention only some particulars which are most important, and which most certainly demonstrate a person to be of that wretched number. There are a great variety of countenances in the human species; yet the principal features in all are the same, though their proportion and lineaments may differ: and I apprehend, the characters which I am now to lay down, will most of them suit every unregenerate person, though they may appear in various persons in different degrees and different instances. I shall chiefly lay down these characters in negatives, as I apprehend it is the safest way: and would only observe, what you may easily imagine, that I speak only of the adult; for I would cautiously avoid entangling this Discourse with what relates purely to the case of infants, lest Satan should get an advantage over us, and turn that into an occasion to amuse curiosity, which I humbly hope, under the influence of the Spirit of God, will be a means of awakening conviction, and of breaking that delusive peace, in which, like the strong man armed, he keeps his vassals, till the fatal hour come which is to complete their ruin. To waive the formality of labored demonstrations in a case which admits of such easy evidence, I shall go upon this obvious principle in the whole of my reasoning: That to be regenerate, and to be born of God, are in scripture terms of the same import; and consequently, that whatever temper and disposition is in scripture declared to be inconsistent with the character of a child of God, must necessarily denominate a man an unregenerate person. And

one would think this principle could hardly be disputed, since all that allow of regeneration at all, in a Christian sense, seem to understand by it, that change, whatever it is, by which a person is made a child of God, and by consequence an heir of heaven.

Now on this principle, you may take the marks of an unregenerate person in such particulars as these; and let those, whose conscience owns them, hear and tremble.

1. The soul that never seriously inquired into its spiritual state, is, beyond all doubt, an unregenerate soul. The Apostle earnestly presses it upon the Christians to whom he wrote, that they should diligently examine themselves whether they were in the faith; (2 Corinthians 13:5) and he who has entirely neglected to do it, seems to express, not merely a forgetfulness of religion, but even a contempt of it too. Nevertheless, be it known unto you, Sirs, that an humble return to God, and a cordial dedication of soul to his service, is not so slight an act of a man's life, that it should pass without any observation in doing it, or any serious reflection on having done it. Religion is a deliberate thing; it brings a man seriously to consider his ways, that he may turn his feet to God's commandments; (Psalms 119:59) to search and try them, that he may turn again unto the Lord. Lamentations 3:40. A good man is so impressed with the thoughts of God, and of eternity, that perhaps he is rather ready to be over anxiously afraid and suspicious, in a matter of so great importance: and therefore will review on the one hand, the plan of salvation that God has laid down in his word, and on the other, the correspondency to it that he may discover in his own soul; and if there are any of you that have never been thus employed, any that have never separated yourselves awhile from other employments, that you might seek and intermeddle with this Divine wisdom, (Proverbs 18:1) you are assuredly strangers to it. If there are any of you that have never studied God's word, to learn his will from thence; that have never attended to sermons, that you might try yourselves by them, and, if possible, carry home something of the chief of what you hear, to assist your retired, and more diligent inquiries; you may now come to a very quick conclusion, and before you leave this place, yea, before I proceed to any further particulars, you may set it down as the memorable beginning of these lectures, and of this discourse, "I am already proved to be an unregenerate creature: I am in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity." Acts 8:23. Nay, you may add, that there are perhaps thousands of those that are unregenerate sinners, who have not been so careless and so insensible as you. For, indeed, Sirs, a man may begin an examination, and start back from the prosecution of it, before it is brought to any important issue; or trying himself by false characters, he may come to a conclusion, which will be so much the more dangerous, as it has been the more deliberate. For the sake of such therefore, I add,

2. The soul that is not deeply convinced of its guilt before God, and desirous to seek deliverance from it by the Lord Jesus Christ, is still in an unregenerate state.

All the promises of God's paternal favor do certainly imply the promise of forgiveness; and you well know, that these are appropriated to such as humble themselves before God: and that humbling which is merely external, and implies no deep sense of inward guilt can pass for very little with that God, who searches the heart, and tries the reins of the children of men. Jeremiah 17:10. The Scripture assures us, that whosoever believes that Jesus is the Christ, is born of God; (1 John 5:1) and nothing can be more certain from the whole tenor of it, than that he that believes not, shall be damned, (Mark 16:16) and surely a state of damnation is not, and cannot be, a state of regeneration. But what is this faith in Christ? Is it no more than a bare notional persuasion, that he

is the Son of God? If this were all, the devils themselves believe; (James 2:19) and many were the instances, in which you know that they confessed it, and trembled before him. You cannot then be ignorant, that the faith, to which the promises of salvation are made, is a faith, which receives the Lord Jesus Christ in all his offices; which trusts his atonement, as well as admits his revelation; and flies to him for righteousness and life. And how can that man seek righteousness from Christ, who is insensible to his own guilt? or how can he depend on him for life, who is not aware that he is under a sentence of death and condemnation? But imagine not you are secure, because you acknowledge yourselves to be sinners. If that acknowledgment be slight and formal, it shows you are strangers to the operation of that Spirit, whose office it is to convince men of sin. John xvi. 8. If you have not been made sensible of the pollution of your hearts as well as the rebellion of your lives; if you have not received as it were a sentence of death in yourselves, and submitted to that sentence as righteous, though ever so dreadful; if you have not been made to loathe and abhor yourselves, and to repent in dust and ashes; (Job xliii. 5;) if you have not laid your hand on your mouth, (Micah 7:16) and your mouth in the dust, (Lamentations 3:29) crying out, Unclean, unclean, (Leviticus 13:46) and in this sense at least, adopted that pathetic complaint, O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me? (Romans 7:24) it is a certain sign, that sin still reigns in your mortal bodies, (Romans 6:12) and is unto this day bringing forth fruit unto death. Romans 7:5.

3. The soul that is unconcerned about the favor of God, and communion with him, is still in an unregenerate state.

Common reason may tell you, that a soul destitute of the love of God, can never be the object of his complacential regards; and that it is impossible you should love him, while you are unconcerned about his favor, and habitually indifferent to converse with him. You believe there is a God; you acknowledge that he is the great benefactor of the whole world; you know your happiness depends upon his favor; you wish therefore that you may enjoy it; that is, you wish that some way or other you may be happy, rather than miserable. But let conscience say, whether you have ever felt, that in his favor is life; (Psalms 30:5) whether you have ever known what it is to cry out with intenseness and ardor of soul, Lord lift up the light of thy countenance upon me. Psalms 4:6. Alas, Sirs, had you been sons, God would have sent the Spirit of his Son into your hearts; (Galatians 4:6) and if this be not the sincere, if it be not the habitual language of your soul; if you do not thus earnestly desire to live under the manifestations of the divine love, and to be able to say, truly our communion is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ; (1 John 1:3) you are spiritually dead, and under the fatal influences of that carnal mind, which, being enmity against God, (Romans 8:7) engages men to live contented without God in the world, (Ephesians 2:12) so long as their corn and their wine increase. Psalms 4:7. A heart, thus alienated from God, was never savingly turned to him, and can have no just reason to imagine itself the object of his paternal favor.

4. The soul that is destitute of a sincere love to mankind, has reason to consider itself as in an unregenerate state.

You may, perhaps, think it unnecessary to mention this; but the Apostle was undoubtedly a much better judge, and his own words suggest this particular to me: Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth, is born of God, and knoweth God; he that loveth not, knoweth not God, and consequently cannot be born of him; for God is love. 1 John 4:7-8. And our

Lord strongly intimates the same thought, when he exhorts his disciples to the most universal and unlimited benevolence by this argument, that ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven; (Matthew 5:45) plainly implying, that otherwise they could not really be born of God, or claim him for their Father. Regeneration is to form a man for intimate communion with the general assembly and church of the first born, (Hebrews 12:23) and to prepare him for the region of complete and everlasting love; and the first fruits of it are to appear, and to be manifested here. It is a faithful saying, that they who believe in God should be careful to maintain good works; (Titus 3:8) and unfeigned love is to be the root of them; so that if you cannot stand this trial, your religious hopes are all delusive and vain.

Let me entreat you therefore, that you would now look into your lives and hearts. Do any of the malignant passions harbor there? Ask yourselves, "Is there any of my fellow-creatures, whom I wish to see miserable; or would make so, if it were in my power to do it by the secret act of my will, so that no mortal on earth should ever know me to be the cause of the calamity?" If it be so, and this be your settled temper, you hate your brethren and are murderers; (1 John 3:15) and therefore are the children of the devil, who was a murderer from the beginning; and we may thus say of you in the very words of our Lord, who never uttered a rash censure: You are of your father the devil, for his passions you cherish, and his lust you would do. John 8:44. But reflect farther, If you wish others no harm, do you really wish them well? and that so really, and so sincerely, as to be ready to do them good? For merely to say unto them, depart in peace, be warmed and filled, (James 2:16) when you have it in your power to help them, is at once to mock the poor, and to despise him that made him. Proverbs 17:5. You that are conscious of a mean selfish temper, and wrap yourselves up, as it were, in your own separate interests, or in those of your own families, and can feel a concern for no others; you that devise what you may imagine shrewd and prudent things, but none that are liberal and compassionate; you whose eye does not affect your heart, when you see the distresses of your brethren, while you have this world’s good, how dwelleth the love of God in you? 1 John 3:17. How can you imagine you are the children of him, whom you so little resemble?

Nay, permit me to add once more upon this, that if all your compassion is only moved by men’s temporal calamities, and works not in any degree with respect to their spiritual and eternal interests, you have reason to fear, that it is no better than an unsanctified humanity; and indeed, that you never have learnt the worth of your own souls, while you set so little value on the souls of others, even of those, to whom you profess and intend friendship. And this concluding hint is of importance to prevent a dangerous mistake, in which too many good natured sinners are ready to flatter themselves, and in which, perhaps, others are too ready to join in flattering them.

5. He that does not know what it is, to struggle with indwelling sin, and heartily to resolve against indulging it in any kind or degree, is undoubtedly still in an unregenerate state.

You will observe, I do not say, that every one who knows what it is, to feel a struggle in his own mind, when assaulted by temptations to sin, is a truly good man: the contrary is dreadfully apparent. A principle of natural conscience often makes very strong remonstrances against sin, and sends out bitter cries when subjected to its violence; and this is so far from denominating a, man a real Christian, that it rather illustrates the power of sin, and aggravates its guilt. But when a man’s inclinations run entirely one way, and when he gives a swing to his natural passions without

any guard or restraint; when he is a stranger to any inward conflict with himself, and any victory over his own lusts, and his corrupted will; it is a certain sign, he is yet under the dominion of Satan, and is to be numbered among the tamest of his slaves. For they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh, with the affections and lusts; (Galatians 5:24) have learnt to deny themselves, (Matthew 16:24) and to mortify their members upon the earth. Colossians 3:5.

It is also of great importance to add, that there must be a resolution to oppose sin in every kind, and in every degree; for he that is born of God sinneth not; (1 John 5:18) nay, it is elsewhere said, He cannot commit sin; (1 John 3:9) and though it is too visibly true in fact, and apparent from several other passages in the very Epistle whence these words are taken, that this expression is to be interpreted with some limitation; yet the least that it can be imagined to signify is this, that he does not wilfully allow himself in the practice of any sin. He has learnt to hate every false way, and to esteem all God's precepts, concerning all things to be right; (Psalms 119:128) so that upon the whole, if he might have his request, and God would grant him the thing that he longs for, (Job 6:3) it would be this, to sin no more, and get rid of every sentiment, desire, and affection, in any degree contrary to the purity of God's nature and law. If, therefore, there be any of you, that spare one accursed thing, though you should seem eager on destroying all the rest--if it be the secret language of your soul, "There is but one lust that I will indulge; there is but one temptation that I will comply with;" I perceive your hearts are not right in the sight of God; (Acts 8:21) for though you could according to your pretended purpose, keep all the rest of the law, and yet offend in this one point alone, you would, in effect, be a transgressor of all. James 2:10. In short, He that committeth sin is of the devil; (1 John 3:8) but he that is begotten of God, keepeth himself, and that wicked one toucheth him not. 1 John 5:18.

6. He that does not know what it is, to overcome this world, and to place his happiness in another, is yet in an unregenerate state. This is another of those certain marks, which God has given us of his own children. Whatsoever is born of God--as it is very emphatically expressed in the original--overcometh the world. 1 John 5:4. (π■ν το■ γεγεννημε■νον ε■κ του Θεου.) It is not, you see, the extraordinary attainment of a few more eminent Christians; but it is an essential branch of every good man's character; for he is begotten again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, even to the hope of an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away. 1 Peter 1:3-4.

You have reason, therefore, to judge very sadly concerning your state, if you are strangers to this lively hope; which is a very different thing from that hope to be saved, of which some people talk in so indolent, not to say in so profane a manner, as to show, that it is the hope of the hypocrite, which will perish, when God takes away his soul. Job 8:13; Job 28:3. If you are conscious to yourselves, that you mind earthly things, your end will be destruction, (Php 3:19) for having your heart on earth, it is plain your only treasure is here; (Matthew 6:21) and if you govern yourselves by worldly maxims alone, and your great care be to obtain those riches and honors, which the children of the world pursue; if the importance of eternity has never appeared in such a light, as to make you judge everything trifling that can come in competition with it; nay, whatever your views of eternity have been, if you are not practically carrying on a scheme for it: and if you cannot, and do not, deny your worldly interest, when it cannot be secured without hazarding your eternal hopes; it is plain you are friends of the world, in such a sense as none can be, but he must be an enemy of God. James 4:4. If indeed you were dead to the world, and your life hid with Christ in God, you

would set your affections on things above, on those things which are there where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God; (Colossians 3:1-3) but the want of this temper shows that you are carnally minded, which it is death to be; (Romans 8:6) and that the redeeming love of Christ has never exerted its influence upon your souls, nor his cross had any due efficacy upon you; for if it had, the world would have been crucified to you, and you to the world. Galatians 6:14.

7. The soul that does not long for greater improvements in the divine life, is still a stranger to the first principles of it.

You know, that we are called, as Christians, with an high and holy calling; (Php 3:14; 2 Timothy 1:9;) and as he that is the author of this calling is holy, so are we to be holy in all manner of conversation, (1 Peter 1:15) and to be perfect, even as our Father which is in heaven is perfect. Matthew 5:48. Here will therefore be room for improvement, not only during our continuance in the present life, but through all the ages of a glorious eternity; and it is the ardent desire of every good man, that in this sense above all others, his path may be like the shining light, that shineth more and more, until the perfect day. Proverbs 4:18. And this is the one thing that he does, or that in which all his labors centre; being conscious to himself how far he is from having already attained, or being already perfect, forgetting the things that are behind, he reacheth forth unto those things that are before, and presses toward the mark, for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. Php 3:12-14. In this view he seriously considers the circumstances of life in which Providence has placed him; that he may observe the advantages, which these circumstances give him for religious improvements; and it is delightful to him to discover such advantages.

Now if there be any of you, who know nothing of this temper, you are certainly in an unregenerate state; for none can be born of God, that do not love him; and none can truly love him, that do not earnestly desire, more and more to resemble him. So that if your hearts can indulge such a thought as this, "I wish I knew how much religion would be just sufficient to save me, and r would go so far, and stop there;" your conscience must tell you that you secretly hate religion, and are unwillingly dragged towards the form of it, by an unnatural and external violence--the fear of misery and ruin in neglecting it; and that you 48are not actuated by the free and liberal principle of a nature savingly renewed.

8. The soul that does not know what it is, to live by faith in Christ, and in dependence on his Spirit, is still in an unregenerate state.

We are all the children of God, by faith in Christ Jesus, (Galatians 3:26) if indeed we are so at all; and he that is joined to the Lord, in this sense, is one spirit with him. 1 Corinthians 6:17. But if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his, (Romans 8:9) for as God has predestined us to the adoption of children, by Jesus Christ, to himself, (Ephesians 1:5) so of his fullness it is, that all believers do receive, even grace for grace, (John 1:16) or an abundance and variety of grace, by virtue of their union with him, who is the head: from whom the whole body being fitly joined together and strengthened by what every joint supplies, by an energy proportionable to every part, increases to the edifying of itself in love. Ephesians 4:15, Ephesians 4:18.

These things, as you see, are not only hinted in Scripture, but are copiously insisted upon, as very material points; and though I readily acknowledge, good men may apprehend and consider them very differently, and may express those apprehensions in different phrases; yet as experience

makes it plain, that those souls generally flourish most, who have the most distinct conceptions 49of them, and the most habitual regard to them; so I think it is plain from these Scriptures, that there can be no religion at all, where there is a total insensibility of them.

If, therefore there are any of you, that apprehend it is enthusiasm to talk of the assistances of the Spirit; nay, I will add, if there are any of you, that do not earnestly desire these assistances, and do not seek them daily from the hand of Christ as the great covenant head of his people, you are, I fear, strangers to some of the first principles of the oracles of God, (Hebrews 5:12) and are sensual, not having the Spirit. Jude 1:9. And though you may now and then form a hasty, and perhaps a warm resolution in religion, you will quickly, with the proud youth that are conceited of their own sufficiency, faint and be weary, and with the young men you will utterly fail; while they only that wait upon the Lord, shall renew their strength, shall mount up as on eagles' wings, and, pressing on with an unwearied pace, according to the different degrees of vigor which the different parts of their course may require, shall run and not be weary, and shall walk and not faint.Isaiah 40:30-31. In short, if you do not thirst after the water of life, that is, (as the Evangelist himself explains it,) the spirit, which they that believe on Christ shall receive, (John 7:39) however bountiful he is, he makes no promise to impart it to you; and if you never receive it, all your other sources of comfort will soon be dried up, and the miserable condition of the creature, that asked in vain for one drop of water to cool his tormented tongue, (Luke 16:24) will certainly be yours.

Here I apprehend multitudes will miscarry, who have made a fair show in the eyes of men; and if you are condemned by this mark, I am sure you will not be acquitted by any of the preceding. For all the branches of a holy temper have such connection with this, and such a dependence upon it, that a man, who is destitute of this, can have only the semblance of the rest. And thus, I have with all plainness and faithfulness, as in the sight of God, and sensible of my account to him, laid before you a variety of hints, by which I think you may safely and truly judge, whether you be, or be not, in an unregenerate state: and I shall now beg leave to conclude this Discourse with one plain inference from the whole, viz: That BAPTISM IS NOT REGENERATION, in the scriptural and most important sense of the word. To prove this as a corollary from the preceding Discourse, I shall only assume this most reasonable concession, with which you may remember I at first set out: that regeneration, and being born of God, signify the same thing. Now I have shown you from a variety of scriptures, under the former heads, that every one whom the Sacred Oracles represent as born of God receiveth Christ, overcometh the world, and sinneth not. But it is too plain, that these characters do not agree to every one that is baptized: and consequently it evidently follows, that every one who is baptized is not of course born of God, or regenerate; therefore, that baptism is not scriptural regeneration.

I think no mathematical demonstration plainer, and more certain than this conclusion; and therefore, whatever great and ancient names may be urged on the other side of the question, I shall rest the matter here, without leading you into the niceties of a controversy so easily decided. See Postscript, at the end. I would only further observe, that they who most vigorously contend for the other manner of speaking, (for after all it is but a dispute about a word,) acknowledge expressly, that a man may be saved without what they call regeneration, and that he may perish with it. And though persons are taught to speak of their state, in consequence of baptism, in very high, and, I fear, dangerous terms; yet when wise and good men come to explain those terms, it evidently appears, that many of whom they are used, are so in a state of salvation as to be daily

obnoxious to damnation! so the children of God, as also to be the children of the devil! and so inheritors of the kingdom of heaven, as to be children of wrath, and on the brink of hell! Where persons of real piety apprehend themselves under a necessity of using such phrases with respect to all that are baptized, we cannot blame them for endeavoring to bring down their signification as low as possible; but they will, I hope, excuse those who choose to speak, in what they apprehend to be a more scriptural, rational, and edifying language.

It was matter of conscience with me, to state the matter as you have heard. I do therefore earnestly entreat you, my dearly beloved, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, and for the sake of your own immortal souls, that you deceive not yourselves with vain words; but that where your eternal salvation is so plainly concerned, you bring the cause, the important cause, to an immediate trial. And if you are convinced, as I suppose many of you quickly may be, that you are at present dead in trespasses and sins, then let me beseech you to reflect on what the most transient survey of the Scriptures may teach you, as to the danger of such a case. For though it will be my business, in the process of these Discourses, more largely to represent it, when I come to speak of the necessity of the new birth, God only knows, whether your lives may be continued, till we advance so far in the subject: and where a case of this kind is in question, the delay of a week, or even of a day, may be inevitable and eternal ruin.

01.02. Discourse 2

DISCOURSE II. OF THE NATURE OF REGENERATION, AND PARTICULARLY OF THE CHANGE IT PRODUCES IN MEN'S APPREHENSIONS.

2 Corinthians 5:17.

If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature; old things are passed away, behold all things are become new. THE knowledge of our true state in religion, is at once a matter of so great importance, and so great difficulty that, in order to obtain it, it is necessary we should have line upon line and precept upon precept. The plain discourse, which you before heard, was intended to lead you into it; and I question not but I then said enough to convince many, that they were in an unregenerate condition. Nevertheless, as there are various approaches towards regeneration and conversion, which on the whole fall short of it; I think it very expedient now to give you, what I may properly enough call the counterpart of this view; which I shall, by Divine assistance, attempt from the words I have now been reading. The Apostle, who wrote them, was transported to such a zeal for Christ, and for the souls of men, that some thought him beside himself, (2 Corinthians 5:13) and no doubt many would represent him as the greatest enthusiast upon the face of the earth. But as it was a very small thing to him to be judged of man's judgment, (1 Corinthians 4:3) he calmly vindicates himself, by declaring that there was a cause for all this warmth, as the honor of God, and the Redeemer, and the eternal salvation of men, were so intimately concerned in the affair. The love of Christ, says he, constrains us, or, (as the word properly signifies,) it bears us away with it, like a mighty torrent, which we are not able to resist; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead, under the sentence of God's righteous law--or they would not have needed such an atonement as the blood of his Son; and we farther judge, that he died for all, that they who now live, only in consequence of his dying love, should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him that died for them. 2 Corinthians 5:14-15. We therefore live to this Jesus; we consecrate our lives and labors to this purpose; and in consequence of it, we henceforth know no man after the flesh, that is, we do not regard our temporal interests, nor consider how we may 56most effectually obtain the favor and friendship of those who may be useful to us in life; yea, though we have known Christ after the flesh, or have expected a temporal Messiah, who should make our nation triumphant over the Gentiles, and enrich it with the spoils of other nations, yet now henceforth we know him no more under such a character. 2 Corinthians 5:16. And in this respect the same temper will prevail in the heart of every real Christian; and therefore, i. e. in consequence of what was said before of the Redeemer's love, if any man be in Christ, if he be really one of his faithful servants, united to him by a lively faith, and in consequence of that union interested in his salvation, he is a new creature: his views and sentiments, his affections and pursuits, are so entirely changed, that he seems, as it were, to be come into a new world, and to be transformed quite into another person from what he formerly was; old things are passed away, and, behold the astonishing transformation! all things are become new. This is the thought that I am now to illustrate; and you cannot but see, how proper a foundation it will be for our Discourse on, The second general head I proposed, which is, Particularly to describe the nature of that great

change, which passes on every soul, that is truly regenerate, in the scriptural, and most important sense of the word. Some choose to call the change here described, renovation rather than regeneration. I have given my reasons, (in the Postscript,) why I use the words promiscuously: but I shall endeavor, through the whole of these Discourses, so to state the nature of this change, as to have no controversy with good men of any persuasion about anything but the name of it; concerning which, I hope, they will not contend with me, as I am sure I will not quarrel with them And here it may hardly seem necessary to tell you, that I do not mean to assert, that the substance of the soul, and its natural faculties, are in a strict and proper sense changed; a man might as reasonably assert from such a Scripture, that the former body was annihilated, and a new one produced; and common sense and decency will not allow us to imagine, that the Apostle meant anything of this nature, by the general terms he uses here. But the plain meaning is, that when a man becomes a real Christian, the whole temper and character of his mind is so changed, as to become different from that of the generality of mankind, and different from what it formerly was, while in an unenlightened and unrenewed state. It is not merely a little circumstantial alteration; it is not assuming a new name, professing new speculative opinions, or practising some new rites and forms; but it is becoming, as we frequently say, in our usual forms of speech, a different creature or a new man. And thus the sacred writers express themselves in many other passages, which very happily serve to illustrate this. They, in particular, represent God as promising, with relation to this work; (Ezekiel 36:26) a new heart will give them, and a new spirit will I put within them; and I will take away the heart of stone, that stubborn, obstinate, impenetrable disposition they once had, and will give them an heart of flesh, a tender, compliant temper, which shall incline them to submit to my will with humility, and to obey it with delight. And thus, when the apostle had exhorted the Ephesians, (Ephesians 4:22-24) to put off, with respect to their former conversation, the old man, which is corrupt according to its deceitful lusts, he adds, And be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new man, which after God, or in conformity to his image, is created in righteousness and true holiness; which is further illustrated by his important exhortation to the Romans. Romans 12:2. Be not conformed to this world; but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind. And on the same principles, what in one place he calls the new creature, (Galatians 6:15) in another parallel place he expresses, by faith that works by love, (Galatians 5:6) and by keeping the commandments of God; (1 Corinthians 7:19) for all these, as equivalent characters, he opposes to circumcision and uncircumcision, or the mere externals of a religious profession; declaring the utter insufficiency of the latter, and the absolute necessity of the former. The general nature of this change may then be understood by an attentive consideration of such Scriptures as those mentioned above: which indeed contain what is most essential on this subject. But for the more complete illustration of the matter, I shall particularly show you, that where there is reason to speak of a man, as one of those who are in Christ Jesus, or who are truly regenerate, there will be new apprehensions--new affections--new resolutions--new labors--new enjoyments--and new hopes.

Perhaps there are few important branches of the Christian character, which may not be introduced as illustrating one or other of these remarks. The former of them is indeed the foundation of the rest; because, as religion is a reasonable service, all the change which is made in the affections and resolutions, in the pursuits, enjoyments, and hopes of a good man, arises from that different view, in which he is now taught to look on those objects, the nature of which is to direct his choice, to determine his conduct, and regulate his passions; it will therefore be the business of this

Discourse to show you, I. That wherever there is a real principle of regeneration, there will be new apprehensions of things. When God created the natural world, he said, in the very beginning of his work, Let there be light, and there was light. Genesis 1:3. And thus he deals in this new creation, which raises the soul from a chaos, to such a beautiful, well-ordered, and well-furnished frame. God, says the Apostle, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined into our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God, in the face of Jesus Christ; (2 Corinthians 4:6) whereas before, the understanding was darkened, being alienated from the life of God, through the ignorance that was in them, because of the blindness or perverseness of their hearts. Ephesians 4:18.

Now this illumination, of which I am speaking, does not so much refer to a speculative, as to a practical and heart-impressing knowledge. It is true, that when a man once comes to be in good earnest in religion, he generally arrives at a clearer and fuller knowledge, even of the doctrines of Christianity, than he had before: for he then sets himself to inquire with greater diligence, and to seek light of the great Father of Lights with greater earnestness; he gets clear of many evil affections, that put a corrupt bias upon his judgment; and he comes within the reach of those promises, Then shall we know, if we follow on to know the Lord; (Hosea 6:3) and if any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God. John 7:17.

Yet, I think, I may very properly say, that at various times, when our judgment of any object is the same, our apprehensions of it are very different. It is one thing, for instance, to believe that God is the omnipotent, all-wise, and all-gracious governor of the world; and another, and very different thing, to have the heart powerfully impressed with an apprehension of his ability and readiness to help us. I will, therefore, a little more particularly illustrate those respects, in which the apprehensions of such as are really regenerate, differ from those which they formerly had: and I hope you will do yourselves the justice to reflect, as we go along, how far you have ever felt these apprehensions which you hear me describe. I have a pleasing persuasion, that many of you have felt them, in a much livelier manner than they can be described. I would observe then to you, that a regenerate soul has new apprehensions of God--of itself--of Christ—of eternity--and of the way and method that God has marked out for its being happy there.

1. A regenerate soul has new apprehensions of the blessed God.

There are very few who pretend so much as to doubt of the being of a God; and fewer yet, that will venture to deny it. And, even among those who have denied it, and disputed against it, some, by their own confession, have felt their hearts give, them the lie, and upbraid them for using the powers of reason and speech against the Giver and Preserver of both. I persuade myself at least, there are none that hear me this day, who would not look upon a professed Atheist as a monster, unworthy to be a member of human society, and little to be trusted in any of its relations. Yet after all, while the being of the blessed God is warmly asserted, his nature is so little understood and considered, that there are thousands who may still properly be said to be without God in the world, (Ephesians 2:13) or in practice and temper, though not in notion, to be Atheists in it. Wicked men therefore, in general, are described as those that know not God; (2 Thessalonians 1:2) but where God has determined to glorify his mercy in the salvation of a sinner, he shines into the heart, for his blessed purpose, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God. 2 Corinthians 4:6. And thus the glories of the Divine Being are known to the regenerate soul in such a manner, as they

are not to the most acute metaphysician, or the sublimest philosopher, who is himself a stranger to the spiritual life. The person of whom we now speak, has new apprehensions of the spirituality and omnipresence of God,—-of his majesty and purity,—-of his power and patience,—-of his goodness,—-and his intimate access to men's spirits, with the reality and importance of his operations upon them. Permit me a little to represent the views of each, both to direct your inquiries, and also to impress your minds, and my own, with truths in which we have all so intimate a concern. The divine spirituality and omnipresence is apprehended by the good man in a peculiar manner. That there is some immaterial Being, and that matter is moved by his active power continually impressed upon it, according to stated laws, is indeed so plain a dictate of reason, that I question not but the thought influences the minds of some, who have not so much acquaintance with language as to be able properly to express it: but, alas I it easily passes through, as if no way important. It is quite a different thing to feel, as it were, the presence of an infinite, intelligent and all-observing Deity, actually surrounding us in all times and places: to say from the heart, O Lord, thou hast searched me, and known me, so that thou understandeth my thoughts afar off: whither shall I go from thy spirit, or whither shall Iflee from thy presence? Thou hast beset me behind and before, and laid thine hand upon me; (Psalms 139:1-7) to feel, as it were, the hand of God, which indeed we may feel, if we duly attend to it, in all the impressions made on our bodily senses, and on the powers of our mind;—-to feel ourselves even now supported by it, and to argue from the constant support of his hand, the never-failing notice of his eye. He reads my present thoughts; he knows, even now, all the secrets of my soul, and has always known them; has always observed my conduct in even the minutest particular; and recorded, in permanent characters, the whole history of my life, and of my heart; of this depraved, sinful life, of this vain, this treacherous, this rebellious heart. With this conception of the divine observance are closely and intimately connected new apprehensions of the purity of God, and of his infinite majesty; views which mutually assist and illustrate each other. The irreverence with which the generality of men behave in the presence of God, and the easiness with which they admit the slightest temptation to sin against him, plainly show what low notions they have of him; but God does, as it were, appear to the eye of a renewed mind, arrayed in his robes of light and majesty; so that he is ready to cry out, 'I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye seeth thee; (Job 13:5) I see the eternal, self-existent, self-sufficient God, who sits upon the circle of the earth, and the inhabitants thereof are as grasshoppers; who spreadeth out the heavens as a tent to dwell in, and looks down on the nations as the drop of a bucket, and counts them as the small dust of the balance. Isaiah 40:15, Isaiah 40:22. Who would not fear before him? who would not tremble at his presence? (Jeremiah 5:22) who would not revere that God, who is of purer eyes than to behold evil, and cannot look upon iniquity? (Habakkuk 1:13) who cannot be tempted with evil, (James 1:13) but must see it, and hate it, even in all its forms?' And such too are the views it has of his almighty power, that the enlightened mind will further add, 'A God of almighty power, who could speak a whole world into ruin. as he spoke it into existence--who by one single thought, by one silent volition, could easily abase the proudest creature in the universe, must have it in his power to bring me in a moment to the dust of death, and to the flames of hell; to lay me as low in misery, and to hold me as long in it as he should please. This, O my soul, this is the God, against whom such feeble worms as we are daily offending, and whom we madly presume to make our enemy.' This gives the regenerate man a further sense of the patience of God, than ever he had before. Others may look round upon the world, and wonder there is so much penal evil in it; but the renewed soul

wonders there is not a thousand times more. When he sees, how the world lieth in wickedness; (1 John 5:19) when he observes, how poor, impotent mortals are, many of them perhaps, in words blaspheming the God of Heaven; many more of them, most presumptously violating all the plainest and most important precepts of his law; and most of the rest, living in a perpetual forgetfulness of him, as if he were not at all, or were not so considerable as to be any way worth their notice; such an one cannot but wonder, that the Almighty Majesty of Heaven does not in a moment make himself known by the thunder of his power, and confound all their madness and folly, by crushing the world, with its inhabitants, into ruin. He often sees the rising sun, and the descending rain, with astonishment that it should be sent down on such a world as ours.

He has also more affecting views than ever of the Divine Goodness. Most men speculatively believe it; and they take occasion, even from that belief, to affront it; but a good man views it at once as a delightful and a venerable thing: he fears the Lord and his goodness; (Hosea 3:5) and while it encourages him, guilty as he is, to repose himself upon it as his hope, it awakens a generous kind of confusion at the thought of ever having offended him, and fills his very soul with indignation at the thought of repeating such offences. And once more, the regenerate man has quite different notions than before, of the intimate access which God has to the spirits of men, and his power of operating upon them. The greatest part of men indeed consider not, as they ought, how the whole material world perpetually depends upon a Divine agency, and is no other than one grand machine, on which the great artificer continually acts, to make it an instrument of mercy to his sensitive and intelligent creatures. But there are yet fewer, who seriously consider, how entirely the hearts of men are in the hand of the Lord, and how much depends on his influences upon them. Nevertheless, experience teaches the renewed soul, that he is the God of the spirits of all flesh, (Numbers 28:16) and he not only views, but manages them as he pleases. "Lord," does he say, "this spirit of mine is shaded with thick darkness, but thou canst illuminate it; it is diseased, but thou canst cure it; it is unstable as water, (Genesis 49:4) and lighter than a feather, yet thou canst fix and establish it; and whatever thou wouldst have me to be, and to do, for thy glory, and mine own happiness, thou canst work in me both to will and to perform it: (Php 2:13) so that all I need, to the rectitude and felicity of my nature, is only this, that I may have more of thine inward, vital, operative presence." It is not easy to conceive, what efficacy this thought has, for the transformation of the soul. But again, 2. New apprehensions are connected with these sentiments in the regenerate soul, concerning itself, and its own state.

It is surprising to think, how many run through successive years in life, without ever turning the eye of the mind inward, that the soul may survey itself. I speak not of a philosophical survey of the faculties of the mind; which, though indeed in its place it be useful and entertaining, is no more necessary in its refinement to a well-ordered state, than skill in anatomy is to a healthful constitution: but I speak of those views of the mind, which are in the reach of all, how low soever their genius, or their education may have been. As all true happiness is an internal thing, wherever God intends to produce it in the heart of a revolted, corrupted creature, and such, alas! we all naturally are, he leads it into a view of itself; and shows it, if I may be allowed the expression, a mixture of grandeur and misery, that lies within; which yet the greatest part of mankind live and die without ever observing. "I am here," does the awakened creature say, "an intelligent being; far superior to this well-wrought frame of flesh and blood, which God has given me for a little while to command, and which I must quickly drop in the dust; I am made capable of determining my own

choice, of directing my own actions, of judging concerning the importance of ends, and the propriety of means in subserviency to them; and while I see a vast variety of creatures in different forms beneath me, I see no rank of creatures above me, nothing nobler than man, here on earth, where I dwell. Yet I see man, in the midst of his glory, a feeble, dependent, mortal creature, who cannot possibly be his own end, nor can of himself alone, by any means command or ensure his own happiness. Everything tells me, that he is the creature of God; and that it is the greatest honor and felicity, to know, and practically to acknowledge himself to be so: everything tells me, that it is most reasonable, that God, who is the great Original of man, should also be the end of his being; but have I made him the end of mine? My soul, thou art conscious to thyself, thou hast lived in many instances without him in the world. Ephesians 2:12. He has given thee, even in the system of thine own nature, and of the visible beings that are round about thee, compared with his providential interposition in the management of them, the intimations of his holy and righteous will; he has expressed these dictates far more plainly in his written word: and when thou comest to examine them, how art thou condemned by them! When thou comest to think of the spirituality and purity of his being, and his law, how shameful does thy temper, and thy life appear to have been! what an infinite disproportion is there between that, and its perfect rule!

"And whom, oh my soul, hast thou offended? whose law hast thou broken? whose grace hast thou despised? The law, the grace of that eternal God, of whom I have now been hearing; who is here present with me, who is even within me, and who sees, O my heart, more distinctly than thou canst see, all thy guilt, and all its aggravations. Oh Lord! I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes. Job 42:6. I have talked of sin, and of the sentence of God against it, as a thing of course: but oh, my soul, it is thine own concern! The guilt, the stain of sin is still upon thee; the sentence of God is pronounced against thee; and it must be reversed, or thou art undone forever! These irregular habits and dispositions that prevail in thee, must be corrected, or they will prove thy mortal disease, and everlasting torment. Thou art a poor, weak, irresolute creature; the experience of every past day of life, since I began to think of religion at all, proves it; yet thou must, by some means or other, attain to inward strength and inward purity, or thou art lost: and all these great capacities, and glorious faculties, will but make thy ruin so much the more distinguished. Oh how weighty the care! oh how great the charge! What shall I do, that thought, that reason, that immortality, may not be my destruction? Where shall I find a rock, that will be firm enough for my support and safety? Where shall I find the means, to build the fabric of such a happiness as thine, O my soul, must be, if ever I am happy at all?"

Thus does God teach the mind, by its inward reviews and reflections, this important lesson of its own impotence and guilt, of its depravity and ruin; and so prepares it for those new apprehensions of Christ; which I mentioned as the third particular.

3. The regenerate soul has new apprehensions concerning the Lord Jesus Christ, considered as a Mediator in general, and as such a particular Mediator as he is exhibited in the word of God. That affecting view which the regenerate soul has of the majesty, glory, power, and purity of the blessed God, will undoubtedly convince him how unfit he is in himself to appear before his awful presence. He is ready to sink down in the dust at the very thought, and to say, "Who is able to stand before such a great and holy God, as thou art? 1 Samuel 6:20. If I were in all the original rectitude and glory of my nature, I could not do it: how much less, surrounded as I am, with so much guilt, with so much pollution! I need, as it were, a daysman betwixt us, who might lay his hand upon us both,

(Job 9:33) who should transact affairs in my name with God, and bring the peaceful messages of God to me: let such an one speak with me and I will hear; but let not God speak with me, lest I die." Exodus 20:19. And when he comes to take a more near and intimate view of this Mediator which GOD has exhibited in the Gospel, the renewed soul is even charmed and transported with the view: and that Jesus, whose name he before pronounced with so much coldness, that the very mention of it was a kind of profanation, now is regarded by him as the chiefest among ten thousand. Song of Solomon 5:10. He beholds his glory, as that of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. John 1:14. The union of the divine and human nature in the person of Christ, though it appears indeed a mystery, which he cannot fully explain, is nevertheless a glorious certainty, which in the general, he most cordially believes. He sees Emanuel--God dwelling with us in human flesh, and acquiesces in the sight; while the rays of Divine Glory are attempered by passing through the veil, that is to say, his flesh. Hebrews 10:20. He considers Christ as made of God unto him wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption; (1 Corinthians 1:30) and each of these views rejoices him to the very heart. "Ignorant as I am, I shall be taught and instructed by him, that great Prophet, whom God sent into the world; by him, who is incarnate wisdom, as well as incarnate love; whose words resound in the Gospel, and whose Spirit seals the instructions of his word. Guilty as I am, my crimes shall be expiated; for there is redemption in his blood; even the forgiveness of sins; (Ephesians 1:7) there is an everlasting righteousness that he has introduced: and oh, how richly will it adorn my soul! This pollution of mine shall not forever exclude me from a comfortable intercourse with the pure majesty of Heaven; for Christ is come to be my sanctification; and he can cleanse me by his Spirit, and transform me into that divine, delightful image which I have lost. Victorious Lord, how easily canst thou redeem me from that state of servitude, in which I have been kept so long complaining! How easily, and how powerfully, canst thou vindicate me into the glorious liberty of the children of God! Romans 8:21. Blessed Jesus, thou art my light and my strength, my hope and my joy! Thou art just such a Saviour as my necessity requires; thou fillest up all my wants, and all my wishes; thou art all in all to me! I would not be ignorant of thee for ten thousand worlds. I would not live a day, nor an hour, without recollecting who, and what thou art, and maintaining that intercourse with thee, which is the life of my soul."

4. The regenerate soul has also new apprehensions of the importance of eternity, when compared with time and all its concerns.

It is indeed a most pitiable thing, and awakens our astonishment, grief,—and indignation, to observe how the things of this world press down immortal spirits, and reduce them almost indeed to a state of brutality. Most deplorable it is, to see the power and energy of those motives, which are taken merely from this earth, and its little concernments, so that if a man did but know what was the favorite vanity, he might almost predict, from the knowledge of circumstances, how a man’s actions would be ordered; and might almost be sure that he would follow, whithersoever this interest, or that pleasure, this ambitious, or that mercenary view, called him; though all the prospects for an eternal world pleaded the contrary way. Such is the folly and madness that is in men’s hearts while they live; and after that they go down to the dead, (Ecclesiastes 9:3) and spend that immortal duration, which they have despised, in fruitless lamentations. Fatal delusion I which it is the great design of the Gospel to cure. But when a soul becomes wise to salvation, it is taught to look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; because it has now a

full sense of what before it only notionally confessed, that the things which are seen, are temporal; but the things that are not seen, are eternal! 2 Corinthians 4:18. Eternity! it is impossible I should tell you how much an eye, that is enlightened by God, sees, and reads, as it were. in that one word; while one scene beyond another is still opening on the mind, till its sight and its thoughts are swallowed up: and as the creatures are as nothing with respect to God, so all the interests of time, with respect to eternity, appear as less than nothing and vanity. Isaiah 40:17. To be made for an everlasting existence appears in so awful a view, that while it has some pleasing hope, it rejoices with trembling; and every remaining fear, with relation to this great interest, seems a greater evil, than the certainty of any temporal calamity.

I might add upon this head, that the regenerate soul has not only new views of the importance, but likewise of the nature of the invisible and eternal state; and particularly of the nature of the celestial happiness. It does not consider it merely, or chiefly, as a state of corporeal enjoyment, formed to gratify and delight the senses; but as a state of perfect conformity to God, and most endearing intercourse with him; of which, as it begins already by Divine Grace to taste the pleasures, so it most ardently thirsts after them; and would be heartily willing to lose this body forever, and to bid an eternal adieu to every object capable of giving it delight; rather than it would consent to lose, in a perpetual succession of such objects, the sight of the Father of Spirits, and that sensibility of his love, which adds the most substantial solidity, and exalted relish, to every inferior good that can be desired from it.

5. A regenerate man has also new apprehensions of the way which God has marked out to this happiness.

Nothing is more common than for carnal and ignorant men to imagine, that it is a very easy thing to get to Heaven; and upon this presumption, they hew out to themselves cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water; (Jeremiah 2:13) and often live and die with a lie in their right hand. Isaiah 44:20. But the renewed soul, having such awful conceptions of the blessed God, and such apprehensions of the excellency and glory of the heavenly state, as you have heard, deeply feels how absolutely necessary it is, that something of a very great and important change should pass in the mind of that sinful creature, that ever hopes to be a partaker of it. He sees, that it is impossible any external profession, or external rite, should secure so great an end--impossible, that baptism should be regeneration, in that sense in which the Scripture uses the word, or that by this alone, though ever so regularly administered, a man’s eternal happiness should be secured. He sees, that to be associated to this or that party of Christians, to join with established, or with separate churches, and to be ever so zealous for their respective order, worship, and discipline, is a thing quite of foreign consideration here; and that the best, or the worst of men, may be, and probably are, on one side and on another; nay, that ignorance, pride, and bigotry may take occasion from hence to render men farther from the kingdom of God, than any mistake in judgment or practice, on these disputed points, could have set them.

No, my brethren, when a man’s eyes are enlightened by God’s renewing Spirit, he sees and feels that, in the language of Scripture, he must be created anew in Christ Jesus; (Ephesians 2:10) he sees, that holiness is a character without which no man shall see the Lord; (Hebrews 12:14) and he is perhaps little anxious, whether this, or the faith that produces it, shall be called a condition, or a qualification, or an instrument, while he sees he must perish without it: he sees, that as it is

absolutely necessary, so it is very extensive, as the commandment, which is its rule, is exceeding broad: (Psalms 119:96) he sees, that it must not only effectually regulate the actions of his life, but control all the sentiments of his heart: nay, he sees it must not only be submitted to as a necessary, but be chosen as a most amiable thing: and, accordingly, he does choose it as such. The unregenerate soul, when he hears of repentance and reformation, though he understands not half that it means, nor is aware of what will, in fact, be the greatest difficulty of it, looks upon it at best as a nauseous medicine, which he must take, or die: but the regenerate man finds his heart so wonderfully and so happily changed, that he regards it for itself, as the food, the health, and the life of his soul; as that which necessarily brings its own pleasures, and, in a considerable degree, its own reward along with it; so that now, as David beautifully expresses it, He openeth his mouth, and panteth, because he longs for God's commandments. Psalms 119:131. And I will add once more, the good man is also made sensible of the place which faith and holiness hold, in the scheme which God has laid, for our justification before him, and our acceptance with him. I do not say that all Christians conceive of this with equal perspicuity, or express their conceptions with equal exactness: the most candid allowance should here be made for the different ideas they fix to the same phrases, as they have been used to look upon them with veneration, or with suspicion. But this I will venture to say, because I am persuaded the Scripture will bear me out in it--that the confidence of a regenerate soul is not fixed on his own holiness, or faith, as the meritorious cause of his acceptance with God. He is deeply and cordially sensible, that he is made accepted in the Beloved; (Ephesians 1:6) and seeing nothing but guilt, and weakness, and ruin in himself, he ascribes to the blessed Jesus, and to the riches of God's free grace in him, his righteousness, his strength, and his salvation. And where a man is thus persuaded, I think he must, in effect, believe, even though he might scruple in words expressly to own it, "that Christ as our great Surety having perfectly obeyed the law of God himself, and by his blood having fully satisfied the Divine Justice for the breach of it, we, on our believing in him by a vital faith, are justified before God by the imputation of his perfect righteousness." This latter way of stating it, when rightly explained, appears just equivalent to the former; and it is a manner of conceiving and expressing it, which, when rightly understood, seems extremely suitable to that deep humility, and poverty of spirit, to which the renewed soul is brought, when, like a new-born babe, it desires the sincere milk of the word, that it may grow thereby. 1 Peter 2:2. But as the mind, at such a time, finds little inclination to contend about words and phrases, it would be much less proper for me, to enter into any controversy about them here.

Let it suffice for the present, that I have given you this plain representation of that change, which is wrought in a man's apprehensions, when he is made a new creature. When old things are passed away, he has new apprehensions of God, of himself, of Christ, of eternity, and of the way to obtain the happiness of it: and as at this happy time all things are become new, there are, "new affections, new resolutions, new labors, new enjoyments, and new hopes," which are the result of the change already described. But it will be much more difficult to reduce what I have to offer on these heads, within the bounds of the next Discourse, than proper to attempt any of them in this. Go home, my friends, and try yourselves by what you have al. ready heard; and be assured, that if you are condemned by this part of the description, it is impossible you should be approved by any that will follow; since they have all their foundation in this.

01.03. Discourse 3

DISCOURSE III. OF THE NATURE OF REGENERATION, WITH RESPECT TO THE CHANGE IT PRODUCES IN MEN'S AFFECTIONS, RESOLUTIONS, LABORS, ENJOYMENTS AND HOPES.

2 Corinthians 5:17.

If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature; old things are passed away, behold, all things are become new.

AMONG the various subjects, which exercise the thoughts and tongues of men, few are more talked of than Religion. But it is melancholy to think how little it is understood; and how much it is mistaken and misrepresented in the world. The text before us gives us a very instructive view of it: such a view, that I am sure, an experimental knowledge of its sense would be infinitely preferable to the most critical and exact knowledge of all the most curious passages, both of the Old Testament, and the New. From it, you know, I have begun to describe that great change, which the word of God teaches us to represent under the notion of regeneration, or, according to the language of St. Paul, in this passage of his writings, by a new creation. I know I am explaining it to many, who have been much longer acquainted with it than myself; and it becomes me to believe, to many that have attained much higher advancement in it: but I fear also at the same time, I speak of it to many, who are yet strangers to it; and I am laboring, by the plainest addresses that I can, to give them at least some just ideas of it. Oh, that to all the descriptions that either have, or shall be given, God may, by his grace, add that understanding which arises from feeling correspondent impressions on the mind!

I have already endeavored to illustrate those new apprehensions, which arise in the regenerate mind; apprehensions of the blessed God, of itself, of Christ, of the eternal world, and of the way to obtain the happiness of it. It now remains, that I consider those "new affections, resolutions, labors, enjoyments, and hopes," which result from them. I observe, therefore, II. That these new apprehensions will be attended with new Affections.

I readily acknowledge, that the degree in which the affections operate, may, and will be different, in different persons, according to their natural constitution: but, as in some degree or another, they make an essential part of our frame, it is impossible but they must be impressed with a matter of such infinite importance, as religion will appear. And the apprehensions described above, must awaken the exercise of correspondent affections, and direct them to objects very different from those by which they were before excited, and on which they were fixed. And here now, 1. This may be especially illustrated in love.

Love is indeed the ruling passion of the mind, and has all the rest in an avowed and real subjection to it. And here lies the very root of human misery in our fallen and degenerate state: we are naturally lovers of ourselves in a very irregular degree--lovers of pleasures, more than lovers of God. 2 Timothy 3:4. But, on the contrary, the first and great commandment of the law is written in the breast of every regenerate man: thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with

all thy soul, and with all thy mind. Matthew 22:37-38. It is true, indeed, that if his soul were perfectly delivered into this mould, and his attainments in Divine love were complete, there would be an end of all sin, and almost of all calamity too: for what evil could assail or impress a mind entirely and unchangeably fixed upon God?

Yet that the love of God should be the prevailing affection, is not merely a circumstance, but an essential part of true religion. While the good man sees Him who is invisible, (Hebrews 11:26) as infinitely perfect in himself, and as the author of being and happiness to the whole creation, he cannot but acknowledge, that he is, beyond comparison, the most amiable of all objects. And though it is certain, that nothing can so much induce and inflame our love to God, as a well-grounded assurance, that he is become our God, and our Father in Christ; yet before the regenerate soul has attained to this, a sense of those favors which he received from God in common with the whole human race, and more especially of those which are inseparable from a Christian community, together with the apprehension of his being accessible through the Mediator, and reconcilable to sinful men, will diffuse some delightful sense of God over the mind; which will grow sweeter in proportion to the degree in which his own hopes brighten and settle, while they are growing toward the full assurance of faith. And as the real Christian loves him that begat, he loves him also that is begotten of him. 1 John 5:1. He loves the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity, (Ephesians 6:24) viewing him not in a cold and insensible manner, as he once did, but with inflamed affection, as the chiefest among ten thousand, and altogether lovely. Song of Solomon 5:10, Song of Solomon 5:16. If he knows, in any degree, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, (2 Corinthians 8:9) in becoming incarnate for the salvation of his people, in making himself a sacrifice for their sins, and paying his life for the ransom of their lives; he feels himself drawn toward Jesus, thus lifted up on the cross; (John 12:32) and the love of Christ constrains him, (2 Corinthians 5:14) to such a degree, that he longs to find out some acceptable method to express his inward and overbearing sense of it. How divided soever true Christians may be in other respects, they all agree in this, in loving that Jesus whom they have not seen. 1 Peter 1:8.

We may further recollect on this head, that the Apostle, in a solemn manner, adjures Christians by the love of the Spirit; (Romans 15:30) thereby plainly implying, that such a love to him is an important branch of their character: and it must be so in all those who regard him, as every regenerate soul does, as the author of divine light and life, and as the source of love and happiness, by whom this love of God is shed abroad in the heart, (Romans 5:5) while it is enlarged with sacred delight to run the way of his commandments: (Psalms 119:32) as that Spirit, by whom we are sealed to. the day of redemption, (Eph. ix. 30,) and who brings down the foretastes of Heaven to the heart in which he dwells, and which, by his presence, he consecrates as the temple of God. 1 Corinthians 3:16. And most natural is it, that a soul filled with these impressions and views should overflow with unutterable joy, and feeling itself thus happy in an intercourse with its God, should be enlarged in love to man: for, says the Apostle, ye are taught of God to love one another. 1 Thessalonians 4:9. Those whom he apprehends as his brethren by regenerating grace, he knows are with him beloved of the Lord; and as he hopes to dwell with them for ever in glory, he must love them so far as he knows them now. And though a narrow education, and that bigotry, which sometimes conceals itself under very honorable and pious names, may perhaps influence even a sanctified heart, so far as to entertain unkind suspicions as to those, whose religious sentiments may differ from his own, and it may be, to pass some rash censures upon them; yet as

his acquaintance with them increases, and he discerns, under their different forms, the traces of their common Father, his prejudices wear off, and that sometimes by very sensible degrees; and Christians receive one another, as Christ has received them all. Romans 15:7. And where the good man cannot love others with a love of complacency and esteem, he at least beholds them with a love of compassion and pity; and remembers the relation of fellow-creatures, where he sees no reason to hope that they are fellow-heirs with him. In a word, the heart is melted down into tenderness; it is warmed with generous sentiments; it longs for opportunities of diffusing good of all kinds, both temporal and spiritual, wide as its influence can reach; it beats with an ardor, which sometimes painfully recoils upon a man's self, for want of ability to help others in proportion to his desire to do it; and that God, who knows all the inmost workings of his mind, hears many an importunate intercession for others in the hour of solemn devotion, and many a compassionate ejaculation, which he is occasionally sending up to Heaven from time to time, as he passes through so sinful and so calamitous a world.

These are the ruling affections in the heart of a good man; and though it is neither reasonable nor possible, that he should entirely divest himself of self-love, yet he endeavors to regulate it so, that it may not interfere with the more important consideration of general good. Self has the lowest place in his regards, nor does he limit his affection to a party; but aiming at extensive usefulness, he guards against those immoderate attachments to particular friendships, and those extravagant sallies of personal fondness, which are often no more than self-love under a specious disguise; which at once alienate the heart from God, and contract the social affections within very narrow, and those very irregular bounds; and so prove almost as fatal to the health of the mind, as an excessive flow of blood into one part would be to that of the body.

I have enlarged so copiously on this change in the leading affections of the mind, that I must touch in a more transient manner on the rest. I add, therefore, 2. That a regenerate soul has new aversions.

He once hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the Lord. Proverbs 1:29. He hated the light, (John 3:20) which disclosed to the aching eye of his conscience the beloved and indulged irregularities of his heart. He hated everything that laid an embargo upon his lusts; and was ready to count those for his enemies that plainly admonished him, and secretly to dislike those whose conduct even silently reproved him. But now all these things are amiable to him; and those are esteemed his most valuable friends, whose example may be most edifying, whose instructions may be most useful, and whose admonitions may be most faithful. For he now hates every false way; (Psalms 119:104) yea, and every vain thought too. Psalms 119:113. He looks upon every irregular desire as an enemy, which he longs utterly to subdue; and especially strives against that sin which does most easily beset him, and abhors it more than he ever delighted in it. And though he rather pities than hates the persons of the most wretched and mischievous transgressors, yet he can no longer continue an endearing friendship with those, who were once his seducers to sin, and his companions in it. In this sense, like David, he hates the congregation of evil-doers, and will not sit with the wicked; (Psalms 26:5) and if they will not be wrought upon by his compassionate endeavors to reclaim them, he will soon break off the infectious intercourse, and say, Depart from me ye evil-doers, for I determine that I will keep the commandments of my God. Psalms 119:115.

3. The regenerate man has also new desires.

There was a time, when sinful passions, as the Apostle expresses it, did work in his members to bring forth fruit unto death. Romans 7:5. He was fulfilling the desires of the flesh, and of the mind, (Ephesians 2:3) and making provisions to fulfil the lusts of both. Romans 13:14. But now he earnestly desires a conformity to God, as his highest happiness; and can look up to him, and say, "O Lord, the desire of my soul is to thy name, and to the remembrance of thee; (Isaiah 26:8) to maintain such a sense of thy presence at all times, as may influence my heart to think, my lips to speak, and my hands to act, in a manner suitable to that remembrance, and agreeable to thy wise and holy will." He now hungers and thirsts after righteousness; (Matthew 5:6) feels as real an appetite after more advanced degrees of piety and holiness, as he ever felt toward the gratification of his senses; and esteems the proper methods of attaining these advanced degrees, even more than his necessary food. Job 23:12. Instead of desiring to run through a long course of animal enjoyments, he desires to get above them; longs to be a pure and triumphant spirit in the refined regions of immortality; and is willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord. 2 Corinthians 5:8. But I waive the farther illustration of this, till I come to consider the new hopes which inspire him. I therefore add, as a necessary consequence of these new desires, 4. That the regenerate man has new fears.

Pain and sorrow, disappointment and affliction, he naturally feared; and the forebodings of his own mind would sometimes awaken the fears of future punishment, according to the righteous judgment of an offended God: but now he fears not merely punishment, but guilt; fears the remonstrance of an injured conscience; for he reverences conscience as God’s vicegerent in his bosom. He therefore fears the most secret sins, as well as those which might occasion public disgrace; yea, he fears, lest by a precipitate and inconsiderate conduct he could contract guilt before he is aware. He fears, lest he should inadvertently injure and grieve others, even the weakest and the meanest. Hte fears using his liberty, in a manner that might ensnare his brethren, or might occasion any scandal to a Christian profession: for such is the sensibility of his heart in this respect, that he would be more deeply concerned for the dishonor brought to God, and the reproach which might be thrown on religion by any unsuitable conduct of his, than merely for that part of the shame that might immediately and directly fall upon himself. But again, 5. The regenerate man has new joys.

These arise chiefly from an intercourse with God through Jesus Christ; and from a review of himself, as under the sanctifying influences of his grace, and as brought into a state of favor with him, in proportion to the degree in which he can discern himself in this character and state.

You know David, speaking of God, calls him his exceeding joy; (Psalms 43:4) and declares the gladness he had put into his heart, by lifting up the light of his countenance upon him, to be far beyond what they could have, whose corn and wine increased. Psalms 4:6-7. And the Apostle Paul speaks of Christians, as joying in God through Jesus Christ, (Romans 5:11) and as rejoicing in Christ Jesus: (Php 3:3) and Peter also describes them as those, who, believing in him, though unseen, rejoice with joy unspeakable, and full of glory. 1 Peter 1:8.

Perhaps there was a time, when the good man censured all pretences of this kind, now at least in these latter days of Christianity, as an empty, enthusiastic pretence; but since he has tasted that the Lord is gracious, (1 Peter 2:3) he has that experimental knowledge of their reality and excellence, which he can confidently oppose to all the most artful and sophistical cavils; and could

as soon doubt, whether the sun enlightens his eyes, and warms his body, as he could question, whether God has ways of manifesting himself to souls, when it is felt with unutterable delight: and when thus entertained, he can adopt David's words, and say, that his soul is satisfied as with marrow and fatness, so that with joyful lips he praises God, (Psalms 63:5) when his meditation of him is thus sweet, (Psalms 104:34) and God says unto his soul, I am thy salvation. Psalms 35:3. The survey of the Lord Jesus Christ gives him also unutterable joy; while he reflects on that ample provision, which God has made by him, for the supply of all his necessities; and that firm security which is given to his soul by a believing union with Christ; whereby his life is connected with that of his Saviour. In his constant presence, in his faithful care, he can boast all the day long; (Psalms 44:8) and that friendship, which establishes a community of interest between him and his Lord, engages him to rejoice in that salvation and happiness, to which he is advanced at the right hand of God, and gives him, by joyful sympathy, his part with Christ in glory, before he personally arrives at the full possession of it. John 14:28; Ephesians 2:6.

I add, that he also rejoices in the consciousness of God's gracious work upon his own soul, so far as he can discern the traces of it there. He delights to feel himself, as it were, cured of the mortal disease with which he once saw himself infected; to find himself in health and vigor of mind, renewed to a conformity with the Divine Image. He delights to look inward, and see that transformation of soul, which has made the wilderness like the garden of the Lord, (Isaiah 51:3) so that instead of the thorn there shall come up the fir-tree, and instead of the brier, the myrtle. Isaiah 55:13. Thus the good man is satisfied from himself: (Proverbs 14:14) and though he humbly refers the ultimate glory of all to that God, by whose grace he is what he is, (1 Corinthians 15:10) he enters with pleasure into his own mind, and reckons it a part of gratitude to his great Benefactor, to enjoy with as high a relish as he can, the present workings of divine grace within him, as well as the pleasing prospect of what it will farther do. But this head has so near a resemblance to some that are to follow, that were I to enlarge upon it, as I easily might, I should leave room for nothing different to be said upon them. I will only add, 6. That as the counterpart of this, new sorrows will arise in the mind of a regenerate man.

These are particularly such as spring--from the withdrawings of God's presence--from the remains of sin in the soul--and from the prevalence of it in the world about him. The regenerate man will mourn, when the reviving manifestations of God's presence are withdrawn from his soul. It seems very absurd to interpret the numberless passages in the sacred writers, in which they complain of the hidings of God's face from them, as if they merely referred to the want of temporal enjoyments, or to the pressure of temporal calamities. If the light of God's countenance, which they so expressly oppose to temporal blessings, signify a spiritual enjoyment, the want of it must relate to spiritual desertion. And I believe there are few Christians in the world, who are entirely unacquainted with this. They have most of them their seasons, when they walk in darkness, and see little or no light: (Isaiah 50:10) and this not only when anxious fears arise with relation to their own spiritual state; but at some other times, when, though they can in the main call God their father, yet he seems, as it were, to stand afar off, and to continue them at a distance, which wears the face of unkindness, especially under temptations and other afflictions, in which they lose their lively sense of God's presence, and that endearing freedom of converse with him, which, through the influence of the Spirit of adoption on their souls, they have sometimes known. If this be mysterious and unintelligible to some of you, I am heartily sorry for it; but I do not remember that I

was ever intimately acquainted with any one, who seemed to me a real Christian, that has not, upon mentioning the case, acknowledged, that he has felt something of it. At least I will boldly venture to say this, that if you are truly regenerate, and do not know what I mean by it, it is because you have hitherto been kept in a continual flow of holy joy, or at least in a calm and cheerful persuasion of your interest in the Divine favor: and even such may see the day, when strong as their mountain seems to stand, God may hide his face to their trouble: (Psalms 30:7) or, however, they will infer from what they now feel, that it must be a mournful case whenever it occurs; and that sorrow, in such circumstance, will soon strike on a truly sanctified heart, and wound it very deep. The sorrow of a good man also arises "from the remains of sin in his soul." Though he is upright before God, and proves it by keeping himself from his iniquity; (Psalms 18:23) yet he cries out, Who can understand his errors? Psalms 19:12. Who can say I have made my heart clean, I am pure from my sin? Proverbs 20:9. A sense of the sinfulness of his nature humbles him in the dust; and the first risings of irregular inclinations and passions give him a tender pain, with which a carnal heart is unacquainted, even when sin is domineering within him. And once more, "The prevalence of sin in the world around him," is a grief to one that is born of God. It pierces him to the heart to see men dishonoring God, and ruining themselves: he beholds transgressors, as David well expresses it, with a mixture of indignation and sorrow; (Psalms 139:21) and when he seriously considers how common, and yet how sad a case it is, he can perhaps borrow the words of the same prophet, so far as to say, that rivers of waters run down his eyes, because men keep not the law of God. Psalms 119:136. Now, as these are sorrows that seldom do at all affect the heart of an unregenerate man, I thought it the more proper to mention them, to assist you in your inquiries into your own state.

Such are the affections of love and aversion, of desire and fear, of joy and sorrow, which fill the breast of the regenerate man, and naturally arise from those new apprehensions which are described under the former head. I add, III. That he has also new RESOLUTIONS.

You will easily apprehend I speak of those that are formed for the service of God, and against sin. I readily acknowledge, that there are often, in unregenerate men, some resolutions of this kind, and perhaps those very warm, and for the present very sincere; yet there is considerable difference between them and those we are now to represent; as the resolutions of the truly good man are more universal, more immediate, and more humble.

1. The resolutions which he now forms, are more universal than they ever were before.

He does not now resolve against this or that sin, but against all; against sin, as sin; as opposite to the holiness of God, and destructive of the honor and happiness of the rational creation. He does not say with Naaman, concerning this or that more convenient iniquity, the Lord pardon thy servant in this thing; (2 Kings 5:18 nor does he resolve to excuse himself in an indulgence, even of that sin which does most easily beset him; (Hebrews 12:1) but rather, in his general determination against sin, and in those solemn engagements, with which such determinations may be attended, he fixes especially upon those sins which he might before have been most ready to accept.

2. The resolutions of the regenerate man are more immediate.

It very frequently happens, that while others are under awakening impressions, as they see a necessity for parting with their sins, and engaging in what they may call a religious life, they

resolve upon it: but then they think it may be delayed a little longer; perhaps a few years, or at least a few weeks or days; or they, perhaps, refer it to some remarkable period which is approaching, which they flatter themselves they shall make yet more remarkable, as the era of their reformation: but, in the mean time, they will take their farewell of their lusts by a few more indulgences: and thus they delude themselves, and rivet their chains faster than before. But the good man, with David, makes haste, and delays not to keep the commandments of God. Psalms 119:60. He is like the prodigal, who, as soon as ever he said, I will arise and go to my father, immediately arose and came to him. Luke 15:18, Luke 15:20. He reckons the time he has already spent in the service of sin may suffice, (1 Peter 5:3) and that indeed it is far more than enough: he wishes he could call back that which is past; but he determines, that he will not take one step further. in this unhappy path. He fully purposes, that he will never once more deliberately and presumptuously offend God, in any matter, great or small; if anything can be called small, which is a deliberate and apprehended offence; and he determines, that from this moment he will yield himself to God, as alive from the dead, and employ his members as instruments of righteousness. Romans 6:13. But then, 3. His resolutions are more modest and humble than they have ever been before. And this indeed is the great circumstance that renders them more effectual. When an awakened sinner feels himself most enslaved to his vices, he pleases himself with this thought, that there is a secret kind of spring in his mind, which, when he pleases to exert, he can break through all at once, and commence, whenever the necessity comes upon him, a very religious man in a moment. And when conscience presses him with the memory of past guilt, and the representation of future danger, he cuts off these remonstrances with a hasty resolve, "I will do so no more;" but then, perhaps, the effects of this may not last a day; though possibly it may, at other times, continue a few weeks or months, where the grosser acts of sin are concerned: and indeed his resolutions seldom reach farther than these; for the necessity of a sanctified heart is a mystery which he has never yet learned. But a truly regenerate man has learned wisdom from this experience of his own, and the observation of other men’s frailty. He feels his own weakness, and is so thoroughly aware of the treachery of his own heart, that he is almost afraid to express in words the purpose which his very soul is forming: he is almost afraid to turn that purpose into a vow before God, lest the breach of that vow should increase his guilt: but this he can say, with repenting Ephraim, Lord turn thou me, and I shall be turned; (Jeremiah 31:18) and with David, Hold up my goings in thy paths, that my footsteps may not slip. Psalms 17:5. "I am exceeding frail; but, Lord, be thou surety for thy servant for good, (Psalms 119:122) and then I shall be safe! Do thou rescue me from temptations, and I shall be delivered! Do thou fill my heart with holy sentiments, and I will breathe them out before thee! Do thou excite and maintain a zeal for thy service, and then I will exert myself in it!" And when once a man is come to such a distrust of himself; when, like a little child, he stretches out his hand to be led by his heavenly Father, and trusts in his guardian care alone for his security and comfort; then out of weakness he is made strong, (Hebrews 11:34) and goes on safe though trembling; and sees those that made the loudest boasts, and placed the greatest confidence in themselves, falling on the right hand and on the left, and their bravery melting away like snow before the sun.

IV. The regenerate man has new LABORS and EMPLOYMENTS. Not that his former employment in secular life is laid aside: it would ordinarily be a very dangerous snare for a man to imagine that God requires this. On the contrary, the Apostle gives it in charge to Christian converts, that in what calling soever a man is found when he is called into the profession of the Gospel, he should

therein abide with God. 1 Corinthians 7:20, 1 Corinthians 7:24. But when he becomes a real Christian he prosecutes this calling, whatever it be, with a new spirit and temper, from new principles, and to new purposes. While his hands are laboring in the world, his heart is often rising to God; he consecrates his work to the Divine honor, and to the credit of religion; and desires, that his merchandise and his gain may, in this sense, be holiness to the Lord, (Isaiah 23:18) by employing it to support the family which Providence has committed to his charge, (1 Timothy 5:8) and to relieve the poor whom Christ recommends to his pity; (Acts 20:35) and as he depends upon God to give him wisdom and success ii. the conduct of his affairs, he ascribes the glory of that success to him; not sacrificing to his own net, nor burning incense to his own drag. Habakkuk 1:16. And I will further add, that regeneration introduces a set of new labors, added to the former, with which the man was before utterly unacquainted. We may consider, as the principal and chief of these, the great labor of purifying the heart, of conquering sinful inclinations, and affections, and of approaching God by a more intimate access and more endeared converse. Now they that imagine this to be an easy matter, know little of the human heart, little of the spirituality of God’s nature, and his law.

Give me leave to say, that the labors of the body, in cultivating the earth, are much more easily performed than this spiritual husbandry. To weed a soil so luxuriant in evil productions, and to raise a plentiful harvest of holy affections and actions in a soil so barren of good; to regulate appetites and passions so exorbitant as those of the human heart naturally are, and to awaken in it suitable affections; to be abundant in the fruits of righteousness, and to converse with God in the exercise of devotion: these are no little things; nor will a little resolution, watchfulness, and activity suffice, in order to the discharge of such a business. It is comparatively easy to go through the forms of prayer and praise, whatever they are: to read, or from present conception to utter, a few words before God: but to unite the heart in God’s service, to. wrestle with him for a blessing, to pour out the heart before him, to speak to him as searching the very heart; so that He should say, "This is prayer:" this, my brethren, is a work indeed; and he that is conscientious in the discharge of it will find, that it is not to be dispatched in a few hasty moments, nor without serious reflection, and a resolute watch maintained over the spirit.

New labors also arise to the regenerate soul, in consequence of the concern it has to promote religion in the world. Being possessed, as I formerly showed you the heart of the good man is, 105with an unfeigned love to his fellow-creatures, and knowing of how great importance religion is to the happiness of men, he pleads earnestly with God for the propagation and success of the Gospel: and he endeavors, according to his ability and opportunity, to promote it; to promote pure and undefiled religion in his family and his neighborhood, even in all around him. And this requires observation and application, that this attempt may be prudently conducted, and great resolution, in order to its being rendered effectual: it requires great diligence in watching over ourselves, lest our examples prove inconsistent with our precepts; and no small degree of courage, considering how averse the generality of mankind are to admonitions and reproofs; in consequence of which, a person can hardly act the part of a faithful friend, without exposing himself to the hazard of being accounted an enemy.

Such are the new labors of the real Christian. Let any man try to perform them, and he will not find them light; but to encourage the attempt, let me further add, V. That the regenerate soul has its new ENTERTAINMENTS too.

He has pleasures, which a stranger intermeddles not with, (Proverbs 14:10) and which the world can neither give, nor take away: (John 16:22) pleasures, which a thousand times overbalance the most painful labors, and the most painful sufferings too; and which, sweetly mingling themselves with the various circumstances of life, through which the Christian passes, do, as it were, gild all the scene, and make all the fatigues and self-denial of his life far more agreeable, than any of those delights the worldling, or the sensualist, can find in the midst of his unbounded and studied indulgences. But here I shall be in great danger of repeating what I said under a former head, when I was speaking of the new joys which the Christian feels, in consequence of the great change that regeneration makes in his soul: and therefore, omitting what I then observed, concerning the pleasure of communion with God through Christ, and of perceiving a work of Divine grace upon the soul, I shall now touch upon some other sources of exalted entertainment, which did not so directly fall under that head.

1. The Christian finds new pleasures in the word of God.

You know with what relish the saints of old spake of it. Thy words were found, says the Prophet, and I did eat them; and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart. Jeremiah 15:16. Thy statutes, says the Psalmist, are more to be desired than gold, yea, than much fine gold: they are sweeter also than honey, and the honeycomb. Psalms 19:10. The apostle Peter beautifully represents this, when he exhorts the saints to whom he wrote, as new-born babes to desire the sincere milk of the word, that they might grow thereby. 1 Peter 2:2. And the infant that smiles on the breast, and with such eagerness and delight draws its nourishment from it, seems an amiable image of the humble Christian, who receives the kingdom of God, and the word of that kingdom, as a little child; (Mark 10:15) who lays up Scripture in his heart, (Job 22:22) and draws forth the sweetness of it, with a firm persuasion, that it is indeed the word of God, and was appointed by him for the food of his soul.

2. He also finds new pleasures in the ordinances of Divine worship.

He is glad when it is said unto him, Let us go into the house of the Lord. Psalms 122:1. He indeed esteems the tabernacles of the Lord, as amiable, and regards a day in his courts as better than a thousand elsewhere. Psalms 84:1, Psalms 84:10. And this pleasure arises, not merely from anything peculiar in the administrations of this or that man who officiates in holy things; but from the nature of the exercise in general, and from a regard to the Divine authority of those institutions which are there observed. He feels a sacred delight in an intercourse with God in those solemnities; in comparison of which, all the graces of composition and delivery appear as little as the harmony of instruments, or the perfume of incense, to one of the Old Testament saints, when compared with the light of God’s countenance, which was lifted up on the pious worshipers under the Mosaic forms, when in his temple every one spake of his glory. Psalms 29:9. One thing has he desired of the Lord, and that he seeks after, that he may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of his life; not to amuse his vain imagination, not to gratify his ear, not to indulge his curiosity with useless inquiries, nor merely to exercise his understanding with sublime speculations; but to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in his temple. Psalms 38:4.

3. He likewise finds a new entertainment in the conversation of Christian friends.

He now knows what it is to have fellowship with those whose communion is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ. 1 John 1:3. His delight is now in them that are truly the excellent of the earth. Psalms 16:3. He delights to dismiss the usual topics of modern conversation, that some religious subject may be taken up, not as matter of dispute, but as matter of devout recollection; and loves to hear the plainest Christian express his experimental sense of divine things. Those sentiments of piety and love, which come warm from a gracious heart, are always pleasing to him; and those appear the dearest bands of friendship, which may draw him nearer to his heavenly Father, and unite his soul in ties of more ardent love to his Redeemer. A society of such friends is indeed a kind of anticipation of heaven; and to choose, and to delight in such, is no contemptible token, that the soul has attained to some considerable degree of preparation for it. I only add, VI. That in consequence of all this, the regenerate soul has new HOPES and PROSPECTS.

Men might be very much assisted in judging of their true state, if they would seriously reflect what it is they hope and wish for. What are those expectations and desires that most strongly impress their minds? A vain mortal, untaught and unchanged by Divine grace, is always dressing up to himself some empty phantom of earthly happiness, which he looks after and pursues, and foolishly imagines, "Could I grasp it, and keep it, I should be happy." But Divine grace teaches the real Christian to give up these empty schemes. "God," he says, "never intended this world for my happiness: he will make it tolerable to me; he will give me so much of it as he sees consistent with my highest interest; he will enable me to derive instruction, and it may be consolation, out of its disappointments and distresses: but he reserves my inheritance for the eternal world. I am begotten again to a lively hope, by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, even to the hope of an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away; (1 Peter 1:3-4) and though it be, for the present reserved in heaven, it is so safe, and so great, that it is well worth my waiting for, though ever so long; for the things that are not seen, are eternal." 2 Corinthians 4:18. And this indeed is the true character of a good man. Eternity fills his thoughts; and growing sensible, in another manner than he ever was before, of the importance of it, he pants after the enjoyment of eternal happiness. Assign any limited duration to his enjoyment of God in the regions of glory, and you would overwhelm him with disappointment: talk of hundreds, of thousands, of millions of years, the disappointment is almost equal: periods like these seem scarce distinguishable from each other, when compared with an eternal hope. To eternity his desires and expectations are raised; and he can be contented with nothing less than eternity; perfect holiness, and perfect happiness for ever and ever, without any mixture of sin, or any alloy of sorrow; this he firmly expects, this he ardently breathes after; a felicity which an immortal soul shall never outlive, and which an eternal God shall never cease to communicate. This heavenly country he seeks; he considers himself as a citizen of it, and endeavors to maintain his conversation there; (Php 3:20) to carry on, as it were, a daily trade for heaven, and to lay up a treasure there; (Matthew 6:20) in which he may be rich and great, when all the pomp of this earth is passed away as a dream, and all its most precious metals and gems are melted down and consumed among its vilest materials in the last universal burning. This is the change, the glorious change, which regeneration makes in a man’s character and views; and who shall dare to speak, or to think contemptibly of it? Were we indeed to represent it as a kind of charm, depending on an external ceremony, which it was the peculiar prerogative of a certain order of men to perform, and yet on which eternal life was suspended; one might easily apprehend, that it would be brought into much suspicion. Or should we place it in any mechanical transports of animal nature, in any blind impulse, in any strong

feelings, not to be described, or accounted for, or argued upon, but known by some inward inexplicable sensation to be divine; we could not wonder, if calm and prudent men were slow to admit the pretension to it, and were fearful it might end in the most dangerous enthusiasm, made impious by excessive appearances of piety. But when it is delineated by such fair and bright characters as those that have now been drawn; when these divine lineaments on the soul, by which it bears the image of its Maker's rectitude and sanctity, are considered as its necessary consequence, or rather as its very essence; one would imagine, that every rational creature, instead of caviling at it, should pay an immediate homage to it, and earnestly desire, and labor, and pray, to experience the change: especially as it is a change so desirable for itself--as we acknowledge health to be, though a man were not to be rewarded for doing well, nor punished, any farther than with the malady he contracts, for any negligence in this respect. Where is there anything can be more ornamental to our natures, than to have all the powers of the mind thus changed by grace, and our pursuits directed to such objects as are worthy of the best attention and regard?--to have our apprehensions of divine and spiritual things enlarged, and to have right conceptions of the most important matters;—-to have the stream of our affections turned from empty vanities, to objects that are proper to excite and fix them;—to have our resolutions set against all sin, and a full purpose formed within us of an immediate reformation and return to God, with a dependence on his grace to help us both to will and to do;—-to have our labors steadfastly applied to conquer sin, and to promote religion in ourselves and others; to have our entertainments founded in a religious life, and flowing in upon us from the sweet intercourse we have with God in his word and ordinances, and the delightful conversation that we sometimes have with Christian friends;—and finally, to have our hopes drawn off from earthly things, and fixed upon eternity? Where is there anything can be more honorable to us, than thus to be renewed after the image of him that created us, (Colossians 3:10) and to put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness? Ephesians 4:24. And where is anything that can be more desirable, than thus to have the darkness of our understandings cured, and the disorders rectified, that sin had brought upon our nature? Who is there that is so insensible of his depravity, as that he would not long for such a happy change? Or who is there that knows how excellent a work it is, to be transformed by the renewing of the mind, (Romans 12:2) that would not, with the greatest thankfulness, adore the riches of Divine grace, if it appear that he is thus become a new creature; that old things are passed away, and behold, all things are become new? But I shall quickly show you, that regeneration is not only ornamental, honorable, and desirable, but absolutely necessary, as ever we would hope to share the blessings of God's heavenly kingdom, and to escape the horror of those that are finally and irrevocably excluded from it. This argument will employ several succeeding Discourses. But I would dismiss you at present with an earnest request, that you would, in the mean time, renew your inquiries, as to the truth of regeneration in your own souls; which, after all that I have been saying, it will be very inexcusable for you to neglect, as probably you will hear few discourses, in the whole course of your lives, which centre more directly in this point, or are more industriously calculated to give you the safest and clearest assistance in it. May God abase the arrogance and presumption of every self-deceiving sinner; and awaken the confidence and joy of the feeblest soul, in whom this new creation is begun!

01.04. Discourse 4

DISCOURSE IV. THE NECESSITY OF REGENERATION, ARGUED FROM THE IMMUTABLE CONSTITUTION OF GOD.

John 3:3.

Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.

WHILE the ministers of Christ are discoursing of such a subject, as I have before me in the course of these Lectures, and particularly in this branch of them which I am now entering upon, we may surely, with the utmost reason, address our hearers in those words of Moses to Israel, in the conclusion of his dying discourse: Set your hearts unto all the words which I testify among you this day, which ye shall command your children to observe and do, even all the words of this law; for it is not a vain thing for you, because it is your life. Deuteronomy 32:46-47. That must undoubtedly be your life, concerning which the Lord Jesus Christ himself, the incarnate wisdom of God, the faithful and true witness, (Revelation 3:14) has said, and said it with a solemn repeated asseveration, that without it a man cannot see the kingdom of God. The occasion of his saying it deserves our notice; though the niceties of the context must be waived in such a series of sermons as this. He said it to a Jew of considerable rank, and, as it appears, one of the grand Sanhedrim, or chief council of the nation; who came not only for his own private satisfaction, but in the name of several of his brethren, to discourse with Christ concerning his doctrine, at the first passover' he attended at Jerusalem, after he had entered on his public ministry. Our Lord would, to be sure, be peculiarly careful what answer he returned to such an inquiry: and this is his answer, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God: as if he should have said, "If the princes of Israel inquire after my character, let them know that I came to be a preacher of regeneration; and that the blessings of that kingdom, which I am come to reveal and erect, are to be peculiar to renewed and sanctified souls; who may, by an easy and natural figure, be said to be born again." And the figure appears very intelligible, and very instructive to those that will seriously consider it; and might well lead us into a variety of pertinent and useful remarks.

You easily perceive, that to be born again must intimate a very great change; coming, as it were, into a new world, as an infant does; when after having lived awhile a kind of vegetative life in the darkness and confinement of the womb, it is born into open day; feels the vital air rushing in on its lungs, and light forcing itself upon the awakened eyes; hears sounds before unknown; opens its mouth to receive a yet untasted food, and every day becomes acquainted with new objects, and exerts new powers, till it grows up to the maturity of a perfect man. Such, and in some respects greater and nobler than this, is the change which regeneration makes in a heart, before unacquainted with religion: as you may have seen at large from the preceding discourses. But I might further observe, that the phrase in the text may also express the humbling nature of this change, as well as the greatness of it. Erasmus gives this turn to the words; and it is so edifying, that I should have mentioned it at least, though I had not thought it so just, as it appears. To be

born again, must signify to become as a little child; (Matthew 18:3) and our Lord expressly and frequently assures us, that without this we cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven. Mark 10:15; Luke 18:17. He has pronounced the very first of his blessings on poverty of spirit; (Matthew 5:3) and where this is wanting, the soul will never be entitled to the rest. A mild and humble, a docile and tractable temper, a freedom from avarice and ambition, and an indifference to those great toys of which men are generally so fond, are all essential parts of the Christian character; and they have all, in one view or another, been touched upon in the preceding discourses. Let it be forgiven, however, if considering the importance of the case, you are told again, that in malice ye must be children; (1 Corinthians 14:20) and that if any man think himself wise, he must become a child, and even a fool, that he may be wise indeed. 1 Corinthians 3:18.

I might observe once more, that these words intimate the divine power, by which this great and humbling change is effected. Our first formation and birth is the work of God, and no less really so in the succeeding generations of men, than the first production of Adam was, when God formed him of the dust of the earth, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life. Genesis 2:7. We may each of us say, with respect to the natural birth, and in an accommodated sense with respect to the spiritual too, thine eyes did see my substance, being as yet imperfect, and in thy book all my members, which in continuance of time were fashioned, were written, when as yet there was none of them. Psalms 139:16. All the first gracious impressions that were made upon the mind, and all the gradual advances of them, till Christ was formed in the heart, and the new creature animated, must, as I shall hereafter show at large, be ultimately and principally referred into a divine operation; and in this sense, it is God that brings every good purpose in the mind to the birth, and God that gives strength to bring forth. Isaiah 66:9. But I omit the farther prosecution of these remarks at present, because they coincide with what I have said in former discourses, or what will occur in those which are yet to come: and shall only further consider the words, as they are a confirmation of, and therefore a proper introduction to, what I am to lay before you under the third general head of these discourses; in which--as I have already shown who may be said to be in an unregenerate state, and how great that change is which regeneration makes in the soul--I shall now proceed, Thirdly, to show the high importance, yea, the absolute NECESSITY of this change. Our Lord expresses it in a very lively and awakening manner, in these few determinate words, which are here before us.: Verily, verily, I say unto thee, except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. You see how emphatical the words are: he who is himself invariable truth, the same yesterday, to-day, and forever, (Hebrews 13:8) repeats it again and again, with as much solemnity as he ever uses upon any occasion; repeats it to us, as he did to Nicodemus, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, that is, I seriously deliver it as a truth of infinite moment; except a man, i. e. any man, whatever his profession, whatever his knowledge, or whatever his privileges, may be; though he be a Jew, though he be a Pharisee, though he be, as thou Nicodemus art, a ruler or a senator; except he be born again, and have that great change, so often described in the word of God, wrought by the operation of the Spirit in his mind, he cannot see the kingdom of God: he cannot by any means approach it so as to enter into it, or have any share in the important blessings which it contains." That we may more fully understand, and enter into this weighty argument, I shall from these words, I. Briefly consider, what it is to see the kingdom of God.

II. Show how absolutely impossible it is, that any unregenerate man should see it. And, III. How wretched a thing it is to be deprived of the sight and enjoyment of it. And I am well persuaded, that

if you diligently attend to these things, you will be inwardly and powerfully convinced, that no argument could be more proper to demonstrate the importance and necessity of regeneration, than this, which our Lord has suggested in these awful, emphatical, and comprehensive words.

I. I am to show you what it is to see the kingdom of God. And for the explication of it, it will be necessary to consider--what we are to understand by this kingdom; and what is meant by seeing it.

I will show you now what we are to understand by the kingdom of God. And you will pardon me if I state the matter pretty largely; because the phrase is used in scripture in different senses; and the true interpretation of many passages in it depends on a proper distinction between them. You may observe then, for the explication of this phrase, that the kingdom of God in general signifies, 'the society of those, who profess themselves the servants and subjects of Christ;' and in consequence of this, that there are some passages, in which it peculiarly relates to the imperfect dispensation of this kingdom, and the beginning of it in the world; and others, in which it relates to the more perfect form, which this society is to bear in the world of glory.

1. The kingdom of God, or the kingdom of heaven—for they are synonymous phrases--does in the general signify the society of those, who profess themselves the servants and subjects of Christ.

You well know this was a phrase used among the Jews: and therefore the original of it is to be traced from the Old Testament; and I apprehend it to be this: Almost every Christian is aware, that in the early days of the Jewish commonwealth, as Samuel with great propriety expresses it, God was their king. 1 Samuel 12:12. Jehovah was not only the great object of their religious regard, as the creator and supporter of the whole world; but he was also their supreme civil magistrate, settling the forms of their political government, and reserving to himself some of the chief acts of royal authority. They did indeed afterwards desire another king, like the other nations around about them. 1 Samuel 8:5. But still those kings, being appointed by God, were indeed to be looked upon as no other than his vicegerents, though another kind of governors than he had originally instituted. By degrees their peculiar regard to the civil authority of God among them, as well as to his religious authority, which was nearly connected with it, in a great measure wore out; and their government went through a great many different forms, which it would be unnecessary here particularly to describe. Nevertheless, God was pleased to declare by king David, and by many others of his holy prophets, that he would in due time interpose to erect another, and a far more extensive kingdom in the world; not indeed upon the same political principles with that which he exercised over the Jews; which principles would by no means have suited this extensive design: but it should be a kingdom in which the authority of the God of heaven should be acknowledged, and his laws of universal righteousness observed with greater care, and to nobler purposes, as well as by a vastly greater number of subjects than ever before. This kingdom he determined to commit to the government of the Messiah, who, with regard to this was called the Lord's anointed, his king whom he set upon his holy hill of Zion; (Psalms 2:2, Psalms 2:6) and to whom indeed he would give all power, not only on earth, but in heaven too; (Matthew 28:18) so that having trained up his subjects here, in the discipline of holiness and obedience, he should at length translate them to another and a better country, that is, a heavenly, where they should see his glory, and should reign with him in eternal life. This plainly appears from the whole tenor of the Old and New Testament, to have been the grand plan of God, with respect to the Messiah's kingdom: and you

will easily see, that coming from God as its great author, and referring to him as its end, it may, with great propriety, be called the kingdom of God; and ultimately terminating in the heavenly state, it may also properly be called the kingdom of heaven. These were phrases, which prevailed in the Jewish nation, before Christ, or his immediate forerunner appeared; and indeed they were used by Daniel in a very remarkable manner, which probably made them so familiar to the Jews, who had some peculiar reason for studying his writings, even more than those of some other prophets. After that prophet had foretold the rise and fall of several great empires of the world, he adds, and in the days of these last kings, i. e. of the Romans, shall the God of Heaven set up a kingdom which shall not be destroyed,—-but shall stand forever. Daniel 2:44. And the person whom the Ancient of Days, i. e. the eternal and ever blessed God, should fix on the throne of this kingdom, from his appearing in the human nature, is called the Son of Man; (Daniel 7:13-14) "I saw in the night visions, and behold, one like the Son of Man, came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of Days, and they brought him near before him; and there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve him: his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed." In allusion to this, when our Lord Jesus Christ appeared, he called himself the Son of Man; and he particularly used this phrase, and it was exceedingly proper that he should, in this conference with Nicodemus, again and again. John iii. 13, 14. And all those who, being convinced of the divine commission he bore, submitted themselves to him, might in this respect be said, to enter into the kingdom of God, or of heaven: that is, into the society which had so long been foretold and expected under that title. This kingdom, as the above mentioned prophecy declared, was to be raised from very low beginnings, and under the personal ministry of Christ and his Apostles, till at last it should extend through very distant regions of the world, and kings and princes should submit themselves to it, and reckon it their glory to enroll themselves among his subjects.

Agreeably to this meaning of the phrase, and to this view with respect to the establishment of his kingdom, our Lord opened his ministry with preaching, as John the Baptist had done, the kingdom of heaven. Matthew 3:2, Matthew 4:1. And you will see, that in most places of the Gospel, where the phrase occurs, it is to be taken in this sense. Thus our Lord says, Blessed are the poor in spirit; for theirs is the kingdom of heaven; (Matthew 5:3) i. e. they are fit to be members of this society, and to receive the blessings of it. Seek first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; (Matthew 6:33) i. e. labor to serve the interests of this society that I am erecting, and to obtain and promote that righteousness which it recommends, and is intended to establish in the world. And again, Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not; for of such is the kingdom of God: (Luke 18:16) persons with such a disposition are most fit to become my subjects, and to enter into this holy and spiritual society. And when our Lord says to, the Pharisees, Publicans and harlots go into the kingdom of God before you; (Mark xxi. 31;) he means, no doubt, they are more ready than you to join themselves to the society of those who profess themselves my subjects. And once more, when he speaks of some who chose the severities of a single life, that with less entanglements they might serve the interests of his church, he expresses it, by their making themselves eunuchs, for the kingdom of heaven’s sake. Matthew 14:12.

I shall only add, that the phrase, by a near connection with this sense, sometimes signifies the character of this society, or the privileges which it affords to its members; as when our Lord says,

Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, shall in no wise enter therein. Luke 18:17. This then is the general sense of this phrase; it signifies the society of those who should submit themselves to the government of Christ, as appointed by God to rule over them; who are thereby to be considered as God's people and subjects. In consequence of this you will easily apprehend,

2. That it comprehends the more imperfect dispensation, under which the members of this society are, during their abode in the present world.

All that passes here is indeed but the opening of Christ's kingdom: nevertheless, the phrase does sometimes more particularly refer to this opening; and there are several passages, in which it would be apparently absurd to suppose it comprehended the glories of the invisible state, to which Christ intended finally to conduct his faithful servants. Thus our Lord tells the Pharisees, The kingdom of God is come unto you, (Matthew 12:28) i. e. that gracious dispensation under the Messiah, by which God is gathering subjects to his Son. And elsewhere he says to them, The kingdom of God cometh not with observation, i. e. not with such outward show and grandeur as you expect; but behold it is within, or, (as it might be rendered,) among you; (Luke 17:20-21) God has begun to open and establish it, though you know it not; and has actually brought many poor sinners into it, whom you proudly deride as ignorant and accursed. Thus also, when our Lord says to Peter, I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven, (Matthew 16:19) it would be most absurd to suppose, he meant to grant to him the power of admitting into, or excluding from, the world of glory: but the plain meaning is, that he should bear office in the church on earth, and be the means of admitting Jews and Gentiles into it. Here, as in many other instances, the kingdom of God, or of heaven, means much the same with the professing church of Christ, in this imperfect state; as it undoubtedly does, when Christ threatens his hearers, that the kingdom of God should be taken away from them; (Matthew 21:43) and when he represents it as consisting of good and bad, (Matthew 13:48) of tares and wheat; (Matthew 13:25) but declares, that at the last day he will gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them that do iniquity; (Matthew 13:41) whereas nothing of that kind shall ever enter into the kingdom of glory. But yet, 3. It ultimately relates to the more perfect form and state of this society in the kingdom of glory.

You very well know, that the design of God in his Gospel was not to establish a temporal kingdom, as the Jews expected: nor merely to form a body of men, who should live upon earth with some peculiar forms of worship, under very excellent rules, and with distinguished privileges of a spiritual nature; but that all these ultimately referred to the invisible world. Thither the Son of Man was removed, when he had finished the scenes of his labor and sufferings upon earth; and thither all the true and faithful members of the kingdom were sooner or later to be brought, and there were to have their final settlement and everlasting abode, in a far more splendid and happy state, than the greatest monarch on earth has ever known: they shall there, as the Apostle most properly expresses it, reign in life by Jesus Christ. Romans 5:17.

Now as the kingdom of God upon earth is to be considered with a leading view to this, so we sometimes find, that this glorious state of its members, or which will come much to the same thing, the society of the faithful in this glorious state, is, by way of eminence, called the kingdom of God: and with regard to this, they whose characters are such that they shall be excluded from thence, are represented as having no part in the kingdom of heaven, though they have been by profession

members of the church of Christ on earth. Of this you have a remarkable instance, where our Lord says, Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven: but he that doth the will of my Father which is in heaven: (Matthew 7:21) now it was calling Christ, Lord, or professing a regard to him as a divine teacher and governor, which was the very circumstance that distinguished the members of his kingdom on earth from the rest of mankind: yet as they who do this insincerely shall be excluded from final glory, it is said, they shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. So also the Apostle tells us, that flesh and blood, i. e. such gross machines of animal nature as those in which we now dwell, cannot inherit the kingdom of God; (1 Corinthians 15:50) they cannot dwell in so pure a region; and therefore it is necessary, that before they enter upon it, those who are found alive at the illustrious day of Christ's appearance, should undergo a miraculous change to fit them for such an abode. In reference to this we are likewise told, that then, i. e. at the great resurrection-day, the righteous shall shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Matthew 13:43. And this is what our Lord most certainly had in view, when he tells the impenitent Jews, that there should be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when they should see Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, and they themselves thrust out; (Luke 13:29) which could not be meant of the privileges of the Christian church upon earth, in which the patriarchs had no share; nor did the Jews at all envy those professing Christians, who most evidently had: it must undoubtedly therefore be numbered among those passages, in which the kingdom of God chiefly refers to the state of glory. And I apprehend, the text here before us may be added to that catalogue which leads us to show, 2. What we are to understand by seeing the kingdom of God.

Now, in general, you will easily apprehend, that to see the kingdom is to enjoy the blessings of it. There is no need of enumerating many passages of Scripture, where to see properly signifies to enjoy. This is apparently the sense of it, when Christ declares, Blessed are the pure in heart; for they shall see God: (Matthew 5:8) for the Deity cannot be the object of sight; but the promise is, that such souls--Oh, that we may be in their number!—shall forever enjoy the most delightful communications from him. And thus again we are to understand it, where it is said, What man is he that desireth life, and loveth many days, that he may see, i. e. that he may enjoy, good? Psalms 34:12. For otherwise, to see it without enjoying it, would be a great aggravation of misery and distress. And in this sense it is most evident, that seeing the kingdom of God must here be put, for enjoying the most important blessings appropriated to this state; because, as I have just been observing, condemned sinners are represented in another sense, as seeing that kingdom and the glorified saints in it; but viewing it only at an unapproachable distance, as a spectacle that fills them with horror and despair. This therefore is, upon the whole, the meaning of this passage: That no unregenerate soul shall finally have any part in the glory and happiness which Christ has prepared for his faithful subjects; nor can any that appear to be such, according to the tenor and constitution of the gospel, be admitted into the number even of professing Christians. It is true, indeed, a man may appear under such a disguise, that those who are in this sense the stewards of the mysteries of God, (1 Corinthians 4:1) may, in the judgment of charity, be obliged to think well of him, and to admit him; but Christ, who intimately knows him, does even now discern him. The present external privileges he enjoys, are such as he has no just right to; and in a little time, Christ will root him out of this kingdom with a vengeance, and he shall be openly declared a rebel, and one whom the Lord of it never knew, or never approved. Matthew 7:23. So that upon the whole, it is so little a part that he had in the kingdom, and that for so short a time, that it may, in the free

language of Scripture, be said, that he has never seen the kingdom of God at all; that he has neither part nor lot in this matter, (Acts 8:21) has no part with God's chosen, nor any lot with his inheritance.

Having thus largely explained the meaning of this phrase, I now proceed,

II. To show you how CERTAIN this declaration of our Lord in the text is, or how absolutely impossible it is, that any unregenerate man should thus see the kingdom of God.

Now this I shall argue, partly from the immutable constitution of God, whose kingdom it is: and partly from the nature of its blessings, which are such, that no unregenerate man, while he continues in that state, can have any fitness or capacity to enjoy them. The first of these considerations is copious and important enough, to furnish out abundant matter for the remainder of this discourse: and it will be difficult to dispatch it within these limits.

1. The impossibility there is, that any unregenerate man should enter into the kingdom of God, appears from the IMMUTABLE CONSTITUTION of that God, whose kingdom it is. This might be sufficiently argued, from the express and emphatical words of our Lord Jesus Christ in the text. For he bore his Father's commission to preach the Gospel of the kingdom, to publish the good news of its erection and success, and likewise to declare its nature, and the method of admittance into it. And he is himself the great Sovereign of that kingdom; and consequently cannot but perfectly, and beyond all comparison with any other, know the whole of its constitution. But God has repeated the declaration by him, and by his other messengers to the children of men, in different ages, and under different dispensations, in such a manner as suited its infinite importance. And, therefore, for the further illustration of the argument, I shall enumerate a great variety of scriptures that speak the same language; not so much aiming therein at the speculative proof of the point, as attempting to impress the conscience of my hearers with a sense of its certainty; and humbly hoping that some of those sharp-pointed arrows, which I am now drawing out of the quiver of God, may, by the direction of his Spirit, enter the reins of some against whom they are leveled, (Lamentations 3:8) and convince them of the absolute necessity of an entire change in their hearts, as well as their lives, or of the vanity of all those hopes which they entertain, while that change is wanting. And let me bespeak your attention, not to the conjectures or reasoning of a frail mortal man, but to the solemn admonitions and declarations of the eternal God; and be assured that in one sense or another, his word shall take hold on you, as it has done on sinners of former generations, either for conviction, or condemnation. That I may not be confounded in the multiplicity of my proofs, I shall range them under these three distinct heads. The prophets of the Old Testament were commissioned to make this declaration:—it was renewed by the preaching of Christ;—and was supported by the testimony of the Apostles under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. The prophets of the Old Testament were commissioned in effect to make this declaration, that no unregenerate sinner should enter the kingdom of God.

Well might our Lord say to Nicodemus, Art thou a teacher in Israel, and knowest not these things? For to this in effect all the prophets bear witness, and it might be learned from almost every page of their writings. It is true the particular phrase of being born again, or regenerated, does not occur there; nor is it expressly said, that an unregenerate man shall not be admitted into God's kingdom. But then the prophets everywhere assert, what is in effect the same, that no wicked man, who does not heartily repent of his sins, and turn from them to God, must expect the Divine favor. Now

if you consider what we mean by an unregenerate man, according to the description I have given before, you will find it is just the same as an impenitent sinner; and if it be declared that such are not to expect the Divine favor, nay, that they must certainly prove the object of his displeasure, this must certainly. imply an exclusion from his kingdom, and must intend a great deal more than being deprived of everlasting happiness. And thus you see that all those scriptures, which speak of the irreconcilable hatred of God against sin, and against all impenitent sinners, come in to do service here, and are equivalent to the declaration in the text. And I may hereafter show you, that there are many scriptures in the Old Testament which lead men to consider that change, said to be so necessary, as what must be effected by a Divine operation on their souls. But as that will more properly come in under a following head, I shall at present content myself with selecting a few scriptures as a specimen of many hundred more, in proof of the main point before us: and I beseech you that you would endeavor to enter, not only into the sense, but into the spirit of them.

You well know that unregenerate sinners are wicked men; and of such it is said, God is angry with the wicked every day; (Psalms 7:2) or all the day long, as the original imports. The sinner lies down and rises up, goes out and comes in, under the Divine displeasure: and though with great patience God bears with him for awhile, he is described as preparing his dreadful artillery against him, to smite him even with a mortal wound: so far will he be from admitting him into his kingdom, that, as it is there added, if he turn not he will whet his sword; he has bent his bow and made it ready; he has also prepared for him the instruments of death. Psalms 7:12-13. And in another place, he describes the dreadful consequence of that preparation in most lively terms: "If I whet my glittering sword, and my hand take hold on judgment, I will render vengeance to mine enemies, and will reward them that hate me: I will make mine arrows drunk with blood, and my sword shall devour flesh, from the beginning of revenges on the enemy;" i. e. as soon as I begin this awful work. Deuteronomy 32:41-42. And elsewhere he compares the destruction which he will bring upon sinners at last, to that which he executed on Sodom and Gomorrah, when he scattered fire and brimstone on their habitations, and reduced their pleasant country to a burning lake; Upon the wicked he will rain snares, fire and brimstone, and an horrible tempest; this will be the portion of their cup: Psalms 11:6) and oh, how unlike the state and abode of those who are the happy subjects of his kingdom!

None of the prophets speak in milder and more gentle language to returning penitents than Isaiah; yet he declares, there is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked. Isaiah 57:21. Yea, he does, as it were, call in the concurrence of all who feared God, and who loved their country, to echo back and enforce the admonition: say ye to the righteous, that it shall be well with him: but on the other hand, wo to the wicked! it shall be ill with him; for the reward of his hands shall be given him. Isaiah 3:10-11. The enumeration would be endless; and it would require more than the time of a whole discourse, only to read over, without any comment or remark one half of the passages which might properly be introduced on this occasion. I will therefore only mention two more, which, though some of you may hear with indifference, I confess I cannot read without a very sensible inward commotion. The one is that passage in the Mosaic law, where God directs his servant to say, "If there be among you a root that beareth gall and wormwood, (i. e. any unregenerate soul,) who when he hears the words of this curse, shall bless himself in his heart, saying, I shall have peace though I walk in the imagination of mine heart, to add drunkenness to thirst, (i. e. run into one debauchery and sin after another:) the Lord will not spare him, but the anger of the Lord, and

his jealousy shall smoke against that man;—-and the Lord shall separate him unto evil out of all the tribes of Israel, according to all the curses of the covenant, that are written in the book of the law." Deuteronomy 29:18-21. There is a terrible emphasis of which we cannot but take notice here: God declares, that if among all the thousands of Israel, there was but one such presumptuous sinner, that thus flattered himself in the way of his own heart, he would make a terrible example of him, and separate that one man to evil, out of thousands and ten thousands of his faithful and obedient servants. This therefore is a passage full of apparent terror: the other is indeed a language of mercy; but it contains a most awful insinuation, which appears, as good Archbishop Tillotson expresses it, "like a razor set in oil, which wounds with so much the keener edge." As I live, saith the Lord God, 1 have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live; turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel? (Ezekiel 33:11) thereby plainly intimating, that notwithstanding all that gentleness of the Divine nature, which he expresses in a most tender invitation, which he confirms even with the solemnity of an oath; yet, if sinners did not turn from their evil ways, there was no remedy, but they must die for it. And how, sirs, will any of you that continue in an unregenerate state, arm yourselves against these terrors? Is it by saying, 'that these are the thunders of Mount Sinai; that these are denunciations of the Old Testament; whereas the New speaks in milder language?' You may easily know the contrary. And to this purpose I am further to show you, that this declaration was renewed by the preaching of Christ.

It is true, indeed, that grace and truth came by Jesus Christ: (John 1:17) yet all the grace and gentleness of that administration he brought, did not contradict those awful threatenings; nay, it obliged him to set them in a stronger light. He presently repeats to Nicodemus what he had just before asserted in the text, and declares, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water, and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God; (John 3:5) i. e. 'As he must be baptized with water, in order to a regular entrance into the society of my people, so he must also be transformed by the cleansing and renewing influence of the Spirit, signified by the water there used, or he can have no part in the blessings which my Gospel brings.' And that this must produce a universal change in the life as well as the heart, and a faithful subjection to the will of God--without which no profession will stand a man in any stead--our Lord solemnly declares in the conclusion of his incomparable discourse on the Mount: "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven: but he that doth the will of my Father who is in heaven: many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name, and in thy name cast out devils, and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity." Matthew 7:21-23. And shall you, sirs, merely for having a name and place in his house, escape; when those that have preached his Gospel, and wrought miracles in confirmation of it, when those that personally conversed with Christ, and those that ministered unto him shall perish, if destitute of a holy temper of heart, and of its solid fruit in their lives? Has not our Lord expressly said, that he will gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them that do iniquity; and will cast them into a furnace of fire; there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth? Matthew 13:41-42. Nay, in his infinite compassion, he has given to sinners, as it were, a copy of the sentence that will another day be pronounced upon them; that they may meditate upon it, and review it, and judge whether they can bear the terror of its execution. Hear it attentively, and then say whether unregenerate sinners shall enter into his kingdom. The dreadful doom is this: Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting

fire, prepared for the devil and his angels. Matthew 25:41. And what now will you say to this? Can any soul of you imagine, that the Lord Jesus Christ did not know what would pass in this day in which he is appointed to preside? or that knowing it, and knowing it would be something different from this, he would, on any consideration whatsoever, make a false representation, and lay so much stress upon it? Yet one or other of these things you must secretly imagine; or must own, that every unregenerate sinner, and you among the rest, must not only be excluded from his presence, but be condemned to suffer all the fury of his wrath, in company with devils and damned spirits, in final darkness, and everlasting burning.

It only remains that I show you, that the same testimony was renewed by the Apostles, under the influence of the Holy Spirit.

You know that they were authorised by their Great Master to declare, in an authentic manner, the constitution of his kingdom; and that he who despises them, despises Christ. Luke 10:16. Now I would fain persuade you all, to consider this argument as it lies in Scripture; to read over the epistolary parts of the New Testament in this view, to observe what encouragement they any of them give to an unregenerate sinner, to expect any part in the kingdom of heaven. In the mean time, permit me to present you with a few texts, as a specimen of the rest. The apostle Paul, in his epistle to the Romans, does indeed speak of God's justifying the ungodly; (Romans 4:5) but lest any should vainly imagine that he encourages the hope of those that continue so, he expressly tells us, in the very same epistle, that the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men; (Romans 2:8) and that ere long this wrath shall be executed, even in the day of the more ample revelation of the righteous judgment of God; who will render to every man according to his deeds: To them that do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, which is the character of every unregenerate sinner, indignation and wrath: tribulation and anguish upon every soul of man that doth evil, of the Jew first, as having had the most signal advantages, though advantages inferior to yours, and also of the Gentile. Romans 2:5-6, Romans 2:8-9. And farther he assures us, that to be carnally minded is death: and that the carnal mind, which universally prevails in men, till by regenerating grace they are made spiritual, is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. Romans 8:6-7. In another epistle he mentions it as a first principle, in which it might rationally be supposed, no Christian was uninstructed. Know ye not, says he, that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? 1 Corinthians 6:9. And elsewhere he declares, that all external modes of religion, separate from that entire change of soul which I have described, are worthless and vain. In Christ Jesus, says he, or to those that desire any part in him and his kingdom, neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature. Galatians 6:15. He likewise tells us to this purpose in another place, that his grace, which has appeared unto all men, teaches us to deny "ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world;" (Titus 2:11-12) and yet, after all, to acknowledge, that it is "not by works of righteousness, which we have done, but according to his mercy he saves us, by the washing of regeneration, and the renewing of the Holy Ghost, which he has shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour." Titus 3:5-6. And without holiness, which is the effect of these sacred operations upon the soul, he expressly tells us in another place, that no man shall see the Lord. Hebrews 12:14. And to allege but one more passage from him: as it is evident, that all unregenerate sinners, and only they are ignorant of God, and disobedient to the Gospel; he solemnly assures us, that instead of

receiving such at last into his kingdom, the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven, with his mighty angels, in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power. (2 Thessalonians 1:7-9. This is the testimony of the apostle Paul in his own emphatical words, zealous as he was for the doctrine of free grace, which such declarations as these do not in the least degree contradict.

Let us now hear his brethren, the other apostles of the Lord. James urges sinners, if they ever desire to draw nigh to God, and to have him draw nigh to them, to cleanse their hands, and purify their hearts. James 4:8. And yet more expressly he says when he speaks of those who should receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him; of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of first-fruits of his creatures. James 1:12, James 1:18. The apostle Peter describes Christians, as those whose souls were purified in obeying the truth through the Spirit-being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible; (1 Peter 1:22-23) and as those who were made partakers of the Divine Nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust. 2 Peter 1:4. Again, John, the beloved disciple, tells us, that every one that doth righteousness is born of God; (1 John 2:29) but he that committeth sin is of the devil; (1 John 3:8) and that every one that has a well grounded hope of being like Christ, and seeing him as he is when he appears, purifies himself, even as he is pure. 1 John 3:2-3. And once more, the apostle Jude, as he describes those who are sensual and have not the Spirit, as men, that if they were saved at all, must be plucked out of the fire; (Jude 1:19, Jude 1:23) so he echoes back that awful prophecy, which Enoch had so long since delivered, that the Lord will come with ten thousand of his saints, to execute judgment upon all, and to convict all that are ungodly, of all those ungodly deeds and works, by which they have violated his law. Jude 1:14-15. This then appears, from the whole tenor of the Scriptures, to be the positive and immutable constitution of the great God—that none who are unregenerate shall be admitted to enjoy the happiness of heaven. And from the view that we have taken of the sacred writings it is manifest, that this, in every age, has been the language of the word of God; and under every dispensation we have sufficient evidence of this important truth. This is the doctrine of the Old Testament; and many are the passages that I have offered from the law of Moses, and from the Prophets, and the Psalms, that show it is impossible an unrenewed soul should enter into heaven. And the same also is asserted in the strongest terms in the New Testament; and when Christ came to set the Gospel of the kingdom in a clearer light, the purport of the declaration that he makes to Nicodemus in the text, was frequently repeated by him in the course of his preaching, and represented as the rule he would regard at the last day. And the inspired apostles speak the same thing with a united voice, and testify at large in their epistles, that it is absolutely necessary we should be born again, if ever we would hope to see the kingdom of God. So that now, sirs, I may say, Call, if there be any that will answer; and to which of the saints will you turn, (Job 5:1) to encourage your vain and presumptuous hope, of finding your lot among God’s people in the kingdom of glory, if you are strangers to that important and universal change, which we before described as regeneration in the Scripture sense of the word? The prophets under the Old Testament, and Christ and his apostles under the New, concur, in all the variety of the most awful language, to expose so presumptuous a hope. And is it not audacious madness in any to venture their souls upon it? Thus you would undoubtedly judge of any man who should strike a dagger into his breast, or discharge a pistol at his head, on this presumption, that the almighty power of God could prevent his death,

though the heart or the brain were pierced. But it is much greater folly for a man, while he continues in an unregenerate state, to promise himself a part in the kingdom of heaven. For though there would be no reason in the world to expect a miraculous interposition, to save a life which a man was so resolutely bent to destroy; yet none can say, that such an interposition would contradict any of the express engagements of God's word; whereas to admit an unregenerate sinner into the regions of glory, would be violating, not this, or that single declaration, but the whole series and tenor of it; and we shall farther show, in the next Discourse, that it would also be, in effect, altering the very nature of the heavenly kingdom itself, as well as its constitution. Now what hope can be more desperate, than that which can have no support, but in the subversion of the Redeemer's kingdom, and even of the eternal throne of God, the foundations of which are righteousness and truth!

01.05. Discourse 5

DISCOURSE V. OF THE INCAPACITY OF AN UNREGENERATE PERSON FOR RELISHING THE ENJOYMENTS OF THE HEAVENLY WORLD.

John 3:3.

—Except a man be born again, he can not see the kingdom of God. IN order to demonstrate the necessity of regeneration, of which I would fain convince not only your understandings, but your consciences, I am now proving to you, that without it, it is impossible to enter into the kingdom of God; and how weighty a consideration that is I am afterwards to represent. That it is thus impossible, the words in the text do indeed sufficiently prove: but for the further illustration of the subject, I have proposed to consider it under two distinct views.

I have already shown it is impossible, because the constitution of the kingdom of heaven is such, that God has solemnly declared, and this under different dispensations, and more or less plainly in all ages of his church, that no unregenerate person, i. e. no impenitent sinner, shall have any part in it. And I am now further to show, That the nature of the future happiness, which is here chiefly signified by the kingdom of God, is such, that an unregenerate person would be incapable of relishing it, even upon a supposition of his being admitted into it. This is a thought of so great importance, and so seldom represented in its full strength, that I shall at present confine my discourse entirely to it.

I know, sinners, it will be one of the most difficult things in the world, to bring you to a serious persuasion of this truth. You think heaven is so lovely, and so glorious a place, that if you could possibly get an admittance there, you should certainly be happy. But I would now set myself, if possible, to convince you that this is a rash and ill-grounded persuasion; and that on the contrary, if you were now in the regions of glory, and in the society of those blessed inhabitants, that unrenewed nature and unsanctified heart of yours, would give you a disrelish for all the sublimest entertainments of that blissful place, and turn heaven itself into a kind of hell to you.

Now for the demonstration of this, it is only necessary for you seriously to consider what kind of happiness that of heaven is, as it is represented to us in the word of God; for from thence undoubtedly we are to take our notions of it.

You might to be sure sit down and imagine a happiness to yourselves, which would perfectly suit your degenerate taste; a happiness, which the more entirely you were enslaved to flesh and sense, the more exquisitely you would be able to enter into it. If God would assign you a region in that beautiful world, where you should dwell in fine houses magnificently furnished, and gaily adorned; where the most harmonious music should soothe your ear, and the most delicious food and generous wines in a rich variety should regale your taste: if he should give you a splendid retinue of people, to caress and attend you, offering you their humblest services, and acknowledging the most servile dependence upon your favor: especially if with all this he should furnish you with a set of companions just of your own temper and disposition, with whom you

might spend what proportion of time you pleased, in gaming and jollity, in riot and debauchery, without any interruption from the reproof, or even the example of the children of God, or from indispositions of body, or remorse of conscience: this you would be ready to call life and happiness indeed: and if the great Disposer of all things were but to add perpetuity to such a situation, you would not envy persons of a more refined taste the heaven you lost, for such a Paradise as this.

Such indeed was the happiness which Mahomet promised to his followers: flowery shades and gay dresses, luxurious fare and beautiful women, are described with all the pomp of language in almost every page of his Alcoran, as the glorious and charming rewards which were to be bestowed on the faithful after the resurrection. And if this were the felicity which the Gospel promised, extortioners and idolators, whoremongers and drunkards, would be much fitter to inherit the kingdom of God, than the most pious and mortified saints that ever appeared on earth. But here, as almost everywhere else, the Bible and the Alcoran speak a very different language; and far from leading us into such gross and sensual expectations, our Lord Jesus Christ has told us that the children of the resurrection neither marry, nor are given in marriage; but are like the angels of God in heaven, (Matthew 22:30) and enjoy such pure and spiritual delights, as are suited to such holy and excellent creatures.

It is true that in the book of Revelations, stately palaces and shining habits, delicious fruit and harmonious music are all mentioned, as contributing to the happiness of those, who have the honor to inhabit the New Jerusalem. But then the style of that obscure and prophetical book naturally leads us to consider these merely as figurative phrases, which are made use of to express the happiness that Divine wisdom and love has prepared for the righteous, in a manner accommodated to the weakness of our conceptions; or at least, if in any of these respects provision be made for the entertainment of a glorified body, whatever its methods of sensation and perception will be, all will be temperate and regular; and after all, this is even there represented but as the least considerable part of our happiness, the height of which is made to consist in the most elevated strains of devotion, and in an entire and everlasting devotedness to the service of God and of the Lamb.

Let us therefore immediately proceed to settle the point in question, by a more particular survey of the several branches of the celestial felicity, as represented to us in the word of God; and from thence it will undeniably appear, that were an unregenerate soul in the same place with the blessed, and surrounded with the same external circumstances, the temper of the mind would not by any means allow him to participate of their happiness. For it is plain the Scripture represents the happiness of heaven as consisting,—-in the perfection of our minds in knowledge and holiness;—-in the sight and service of the ever blessed God,—-in beholding the glory of our exalted Redeemer;—-and enjoying the society of glorious angels and perfected saints,—-throughout an endless eternity. Now, sinners, it is impossible you should enter into any such delights as these, while you continue in an unregenerate state.

1. One very considerable part of the happiness of heaven consists in that perfection of knowledge and holiness to which the blessed shall be there exalted; but in which the unregenerate soul can have no pleasure.

Thus we are told, that the spirits of just men shall there be made perfect; (Hebrews 13:23) for nothing that defiles, as every degree of moral imperfection does, shall enter into the New

Jerusalem. Revelation 21:27. An Old Testament saint conceived of future happiness, as consisting in being satisfied with the likeness of God: (Psalms 17:15) a character that is manifestly most agreeable to the view of it, which the beloved disciple gives us, where he says, that when Christ shall appear, we shall be tike him, for we shall see him as he is; (1 John 3:2) which must certainly refer to the glories of the mind, which are of infinitely greater importance than the highest imaginable beauty and ornament, that can be put upon the corporeal part of our nature in its most illustrious state.

Now from this perfection and holiness, which shall then be wrought in the soul, there will naturally arise an unspeakable complacency and joy, something resembling that which the blessed God himself possesses, in the survey of the infinite and unspotted rectitude of his own most holy nature. And in proportion to the degree, in which the eyes of our understandings are enlightened to discern wherein true excellency consists, will the soul be delighted in the consciousness of such considerable degrees of it in itself. But surely it will be superfluous for me to undertake to demonstrate, that an unregenerate soul can have no part in this divine pleasure, which implies the complete renewal of the mind as its very foundation. For to imagine that he might, would be supposing him regenerate and unregenerate at the same time. As Mr. Baxter very well expresses it, "The happiness of heaven is holiness; and to talk of being happy without it is as apparent nonsense, as to talk of being well without health, or being saved without salvation."

I would only add on this head, that the highest improvement of our intellectual faculties could not make us happy, without such a change in the affections and the will, as I have before described under the former general head. For the more clear and distinct the knowledge of true excellence and perfection is, the greater would be your anguish and horror, to see and feel yourselves entirely destitute of it; and it is exceedingly probable that spirits of the most elevated genius have the keenest sensation of that infamy and misery, which is inseparable from the prevalence of sinful dispositions in such minds as these.

2. Another very considerable branch of the celestial happiness, is that which arises, from the contemplation and enjoyment of the ever blessed God; but of this likewise an unregenerate sinner is incapable. As our own reason assures us, that God is the greatest and best of beings, and the most deserving object of our inquiries and regards, one would think it would naturally lead us to imagine, that the perfection and happiness of the human soul consists in the knowledge and enjoyment of him; and that when it arrives at the seat of complete felicity, it must intimately know him, and converse with him. And in this view, I have sometimes been surprised, that men of such distinguished abilities, as some of the heathen poet, and philosophers appear to have been, should have had no greater regard to the Supreme Being in the description which they give us of the future happiness. That sort of friendship for them, which an acquaintance with their writings must give to a person of any relish for the beauties of composition, makes one almost unwilling to expose the low and despicable ideas, which they often give of the state of their greatest heroes in the regions of immortality. But the word of God speaks a very different language. Our Lord represents the rewards to be bestowed on the pure in heart, by telling us that they shall see, i. e. contemplate and enjoy God; (Matthew 5:8) and virtuous souls who overcome the temptations with which they are here surrounded, shall be made as pillars in the house of their God, and shall go no more out: (Revelation 3:12) and it is elsewhere said that his servants shall serve him, and shall see his face. Revelation 22:3-4. And David’s views under a darker dispensation rose to such a

degree of refinement, as to say, As for me, I shall behold thy face in righteousness; (Psalms 17:1) which he mentions as a felicity infinitely superior to all the delights of the most prosperous sinner. But now, sinners, it is utterly impossible that while you continue in an unregenerate state, you should behold the face of God with pleasure. The unutterable delight which the blessed inhabitants of heaven find in it, arises not merely from the abstract ideas of his essential perfections, but from a sense of his favor and love to them. It is this that gives a relish to the whole survey, and rejoices the heart of all the saints, both in heaven and on earth. He is a God of awful majesty and irresistible power, of infinite wisdom and unspotted holiness, of unerring justice, invariable fidelity, and inexhaustible goodness; and this God is our God; he will be our guide and our portion forever. Psalms 48:14; Psalms 73:26. And were it not for this view, let a creature think of God with ever so much spirit and propriety, he must think of him, and be troubled; (Psalms 72:3) yea, he must be filled with unutterable horror and confusion, as the devil is at the thought of an infinitely perfect Being, in whom he has no interest, from whom he has nothing friendly to expect; and if nothing friendly, then everything dreadful.

Now it is certain, sinners, that while you continue in an unregenerate state, under the influence of that carnal mind which is enmity against God, (Romans 8:7) and full of unconquerable rebellion against his law, there can be no foundation for a friendship between him and your souls; nor for any persuasion, or any apprehension of your interest in his favor and love. Friendship, you know, supposes something of a similitude of nature and sentiment; for as God himself argues, how can two walk together except they be agreed? Amos 3:3. Now I have before observed to you at large, that God being of purer eyes than to behold evil, (Hebrews 1:13) must necessarily hate all the workers of iniquity; the foolish therefore shall not stand in his sight, (Psalms 5:5) or shall not be admitted to such a situation: nor would they indeed be able to endure it. Let conscience judge what satisfaction you could find in the presence of a God, that you knew scorned and hated you, even while he suffered you to continue among the crowd of his children and servants. The more lively ideas you had of the beauty and perfection of the Divine nature, the more you must loathe yourselves for being so unlike him, and so abominable to him: and what pleasure do you think consistent with such self-contempt and abhorrence? Or rather, would not the wretched degeneracy of your nature lead you another way; and a kind of unconquerable self-love, joined even with this consciousness of deformity and vileness, lead you to hate God himself? It is described as the fatal effect of prevailing wickedness in the heart, my soul loathed them, and their soul also abhorred me. Zechariah 11:8. And thus would it probably work in you, and produce in your wretched breasts a mortal hatred against him, and an envious rage at the thought of his perfect happiness; a state of mind, of all others that can be imagined, the most odious, and the most tormenting.

How, sirs, could your hearts, possessed with these diabolical passions, bear to see the beams of his glory surrounding you on every side? How could you bear to hear the songs and adorations, that were continually addressed to his throne; and to observe the humble attendance of all the hosts of heaven about it, who perpetually reckon it their honor and happiness to be employed in obedience to his commands? Such a sight of the glory and felicity of your Divine Enemy would make you, so far as your limited nature was capable of it, miserable even in proportion to the degree in which he is happy. This was, no doubt, the torment of the devils as soon as they had harbored a thought of hostility against God; and the remembrance of that glory in which they once

saw him, and which they know he still invariably possesses, is surely an everlasting vexation to them: and it would be so to you, if you were within the sight of it. But further, the blessed in heaven find their everlasting entertainment in the service of God. They rest not day and night, saying, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty; (Revelation 4:8) i. e. they are continually employed, either in the immediate acts of devotion, or in other services, in which they still maintain a devotional temper, and are breathing out their souls in holy affections, while their active powers are employed in the execution of his commands. But as I have already shown you, that while in an unregenerate state you could have no sense of his favor to you, it is very apparent, that you could have no sentiments of gratitude and love towards him. So that while angels and glorified saints were breathing out their souls in the most delightful and rapturous praises, you must keep a sullen silence; or, if it were possible that your harps and voices should sound as melodiously as theirs, it would be all ceremony and show; the music of the heart would be wanting; and you would look on all the external forms of service but as a tedious task, and count it your misfortune, that the customs of the place obliged you to attend them.

You may the more easily apprehend and believe this when you consider what little relish you now have for those solemnities of Divine worship, in which sincere Christians have the most lively foretaste of heaven. You know, in your own consciences, that short and interrupted as our public services are, they are the burden of your lives. You know that you say, in your hearts at least, When will the Sabbath be past, and the new moon be gone? Amos 8:1-14. Judge then how insupportable it would be to you, to spend an everlasting Sabbath thus. I question not, but to your wretched spirits annihilation would appear vastly preferable to an eternal existence so employed.

3. Another very considerable branch of the happiness of heaven, is that which arises from the sight of the glory of an exalted Redeemer; but for this likewise no unconverted sinner can have any relish. This is a view of the future happiness, which our Lord gives us, when he prays for his people in those memorable words, engraven, as I hope, upon many of our hearts; Father, I will that they whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory which thou hast given me. John 17:24. And he elsewhere promises it, as the great reward he would bestow upon his people; If any man serve me, let him follow me; and where I am, there also shall my servant be. John 12:26. And agreeably to this, the apostle Paul represents it as the transporting view in which he considered the happiness of the future world; I desire, says he, to depart and be with Christ; which is far better; (Php 1:28) incomparably beyond any of the enjoyments of the present world which can come into competition with it. But for this part of the happiness of angels, and of the spirits of just men made perfect, it is also evident, that you, sinners, can have no relish. The sight of Christ will afford holy souls a transporting delight, because they will regard it as the glory of their Redeemer and their Friend, and as a pledge and security of their own glory. But what foundation can you, sinners, find for such a joyful sympathy with Christ, and such a comfortable conclusion with regard to yourselves? Such is the wretched degeneracy of your nature, that though Christ be indeed the chiefest among ten thousand, and altogether lovely, (Song of Solomon 5:10, Song of Solomon 5:16) being the brightness of his Father’s glory, and the express image of his person, (Hebrews 1:3) possessed of every divine perfection and excellence; yet you now slight and neglect him, and discern in him no form or comeliness, for which he is to be desired: (Isaiah 53:2) and were you unregenerate in heaven, the same principle would prevail. Now where there is no love to a person, there can be no delight in

his converse, nor any pleasure in his happiness. Nay, the contrariety of your nature to his would rather occasion aversion and terror. You could not but know, that the blessed Jesus is holy and undefiled, and separate from sinners; (Hebrews 7:26) that he abhors all moral evil to such a degree, that he laid aside all the glory and entertainments of heaven, that he might destroy the interest of sin in this world of ours, and might purify to himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works: (Titus 2:14) and when you should recollect at the same time that sinfulness that continued to reign in your hearts, and made you to every good work reprobate, (Titus 1:16) you could not but know that you must be hateful to him; and therefore could not but fear, lest his almighty power should be exercised for your punishment and destruction: and thus your terror must rise, in proportion to the sensible evidence you had of his dignity and authority. In a word, you would stand like guilty rebels in the presence-chamber of their injured and displeased Sovereign: his throne. and his sceptre, his robe and his crown, his courtiers and his guards, though in themselves splendid and magnificent objects, only serve to terrify and amaze them, while they display the grandeur and power of their enemy.

4. Another very considerable branch of the celestial happiness will be the society of angels and glorified saints; but for this likewise an unregenerate sinner must be unfit.

You know that when the apostle speaks of our alliance to the heavenly world, he represents it as a social state; where excellent spirits dwell together, and converse with each other with mutual esteem and endearment: ye are come, says he, to the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the first-born, which are written in heaven, and to the spirits of just men made perfect. Hebrews 12:22-23. It is sitting down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, with all the patriarchs and prophets, all the apostles and martyrs in the kingdom of heaven: (Matthew 8:11) and perhaps you think you shall want nothing more to complete your happiness, than to be admitted to a place among them. But reflect a little more attentively upon the circumstances of things, and I am persuaded you will form a different judgment.

There is no reason to doubt, but that at your first entrance into the regions of glory you would be agreeably struck with the view of those inhabitants. As for those beauties of their character, which consist in love to God, and in zeal for his honor and interest, it is certain, that you would be insensible of them, and pay but little regard to them: but the humanity and benevolence of their temper would, no doubt, render them agreeable to you; and so much the more, as self-love might lead you to expect some personal advantage by it. And it is more than possible, that you would be much prejudiced in their favor by those resplendent and attractive forms in which they appear; forms, no doubt, far more beautiful and engaging than any which the children of men ever saw upon earth. On both these accounts it might be natural enough for you, at first, to address them with an air of respect, as persons that you could be glad to be upon good terms with, and in whose friendship you could desire a share. But how do you think that any such proposal of friendship would be received by an angel, or a glorified saint? No doubt, if there were any prospect of converting you, or any hope you might be brought to a devout and holy temper, they would immediately become preachers of righteousness to you; and endeavor by the most rational, the most pathetic, and the most insinuating address, to awaken and charm you to a sense of religion, and so to form you to a capacity for happiness. But they would know, that according to the eternal constitution of God, there could be no room to entertain such a hope; but that being filthy, you

must be filthy still: (Revelation 22:11) and therefore, as they would know you to be incorrigible, their love to God, and their concern to be approved and accepted by him, would prevent their forming any intimate friendship with persons whose natures were so contrary to him, and on whom he looked with such irreconcilable abhorrence. And besides this, their own personal sanctity of character would give them an aversion to such corrupt and degenerate creatures: so that how much soever they might pity your condition, they would turn away from you, as objects whose presence and converse were not to be endured. And do you not easily apprehend, that such a refusal on their part would be both shameful and very provoking to you? For which way could you bear it, to be thus rejected and dishonored by the most excellent part of the creation; by those whom perhaps you once intimately knew, and with whom you conversed upon equal terms; nay, by many who were once much your inferiors, and whom, perhaps, in the pride of your hearts, you would not condescend to regard? The natural effect of this must surely be, that you would soon be proportionably displeased and enraged with the refusal, as you were at first charmed at their appearance; and when you saw that transporting pleasure which they took in the affection and friendship of each other, and the joy which the Divine favor poured into their souls, while you, in the very same place, were excluded from these rich entertainments, your hearts would soon burn with envy and indignation; and as much as you before admired them, you, upon this, would come to hate them. And, perhaps, that hatred would put you upon some attempt to interrupt, or even, if it were possible, to destroy that happiness which you were not allowed to share. But, then, when you saw them continually under the Divine protection, and compassed with his favor as with a shield, (Psalms 5:12) so that your malice could not reach them, all the keenness and rancor of your spirit would recoil upon itself; you would fly from their presence, as insupportable; and would be glad to retire to some meaner apartment, or to hide yourselves in the shades of darkness; so that you might but get rid of the sight of so many dazzling objects, whose lustre, instead of cheering your vitiated eye, would pain and overpower it. But if you should not be transported to this diabolical excess--if it were possible for you to behold the glorified saints, and to live among them, without these envious and tormenting passions; yet surely you would want a relish for the most entertaining part of their conversation. Had you indeed a good natural genius, which to be sure many unconverted sinners have, it might be very agreeable to hear them discoursing of the wonders of nature; and that curiosity, which is in some measure incident even to persons of the meanest capacities, would make it pleasant to hear them recount the important history relating to the revolutions of the angelic world, which we on this earth are entirely strangers to, or at least have been very little acquainted with them. But surely the most delightful topics of conversation, which heaven itself can furnish out, must be those which are religious and divine; the infinite perfections of the ever blessed God; the personal glories and incomparable love of his condescending, but exalted Son; and the sanctifying operations of the blessed Spirit on the soul, transforming it into the Divine Image, and making it meet for eternal glory. Yes, even when the blessed spirits above are handling philosophical or historical subjects, they still consider them with a regard to God, as his perfections are displayed and illustrated in the works of his hands, and in the conduct of his providence. And here their pleasure flows, not merely from a set of rational ideas, which arise in their own minds, or are suggested to them by others: but from the exercise of those devout affections upon the blessed God, which are correspondent to these several subjects of discourse. And can you, sirs, who are alienated from the divine life, (Ephesians 4:18) and accustomed to live in a continual neglect and forgetfulness of the Great Parent of universal nature,

can you relish such subjects as these? You would, no doubt, be discontented and uneasy in such a scene: the heavenly oratory of this holy society would have no charms for you; but you would be longing for some of those vain and worthless companions, whom you were so fond of here upon earth, to hear a merry story, or a song, or to join with them in the pleasures of a debauch.

5. Another considerable branch of the happiness of heaven arises from the assured prospect of the everlasting continuance of this felicity; but, if an unregenerate soul could find any entertainment at all in heaven, he certainly could have no ground for such an expectation of its continuance. When the children of God on earth think of the happiness of heaven, the eternity of it makes a very deep impression on their hearts, and even swallows up their souls with ardent desire and unutterable joy: it raises their esteem, and animates their hope, while they reflect on that exceeding and eternal weight of glory, (2 Corinthians 4:17) that house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens, (2 Corinthians 5:1) and that inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, and which fadeth not away. 1 Peter 1:4. And no doubt that the blessed in heaven regard it in the same view, and all the pleasures they enjoy are vastly increased by the prospect of their endless duration; so that by the anticipation of an eternity still to come, they do, as it were, every moment enjoy an infinite satisfaction. But as for you, sinners, while you are so ill attempered to the happiness of heaven, the prospect of an eternal abode there would not, on the principles I have laid down above, be a prospect of eternal happiness, but rather, on the whole, of eternal uneasiness to you. But suffer me a little to discourse upon another supposition; and let me now, for argument sake, waive what I have been so long insisting upon, and suppose, that you could so far command the turbulent passions of your own heart, and so unite, as it were, the whole powers of your soul, to attend to the beauty of place, the harmony of music, and whatever else may be supposed capable of regaling the senses or the imagination, as upon the whole, to find heaven a pleasing and delightful abode, and to wish, that though some of its entertainments were above your taste and capacity, yet you might be allowed an eternal enjoyment of the rest; could there be any room for you to expect a perpetual abode in these blissful seats? No, sinners, you would not be able so much as to hope it. The good itself is so great, and perpetual enjoyment, even in any degree, has such a kind of infinite value, that I know not how the purest and noblest spirits in heaven could absolutely have been secure of it, separate from the engagement of a Divine promise. And what Divine promise would you be able to have recourse to in such a circumstance as we now suppose? Where could you find it in all the book of God, that persons of your character should ever enter into heaven at all, much less that you should forever continue there? You could have therefore no security of the continuance of your abode in heaven, if it were possible that you should enter on the possession of it: but when you should consider the unsullied holiness of the ever blessed God, the sovereign of this sacred province, and the spotless purity of that gracious Redeemer, to whom the government of it is committed, you could not but fear, that you should quickly be seized by the hand of vengeance, be hurled from the battlements of heaven, and plunged low into the pit of destruction. You know this was the condemnation of the rebel angels, and your guilt, compared with that dreadful event, which makes so considerable a scene of the history of heaven, would, I doubt not, be sufficient to create everlasting jealousy and uneasiness, and to turn every pleasurable circumstance into a source of horror, in the apprehensions of being deprived eternally of it.

Thus you see, sirs, from a particular survey of the various lights in which heaven is represented, and of the various branches of which its happiness consists, an unregenerate sinner is incapable of it, even though we would suppose that he was actually admitted to it. Let me entreat you to reflect on all these things, and you will see the reasonableness of that one remark with which I shall conclude this discourse, viz.:

How vain are all those hopes of heaven, which in your present condition you are ready to entertain!

I have been proving at large, that if God were to admit you to the possession of heaven, which it is certain he never will, you would be incapable of relishing the enjoyment of it: nay, that there would be a solid foundation in your own hearts, for many of the most tumultuous and disquieting passions. Envy and grief, fear and rage, those roots of bitterness, would spring up even in the Paradise of God, and turn the fertility of that blessed soil into their own nourishment. And do you imagine that any external accommodations or ornaments could make you easy and comfortable, under the transports of such hellish passions? What if you were to take a man that was tormented with a violent fit of the stone or gout, and to place him in a most delicious garden, or in a palace of marble and cedar, to set him on a throne of gold under a canopy of purple, to clothe him with robes of velvet and embroidery, regaling him with the most delicious fruits and generous wines, and at the same time soothing his ear with all the harmony of sound, which the most melodious symphony of instruments and voices could afford? Would all this magnificence and luxury make him insensible of that anguish which was racking his very vitals? or would not that inward torture rather render him insensible of this association of pleasurable impressions from without? Yea, would it not incline him to suspect, that you intended all these pompous preparations only to deride and insult him?' As little would your distempered and unholy souls be capable of relishing the entertainments of heaven, while these entertainments and these souls of yours, continue what they are at present.

There must be therefore a change: and will you consider where that change must be made? If you continue still in your present character and circumstances, there must be a vast change in heaven itself, before you can be happy in it. The whole temper, character, and disposition of every saint and angel there, must be changed from what it now is, before they can be capable of any friendly and complacential conversation with you. Yea, our Lord Jesus Christ, who is the same yesterday, to-day, and forever, (Hebrews 13:9) must divest himself of those beauties of holiness, which are infinitely dearer to him than any external grandeur or authority, before he can receive you into his kingdom. Nay, the very Father of lights, with whom there is no variableness, neither shadow of turning, (James 1:17) must be entirely changed. He must lay aside that holiness which is essential to his nature, and which is the brightness and glory of it: he must love that which he now hates, and be indifferent to that which he most affectionately loves, before he can open his arms to you, and smile upon your souls. And can you dare to hope for such an unaccountable, such an inconceivable revolution as this? No, sirs, infinitely sooner would God change earth into hell, and bury you, and all of your character, under the ruins of this world, which you inhabit and pollute, than he would thus tarnish the beauties of heaven, and divest himself of the brightest glory of his own divinity. "God," says Archbishop Tillotson, "has condescended to take our nature upon him, that he might make us capable of happiness; but if this will not do, he will not put off his own nature to make us happy."

What then do you imagine? Do you think that God will prepare some separate apartments in heaven, furnished with a variety of sensual pleasures, for the entertainment of persons of your character? some apartments from whence the tokens of his presence shall be withdrawn, from whence the exercise of his worship shall be banished, from whence saints and angels shall retire to make way for those inhabitants, who, like you, have sinned themselves beyond a capacity of enjoying God, or of being fit companions for any of his most excellent creatures? This were to suppose the Christian religion false, and to contradict the light of natural reason too, which not only shows such a disposition of things to be unworthy the Divine sanctity and majesty, but also shows that if there be a future state, it must be a state of misery to wicked men, in whose minds those vicious habits prevail, which are even now the beginnings of hell; which therefore they must carry along with them wherever they are, in proportion to the degree in which they are predominant.

Upon the whole then, you must evidently see that it is absolutely necessary that you, sinners, should be changed, if ever you expect to have any part or lot in the future happiness. And when do you expect that change should be wrought? Do you expect it when death has done its dreadful office upon you, and your soul arrives at the invisible world? Is the air of it, if I may be allowed the expression, so refined that it will immediately purify, and transform every polluted sinner that comes into it? You cannot but know, that the whole tenor of scripture forbids that presumptuous destructive hope. It assures us that there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom in the grave; (Ecclesiastes 9:10) but that we must be judged according to what we have done in the body, and not according to what has passed in a separate state, whether the actions we have done be good, or whether they be evil. 2 Corinthians 5:10.

If ever therefore you are regenerate at all, it must be while you are here below, in this state of education and trial: and if you continue in your sins till death surprise you, your souls will be forever sealed up under an irreversible sentence, and by the decree of God, and the constitution of things, will be excluded from happiness, as by no means either entitled to it, or prepared for it. So evident is the truth of this assertion in the text, that Except a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of God. And will you then sit down contentedly under such conclusion as this, "I shall be excluded from this kingdom, as accursed and profane?" Alas, sirs, the conclusion is big with unutterable terror and death, as I should now proceed to show you at large if my time would allow: for I am next to represent the infinite importance of entering into that kingdom, and consequently of that entire change which has been proved to be necessary to that entrance. But I must reserve that to the next opportunity of this kind. In the mean time let me add, that I doubt not but there are many present, who have heard this description of the heavenly world with delight, and who are saying in their hearts, "This is my rest forever: here will I dwell, for I have desired it: (Psalms 132:14 :) This is the felicity to which my heart aspires with the most ardent breathing." Such may with the utmost reason regard it as a token for good, and may go on in a cheerful assurance, that the grace that has made them meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light, (Colossians 1:12,) will at length conduct them to it, in perfect safety and everlasting triumph. Amen.

01.06. Discourse 6

DISCOURSE VI. OF THE IMPORTANCE OF ENTERING INTO THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN

John 3:3.

--Except a man be born again, he can not see the kingdom of God.

How impossible it is that an unregenerate sinner should see the kingdom of God, or enjoy that future blessedness to which the Gospel is intended to lead its professors, I have shown you at large. I have appealed to the testimony of God's holy prophets, and apostles, in concurrence with that of his incarnate Son, to prove that persons of such a character are, by the inviolable constitution of that kingdom, excluded from it. And I have further, in my last discourse, proved, that if they were actually admitted to it, they would be incapable of relishing its pleasures: that their vitiated palate would have a distaste to the choicest fruits of the Paradise of God; yea, that in these blessed regions thorns and briers would spring up in their paths, and make them wretched in the very seat of happiness.

I doubt not, but you are in your consciences generally convinced, that the truth of these things cannot be contested. You are inwardly persuaded that it is indeed so; and I fear many of you have also reason to apprehend, that you are of this unhappy number, who are hitherto strangers to regenerating grace. But how are your minds impressed with this apprehension? Do I wrong you, sirs, when I suspect that some of you are hardly impressed at all? Do I wrong you when I suspect there are those of you, who have spent the last week with very little reflection upon what you have heard? The cares and amusements of life have been pursued as before, and you have not taken one hour to enter into the thought with self-application, and seriously to consider, 'I am one of these concerning whom eternal wisdom and truth has pronounced, that if they continue such as at present they are, they shall not see the kingdom of heaven.' You have not paused at all upon the awful thought; you have not offered one lively petition to God, to beg that you may be recovered from this unhappy state, and brought to a meetness for his kingdom, and a title to it. For your sakes therefore, and for the sakes of others in your state, having already explained, illustrated, and confirmed the proposition in my text, I proceed,

III. To represent to you the IMPORTANCE of the argument suggested here; or to show you how much every unregenerate sinner ought to be alarmed to hear, that while he continues in his present state, he cannot see the kingdom of God. And oh! that while I endeavor to illustrate this, my words might enter into your minds, as goads, and might fix there as nails fastened in a sure place! The substance of my argument is given forth by the one great Shepherd; (Ecclesiastes 12:11) may the prosecution of it be blessed, as the means of reducing some wandering sheep into his fold.

Now in order to illustrate the force of this argument, I beseech you seriously to consider,—-what this kingdom is, from which you are in danger of being forever excluded:—and what will be the condition of all those, who shall be finally cut off from any interest in it.

Consider first what that kingdom is, from which the unregenerate, or those who are not born again, shall be excluded. And here you are not to expect a complete representation of it: for that is an attempt in which the tongues of angels, as well as men, might fail; or how proper soever their language might be in itself, to us it would be unintelligible: for eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. 1 Corinthians 2:9. And surely these final and most illustrious preparations of his love must, beyond all others, exceed our description and conception. A minister, that, with the apostle Paul, had been caught up into the third heaven, if he would attempt to speak of the glorious scenes which were there opened to him, must say, they were unutterable things: (2 Corinthians 12:2, 1 Corinthians 2:4) and one, that with John, had lain in the bosom of Christ himself, must say, as that Apostle did, It does not yet appear what we shall be. 1 John 3:2. And indeed, when we go' about to discourse of it, I doubt not but the blessed angels pity the weakness of our apprehensions and expressions, and know that we do but debase the subject, when we attempt the most to exalt and adorn it.

Yet there are just and striking representations of this kingdom made in the word of God; and we are there often told in general, wherein it shall consist. You no doubt remember that I was, in the last of these Lectures, going over several important views of it. I then told you, it will consist in the perfection of our souls in knowledge and holiness; in the sight of God and our blessed Redeemer; in exercising the most delightful affections towards them, and in being forever employed in rendering them the most honorable services; in conversing with saints and glorious angels; and in the assured expectation of the eternal continuance of this blessedness in all its branches. That this is the scriptural representation of the matter, I proved to you from many express testimonies in the word of God; and I doubt not, but you have often heard the excellency of each of these views represented at large, in distinct discourses on each.

I will not therefore now repeat what has been said upon such occasions; but will rather direct you to some general considerations, which may convince you of the excellency of that state and world, from which, if you continue unregenerate, you must forever be excluded: for I would fain fix it upon your minds, that it is in this connection, and for this purpose, that the representation is made. And oh! that you might so review it, as no longer to neglect so great salvation, (Hebrews 2:3) nor act as if you judged such everlasting life to be beneath your attention, and unworthy your care and regard! Acts 13:46. You cannot think it so when you consider,—that it is represented in scripture under the most magnificent images;—that it is the state which God has prepared for the display of his glory, and the entertainment of his most favorite creatures; that it is tile purchase of the blood of his eternal Son, that it is the main work of his sacred Spirit to prepare men's hearts for it; and the great business of our inveterate enemy, the devil, by all possible means, to prevent our obtaining it. Each of these considerations may much illustrate the excellency of it and all taken together yield a most convincing demonstration.

1. Consider, by what a variety of beautiful and magnificent images this happiness is represented in the word of God; and that may convince you of its excellency. When the blessed God himself would raise our conceptions of a state of being, so much superior to anything we have ever seen or known, unless he intended a personal and miraculous revelation of it, he must borrow our language, and in painting the glory of heaven must take his colors from earth. And here the magnificence of a city, the sweetness of a garden, the solemn pomp of a temple, the lustre of a

crown, and the dignity of a kingdom, strike powerfully on the human mind, and fill it with veneration and delight. But when such figures as these are borrowed from this lower world of ours, faintly to shadow out that which is above, there is always the addition of some important circumstance, to intimate how far the celestial original: exceeds the brightest earthly glory, by which the Divine condescension has vouchsafed to describe it. The enumeration of a variety of scriptural descriptions will set these remarks in the strongest light. If therefore heaven be described as a city, it is the New Jerusalem, the city of our God, that cometh down from God out of heaven; (Revelation 3:12, Revelation 21:2) the pavement of its streets is all of pure gold, its gates are pearl, and its foundations jewels. Revelation 21:19, Revelation 21:21. If it be a garden, it is the Paradise of God, (Revelation 2:7) and so far superior to that which he at first prepared and furnished out for the entertainment of Adam in his state of innocence, that it is planted on every side with the tree of life, (Revelation 22:2) of which there was but one alone in the garden of Eden: and is watered, not with such common rivers as the Tigris and Euphrates, but with that living, copious, inexhausted stream, the river of the water of life, which proceeds from the throne of God, (Revelation 22:1) and gently glides along through all its borders. When it is represented as a temple, we are told that instead of a golden ark placed in the remotest recess, to which only the high priest might once a year approach, and on which he might not be allowed to gaze, the throne of God is erected there, (Revelation 7:15) perpetually surrounded with myriads of worshipers who see his face, and like the high priest when clothed in his richest robes, have his name written in their foreheads: (Revelation 22:4) instead of the feeble rays of that golden candle. stick, whose lamps shone in the holy place, the heavenly temple is illuminated in a more glorious manner, and needs no candle, neither light of the sun, for the glory of God continually enlightens it, and the Lamb is the light thereof: (Revelation 21:23, Revelation 22:5) Nay, we are assured that its sacred ministers are made kings as well as priests unto God; (Revelation 1:6) and accordingly being clothed in white raiment, they have crowns of gold on their heads; (Revelation 4:4) as well as harps and golden vials, or censers full of incense in their hands: (Revelation 5:8) and lest we should think these pompous services are only the entertainments of some peculiarly sacred seasons, we are told that they rest not day nor night, (Revelation 4:8) adoring him that sits upon the throne, and are fixed as pillars in his temple, to go out no more. Revelation 3:12. Again, if it be spoken of as a crown, it is represented as incorruptible; (1 Corinthians 9:25) a crown of glory that fadeth not away. 1 Peter 5:4. And when it is called a kingdom, the scripture does not only add, as here in the text, that it is the kingdom of God, which must certainly exalt the idea of it; but that it is a kingdom which can not be moved, (Hebrews 12:28) an everlasting kingdom: (2 Peter 1:11) nay, to carry our thoughts to the highest degree of dignity and glory, it is spoken of as a sitting down with Christ on his throne. Revelation 3:21. But further, the value of these illustrious representations is much enhanced, if we consider the character of the persons by whom they are made. They were persons well acquainted with these things, having received their information from a Divine revelation, and from the immediate visions of God. They were also persons of such sublime and elevated sentiments, that they had a sovereign contempt for all the enjoyments of time and sense, even those which the generality of mankind set the greatest value upon: and counted all things but loss for the knowledge of Christ, (Php 3:8) and the testimony of a good conscience, (2 Corinthians 1:12) while they looked not at temporal, but at eternal things. 2 Corinthians 4:18. They could deliberately, constantly, and even cheerfully, resign all the riches and honors, and carnal pleasures, which they might have purchased by their apostacy from religion; and were ready to

embrace bonds, imprisonments, or death itself, when it met them in the way of their duty. Now certainly a glory, with which such holy, wise and heroic persons were so passionately enamored, and which they describe with such pathos of language, and such ecstasy of delight, while they were trampling with so generous a disdain on everything which earth calls good and great, must deserve our very attentive regard. And this it yet more evidently will appear to do, if we consider,

2. It is the state and world, which God has prepared for the display of his glory, and the entertainment of the most favored of his creatures. This argument seems to be hinted at, when it is said, as in the place I referred to before, eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. 1 Corinthians 2:9. God well knows the capacity of his creatures, and how much happiness they are able and fit to receive; and he can fill their capacities to the utmost: nay, he can farther enlarge them to what degree he pleases, that they may admit superior degrees of. glory and felicity. A happiness, therefore, which he has prepared on purpose to display the riches of his magnificence and love, and to show what he can do to delight his creatures, must certainly be in some measure proportionable, if I may so express it, to the infinity of his own sacred perfections. Let us then seriously consider who God is; and attentively dwell in our meditations on the extent of his power, and the riches of his bounty; and our conception of the happiness of heaven must be raised to something more glorious, than the most emphatical words can perfectly describe. And here, to assist our imagination in some degree, let us look round us, and take a survey of this visible world. This earth, how conveniently has he furnished it, how beautifully has he disposed it, how richly has he adorned it! What various and abundant provision has he made for the subsistence, the accommodation, and the entertainment of the creatures that inhabit it and especially of man, in whom this scheme and system of things appears to centre, and to whom it is almost wisely and graciously referred! Yet earth is the habitation of a race of mean and degenerate creatures, who are but in a state of trial; nay, it is the habitation of thousands and ten thousands of God’s incorrigible enemies, with whom he is angry every day. Psalms 7:11. Already it is marked with some awful characters of the Divine displeasure: and the scripture assures us, that it is reserved unto fire, against the day of judgment, and perdition of ungodly men. 2 Peter 3:7. Yet even this earth is not a spectacle unworthy our regard; nor can we, if we allow ourselves to survey it with becoming attention, behold it without an affecting mixture of admiration, of love, and of joy—passions that will strike us yet more powerfully, if from this earth of ours we raise our eyes to the visible heavens; and there behold the glory of the sun, the brightness of the moon, and all the numerous host of heaven that attend in her train. Who that considers, with any degree of attention, their magnitude, their lustre, their motion, and their influence, can forbear crying out, Oh Lord, our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth! who hast set thy glory above the heavens. Psalms 8:1. And when, with even these in our view, we further reflect, that there is another apartment, as yet invisible, of which this spangled firmament is but, as it were, the shining vail; an apartment, where the great Creator and Governor of all has fixed his stated residence, and erected the throne of his glory; even that throne which is forever surrounded by all the most holy and excellent of his creatures; we must be convinced, it is something more beautiful, and more magnificent than this harmonious system itself. And, methinks, when we have said more beautiful and more magnificent than this, imagination is ready to fail us, and to leave the mind dazzled and overwhelmed with an effulgency of lustre which it cannot delineate, and can scarce sustain. Yet will our venerable apprehensions of it be farther assisted if we consider,

3. That the kingdom of heaven is the great purchase of the blood of God's only begotten Son; and therefore to be sure it must be inconceivably valuable.

If you are at all acquainted with your Bibles, you must know that we are by sin in a state of alienation from God; (Ephesians 4:18) that we had forfeited all our title to his love, and stood justly exposed to his severe displeasure; and that it is Jesus who delivered us from the wrath to come. 1 Thessalonians 1:10. Now if we owe it to his merit and atonement that we live, (1 John 4:9) much more are we to ascribe it to him, if we are raised to any superior degree of happiness. If God could not, with honor to his justice, have suffered us, without such a propitiation, to have passed off with impunity; much less could he, without it, have received us to his embraces, and have advanced us to sit with him on his throne. Revelation 3:21. Accordingly it is said of the blessed martyrs in the heavenly world, even of those who had so gloriously distinguished their fidelity and zeal, and loved not their lives unto the death; (Revelation 12:11) that they had washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb; (Revelation 7:14) and they gratefully acknowledge it in their hymns of praise, that Christ had redeemed them to God by his blood, and had made them kings and priests unto God. Revelation 5:9-10.

Now let us seriously reflect, and consider what this blood of the Lamb is. The apostle Peter tells us, that silver and gold, and all the peculiar treasures of kings and princes, are but corruptible things, (1 Peter 1:18-19) or perishing and worthless trifles, when compared with it. And no wonder it is represented in such exalted language, when we consider it was the blood of the only begotten Son of God, who is the brightness of his Father's glory, and the express image of his person, (Hebrews 1:3) and indeed one with him, (John 10:30) being possessed of a nature truly and properly divine; so that it is called the blood of God. Acts 20:28. We may well argue, even from these transient surveys, that it was some important happiness, which he came to procure at so expensive a rate. Had an angel been sent down from heaven, we should naturally have concluded, it must have been upon some momentous errand: surely then, when the Lord of angels comes down, not only to live on earth, but to expire in bitter agonies on the cross, to purchase a benefit for us, we may be well assured, that this benefit must be very considerable. Our Lord Jesus Christ must certainly set a very great value upon it, or he would not have purchased it at such a price; and we are sure, the value that he apprehended in it must be its true value. He could not be imposed upon by any false appearance of glory and splendor: he despised, with a just and generous contempt, all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them; (Matthew 4:8, Matthew 4:10) and he was also well acquainted with the celestial kingdom, having so long dwelt in it, and so long presided over it: yet so highly does he esteem it, that he speaks of it upon all occasions, as the highest possible gift of Divine bounty, the richest preparation and noblest contrivance of Divine love: yea, he regards it as a felicity so great, that when he conducts his people into it, with the last solemn pomp of the judgment day, it is said, he shall see of the travail of his soul, and be satisfied, (Isaiah 54:11) allowing it to be a just equivalent for all he has done, and all he has suffered in so glorious a cause.

4. The excellency of the heavenly kingdom will further appear, if we consider, that it is the main work of the Spirit of God upon men's hearts, to prepare them for an admittance into it.

You well know, that the blessed Spirit of God is spoken of as that Divine Agent, by whom all the hosts of heaven were created, and all God's various works produced; (Job 33:4) and it is he that

knows the things of God even as the human spirit knows the things of a man. 1 Corinthians 2:11. Now it is his peculiar office in the economy of our redemption, to form the soul to a meetness for glory. Accordingly, when the apostle Paul had been reminding the Corinthians, that while they continued in their sinful state, they were unfit for the kingdom of God, he adds, But ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified, in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God. 1 Corinthians 4:11. That the Spirit should condescend to engage at all in such a work, must give us a very sublime idea of the end at which it aims. But much more will that idea be raised, when we consider with what a variety, and what a constancy of operations he begins, continues, and perfects it. He attempts it, as we shall hereafter more particularly show you, sometimes by convictions of terror, and sometimes by insinuations of love; and by one method or another, in the hearts of all the heirs of this glory, he works so great a change, that it is represented by turning a heart of stone into a heart of flesh, (Ezekiel 36:26) by raising the dead from their graves, (Ezekiel 37:13. Ephesians 2:5-6) yea, by producing a new creation. 2 Corinthians 5:17. Ephesians 2:10. For this does he watch over the soul with the tenderest care, and continues his friendly offices, to recover it from relapses, and gradually to form it to advancing degrees of sanctity, till at length it be enabled to perfect holiness in the fear of God. 2 Corinthians 7:1. Nay, so intent is this Sacred Agent on the important work, that when sinners most insolently and ungratefully reject him, and by resisting him oppose their own happiness, he does not immediately leave them; he strikes them again and again; and waits upon them for succeeding days and months, and years. And when, perhaps, the sincere convert makes the most ungrateful return for the experience of his goodness, even after he has acknowledged, and at length obeyed it: when under the fatal transport of some ungoverned passion, and the influence of some strong temptation, he acts as if he were intent upon tearing down the work of the Spirit of God upon his soul, and driving him forever away; yet in how many instances does he return again after all these injuries, pleading the cause of God with a sweetly prevailing eloquence, and thus healing the wound, and repairing the breach, and making it perhaps stronger than before I And all this, for what? That the happy subject of all these kind operations may be formed to a fitness for the kingdom of heaven. And are we to regard this blessed Spirit as an unmeaning agent, or as incapable of judging of the importance of this end for which he acts? Is that almighty energy of his employed in an insignificant manner? Surely Nicodemus, slow of understanding as he was, must apprehend the importance of entering into the kingdom of heaven, when he heard, that in order to be admitted to it, a man must be born of the Spirit. And let me add once more,

5. That the excellency of the heavenly kingdom may further be argued from the eagerness with which the enemy of souls is endeavoring to prevent our entrance into it.

You know the devil is always represented as the inveterate enemy of our happiness. His rage is expressed by that of a roaring lion, that walks about, seeking whom he may devour: (1 Peter 5:9) and with unwearied diligence he is continually employed in forming and pursuing his temptations. And this is the grand design of all, that he may exclude us from the promised felicity. While sinners are in their unregenerate state, he endeavors to engage all their regards to the objects of time and sense; and for that purpose he continually presents them with a variety of entertainments and amusements suited to their respective tempers and circumstances. If they are awakened to any serious concern about their eternal salvation, he uses his utmost address to divert their minds from an attendance to it: and for this purpose he displays before them all the allurements of sin in its

most engaging forms, and if they are not captivated with these, he often puts on a face of terror, and endeavors to affright them from religion by the most gloomy representations of it, or by horrible and distracting suggestions, that it is now forever too late to attain it.

Or, if Divine Grace surmount all this opposition, and the sinner resolutely chooses his portion in heaven, and puts his soul into the hands of Christ to be conducted to it, the malice of Satan pursues him even to that sacred retreat, which he has sought in the arms of his Saviour: and if he cannot prevent the soul from entering into heaven, he will at least labor to bring it into such a state of negligence, and to seduce it into those delays and relapses, which may divert its regards to that blessed world, which may cloud its evidences of it, and may at least, as much as possible, diminish the degree of its glory there.

Now permit me, in this instance, to turn the artillery of this cunning enemy against himself, and to argue the excellency of this kingdom, from the zeal and attachment with which he endeavors to obstruct your attaining it. Though Satan be now a very degenerate creature, he was once an angel of light, and still retains much of the knowledge, though he has lost the rectitude and integrity of the angelic nature. And he particularly knows what heaven is because he was once an inhabitant there; and while he is endeavoring to persuade the sinner to prefer earth before it, he does, by that very endeavor, incontestably prove, that he himself knows the contrary, and is fully apprized that there is nothing here to be compared with the felicity of the future state. And therefore while he seeks the destruction of the soul, he can leave it in the enjoyment of all its worldly prosperity; nay, he will attempt to lead him into methods, by which this prosperity may be promoted and increased. And thus, sirs, I have endeavored a little to represent to you, what this kingdom of heaven is from which we are assured that unconverted sinners shall forever be excluded. I have argued its excellency--from the representations which are made of it in the word of God--from its being the preparation of Divine love--from its being the purchase of a Redeemer’s blood--and the end to which, on the one hand, the glorious operations of the blessed Spirit lead--and of which, on the other hand, all the stratagems and assaults of the prince of darkness are intended to deprive us. If, therefore, there be truth in scripture, if there be wisdom in heaven, or policy in hell, it must surely be infinitely important. And will any of you be such mean-spirited creatures, as, when that happiness is proposed to you, basely to relinquish the pursuit of it, and to sacrifice this blessed hope to any perishing trifle of mortal life? Surely it would be madness; though nothing more were to be apprehended than the loss of it; and though, when heaven were lost, all that earth can give should remain, if not to counterbalance the loss, yet at least to make you less sensible of it. But the weight of the argument will much more evidently appear, if you consider, Secondly, What will at last become of all those who are excluded from this heavenly kingdom? And here I beseech you to ask your own consciences, whether they be not inwardly persuaded, that those who are excluded from heaven, will remain in a state of existence, in which they will be ever sensible of their loss, and will be delivered over by Divine vengeance into that seat of torment, which God has prepared for the punishment of his implacable and incorrigible enemies. This many of you do undoubtedly believe of such persons in general; believe it, therefore, of yourselves, if you are, and continue, in an unregenerate state.

1. You will still continue in a state of existence, in which you will be ever sensible of your unspeakable loss.

It might afford some wretched kind of consolation to you, if, as soon as you died out of this world, your being or your apprehensive powers were immediately to cease. Then the loss of heaven would only be an affliction to you in your dying moments, when you saw the enjoyments of earth were come to an end, and that you must have no part in any future happiness. But, alas! sirs, you cannot but know that when your bodies are dead, and consumed in their graves, your thinking faculties will still be continued to you: and, oh, that you would seriously reflect, how they will then be employed! You will then be thinking what you have done in life, what you have chosen for your happiness, and what has been the consequence of that choice. You will look round in vain for such accommodations and pleasures as you were once most fond of: but they will be no more. And when you perceive them vanished, like the visionary amusements of a dream, you will lift up your astonished eyes towards the regions of glory. And you indeed will have a lively view of those happy regions: but to what purpose will that view serve? Only through the righteous vengeance of God to aggravate your misery and despair.

"Alas," you will think, "there are millions of creatures yonder in heaven, who are rejoicing in the sight and favor of God, and are as full of happiness as their natures can contain, and shall be so forever; while I am cut off from all share in the Divine bounty. Rivers of pleasures are flowing in upon them, while not one drop is sent down to me; nor could I obtain it, though I were to ask the favor from the least of Christ's servants there. I am cast out as an accursed wretch, with whom God and his holy and blessed creatures will have no farther intercourse, or communion. And why am I thus cast out? and why am I thus cut off from God's favor, and driven from his presence, while so many that dwell with me on earth are admitted to it? My nature was originally as capable of happiness as theirs: and though it was sadly degenerate, it might, like theirs, have been renewed. God was once offering me that grace, by which my disordered soul might have been transformed, and I might have been fitted for the regions of glory: but I despised all these offers, and gave the preference to those fading vanities, which, alas I have forever forsaken me. And now they that were ready are gone in to the delightful banquet, and the door is shut; (Matthew 25:10) the everlasting gates are shut forever, and barred against me. And here I must lie at this miserable distance, envying and raging at their happiness--of which, whatever sight or knowledge I may have of it, I must never, never, never partake!"

Such reflections, as these, sirs, will cut deep into your souls; and accordingly our Lord declares to impenitent sinners in his own days, There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when you see others sitting down in the kingdom of God, and you yourselves thrust out. Luke 13:28. And if you would reflect, you might easily apprehend this. How would you be enraged at yourselves, if by your folly you had neglected securing a plentiful estate, when it was offered to you on the most easy terms; and you actually saw others, once your equals, and perhaps your inferiors, in the possession of it, in consequence of having taken those methods which you stupidly neglected? The reflection, I doubt not, would very much impair the pleasure you might find in other comfortable and agreeable circumstances. How much more insupportable then will the loss of heaven appear to you, when you come to see, and know, what it is you have lost, and have nothing to relieve or support you, under the painful recollection?

It is to no purpose to object, that upon the principles of my last discourse, there will be no room to lament your exclusion from those entertainments, which you would be incapable of relishing if you were admitted to them: for you will then see, and lament that incapacity as a very great misery. As

if a man, who was naturally fond of feasting and mirth, should see a great many regaling themselves, and reveling about him, while he was languishing under some painful distemper, which made him incapable of joining in the entertainment; he would yet grieve that he had no part in it: and it would be the increase, rather than the alleviation of his uneasiness, that it was his sickness which unfitted him for it; especially if, as in your case, it was a sickness, which he had brought upon himself by his own folly, and for which he had been offered an easy, pleasant, and infallible remedy, which he had refused to use till the malady was grown utterly incurable. One would imagine, this thought would be enough to impress you; but if it do not, let me entreat, and even charge you, to consider.

2. That if you are excluded from the kingdom of heaven, you will be consigned over to those regions of darkness, despair, and misery, which God has prepared for those unhappy criminals, who are the objects of his final displeasure, and whom he will render everlasting monuments of his wrath.

There is something in human nature, that starts back at the thought of annihilation with strong reluctance: and yet how many thousands are there in this miserable world, who would with all their souls fly to it as a refuge! They shall seek death, as an inspired writer strongly expresses it, and shall not find it; and shall desire to die, and death shall flee from them. Revelation 9:6. I will not attempt to enter into a detail of the horrors, attending the place and state, into which all who are excluded from the glories of the heavenly world shall be cast, and in which they shall be fixed. Let that one awful scripture suffice for a specimen of many more; in which we are told, that every one whose name was not found written in the book of life, or who was not registered in the number of those, who were to inhabit the New Jerusalem, or the kingdom of heaven, was cast into the lake of fire, (Rev. xx. 25,) or, as it is afterwards expressed, into the lake that burns with fire and brimstone. Revelation 21:8. Think of this, and ask your own hearts, you that are so impatient of the little evils of mortal life, whether you can endure to take up your abode forever in devouring fire, or whether you can dwell with everlasting burnings? Isaiah 33:14. Yet these are the images by which the word of God represents it; to be plunged as in a sea of liquid fire, whose flames are exasperated and heightened, by being fed with brimstone; nay, as the prophet speaks, by a copious stream of brimstone, so expressly appointed by God himself, that this, as well as the river of the water of life, is represented as proceeding immediately from him: he has made Tophet deep and large: the pile thereof is fire and much wood, and the breath of the Lord, like a stream of brimstone, doth kindle it. Isaiah 30:33.

It is painful to a tender mind to think of this, as what its fellow-creatures are obnoxious to: it is grievous to speak of it in these dreadful terms. But who are we, that we should be more merciful than God? Or rather, how can we imagine it is mercy, to avoid speaking of the appointment of infinite wisdom, for the punishment of impenitent sinners? What mercy were that, sirs, to avoid to mention these terrors to you, and to neglect to warn you of them, because they are great? which is indeed the very reason why the scripture thus pathetically describes them.

Away therefore with this foolish, this treacherous compassion, which chooses rather to leave men to be consumed, than to disturb their slumbers. Think, sirs, of that wretched man, whom Christ describes as lifting up his eyes in hell, being in torments; seeing the regions of the blessed at an unapproachable distance, and begging in vain that one drop of water might be sent to cool his

tongue, amidst all the raging thirst with which he was tormented in this flame. Luke 16:23-24. Regard it attentively; for as God lives, and as your soul lives, if you continue in an unrenewed state, you see in that wretch the very image and representation of yourselves. Yes, sinners, I testify it to you this day, that intolerable as it seems, it will on that supposition be your own certain fate; or to speak much more properly, your righteous, but inevitable doom. Heaven and earth will desert you in that dreadful hour: or if the inhabitants of both were to join to intercede for you, it would be in vain. Sentence will be past, and execution done. Hell will open its mouth to receive you, and shut it again forever to enclose you, with thousands, and ten thousands more, among whom you will not find one to comfort you, but every one ready to afflict you. Then shall you know the value which God sets upon his heavenly kingdom, by the judgments he inflicts upon you for neglecting and despising it; and then shall you know the importance of being born again, that only means by which Hell can be avoided, and Heaven secured. And let me farther add, that conviction will quickly come in this terrible way, if you are not now prevailed upon to consider these things; things which, if you have the least regard to the word of God, you cannot but notionally believe. Do not then go about to annihilate, as it were, these prospects to your mind, by placing them at a long distance. The distance is not so great as to deserve mention. The patience of God will not wait upon you for thousands, or even hundreds of years; you have a few mortal days, in which to consider of the matter; or rather, you have the present moment to consider of it. And if you improve the opportunity, it is well; but if not, the just and uniform methods of the divine administration shall proceed, though it should be to your ruin. God has vindicated the honors of his violated law, and despised Gospel, upon millions, who with the rebel-angels, by whom they have been seduced, are even now reserved in everlasting chains under darkness, unto the judgment of the great day; (Jude 1:6) and he will as surely vindicate them upon you. If you do not repent, if you are not regenerate, you shall all likewise perish, (Luke 13:3) and not one of you shall escape. And thus I close this copious and important argument: this argument, in which life and death, salvation and damnation are concerned. View it, my friends, in all its connection, and see in what part of it the chain can be broken. Will you say, that without regeneration you can secure an interest in the kingdom of heaven, though the constitution of heaven oppose it, and all the declarations of God's word stand directly against it; and though nature itself proclaim, and conscience testify your incapacity to enjoy it? Or will you say, that being excluded from it, you shall suffer no considerable damage, though you lose so glorious a state, the noblest preparation of Divine love, the purchase of redeeming blood, and the end of the Spirit's operation on the soul; though you ever remain sensible of your loss, and be consigned over to dwell in that flaming prison, which God has prepared for the devil and his angels, and where all the terrors of his righteous judgment are made known? But if you are indeed inwardly convinced of the truth and importance of these things, and will go away, and act as before, without any regard to them, I can say no more The reason of man, and the word of God can point out no stronger arguments, than an infinite good on the one hand, and an infinite evil on the other.

Hear, therefore, O heavens! and give ear O earth! and let angels and devils join their astonishment; that creatures, who would strenuously contend, and warmly exert themselves, I will not say merely for an earthly kingdom, but in an affair where only a few pounds, or perhaps a few shillings or pence were concerned, are indifferent here, where, by their own confession, a happy or miserable eternity is in question. For indifferent, I fear, some of you are and will continue. I have represented these things in the integrity of my heart, as in the sight of God, not in artful forms of

speech, but in the genuine language, which the strong emotions of my own soul, in the views of them, most naturally dictated. Yet I think it not at all improbable, that some of you, and some perhaps who do not now imagine it, will, as soon as you return home, divert your thoughts and discourses to other objects; and may, perhaps, as heretofore, lie down upon your beds without spending one quarter of an hour, or even one serious minute, in lamenting your miserable state before God, and seeking that help and deliverance which his grace alone can give. But if you thus lie down, make, if you can, a covenant with death that it may not break in upon your slumbers; and an agreement with hell, (Isaiah 28:15) that before the return of the morning, it may not flash in upon your careless souls another kind of conviction, than they will now receive from the voice of reason and the word of God.

01.07. Discourse 7

DISCOURSE VII. OF THE NECESSITY OF DIVINE INFLUENCES TO PRODUCE REGENERATION IN THE SOUL.

Titus 3:5-6. Not by works of righteousness, which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; which he shed on us abundantly, through Jesus Christ our Saviour.

IF my business were to explain and illustrate this scripture at large, it would yield an ample field for accurate criticism and useful discourse, and more especially would lead us into a variety of practical remarks, on which it would be pleasant to dilate in our meditations. It evidently implies that those, who are saved of the Lord, are brought to the practice of good works, without which faith is dead, (James 2:17) and all pretences to a saving change are not only vain, but insolent. Yet it plainly testifies to us, that our salvation, and acceptance with God, is not to be ascribed to these, but to the Divine mercy; which mercy operates by sanctifying our hearts, through the renewing influence of the Holy Spirit: And that there is an, abundant effusion of this Spirit under the Gospel, which is therefore, with great propriety, called the ministration of the Spirit, (2 Corinthians 3:8) and the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus. Romans 8:2. But I must necessarily, in pursuance of my general scheme, waive several of these remarks, that I may leave myself room to insist on the grand topic I intend from the words.

I have already shown you, who may be said to be in an unregenerate state: I have also described the change which regeneration makes in the soul; and have largely shown you, in the three last discourses, the absolute necessity and importance of it. And now I proceed, To show the necessity of the Divine power, in order to produce this great and important change. This is strongly implied in the words of the text: in which the apostle, speaking of the method God has been pleased to take for the display of his goodness in the salvation and happiness of fallen men, gives us this affecting view of it, that it is not by works of righteousness which we, i. e. any of us Christians, have done; but according to his free grace and mercy that he has saved us by the washing of regeneration, and the renewing of the Holy Ghost. . . . . .

Lest any should imagine, that an external ceremony (baptism) was sufficient, or that it was the chief thing intended, the apostle takes the matter higher. And as the apostle Peter tells us, that the baptism which saves us is not merely the putting away the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience towards God; (1 Peter 3:21) so the apostle Paul here adds, that we are saved by the renewing of the Holy Ghost: by which I can by no means understand something entirely distinct from, and subsequent to his regenerating influences; for according to the view of regeneration stated in our former discourses, none can be regenerated who are not renewed: but it seems to explain the former clause, and to refer to the more positive effect produced by Divine grace on the soul, whereby Christians are not only purified from sin, but disposed to, and quickened in a course of holy obedience. And then he further tells us, that this Spirit is the gift of God, and is plentifully communicated to us in the name, and through the hands of the blessed

Redeemer, being shed on us abundantly by God, through Jesus Christ our Saviour.

Agreeably therefore to the general design and purport of these words, I shall go on to demonstrate the absolute necessity of a Divine agency and operation in this great work of our regeneration; which I shall do from a variety of topics. And here I shall studiously waive many controversies, with which the Christian world has been afflicted, and the soundest part of it disturbed, with relation to the kind and manner of this influence. I will not so much as mention them, and much less discuss them; lest Satan should take an advantage of us, (1 Corinthians 2:11) to divert our minds from what is essential in this doctrine, to what is merely circumstantial. Only let it be observed in general, that I speak of such an agency of God on our minds, as offers no violence to the rational and active nature which God has given us, nor does by any means supersede our obligation to those duties which his word requires; but on the contrary, cures and perfects our nature, and disposes the soul to a regard to such incumbent duties, and strengthens it in the discharge of them. With this only preliminary, which appears to me highly important, I proceed to show the reasonableness of ascribing this change to a Divine agency, rather than to anything else, which may be supposed to have any share in producing it. And we may infer this, First, from the general and necessary dependence of the whole created world upon God.

There was a philosophical as well as Divine truth, in that observation of the apostle Paul at Athens, which was well worthy the most learned assembly; In him, i. e. in God, we live, and move, and have our being. Acts 17:28. Such is the innate weakness of created nature, that it continually depends on a Divine support. The very idea of its being created, supposes that it had no cause of its existence, but the Divine will in the first moment of it; and if it could not then subsist without that will, in the first moment of its existence, it neither could subsist without it in the second, or in any future moment of it; since to have been dependent for a while, can never be supposed to render anything for the future independent. The continued existence then of all the creatures—no less of angels, than of worms, or trees, or stones-- does properly depend upon the Divine energy which bears them up; and holds those of them in life, which live, and those of them in being, which are inanimate, or without life. And if their being be dependent, then surely it will follow, that all their perceptive and active powers, whatsoever they are, must continually depend upon God: for to exist with such powers is evidently more than simply to exist; and if a Divine agency be necessary for the latter, much more must we allow it to be necessary for the former. The human mind, therefore, with all its capacities and improvements, must acknowledge itself perpetually indebted to God, who is the fountain of truth and wisdom, as well as of being: accordingly we are told, it is he that teacheth man knowledge. Psalms 94:1. All the skill of the husbandman, in one passage of Scripture, (Isaiah 28:26) and all the wisdom of the artificer, in another, (Exodus 36:1-2,) is ascribed to his influence: and if the improvement of the sciences, and any other discovery, which renders human life in any degree more commodious and agreeable, is to be ascribed to the Divine illumination and influence, then surely it is from hence this art of living wisely and well must also be derived. All the views upon which good resolutions are formed, all the strong impressions upon the mind arising from these views, and all the steadiness and determination of spirit, which does not only form such purposes, but carries them into execution, are plainly the effect of the Divine agency on the mind; without which no secular affairs could be clearly understood, strenuously pursued, or successfully accomplished. And how peculiarly reasonable it is, to apply this remark to the point now in view, will appear by attending, Secondly, to the greatness and excellency of this

regenerating change, which speaks it aloud to be the Divine work.

I must, upon this occasion, desire you to recollect what I laid before you in several of the former discourses. Think of the new light that breaks in upon the understanding; of the new affections that are enkindled in the heart; of the new resolutions, by which the will is sweetly and powerfully, though most freely influenced; and think of the degree of vigor attending these resolutions, and introducing a series of new labors and pursuits; and surely you must confess, that it is the finger of God; especially when you consider, how beautiful and excellent, as well as how great the work is. Do we acknowledge, that it was the voice of God that first commanded the light to shine out of darkness, and that it was worthy of a Divine agency to produce so Beautiful a creature as the sun, to gild the whole face of our world, and to dress the different objects around us in such a varied and vivid assemblage of colors? And shall we not allow it to be much more worthy of him, to lighten up a benighted soul, and reduce its chaos into harmony and order? Was it worthy of God to form the first principles even of the vegetative life, in the lowest plant or herb, and to visit with refreshing influences of the rain and sun the earth wherein these seeds are sown? And is it not much more worthy of him to implant the seed of the divine life, and to nourish it from time to time by the influence of his Spirit? Did it suit the Divine wisdom and mercy to provide for sustaining our mortal lives, for healing our wounds, and recovering us from our diseases? And shall it not much more suit him, to act as the great Physician of souls, in restoring them to ease, to health and vigor?

They must be dead indeed to all sense of spiritual excellence, who do not see how much more illustriously God appears, when considered as the author of grace, than merely as the author of nature. For indeed all the works of nature, and all the instances of Divine interposition to maintain its order and harmony, will chiefly appear valuable and important, when considered in subserviency to the gracious design of recovering apostate man from the ruin of his degenerate state--without which it had been far better for him never to have known being, and never to have inhabited a world so liberally furnished with a variety of good. And, therefore, I would appeal to every Christian, whether he does not find a much more ardent gratitude glowing in his heart when he considers God as the author of the religious and divine, than merely of the animal or the rational life? And permit me here to remark, that, agreeably to these reasonings, some of the pagan philosophers have said very serious and remarkable things concerning the reality and the need of Divine influences on the mind, for the production of virtue and piety there. Thus, Seneca, when he is speaking of a resemblance to the Deity in character, ascribes it to the influence of God upon the mind: "Are you surprised," says he, "that man should approach to the gods? It is God that comes to men; nay, which is yet more, he enters into them; for no mind becomes virtuous but by his assistance." Senec. Epistol. LXXIII. Simplicius, also, was so sensible of the necessity of such an influence, that he "prays to God, as the father and guide of reason, so to co-operate with us, as to purge us from all carnal and brutish affections, that we may be enabled to act according to the dictates of reason, and to attain to the true knowledge of himself." Simplic. in Epictet. ad fin. And Maximus Tyrius argues, agreeably to what is said above, that "if skill in the professions and sciences is insinuated into men’s minds, by a Divine influence, we can much less imagine, that a thing so much more excellent, as virtue is, can be the work of any mortal art; for strange must be the notion that we have of God, to think that he is liberal and free in matters of less moment, and sparing in the greatest." Max. Tyr. Dissert. xxii. And in the same discourse he tells us, "that even

the best disposed minds, as they are seated in the midst, between the highest virtue and extreme wickedness, need the assistance and the help of God, to incline and lead them to the better side."Max. Tyr. ibid. I am sensible that all these philosophers, with many more who speak to the same purpose, living after Christ's time, may be said to have learned such language from Christians: and if they did so, I wish all who have since worn the name had been equally teachable. But some who appeared much earlier, speak much in the same manner, It is here remarkable, that Xenophon represents Cyrus, with his dying breath, "as humbly ascribing it to a Divine influence on his mind, that he had been taught to acknowledge the care of Providence, and to bear his prosperity with a becoming moderation."--Xen. Cyropæd. lib. viii. cap. 7, § 1. And Socrates is introduced, by Plato, as declaring, "that wheresoever virtue comes, it is apparently the fruit of a Divine dispensation."--Plat. Men. ad. fin. p. 428. And to this purpose Plato has observed, "that virtue is not to be taught but by Divine assistance."--Epinom. pag. 1014. And elsewhere he declares, "that if any man escape the temptations of life, and behave himself as becomes a worthy member of society, as the laws of it are generally settled"--which, by the way, is something very far short of religion—"he has reason to own, that it is God that saves him."--De Repub. lib. vi. pag. 677. edit. Franc. of 1602. as I might easily show you, if it were not already more than time to observe,

Thirdly. That we may further argue the Divine agency in this blessed work, from the violent opposition over which it prevails in its rise and progress. The awakened soul, when laboring towards God, and aspiring after further communications of his grace to form it for his service, may justly say with David, Lord, how are they increased that trouble me? How many are they that rise up against me? Psalms 3:1. With how many threatening dangers are we continually surrounded! And what a numerous host of enemies are ready to oppose us! The law of sin, that wars in our members, (Romans 7:23) and concerning whose forces it may well be said, their name is Legion, for they are many: the evil influence of a degenerate world, whose corrupt examples press like a torrent, and require the most vigorous efforts to bear up against them: and in confederacy with these, and at the head of all, the Prince of Darkness--whose counsels and efforts, with relation to this world of ours, do as it were centre in this one thing, to prevent men's regeneration; because it is by means of this, that those are recovered out of the snare of the devil, who were before led captive by him at his will. 2 Timothy 2:26.

I persuade myself, that when I am speaking on this head, though some may imagine it to be mere empty harangue, and common place declamation, the experienced soul will attest the truth of what I say. It may be s6me of you, who, by what of these sermons you have already heard, have come under some serious convictions, and been awakened in god earnest to be thoughtful about being born again, have felt such a struggle in your own minds that you may say, you never knew before what the flesh, the world, and the devil were, nor could have imagined that their opposition to this work was so forcible and violent as you now find it. To reform the irregularities of the life is comparatively easy; but to root sin out of the soul, to consecrate the whole heart to God, and demolish those idols that have been set up, as it were, in the secret chambers of imagery, (Ezekiel 8:12) is difficult indeed; all the corruptions of the heart in such a case are ready to exert themselves, and it is natural for the lusts of the flesh to unite against that which is set upon destroying them all; nor did you ever know before, that there was such a world of sin within you. With violence also does the strong man armed exert himself, when his goods are about to be

taken from him by one stronger than himself: as our Lord, with an unerring propriety and wisdom, represents it; (Luke 11:21-22) and indeed it seems as if through the violence of his malignity, and the righteous judgment of God, who, whenever he pleases, can take the wise in his own craftiness, (1 Corinthians 3:19) that Satan sometimes overshoots his mark, and raises so sensible an opposition against the cause of God in the soul, that an argument might be drawn, even from that very opposition, to prove the truth and excellency of what he sets himself so directly against. And you have now perhaps experienced, too, more than you ever did before, the inveterate opposition of the seed of the Serpent to that of the Woman: you have found, that since you began to think of religion in good earnest, some have derided you, others it may be have reviled you, and enemies have sprung up out of your own house: (Matthew 10:36) though the impressions you have felt tend to make you more amiable, more kind, and more useful, and therefore one would think should conciliate their friendship: but this is a memorable instance in which self-love seems to make, as it were, a sacrifice of itself to the hatred of God. Now, therefore, to accomplish such a mighty change in the midst of such opposition, must evidently speak a Divine interposition. And surely the Christian, when thus recovered and restored, has reason to declare, as Israel did, if it had not been the Lord who was on our side when these confederate enemies rose up against us, then they had swallowed us up quick, when their wrath was kindled against us; then the waters had overwhelmed us, the stream had gone over our soul, then the proud waters had gone over our soul, (Psalms 124:1-5) and would have quenched and buried every spark that looked like Divine life, and have borne away every purpose of reformation and holiness. The remark will be further illustrated, if we consider, Fourthly, By what feeble means this change is accomplished. The apostle observes, that in his day they had the treasure of the gospel lodged in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power, which rendered it successful, might appear to be of God and not of man. 2 Corinthians 4:7. And it is still in a great measure apparent, that the same method is made use of from the same principle. The weapons of our warfare are not carnal; and if at any time they are mighty and effectual, it must be only through God. 2 Corinthians 10:4. It is not by secular might or power, (Zechariah 4:6) that this great work is accomplished: no, nor by the refinements of learning, or the charms of eloquence. These things indeed have their use; the understanding may sometimes be convinced by the one, and the affections moved by the other: yet where both these have been done, the work often drops short: and it may be the plainest addresses, from a weak and almost trembling tongue, shall perform that which the far superior talents of many have not been able to effect. A multitude of such instances has been found, and perhaps seldom in these latter ages more observable than in the compass of our own observation.

Now whenever this work is accomplished by the preaching of the gospel in a Christian country, there is generally some circumstance that shows it is a divine, and not a human work. It is not the novelty of the doctrine which strikes; for all the main truths, on which the conviction and impression turns, have been known even from early infancy. No miracles awaken the attention, no new doctrines astonish the mind; but what has a thousand times been heard, and as often neglected, breaks in upon the mind with an almost irresistible energy, and strikes it as if it never had been heard of before. They seem as Israel did, when the Lord turned again their captivity, to awake out of a dream, (Psalms 126:1) and wonder at the influence that has awakened them. The ministry of the word may seem but feeble, when compared to such an event: and yet sometimes even less solemn methods than that shall be effectual. One single text of scripture occurring to the sight or thought, one serious hint dropped in conversation, shall strike the mind, and pierce it through with

an energy that plainly shows, that from whatever feeble hand it might seem to come, it was shot out of the quiver of God, and intended by him that made the heart to reach it: since there is almost as much disproportion between the cause and the effect, as between Moses lifting up his rod and the dividing of the water of the sea before Israel. Exodus 14:16. In many instances, remarkable providences, which one would have thought should have struck the soul as it were to the centre, have produced no effect: and yet a word, or a thought, has accomplished it; and after the whirlwind, the earthquake, and the fire have made their successive efforts in vain, it has appeared that the Lord has been in the still small voice. 1 Kings 19:1, 1 Kings 19:12. On the whole, a variety of circumstances may illustrate the matter in different degrees; but, taking it in a general view, the remark appears to be well founded, that the weakness of the means, by which the saving change is wrought, argues plainly that the hand of God is in it: as when anointing the eyes with spittle gave sight to the blind, (John 9:6) it was evidently the exertion of a miraculous power. But now, agreeably to what has been advanced under these several heads, I shall proceed to show at large, Fifthly, That the Scripture teaches us to ascribe this great change on the mind to a Divine agency and operation. And here you will see, that it does not merely drop here and there an expression which is capable of such an interpretation, but that the whole tenor of the word of God leads to such a conclusion: and surely, if we own the word to be divine, we need no more convincing argument of the truth of this remark. The only difficulty I shall here find, will be like that which occurred under the former head, and proceeds from the variety and multiplicity of texts which offer them selves to me while reflecting on this subject; however, I will endeavor to rank them in the plainest and best order I can, under the following particulars. We find God sometimes promises to produce such a change in men's minds; and at other times he speaks of it as his own work, when it has been already produced: the scripture represents even the increase of piety in a regenerate heart, as the effect of a Divine power; and how much more must the first implanting of it be so: nay, it goes yet further than this, and expresses the necessity as well as the reality of a Divine influence on the mind to make it truly religious, and resolves the want of true religion into this, that God withholds his influence. If, therefore, any one, and much more if all these particulars can be made out, I think it must force a conviction on your judgment at least, that what we are endeavoring to confirm in this discourse is the doctrine of scripture.

1. There are various places in scripture, wherein God promises to produce such a change in men's minds as we have before described; which plainly shows that it is to be acknowledged as his work.

Thus Moses says to Israel, without all doubt by the Divine direction, The Lord thy God will circumcise thy heart, and the heart of thy seed, to love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, that thou mayest live. Deuteronomy 30:6. And this circumcision of the heart must surely be the removal of some insensibility and pollution adhering to it, and bringing it to a more orderly, regular, obedient state. It is sometimes made matter of exhortation, and thus indeed proves that there is a view in which it may be considered as a DUTY incumbent upon us (as when Moses said, circumcise the foreskin of your heart; (Deuteronomy 10:16) and Jeremiah, in imitation of him, circumcise yourselves to the Lord, and take away the foreskin of your heart. (Jeremiah 4:4) Here it is put in the form of a promise, to signify that wherever it was done, it was in consequence of God's preventing and assisting grace. On the same principle, the Father promises to Christ, thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power. Psalms 110:3. But if any pretend that these words may possibly admit of another version, though I know none more just than this, there are many

other parallel places which are not attended with any ambiguity at all. Such, in particular, is that gracious promise, which though it was immediately made to the house of Israel, Sis nevertheless quoted by the apostles as expressive of God's gospel covenant with all believers; After those days, saith the Lord, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people: (Jeremiah 31:33; Heb. viii. 19:) or, as it is elsewhere expressed by the same prophet Jeremiah, I will give them one heart and one way, that they may fear me forever; and I will put my fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from me. Jeremiah 32:32, Jeremiah 32:39-40. And Ezekiel echoes back the same language by the same Spirit; I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within you; and I will take the stony heart out of their flesh, and will give them a heart of flesh; that they may walk in my statutes, and keep mine ordinances and do them; (Ezekiel 11:19-20) which is afterwards repeated again almost in the same words: A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh; and I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them. Ezekiel 36:26-27.

Now such a transformation of the heart and spirit as may be represented by a thorough renovation, or by changing stone into flesh, speaks the doctrine I am asserting in as plain terms as we could contrive or express; and beautifully points out at once the greatness and excellency of the change, and the Almighty power by which it is effected; for we may assure ourselves God would never promise such influences, if he did not really mean to impart them. But again,

2. Agreeably to the tenor of these promises, the scripture also ascribes this work to a Divine agency, when it is effected.

Thus the apostle John, when he is speaking of those who, on receiving Christ, become the sons of God, declares concerning them that they were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God: (John 1:13) plainly intimating that it was to him, and not only or chiefly to themselves or others, that this happy change was to be ascribed: which is well explained by those words of St. James, in which he says, of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of first-fruits of his creatures. James 1:18. Accordingly our Lord, as you have heard at large, insists upon it as absolutely necessary to a man's entering into the kingdom of God, not only that he should be born again, but more particularly that he should be born of the Spirit, (John 3:3, John 3:5,) i. e. by the sanctifying influence of the Spirit of God operating upon his soul, to purify and cleanse it. And as this great work of regeneration chiefly consists in being brought to faith and repentance, you may observe, that each of these are spoken of as a Divine production in the mind, or as the gift of God to it. Thus the believing Jews, with one consent, expressed their conviction when they heard the story of Cornelius and declare, then has God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life. Acts 11:18. And so the apostle Paul expresses it, when speaking of the possibility that some might be recovered out of the snare of the devil, he says, If God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth. 2 Timothy 2:25-26. That very attention to the Gospel, which is the first step towards the production of faith in the soul, is resolved into this, when it is said, that the Lord opened Lydia's heart, that she attended to the things which were spoken by Paul. Acts xvi. 41. And with regard to the progress of it, it is not only said in general, you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins; but faith is expressly declared to be the gift of God; (Ephesians 2:1, Ephesians 2:8) and the apostle says to

the Philippians, that it was given to them to believe; (Php 1:29) nay, it is represented as a most glorious and illustrious effort of Divine power, and ascribed to the exceeding greatness of his power towards them that believe, according to the working of his mighty power which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead. Ephesians 1:19-20. And in this view it is, that this change is called a new creation; (2 Corinthians 5:17) plainly implying, as a celebrated writer well expresses it, "that something must here be done in us, and for us, which cannot be done by us." Wherefore it is said, that the new man is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him: (Colossians 3:10) and we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works: (Ephesians 2:10) not to insist upon the great variety of parallel passages, in which the same thoughts are expressed almost in the very same words. But he indeed who would reckon up all the scriptures, both in the Old and New Testaments, which directly or indirectly refer to this, must transcribe a larger part of both than would be convenient to read at one time in a worshiping assembly. But we may further, by a very strong consequence, infer the doctrine I am now maintaining from those various passages of the sacred writers, in which, 3. The increase of piety in a heart already regenerated, is spoken of as the work of God.

Thus David, even when he felt himself disposed to the most vigorous prosecution of religion, solemnly declares his dependence upon continued Divine influences, to enable him to execute the holy purpose he was then most affectionately forming: I will run the way of thy commandments, says he, when thou shalt enlarge my heart, (Psalms 119:32) i. e. when thou shalt influence it with a steady principle of zeal, and with those devout passions which may make every branch of my duty easy and delightful. And the apostle Paul declares his persuasion that God would continue those gracious influences which he had already imparted: He that has begun a good work in you, will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ. Php 1:6. And when he speaks of the ardent desire with which Christians were aspiring towards a better world, he adds, He that hath wrought us for the self-same things is God. 2 Corinthians 5:5. Thus also he ascribes his continued fidelity in the ministry to the grace of God that was with him, as being one that had obtained mercy of the Lord to be faithful: (1 Corinthians 7:25) for by the grace of God, says he, I am what I am: and if I have labored more abundantly than others, it is not I, but the grace of God which was with me. 1 Corinthians 15:10. On the same principle he acknowledges, that the success of Apollos in watering, as well as his own in planting, was to be referred to this, that God gave the increase in the one case as well as in the other. 1 Corinthians 3:6-7. And he concludes his Epistle to the Hebrews with this remarkable prayer: The God of peace make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is well-pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ. Heb. iii. 31. But indeed, as every prayer that the apostles offer for any of their Christian brethren and friends, that they may grow in grace, might be urged for the illustration of this head, I choose rather to refer the rest to your own observation on this general hint, than to enter into a more particular enumeration. I shall only add, to complete the argument,

4. That the scripture often declares the necessity as well as the reality of such influences, and refers the ruin of man to this circumstance, that God in his righteous judgment had withheld or withdrawn them. When Moses would upbraid the obstinacy of the Israelites, that all the profusion of wonders wrought for them in Egypt, and in the wilderness, had not produced any suitable impressions; so much was he accustomed to think of every thing good, in the moral, as well as in the natural world, as the gift of God, that he uses this remarkable expression: Yet the Lord hath

not given you a heart to perceive, and eyes to see, and ears to hear, unto this day. Deuteronomy 29:4. And our Lord, the propriety of whose expressions surely none can arraign, speaks to the same purpose, when adoring the Divine conduct with respect to the dispensation of saving light and gospel blessings, he says, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes; even so, Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight. Matthew 11:25-26. If some of the plainest and lowest of the people, who were in comparison to others but as little children, understood and received the gospel, while the learned men and politicians of the age despised it, God revealed it to the former, while he suffered the vail of prejudice to remain on the mind of the latter, though his Almighty hand could easily have removed it.

Those other words of our Lord must not be omitted here, in which he says, No man can come unto me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: (John 6:44) and what this drawing of the Father means, he himself has explained by saying, No man can come unto me, except it be given him of my Father; (John 6:65) and elsewhere he expresses it by learning of the Father; (John 6:45) all which must undoubtedly signify a Divine agency and influence on the mind. Nay, a more forcible expression than this is made use of by the evangelist John, where he takes notice of the unbelief of those that saw the miracles of Christ, therefore they could not believe, because Esaias said, he has blinded their eyes, and hardened their hearts: (John 12:39-40) which is agreeable to that expression of the apostle Paul, he has mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth: (Romans 9:18) a thought which the apostle pursues at large through the following verses.

These, to be sure, are very emphatical scriptures: and though it is necessary to understand them in such a qualified sense as to make them consistent with other scriptures which charge men’s destruction, not on any necessitating decree of God, but upon themselves and the abuse of their own faculties; yet still these expressions must stand for something; and in the most moderate sense that he can put upon them, they directly confirm what I have here brought them to prove. So that on the whole, the matter must come to this--That the cause of men’s final and everlasting ruin may be referred in one view of it, to God’s withholding those gracious influences, which if they had been imparted, would indeed have subdued the greatest perverseness; but his withholding these influences is not merely an arbitrary act, but the just punishment of men’s wickedness; and of their obstinate folly in trifling with the means of his grace, and grieving his Spirit till he was provoked to withdraw. This thought, which I might largely prove to you to be a compendium of the scripture scheme, reconciles all; and any consequences drawn from one part of that scheme to the denial of the other, how plausible soever, must certainly be false.

I hope what I have here said may be sufficient to fix a conviction in your judgments and consciences, that regeneration is ultimately to be referred to a Divine influence upon the soul: or, as the apostle expresses it in the text, that God saves us of his mercy, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost, which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour.

I shall conclude with two or three reflections, which, though so exceeding obvious, I shall touch upon, in regard to their great importance, without offering, as I might, to dilate on each of them at large.

1. Let those who have experienced this divine change in their souls give God the glory of it.

Perhaps there are many of you who may see peculiar reason to do it; perhaps you may be conscious to yourselves, that the arm of the Lord was remarkably revealed in conquering, every sensible opposition, and getting itself the victory, even when you seemed, as if you had been resolutely bent upon your own destruction, to struggle to the utmost against the operation of his grace on your soul. Others may perhaps have perceived the strength of the Divine agency in the slightness of the occasion, or in the weakness of the means by which he wrought; which indeed is often matter of astonishment to those that seriously reflect upon it. But whatever your inclinations may have appeared, and whatever means or instruments were used, give God the glory of all.

If you have found yourselves, from your early years, inclined to attend to divine things, and susceptible of tender impressions from them, that attention and those impressions were to be resolved into this; that God prevented you with the blessings of his goodness. If you have enjoyed the most excellent public ordinances, even with all the concurrent advantages that the most pressing exhortations, and. the most edifying example of parents, ministers, and companions could give; it was Divine Providence that furnished you with those advantages, and Divine grace that added efficacy to them--else they had only served to display their own weakness, even where they might have appeared most powerful, and to illustrate that insensibility or obstinacy of heart which would have rendered you proof against all. You do well indeed to honor those whom God has blessed as the means of your spiritual edification: but if they think aright, it would grieve them to the very heart to have those applauses given, and those acknowledgments made to them, which are due to God alone. All they have done is so little that it deserves not the mention; and the greater attainments they have made in religion, the more cordially will they join with the holy apostle in saying, Neither is he that planteth anything, neither he that watereth, but God that giveth the increase. 1 Corinthians 3:7.

2. We may further infer, that they who attempt the conversion of sinners, should do it with an humble dependence on the co-operation of Divine grace.

Otherwise they will probably find themselves fatally disappointed; and after their most skillful or most laborious attempts, they will complain that they have labored in vain, and spent their strength for nought; (Isaiah 49:4) and find reason to say, The bellows are burnt, and the lead is consumed of the fire, yet the dross is not taken away. Jeremiah 6:29. A dependence upon God, in all the common affairs of life, becomes us as we are creatures; and it is most necessary that we should, in all our ways acknowledge him, as we expect or desire that he should direct or prosper our paths: (Proverbs 3:6) but the greater the undertaking is, the more solemn should the acknowledgment of God be.

Let me therefore especially recommend this to those who are coming forth as young officers in the army of Christ. See to it, my brethren, that in the name of your God you set up your banners; (Psalms 20:5) that you apply from time to time to your public work with a deep conviction upon your minds that no strength of reason will effectually convince, that no eloquence will effectually persuade, unless he that made men’s hearts will plead his own cause, and bow those hearts in humble subjection. With these views, I have often known the feeblest attempts successful, and the meek and lowly have out of weakness been made strong; (Hebrews 11:34) while for want of this, all the charms of composition and delivery have been at best but like the lovely song of one who

has a pleasant voice, or the art of one that can play well on an instrument. Ezekiel 33:32. It is those that honor God by the most cordial dependence upon him that he delighteth to honor: (1 Samuel 2:30) and I will presume to say, that it is the inward conviction of this important truth, which I feel upon my soul while I am confirming it to you, that encourages me to hope, that this labor shall not be in vain in the Lord, (1 Corinthians 15:58) but that a Divine blessing shall evidently attend what has already been delivered, and what shall further be spoken. Only let me conclude my present Discourse with this one necessary caution,

3. That you do not abuse this doctrine of the necessity of Divine influences, which from the word of God, has been so abundantly confirmed.

God does indeed act upon us, in order to produce this happy change: but he acts upon us in a manner suitable to our rational nature, and not as if we were mere machines. He saves us, as the scripture expresses it, by awaking us to save ourselves: (Acts 2:40) a new heart does he give us, and a new spirit does he put within us, (Ezekiel 36:26) to stir us up to be solicitous to make ourselves a new heart and a new spirit: (Ezekiel 18:31) he circumcises our heart to love him, (Deuteronomy 30:6) by engaging us to take away the foreskin of our hearts. Jeremiah 4:4. You see the correspondency of the phrases, and it is of great importance that you attend to it. If any therefore say, "I will sit still, and attempt nothing for my own recovery, till God irresistibly compels me to it:" he seems as like to perish, as that man would be, who, seeing the house in flames about him, should not attempt to make his escape, till he felt himself moved by a miracle.

Sirs, the dependence of the creature on God, though it be especially, yet it is not only, in spiritual affairs: it runs through all our interests and concerns. We as really depend upon his influence to stretch out our hands, as we do to raise our hearts towards him in prayer. Your fields could no more produce their fruit without his agency, than his word could, without it, become fruitful in your hearts: yet you plow and sow; and would look upon him as a madman, that upon this principle should decline it, urging, that no crop could be expected if God did not produce it; and that if he pleased to produce it, it would come up without any human labor. The argument is just the same in that case, as when men plead for the neglect of means or endeavors, from the reality and necessity of a divine concurrence. And if they apply this argument to the concerns of their souls, when they do not apply it to those of their bodies, it plainly shows, that they regard their bodies more than their souls; and that in pretending to make these excuses, they belie their conscience, and act against the secret conviction of their own heart. Such persons do not deserve to be disputed with, but rather should be solemnly admonished of the danger of such egregious trifling, where eternity is at stake. And sure I am, that it is offering a great affront to the memory of the blessed Paul, when men pretend to encourage themselves in this perverse temper from anything he has said. For when he gives us, as it were, the substance of all I have now been saying, in those comprehensive words, It is God that worketh in you, both to will and to do, of his good pleasure, (Php 2:13) he is so far from mentioning it as an excuse for remissness and sloth, that he introduces it professedly in the very contrary view, as engaging us to exert ourselves with the utmost vigor in a dependence upon that Divine operation. And therefore, as he there expresses it, I say with him, Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; and if you will not do it, you have reason to tremble in the prospect of a final condemnation from God, aggravated by your having thus irrationally and ungratefully abused the revelation of his grace.

01.08. Discourse 8

DISCOURSE VIII OF THE VARIOUS METHODS OF THE DIVINE OPERATION IN THE PRODUCTION OF THIS SAVING CHANGE.

1 Corinthians 12:6.

There are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all.

WHATEVER the original sense of these words was, and how peculiarly soever they may relate to the miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit, the whole tenor of this discourse will show with how much propriety they may, at least, be accommodated to the operations of his grace. I have proved to you in the last of these lectures, that wherever regeneration is produced, it is ultimately to be ascribed to a Divine agency; and though I cannot say it is equally important, yet I apprehend it may be both agreeable and useful to proceed,

Fifthly, To survey the VARIETY OF METHODS which God is pleased to take in producing this happy change: or, to borrow the language of the text, to consider the diversity of operations, by which the same God, who worketh all in all, i. e. who produces all the virtues and graces of the Christian character, in some degree, in all his people, is pleased, according to his own wise and gracious purposes, to proceed in his agency, on those whom he regenerates and saves. And this survey will not be matter of mere curiosity, but may probably revive the hearts of some amongst you by the recollection of your own experience: and it may be a caution to others, who, for want of due compass and extent of thought and knowledge, are ready to argue, as if God had but one way to work on the human heart, and that one the particular manner by which he recovered them. Of this I shall speak more largely hereafter. In the mean time, I judged it necessary to premise this hint, to direct us as to the temper with which this discourse should be heard, as well as to the purpose to which it is to be improved.

Now what I have to offer on this subject will be ranged under these three heads. There is a diversity and variety observable—in the time—the occasion--and the manner, of the Divine operations on the soul.

I. There is an observable variety, as to the TIME of God’s gracious operations on different persons.

Some are called in their infancy:--others, and these perhaps the greatest part, are wrought upon in youth:--and some very few in the advance, and even in the decline of life.

1. Some are wrought upon by Divine grace in their infancy. This is often the case; and I doubt not, but if parents were to do their duty, it would much more frequently be so. And it is an honor which God is pleased, in some instances, remarkably to confer on a good education; which is indeed so important a duty on one side, and so great a privilege on the other, that it is the less to be wondered at, that he so mercifully encourages Christian parents in the discharge of it: thus granting, as it were, an immediate reward for this labor of love. And I must here take the freedom,

on my own observation, to say, that God seems especially to own the faithful endeavors of pious mothers in this respect. He has wisely and graciously given that sex a peculiar tenderness of address, and an easy and insinuating manner, which is admirably adapted to this great end, for which, no doubt, he especially intended it, that of conveying knowledge to children, and making tender impressions on their minds: and there is hardly any view in which the importance of the sex more evidently appears.

We have encouragement to believe, there are a considerable number who are, as it were, sanctified from the womb, and in whom the seeds of Divine grace are sown, before they grow up to a capacity of understanding the public preaching of the word: a remark, which Mr. Baxter carries so far as to say, that he believes, "if the duties of religious education were conscientiously discharged, preaching would not be God’s ordinary method of converting souls: but the greater part would be wrought upon before they were capable of entering into the design of a sermon." And indeed it seems to me, that children may early come to have some apprehensions of what is most important in religion. They may have a reverence for God, and a love for him, as that great Father who made them, and that kind Friend who gives them everything that they have: they may have a fear of doing anything that would displease him; and though it is not so easy for them to understand the doctrines peculiar to a Redeemer, yet when they hear of Christ as the Son of God, who came down from heaven to teach men and children the way thither; who loved them, and did them good every day, and at last died to deliver them from death and hell; their little hearts may well be impressed with such thoughts as these, and they may find a growing desire to be instructed in what Christ is, and what he taught and did, and to do what shall appear to be his will. And wherever this is the prevailing disposition, it seems to me that the seeds of holiness are sown in that soul, though but small proficiency may be made in knowledge, and though the capacities for service be very low.

I will add, that some remarkably pertinent and solid things, which little children have said concerning religion, seem to me plainly to evidence, that they have been, in many instances, under some uncommon teachings of the Divine Spirit: and it seems perfectly suitable to the genius of Christianity, that in this sense God should ordain strength out of the mouth of babes and sucklings, (Psalms 8:2) and should reveal to them what he has suffered to be hidden from the wise and prudent. (Matthew 11:25) Nor can I suppose it hard for any, who have been for a considerable time acquainted with the state of religion in Christian societies, to recollect various instances, in which persons thus taught of God, who have heard, and known, and loved the scriptures, and delighted in ordinances and serious discourse from their childhood, have been, in some measure, like Samuel, Obadiah, Jeremiah, Josiah, and Timothy, honored with eminent usefulness in the church, and have happily filled some of its most important stations of service. Almost every age has afforded instances of this; and I am persuaded, many are now growing up amongst us, who will be instances of it in ages yet to come.

2. Others, and these perhaps the greatest part of real Christians, are wrought upon in their youthful days.

Many parents are very deficient in a due care to cultivate the infant minds of their little ones; or the feeble and general impressions then made are, perhaps, worn out and lost, in the growing vanities of childhood and youth. They begin to be drawn away by evil inclinations and examples, and by

the delusions of a flattering world, which then puts on its most attractive charms, to gain upon their inexperienced minds: and hereupon they follow after vanity, and become vain: (2 Kings 17:15) of the rock which begat them, they grow unmindful, and forget the God that formed them. Deuteronomy 32:18. But by one method or another, God often stops them in this dangerous career; and awakening ordinances, or more awakening providences, bring them to a stand, and turn them the contrary way. The terrors of the Lord set themselves in array against them; (Job 6:4) or his mercy melts their souls, and they yield themselves its willing captives. They consecrate their hearts, warm as they are with youthful vigor, to be the sacrifices of Divine love, and enter, it may be, very early into the bonds of God's covenant: and so prove such a seed to serve him, as is accounted to the Lord for a most honorable and useful generation. Psalms 22:30. Blessed be God, I speak to many who know this by experience! By far the greater part of those who have been admitted to your communion, since I settled among you, have been, as I apprehend, under the age of twenty-four years: and several of those, who were farther advanced in life when they first approached the table of the Lord, had been brought to real religion in their much earlier years; though particular circumstances, or some mistaken apprehensions, might prevent their giving up their names publicly to the Lord, so soon as they might, and as they ought to have done it.

3. Some few are wrought upon by Divine grace in the advance, and even in the decline of life.

I confess that the number of these is comparatively small: and it is not to be wondered at, that it is so. They are not many who arrive at what can properly be called old age; and of them but a very inconsiderable part are then brought to anything which looks like a saving change. Nor shall we be much surprised at this, if we consider the inveterate nature of bad habits, which render it almost as hard for them that are accustomed to do evil, to learn to do good, as it is for the Ethiopian to Change his skin, or the leopard his spots. Jeremiah 13:23. To such a degree are prejudices riveted in the mind, so insensible is it rendered of tender and generous impressions, so cold are the affections, and the habits, if the phrase may be allowed, so rigid, that, humanly speaking, there is much less probability of their being impressed with religion, than there was when they were in the bloom of life; notwithstanding all the seeming advantages which might arise from riper reason, deeper experience, and a nearer prospect of eternity. In all these things, it is in vain to reason against observation of fact, since we evidently see how uncommon a thing it is, for persons to be awakened and reformed in old age; especially if they have been educated in the principles of religion, and have made a florid profession of it in their youth--from which they have afterwards apostatized, out of a love to the wealth or honors of the world, or a relish for sensual delights. Such persons generally live and die monuments of Divine wrath, bearing, as it were, in characters dreadfully legible, the sad inscription of those, who having forsaken God, are finally forsaken of him. They appear as dry trees, twice dead, and fit for nothing but to be plucked up by the roots, and cast into the fire. Jude 1:12; John 15:16.

Nevertheless, to prove the infinite energy and sovereignty of Divine grace, God is sometimes pleased to work even on such. He touches the rock which has stood for ages unmoved, and the waters flow forth: he says to the dry bones, Live, and they obey; they are clothed with beauty, they are animated with life, and stand up as with the vigor of a renewed youth, to pursue the labors of religion, and to fight the battles of the Lord. Ezekiel 38:20. Such instances, in which aged sinners have been thus wrought upon, I have read and heard; though, I grieve to say it, I can recollect very few, if any, that have occurred to me within the sphere of my own personal observation and

acquaintance. But besides this variety in the time, there is also, II. An observable diversity, in the OCCASION, which Divine grace takes to operate upon different persons. The occasions are indeed so various, that it would be impossible to enumerate them; I shall however just touch on some of the chief. And here I might particularly consider a religious education in this view, and that daily converse with pious friends, which is of course connected with it. But though perhaps there may be no occasion more considerable in itself, and none that has been more eminently honored of God; yet it is proper to waive it here, as having been mentioned under the former head.

I proceed therefore further to observe, that some are wrought upon by the word of God; others by some remarkable providences; some by little incidents, which, inconsiderable as they seem in themselves, grow memorable by the noble effects they are made to produce: and others by secret and immediate impressions of God upon their spirits, which cannot be resolved into any external cause, or any visible occasion at all.

1. The administration of Divine ordinances, and especially the word of God and prayer, is an occasion, which he most frequently takes to work upon men's hearts by his grace.

I do not mention the administration of the sacraments upon this occasion; because, though they have so noble and effectual a tendency to improve men's minds in piety, and to promote Christian edification; yet I do not remember to have heard of any instance, in which they have been the means of men's conversion; which is the less to be wondered at, as they were appointed for a very different end.

There are many, however, that have been wrought upon in prayer, as there are many things concur in this to awaken and impress the mind. The solemn acknowledgments then made of the Divine perfections, the praises offered to his tremendous Majesty, the deep and humble confession of our various and aggravated guilt in his holy presence, the lamentations over it, the importunate pleadings for a variety of blessings both for time and eternity; in a word, all the overflowings of pious affections in the breast of him that leads the devotion, and especially the earnest entreaties then offered for unconverted sinners, the genuine expressions of an undissembled apprehension of their danger, and the fervent breathings after Divine grace, to be communicated to them for their spiritual life: all these things, I say, and many more, which occur in prayer, when it is managed aright, may, by the Divine blessing, be singularly useful. And I am well assured, there have been happy instances, in which, while God's people have yet been speaking to him on this head, he has graciously heard, and signally answered them. Isaiah 65:24. But the reading, and especially the preaching of the word of God, is the grand occasion and instrument in the conversion of souls. Of his own will he begets them with' the word of truth: (James 1:18) and it is admirably suited to those saving impressions which it is intended to make on the heart, being quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword. Hebrews 4:12. It was while Paul was preaching that the Lord opened Lydia's heart, so that she attended to the things which were spoken by him: (Acts 16:14) and it was while Peter was thus employed, that such vast multitudes were pricked in their hearts, and said to him, and to the rest of the apostles present, Men and brethren, what shall we do? Acts 2:37? And I am well persuaded, that various and lamentable as the instances are, in which men stop their ears and harden their hearts against it, God does not even to this day leave it without witness: but the terrors of the Lord, as displayed by his faithful ministers, have subdued their thousands, and the riches of his grace their ten thousands, when

illustrated by those who have not only heard, but have themselves tasted of their sweetness. The preaching of the cross may indeed to them that perish be foolishness; but blessed be his name who died upon it, there is still a happy remnant, to whom it appears to be the power of God, and the wisdom of God. 1 Corinthians 1:18, 1 Corinthians 1:24.

Evangelical subjects, when opened with perspicuity, and enforced with vigor and tenderness, by those that have experienced the transforming energy of them on their own hearts, and desire above all things, to be wise to win the souls of others, (Proverbs 11:30) are generally the occasion of producing the most immediate and the most important change; as I doubt not, but many now present have seen and felt. And the observation of every year of life convinces me more and more that they who desire to be signally instrumental in this good work--this work of all others the most benevolent and important—must, in the account of a vain world, become fools, that they may be wise. 1 Corinthians 3:18. How contemptuously soever it may be fashionable to treat such preaching, we must make these subjects familiar to our hearers, and must treat them with all plainness of speech, and all seriousness of address, or we shall generally labor in vain, and spend our strength for nought. Isaiah 49:4. Would to God, that the teachers of our Israel may consider the importance of it, and grow wise by such experiments as these! that they may act the part of prudent physicians, who prescribe the medicines they find in fact most useful, and not those concerning which the finest speculations may be framed. Till then, whatever their learning, politeness, and parade may be, it cannot be expected that our health should be generally recovered; but we are like to continue, what we have long been, a vicious people, amidst the finest encomiums of virtue, that are anywhere to be found: nor will there be much room to wonder, if some of its most eloquent advocates should appear, even in their own practice, insensible of those charms which they so gracefully recommend to others, and sink in their character below those heathen moralists, whom they may choose to imitate, rather than Christ and his apostles. Nevertheless, I am persuaded, that if God intend mercy for us as a people, he will support among us a succession of those who shall dispense his truths in such a manner, as he has generally chosen to honor with success. But though the greater part of sincere converts are won by these, I am to add,

2. That remarkable providences, whether merciful or afflictive, are occasions which God takes to work upon the hearts of many others. When ordinary means have long been attended in vain, God perhaps interposes, by other more peculiar and signal methods, to pluck the trifling and lethargic sinner as a firebrand out of the burning. Amos 4:11.

Sometimes remarkable mercies and deliverances accomplish the work. An appearance of God in their favor, when they are conscious to themselves that they are the unworthiest of all his creatures, shall shame and melt them, and powerfully prevail on their minds to turn unto the Lord, who daily loads them with his benefits; (Psalms 68:19) and thus seems, in more senses than one, to send from heaven to save them, and to draw them out of many waters, in which they had otherwise been lost. Psalms 18:16. But we more frequently see, that afflictions are the means of performing this happy work. By a gracious severity God is pleased to lay hold on many, and to give them reason to bless the hand, which, though by a rough motion, delivers them from the flames that were kindling around them, and shows the Lord to be merciful to them. Genesis 19:16. Like Jonah in the ship, they are awakened by a storm to call upon their God: (John 1:6) like Manasseh, they are taken among the thorns, and laid in fetters, that they may be brought to know

the Lord: (2 Chronicles 23:11, 1 Chronicles 23:13) like the jailer, they are shaken with an earthquake, and trembling and astonished they fall down, and inquire what they shall do to be saved. Acts 16:26-30. The terrifying fear of the approach of death, or the distressing weight of some calamity, which threatens every moment to swallow them up in destruction, rouses their consciences to an attention to those divine truths which they had long forgotten, and opens those records of guilt which they had studiously sealed up. And there seems to be no affliction by which God more frequently works upon men than by sickness. When he weakens their capacity for the business of life, and spoils their relish for its enjoyments; when he confines them to their chambers, or even to their beds, and makes their chain straight and heavy; (Lamentations 3:7) when he threatens to take them away in the midst of their days, (Psal. xii. 24,) to deprive them of the residue of their years, (Isaiah 23:10) and immediately to bring them before that awful tribunal, for which they know, in their own consciences, they are so ill prepared: then do we often see the accomplishment of that observation which Elihu made so many ages ago; He chasteneth a man with pain upon his bed, and the multitude of his bones with strong pain, so that his life abhorreth bread, and his soul dainty meat: his flesh is consumed away that it cannot be seen: and his bones, that were not seen, stick out; yea, his soul draweth near to the grave, and his life to the destroyers: but sending him an interpreter, one among a thousand, to show unto man his uprightness, then he is gracious to him, and saith, in a spiritual as well as literal sense, Deliver him from going down to the pit, I have found a ransom. Job 33:19-24. Blessed be God, instances of this kind have been known among us, in which the sickness of the body has wrought the cure of the soul, under the conduct of the great Physician of both; and so has proved eminently to the glory of God, and the good of those who, for a while, have been in heaviness. 1 Peter 1:6.

Yet it must be acknowledged, that, in other instances, the remorse which a man expresses upon a sick bed, and in the near views of eternity, proves but like that of some condemned malefactor, who, when he has obtained a pardon, throws off all those appearances of repentance with which he had once deceived himself, and perhaps deceived others too, and plunges himself anew into capital crime; it may be, into crimes for which he afterwards suffers death, without those compunctions of conscience which he before felt, being hardened by a return into sin, attended with such dreadful aggravations. This has been the case of many; and I pray God it may not be thus with any of you. But if there be any among you that were once under powerful awakenings; and that have cried out of terrors on every side; (Job 18:11) that have confessed your sins, it may be, with greater freedom, and a more particular detail of circumstances, than the minister who attended you could have desired, and have resolved against them with all the appearances of the most determined purpose; and yet, after all, have returned with the sow that was washed, to her wallowing in the mire: (2 Peter 2:22) such have peculiar reason to be alarmed. and terrified. Every day of Divine patience toward such is astonishing. And if to all this have been added the returns of danger, and signal interposition of Providence for your deliverance, and yet there be no kindly impressions of penitence and gratitude on your hearts, they who know the particulars of the case, must surely look upon you with horror as well as with wonder: for what can one imagine of such, but that they are given over by God to a darkness, which nothing but the flames of hell can enlighten, and a hardness, which nothing can penetrate but the sharpness of unquenchable fire, and the gnawings of the never-dying worm? But to return from a digression, into which compassion towards such a deplorable case has insensibly led me, I would farther observe, that as these various interpositions of a remarkable Providence are often the means of working saving

impressions on men's minds, so,

3. God is sometimes pleased to overrule little and inconsiderable incidents in life, as the occasion of accomplishing this happy change. As the treasure of the Gospel was at first put into earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power might appear to be of God, and not of man; (2 Corinthians 4:6) so God to make his own praise glorious, (Psalms 66:2) is sometimes pleased to produce the most important effects, by causes which seem in themselves least considerable. And it is astonishing to see from how small and seemingly unpromising a seed this plant of paradise springs up, and with how little cultivation too in some instances, after Paul had long attempted in vain to plant, and Apollos to water. 1 Corinthians 3:6-7. A few lines in the Bible, or any other good book, perhaps taken up by chance, shall be the instrument; and a passage, on which the eye glances without expectation or design, shall strike to the heart, like an arrow from the bow of God himself--after quivers of the most pointed and polished shafts have been exhausted in vain, though such shafts were most skillfully aimed, and most vigorously discharged. In other instances, a word dropped in conversation, and that perhaps no way remarkable either for its spirit or propriety, shall do that which the most solemn ordinances have not been capable of doing: an important encouragement, by the way, to abound in religious discourse, which God has sometimes been pleased to honor as the happy means of saving a soul from death, and laying a foundation for the delights of an everlasting friendship with those who have been so recovered.

4. Sometimes this great work is accomplished by secret and immediate impressions from God upon the mind, without any visible means, instruments, or occasions at all.

These things do not frequently happen; nor does it seem fit they should, lest any should be encouraged to expect them in the neglect of the appointed means. Nevertheless, it is plain, in fact, that God is sometimes pleased to go out of the common way; and his mighty hand is to be acknowledged in it. The reasons are known to himself; and the praise is humbly to be ascribed to him who giveth not an account of any of his matters. Job 33:13.

It is not, to be sure, so common now as it was in the days of Elihu, that God should speak to men in a dream, or seal instruction to them in slumberings on their bed; (Job 33:15-16) yet I have myself known several who have ascribed their first religious awakenings to some awful dream, in which the solemnity of the judgment day, or a view of the invisible world, has been represented to them with unspeakable terror; and others, to whom, when they have waked in the night, some words of scripture have occurred with such power, that they have not been 266able to divert their thoughts to anything else; and that when they themselves have not certainly known whether they were in the Bible or not.

I have known those that, in the circle of their vain companions, and in the midst of their sensual delights, have been struck to the very heart with some such scripture as this: to be carnally minded is death: (Romans 8:6:) or such a text as this has, on a sudden, darted into their minds; The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men. Romans 1:18. Such passages have seemed to ring and thunder in their ears, till the sound of their music, and the noise of their mirth have been quite overpowered, so that they have been driven from their revels to their knees, and have returned no more into the paths of the destroyer.

Yea, to add no more instances of this kind, I have known those of distinguished genius, polite manners, and great experience in human affairs, who, after having outgrown all the impressions of a religious education; after having been hardened, rather than subdued, by the most singular mercies, even various, repeated, and astonishing deliverances, which have appeared to themselves no less than miraculous; after having lived for years without God in the world, notoriously corrupt themselves, and laboring to the utmost to corrupt others; have been stopped on a sudden in the full career of their sin, and have felt such rays of the Divine presence, and of redeeming love, darting in upon their minds, almost like lightning from heaven, as have at once roused, overpowered, and transformed them; so that they have come out of their chambers with an irreconcilable enmity to those vices, to which, when they entered them, they were the tamest and most abandoned slaves; and have appeared, from that very hour, the votaries, the patrons, the champions of religion; and after a course of the most resolute attachment to it, in spite of all the reasonings, or the railleries, the importunities, or the reproaches of its enemies, they have continued to this day some of its brightest ornaments: a change which I behold with equal wonder and delight, and which, if a nation should join in deriding it, I would adore as the finger of God.99The conversion of Col. Gardiner is evidently alluded to here, in which Dr. Doddridge was deeply interested.--J. N. B. In mentioning these things thus publicly, I do indeed take an uncommon freedom, which some may perhaps censure; but so far as human testimony can give an assurance of truth, I may justly say, that I speak what I know, and testify what, in its genuine and powerful effects, I have myself seen. John 3:11. And since the possibility of abusing such condescensions of Divine mercy did not prevent their being granted, I can not think it ought to engage me to be silent, when so natural an opportunity offered of declaring them, to the glory of him who worketh all things according to the counsel of his own will. Ephesians 1:11. Yet I must repeat the caution which I before suggested, that it would be madness for any to neglect God’s appointed means of operation, on presumption that they shall be added to the small list of those who have been such uncommon and astonishing trophies of the efficacy and sovereignty of Divine grace.

These remarks must for the present suffice, with regard to the various occasions by which God works upon men’s minds. It is well to notice that the revealed word of God is in all these different modes of application the powerful instrument. This is the only safeguard against delusions of all kinds.--J. N. B. And I hope you will excuse me, if in illustrating some of them, I have a little anticipated some things which might have been mentioned under the third head, in which I proposed, III. To consider some varieties observable in the manner in which Divine grace operates on the mind. And this variety, by the way, will be observable in many instances where the occasions are in general the same. Thus among those that are awakened by the word of God, or by his providence, some are shaken by strong terrors, some are melted into deep sorrows; others are astonished, as it were, and captivated at once, by the discovery of the love of God in Christ, and others are led on by such gentle and gradual impressions, that they can hardly recollect any remarkable circumstance at all relating to the manner in which this blessed work was begun, or conducted in their souls.

1. Some converts are awakened by strong terrors.

It is obvious, that conviction of sin, in some degree or other, is absolutely necessary to make way for the entrance of the gospel into the soul. But the degrees are various in different persons; and

as for those of whom we now speak, God reproves them aloud and sets their sins in order before them, (Psalms 50:21) marshals them in dreadful array, as the expression imports; so that they seem like defenceless criminals surrounded by a host of enemies, whose weapons are raised for their destruction. Yea, God himself, the great, the terrible, the eternal, and omnipotent God, seems to set them up as a mark for those arrows, (Lamentations 3:12) the poison of which drinketh up their spirits: (Job 6:4) and, as he himself expresses it, He is unto them as a bear or a lion, ready to tear and rend the very caul of their heart. Hosea 13:8.

They come, as it were, to the trembling and terrifying Mount Sinai, to blackness, and darkness, and tempest. Hebrews 12:18. The conviction of guilt is attended with such a sense of the demerit of sin, as fills them with horror and astonishment, and engages them to wish in the bitterness of their souls, that they had never been born. They are left for a time, and that perhaps for weeks and months, to be, as it were, deafened with the loud thunders of the law; a dreadful sound, as Eliphaz expresses it, is in their ears, (Job 15:21) even the sentence of their own damnation; and the awful curse of an almighty, sin-avenging God comes into their bowels like water, and like oil into their bones. Psalms 109:18.

They are filled with such deep remorse for their past sins, that they verily think no iniquity was ever like theirs, and that no punishment will be like theirs. They hardly see a glimmering of hope that they shall obtain deliverance, but expect, in a very little while, to be sealed up under wrath, if they are not already so. When they bear the offers and the promises of the Gospel, they can apply none of them to themselves, and find comfort in none: but every threatening and every curse of the book of God seems to have been written as their intended portion. And thus, perhaps, they continue for weeks or for months together, expecting every day and every night that destruction from God, which is now a terror to them. (Job 31:23) should utterly swallow them up, and leave them neither root nor branch, neither comfort nor hope. Malachi 4:1. The law is a schoolmaster to bring them to Christ, (Galatians 3:24) and it scourges them with the most rigorous discipline; yea, the infernal lion roars over them, though he is not permitted to devour them: he particularly terrifies them when they think of approaching God, as if they were to meet with some peculiar danger there, where alone they can find their relief: or, if they do in broken accents utter their prayer before God, it seems to be shut out, (Lamentations 3:8) and they are apprehensive that it is turned into sin. Psalms 109:7. Yet there is one thing to be observed in the midst of this scene of horror, and it is a circumstance of great importance, that they justify God when he seems most inexorable, and subscribe to that sentence as righteous which dooms them to eternal ruin.

2. Others are melted into deep sorrows. Their eyes run down with tears; and they are ready to wish that their head were waters, and their eyes fountains, that they might continue to weep day and night. Jeremiah 9:1, Jeremiah 9:18. They see the evil of sin, and the misery to which it has reduced them, in a most deplorable view; and it may be, while those described under the former head are ready to tremble because they can not weep; these are ready to weep because they cannot tremble. They lament, among other things, the want of those strong horrors which some have felt: they cry out, "Woe is me! for I am undone; (Isaiah 6:5) I have destroyed myself, and in myself my help is not found." Hosea 13:9.

It may be, indeed, a considerable time before they can persuade themselves there is any help for them even in God. They know there is help in him through Christ for penitent and believing

sinners: but they cannot easily be convinced that they believe, because they do not feel that confident trust which some others have much sooner been brought to; and they are afraid, lest whatever they experience, which looks like repentance, should be only the false appearance of it, proceeding from mere self-love and a natural dread of future misery. They dwell perpetually on the dark side of things: they read over the catalogue of their iniquities again and again, and attend to those passages in which the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against every kind and degree of sin; (Romans 1:18) while they are slow of heart to admit those reviving consolations which the various rich and precious promises of the Gospel are so admirably well calculated to administer. The state of such souls, when they are first savingly enlightened, is like that of the earth, when fogs and mists have vailed the face of the sun after it is risen. But it very often happens, with respect to such souls, that when these mists are at length dispersed, a very bright and cheerful day opens: they are comforted by the warmer beams of the Sun of Righteousness, according to the hours in which they have been beclouded, and are made glad according to the days in which they were afflicted: (Psalms 90:15) and going on to fear the Lord, and to obey the voice of his servant, though they have long walked in darkness, and seen no light, they are at length encouraged by his Spirit enforcing the exhortations of his word, to trust in the name of the Lord, and stay themselves upon their God. Isaiah 1:10.

3. Some are captivated with astonishing and delightful views of the love of God in Christ.

There is always, as we observed before, in the awakened soul, some conviction of sin and apprehension of danger; nevertheless, there are instances in which God heals almost as soon as he wounds, and speaks peace almost as soon as he speaks trouble. He graciously shortens, to some souls, the pangs of the new birth, and gives them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness. Isaiah 61:3. The news of salvation by the blood, and righteousness, and grace of Christ, is received with so thankful a sense, with so joyful a compliance, that the soul, feeling beyond all doubt the cordial sincerity with which it embraces the offer, is filled with joy unspeakable, and full of glory: (1 Peter 1:8) the heart does magnify the Lord, and the spirit rejoices in God the Saviour. Luke 1:46-47. This was remarkably the case of the jailer, who in the very night in which he was converted, that same night in which the foundation of his house had been shaken, and his own soul too shaken, by an earthquake, so that he had endeavored to lay violent hands on himself: yet, I say, that very night, before the day appeared, having been directed to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, that he might be saved, and been enabled, by Divine grace to comply with the exhortation, it is added concerning him, that he rejoiced, believing in God with all his house. Acts 16:34. Thus too the Thessalonians, though they received the word in much affliction, and ran the risk of losing their possessions and their lives in adhering to it, yet received it with joy of the Holy Ghost. 1 Thessalonians 1:6. And though I cannot say this is God’s most ordinary way of’ dealing, and though I fear the counterfeit appearance of such a, work as this often leaves men in the number of those whom our Lord represents by stony ground hearers; (Matthew 13:20-21) yet it is certain, some instances of this kind are still to be found. But then I must observe, this is a joy attended with the deepest humility, and animates the soul to the most ardent and affectionate resolution of walking worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being strengthened with all might, according to his glorious power, unto all patience and long-suffering with joyfulness. Colossians 1:10-11.

4. Others--and these perhaps the greatest part of such as are religiously educated--are led on by such gentle and insensible degrees, that they can hardly recollect any remarkable circumstances that have attended their conversion, nor can certainly fix on the particular time of it.

God is sometimes, in the preceding instances, in the whirlwind, the earthquake, and the fire; but he is also frequently in the still small voice. 1 Kings 19:11-12. The operations of the Holy Spirit on the soul are often, and perhaps generally, of such a nature, that it is difficult exactly to distinguish them from the rational exercise of our own thoughts, because the Spirit operates by suggesting rational views of things, and awakening rational affections. For whatever some have vainly and dangerously insinuated, nothing is so rational as the sentiments and temper which prevail in renewed souls, and to which it is the work of God's regenerating Spirit to bring them.

These operations, where there is a religious education, often begin very early: but then, in some degree, the impressions wear off from the weak and flexible mind; and perhaps there are various instances in which they alternately revive and decay again. And this vicissitude of affectionate applications to religion under moving ordinances, afflictions, or deliverances, and of backslidings and remissness in it, with respect to many, may be permitted to continue for a long time. At length, under the various methods of Providence and Grace, the soul attains to greater steadiness, and a more habitual victory over the remains of indwelling sin: but it may be exceeding hard, and perhaps absolutely impossible, to determine concerning some remarkable scenes through which it has passed, whether such a one in particular, perhaps the last which strikes the memory, were the season of its new birth; or whether it were merely a recovery from such a degree of negligence and remissness, as may possibly be consistent with real religion, and be found in a regenerate soul.

These balancings of backsliding and recovery often occasion very great perplexity; and such sort of converts are frequently much discouraged, because they cannot give the history of their religious experiences in so clear and distinct a manner as others: and particularly, because they have not passed through such violent terrors and agitations of mind as many, who were perhaps once sunk into much deeper degeneracy have done. Nevertheless, where there is a consciousness of an undissembled love to God, an unreserved devotedness to his service, a cordial trust in the Lord Jesus Christ, and a sincere affection to mankind in general, and especially to those of the household of faith, a man ought not to perplex himself on this account. For as every man knows he was born into the world, by a consciousness that he now lives and acts here, though it is impossible he should remember anything of the time or circumstances in which he was first introduced into it; so may a Christian be assured, that some way or another he was born of the Spirit, if he can trace its genuine fruits and efficacious influences in a renewed heart and life.

I have thus laid down several particulars. which appeared to me important, in order to illustrate that diversity which is observable in the methods of the Divine operations on the heart; and they will naturally lead us to these three reflections, with which I shall conclude my present Discourse. Let us not make our own experiences a standard for others,—nor the experiences of others a standard for ourselves;—nor let us be unwilling, in a prudent manner, to communicate our spiritual experiences to each other.

1. Let us not make our own experiences a standard for others.

Let us remember that there is, as we have heard, a diversity of operations; and that many a person may be a dear child of God, who was not born just with those circumstances which attended our own regeneration. Others may not so particularly have discerned the time, the occasion, the progress of the change; they may not have felt all that we have felt, either in the way of extraordinary terror or extraordinary comfort; and yet, perhaps, may equal, or even exceed us in that holy temper, to which it was the great intention of our Heavenly Father, by one method or another, to bring all his children. Nay, I will add, that Christians of a very amiable and honorable character may express themselves but in a dark, and something of an improper manner, concerning the doctrine of regeneration, and may, in conscience, scruple the use of some phrases relating to it, which we judge to be exceeding suitable; and yet, that very scruple which displeases us may proceed from a. reverence for God and truth, and from such a tenderness of heart as is the effect of his renewing grace. We should therefore be very cautious how we judge each other, and take upon us to reject those whom perhaps God has received.

I remember good Dr. Owen, whose candor was, in many respects, very remarkable, carries this so far, as somewhere to say, "that some may, perhaps, have experienced the saving influences of the Holy Spirit on their hearts, who do not in words acknowledge the necessity, or even the reality of those influences." Judging men’s hearts, and judging their states, is a work for which we are so ill qualified, that we have reason to be exceeding thankful it is not assigned to us. And when we are entering into such an examination of their character, as our duty may in some particular circumstances seem to require, we should be very solicitous that we do not lay down arbitrary and precarious rules. It seems, indeed, that so far as we can learn it, we may more safely judge by their present temper and conduct, than by the history of anything which has formerly passed in their minds. And let me add it as a necessary caution here, that they who never felt any of the extraordinary emotions of mind, which have been described under some former heads, but have been brought to religion by less observable methods, perhaps by calm, rational views of it--of whom I believe there are great numbers—should be very cautious that they do not rashly censure such things as I have now been representing, as if they were mere enthusiasm. I can not but think this a criminal limiting the Holy One of Israel, (Psalms 78:41) and fear it will be found a boldness highly displeasing to him, and very injurious to the souls of those who allow themselves in it, and of others too, if they be such as are employed in the ministerial work: not now to insist on what, in comparison of this, is but a small matter, the apparent rudeness and petulance of contradicting facts so well attested as many of this kind have been, and running counter to the solid effects which such impressions have produced. The rashness which prevails under different forms among men of the most opposite sentiments, is too obvious; but if we would give ourselves leave calmly to weigh and consider matters, our spirits would be rendered on all sides more moderate, and many harsh and hasty censures would be suspended, which at present prove very little more than the ignorance, pride, and folly of those that pass them.

2. Let us not make the experiences of others a standard for ourselves. This is frequently the case, and especially with those who are naturally of an humble and tender temper; for whose peace and comfort therefore one can not but be peculiarly solicitous. Having heard of some extraordinary experiences of others, they are ready to imagine, because they can trace nothing correspondent to these in their own minds, that they are utter strangers to real regeneration, and have nothing more than such religious notions and forms, as natural men may easily learn of each other. But

what I have now been saying of the variety of the Divine operations on the heart, affords a solid answer to such scruples, when they arise in a pious mind. Reflect, on this occasion, how it is in the works of nature: there we know that God works in all, so that he is the life and existence of the whole creation; and yet, as an excellent writer expresses it, "He alone seems not to work.'' His agency is so invisible and secret, that did not reason and scripture join to teach it, one might live a great many years in the world without knowing anything more, than that such and such effects are produced by correspondent second causes: though in strict propriety of speech they are no causes at all, but owe all their efficacy to the Divine presence and operation. Sense tells us that the sun enlightens the earth, and warms it; that the rain waters it, the seeds produce vegetables, and the animals continue their proper race; but that God is the Father of lights, (James 1:17) that he has prepared the light and the sun: (Psalms 74:16) that he visits the earth, and causes rain to descend into the furrows thereof, (Psalms 65:9-10) so as to make the grass to grow for cattle, and corn and herb for the service of man; (Psalms 104:14) that he sends forth his Spirit, and the animal race is created, and the face of the earth renewed; (Psalms 104:30) this, I say, is what multitudes of the human race are not aware of; because in all these things he acts in a gentle, stated, and regular manner, and employs inferior agents as the instruments of his providence. And just thus gentle, silent, and regular are the influences of his Spirit upon men's souls; and it is often impossible exactly to distinguish them from the teachings of parents and ministers, and from those reflections which seem to spring from our own minds, though it is he that gives us counsel, while our reins instruct us in our secret musings, (Psalms 16:7) and that teaches us to profit by the lessons which others give us. Be not therefore surprised, and be not dejected, though you cannot assign the place, the time, the manner, in which your conversion began; and though you are strangers to the terrors, the sorrows, or the transports of joy, which you have heard one and another express. The wind bloweth where it listeth, and the Spirit dispenses his influences where and when, and in what measure and degree he pleases; but while the way and manner of his operation may be secret and unknown, the effects of it are sensible and evident; and as with regard to the wind, thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth; so is every one that is born of the Spirit. John 3:8. You may not certainly know when to fix the precise time of your conversion, or how to trace the particular steps by which it has been brought to pass; for as thou knowest not what is the way of the Spirit, nor how the bones do grow in the womb of her that is with child; even so thou knowest not the works of God who maketh all. Ecclesiastes 11:5. But though you cannot trace the process of the operation, the effects of it are such as you may feel within you, and by its fruits it will be known. Matthew 7:20.

It is indeed desirable to be able to give an account of the beginning and the progress of the work of God upon your souls, as some that are regenerate can do; but this is not necessary to evidence the truth of grace. Happy is he who in this case can say as the blind man in the gospel, One thing I know, that whereas I was blind, now I see. John 9:25. For as you know that there is fire when you see the flame, though you know not how or when it began; so also it may be discerned, that you have really undergone a saving change, though you know not how or when it was wrought in your hearts. If you answer the characters I laid down in the preceding discourses, as essential to the truly regenerate, which are all comprehended in repentance and faith, producing an unfeigned love and uniform obedience, you may trace the cause from the effect, with far greater certainty than you could have traced such an effect, as what would infallibly follow from any cause which you could have perceived in your minds previous to it. There may be great awakenings, violent

terrors, and ecstatic joys, where there is no saving work of God on the soul; but where the Divine image is produced, and the soul is actually renewed, we are sure, as was before observed, that grace has been working, though we know not when, or where, or how. And therefore, on the whole, guarding against both these extremes, and to cure them both, 3. Let Christians, in a prudent and humble manner, be ready to communicate their religious experiences to each other.

God undoubtedly intended that the variety of his operations should be observed and owned in the world of grace, as well as in that of nature; and as these things pass in the secret recesses of men's hearts, how should they be known, unless they will themselves communicate and declare them? And let me caution you against that strange averseness to all freedoms of this kind, which, especially in persons of a reserved temper, is so ready to prevail.

Let not any think it beneath them to do it. You well know that David, who was not only a a man of an admirable genius, but a mighty prince, too, was far from thinking it so; on the contrary, deeply impressed with the Divine condescension in all the gracious visits he had received from him, he calls, as it were, the whole pious world around him, that they might be edified and comforted by the relation: Come, says he, and hear, all ye that fear God, and I will declare what he has done for my soul. Psalms 66:16. He proclaimed it, not with his voice and harp alone, but with his immortal pen; and many other noble and excellent persons concurred with him; and the invaluable treasure of their experiences, in as great a variety of circumstances as we can well imagine, is transmitted to us in the book of Psalms. Can any just reason then be assigned, why they, who live under a nobler dispensation, and a more abundant communication of the Spirit, should be entirely silent on this subject?

There may indeed be an over-forwardness, which is the apparent effect of pride and self-conceit, and which, with thinking people, may bring even the sincerity of the speaker into question, or put his indiscretion beyond all possibility of being questioned. But it would be very unreasonable to argue, that because a thing may be done ill, it cannot possibly be done well.

Why may not intimate friends open their hearts to each other on such delightful topics? Why may not they, who have met with anything peculiar of this kind, communicate it to their minister? And though I must in conscience declare against making it absolutely and universally a term of communion, yet I am well assured that in some instances a prudent and serious communication of these things to a Christian society, when a person is to be admitted into fellowship with it, has often answered very valuable ends. By this means God has the honor of his own work: and others have the pleasure of sympathizing with the relator, both in his sorrows and his joys: they derive from hence some additional satisfaction as to his fitness for an approach to the Lord's table; they learn with pleasure the Divine blessing which attends the administration of ordinances among them: and make observations and remarks which may assist them in offering their addresses to God, and in giving proper advices to others who are in circumstances like those related. To all which we may add, that the ministers of Christ do, in particular, learn what may be a means of forming them to a more experimental manner of preaching, as well as in many instances discover those, before unknown, tokens of success which may strengthen their hands in the work of their great Master.

It is by frequent conversations of this kind, I have learned many of the particulars on which I have grounded the preceding discourse. I hope therefore you will excuse me, if, on so natural an

occasion, I have borne my public testimony to what has been so edifying to me, both as a minister and a Christian. And the tender regard which I have for young persons training up for the work of the ministry, and my ardent desire that they may learn the language of Zion, and have those peculiar advantages which nothing but an acquaintance with causes, and an observation on facts can give, has been a further inducement to me to add this reflection, with which I conclude my discourse; humbly hoping that what you have heard upon this occasion will, by the Divine blessing, furnish out agreeable matter for such conversation as I have now recommended, to the glory of God, and to the advancement of religion among you. Amen.

01.09. Discourse 9

DISCOURSE IX.

DIRECTIONS TO AWAKENED SINNERS.

Acts 9:6. And he, trembling and astonished, said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do.

THESE are the words of Saul, who also is called Paul, (Acts 13:9) when he was stricken to the ground as he was going to Damascus; and any one who had looked upon him in his present circumstances and knew nothing more of him than that view, in comparison with his past life, could have given, would have imagined him one of the most miserable creatures that ever lived upon earth, and would have expected that he should very soon have been numbered among the most miserable of those in hell.

He was engaged in a course of such savage cruelty as can upon no principle of common morality be vindicated, even though the Christians had been as much mistaken, as he rashly and foolishly concluded they were. After having dragged many of them into prison, and given his voice against some that were put to death, he persecuted others into strange cities; and had now obtained a commission from the Sanhedrim at Jerusalem to carry this holy, or rather this impious war into Damascus, (Acts 26:10-12) and to bring all the disciples of the blessed Jesus bound from thence to Jerusalem: (Acts 9:2) probably that they might there be animadverted upon with greater severity than could safely have been attempted by the Jews in so distant a city, under a foreign governor. But behold, as he was in the way, Jesus interposes, clothed with a lustre exceeding that of the sun at noon. Acts 26:13. He strikes him down from the beast on which he rode, and lays him prostrate on the ground, calling to him with a voice far more dreadful than that of thunder, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? Acts 9:4.

Any one would have imagined, from the circumstances in which he now beheld Saul, that Divine vengeance had already begun to seize him, and that full execution would quickly have been done. But God’s ways are not as our ways, nor are his thoughts as our thoughts. Isaiah 55:8. Christ laid him almost as low as hell, that he might raise him as high as the third heaven; of which he afterwards gave him a view in vision, to anticipate his reception into it. 2 Corinthians 12:2. This day of his terror and astonishment was, in a nobler sense than any other, the day of his birth; for he is brought to bow himself at the foot of an injured Saviour, to offer him, as it were, a blank upon which to write his own terms of peace; and as soon as he heard that this glorious person was Jesus, whom, in his members, he had so long persecuted, he makes his submission in these lively, comprehensive words, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? This was not a time for a long speech; but be that discerns all the secret recesses of the spirit, knew these few words were full of a most important meaning, and expressed not only a grief of heart for all that he had before been doing against Christ and his kingdom, but the sincerest resolution for the future to employ himself in his service, waiting only the intimations of his wise and gracious will, as to the most proper and acceptable manner of beginning the attempt.

There is, methinks, a poignant kind of eloquence in this short expression, far beyond what any paraphrase upon it can give: and our compassionate Lord accepted this surrender. All his former rebellions were no more remembered against him; and before he rose from the ground, to which he fell on so terrible an occasion, Christ gave him an intimation, not only that his forfeited life should be spared, so that he should get safe into the city to which he was bound, but that he should there be instructed in the service which Jesus, whom he had persecuted, would now condescend to receive at his hands.

I represent the case thus largely, because I hope it is a case, which, in some measure, suits the experience of some that hear me this evening. Paul tells us, it was for this reason, among others, that he himself obtained mercy, though he was the chief of sinners, that in him, as the chief, Jesus Christ might show forth all long-suffering, for a pattern to them who should afterwards believe. 1 Timothy 1:15-16. Is there then, in this assembly, any awakened and convinced sinner; any one that, apprized of his folly, and sensible of his misery, is desirous to fall at the foot of Christ, and say with Saul, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? That which I see not, teach thou me; and wherein I have done iniquity, I will do so no more! Job 34:32. Such would I now especially address; and while I put the question, Is there any such among us? I would fain persuade myself, there are several. For I humbly hope, that all the labors that have been bestowed in the preceding discourses are not in vain, nor all the prayers that have been offered for their success in vain; prayers which, I doubt not, have been carried by many of you into your families and your closets, as well as jointly presented to God in this public assembly. Trusting, therefore, that it is thus with some, and praying that it may be a more frequent case, I proceed,

Sixthly, to give some directions to such as are awakened by Divine grace to a sense of their misery in an unregenerate state, and are brought to desire recovery from it. To such I propose to give directions: and to what purpose would it be to undertake to offer them to any others? Who would pretend to teach those who are unconcerned about their salvation, what methods they are to take in order to their becoming truly regenerate? This, methinks, would be like giving directions how those might learn to write who do not desire it, and will not take a pen into their hands. All I could say to such, while they continue in this character, would vanish into empty air. It would not, probably, be so much as observed and remembered.

I speak therefore to awakened souls, and it is pleasant to address such on this head. Ananias undoubtedly undertook his message to Saul with cheerfulness, to tell him what Christ would have him to do: and I would with pleasure and cheerfulness engage in the like work; humbly hoping, that some will hear with observation and attention--will hear for themselves and so hear for their good. Job 5:27. And to this purpose let me advise you--to attend to the impressions that have been made upon you with great seriousness--to break off everything that is contrary to them--to seek for further knowledge in religious matters—to pour out your souls before God in earnest prayer—to communicate the state of your case to some experienced Christian--to acquaint yourselves with such as are much in your own circumstances--to fly immediately to Christ, as ready to receive all that come to him--to dedicate yourselves to him, and to his service, in the most solemn manner--to arm yourselves to encounter the greatest difficulties in your Christian course--and finally, to take every step in this attempt with a deep sense of your own weakness, and an humble dependence upon Divine grace to be communicated to you as the matter requires. These are the several directions I would offer to you: and may they be impressed in such a manner on your souls, that

none of you may lose the things that have been wrought: (2 John 1:8) but by the effectual working of the mighty power of God, (Ephesians 1:19) such as he graciously has been pleased to bring to the birth, may be brought forth, (Isaiah 66:9) and such as are awakened may be savingly renewed!

1. I would advise you to attend to the impressions made upon you with great seriousness.

They may perhaps take you a little off the world and its concernments; and some will blame you for suffering such an interruption: but regard not that censure. The time will come, if you pursue these things aright, when renewed diligence, prudence, and the Divine blessing, will amply make amends for any present hindrance which these impressions may occasion. And if it should be otherwise, is there not a cause? If a man seized with a threatening distemper should choose, for a little while, to lay aside his usual business, that he might attend to the care of his health, before the symptoms grew incurable would any body blame him for this? On the contrary, would it not be looked upon as acting a very wise, prudent, and necessary part? Much more may be said here. It is not a light thing for you, because it is your life. Deuteronomy 32:47. And if the life is more than meat, and the body than raiment, (Matthew 6:25) then surely the soul is more to be regarded than either. And therefore what you do in your worldly affairs, do moderately, and do not grudge that retirement which is so necessary in such a tender circumstance as this.

I may apply to you, on this occasion, those words of Solomon: Through desire a man having separated himself, seeketh and intermeddleth with all wisdom. Proverbs 18:1. If you desire to attain Divine wisdom, you must separate yourself from all other things to pursue it. And it is the more necessary to attend to this now, because the Tempter may probably contrive to lay some more than ordinary avocation in your way, at a time when the interest of his kingdom requires you should be diverted from prosecuting those views which are presenting themselves to you, and by which you may so probably be rescued out of his hands, and put forever out of his power.

2. Let me advise you to break off everything which is contrary to such impressions as these.

Sin will immediately appear to have been your disease and your ruin: and therefore, if ever you hope for recovery, you must resolutely break with that; not merely with this or that particular evil, but with every sin; and that not only for a little while, but entirely and forever. A mortal, irreconcilable war must be declared against it. Every fleshly lust must be denied, every immoral practice, for which your heart may at any time smite you, must be reformed; and if ever you expect to reap mercy and life, you must, as the prophet expresses it, break up your fallow ground, (Hosea 10:12) and not sow among thorns. Jeremiah 4:3. For righteousness has no fellowship with unrighteousness, and light no communion with darkness. 2 Corinthians 6:14. And you may be assured, that as all sin grieves the Spirit of God, and strengthens the heavy fetters which lie upon the soul; so those sins which are committed after these awakenings and convictions, have a peculiar guilt attending them, and do greater despite to the Spirit of grace, (Hebrews 10:29) in proportion to the degree in which his motions on the soul have been vigorous and warm.

3. Seek further knowledge, especially from the word and ordinances of God. The influences of Divine grace are not to be considered as a blind impulse: but God’s Spirit works on the spirit of man, as one rational being on another. The apostle therefore put the question with great reason, How shall they believe in him, of whom they have not heard? Romans 10:14. And as some knowledge is the foundation on which the Spirit of God ordinarily operates in men’s hearts; so in

proportion to the degree in which you attain further light into the scheme of the gospel, and of salvation by Christ, it may be expected you will be more impressed by it. The mention of this is so much the more necessary, as mistaken notions of religion often expose people on the one hand, to great perplexities, and on the other, betray them into a false peace, which one way or another will be bitterness in the end.

Come, therefore, to the house of God, and attend spiritual preaching. The question is not about forms, but things. Be not therefore over-scrupulous about what is merely circumstantial in religion, on the one hand or the other: but where you find more spiritual light and improvement, there choose generally to attend: not confining religion to any particular party, nor judging those who differ from you in their sentiment or practice; but calmly and humbly seeking your own edification, leaving others to seek theirs where they are persuaded, in the sight of God, they may most probably find it.

Above all, remember, in this circumstance, to make the word of God the man of your counsel, (Psalms 119:24) and to judge of what you read and hear by the tenor of that, as the oracle of eternal truth; always attending the reading of it with earnest prayer to God for the illumination of his Spirit, as I shall afterwards more particularly direct. No other books are to be set up in opposition to this, or in comparison with it; yet let it be your care, in subordination to scripture, to study the writings of those faithful servants of God in latter ages, who themselves manifest a sense of practical religion. Especially endeavor to find out and peruse those writings which treat of conversion and regeneration, and which contain advice suited to your case. Blessed be God, our language abounds with such: and every truly Christian minister will be glad to direct you to them, and so far as he has a convenient opportunity to furnish you with them.

4. Pour out your soul before God in earniest prayer.

You cannot be unacquainted with the many promises God has made in scripture for the encouragement of those who desire to pray to him in the sincerity of their hearts. You know into how little a compass Christ has crowded together three equivalent promises. Ask, and it shall be given you: seek and ye shall find: knock, and it shall be opened unto you; (Matthew 7:7) and you cannot but remember the threefold encouragement, from the success of those who have recourse to this expedient, which he has added in the most express and general terms: For every one that asketh, receiveth; and he that seeketh, findeth; and to him that knocketh, it shall be opened. Matthew 7:8. Go, therefore, in a cheerful dependence upon this promise: go, and try the truth of it. Whither should a creature in such circumstances go, but to that God, who has the hearts of all in his hand as the rivers of water, and turns them whithersoever he will? Proverbs 21:1. And who should go to him, rather than you? And in what circumstances should a distressed creature rather think of looking and crying to him, than in these; where it sees itself surrounded with so much danger, and yet feels an inward earnest desire, not only of deliverance, but of holiness, too? Go, therefore, and cast yourself at the feet of God this very evening: do it as soon as you return to your habitations; and if you can not put your thoughts and desires into words, at least sigh and groan before the Lord. Mourn, if you can not pray; and mourn that you can not; or rather be assured, that unutterable groanings have sometimes the greatest efficacy, and prove the most prevailing eloquence.

It will be no wonder at all, if in these circumstances Satan should endeavor to terrify you. It is his common practice. So many souls have vanquished him upon their knees, that he dreads and hates the posture: but draw an argument from that very opposition to make you so much the more eager and importunate; and when your heart is overwhelmed within you, fly unto the rock that is higher than you. Psalms 61:2.

I will add, Be not discouraged, though help be not immediately imparted. Though you may seem to be cast out of God's sight, yet look again towards his holy temple: (Jonah 2:4) though you may seem to cry from the deep, and almost from the belly of hell, (Jonah 2:2) the bowels of a heavenly Father will yearn over you as returning prodigals; and I doubt not you will meet with the reception that Ephraim found, when God saw him bemoaning and humbling himself, because he had been as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke: when he cried, Turn thou me, and I shall be turned: for thou art the Lord my God; his heavenly Father answers him in these most affectionate words: attend to them, O thou returning sinner, for thy comfort in this hour of distress! Is Ephraim my dear son? is he a pleasant child? for since I spake against him, I do earnestly remember him still; therefore my bowels are troubled for him, and I will surely have mercy upon him, saith the Lord. Jeremiah 31:18, Jeremiah 31:20.

5. I would advise you farther, that you immediately communicate the state of your case to some experienced Christian.

I know there is a backwardness in persons of your circumstances to do it; and it has been surprising to me to learn from some, who, in this respect, have afterwards grown wiser, how long they have been pining away. in their sorrows before they could be persuaded to consult their ministers or Christian friends. It is a stratagem of Satan, against which I would by all means caution you. And one would think your own reason should suggest some very obvious advantages attending the method I propose, of opening your case freely to those whom you think to be more experienced in these things. The impression may be revived upon your own souls, even by the account you give them: and their advice may be exceeding useful to you to guard you against the wiles of the enemy which they have known, though hitherto you have been strangers to them; and to guide you into such methods as, by the Divine blessing, may farther promote that good work which seems, in any measure, to have been begun within you. You may also depend upon it that it will engage their prayers for you; which, in this case, may have great prevalency. And it will also naturally lead them to inspect your conduct: and if they see you afterwards in danger of being drawn aside, they may remind you of the hopes once entertained, and the impressions once made upon your mind. In this respect you may hope, that by walking with wise men you will be yet wiser; (Proverbs 13:20) and will soon find how happy an exchange you make, when you give up your vain, and perhaps wicked companions, that you may become the companion of them that fear God, and that keep his precepts; (Psalms 119:63) and may have your delight in them, who, in the judgment of God, are the excellent of the earth, (Psalms 16:3) however they may be despised and derided by men.

6. I would also advise that you endeavor to search out those, if there be any such about or near you, who are much in your own circumstances.

Observe, especially among young people, whether there are any that seem of late to have grown more serious than ordinary; and particularly more constant in attending the ordinances of God,

and more cautious in venturing on occasions and temptations to sin; and if you can discover such, endeavor to form an acquaintance with them. Try by proper hints how far their circumstances resemble yours; and as you find encouragement, enter into a stricter friendship with them, founded on religion, and intended to promote it in each other's hearts. Associate yourselves in little bands for Christian converse and prayer; and by this means you will quicken and strengthen the hearts of each other. For on the one hand, what they tell you of their own experience will much confirm you in a persuasion that what you find in yourselves is not a mere fancy, but is really a Divine work begun on your hearts, and will give you encouragement to pursue it as such; for as face answers to face, in water, so does the heart of man to man. Proverbs 27:19. And on the other hand, the observation of your pious zeal will quicken others, and may occasion the revival of religion in the hearts of older Christians; as I bless God, I have found some things of this kind have done, and hope, and through the Divine blessing expect, to find it more and more. Therefore exhort one another daily, while it is called to-day, lest any of you should be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. Hebrews 3:13. Strengthen ye the weak hands and confirm the feeble knees; (Isaiah 35:3) and be assured, that while you are endeavoring to help others, you will find in yourselves the first fruits of this happy attempt; and while you water others, you will be watered also yourselves.

7. It is an advice of the highest importance, that whoever you are, you should immediately fly to Christ, and repose the confidence of your souls upon him.

Observe that I urge you, WHOEVER YOU ARE, to fly immediately to Christ: and this I do, to guard against a strange notion which some are ready to entertain, as if we were to bring something of our own righteousness and obedience to him, to render us worthy of being accepted by him. But this is a grand mistake. The blessings of the gospel are not to be considered as matter of bargain and sale: no, if we come to buy wine and milk, it must be without money and without price; (Isaiah 55:1) and whoever will take of the water of life, must do it freely. Revelation 22:17. If he pretend to offer an equivalent, he forfeits his share in the invitation; and must be made to know, that the price he offers is a great affront to the value of the blessings for which he would thus barter.

Let this then be your language, "Lord, I have undone myself, and in me is no help; I see nothing in myself which makes me worthy of thy regard; but this I know, that where sin has abounded, grace does much more abound, and reigns through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ; (Romans 5:20-21) through whom thou hast assured me in thy word that eternal life is the gift of God. Romans 6:23. As such let me receive it: and by how much the more undeserving I have been, by so much the more will I celebrate the riches of thy grace in making me a vessel of mercy, and a monument of love throughout all eternity. Blessed Jesus, thou hast said, that him who comes unto thee thou wilt in no wise cast out; (John 6:37) behold, I come, and cast myself at thy feet; receive me, and put me among the children, (Jeremiah 3:19) though I deserve not the very crumbs that fall from thy table." Matthew 15:27.

You will not, I hope, imagine that when I give such advice as this, I mean to insinuate that a person, purposing to continue in his sins, may nevertheless come and receive the blessings of the gospel: for that would be no other than in the grossest manner to pervert and contradict the whole tenor of it. But this I say, and repeat it, that when once a sinner finds himself, by Divine grace, disposed to turn from his sins to God, and made willing to accept the mercy tendered in the

gospel, of which a deliverance from sin and a renovation of nature are a great, important, and essential part; he may with cheerfulness apply himself to the great Redeemer, as one of those whom he came on purpose to deliver; and in proportion to the degree in which he can discern the sincerity of his sentiments, he may open his heart to comfort, how great soever his former unworthiness has been, and how lately soever such impressions may have been made upon his heart.

8. Make the dedication of yourselves to Christ and his service as solemn a thing as you can.

We read in the Acts of some that were baptized, and publicly received into the church the very same day in which they were converted. Acts 2:41, Acts 2:47. Though a change of circumstances may at present render it convenient to defer doing it for some time, because it is proper that the efficacy of your repentance and conversion should first of all be so far seen, as in the judgment of charity to approve the sincerity of it: yet I think, when you feel your hearts absolutely determined for God, you should in a solemn manner lay hold of his covenant, in secret at least, as soon as possible; and declare, as before him that searcheth all hearts, the sincerity of that acceptance. Some have recommended the doing this in a written engagement: and there are several very affecting forms of this kind in books on this subject, which may very profitably be used. But I hope the fullness of your heart will dictate something of this kind, if such helps should be wanting, or if any peculiar consideration should prevent their being used. And surely, if you feel the love of the blessed Jesus glowing in your hearts as you ought, you will need no other engagement to yield yourselves to him: that love will be instead of ten thousand arguments; and you will see a secret charm in the view of serving him, which will engage your very soul to spring forward with vigor and eagerness to every proper instance of it. The dread of future punishment has certainly its use to restrain from the commission of sin, especially in an hour of pressing temptation; and the hope of that exceeding and eternal weight of glory, which the gospel promises, will have a still greater efficacy upon a generous mind: yet I will venture to say, that a heart powerfully impressed with the love of Jesus will have a stronger influence than either of these. Cordial friendship needs not to be hired to perform its proper office. Love is a law to itself: it adds a delightful relish to every attempt for the service of its object: and it is most evidently thus in the present case.

"Lord," will the Christian say, "wilt thou do me the honor to accept any feeble attempt for thy service which I can form? I thank thee for it, and bow my head before thee in the most grateful acknowledgments, that thou favorest me with an ability to discharge, in any degree, the fullness of my grateful heart in presenting them. O that my whole soul might daily rise before thee as an acceptable sacrifice in the flame of love! O that I might always feel my heart enlarged, to run the way of thy commandments! Psalms 119:32. Were the degree of my future happiness from this moment invariably fixed, I would still pursue this delightful business; for there is no other in which my soul could find a pleasure equal, or comparable to it." If you feel such thoughts as these rising in your mind, breathe them out before the throne from day to day; and when you have done it, recollect frequently the vows of God that are upon you; (Psalms 56:12) and see, that having sworn, you perform it, (Psalms 119:106) and maintain in the whole of your lives a conduct agreeable to such a profession as this.

9. Gird up the loins of your mind to encounter a great deal of difficulty in your Christian course.

Many are the difficulties that you must expect; great, and possibly for a while increasing difficulties. It is commonly said, indeed, that those difficulties which attend the entrance on a religious life are the greatest; and in themselves considered, no doubt but they are so: they arise from many quarters, and unite all together in the same design of keeping you from a believing application to Christ, and a resolute closure with him. In this respect, evil sometimes arises to a man in his own house; (Matthew 10:35-36) and those, whose near relation should rather engage them to give the young convert the best assistance where his most important interests are concerned, are on the contrary ready to lay a stumbling block in his way; and perhaps act as if they had rather he should have no religion at all, than change a few circumstances in the outward profession of it. Worldly interest, too, is perhaps to be sacrificed; and conscience cannot be preserved without giving up the friendship of those whom at any other expense but conscience a man would gladly oblige. And it is no wonder if Satan make his utmost efforts, and those very unwearied, too, that he may prevent the revolt of these subjects, or rather the escape of his prisoners. The Christian is therefore called upon by the apostle to arm himself as for a combat, and that at all points; to put on the whole armor of God, that he may be able to withstand in the evil day; and having done all, to stand. Ephesians 6:11, Ephesians 6:13. Nor must you, my friends, though as soon as you have put on your harness you gain some important victory, boast as if you might securely put it off. 1 Kings 22:11. Your whole life must be a series of exercise. Through much opposition, as well as much tribulation, you must enter into the kingdom of God: (Luke 9:62) and though your difficulties may generally be greatest at first, yet your encouragements then may perhaps be so peculiarly great, and your spirits under their first religious impressions so warm, that other difficulties, in themselves smaller, may afterwards press more sensibly upon you. Endeavor therefore to keep yourselves in a prepared posture. Put on a steady resolution; and to support it, sit down and count the cost, lest having begun to build, you shamefully desist and be not able to finish it; (Luke 14:28, Luke 14:30) or lest having put your hand to the plow, you should look back, and become unfit for the kingdom of God. Luke 9:62. And therefore,

10. Let every step in this attempt be taken with a deep sense of your own weakness, and on humble dependence upon Divine grace to be communicated to you as the matter requires.

Recollect seriously what I was telling you in a former discourse, of the necessity of a Divine agency and interposition; and remember, it depends upon God, not only to begin the good work, but also to carry it on, and perform it until the day of Jesus Christ. Php 1:6. If we trust in our hearts, especially after this solemn admonition, this plain instruction, added to such frequent experience, we are fools indeed. Proverbs 28:26. Let us therefore trust in the Lord, and not lean to our own understanding. Proverbs 3:5. And do you, my friends, who have but just enlisted yourselves in this holy war, every one of you say, with an humble yet cheerful heart, in the name of our God will we set up our banners. Psalms 20:5. And if thus you wait on the Lord, you shall renew your strength; and even the feeblest soul shall be enabled by Divine grace to mount up with wings as eagles, and to press on from one degree of religious improvement to another, while the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall. Isaiah 40:31-32. The Apostle expresses, in the liveliest manner, his dependence on the Divine Redeemer to communicate this grace in a proper degree, when he says, Let us come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need: (Hebrews 4:16) plainly implying, that it may be obtained if we have but hearts to seek for it; which, as on the one hand, it effectually takes off all idle excuses for

the neglect of our duty, pleaded from our own acknowledged weakness, any further than we are supported by Divine power; so on the other hand it animates the heart, that, sensible of its various infirmities, desires nevertheless to go forth to the work of God, and to consecrate all its faculties to his service; using them, such as they are, for God, and humbly seeking from him the enlargement of them.

Go, therefore, my friends, into the Divine presence; and while under a sense of this be not discouraged, though mountains of opposition may lie in your way. Those mountains shall be made low, and spread themselves into a plain before you; (Isaiah 11:4) while you go forth under the influences of the Spirit of the Lord who is able to make all grace abound to his people. 2 Corinthians 9:8. Of this Paul in our text was a most celebrated instance, who not only received, as was here promised, directions what he should do, but had strength also given him to perform it; a strength, which was made perfect and illustrious in his weakness: (2 Corinthians 12:9) and when, in consequence of this, he had attained to very distinguished improvements in religion, and had been enabled to act up, in the most honorable manner, not only to the Christian character in general, but to that of a minister and an apostle, he acknowledges, in all his abundant labors, that it was not he, but the grace of God that was with him. 1 Corinthians 15:10.

If he be thus with you, my dear friends, you will be established and built up in your most holy faith. Colossians 2:7; Jude 1:20. The most agreeable hopes we form concerning you, when we see you under such serious impressions as this discourse supposes, will be answered; and they who have spoken to you the word of God, on such occasions as these, will have the pleasure to think that they have not run in vain. Php 2:16. And now if these directions, which I have offered to you with great plainness and freedom, but with the sincerest desire of your edification and establishment in religion, be seriously pursued, I shall have the satisfaction of thinking, that though I might find you in the number of the unregenerate when I began these lectures, I shall carry you on along with me in a new character through the only head that yet remains to be handled. I shall indeed address myself to you, as those who were sometimes darkness, but are now light in the Lord, (Ephesians 5:8) when I proceed to address those who have been renewed by Divine grace; which I promised as my last general topic, and with which I shall conclude my discourses on this important subject.

01.10. Discourse 10

DISCOURSE X. AN ADDRESS TO THE REGENERATE, FOUNDED ON THE PRECEDING DISCOURSES.

James 1:18. Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of first fruits of his creatures.

I INTEND the words which I have now been reading, only as an introduction to that address to the sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty, with which I am now to conclude these lectures; and therefore shall not enter into any critical discussion, either of them, or of the context.

I hope God has made the series of these discourses, in some measure, useful to those for whose service they were immediately intended: but if they have not been so to all, and if with relation to many I have labored in vain from Sabbath to Sabbath, I cannot be surprised at it. What am I better than my fathers? 1 Kings 19:4. It has, in every age, been their complaint, that they have stretched out their hands all the day to a disobedient and gainsaying people; (Isaiah 65:2; Romans 10:21) that the bellows have been burnt, and the lead consumed of the fire, but the dross has not been taken away: such reprobate silver have multitudes been found. Jeremiah 6:20-30. Yea, the Lord Jesus Christ himself, who spake with such unequaled eloquence, with such divine energy, yet met with multitudes, who were like the deaf adder, that would not hearken to the voice of the wisest charmer: (Psalms 58:4-5) and surely the disciple is not above his master, nor the servant above his lord. Matthew 10:24. When indeed we consider the infinite importance of the message we address to you, O ye perishing sinners I we hardly know how to give over, or to take a denial. We feel a strong impulse on our hearts to give line upon line, and precept upon precept: (Isaiah 28:10) as a physician that loves his patient, when he sees the distemper prevailing, and has run through the whole range of medicines, is ready, while life yet remains, not entirely to give over, but to repeat again what he had prescribed unsuccessfully before. And if God spares our lives, no doubt many of those things which I have before been urging, must in substance be repeated. But at present I will desist: I know not what more or further to say; and if you are utterly unimpressed with what I have already laid before you, especially with regard to the character of the unregenerate--the nature of regeneration--the absolute necessity of it—and of the Divine agency in producing it, with the absolute importance of your securing a part in the kingdom of heaven; I know not what further to urge, and must leave you either to the grace or the judgment of God. The time will certainly come, when you will see and own the importance of these things. The word of God will, in one sense or another, take hold of every soul that hears it, and, perhaps on some of you in a very terrible manner, and in a very little time. But if it do, I may say with the apostle Paul, when in token of the solemnity with which he spoke, he shook his raiment, and took leave of his obstinate hearers, I am clean from your blood; (Acts 18:6) and since you refuse to be instructed, I turn to those who regard what I say. And thus, according to the method I at first proposed, I proceed,

Seventhly, To conclude these discourses with an address to those who, by Divine grace, are experimentally acquainted with this great work of regeneration; to show them how they ought to be affected with the consideration of the truths that have been offered, and what improvement they should make of such a course of sermons as you have lately been attending.

Out of a general regard to the glory of God and the good of souls, you have attended on what has hitherto been spoken to persons of a very different character; and I hope not altogether without some sensible refreshment and advantage; but now hear more immediately for yourselves, and suffer a word of exhortation in such particulars as these: Be thankful to God for what you have experienced; improve it as an engagement to behave in a suitable manner; study to promote the work of God upon the hearts of others; and long for that blessed world where the change that is now begun, and is gradually advancing in your souls, shall be universal and complete. Your own wisdom and piety have, no doubt, anticipated me in each of these particulars; but you will be glad to enter more fully into the reflection than you could do, while it was intermingling itself with other thoughts.

I. Return the most affectionate acknowledgments of praise to the God of all mercy for the experience you have had of a regenerating change.

I would now address this exhortation and charge to every one of you, who, through Divine grace, hope you can say, that you are born again; to all who can say, that God has, of his own will, begotten you with the word of truth, that you may be a kind of first fruits of his creatures. To you I would say, Sing unto the Lord, O ye saints of his, and give thanks at the remembrance of his holiness and goodness. Psalms 30:4. Give thanks to the Father, who has made you meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light. Colossians 1:12. Join your voices and your hearts in the most cheerful hymns of praise, whatever your different circumstances are. Let the young and the old, the rich and the poor, the honorable and the mean, rejoice together; if any may be called poor, who are thus enriched; if any may be accounted mean, who are thus honored. Bless the Lord at all times, let his praise be continually in your mouths; (Psalms 34:1) and endeavor to carry along with you, through the darkest road you travel, and the bitterest sorrows you taste, cheerfulness in your hearts, and praise on your tongues; considering—how important the blessing is with which the Lord has favored you; how few there are who partake of it; and in the midst of how much opposition the Divine grace has taken hold of your souls, and wrought its wonders of love there.

1. Consider, my Christian friends, how important this favor is which God has bestowed upon you, in thus begetting you as a kind of first fruits of his creatures.

Justly indeed may we say, Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be regenerated by his grace, and so be called, and that with propriety, the sons of God! 1 John 3:1. Justly may I say to you, now you are assembled in the courts of the Lord, in those emphatical words of David, O come, let us worship, and bow down; let us kneel before the Lord our Maker; (Psalms 95:6) for it is he that has made us and not we ourselves, with regard to this second, as well as the first creation; and we, in consequence of it, are in the noblest sense, his people, and the sheep of his pasture: enter, therefore, into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise; be thankful unto him, and bless his name. Psalms 100:3-4. My brethren, it is a favor in which the salvation of your souls is concerned; and can that be small? or ought it ever to

be thought of but with the highest emotion and enlargedness of heart? The gracious purposes of God towards his children are to make every one of them higher than the kings of the earth, (Psalms 89:27) to jive them more solid satisfaction than crowns and kingdoms can afford, and at length to raise them to a diadem of immortal glory. Oh what reason have you with the Apostle, to say, Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who, according to his abundant mercy, has begotten us again to a lively hope, by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, even to the hope of an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for us, who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation! 1 Peter 1:3-5. Survey this great privilege which God has already given you, this high security, these glorious hopes. Has he not brought the beginning of glory already into your souls? Has he not wrought you to a filial temper, and taught you to cry, Abba, Father? Galatians 4:6. Has he not, in some measure, formed and fashioned your minds to a meetness to dwell with angels and perfected spirits in heaven? So that you can now say, even with relation to that which you already feel, that you are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God. Ephesians 2:19. You are even now the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what you shall be; (1 John 3:2;) but there is enough appears, and enough known at present, of what you are, and what you shall be, to revive, to delight, to transport the heart. And is not this too, O thou afflicted soul, who art called to encounter the most painful difficulties, enough to be the means of thy support, and to afford thee matter for thy strong consolation? You that are tossed with tempests, (Isaiah 54:11) and obliged to struggle under various and long continued burdens, have you not here a joy that the world can neither bestow nor impair, a pleasure in public and in secret duties, and a hope, which is as the anchor of the soul both sure and steadfast, entering into that within the vail, (Hebrews 6:19) and so enabling you to outride these storms and tempests? How glorious does your lot appear when viewed in the light of scripture! You are expressly told, All things are yours: (1 Corinthians 3:21) the Lord will give grace and glory, and no good thing will he withhold from you: (Psalms 84:11) all the paths of the Lord are mercy and truth to you; (Psalms 25:10) and ere long you shall see how they are so. You have a sight by faith of the inheritance appointed for his children; but he does not intend merely a distant prospect for you: you shall go in and possess that good land, (Deuteronomy 4:22) and shall ere long be absent from the body, and present with the Lord: (2 Corinthians 5:8) yea, the Lord Jesus Christ, ere long, shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe, (2 Thessalonians 1:10) to be glorified and admired, in and by you in particular; when bearing the image of your heavenly Father, you shall rise far beyond this earth and all its vain anxieties, and vainer amusements, to dwell forever in his presence. And what is there in this world that you imagine you want, which is by any means to be compared with these enjoyments and hopes? Surely, sirs, in such a view, you should be much more than content; and should feel your inward admiration, love, and joy, bursting the bonds of silence, and turning your voices, that have been broken by sighs, into the most cheerful and exalted anthems of praise: especially when you consider, 2. How few there are who partake of this important favor, which God has extended to you.

I hope I need not, after all I have said, remind you at large, that I intend not by any means to speak, as excluding those of different forms and different experiences; as if, in consequence of that diversity, they had neither part nor lot in this matter. Acts 8:21. I hope. that many who are not so ready, as it were to be wished, to receive one another, are nevertheless, in this respect, received by Christ to the glory of God. Romans 15:7. Yet the temper and conduct of the generality

of mankind, even under a Christian profession, too plainly show, that they have the marks of eternal ruin upon them: and one can form no hope concerning them, consistent with the tenor of the whole word of God, any other than this, that possibly they may hereafter be changed into something contrary to what they are, and in that change be happy.

Now that you are not left among the wide extended ruins of mankind, but are set as pillars in the building of God, is what you have been taught by the preceding discourses to refer to the grace of God, which has taken and polished you to the form you now bear. Or, as the Evangelist expresses it, in language more suitable to the subject before us, the power, or privilege, to become the sons of God, is what he gives to as many as receive him; and it is manifest as to your regeneration, that you are born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God: (John 1:12-13) for we love him, because he first loved us; (1 John 4:12) and whatsoever our attainments be, there is no true believer but will be ready, with the Apostle Paul, to say, By the grace of God I am what I am. 1 Corinthians 15:10. And now, when these two thoughts are taken in this comparison with each other, how deeply should they impress our minds! And how should it excite us to the most lively gratitude, to consider that when so many of our fellow-creatures perish, even under the sound of the gospel; that when they live and die under the power of a corrupt and degenerate nature, despising all the means which God has given them of becoming better, and turning them into the occasion of greater mischief; God should graciously incline our hearts to a wiser and better choice! It is indeed a melancholy reflection, that the number of those who are made wise to salvation should be so small; yet it is an endearing circumstance in the Divine goodness to us, that when it is so small, we should be included in it: as no doubt it would appear to every truly religious person in the ark, that when but eight souls were saved from the deluge, he should be one. There is now a remnant, says the Apostle, according to the election of grace: (Romans 11:5) to that grace therefore should we render the praise. We have indeed chosen him; but it is in consequence of his choosing us. John 15:16. We have said, The Lord is my portion; but let us remember to bless him that he has given us that counsel, (Psalms 16:4, Psalms 16:7) in consequence of which we have been inclined to do it. Again,

3. Consider, in the midst of how much opposition the grace of God has laid hold on your souls, and wrought its wonders of love there.

Christians, look into your own hearts; yea, look back upon your own lives, and see whether many of you have not reason to say, with the great Apostle, It is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief: (1 Timothy 1:15) and yet to me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this given, (Ephesians 3:8) that I should be a regenerate, adopted child of God, begotten to an inheritance of eternal glory.

"Oh," may one Christian say, "how obstinately did I strive against my own happiness! like a poor creature that, having received some dangerous wound, and being delirious with a fever attending it, struggles with the hand that is stretched out to heal him. How did I draw back from the yoke of God! How did I trifle with convictions, and put them off from one time to another! So that God might most righteously have awakened any heart rather than mine. He admonished me by his word, and by his providence; he sent afflictions; he wrought out deliverances for me; and yet I went on to harden my heart, as if I had been afflicted and delivered, that I might work greater abominations; (Jeremiah 7:10) till the Lord being merciful to me, laid hold upon me, and drew me out of Sodom."

Genesis 20:16. And here another Christian will be ready to say within himself, ''If the grace of God wrought sooner upon me, when my soul was more pliant, when my heart was comparatively tender in infancy or childhood, or in early youth; yet what ungrateful returns have I since made for his mercy I How defective have I been in those fruits of holiness which might reasonably have been expected from me, who have so long a time been planted in the house of the Lord! Alas for me! that I have flourished no more in the courts of my God. Psalms 92:13. How often have I forgotten and forsaken him; how cold and negligent has my spirit been, how inconstant my walk, how indolent my behavior, for these many years that have passed since I was first brought into his family! How little have I done in his service in proportion to the advantages I have enjoyed! All this he foresaw; all the instances in which my goodness would be as a morning cloud, and as the early dew; (Hosea 6:4) all the instances in which this perverse heart of mine, so prone to backslide, should turn aside, and start back from him like a deceitful bow: (Psalms 78:57) and yet he has mercy upon me, I know not why. I cannot pretend to account for it any otherwise than by saying, Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight: (Matthew 11:26) thou hast mercy on whom thou wilt have mercy, and thou hast compassion on whom thou wilt have compassion. Romans 9:15. I have revolted deeply from thee again and again; yet thou sufferest me not to be lost to this very day, nor wilt thou ever suffer it: Thou restorest my soul; thou leadest me in the paths of righteousness for thy name's sake. Psalms 23:3. Having therefore obtained help from God, I continue to this day; (Acts 26:2) and surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and unworthy as I am so much as to enter into thine house below, I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever above. Psalms 23:6. Thus, Lord, thou makest me, as it were, a wonder to myself; and I hope to express my admiration and my gratitude throughout eternal ages: and if I can vie with the rest of thy redeemed ones in nothing else, I will at least do it in bowing low before thy throne, and acknowledging that I am of the number of the most unworthy, in whom my Lord has been pleased to glorify the riches of his mercy, and the freedom of his grace." In the mean time, Christians, I call you often to entertain yourselves with such views as these, often to excite your hearts by such lively considerations; I call you, in the name of your Father and your Saviour, to a whole life of gratitude and praise. And this leads me to add, II. Improve those experiences you have had of Divine grace, as an engagement to behave in a suitable manner.

Remember the lively admonition of the text, that you were begotten by him for this very purpose, that you should be a kind of frst-fruits of his creatures. See, therefore, that ye be entirely consecrated to him; and behave as becomes the children of God, in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation: being not only harmless and blameless among them, but shining as lights in the world, and holding forth that word of life, (Php 2:16) by which he has begotten you to himself, and quickened you when you were dead in trespasses and sins. Ephesians 2:1, Ephesians 2:5.

God has now brought you into a most honorable relation: he may therefore well expect more, much more from you than from others. He has made you as his children, kings and priests to himself, (Revelation 1:6) and you are therefore to offer up spiritual sacrifice, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ. 1 Peter 2:5. You were once darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord; walk, therefore, as children of light. Ephesians 5:8. Remember you are not your own; (1 Corinthians 6:19) your time, your possessions, and all your capacities for service, are the property of your heavenly Father. And permit me to remind you, that if you desire to see this doctrine of regeneration prevail, you, who profess to be experimentally acquainted with it, must take great

care that your behavior may not only be innocent, but exemplary: otherwise many will be ready to blaspheme the holy name of that God, (2 Samuel 12:14) whom you call your Father; and you are like to bring a reproach upon the household of faith, which probably you will never be able to roll away.

Christians, the dignity of our birth and our hopes is too little considered and regarded; and the reason why the world thinks so meanly of it, is because we ourselves are so insensible of its excellency. Did we apprehend it more, we should surely be more solicitous to walk worthy of that calling wherewith we are called, (Ephesians 4:1) that high and holy calling. Let me, therefore, exhort you to endeavor to loosen your affections more from these entanglements of time and sense, which so much debase our minds, and dishonor our lives. Yield yourselves unto God as those that are alive from the dead: (Romans 6:13) employ, with a growing zeal, to the honor of God, that renewed life which he has given you: Be not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of your minds: (Romans 12:2) and let your conversation and behavior be like those who feel the constraining influences of Divine love, (2 Corinthians 5:14) who are, not in form, but in reality, devoted to God; and who would be continually waiting for his salvation, (Genesis 49:18) with that temper in which you could most desire that salvation to find you when it comes.

III. Let those who have experienced the power of Divine grace themselves, study to promote the work of God upon the hearts of others.

Labor, as much as possible, to spread this temper which God has wrought in your hearts; for you cannot but know that with it you spread true happiness, which alone is to be found in that intercourse with the great Author of our being, for which this lays the foundation, and in the regular exercise of those powers which are thus sanctified. No sooner was Paul converted himself, but he presently set himself to bring others to Christ, and to preach the faith which once he destroyed. Galatians 1:13. And David speaks of it as the effects of God’s pardoning love to him, Then will I teach transgressors thy ways, and sinners shall be converted unto thee. Psalms 51:13.

If, therefore, God has called us to the office of the ministry, as the experience of this change on our own hearts will be our best qualification for our public work, and indeed such a qualification that nothing else can supply the want of it; so it will surely excite us in a very powerful manner to apply vigorously to this care. That which we have not only heard, but seen with our eyes, and looked upon, and handled of the word of life, let us declare to others; that their fellowship also may be with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ. 1 John 1:1, 1 John 1:3. Let us declare it in our public discourses, and never be ashamed to bear our testimony to that grace to which we are so much indebted; to that grace by which we are what we are. 1 Corinthians 15:10. Let us warn every man, and teach every man the absolute necessity of regeneration; and expose the vanity of all those hopes which are built upon any fair outside, on any moral decency of behavior, or any humane turn of temper, on any warm flight of imagination or emotion of the passions, while the soul continues unrenewed and unsanctified. Let us endeavor to save men with fear, pulling them out of the fire, (Jude 1:23) which, if they are yet unregenerate, is just ready to kindle upon them. And let us be often reviewing our respective flocks, that we may see who they are, concerning whom there is reason to entertain this fear; that proper applications may be made to them in private, as well as in public; that joining our admonitions to our sermons, and our prayers and examples to both, we

may at least deliver our own souls, (Ezekiel 33:9) if we cannot deliver theirs. But in proportion to the degree that such a spirit prevails in us, there is very great encouragement to hope it will be propagated to them, and that our labor shall not be in vain in the Lord. 1 Corinthians 15:58. And let me beseech you, my beloved hearers in other stations of life, that you would not imagine the work is so entirely ours that you have nothing to do with it. Are we alone redeemed by the blood of the Son of God? Are we alone renewed and sanctified by his grace? Are we alone the brethren and friends of mankind, that the generous care and endeavor to promote their eternal happiness should be entirely devolved upon us? We wish so well to the world, and permit us to say, we wish so well to you, to your own religious consolation and establishment, to your comfortable account, to your eternal reward, that we can not but earnestly exhort you all, even as many as have tasted that the Lord is gracious, (1 Peter 2:3) that in this respect you join, not only as I trust you do, your prayers with ours, but that you also join your endeavors.

Let me particularly address this exhortation to those of you who bear any distinguished office in the society, to whom therefore its religious interests are dear by additional ties Let me address those of you whose age and experience, in the human and the divine life, give you something of a natural authority in your application, and command a distinguished regard. Look round about you and observe the state of religion in your neighborhood; and labor to the utmost to propagate, not so much this or that particular opinion or form of worship, but real vital Christianity in the world. Bear your testimony to it on all proper occasions: be not ashamed of it in your familiar discourse; and above all, labor to adorn it by your actions. And when you see any under serious impressions, as it is certain they will have a great deal discouraging and difficult to break through; and as the devil and his instruments, among whom I must necessarily reckon licentious company, will be doing their utmost to draw them back into the snare of the fowler; let me exhort and charge you to be as solicitous to save as others are to destroy. I know how many excuses our cowardly, and indolent hearts are ready to find out upon such an occasion: but I think those words of Solomon are a sufficient answer to all, and I beg you would seriously revolve them; If thou forbear to deliver them that are drawn unto death, and those that are ready to be slain: if thou sayest, Behold we knew it not; doth not he that pondereth the heart consider it? and he that keepeth thy soul, thine, Oh Christian, with such peculiar and gracious care, doth not he know it? and shall not he render to every man according to his works? Proverbs 24:11-12. He will assuredly remember, and will abundantly reward, every work of faith, and every labor of love; (1 Thessalonians 1:3) and we are insensible of our own true interest, if we do not see how much it is concerned here.

Let me especially leave this exhortation with you who are parents and heads of families. And one would imagine there should need but little importunity in such a case as this: one would think your own hearts should speak to you, upon such an occasion, in very pathetic language. Look upon your dear children, to whom you have conveyed a nature which you know to be degenerate and corrupt; and be earnest in your prayers before God, and your endeavors with them, that it may be renewed. And take care that you do not in this sense despise the soul of your manservant, or of your maid-servant. Job 31:13. God has brought them under your care, it may be in those years of life in which, on the one hand, they are most capable of being instructed and seriously impressed; and in which, on the other hand, they are also most in danger of being corrupted. Perhaps their relation to you, and abode with you, is the most advantageous circumstance which may occur in their whole lives: see therefore that you seize it with a holy eagerness; and amidst all the charges

you give them relating to your own business, neglect not that of the one thing needful; (Luke 10:42) and labor heartily to bring them to the honor and happiness which is common to all God's servants, and peculiar to them alone.

Let me conclude this part of my address with entreating you all to express your concern for the souls of others, by your importunate prayers to God for them. Pray for the success of gospel ordinances: and for a blessing on the labors of all God's faithful servants throughout our whole land, of one or another denomination in religion. Yea, pray that throughout the whole world, God would revive his work in the midst of the years; (Habakkuk 3:2) that the religion of his Son, by which so many souls have been regenerated, refined and saved, may be universally propagated; and that all who are vigorously engaged in so important, though so self-denying a work, may find that the hand of the Lord is with them, and multitudes believe and turn unto the Lord; (Acts 11:21) so that his sons may be brought from far, and his daughters from the ends of the earth; (Isaiah 43:6) that the barren may rejoice, and she that did not travail with child, may break forth into singing, and cry aloud; that the children of nations now strangers to Christ, may be more than of those that are already espoused to him. Isaiah 54:1; Galatians 4:27. And then,

IV. Let all that are born again, long for that blessed world, where the work of God shall be completed, and we shall appear with a dignity and glory becoming his children. As for God, his work is perfect; (Deuteronomy 32:4) and the time, the happy time is approaching, when we shall know, and the whole world shall know, in another manner than we now do, what our heavenly Father has intended for us in begetting us to himself. Whatever our attainments here may be, we know at present but in part: (1 Corinthians 13:9) and with whatever integrity of soul we now walk before God, we are sanctified but in part: and hereupon we find, and must expect to find, the flesh striving against the Spirit, as well as the Spirit against the flesh: so that, in many respects, we cannot do the things that we would. Galatians 5:17. In proportion to the degree in which our nature is refined and brightened, we are more sensible of the evil of these corruptions that remain within us; so that though we are not, in a strict propriety of speech, carnal and sold under sin, but do indeed delight in the law of God after the inward man, (Romans 7:14, Romans 7:22) yet in the humility of our hearts we are often borrowing that pathetic complaint, Oh, wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death? Romans 7:24. But let it be remembered, Christians, as the matter of your joy, that the struggle shall not be perpetual, that it shall not indeed be long. Look up with pleasure then, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh. Luke 21:28. The time is approaching, when that which is perfect shall come, and that which is in part shall be done away. 1 Corinthians 13:10. You are now the children of GOD; but it does not appear to every eye that you are so: the world knows us not. 1 John 3:1-2. Nor are we to wonder at it: for even Christ our Lord was once unknown, and appeared in so much meanness, and so much calamity, that an undiscerning and carnal eye could not have discovered who and what he was. But there is a day appointed for the manifestation of the sons of GOD, (Romans 8:19) as the apostle Paul most happily expresses it; when he will manifest them to each other, and manifest them also to the whole world. They shall not always live thus at a distance from their Father's house, and under those dispensations of Providence that look so much like disregard and neglect; but he will take them home, and gather them to himself. Ere long, Christians, he will call these heaven-born spirits of yours, that are now aspiring towards him, to dwell in his immediate presence: he will receive you to himself; and you shall stand, where no sinner shall have a place,

in the congregation of the righteous, (Psalms 2:5) and shall have an inheritance among the saints in light, the saints in holiness and glory.

O happy day! when dropping this body in the grave, we shall ascend pure and joyful spirits to that triumphant assembly, where there is not one vitiated affection, not one foolish thought to be found among the thousands and ten thousands of God's Israel! O blessed period of a regenerate state I Though all the schemes of the Divine love were to rest here, and these bodies were forever to be laid aside, and utterly to be lost in the grave; the rejoicing soul might say, "Lord, it is enough!" And it might be indeed enough for us; but it is not enough to answer the gracious purposes of God's paternal love. God will show, in the most conspicuous manner, what a family he has raised to himself among the children of men; and therefore he will assemble them all in their complete persons, and will do it with solemn pomp and magnificent parade. He will for this purpose send his own Son, with all his holy angels, (Matthew 25:31) and will cause the bodies of millions of his children, that have long dwelt in the dust, to spring out of it, at once in forms of beauty and lustre, worthy their relation to him. This, therefore, is, with beautiful propriety, called by the apostle the adoption, even the redemption of our body; (Romans 8:23) alluding to the public ceremony, with which adoptions among the ancients were solemnly confirmed and declared, after they had been more privately transacted between the parties immediately concerned.

O, Christians, how reasonable is it that our souls should be rising with a secret ardor towards this blessed hope, this glorious abode!—It is pleasant for the children of God to meet and converse with one another upon earth; so pleasant, that I wonder they do not more frequently form themselves into little societies, in which, under that character, they should join their discourses and their prayers. It is delightful to address those that, we trust, through grace are born of God. No discourses are more pleasant than those that suit them: and could we, that are the ministers of Christ, reasonably hope, that we had none but such to attend our labors, we should joyfully confine our discourses to such subjects. Yet while we are here, we see imperfections in others, we feel them yet more painfully in ourselves: and as there is no pure, unmixed society, no fellowship on earth that is completely holy and without blemish, so there is now no pure delight, no perfect pleasure to be met with here. Oh when shall I depart from this mixed society, and reach that state where all is good, all glorious: where I shall see my heavenly Father, and all my brethren in the Lord; and shall behold them all forever acting up to their character! All giving thanks to the Father, who has made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light! Colossians 1:12. All forever blessing and serving the great Redeemer; and without one ungenerous action, one reflecting word, one suspicious thought, forever serving each other in love, rejoicing in each other's happiness, and with the most prudent and steadfast application forever studying and laboring to improve it! With the most earnest desire that you, my dear brethren and friends, may at length attain to this state of perfection and glory; and with a cheerful expectation, through Divine grace, that I shall ere long meet many of you in it, I close this sermon, and these discourses: not without an humble hope, that when we arrive at this blessed world, these hours, which we have spent together in the house of God, in attending them, will come into a pleasant remembrance; and that the God of all grace, to whose glory they are faithfully devoted, and to whose blessing they are humbly committed, will honor them as the means of increasing his family, as well as of feeding and quickening those who are already his regenerate children!--Amen.

01.11. Postscript

POSTSCRIPT.

MEANING OP THE WORD REGENERATION. To what I have said in the conclusion of the first discourse concerning the proper import of the word Regeneration, I beg leave to add the following remarks for the farther satisfaction of some worthy persons, who think it may be convenient to state the matter a little more particularly.

I ACKNOWLEDGE that many learned and pious divines have taught and contended, that Regeneration does, in the strictest propriety of speech, signify Baptism--so that no unbaptized person, how well disposed soever, can properly be said to be regenerated; whereas that title may justly be given to all who have been baptized, how destitute soever they might have been of Christian faith and holiness when they received the ordinance, or how grossly soever they may since have forfeited the final blessings of a regenerate state. Dr. Waterland has stated this matter at large in his labored and ingenious treatise on the subject, which is the best I know on this side of the question. And though this would be a very improper place to enter on a critical examination of that piece, I will briefly touch on the chief arguments which he, or others in his sentiments, have urged in vindication of this favorite notion. So far as I can recollect, what they say is capable of being reduced to two heads;—that Christian antiquity uses the word in this sense;—and that there are passages of Scripture which authorize such an application of it. As to the first of these, I readily own that the word has this sense in the generality of the Christian writers, from about the middle of the second century, though I think not so universally as some have concluded:1111Clemens Alexandrinus, so often, and to be sure reasonably, quoted on the other side, plainly uses the word for a change of character by true repentance; (Strom. lib. ii. page 425,) where, speaking of a penitent harlot, he says, "that being born again by conversion, or a change in her temper and behavior, she has the regeneration of life:" αναγεννηθεισα κατα την επισστοφην του βιου παλιγγενεσιαν εχει ζωης. but I think it easy to account for such a use of it among them. For in the earliest ages of the church, persons were generally baptized as soon as they were converted to the cordial belief of Christianity; and therefore the time of their conversion, and that of their baptism, might naturally enough be spoken of as one: and as this was a period when they did, as it were, come into a new world, it is no wonder that the action by which they testified a change so lately made, should be put for that change itself. Just as illumination also among the ancients signifies baptism: not to intimate that the grand illumination of the mind was made by this rite, or at the time of it; for that would be supposing the person in darkness when he embraced the Gospel, and determined to be baptized: but because it was taken for granted, and that very justly in those days, that every one savingly enlightened would soon be baptized, that so he might be regularly joined to the society of enlightened or regenerated persons, that is, to the Christian church: which no doubt had the best right of any body of men in the world to that title, though in its purest state it contained some ignorant and wicked members. In a word, a man by baptism solemnly professed himself a Christian; and as it was generally the first overt act by which his believing the Gospel could be publicly and generally known, and was also supposed to be very near the time of his

inward conversion, they dated his regeneration, that is, his happy change (as that word used to signify even among the heathen1212 It is well known that Cicero expresses the happy change made in his state, when restored from his banishment, by this word. (Cic. ad Attic. lib. vi. Epist. 6.) The Greeks expressed by it the doctrine of the Brahmans, in which they affirmed our entering on a new state of being after death. (Clem. Alex. Strom. lib. iii. pag. 451.) And the Stoics used it to denote their expected renovation of the world after successive conflagrations. (Marc. Antonin. Medit. lib. xi. § l. v. 13, x. 7. See Lucian, Oper. pag. 532. Euseb. Præp: Evang. ex numen. lib. xv. chap. 19. Phil. Jud. de Mundi Immort. pag. 940, 951, and in many other places.) And so the fathers often use it to signify the resurrection which Christians expect. (See Euseb. Eccl. Hist. lib. v. chap. 1. in fin.) Compare Matthew 19:28, and the Note there: Fam. Expos. Vol. II. pag. 238.) from that time. We own therefore that these ancient Christians (of whom I always think and speak with great respect) had a very good excuse for this method of speaking: but whether they were perfectly accurate in this, and whether they did not recede from the scripture use of the word, may be matter of farther inquiry. As to the arguments from Scripture in support of the interpretation I oppose, they are taken partly from particular places; but chiefly, as I apprehend, from the general tenor of it, in which Christians are spoken of as regenerated. The particular texts are John 3:5, and Titus 3:5, on which much of the stress of this controversy is laid; but on considering them attentively, I find nothing in either of them to lead us to think baptism the regeneration spoken of there. As to the former of them, John 3:5, when our Lord says, Except a man be born of water, and of the Spirit, he can not enter into the kingdom of GOD; it is (after all the contempt with which that interpretation has been treated) very possible he may mean, by a well-known figure, to express one idea by both those clauses, that is, the purifying influences of the Spirit cleansing the mind, as water does the body: as elsewhere, to be baptized with the Holy Ghost and with fire, (Matthew 3:11) signifies to be baptized by the Spirit operating like fire. But if there is indeed a reference to baptism in these words (which I own I am much inclined to believe) it will by no means follow that baptism is Regeneration. On that supposition, I still think the sense of the passage must be that which I have given in my paraphrase on it (Fam. Expos. vol. I. p. 148-p. 57 Am. Ed.) "Whosoever would become a regular member of the kingdom of God, must not only be baptized, but as ever he desires to share in its spiritual and eternal blessings, must experience the renewing and sanctifying influences of the Holy Spirit on his soul, to cleanse it from the power of corruption, and to animate and quicken it to a spiritual and Divine life." It is granted therefore, that how excellent soever any man’s character is, he must be baptized before he can be looked upon as completely a member of the church of Christ; and that, in general, being born of the Spirit, he will also be solicitous that he may be born of water, and so fulfill all righteousness. But it will never follow from hence, that being born of water and born of the Spirit are the same thing. The text rather implies they are different; and I think every body must own, they may be actually separate.

Nothing therefore can be more absurd than to infer from this text, that if there be two persons, one of whom is born of the Spirit, and not of water; another of water, and not of the Spirit; the latter, that is, the wicked man, who has perhaps with some iniquitous design been baptized, may properly be said to be regenerated, or born of GOD, and consequently to be an heir of GOD, (Romans 8:17) rather than a truly religious man who has not yet been baptized, either through want of opportunity, or through some unhappy mistake, as to the nature and design, or the perpetuity and obligations of that ordinance. Now this I take to be precisely the question, and must declare that when a baptized person is destitute of true religion, that birth which he had by water,

seems to me as it were an evanescent thing, or a thing which disappears as unworthy the mention; and that it must be therefore most safe and advisable, as well as most agreeable to the scripture sense, to appropriate the title of regenerate persons to those sanctified by Divine grace, rather than to use it of all who are baptized. As to the text in Titus (Titus 3:5) where God is said to save us by the washing of regeneration, or, as some earnestly contend it should be rendered, by the laver of regeneration: I might answer, that as that interpretation is by no means necessary,1313The original is δια λουτρου παλυγγενεσιασ. Now it is certain the seventy use another word, that is Λουτηρ, to signify Laver, Exodus 30:18, Exodus 30:28; Exodus 31:9; and I think (so far as I have observed) everywhere else: and Λουτρον (St. Paul's word here) is used where it can not signify laver, for the water in which sheep are washed, Song of Solomon 4:2, and for a large quantity of water in which an adult person was washed or bathed. Ephesians 5:26. And this remark quite overthrows all the argument from this text, if any argument would follow from rendering it laver: but I think I need not urge this. it cannot be proved that baptism is here designed; though I acknowledge there may be a graceful allusion to it. The Apostle may mean, we are saved by GOD'S washing our hearts by his sanctifying Spirit (a phrase so often used in the Old Testament) and thereby making us his children: and in this sense it might have been used, though baptism had never been instituted. But granting (as I have done) that Λουτρον may be rendered laver, and that baptism may be the laver referred to; and that "there is indeed an allusion to the washing new-born children; (as Mr. Mede in his diatribe on this text contends;) I think this text will be so far from proving that St. Paul meant to call baptism Regeneration, that it will prove the contrary: for regeneration itself, and the laver of regeneration, can not be the same thing. And whatever Tertullian and other ancients may fancifully talk of our being generated like fishes in the water, in a weak allusion to the technical word ΙΧΘΥΣ, (a fish,) common sense will see how absurd it would be to apply this to a child, and will teach us rather to argue, that as children must be born before they can be washed, so they must be regenerated before the washing of regeneration (that is, the washing which belongs to their new birth,) can be applied to them. But on the whole, I am more and more inclined to think there is no reference at all here to a laver, or to the washing new-born children; and therefore, that this washing and the renewing of the Holy Ghost are exegetical, and that the latter clause might be rendered, even the renewing, &c, which makes the text decisive for the sense in which I use the word.

After all, then, if any argument can be deduced from scripture in favor of the manner of speaking now in debate, it must be from the general tenor of it; according to which it seems that all who are members of the visible church are spoken of as regenerate; from which it may be inferred, with some plausible probability at least, that baptism, by which they are admitted into that society, may be called Regeneration. And I am ready to believe, as I hinted above, that this was the chief reason why the ancients so often used the word in the sense I am now opposing.

Now with relation to this, I desire it may be recollected, that when Christianity first appeared in the world, it was attended with such discouragements, as made the very profession of it, in a great measure, a test of men's characters. The Apostles therefore, knowing the number of hypocrites to be comparatively very small, generally take no notice of them, but address themselves to whole bodies of Christians, as if they were truly what they professed to be. Just as our Lord Jesus Christ, though he knew the wickedness of Judas, often addressed himself to the whole body of his Apostles, as if they were all his faithful servants, and makes gracious declarations and promises to

the whole society, which could by no means be applicable to this one corrupt and wretched member of it; telling them, for instance, that they should share in his final triumph, and sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. Matthew 19:28. This is therefore the true key to all those passages in which Christians are, in the general, said to be adopted, sanctified, justified, &c., as well as regenerated. The Apostles had reason, in the judgment of charity, to think thus of by far the greatest part of them; and therefore they speak to them all, as in such a happy state. And agreeably to this, we find not only such privileges, but also such characters, ascribed to Christians in general, as were only applicable to such of them as were Christians indeed. Thus all the Corinthians are spoken of by the Apostle Paul, as waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, (1 Corinthians 1:7) and all the Ephesians, and all the Colossians, as having faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and love to all the saints, (Ephesians 1:15, Colossians 1:4) and all the Philippians, as having a good work begun in them, which Paul was persuaded GOD would perfect, (Php 1:6) and all the Thessalonians, as remarkable for their work of faith, and labor of love, and patience of hope; (1 Thessalonians 1:3) though it evidently appears there were persons in several of these churches who behaved much amiss, and to whom, had he been particularly addressing each of them alone, he could not by any means have used such language. On the like principles Peter, when addressing all the Christians in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, speaks of the whole aggregate of them, (1 Peter 1:8,) as loving an unseen Saviour, and amidst all their tribulations, rejoicing in him with joy unspeakable and full of glory; though probably there were some weak and dejected Christians among them, and undoubtedly in so large an extent of country, in which there were such a vast number of churches, not a few, who (as our Lord afterwards expresses it of some of them) had only a name to live, while they were dead; (Revelation 3:1) in which passage, by the way, our Lord uses the same figure, and describes the whole body by the character of those who made the greater of it.

I state the matter thus particularly, because I think this obvious remark is a sufficient answer to what is most peculiar and important in a late Discourse, consisting of near 130 quarto pages, and entitled A Key to the Apostolic Writings, &c., prefixed by the Rev. Mr. Taylor, of Norwich, to his late Paraphrase and Notes on the Romans.1414And with singular inconsistency adopted by Dr. Adam Clarke, in his Commentary on the New Testament, now so widely circulated.--J. N. B. I think what I have briefly advanced here, will much more effectually answer the end of fixing the true sense of the scripture phrases in question. And I cannot forbear saying, that to determine the sense of the words called, redeemed, sanctified, &c., when applied to the Christian church, by that in which they are used in Moses and the prophets with respect to the whole people of Israel, seems to me as unreasonable, as it would be to maintain, that the dimensions, the strength, and the beauty of a body are to be most exactly estimated by looking on its shadow.

Yet on this evidently weak and mistaken principle, the learned and ingenious Author referred to above, ventures not only to attempt an entire alteration in the generally-received strain of theological Discourses, but to throw out a censure, which, considering its extent and its severity, must either be very terrible, or very pitiable. He not only seems to think, if I understand him right, that we were all regenerated (if at all) as well as justified, in those of our parents who were first converted from idolatry to Christianity, (Key, § 81, 82, and 246,) as indeed he expressly says, "that we are born in a justified," and therefore undoubtedly, (if the word is to be retained,) in a regenerate "state:" but he presumes to say, that such doctrines as have been almost universally

taught and received among Christians, concerning "Justification, regeneration, redemption, &c., have quite taken away the very ground of the Christian life, the grace of God, and have left no object for the faith of a sinner to work upon." (§ 357.) And hereupon, lest it should be forgot, he repeats it in the same section, that to represent it as "the subject of doubtful inquiry, trial, and examination, whether we have an interest in Christ, whether we are in a state of pardon, whether we be adopted, (and by consequence, to be sure, whether we be regenerated,) "is" (as the Antinomians I imagine would also say,) "to make our justification, as it invests us in those blessings, to be of works, and not by faith alone;" and (as we just before said in the same words,) "to take away the very ground of the Christian life, the grace of God, and to leave no object for the faith of a sinner to act upon." And this way of stating things, which has so generally prevailed, is joined with the wickedness and contentions of professing Christians, as a third cause of that disregard to the Gospel which is so common in the present day.

Now as no book can fall more directly under this censure, than this of mine, in which, it is the business of the first three discourses to direct professing Christians into an inquiry, whether they be or be not in a regenerate state; I thought it not improper, in this postscript, briefly to acquaint my reader with the principles on which I continue to think the view, in which I have put the matter, to be rational and scriptural,1515 For the full proof of this, that it is the most scriptural sense, I must desire the reader diligently to examine, and seriously to consider, the several texts which are quoted in the foregoing Discourses.

Let it still be remembered, that to be regenerated, and to be born of GOD, are equivalent phrases: And with this remark, let any one that can do it paraphrase all the passages referred to, in two different views; first putting the word baptism for regeneration, and baptized persons for born of GOD; and then substituting our definition of regeneration or of a regenerate person, instead of the words themselves: and I can not but think he will be struck with that demonstration, which will (as it were) emerge of itself upon such a trial. And I must add, that if he looks into the context of many of these passages, he will at the same time see how utterly ungrounded it is to assert, as some have done, "that regeneration is only used when applied to Jewish converts to Christianity, referring to their former birth from Abraham;" a notion so fully confuted by our Lord’s discourse with Nicodemus, John 3:3, et seq. by Titus 3:5, and by 1 Peter 1:3, 1 Peter 1:23, 1 Peter 2:2, when compered with 1 Peter 1:14, 1 Peter 4:3, (which proves that the Apostle there wrote to societies, of which the greater part had before been idolatrous Gentiles.) and do still in my conscience judge it far preferable to what the advocates of baptismal regeneration on the one hand, or Dr. Taylor on the other, would introduce.

It seems to me, that the points in dispute with him are much more important than our debates with them, as a much greater number of Scriptures are concerned, and the whole tenor of our ministerial addresses would be much more sensibly affected. Had I leisure to discuss the matter more largely with this gentleman, I should think it might be an important service to the Gospel of Christ. I hope it will be undertaken by some abler hand; and shall, in the mean time, go on preaching and writing in the manner so solemnly condemned, with no apprehension from the discharge of all this overloaded artillery, except it be what I feel for the zealous engineer himself, and a few other friends who may chance to stand nearer him than in prudence they ought.

P. D.

Northampton, June 13, 1745.

02.00. The Rise and Progress of Religion in the Soul

The Rise and Progress of Religion in the Soul by Philip Doddridge 1. The Introduction To The Work 2. The Careless Sinner Awakened 3. The Awakened Sinner Urged To Immediate Consideration 4. The Sinner Arraigned And Convicted 5 The Sinner Stripped Of His Vain Pleas 6. The Sinner Sentenced 7. The Helpless State Of The Sinner Under Condemnation 8. News Of Salvation By Christ Brought To The Convinced 9. The Way By Which This Salvation Is To Be Obtained 10. The Sinner Seriously Urged To Accept Of Salvation 11. To Those Who Will Not Be Persuaded...

12. An Address To A Soul So Overwhelmed Sins 13. The Doubting Soul 14. The Several Branches Of The Christian Temper 15. How Much He Needs The Assistance Of The Spirit Of God 16. The Christian Convert Warned Of Discouragements 17. The Christian Urged To An Express Act Of Self-Dedication 18. On Communion In The Lords Supper 19. Continual Communion With God 20. Spending Our Days As Is Represented In The Former Chapter 21. A Caution Against Various Temptations 22. The Case Of Spiritual Decay And Languor In Religion 23. The Sad Case Of A Relapse Into Known And Deliberate Sin 24. The Case Of The Christian Under The Hiding Of God’s Face 25. The Christian Struggling Under Great And Heavy Affliction 26. The Christian Assisted In Examining Into His Growth In Grace 27. The Advanced Christian Reminded Of The Mercies Of God 28. The Established Christian Urged To Exert Himself 29. The Christian Rejoicing In The Views Of Death And Judgment 30. Maintaining Continual Communion With God

02.01. The Introduction To The Work

CHAPTER I. THE INTRODUCTION TO THE WORK WITH SOME GENERAL ACCOUNT OF ITS DESIGN.

1.2.That true religion is very rare, appears from comparing the nature of it with the lives and characters of men around us.--3. The want of it, matter of just lamentation.--4. To remedy this evil is the design of the ensuing Treatise.--5. 6. To which, therefore, the Author earnestly bespeaks the attention of the reader, as his own heart is deeply interested in it.--7.to 12. A general plan of the Work; of which the first fifteen chapters relate chiefly to the Rise of Religion, and the remaining chapters to its Progress,--Prayer for the success of the Work.

1. WHEN we look around us with an attentive eye, and consider the characters and pursuits of men, we plainly see, that though, in the original constitution of their natures, they only, of all the creatures that dwell on the face of the earth, are capable of religion, yet many of them shamefully neglect it. And whatever different notions people may entertain of what they call religion, all must agree in owning that it is very far from being a universal thing.

2. Religion, in its most general view, is such a Sense of God in the soul, and such a conviction of our obligations to him, and of our dependence upon him, as shall engage us to make it our great care to conduct ourselves in a manner which we have reason to believe will be pleasing to him. Now, when we have given this plain account of religion, it is by no means necessary that we should search among the savages of distant Pagan nations to find instances of those who are strangers to it. When we view the conduct of the generality of people at home, in a Christian and Protestant nation, in a nation whose obligations to God have been singular, almost beyond those of any other people under heaven, will any one presume to say that religion has a universal reign among us? Will any one suppose that it prevails in every life; that it reigns in every heart? Alas! the avowed infidelity, the profanation of the name and day of God, the drunkenness, the lewdness, the injustice, the falsehood, the pride, the prodigality, the base selfishness, and stupid insensibility about the spiritual and eternal interests of themselves and others, which so generally appear among us, loudly proclaim the contrary. So that one would imagine, upon this view, that thousands and tens of thousands thought the neglect, and even the contempt of religion, were a glory, rather than a reproach. And where is the neighborhood, where is the society, where is the happy family, consisting of any considerable number, in which, on a more exact examination, we find reason to say, "religion fills even this little circle?" Where is, perhaps, a freedom from any gross and scandalous immoralities, an external decency of behavior, an attendance on the outward forms of worship in public, and, here and there, in the family; yet amidst all this, there is nothing which looks like the genuine actings of the spiritual and divine life. There is no appearance of love to God, no reverence of his presence, no desire of his favor as the highest good: there is no cordial belief of the Gospel of salvation; no eager solicitude to escape that condemnation which we have incurred by sin; no hearty concern to secure that eternal life which Christ has purchased and secured for his people, and which he freely promises to all who will receive him. Alas! whatever the love of a

friend, or even a parent can do; whatever inclination there may be to hope all things, and believe all things the most favorable, evidence to the contrary will force itself upon the mind, and extort the unwilling conclusion, that, whatever else may be amiable in this dear friend--in that favorite child--"religion dwells not in his breast."

3. To a heart that firmly believes the Gospel, and in views persons and things the light of eternity, this is one of the most mournful considerations in the world. And indeed, to such a one, all other calamities and evils of human nature appear trifles, when compared with this-the absence of real religion, and that contrariety to it which reigns in so many thousands of mankind. Let this be cured, and all the other evils will easily be borne; nay, good will be extracted out of them. But if this continue, it "bringeth forth fruit unto death;" (Romans 7:5) and in consequence of it, multitudes, who stare the entertainments of an indulgent Providence with us, and are at least allied to us by the bond of the same common nature, must, in a few years, be swept away into utter destruction, and be plunged, beyond redemption, into everlasting burnings.

4. I doubt not but there are many, under the various forms of religious profession, who are not only lamenting this in public, if their office in life calls them to an opportunity of doing it; but are likewise mourning before God in secret, under a sense of this sad state of things; and who can appeal to Him that searches all hearts as to the sincerity of their desires to revive the languishing cause of vital Christianity and substantial piety. And among the rest, the author of this treatise may with confidence say, it is this which animates him to the present attempt, in the midst of so many other cares and labors. For this he is willing to lay aside many of those curious amusements in science which might suit his own private taste, and perhaps open a way for some reputation in the learned world. For this be is willing to wave the labored ornaments of speech, that be may, if possible, descend to the capacity of the lowest part of mankind. For this he would endeavor to convince the judgment, and to reach the heart of every reader: and, in a word, for this, without any dread of the name of an enthusiast, whoever may at random throw it out upon the occasion, he would, as it were, enter with you into your closet, from day to day; and with all plainness and freedom, as well as seriousness, would discourse to you of the great things, which he has learned from the Christian revelation, and on which he assuredly knows your everlasting happiness to depend; that, if you hitherto have lived without religion, you may be now awakened to the consideration of it, and may be instructed in its nature and importance; or that, if you are already, through Divine grace, experimentally acquainted with it, you may be assisted to make a farther progress.

5. But he earnestly entreats this favor of you that, as it is plainly a serious business we are entering upon, you would be pleased to give him a serious and an active hearing. He entreats that these addresses, and these meditations, may be perused at leisure, and be thought over in retirement; and that you would do him and yourself the justice to believe the representations which art here made, and the warnings which are here given. to proceed from sincerity and love, from a heart that would not designedly give one moment’s unnecessary pain to the meanest creature on the face of the earth, and much less to any human mind. If he be importunate, it is because he at least imagines that there is just reason for it, and fears, lest, amidst the multitudes who are undone by the utter neglect of religion, and among those who are greatly damaged for want of a more resolute and constant attendance to it, this may be the case of some into whose hands this treatise may fall.

6. He is a barbarian, and deserves not to be called a man, who can look upon the sorrows of his fellow creatures without drawing out his soul unto them and wishing, at least, that it were in the power of his hand to help them. Surely earth would be a heaven to that man who could go about from place to place scattering happiness wheresoever be came, though it were only the body that he were capable of relieving, and though he could impart nothing better than the happiness of a mortal life. But the happiness rises in proportion to the nature and degree of the good which he imparts. Happy, are we ready to say, were those honored servants of Christ, who, in the early days of his church, were the benevolent and sympathizing instruments of conveying miraculous healing to those whose cases seemed desperate; who poured in upon the blind and the deaf the pleasures of light and sound, and called up the dead to the flowers of action and enjoyment. But this is an honor and happiness which it is not fit for God commonly to bestow on mortal men. Yet there have been, in every age, and blessed be his name, there still are those whom he has condescended to make his instruments in conveying nobler and more lasting blessings than these to their fellow-creatures. Death has long since veiled the eyes and stopped she ears of those who were the subjects of miraculous healing, and recovered its empire over those who were once recalled from the grave. But the souls who are prevailed upon to receive the Gospel, live for ever. God has owned the labors of his faithful ministers in every age to produce these blessed effects; and some of them "being dead, yet speak" (Hebrews 11:4) with power and success in this important cause. Wonder not then, if, living and dying I be ambitions of this honor; and if my mouth be freely opened, where I can truly say, "my heart is enlarged." (2 Corinthians 6:11)

7. In forming my general plan, I have been solicitous that this little treatise might, if possible, be useful to all its readers, and contain something suitable to each. I will therefore take the man and the Christian in a great variety of circumstances. I will first suppose myself addressing one of the vast number of thoughtless creatures who have hitherto been utterly unconcerned about religion, and will try what can be done, by all plainness and earnestness of address, to awaken him from this fatal lethargy, to a care (chap. 2), an affectionate and an immediate care about it (chap. 3). I will labor to fix a deep and awful conviction of guilt upon his conscience (chap. 4), and to strip him of his vain excuses and his flattering hopes (chap. 5). I will read to him, O! that I could fix on his heart that sentence, that dreadful sentence, which a righteous and an Almighty God hath denounced against him as a sinner (chap. 6), and endeavor to show him in how helpless a state he lies under this condemnation, as to any capacity he has of delivering himself (chap 7). But I do not mean to leave any in so terrible a situation: I will joyfully proclaim the glad tidings of pardon and salvation by Christ Jesus our Lord, which is all the support and confidence of my own soul (chap. 8). And then I will give some general view of the way by which this salvation is to be obtained (chap. 9); urging the sinner to accept of it as affectionately as I can (chap. 10); though not thing can be sufficiently pathetic, where, as sin this matter, the life of an immortal soul is in question.

8. Too probable it is that some will, after all this, remain insensible; and therefore that their sad case may not encumber the following articles, I shall here take a solemn leave of them (chap. 11); and then shall turn and address myself as compassionately as I can, to a most contrary character; I mean, to a soul overwhelmed with a sense of the greatness of its sins, and trembling under the burden, as if there were no more hope for him in God (chap. 12). And that nothing may be omitted which may give solid peace to the troubled spirit, I shall endeavor to guide its inquiries as to the

evidences of sincere repentance and faith (chap. 13); which will be farther illustrated by a more particular view of the several branches of the Christian temper, such as may serve at once to assist the reader in judging whit he is, and to show him what he should labor to be (chap. 14). This will naturally lead to a view of the need we have of the influences of the blessed Spirit to assist us in the important and difficult work of the true Christian, and of the encouragement we have to hope for such divine assistance (chap. 15). In an humble dependence on which, I shall then enter on the consideration of several cases which often occur in the Christian life, in which particular addresses to the conscience may be requisite and useful.

9. As some peculiar difficulties and discouragements attend the first entrance on a religious course, it will here be our first care to animate the young convert against them (chap. 16). And that it may be done more effectually, I shall urge a solemn dedication of himself to God (chap. 17), to be confirmed by entering into a communion of the church, and an approach to the sacred table (chap. 18). That these engagements may be more happily fulfilled, we shall endeavor to draw a more particular plan of that devout, regular and accurate course, which ought daily to be attended to (chap. 19). And because the idea will probably rise so much higher than what is the general practice, even of good men, we shall endeavor to persuade the reader to make the attempt, hard as it may seem (chap. 20); and shall caution him against various temptations, which might otherwise draw him aside to negligence and sin (chap.21).

10. Happy will it be for the reader, if these exhortations and cautions be attended to with becoming regard; but as it is, alas! too probable that, notwithstanding all, the infirmities of nature will sometimes prevail, we shall consider the case of deadness and languor in religion, which often steals upon us by sensible degrees (chap. 22); from whence there is too easy a passage to that terrible one of a return into known and deliberate sin (chap. 23). And as the one or the other of these tends in a proportionable degree to provoke the blessed God to hide his face, and his injured Spirit to withdraw, that melancholy condition will be taken into particular survey (chap. 24). I shall then take notice also of the case of great and heavy afflictions in life (chap. 25), a discipline which the best of men have reason to expect, especially when they backslide from God and yield to their spiritual enemies.

11. Instances of this kind will, I fear, be too frequent; yet, I trust, there will be many others, whose path, like the dawning light, will "shine more and more unto the perfect day." (Proverbs 4:18) And therefore we shall endeavor, in the best manner we can, to assist the Christian in passing a true judgment on the growth of grace in his heart (chap. 26), as we had done before in judging of its sincerity. And as nothing conduces more to the advancement of grace than the lively exercise of love to God, and a holy joy in him, we shall here remind the real Christian of those mercies which tend to excite that love and joy (chap. 27); and in the view of them to animate him to those vigorous efforts of usefulness in life, which so well become his character, and will have so happy an efficacy in brightening his crown (chap. 28). Supposing him to act accordingly, we shall then labor to illustrate and assist the delight with which he may look forward to the awful solemnities of death and judgment (chap. 29). And shall close the scene by accompanying him, as it were, to the nearest confines of that dark valley through which he is to pass to glory; giving him such directions as may seem most subservient to his honoring God and adorning religion by his dying behavior (chap. 30). Nor am I without a pleasing hope, that, through the Divine blessing and grace, I may be, in some instances, so successful as to leave those triumphing in the views of judgment and

eternity, and glorifying God by a truly Christian life and death, whom I found trembling in the apprehensions of future misery; or, perhaps, in a much more dangerous and miserable condition than that I mean, entirely forgetting the prospect, and sunk in the most stupid insensibility of those things, for an attendance to which the human mind was formed, and in comparison of which all the pursuits of this transitory life are emptier than wind and lighter than a feather.

12. Such a variety of heads must, to be sure, be handled but briefly, as we intend to bring them within the bulk of a moderate volume. I shall not, therefore, discuss them as a preacher might properly do in sermons, in which the truths of religion are professedly to be explained and taught, defended and improved, in a wide variety, and long detail of propositions, arguments, objections, replies, and inferences, marshalled and numbered under their distinct generals. I shall here speak in a looser and freer manner, as a friend to a friend; just as I would do if I were to be in person admitted to a private audience by one whom I tenderly loved, and whose circumstances and character I knew to be like that which the title of one chapter or another of this treatise describes. And when I have discoursed with him a little while, which will seldom be so long as half an hour, shill, as it were, step aside, and leave him to meditate on what he has heard, or endeavor to assist him in such fervent addresses to God as it may be proper to mingle with those meditations. In the mean time, I will here take the liberty to pray over my reader and my work, and to commend it solemnly to the Divine blessing, in token of my deep conviction of an entire dependence upon it. And I am well persuaded that sentiments like these are common, in the general, to every faithful minister to every real Christian.

A Prayer for the Success of this Work, in promoting the Rise and Progress of Religion.

"O thou great eternal Original, and Author of all created being and happiness! I adore thee, who hast made man a creature capable of religion, and host bestowed this dignity and felicity upon our nature, that it may be taught to say, Where is God our maker? (Job 35:10) I lament that degeneracy spread over the whole human race, which has "turned our glory into shame," (Hosea 4:7) and has rendered the forgetfulness of God, unnatural as it is, so common and so universal a disease. Holy Father, We know it is thy presence, and thy teaching alone, that can reclaim thy wandering children, can impress a sense of Divine things on the heart, and render that sense listing and effectual. From thee proceed all goon purposes and desires; and this desire, above all, of diffusing wisdom, piety, and happiness in this world. which (though sunk in such deep apostacy) thine infinite mercy has not utterly forsaken.

"Thou `knowest, O Lord, the hearts of the children of men;' (2 Chronicles 6:30) and an upright soul, in the midst of all the censures and suspicions it may meet with, rejoices in thine intimate knowledge of its most secret sentiments and principles of action. Thou knowest the sincerity and fervency with which thine unworthy servant desires to spread the knowledge of thy name, and the savor of thy Gospel, among all to whom this work may reach. Thou knowest that hadst thou given him an abundance of this world, it would have been, in his esteem, the noblest pleasure that abundance could have afforded to have been thine almoner in distributing thy bounties to the indigent and necessitous, and so causing the sorrowful heart to rejoice in thy goodness, dispensed through his hands. Thou knowest, that, hadst thou given him, either by ordinary or extraordinary methods, the gift of healing, it would have been his daily delight to relieve the pains, the maladies, and the infirmities of men's bodies; to have seen the languishing countenance brightened by

returning health and cheerfulness; and much more to have beheld the roving, distracted mind reduced to calmness and serenity in the exercise of its rational faculties. Yet happier, far happier wilt he think himself, in those humble circumstances in which thy providence hath placed him, if thou vouchsafe to honor these his feeble endeavors as the means of a relieving and enriching men’s minds; of recovering them from the madness of a sinful state, and bringing back thy reasonable creatures to the knowledge, the service, and the enjoyment of their God; or of improving those who are already reduced.

"O may it have that blessed influence on the person, whosoever he be, that is now reading these lines, and all who may read or hear them! Let not my Lord be angry if I presume to ask, that, however weak and contemptible this work may seem in the eyes of the children of this world, and however imperfect it really be, as well as the author of it unworthy, it may nevertheless live before thee; and, through a divine power, be mighty to produce the rise and progress of religion in the minds of multitudes in distant places, and in generations yet to come! Impute it not, O God, as a culpable ambition, if I desire that, whatever becomes of my name, about which I wou1d not lose one thought before thee, this work, to which I am now applying myself in thy strength, may be completed and propagated far abroad: that it may reach to those that are yet unborn, and teach them thy name and thy praise, when the author has long dwelt in the dust; that so, when he shall appear before thee in the great day of final account, his joy may be increased, and his crown brightened, by numbers before unknown to each other, and to him! But if this petition be too great to be granted to one who pretends no claim but thy sovereign grace to hope for being favored with the least, give him to be, in thine Almighty hand, the blessed instrument of converting and saving one soul; and if it be but one, and that the weakest and meanest of those who are capable or receiving this address, it shall be most thankfully accepted as a rich recompense for all the thought and labor it may cost; and though it should be amidst a thousand disappointments with respect to others, yet it shall be the subject of immortal songs of praise to thee, O blessed God, for and by every soul whom, through the blood of Jesus and the grace of thy Spirit, thou hast saved; and everlasting honors shall be ascribed to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, by the innumerable company of angels, and by the general assembly and church of the first-born in heaven. Amen."

02.02. The Careless Sinner Awakened

Chapter 2 The Careless Sinner Awakened

1.2. It is too supposable a case that this Treatise may come into such hands.--3. 4. Since many, not grossly vicious, fail under that character.--5. 6. A more particular illustration of this case, with an appeal to the reader, whether it be not his own.--7 to 9. Expostulation with such.--10 to 12. More particularly--From acknowledged principles relating to the Nature of Got, his universal presence, agency, and perfection.--13. From a view of personal obligations to him.--14. From the danger Of this neglect, when considered in its aspect on a future state.--15. An appeal to the conscience as already convinced.--16. Transition to the subject of the next chapter. The meditation of a sinner, who, having been long thoughtless, begins to be awakened.

1. SHAMEFULLY and fatally as religion is neglected in the world, yet, blessed be God, it has some sincere disciples, children of wisdom, by whom even in this foolish and degenerate age, it "is justified:" (Matthew 9:18) who having, by Divine grace, been brought to the knowledge of God in Christ, have faithfully devoted their hearts to him, and, by a natural consequence, are devoting their lives to his service. Could I be sure this Treatise would fall into no hands but theirs, my work would be shorter, easier and more pleasant.

2. But among the thousands that neglect religion, it is more than probable that some of my readers may be included; and I am so deeply affected with their unhappy ease, that the temper of my heart, as well as the proper method of my subject, leads me, in the first place, to address myself to such: to apply to every one of them; and therefore to you, O reader, whoever you are, who may come under the denomination of a careless sinner.

3. Be not, I beseech you angry at the name. The physicians of souls must speak plainly, or they may murder those whom they should cure I would make no harsh and unreasonable supposition. I would charge you with nothing more than is absolutely necessary to convince you that you are the person to whom I speak. I will not, therefore, imagine you to be a profane and abandoned profligate. I will not suppose that you allow yourself to blaspheme God, to dishonour his name by customary swearing, or grossly to violate his Sabbath, or commonly to neglect the solemnities of his public worship; I will not imagine that you have injured your neighbors, in their lives, their chastity, or their possessions, either by violence or by fraud; or that you have scandalously debased the rational nature of man, by that vile intemperance which transforms us into the worst kind of brutes, or something beneath them.

4. In opposition to all this, I will suppose that you believe the existence and providence of God, and the truth of Christianity as a revelation from him: of which, if you have any doubt, I must desire that you would immediately seek your satisfaction elsewhere*." I say immediately; because not to believe it, is in effect to disbelieve it; and will make your ruin equally certain, though perhaps it may leave it less aggravated than if contempt and opposition had been added to suspicion and neglect. But supposing you to be a nominal Christian, and not a deist or a skeptic, I wilt also suppose your

conduct among men to be not only blameless, but amiable; and that they who know you most intimately, must acknowledge that you are just and sober, humane and courteous, compassionate and liberal; yet, with all this, you may "lack that one thing" (Mark 10:21) on which your eternal happiness depends.

5. I beseech you, reader, whoever you are, that you would now look seriously into your own heart, and ask it this one plain question; Am I truly religious? Is the love of God the governing principle of my life? Do I walk under the sense of his presence? Do I converse with him from day to day, in the exercise of prayer and praise? And am I, on the whole, making his service my business and my delight, regarding him as my master and my father?

6. It is my present business only to address myself to the person whose conscience answers in the negative. And I would address, with equal plainness and equal freedom, to high and low, to rich and poor: to you, who, as the Scripture with a dreadful propriety expresses it, "live without God in the world!" (Ephesians 2:12) and while in words and forms you "own God, deny him in your actions," (Titus 1:16) and behave yourselves in the main, a few external ceremonies only excepted, just as you would do if you believed and were sure there is no God. Unhappy creature, whoever you are! your own heart condemns you immediately! and how much more that "God who is greater than your heart, and knoweth all things." (1 John 3:20) He is in "secret," (Matthew 6:6) as well as in and words cannot express the delight with which his children converse with him alone: but in secret you acknowledge him not: you neither pray to him, nor praise him in your retirements. Accounts, correspondences studies, may often bring you into your closet; but if nothing but devotion were to be transacted there, it would be to you quite an unfrequented place. And thus you go on from day to day in a continual forgetfulness of God, and are as thoughtless about religion as if you had long since demonstrated to yourself that it was a mere dream. If, indeed, you are sick, you will perhaps cry to God for health in any extreme danger you will lift up your eyes and voice for deliverance but as for the pardon of sin, and the other blessings of the Gospel, you are not at all inwardly solicitous about them; though you profess to believe that the Gospel is divine, and the blessings of it eternal. All your thoughts, and all your hours are divided between the business and the amusements of life; and if now and then an awful providence or a serious sermon or book awakens you, it is but a few days, or it may be a few hours, and you are the same careless creature you ever were before. On the whole, you act as if you were resolved to put it to the venture, and at your own expense to make the experiment, whether the consequences of neglecting religion be indeed as terrible as its ministers and friends have represented. Their remonstrances do indeed sometimes force themselves upon you, as (considering the age and country in which you live), it is hardly possible entirely to avoid them; but you have, it may be, found out the art of Isaiah’s people, "hearing to hear, and not understand; and seeing to see, and not perceive your heart is waxed gross, your eyes are closed, and your ears heavy." (Isaiah 6:9-10) Under the very ordinances of worship your thoughts "are at the ends of the earth." (Proverbs 17:24) Every amusement of the imagination is welcome, if it may but lead away your mind from so insipid and so disagreeable a subject as religion. And probably the very last time you were in a worshipping assembly, you managed just as you would have done if you had thought God knew nothing of your behavior, or as if you did not think it worth one single care whether he were pleased or displeased with it.

7. Alas! is it then come to this, with all your belief of God, and providence and Scripture, that religion is not worth a thought? That it is not worth one hour's serious consideration and reflection, "what God and Christ are, and what you yourselves are, and what you must hereafter be?" Where then are your rational faculties? How are they employed, or rather how are they stupefied and benumbed?

8. The certainty and importance of the things of which I speak are so evident, from the principles which you yourselves grant, that one might almost set a child or an idiot to reason upon them. And yet they are neglected by those who are grown up to understanding; and perhaps some of them to such refinement of understanding that they would think themselves greatly injured if they were not to be reckoned among the politer and more learned pan of mankind.

9. But it is not your neglect, sirs, that can destroy the being or importance of such things as these. It may indeed destroy you, but it cannot in the least affect them. Permit me, therefore, having been my-self awakened, to come to each of you, and say, as the mariners did to Jonah while asleep in the midst of a much less dangerous storm, "What meanest thou, O sleeper? Arise and call upon thy God." (Jonah 1:6) Do you doubt as to the reasonableness or necessity of doing it? "I will demand, and answer me;" (Job 38:3) answer me to your own conscience, as one that must, ere long, render another kind of account.

10. You own that there is a God, and well you may, for you cannot open your eyes but you must see the evident proofs of his being, his presence, and his agency. You behold him around you in every object. You feel him within you, if I may so speak, in every vein and in every nerve. You see and you feel not only that he hath formed you with an exquisite wisdom which no mortal man could ever fully explain or comprehend, but that he is continually near you, wherever you are, and however you are employed, by day or by night; "in hint you live, and move, and have your being." (Acts 17:28) Common sense will tell you that it is not your own wisdom, and power, and attention that causes your heart to beat and your blood to circulate; that draws in and sends out that breath of life, that precarious breath of a most uncertain life, "the is in your nostrils." (Isaiah 2:22) These things are done when you sleep, as well as in those waking moments when you think not of the circulation of the blood, or of the necessity of breathing, or so much as recollect that you have a heart or lungs. Now, what is this but the hand of God, perpetually supporting and actuating those curious machines that he has made?

11. Nor is this his care limited to you; but if you look all around you, far as your view can reach, you see it extending itself on every side: and, oh! how much farther than you can trace it! Reflect on the light and heat which the sun every where dispenses; on the air which surrounds all our globe; on the right temperature on which the life of the whole human race depends, and that of all the inferior creatures which dwell on the earth. Think on the suitable and plentiful provisions made for man and beast; the grass, the grain, the variety of fruits, and herbs, and flowers; every thing that nourishes us, every thing that delights us, and say whether it does not speak plainly and loudly that our Almighty Maker is near, and that he is careful or us, and kind to us. And while all these things proclaim his goodness, do not they also proclaim his power? For what power has any thing comparable to that which furnishes out those gifts of royal bounty; and which, unwearied and unchanged, produces continually, from day to day, and from age to age, such astonishing and magnificent effects over the face of the whole earth, and through all the regions of heaven?

12. It is then evident that God is present, present with you at this moment; even God your creator and preserver, God the creator and preserver of the whole visible and invisible world. And is he not present as a most observant and attentive being? "He that formed the eye, shall not he see? He that planted the ear, shall not he hear? He that teaches man knowledge," that gives him his rational faculties, and pours in upon his opening mind all the light it receives by them, "shall not he know?" (Psalms 94:9-10) He who sees all the necessities of his creatures so seasonably to provide for them, shall be not see their actions too; and seeing, shall he not judge them? Has he given us a sense and discrimination of what is good and evil, of what is true and false, of what is fair and deformed in temper and con duct; and has he himself no discernment of these things? Trifle not with your conscience, which tells you at once that he judges of it, and approves or condemns as it is decent or indecent, reasonable or flu-reasonable; and that the judgment which he passes is of infinite importance to all his creatures.

13. And now to apply all this to your own case; let me seriously ask you, is it a decent and reasonable thing, that this great and glorious Benefactor should be neglected by his rational creatures--by those that are capable of attaining to some knowledge of him, and presenting to him some homage? Is it decent and reasonable that he should be forgotten and neglected by you? Are you alone, of all the works or his hands, forgotten or neglected by him? O sinner, thoughtless as you are, you cannot dare to say that, or even to think it. You need not go back to the he1pless days of your infancy and childhood to convince you of the contrary. You need not, in order to this, recollect the remarkable deliverances which perhaps were wrought out for you many years ago. The repose of the last night, the refreshment and comfort you have received this day; yea, the mercies you are receiving this very moment bear witness to him; and yet you regard him not ungrateful creature that you are! Could you have treated any human benefactor thus? Could you have borne to neglect a kind parent, or any generous friend, that had but for a few months acted the part of a parent to you; to have taken no notice of him while in his presence; to have returned him no thanks; to have had no contrivances to make some little acknowledgment for all his goodness? Human nature, bad as it is, is not fallen so low. Nay, the brutal nature is not so low as this. Surely every domestic animal around you must shame such ingratitude. If you do but for a few days take a little kind notice of a dog, and feed him with the refuse of your table, he will wait upon you, and love to be near you; he will be eager to follow you from place to place, and when, after a little absence you return home, will try, by a thousand fond, transported motions, to tell you how much he rejoices to see you again. Nay, brutes far less sagacious and apprehensive have some sense of our kindness, and express it after their way: as the blessed God condescends to observe, in this very view in which I mention it, "The" dull "ox knows his owner, and the" stupid "ass his master’s crib." (Isaiah 1:3) What lamentable degeneracy therefore is it, that you do not know-that you, who have been numbered among God’s professed people, do not and will not consider your numberless obligations to him.

14. Surely, if you have any ingenuousness of temper, you must be ashamed and grieved in the review; but if you have not, give me leave farther to expostulate with you on this head, by setting it in something of a different light. Can you think your-self safe, while you are acting a part like this? Do you not in your conscience believe there will be a future judgment? Do you not believe there is an invisible and eternal world? As professed Christians, we all believe it; for it is no controverted point, but displayed in Scripture with so clear an evidence, that, subtle and ingenious as men are

in error, they have riot yet found out a way to evade it. And believing this, do you not see, that, while you are thus wandering from God, "destruction and misery are in your way?" (Romans 3:16) Will this indolence and negligence of temper be any security to you? Will it guard you from death? Will it excuse you from judgment? You might much more reasonably expect that shutting your eyes would be a defence against the rage of a devouring lion; or that looking another way should secure your body from being pierced by a bullet or a sword; When God speaks of the extravagant folly of some thoughtless creatures who would hearken to no admonition now he adds, in a very awful manner, "In the latter day they shall consider it perfectly." (Jeremiah 23:20) And is not this applicable to you? Must you not sooner or later be brought to think of these things, whether you wilt or not! And in the mean time do you not certainly know that timely and serious reflection upon them is, through divine grace, the only way to prevent your ruin!

15. Yes, sinner, I need not multiply words on a subject like this. Your conscience is already inwardly convinced, though your pride maybe unwilling to own it. And to prove it, let me ask you one question more: Would you, upon any terms and considerations whatever, come to a resolution absolutely to dismiss all farther thought of religion, and all care about it, from this day and hour, and to abide the consequences of that neglect? I believe hardly any man living would be bold enough to determine upon this. I believe most of my readers would be ready to tremble at the thought of it.

16. But if it be necessary to take these things into consideration at all, it is necessary to do it quickly; for life itself is not so very long nor so certain, that a wise man should risk much upon its continuance. And I hope to convince you when I have another hearing, that it is necessary to do it immediately, and that next to the madness of resolving you will not think of religion at all, is that of saying you will think of it hereafter. In the meantime, pause art the hints which have been already given, and they will prepare you to receive what is to be added on that head.

The Meditation of a Sinner who was once thoughtless, but begins to be awakened.

"Awake, O my forgetful soul, awake from these wandering dreams. Turn thee from this chase of vanity, and for a little while be persuaded, by all these considerations, to look forward, and to look upward, at least for a few moments. Sufficient are the hours and days given to the labors and amusements of life. Grudge not a short allotment of minutes, to view thyself and thine own more immediate concerns: to reflect who and what thou art, how it comes to pass that thou art here, and what thou must quickly be!

"It is indeed as thou hast seen it now represented. O my soul! thou art the creature of God, formed and furnished by him, and lodged in a body which he provided, and which he supports; a body in which he intends thee only a transitory abode. O! think how soon this `tabernacle' must be `dissolved,' (2 Corinthians 5:1) and thou must `return to God.' (Ecclesiastes 12:7) And shall He, the One, Infinite, Eternal, Ever-blessed, and Ever-glorious Being, shall He be least of all regarded by thee? Wilt thou live and die with this character, saying, by every action of every day, unto God, `Depart from me, for I desire not the knowledge of thy ways?' (Job 21:14) The morning, the day, the evening, the night, every period of time has its excuses for this neglect. But O! my soul, what will these excuses appear when examined by his penetrating eye! They may delude me, but they cannot impose upon him.

"O thou injured, neglected, provoked Benefactor! when I think but for a moment or two of all thy greatness and of all thy goodness, I am astonished at this insensibility which has prevailed in my heart, and even still prevails; I `blush and am confounded to lift up my face before thee.' (Ezra 9:6) On the most transient review, I `see that I have played the fool,' that `I have erred exceedingly.' (1 Samuel 26:21) And yet this stupid heart of mine would make its having neglected thee so long a reason for going on to neglect thee. I own it might justly be expected, that, with regard to thee, every one of thy rational creatures should be all duty and love; that each heart should be full of a sense of thy presence; and that a care to please thee should swallow up every other care. Yet thou `hast not been in all my thoughts;' (Psalms 10:4) and religion, the end and glory of my nature, has been so strangely overlooked, that I have hardly ever seriously asked my own heart what it is. I know, if matters rest here, I perish; yet I feel in my perverse nature a secret indisposition to pursue these thoughts; a proneness, if not entirely to dismiss them, yet to lay them aside side for the present. My mind is perplexed and divided; but I am sure, thou, who madest me, knowest what is best for me. I therefore beseech thee that thou wilt, `for thy name's sake, lead me and guide me.' (Psalms 31:3) Let me not delay till it is for ever too late. `Pluck me as a brand out of the burning!' (Amos 4:11) O break this fatal enchantment that holds down my affection to objects which my judgment comparatively despises! and let me, at length, come into so happy a state of mind that I may not be afraid to think of thee and of myself, and may not be tempted to wish that thou hadst not made me, or that thou couldst for ever forget me; that it may not he my best hope, to perish like the brutes.

"If what I shall farther read here be agreeable to truth and reason, if it be calculated to promote my happiness, and is to be regarded as an intimation of thy will and pleasure to me, O God, let me hear and obey! Let the words of thy servant, when pleading thy cause, be like goads to pierce into my mind! and let me rather feel, and smart, than die! Let them be `as nails fastened in a sure place;' (Ecclesiastes 12:4) that whatever mysteries as yet unknown, or whatever difficulties there be in religion, if it be necessary, I may not finally neglect it; and that, if it be expedient to attend immediately to it, I may no longer delay that attendance! And, O! let thy grace teach me the lesson I am so slow to learn and conquer that strong opposition which I feel in my heart against the very thought of it! Hear these broken cries, for the sake of thy Son, who has taught and saved many a creature as untractable as I, and can `out of stones raise up children unto Abraham!' (Matthew 3:9) Amen."

02.03. The Awakened Sinner Urged To Immediate Consideration

Chapter 3 The Awakened Sinner Urged To Immediate Consideration And Cautioned Against Delay

1. Sinners, when awakened, inclined to dismiss convictions for the present.--2. An immediate regard to religion urged.--3. From the excellence and pleasure of the thing itself.--4. From the uncertainty of that future time on which sinners presume, compared with the sad consequences of being cut off in sin.--5. From the immutability of God’s present demands.--6. From the tendency which delay has to make a compliance with these demands more difficult than it is at present.--7. From. the danger of God’s withdrawing his Spirit, compared with the dreadful case of a sinner given up by it.--8. Which probably is now the case of many.--9. Since, therefore, on the whole, whatever ever the event be, delays may prove matter of lamentation.--10. The chapter concludes with an exhortation against yielding to them; and a prayer against temptations of that kind.

1. I HOPE my last address so far awakened the convictions of my reader, as to bring him to this purpose, "that some time or other he would attend to religious considerations." But give me leave to ask, earnestly and pointedly, When shall that be? "Go thy way for this time, when I have a convenient season I will call for thee," (Acts 24:25) was the language and ruin of unhappy Felix, when he trembled under the reasonings and expostulations of the apostle. The tempter presumed not to urge that he should give up all thoughts of repentance and reformation; but only that, considering the present hurry of his affairs, (as no doubt they were many) he should defer it to another day. The artifice succeeded; and Felix was undone.

2. Will you, render, dismiss me thus? For your own sake, and out of tender compassion to your perishing, immortal soul, I would not willingly take up with such a dismission and excuse--no, not though you shall fix a time; though you shall determine on the next year, or month, or week, or day. I would turn upon you, with all the eagerness and tenderness of friendly importunity, and entreat you to bring the matter to an issue even now. For if you say, "I will think on these things tomorrow," I shall have little hope; and shall conclude that all that I have hitherto urged, and all that you have read, has been offered and viewed in vain.

3. When I invite you to the care and practice of religion, it may seem strange that it should be necessary for me affectionately to plead the cause with you, in order to your immediate regard and compliance. What I am inviting you to is so noble and excellent in itself, so well worthy of the dignity of our rational nature so suitable to it, so manly and so wise, that one would imagine you should take fire, as it were, at the first hearing of it; yea, that so delightful a view should presently possess your whole soul with a kind of indignation against your-self that you pursued it no sooner. "May I lift up my eyes and my soul to God! May I devote my-self to him! May I even now commence a friendship with him--a friendship which shall last for ever, the security, the delight, the glory of this immortal nature of mine! And shall I draw back and say, Nevertheless, let me not commence this friendship too soon: let me live at least a few weeks or a few days longer without God in the world?" Surely it would be much more reasonable to turn inward, and say, "O my soul,

on what vile husks hast thou been feeding, while thy Heavenly Father has been forsaken and injured? Shall I desire to multiply the days of my poverty, my scandal, and my misery?" On this principle, surely an immediate return to God should in all reason be chosen, rather than to play the fool any longer, and go on a little more to displease God, and thereby starve and wound your own soul! even though your continuance in life were ever so certain, and your capacity to return to God and your duty ever so entirely in your power, now, and in every future moment, through scores of years yet to come.

4. But who and what are you, that you should lay your account for years or for months to come? "What is your life? Is not even as a vapor, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away?" (James 4:14) And what is your security, or what is your peculiar warrant, that you should thus depend upon the certainty of its continuance, and that so absolutely as to venture, as it were, to pawn your soul upon it? Why, you will perhaps say, "I am young, and in all my bloom and vigor; I see hundreds about me who are more than double my age, and not a few of them who seem to think it too soon to attend to religion yet."

You view the living, and you talk thus. But I beseech you, think of the dead. Return, in your thoughts, to those graves in which you have left some of your young companions and your friends. You saw them awhile ago gay and active, warm with life, and hopes, and schemes. And some of them would have thought a friend strangely importunate that should have interrupted them in their business and their pleasures, with a solemn lecture on death and eternity. Yet they were then on the very borders of both. You have since seen their corpses, or at least their coffins, and probably carried about with you the badges of mourning which you received at their funerals. Those once vigorous, and perhaps beautiful bodies of theirs, now lie moldering in the dust, as senseless and helpless as the most decrepit pieces of human nature which fourscore years ever brought down to it. And, what is infinitely more to be regarded, their souls, whether prepared for this great change, or thoughtless of it, have made their appearance before God, and are at this moment fixed, either in heaven or in hell. Now let me seriously ask you, would it be miraculous. Or would it be strange, if such an event should befall you? How are you sure that some fatal disease will not this day begin to work in your veins? How are you sure that you shall ever be capable of reading or thinking any more, if you do not attend to what you now read, and pursue the thought which is now offering itself to your mind? This sudden alteration may at least possibly happen; and if it does, it will be to you a terrible one indeed. To be thus surprised into the presence of a forgotten God; to be torn away, at once, from a world to which your whole heart and soul has been riveted--a world which has engrossed all your thoughts and cares, all your desires and pursuits; and be fixed in a state which you never could be so far persuaded to think of, as to spend so much as one hour in serious preparation for it: how must you even shudder at the apprehension of it, and with what horror must it fill you? It seems matter of wonder that in such circumstances you are not almost distracted with the thoughts of the uncertainty of life, and are not even ready to die for fear of death. To trifle with God any longer, after so solemn an admonition as this, would be a circumstance of additional provocation, which, after all the rest, might be fatal; nor is there any thing you can expect in such a case, but that he should cut you off immediately, and teach other thoughtless creatures, by your ruin, what a hazardous experiment they make when they act as you are acting.

5. And will you, after all, run this desperate risk? For what imaginable purpose can you do it? Do you think the business of religion will become less necessary or more easy by your delay? You

know that it will not. You know, that whatever the blessed God demands now, he will also demand twenty or thirty years hence, if you should live to see the time. God has fixed his method, in which he will pardon and accept sinners in his Gospel. And will he ever alter that method? Or if he will not, can men alter it? You like not to think of repenting and humbling yourself before God, to receive righteousness and life from his free grace in Christ; and you, above all, dislike the thought of returning to God in the ways of holy obedience. But will lie ever dispense with any of these, and publish a new Gospel, with promises of life and salvation to impenitent unbelieving sinners, if they will but call themselves Christians, and submit to a few external rites? How long do you think you might wait for such a change in the constitution of things? You know death will come upon you, and you cannot but know, in your own conscience, that a general dissolution will come upon the world long before God can thus deny himself, and contradict all his perfections and all his declarations;

6. Or if his demands continue the same, as they assuredly will, do you think any thing which is now disagreeable to you in them, will be less disagreeable hereafter than it is at present? Shall you love to sin less, when it becomes more habitual to you, and when your conscience is yet more enfeebled arid debauched? If you are running with the footmen and fainting, shall you be able "to contend with the horsemen?" (Jeremiah 12:5) Surely you cannot imagine it. You will not say, in any distemper which threatened your life, "I will stay till I grow a little worse, and then I will apply to a physician: I will let my disease get a little more rooting in my vitals, and then I will try what can be done to remove it." No, it is only where the life of the soul is concerned that men think thus wildly: the life and health of the body appear too precious to be thus trifled away.

7. If; after such desperate experiments, you are ever recovered, it must be by an operation of Divine grace on your soul yet more powerful and more wonderful in proportion to the increasing inveteracy of your spiritual maladies. And can you expect that the Holy Spirit should be more ready to assist you, in consequence of your having so shamefully trifled with him, and affronted him? He is now, in some measure, moving on your heart. If you feel any secret relentings in it upon what you read, it is a sign that you are not yet utterly forsaken. But who can tell whether these are not the last touches he will ever give to a heart so long hardened against him? Who can tell, but God may this day "swear, in his wrath, that you shall not enter into his rest?" (Hebrews 3:18) I have been telling you that you may immediately die. You own it is possible you may. And can you think of any thing more terrible? Yes, sinner, I will tell you of one thing more dreadful than immediate death and immediate damnation. The blessed God may say, "As for that wretched creature, who has so long trifled with me and provoked me, let him still live; let him live in the midst of prosperity and plenty; let him live under the purest and the most powerful ordinances of the Gospel too; that he may abuse them to aggravate his condemnation, and die under sevenfold guilt and a sevenfold curse. I will not give him the grace to think of his ways for one serious moment more; but he shall go on from bad to worse, filling up the measure of his iniquities, till death and destruction seize him in an unexpected hour, and `wrath come upon him to the uttermost.'" (1 Thessalonians 2:16)

8. You think this is an uncommon case; but I fear it is much otherwise. I fear there are few congregations where the word of God has been faith-fully preached, and where it has long been despised, especially by those whom it had once awakened, in which the eye of God does not see a number of such wretched souls; though it is impossible for us, in this mortal state, to pronounce upon the case who they are.

9. I pretend not to say how he will deal with you, O reader! whether he will immediately cut you off; or seal you up under final hardness and impenitency of heart, or whether his grace may at length awaken you to consider your ways, and return to him, even when your heart is grown yet more obdurate than it is at present. For to his Almighty grace nothing is hard, not even to transform a rock of marble into a man or a saint. But this I will confidently say, that if you delay any longer, the time will come when you will bitterly repent of that delay, and either lament it before God in the anguish of your heart here or curse your own folly and madness in hell, yea, when will wish that, dreadful as hell is, you had rather fallen into it sooner, than have lived in the midst of so many abused mercies, to render the degree of your punishment more insupportable, and your sense of it more exquisitely tormenting.

10. I do therefore earnestly exhort you, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by the worth, and, if I may so speak, by the blood of your immortal and perishing soul, that you delay not a day or an hour longer. Far from "giving sleep to your eye; or slumber to tour eyelids," (Proverbs 6:4) in the continued neglect of this important concern, take with you, even now, "words, and turn unto the Lord;" (Hosea 14:2) and before you quit the place where you now are, fall upon your knees in his sacred presence, and pour out your heart in such language, or at least to some such purpose as this: A Prayer for one who is tempted to delay applying to Religion, though under some conviction of its importance.

"O thou righteous and holy Sovereign of heaven and earth! thou God, `in whose hand my breath is, and whose are all my ways!' (Daniel 5:23) I confess I have been far from glorifying thee, or conducting myself according to the intimations or the declarations of thy will. I have therefore reason to adore thy forbearance and goodness, that thou hast not long since stopped my breath, and cut me off from the land of the living. I adore thy patience. that I have not, months and years ago, been an inhabitant of hell, where ten thousand delaying sinners are now lamenting their folly, and will be lamenting it for ever. But, O God, how possible is it that this trifling heart of mine may at length betray me into the same ruin! and then, alas! into a ruin aggravated by all this patience and forbearance of thine! I am convinced that, sooner or later, religion must be my serious care, or I am undone. And yet my foolish heart draws back from the yoke; yet I stretch myself upon the bed of sloth, and cry out for `a little more sleep, a little more slumber, a little more folding of the hands to sleep.' (Proverbs 6:10) Thus does my corrupt heart plead for its own indulgence against the conviction of my better judgment. What shall I say? O Lord, save me from myself! Save me from the artifices and deceitfulness of sin! Save me from the treachery of this perverse and degenerate nature of mine, and fix upon my mind what I have now been reading!

"O Lord, I am not now instructed in truths which were before quite unknown. Often have I been warned of the uncertainty of life, and the great uncertainty of the day of salvation. And I have formed some light purposes, and have begun to take a few irresolute steps in my way toward a return to thee. But, alas! I have been only, as it were, fluttering about religion, and have never fixed upon it. All my resolutions have been scattered like smoke, or dispersed like a cloudy vapor before the wind. O that thou wouldst now bring these things home to my heart, with a more powerful conviction than it hath ever yet felt? O that thou would pursue me with them, even when flee from them! If I should even grow mad enough to endeavor to escape them any more, may thy Spirit address me in the language of effectual terror, and add all the most powerful methods which thou knowest to be necessary to awaken me from this lethargy, which must otherwise be mortal! May

the sound of these things be in mine ears `when I go out, and when I come in, when I lie down, and when I rise up!' (Deuteronomy 6:7) And if the repose of the night and the business of the day he for a while interrupted by the impression, be it so, O God! if I may but thereby carry on my business with thee to better purpose, and at length secure a repose in thee, instead of all that terror which I now find when `I think upon God, and I am troubled.' (Psalms 77:3)

"O Lord, `my flesh trembleth for fear of thee, and I am afraid of thy judgments.' (Psalms 119:120) I am afraid lest, even now that I have begun to think of religion, thou shouldst cut me off in this critical and important moment, before my thoughts grow to any ripeness, and blast in eternal death the first buddings and openings of it in my mind. But O spare me, I earnestly entreat thee: for thy mercies' sake, Spare me a little longer! It may be, through thy grace I shall return. It may be, if thou continuest thy patience towards me while longer, there may be `some better fruit produced by this cumberer of the ground.' (Luke 13:7) And may the remembrance of that long forbearance which thou hast already exercised towards me prevent my continuing to trifle with thee, and with my soul! From this day, O Lord, from this hour, from this moment, may I be able to date more lasting impressions of religion than have ever yet been made upon my heart by all that I have ever read, or all that I have heard. Amen."

02.04. The Sinner Arraigned And Convicted

Chapter 4 The Sinner Arraigned And Convicted

1. Conviction of guilt necessary.--2. A charge of rebellion against God advanced.--3. Where it is shown--that all men are born under God's law.--4. That no man hath perfectly kept it.--5. An appeal to the reader's conscience on this head, that he hath not.--6. That to have broken it, is an evil inexpressibly great.--7. Illustrated by a more particular view of the aggravations of this guilt, arising--from knowledge.--8. From divine favors received.--9. From convictions of conscience overborne.--10. From the strivings of God's Spirit resisted.--11.. From vows and resolutions broken.--12. The charges summed up, and left upon the sinner's conscience.--The sinner's confession under a general conviction of guilt.

1. AS I am attempting to lead you to true religion and not merely to some superficial form of it, I am sensible I can do it no otherwise than in the way of deep humiliation. And therefore supposing you are persuaded, through the divine blessing on what you have before read, to take it into consideration, I would now endeavor, in the first place, with all the seriousness I can, to make you heartily sensible of your guilt before God. For I well know, that, unless you are convinced of this, and affected with the conviction, all the provisions of Gospel grace will be slighted, and your soul infallibly destroyed, in the midst of the noblest means appointed for its recovery. I am fully persuaded that thousands live and die in a course of sin, without feeling upon their hearts any sense that they are sinners, though they cannot, for shame, but own it in words. And therefore let me deal faithfully with you, though I may seem to deal roughly; for complaisance is not to give law to addresses in which the life of your soul is concerned.

2. Permit me therefore, O sinner, to consider myself at this time as an advocate for God, as one employed in his name to plead against thee and to charge thee with nothing less than being a rebel and a traitor against the Sovereign Majesty or heaven and earth. However thou mayest be dignified or distinguished among men; if the noblest blood run in thy veins; if thy seat were among princes, and thine arm were "the terror of the mighty in the land of the living," (Ezekiel 32:27) it would be necessary thou shouldst be told plainly, thou hast broken the laws of the King of kings and by the breach of them art become obnoxious to his righteous condemnation.

3. Your conscience tells you that you were born the natural subject of God, born under the indispensable obligations of his law. For it is most apparent that the constitution of your rational nature, which makes you capable of receiving law from God, binds you to obey it. And it is equally evident and certain that you have not exactly obeyed this law, nay, that you have violated it in many aggravated instances.

4. Will you dare to deny this? Will you dare to assert your innocence? Remember, it must be a complete innocence; yea, and a perfect righteousness too, or it can stand you in no stead, farther than to prove, that, though a condemned sinner, you are not quite so criminal as some others, and will not have quite so hot a place in hell as they. And when this is considered, will you plead not

guilty to the charge? Search the records of your own conscience, for God searcheth them: ask it seriously, "Have you never in your life sinned against God?" Solomon declared, that in his days "there was not a just man upon earth, who did good and sinned not;" (Ecclesiastes 7:20) and the apostle Paul, "that all had sinned and come short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23) "that both Jews and Gentiles (which you know, comprehend the whole human race) were all under sin." (Romans 3:9) And can you pretend any imaginable reason to believe the world is grown so much better since their days, that any should now plead their own case as an exception? Or will you, however, presume to arise in the face of the omniscient Majesty of heaven, and say, I am the man?

5. Supposing, as before, you have been free from those gross acts of immorality which are so pernicious to society that they have generally been punishable by human laws; can you pretend that you have not, in smaller instances, violated the rules of piety, of temperance, and charity? Is there any one person, who has intimately known you, that would not be able to testify you had said or done something amiss! Or if others could not convict you, would not your own heart do it! Does it not prove you guilty of pride, of passion, of sensuality, of an excessive fondness of the world and its enjoyments? of murmuring, or at least of secretly repining against God, under the strokes of an afflictive providence; of misspending a great deal of your time; abusing the gifts of God’s bounty to vain, if not, in some instances, to pernicious purposes; of mocking him when you have pretended to engage in his worship, "drawing near to him with your mouth and your lips while your heart has been far front him?" (Isaiah 29:13) Does not conscience condemn you of some one breach of the law at least? And by one breach of it you are, in a sense, a Scriptural sense, "become guilty of all," (James 2:19) and are as incapable of being justified before God, by any obedience of your own, as if you had committed ten thousand offences. But, in reality, there are ten thousand and more chargeable to your account. When you come to reflect on all your sins of negligence, as we as on those of commission; on all the instances in which you have "failed to do good when it was in the power of your hand to do it;" (Proverbs 3:27) on all the instances in which acts of devotion have been omitted, especially in secret; and on all those cases in which you have shown a stupid disregard to the honor of God, and to the temporal and eternal happiness of your fellow-creatures: when all these, I say, are reviewed, the number will swell beyond all possibility of account, and force you to cry out, "Mine iniquities are more than the hairs of my head." (Psalms 40:12) They will appear in such a light before you, that your own heart will charge you with countless multitudes; and how much more, "then, that God, who is greater than your heart, and knoweth all things!" (1 John 3:20)

6. And say, sinner, is it a little thing that you have presumed to set light by the authority of the God of heaven, and to violate his law, if it had been by mere carelessness and inattention? How much more heinous, therefore, is the guilt, when in an many instances you hare done it knowingly and willfully! Give me leave seriously to ask you, and let me entreat you to ask your own soul, "Against whom hast thou magnified thyself? Against whom hast thou exalted thy voice," (2 Kings 19:22) or "lifted up thy rebellious hand?" On whose law, O sinner, hast thou presumed to trample? and whose friendship, and whose enmity, hast thou thereby dared to affront! Is it a man like thyself that thou host insulted? Is it only a temporal monarch--only one "who can kill thy body, and then hath no more that he can do?" (Luke 12:4)

Nay, sinner, thou wouldst not have dared to treat a temporal prince as thou hast treated the "King Eternal, Immortal," and "Invisible." (1 Timothy 1:17) No price could have hired thee to deal by the majesty of an earthly sovereign, as thou bast dealt by that God before whom the cherubim and seraphim are continually bowing. Not one opposing or complaining, disputing or murmuring word is heard among all the celestial legions, when the intimations of his will are published to them. And who art thou, O wretched man! who art thou, that thou shouldst oppose him? That thou shouldst oppose and provoke a God of infinite power and terror, who needs but exert one single act of his sovereign will, and thou art in a moment stripped of every possession; cut off from every hope; destroyed and rooted up from existence, if that were his pleasure; or, what is inconceivably conceivably worse, consigned over to the severest and most lasting agonies? Yet this is the God whom thou hast offended, whom thou hast affronted to his nice, presuming to violate his express laws in his very presence. This is the God before whom thou standest as a convicted criminal; convicted not of one or two particular offenses, but of thousands and ten thousands; of a course and series of rebellion and provocations, in which thou hast persisted more or less ever since thou want born, and the particulars of which have been attended with almost every conceivable circumstance of aggravation. Reflect on particulars, and deny the charge if you can.

7. If knowledge be an aggravation of guilt, thy guilt, O sinner, is greatly aggravated! For thou wast born in Emmanuel’s land, and God hath "written to thee the great things of his law," yet "thou hast accounted them as a strange thing." (Hosea 8:12) Thou hast "known to do good, and hast not done it;" (James 4:17) and therefore to thee the omission of it has been sin indeed. "Hast thou not known? Hast thou not heard?" (Isaiah 30:28) Wast thou not early taught the will of God? Hast thou not since received repeated lessons, by which it has been inculcated again and again, in public and in private, by preaching and reading the word of God? Nay, hath not thy duty been in some instances so plain, that, even without any instruction it all, thine own reason might easily have inferred at? And hast thou not also been warned of the consequences of disobedience? Hast thou not "known the righteous judgment of God, that they who commit such things are worthy of death?" Yet, thou hast, perhaps, "not only done the same, but hast had pleasure in those that do them;" (Romans 1:32) hast chosen them for thy most intimate friends and companions; so as hereby to strengthen, by the force of example and converse, the hands of each other in your iniquities.

8. Nay more, if Divine love and mercy be any aggravation of the sins committed against it, thy crimes, O sinner, are heinously aggravated. Must thou not acknowledge it, O foolish creature and unwise! Hast thou not been "nourished and brought up by him as his child, and yet hast rebelled against him?" (Isaiah 1:2) Did not God "take you out of the womb?" (Psalms 22:9) Did he not watch over you in your infant days, and guard you from a multitude of dangers which the most careful parent or nurse could not have observed or warded off? Has he not given you your rational powers? and is it not by him you have been favored with every opportunity of improving them? Has he not every day supplied your wants with an unwearied liberality, and added, with respect to many who will read this, the delicacies of life to its necessary supports? Has he not "heard you cry when trouble came upon you?" (Job 27:9) and frequently appeared for your deliverance, when in the distress of nature you have called upon him for help? Has be not rescued you from ruin, when it seemed just ready to swallow you up; and healed your diseases, when it seemed to all about you, that the residue of your days was cut off in the midst? (Psalms 102:24) Or, if it has not been

so, is not this long-continued and uninterrupted health, which you have enjoyed for so many years, to be acknowledged as an equivalent obligation? Look around upon all your possessions, and say, what one thing have you in the world which his goodness did not give you, and which he hath not thus far preserved to you? Add to all this, the kind notice of his will which he hath sent you; the tender expostulations which he hath used with you, to bring you to a wiser and better temper; and the discoveries and gracious invitations of his Gospel which you have heard, and which you have despised; and then say, whether your rebellion has not been aggravated by the vilest ingratitude, and whether that aggravation can be accounted small?

9. Again, if it be any aggravation of Sin to be committed against conscience, thy crimes, O sinner! have been so aggravated. Consult the records of it, and then dispute the fact if you can. "There is a spirit in man, and the inspiration of the Almighty giveth him understanding;" (Job 32:8) and that understanding will act, and a secret conviction or being accountable to its Maker and Preserver is inseparable from the actings of it. It is easy to object to human remonstrances, and to give things false colorings before him; but the heart often condemns, while the tongue excuses. Have you not often found it so? Has not conscience remonstrated against your past conduct, and have not these remonstrances been very painful too! I have been assured, by a gentleman of undoubted credit, that, when he was in the pursuit of all the gayest sensualities of life, and was reckoned one of the happiest of mankind, he has seen a dog come into the room where he was among his merry companions, and has groaned inwardly and said, "O! that I had been that dog!" And hast thou, O sinner, felt nothing like this? Has thy conscience been so stupified, so "seared with a hot iron," (1 Timothy 4:2) that it has never cried out for any of the violences which have been done it? Has it never warned thee of the fatal consequences of what thou hast done in opposition to it? These warnings are, in effect, the voice of God; they are the admonitions which he gave thee by his vicegerent in thy breast. And when his sentence for thy evil works is executed upon thee in everlasting death, thou shalt hear that voice speaking to thee again in a louder tone and a severer accent than before; and thou shalt be tormented with its upbraiding through eternity, because thou wouldst not, in time, hearken to its admonitions.

10. Let me add farther, if it be any aggravation that sin has been committed after God has been moving by his Spirit on the mind, surely your sin has been attended with that aggravation too. Under the Mosaic dispensation, dark and imperfect as it was, the Spirit strove with the Jews else Stephen could not have charged it upon them, that through all their generations "they had always resisted him." (Acts 7:51) Now, surely, we may much more reasonably apprehend that he strives with sinners under the Gospel. And have you never experienced any thing of this kind, even when there has been no external circumstance to awaken you, nor any pious teacher near you? Have you never perceived some secret impulse upon your mind, leading you to think of religion, urging you to an immediate consideration or it, sweetly inviting you to make trial of it, and warning you, that you would lament this stupid neglect? O sinner, why were not these happy motions attended to? Why did you not, as it were, spread out all the sail of your soul to catch that heavenly, that favorable breeze? But you have carelessly neglected it: you have overborne these kind influences. How reasonably then might the sentence have gone forth in righteous displeasure, "My Spirit shall no more strive." (Genesis 6:3) And indeed who can say that it is not already gone forth? If you feel no secret agitation of mind, no remorse, no awakening while you read such a remonstrance as this, there will be room, great room to suspect it.

11. There is indeed one aggravation more, which may not attend your guilt--I mean that of being committed against solemn covenant engagements: a circumstance which has lain heavy on the consciences of many, who perhaps in the main series of their lives have served God with great integrity. But let me call you to think to what this is owing. Is it not that you have never personally made any solemn profession of devoting yourself to God at all--have never done any thing which has appeared to your own apprehension an act by which you have made a covenant with him, though you have heard so much of his covenant, though you have been so solemnly and so tenderly invited to it? And in this view, how monstrous must this circumstance appear, which at first was mentioned as some alleviation of guilt! Yet I must add that you are not, perhaps, altogether so free from guilt on this head as you may at first imagine. Has your heart been, even from your youth, hardened to so uncommon a degree that you have never cried to God in any season of danger and difficulty? And did you never mingle vows with those cries? Did you never promise, that, if God would hear and help you in that hour of extremity, you would forsake your sins, and serve him as long as you lived? He heard and helped you, or you had not been reading these lines; and, by such deliverance, did as it were bind down your vows upon you; and therefore your guilt, in the violation of them, remains before him, though you are stupid enough to forget them. Nothing is forgotten, nothing is overlooked by him; and the day will come, when the record shall be laid before you too.

12. And now, O sinner, think seriously with thyself what defence thou wilt make to all this. Prepare thine apology; call thy witnesses; make thine appeal from him whom thou hast thus offended, to some superior judge, if such there be. Alas! those apologies are so weal: and vain, that one of thy fellow-worms may easily detect and confound them; as I will endeavor presently to show thee. But thy foreboding conscience already knows the issue. Thou art convicted, convicted of the most aggravated offences. Thou "hast not humbled thine heart, but lined up thyself against the Lord of heaven," (Daniel 5:22-23) and "thy sentence shall come forth from his presence." (Psalms 17:2) Thou hast violated his known laws; thou hast despised and abused his numberless mercies; thou hast affronted conscience, his vicegerent in thy soul; thou hast resisted and grieved his Spirit; thou hast trifled with him in all thy pretended submissions; and, in one word, and that his own, "thou hast done evil things as thou couldst." (Jeremiah 3:5) Thousands are no doubt already in hell whose guilt never equaled thine; and it is astonishing that God hath spared there to read this representation of thy case, or to make any pause upon it. O waste not so precious a moment, but enter attentively, and as humbly us thou canst, into these reflections which suit a case so lamentable and so terrible as thine.

Confession of a Sinner convinced in general of his Guilt.

"O God! thou injured Sovereign, thou all-penetrating and Almighty Judge! what shall I say to this charge! Shall I pretend I am wronged by it, and stand on the defence in thy presence? I dare not do it; for `thou knowest my foolishness, and none of my sins are hid from thee.' Psalms 69:5) My conscience tells me that a denial of my crimes would only increase them, and add new fuel to the fire of thy deserved wrath. `If I justify myself, mine own mouth will condemn me; if I say I am perfect, it will also prove me perverse;' (Job 9:20) `for innumerable evils have compassed me about: mine iniquities have taken hold upon me, so that I am not able to look up: they are,' as I have been told in thy name, `more than the hairs of my head; therefore my heart faileth me.' (Psalms 40:12) I am more guilty than it is possible for another to declare or represent. My heart

speaks more than any other accuser. And thou, O Lord, art much greater than my heart, and knowest all things. (1 John 3:20)

"What has my life been but a course of rebellion against thee? It is not this or that particular action alone I have to lament. Nothing has been right in its principles, and views, and ends. My whole soul has been disordered. All my thoughts, my affections, my desires, my pursuits have been wretchedly alienated from thee. I have acted as if I had hated thee, who art infinitely the loveliest of all beings; as if I had been contriving how I might tempt thee to the uttermost, and weary out thy patience, marvelous as it is. My actions have been evil, my words yet more evil than they! and, O blessed God, my heart, how much more corrupt than either! What an inexhausted fountain of sin has there been in it! A fountain of original corruption, which mingled its bitter streams with the days of early childhood; and which, alas! flows on even to this day, beyond what actions or words could express. I see this to have, been the case with regard to what I can particularly survey. But, oh! how many months and years have I forgotten, concerning which I only know this in the general, that they are much like those I can remember; except it be, that I have been growing worse and worse, and provoking thy patience more and more, though every new exercise of it was more and more wonderful.

"And how am I astonished that thy forbearance is still continued! it is because thou art `God, and not man.' (Hosea 11:9) Had I, a sinful worm, been thus injured, I could not have endured it. Had I been a prince, I had long since done justice on any rebel whose crimes had borne but a distant resemblance to mine. Had I been a parent, I had long since cast off the ungrateful child who had made me such a return as I have all my life long been making to thee, O thou Father of my spirit! The flame of natural affection would have been extinguished, and his sight and his very name would have become hateful to me. Why then, O Lord, am I not `cast out from thy presence?' (Jeremiah 52:3) Why am I not sealed up under an irreversible sentence of destruction! That I live, I owe to thine indulgence. But, oh! if there be yet any way of deliverance, if there be yet any hope for so guilty a creature, may it be opened upon me by thy Gospel and thy grace! And if any farther alarm, humiliation, or terror be necessary to my security and salvation, may I meet them and bear them all! Wound my heart, O Lord, so that thou wilt but afterwards `heal it;' and break it in pieces, if thou wilt but at length condescend to bind it up." (Hosea 1:1)

02.05. The Sinner Stripped Of His Vain Pleas

Chapter 5 The Sinner Stripped Of His Vain Pleas

1,2. The vanity of those pleas which sinners may secretly confide in, is so apparent that they will be ashamed at last to mention them before God.--3. Such as, that they descended from pious us parents.--4. That they had attended to the speculative part of religion.--5. That they had entertained sound notion..--6. 7. That they had expressed a zealous regard to religion, and attended the outward forms of worship with those they apprehended the purest churches.--8. That they had been free from gross immoralities.--9. That they did not think the consequences of neglecting religion would have been so fatal.-- 10. That they could not do otherwise then they did.--11. Conclusion. With the meditation of a convinced sinner giving up his vain pleas before God

1. MY last discourse left the sinner in very alarming and very pitiable circumstances; a criminal convicted at the bar of God, disarmed of all pretences to perfect innocence and sinless obedience, and consequently obnoxious to the sentence of a holy law, which can make no allowance for any transgression, no not for the least; but pronounces death and a curse against every act of disobedience: how much more then against those numberless and aggravated acts of rebellion, of which, O sinner! thy conscience hath condemned thee before God? I would hope Some of my readers will ingenuously fall under the conviction, and not think of making any apology; for sure I am, that, humbly to plead guilty at the divine bar, is the most decent, and, all things considered, the most prudent thing that can be done in such an unhappy state. Yet I know the treachery and the self-flattery of a sinful and corrupted heart. I know what excuses it makes, and how, when it is driven from one refuge, it flies to another, to fortify itself against conviction, and to persuade, not merely another, but itself, "That if it has been in some instances to blame, it is not quite so criminal as was represented; that there are at least considerations that plead in its favor, which, if they cannot justify, will in some degree excuse." A secret reserve of this kind, sometimes perhaps scarcely formed into a distinct reflection, breaks the force of conviction, and often prevents that deep humiliation before God which is the happiest token of approaching deliverance. I will therefore examine into some of these particulars; and for that purpose would seriously ask thee, O sinner! what thou hast to offer in arrest or judgment? What plea thou canst urge for thyself; why the sentence of God should not go forth against thee, and why thou shouldst not fall into the hands of his justice?

2. But this I must premise, that the question is not; how wouldst thou answer to me, a weak sinful worm like thyself, who am shortly to stand with thee at the same bar? and "the Lord grant that I may find mercy of the Lord in that day," (2 Timothy 1:18) but, what wilt thou reply to thy Judge? What couldst thou plead, if thou wast now actually before his tribunal, where, to multiply vain words, and to frame idle apologies, would be but to increase thy guilt and provocation? Surely, the very thought of his presence must supersede a thousand of those trifling excuses which now sometimes impose on "a generation that are pure in their own eyes," though they "are not washed from their filthiness!" (Proverbs 30:12) or while they are conscious of their impurities, "trust in

words that cannot profit," (Jeremiah 7:8) and "lean upon broken reeds." (Isaiah 36:6)

3. You will not to be sure, in such a condition, plead "that you are descended from pious parents." That was indeed your privilege; and wo be to you that you have abused it, and "forsaken the God of your fathers." (2 Chronicles 7:22) Ishmael was immediately descended from Abraham, the friend of God, and Esau was the son of Isaac, who was born according to the promise: yet you know they were both cut off from the blessing to which they apprehended they had a kind of hereditary claim. You may remember that our Lord does not only speak of one who would call "Abraham father," who "tormented in flames," (Luke 16:24) but expressly declares that many of the children of the kingdom shall be shut out of it; and when others come from the most distant parts to sit down in it, shall be distinguished from their companions in misery only by louder accents of lamentation, and more furious "gnashing of teeth." (Matthew 8:11-12)

4. Nor will you then presume to plead "that you had exercised your thoughts about the speculative parts of religion." For to what end can this serve, but to increase your condemnation? Since you have broken God’s law, since you have contradicted the most obvious and apparent obligations of religion, to have inquired into it, and argued upon it, is a circumstance that proves your guilt more audacious. What! did you think religion was merely an exercise of men’s wit, and the amusement of their curiosity? If you argued about it on the principles of common sense, you must have judged and proved it to be a practical thing; and if it was so, why did yen not practice accordingly? You knew the particular branches of it; and why then did you not attend to every one of them? To have pleaded an unavoidable ignorance would have been their happiest plea that could have remained for you; nay, an actual, though faulty ignorance, would have been some little allay of your guilt. But if; by your own confession, you have "known your Master’s will, and have not done it," you bear witness against yourself, that you deserve to be "beaten with many stripes." (Luke 12:47)

5. Nor yet, again, will it suffice to say "that you have had right notions both of the doctrines and the precepts of religion." Your advantage for practicing it was therefore the greater; but understanding and acting right can never go for the same thing in the judgment of God or of man. In "believing there is one God," you have done well; but the "devils also believe and tremble." (James 2:19) In acknowledging Christ to be the Son of God and the Holy One, you have done well too; but you know the unclean spirits made this very orthodox confession; (Luke 4:34, Luke 4:41) and yet they are "reserved in everlasting chains, under darkness, unto the judgment of the great day." (Jude 1:6) And will you place any secret confidence in that which might be pleaded by the infernal spirits as well as by you?

6. But perhaps you may think of pleading that "you have actually done something in religion." Having judged what faith was the soundest, and what worship the purest, "you entered yourself into those societies where such articles of faith were professed, and such forms of worship were practiced: and among these you have signalized yourself by exactness of your attendance, by the zeal with which you have espoused their cause, and by the earnestness with which you have contended for such principles and practices." O sinner! I much fear that this zeal of thine about the circumstantials of religion will swell thine account, rather than be allowed in abatement of it. He that searches thine heart knows from whence it arose, and how far it extended. Perhaps be sees that it was all hypocrisy, an artful veil under which thou wast carrying on thy mean designs for this world, while the sacred name of God and religion were profaned and prostituted in the basest

manner: and if so, thou art cursed with a distinguished curse for so daring an insult on the Divine omniscience as well as justice. Or perhaps the earnestness with which you have been "contending for the faith and worship which was once delivered to the saints," (Jude 1:3) or which, it is possible, you may have rashly concluded to be that, might be mere pride and bitterness of spirit; and all the zeal you have expressed might possibly arise from a confidence of your own judgment, from an impatience of contradiction, or some secret malignity of spirit, which delighteth itself in condemning, and even in worrying others; yea, which, if I may be al1owed the expression, fiercely preys upon religion, as the tiger upon the lamb, to turn it into a nature most contrary to its own. And shall this screen you before the great tribunal? Shall it not rather awaken the displeasure it is pleaded to avert?

7. But say that this zeal for notions and forms has been ever so well intended, and, so far as it has gone ever so well conducted too; what will that avail toward vindicating thee in so many instances or negligence and disobedience as are recorded against thee in the book of God’s remembrance? Were the revealed doctrines of the Gospel to be earnestly maintained, (as indeed they ought) and was the great practical purpose for which they were revealed to be forgot? Was the very mint, and anise, and cummin to be tithed; and were "the weightier matters of the law to be omitted," (Matthew 23:23) even that love to God which is its "first and great command?" (Matthew 22:38) O! how wilt thou be able to vindicate even the justest sentence thou hast passed on others for their infidelity, or for their disobedience, without being "condemned out of thine own mouth?" (Luke 19:22)

8. Will you then plead "your fair moral character, your works of righteousness and of mercy?" Had your obedience to the law of God been complete, the plea might be allowed as important and valid. But I have supposed, and proved above, that conscience testifies to the contrary; and you will not now dare to contradict it. I add farther, had these works of yours, which you now urge, proceeded from a sincere love to God, and a genuine faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, you would not have thought of pleading them any otherwise than as an evidence of your interest in the Gospel-covenant and in the blessings of it, procured by the righteousness and blood of the Redeemer; and that faith, had it been sincere, would have been attended with such deep humility, and with such solemn apprehensions of the Divine holiness and glory, that, instead of pleading any works of your own before God, you would rather have implored his pardon for the mixture of sinful imperfection attending the very best of them. Now, as you are a stranger to this humbling and sanctifying principle, (which here in this address I suppose my reader to be) it is absolutely necessary you should be plainly and faithfully told, that neither sobriety, nor honesty, nor humanity will justify you before the tribunal of God, when he "lays judgment to the line, and righteousness to the plummet," (Isaiah 28:17) and examines all your actions and all your thoughts with the strictest severity. You have not been a drunkard, an adulterer, or a robber. So far it is well. You stand before a righteous God, who will do you ample justice, and therefore will not condemn you for drunkenness, adultery, or robbery; but you have forgotten him, your Parent and your Benefactor; you have "cast off fear, and restrained prayer before him;" (Job 15:4) you have despised the blood of his Son, and all the immortal blessings that he purchased with it. For this, therefore, you are judged, and condemned. And as for any thing that has looked like virtue and humanity in your temper and conduct, the exercise of it has in great measure been its own reward, if there were any thing more than form and artifice in it; and the various bounties of Divine Providence to you, amidst

all your numberless provocations, have been a thousand times more than an equivalent for such defective and imperfect virtues as these. You remain therefore chargeable with the guilt of a thousand offences, for which you have no excuse, though there are some other instances in which you did not grossly offend. And those good works in which you have been so ready to trust, will no more vindicate you in his awful presence, than a man’s kindness to his poor neighbors would be allowed as a plea in arrest of judgment, when he stood convicted of high treason against his prince.

9. But you will, perhaps, be ready to say, "you did not expect all this: you did not think the consequences of neglecting religion would have been so fatal." And why did you not think it? Why did you not examine more attentively and more impartially? Why did you suffer the pride and folly of your vain heart to take up with such superficial appearances, and trust the light suggestions of your own prejudiced mind against the express declaration of the word of God? Had you reflected on his character as the supreme Governor of the world, you would have seen the necessity of such a day of retribution as we are now referring to. Had you regarded the Scripture, the divine authority of which you professed to believe, every page might have taught you to expect it. "You did not think of religion!" and of what were you thinking when you forgot or neglected it? Had you so much employment of another kind? Of what kind, I beseech you! What end could you propose, by any thing else, of equal moment? Nay, with all your engagements, conscience will tell you that there have been seasons when, for want of thought, time and life have been a burden to you; yet you guarded against thought as against an enemy, and cast up, as it were, an entrenchment of inconsideration around you on every side, as if it had been to defend you from the most dangerous invasion. God knew you were thoughtless, and therefore he sent you "line upon line, and precept upon precept," (Isaiah 28:10) in such plain language that it needed no genius or study to understand it. He tried you too with afflictions as well as with mercies, to awaken you out of your fatal lethargy; and yet, when awakened, you would lie down again upon the bed of sloth. And now, pleasing as your dreams might be, "you must lie down in sorrow." (Isaiah 50:11) Reflection has at last overtaken you, and must be heard as a tormentor, since it might not be heard as a friend.

10. But some may perhaps imagine that one important apology is yet unheard, and that there may be room to say, "you were, by the necessity of your nature, impelled to those things which are now charged upon you as crimes; and that it was not in your power to have avoided them, in the circumstances in which you were placed." If this will do any thing, it indeed promises to do much--so much that it will amount to nothing. If I were disposed to answer you upon the folly and madness of your own principles. I might say that the same consideration which proves it was necessary for you to offend, proves also that it is necessary for God to punish you; and that, indeed, he cannot but do it: and I might farther say with an excellent writer, "that the same principles which destroy the injustice of sins, destroy the injustice of punishment too." But if you cannot admit this; if you should still reply, in spite of principle, that it must be unjust to punish you for an action utterly and absolutely unavoidable, I really think you would answer right. But in that answer you will contradict your own scheme, as I observed above; and I leave your conscience to judge what sort of a scheme that must be which would make all kind of punishment unjust; for the argument will on the whole be the same, whether with regard to human punishment or divine. It is a scheme full of confusion and horror. You would not, I am sure, take it from a servant who had robbed you and then fired your house; you would never inwardly believe that he could not have

helped it or think that he had fairly excused himself by suck a plea; and I am persuaded you would be so far from presuming to offer it to God at the great day, that you would not venture to turn it into a prayer even now. Imagine that you saw a malefactor dying with such words as these in his mouth: "O God! it is true I did indeed rob and murder my fellow-creatures; but thou knowest, that, as my circumstances were ordered, I could not do otherwise; my will was irresistibly determined by the motives which thou didst set before me, and I could as well have shaken the foundations of the earth, or darkened the sun in the firmament, as have resisted the impulse which bore me on." I put it to your conscience whether you would not look on such a speech as this with detestation, as one enormity added to another. Yet, if the excuse would have any weight in. your mouth, it would have equal weight in his; or would be equally applicable to any, the most shocking occasions. But indeed it is so contrary to the plainest principles of common reason, that I can-hardly persuade myself that any one could seriously and thoroughly believe it; and should imagine my time very ill employed here if I were to set myself to combat those pretences to argument by which the wantonness of human wit has attempted to varnish it over.

11. You-see then, on the whole, the vanity of all your pleas; and how easily the most plausible or them might be silenced by a mortal man like yourself; how much more then by Him who searches all hearts, and can; in a moment, flash in upon the conscience a most powerful and irresistible conviction? What then can you do, while you stand convicted in the presence of God? What should you do, but hold your peace under an inward sense of your inexcusable guilt, and prepare yourself to hear the sentence which his law pronounces against you? You must feel the execution of it, if the Gospel does not at length deliver you; and you must feel something of the terror of it before you can be excited to seek to that Gospel for deliverance. The Meditation of a convinced Sinner giving up his vain pleas before God.

"Deplorable condition to which I am indeed reduced! I hare sinned, and `what shall I say unto thee, O thou Preserver of men?' (Job 7:20) What shall I dare to say? Fool that I was, to amuse myself with such trifling excuses as these, and to imagine they could have any weight in thy tremendous presence, or that I should be able so much as to mention them there. I cannot presume to do it. I am silent and confounded: my hopes, alas! are slain, and my soul itself is ready to die too, so far as an immortal soul can die; and I am almost ready to say, O that it could die entirely! I am indeed a criminal in the hands of justice, quite disarmed, and stripped of the weapons in which I trusted. Dissimulation can only add provocation to provocation. I will therefore plainly and freely own it. I have acted as if I thought God was `altogether such a one as myself:' but he hath said, `I will reprove thee; I will set thy sins in order before thine eyes;' (Psalms 50:21) will marshal them in battle array. And, oh! what a terrible kind of host do they appear! and how do they surround me beyond any possibility of an escape! O my soul they have, as it were, taken thee prisoner, and they are bearing thee away to the divine tribunal.

"Thou must appear before it! thou must see the awful, the eternal Judge, who `tries the very reins,' (Jeremiah 27:10) and who needs no other evidence, for he has `himself been witness to all thy rebellion.' (Jeremiah 29:23) Thou must see him, O my soul! sitting in judgment upon thee; and, when He is strict to `mark iniquity,' (Psalms 130:8) how wilt thou `answer him for one of a thousand!' (Job 9:3) And if thou canst not answer him, in what language will he speak to thee! Lord, as things at present stand, I can expect no other language than that or condemnation. And what a condemnation is it! Let me reflect upon it! Let me read my sentence before I hear it finally

and irreversibly passed. I know he has recorded it in his word, and I know, in the general, that the representation is made with gracious design. I know that be would have us alarmed, that we may not be destroyed. Speak to me, therefore, O God! while thou speakest not for the last time, and in circumstances when thou wilt hear me no more. Speak in the language of effectual error, so that it be not to speak me into final despair. And let thy word, however painful in its operation, be `quick and powerful and sharper than any two-edged sword.' (Hebrews 4:12) Let me not vainly flatter myself let me not be left a wretched prey to those `who would prophecy smooth things to me,' (Isaiah 30:10) till I am sealed up under wrath, and feel thy justice piercing my soul, and `the poison of thine arrows drinking up all my spirits.' (Job 6:4)

"Before I enter upon the particular view, I know, in the general, that `it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.' (Hebrews 10:31) O thou living God! in one sense I am already fallen into thine hands. I am become obnoxious to thy displeasure, justly obnoxious to it and whatever thy sentence may be, when it comes forth from thy presence (Psalms 17:2) I must condemn myself and justify thee. Thou canst not treat file with more severity than mine iniquities have deserved; and how bitter soever that cup of trembling may be (Isaiah 51:17) which thou shalt appoint for me, I give judgment against myself, that I deserve `to wring out the very dregs of it.'" (Psalms 75:8)

02.06. The Sinner Sentenced

Chapter 6 The Sinner Sentenced

1,2.The sinner called upon to hear his sentence.--3. God’s law does now in general pronounce a curse.--4. It pronounces death.--5. And being turned into hell.--6. The judgement day shall come.--7.8. The solemnity of that grand process described according to scriptural representations of it.--9. With a particular illustration of the sentence, "Depart, accursed," &c.--10. The execution wilt certainly and immediately follow.--11. The sinner warned to prepare for enduring it. The reflection of a sinner struck with the terror of his sentence.

1. HEAR, O sinner! and I will speak (Job 42:4.) yet once more, as in the name of God, of God thine Almighty Judge, who, if thou dost not attend to his servants, will, ere long, speak unto thee in a more immediate manner, with an energy and terror which thou shalt not be able to resist.

2. Thou hast been convicted, as in his presence. Thy pleas have been overruled, or rather they have been silenced. It appears before God, it appears to thine own conscience that thou hast nothing more to offer in arrest of judgment; therefore hear thy sentence, and summon up, if thou canst, all the powers of thy soul to bear the execution of it. "It is," indeed, a very small thing "to be judged of man’s judgment;" but "he who now judgeth thee is the Lord." (1 Corinthians 4:3-4) Hear, therefore, and tremble, while I tell thee how he will speak to thee; or rather, while I show thee, from express Scripture, how he doth even now speak, and what is the authentic and recorded sentence of his word, even of his word who hath said, "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but not one tittle of my word shall ever pass away." (Matthew 5:18)

3. The law of God speaks not to thee alone, O sinner! nor to thee by any particular address; but in a most universal language it speaks to all transgressors, and levels its terrors against all offences, great or small, without any exception. And this is its language: "Cursed is everyone that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them." (Galatians 3:10) This is its voice to the whole world; and this it speaks to thee. Its awful contents are thy personal concern, O reader! and thy conscience knows it. Far from continuing in all things that are written therein to do them, thou canst not but be sensible that "innumerable evils have encompassed thee about." (Psalms 40:12) It is then manifest thou art the man whom it condemns: thou art even now "cursed with a curse," as God emphatically speaks, (Malachi 3:9.) with the curse of the Most High God; yea, "all the curses which are written in the book of the law" are pointed against thee. (Deuteronomy 29:20) God may righteously execute any of them upon thee in a moment; and though thou at present feelest none of them, yet, if infinite mercy do not prevent, it is but a little while and they will "come into thy bowels like water," till thou art burst asunder with them, and shall penetrate "like oil into thy bones." (Psalms 109:18)

4. Thus saith the Lord, "The soul that sinneth, it shall die." (Ezekiel 18:4) But thou hast sinned, and therefore thou art under a sentence of death. And, O unhappy creature, of what a death! What will the end of these things be? That the agonies of dissolving nature shall seize thee, and thy soul

shall be torn away from thy languishing body, and thou "return to the dust from whence thou wast taken." (Psalms 104:29) This is indeed one awful effect of sin. In these affecting characters has God, through all nations and all ages of men, written the awful register and memorial of his holy abhorrence of it, and righteous displeasure against it. But, alas! all this solemn pomp and horror of dying is but the opening of the dreadful scene. It is a rough kind of stroke, by which the fetters are knocked off when the criminal is led out to torture and execution.

5. Thus saith the Lord, "The wicked shall be turned into hell, even all the nations that forget God." (Psalms 9:17) Though there be whole nations of them, their multitudes and their power shall be no defence to them. They shall be driven into hell together--into that flaming prison which divine vengeance hath prepared-into "Tophet, which is ordained of old, even for royal sinners" as well as for others; so little can any human distinction protect! "He hath made it deep and large: the pile thereof is fire and much wood; the breath of the Lord, like a stream of brimstone, shall kindle it;" (Isaiah 30:33) and the flaming torrent shall flow in upon it so fast, that it shall be turned into a sea of liquid fire; or, as the Scripture also expresses it, "a lake burning with fire and brimstone" for ever. (Revelation 21:8) "This is the second death," and the death to which thou, O sinner! by the word of God art doomed;

6. And shall this sentence stand upon record in vain! Shall the law speak it, and the Gospel speak it? and shall it never be pronounced more audibly? and will God never require and execute the punishment? He will O sinner! require it; and he will execute it, though he may seem for a while to delay. For well dost thou know that "he hath appointed a day in which he will judge the" whole "world in righteousness, by that Man whom he hath ordained, of which he hath given assurance in having raised him from the dead." (Acts 17:31) And when God judgeth the world, O reader! whoever thou aft, he will judge thee. And while I remind thee of it, I would also remember that he will judge me. And "knowing the terror of the Lord," (2 Corinthians 5:11) that I may "deliver my own soul," (Ezekiel 33:9) I would, with all plainness and sincerity, labor to deliver thine.

7. I therefore repeat the solemn warning: Then, O sinner! shalt "stand before the judgment-seat of Christ." (2 Corinthians 5:10) Thou shalt see that pompous appearance, the description of which is grown so familiar to thee that the repetition of it makes no impression on thy mind. But surely, stupid as thou now art, the shrill trumpet of the archangel shall shake thy very soul: and if nothing else can awaken and alarm thee, the convulsions and flames of a dissolving world shall do it.

8. Dost thou really think that the intent of Christ’s final appearance is only to recover his people from the grave, and to raise them to glory and happiness? Whatever assurance thou hast that there shall be "a resurrection of the just," thou hast the same that there shall also be "a resurrection or the unjust;" (Acts 24:15) that "he shall separate" the rising dead "one from another, as a shepherd divideth the sheep from the goats," (Matthew 25:32) with equal certainty, and with infinitely greater ease. Or can you imagine that he will only make an example of some flagrant and notorious sinners, when it is said that "all the dead," both "small and great," shall "stand before God;" (Revelation 20:12) and that even "he who knew not his Master’s will," and consequently seems of all others to have had the fairest excuse for his omission to obey it, yet even "he," for that very omission, "shall be beaten," though "with fewer stripes?" (Luke 12:48) Or can you think that a sentence, to be delivered with so much pomp and majesty, a sentence by which the righteous judgment of God is to be revealed, and to have its most conspicuous and final triumph, will be

inconsiderable, or the punishment to which it shall consign the sinner be slight or tolerable? There would have been little reason to apprehend that, even if we had been left barely to our own conjectures what that sentence should be. But this is far from being the case: our Lard Jesus Christ, in his infinite condescension and compassion, has been pleased to give us a copy of the sentence, and no doubt a most exact copy; and the words which contain it are worthy of being inscribed on every heart. "The King," amidst all the splendor and dignity in which he shall them appear, "shall say unto those on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world!" (Matthew 25:34) And "where the word of a king is, there is power" indeed. (Ecclesiastes 8:4) And these words have a power which may justly animate the heart of the humble Christian under the most overwhelming sorrow, and may fill him "with joy unspeakable and fall of glory." (1 Peter 1:8) To be pronounced the blessed of the Lord! to be called to a kingdom! to the immediate, the everlasting inheritance of it; and of such a kingdom! so well prepared, so glorious, so complete, so exquisitely fitted for the delight and entertainment of such creatures, so formed and so renewed that it shall appear worthy the eternal counsels of God to have contrived it, worthy his eternal love to have prepared it, and to have delighted himself with the views of bestowing it upon his people: behold a blessed hope indeed! a lively, glorious hope, to which we are "begotten again by the resurrection of Christ from the dead," (1 Peter 1:3) and formed by the sanctifying influence of the Spirit of God upon our minds. But it is a hope from which thou, O sinner! art at present excluded; and methinks that it might be grievous to reflect, "These gracious words shall Christ speak to some, to multitudes--but not to me; on me there is no blessedness pronounced; for me there is no kingdom prepared." But is that all? Alas! sinner, our Lord hath given thee a dreadful counterpart to this. He has told us what he will say to thee, if thou continuest what thou art--to thee, and all the nations of the impenitent and unbelieving world, be they ever so numerous, be the rank of particular criminals ever so great. He shall say to the "kings of the earth" who have been rebels against him, to "the great and rich men, and the chief captains and the mighty men," as well as to "every bondman and every freeman" or inferior rank, (Revelation 9:15) "Depart front me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels." (Matthew 25:41) Oh! pause upon these weighty words, that thou mayest enter into something of the importance of them

9. He will say, "Depart:" you shall be driven from his presence with disgrace and infamy: "from him," the source of life and blessedness, in a nearness to whom all the inhabitants of heaven continually rejoice; you shall "depart," accursed: you have broken God’s law, and its curse falls upon you; and you are and shall he under that curse, that abiding curse; from that day forward you shall be regarded by God and all his creatures as an accursed and abominable thing, as the most detestable and the most miserable part of the creation. You shall go "into fire;" and, oh! consider into what fire! Is it merely into one fierce blaze which shall consume you in a moment, though with exquisite pain? That were terrible. But, oh! such terrors are not to be named with these. Thine, sinner, "is everlasting fire." It is that which our Lord hath in such awful terms described as prevailing there, "where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched;" and again, in wonderful compassion, a third time, "where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched," (Mark 9:44, Mark 9:46, Mark 9:48) Nor was it originally prepared or principally intended for you: it was "prepared for the devil and his angels;" for those first grand rebels who were, immediately upon their fall, doomed to it: and since you have taken part with them in their apostacy, you must sink with them into that flaming ruin, and sink so much the deeper, as you have despised the

Savior, who was never offered to them. These must be your companions and your tormentors, with whom you must dwell forever. And is it I that say this? or says not the law and the Gospel the same? Does not the Lord Jesus Christ expressly say, who is the "faithful and true witness," (Revelation 3:14) even he who himself is to pronounce the sentence?

10. And when it is thus pronounced, and pronounced by him, shall it not also be executed? Who could imagine the contrary? Who could imagine there should be all this pompous declaration to fill the mind only with vain terror, and that this sentence should vanish into smoke? You may easily apprehend that this would be a greater reproach to the Divine administration than if sentence were never to be passed. And therefore we might easily have inferred the execution of it, from the process of the preceding judgment. But lest the treacherous heart of a sinner should deceive him with so vain a hope, the assurance of that execution is immediately added in very memorable terms. It shall be done: it shall immediately be done. Then on that very day, while the sound of it is yet in their ears, "the wicked shall go away into everlasting punishment;" (Matthew 25:46) and thou, O reader! whoever thou art, being found in their number, shalt go away with them; shalt be driven on among all these wretched multitudes and plunged with them into eternal ruin. The wide gates of hell shall be open to receive thee: they shall be shut upon thee for ever, to enclose thee, and be fast barred by the Almighty hand of divine justice, to prevent all hope, all possibility of escape for ever.

11. And now "prepare" thyself "to meet the Lord thy God." (Amos 4:12) Summon up all the resolution of thy mind to endure such a sentence such an execution as this: for "he will not meet thee as a man;" (Isa. 47:36) whoseheart may sometimes fail him when about to exert a needful act of severity, so that compassion may prevail against reason and justice. No, he will meet thee as a God, whose schemes and purposes are all immovable as iris throne. I therefore testify to thee in his name this day, that if God be true, he will thus speak; and that if he be able, he will thus act. And on supposition of thy continuance in thine impenitence and unbelief, thou art brought into this miserable case, that if God be not either false or weak, thou art undone, thou art eternally undone. The Reflection of a Sinner struck with the Terror of his Sentence.

"Wretch that I am, What shall I do, or whither shall I flee? `I arm weighed in the balance, and and found wanting.' (Daniel 5:27) This is indeed my doom; the doom I am to expect from the mouth of Christ himself, from the mouth of him that died for the redemption and salvation of men. Dreadful sentence! and so much the more dreadful when considered in that view! To what shall I look to save me from it? To whom shall I call? Shall I say to the rocks, fall upon me, and to the hills, cover me? (Luke 23:30) What should I gain by that? Were I indeed overwhelmed with rocks and mountains, they could not conceal me from the notice of his eye; and his hand could reach me with as much ease there as any where else.

"Wretch indeed that I am! O that I had never been born! O that I had never known the dignity and prerogative of the rational nature? Fatal prerogative indeed, that renders me obnoxious to condemnation and wrath! O that I had never been instructed in the will of God at all rather than that, being thus instructed, I should have disregarded and transgressed it! Would to God I had been allied to the meanest of the human race, to them that come nearest to the state of the brutes, rather than that I should have had my lot in cultivated Life, amidst so many of the improvements of reason, and (dreadful reflection!) amidst so many of the advantages of religion tool and thus to

have perverted all to my own destruction! O that God would take away this rational soul! but, alas! it will live for ever, will live to feel the agonies of eternal death. Why have I seen the beauties and glories of a world like this, to exchange it for that flaming prison! Why have I tasted so many of my Creator's bounties, to wring out at last the dregs of his wrath! Why have I known the delights of social life and friendly converse, to exchange them for the horrid company of devils and damned spirits in hell! Oh! `who can dwell with them in devouring flames? who can lie down' with them `in everlasting, everlasting, everlasting burnings?' (Isaiah 33:14)

"But whom have I to blame in all this but my-self? What have I to accuse but my own stupid incorrigible folly? On what is all this terrible ruin to be charged, but on this one fatal, cursed cause that having broken God's law. I rejected his Gospel too;

"Yet stay, O my soul, in the midst of all these doleful foreboding complaints. Can I say that I have finally rejected the Gospel? Am I not to this day under the sound of it? The sentence is not yet gone forth against me in so determinate a manner as to be utterly irreversible. Through all this gloomy prospect one ray of hope breaks in, and it is possible I may yet be delivered.

"Reviving thought! Rejoice in it, O my soul! though it be with trembling, and turn immediately to that God, who, though provoked by ten thousand offences, has not yet 'sworn in his wrath that thou shalt never be permitted to hold further intercourse with him., or to `enter into his rest' (Psalms 95:11)

"I do then, O blessed Lord! prostrate myself in the dust before thee, I own I am a condemned and miserable creature. But my language is that of the humble publican, `God be merciful to me a sinner!' (Luke 18:13) Some general and confused apprehensions I have of a way by which I may possibly escape. O God, whatever that way is, show it me, I beseech thee! Point it out so plainly that I may not be able to mistake it! And. oh! reconcile my heart to it, be it ever so humbling, be it ever so painful!

"Surely, Lord, I have much to learn; but be thou my teacher! Stay for a little moment thine uplifted hand, and in thine infinite compassion delay the stroke till I inquire a little farther how I may finally avoid it!"

02.07. The Helpless State Of The Sinner Under Condemnation

Chapter 7 The Helpless State Of The Sinner Under Condemnation

1.2. The sinner urged to consider how he can be saved from this impending ruin.--3 Not by any thing he can offer.--4. Nor by any thing he can endure.--5 Nor by any thing hr can do in the course of future duty.--6-8. Nor by any alliance with fellow-sinners on earth or in hell.--9. Nor by any interposition or intercession of angels or saints in his favor. Hint of the only method to be afterwards more largely explained. The lamentation of a sinner in this miserable condition.

1. SINNER, thou hast heard the sentence of God as it stands upon record in his sacred and immutable word; and wilt thou lie down under its in everlasting despair? wilt thou make no attempt to be delivered from it, when it speaks nothing less than eternal death to thy soul? If a criminal, condemned by human laws, has but the least shadow of hope that he may escape, he is all attention to it. If there be a friend who be thinks can help him, with what strong importunity does be entreat! the interposition of that! friend? And even while he is before the judge. how difficult is it! often to force him away from the bar, while the cry of mercy, mercy, mercy, may be heard, though it be never so unseasonable? A mere possibility that it may make some eager in it, and unwilling to be silenced and removed.

2. Wilt thou not then, O Sinner! ere yet execution is done, that execution which may perhaps be done this very day, wilt thou not cast about in thy thoughts what measures may be taken for deliverance? Yet what measures can be taken? Consider attentively, for it is an affair of moment. Thy wisdom, thy power, thy eloquence, thy interest can never he exerted on a greater occasion. If thou canst help thyself, do it. If thou hast any secret source of relief, go not out of thyself for other assistance. If thou hast any sacrifice to offer, if thou hast any strength to exert; yea, if thou hast any allies on earth, or in the invisible world, who can defend or deliver thee, take thy own way, so that thou mayest but be delivered at all, that we may not see thy ruin. But say, O sinner! in the presence of God, what sacrifice thou wilt present, what strength thou wilt exert, what allies thou wilt have recourse to on so urgent, so hopeless an occasion. For hopeless I must indeed pronounce it, if such methods are taken.

3. The justice of God is injured; hast thou any atonement to make to it? If thou wast brought to an inquiry and proposal, like that of an awakened sinner, "Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the high God? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves of a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil?" (Micah 6:6-7) Alas! wert thou as great a prince as Solomon himself and couldst thou indeed purchase such sacrifices as these, there would be no room to mention them. "Lebanon would not be sufficient to burn, nor all the beasts thereof for a burnt-offering." (Isaiah 40:18) Even under that dispensation which admitted and required sacrifices in some cases, the blood of bulls and of goats, though it exempted the offender from farther temporal punishment, "could not take away sin," (Hebrews 10:4) nor prevail by any means to purge the conscience in the sight of God. And that soul that had "done aught presumptuously" was not allowed to bring any sin-offering, or

trespass-offering at all, but was condemned to "die without mercy." (Numbers 15:30) Now God and thine own conscience know that thine offences have not been merely the errors of ignorance and inadvertency, but that thou hast sinned with a high hand in repeated aggravated instances, as thou hast acknowledged already. shouldst thou add, with the wretched sinner described above, "Shall I give my first-born for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?" (Micah 6:7) What could the blood of a beloved child do in such a case, but dye thy crimes so much the deeper and add a yet unknown horror to them? Thou hast offended a Being of infinite majesty; and if that offence is to be expiated by blood, it must be another kind of blood than that which flows in the veins of thy children, or in thine own.

4. Wilt thou then suffer thyself till thou hast made full satisfaction? But how shall that satisfaction be made? Shall it be by any calamities to be endured in this mortal, momentary life? Is the justice of God then esteemed so little a thing, that the sorrows of a few days should suffice to answer its demands? Or dost thou think of future sufferings in the invisible world? If thou dost, that is not deliverance; and with regard to that, I may venture to say, when thou hast made full satisfaction, thou wilt be released; when thou hast paid the uttermost farthing of that debt, thy prison-doors shall be opened; but in the mean time thou must "make thy bed in hell:" (Psalms 139:8) and, oh! unhappy man, wilt thou lie down there with a secret hope that the moment will come when the rigor of Divine justice will not be able to inflict any thing more than thou hast endured, and when thou mayest claim thy discharge as a matter of right? It would indeed be well for thee if thou couldst carry down with thee such a hope, false and flattering as it is; but, alas! thou wilt see things in so just a light, that to have no comfort but this will be eternal despair. That one word of thy sentence, "everlasting fire;" that one declaration, "the worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched," will be sufficient to strike such a thought into black confusion, and to over-whelm thee with hopeless agony and horror.

5. Or do you think that your future reformation and diligence in duty for the time to come will procure your discharge from this sentence? Take heed, sinner, what kind of obedience thou thinkest of offering to a holy God. That must be spotless and complete which his infinite sanctity can approve and accept, if he consider thee in thyself alone: there must be no inconstancy, no forgetfulness, no mixture of sin attending it. And wilt thou, enfeebled as thou art by so much original corruption and so many sinful habits contracted by innumerable actual transgressions, undertake to render such an obedience, and that for all the remainder or thy life! In vain wouldst thou attempt it, even for one day. New guilt would immediately plunge thee into new ruin. But if it did not, if from this moment to the very end of thy life all were as complete obedience as the law of God required from Adam in Paradise, would that be sufficient to cancel past guilt? Would it discharge an old debt, that thou hast not contracted a new one? Offer this to thy neighbor, and see if he will accept it for payment; and if he will not, wilt thou presume to offer it to thy God?

6. But I will not multiply words on so plain a subject. While I speak thus, time is passing away death presses on, and judgment is approaching. And what can save thee from these awful scenes, or what can protect thee in them? Can the world save thee--that vain delusive idol of thy wishes and suits, to which thou alt sacrificing thine eternal hopes? Well dost thou know that it will utterly forsake thee when thou needest it most; and that not one of its enjoyments can be carried along with thee into the invisible state, no, not so much as a trifle to remember it by, if thou couldst desire to remember so inconstant and so treacherous a friend as the world has been.

7. And when you are dead, or when you are dying, can your sinful companions save you? Is there any one of them, if he were ever so desirous of doing it, that "can give unto God a ransom for you," (Psalms 49:7) to deliver you from going down to the grave, or from going down to hell? Alas! you will probably be so sensible of this, that when you lie on the borders of the grave you will be unwilling to see or to converse with those that were once your favorite companions. They will afflict you rather than relieve you, even then; how much less can they relieve you before the bar of God, when they arc overwhelmed with their own condemnation!

8. As for the powers of darkness, you are sure they will he far from having any ability or inclination to help you. Satan has been watching and laboring for your destruction, and he will triumph in it. But if there could he any thing of an amicable confederacy between you, what would that be but an association in ruin? For the day of judgment of ungodly men will also be the judgment of these rebellious spirits; and the fire into which thou, O sinner, must depart, is that which was "prepared for the devil and his angels."" (Matthew 25:41)

9. Will the celestial spirits then save thee? Will they interpose their power or their prayers in thy favor? An interposition of power, when sentence is gone forth against thee, were an act of rebellion against heaven, which these holy and excellent creatures would abhor. And when the final pleasure of the Judge is known, instead of interceding in vain for the wretched criminal, they would rather, with ardent zeal for the glory of their Lord, and cordial acquiescence in the determination of his wisdom and justice, prepare to execute it. Yea, difficult as it may at present be to conceive it, it is a certain truth, that the servants of Christ, who now most tenderly love you, and most affectionately seek your salvation, not excepting those who are allied to you in the nearest bonds of nature or of friendship, even they shall put their amen to it. Now indeed their bowels yearn over you, and their eyes pour out tears on your account. Now they expostulate with you, and plead with God for you, if by any means, while yet there is hope, you may "be plucked as a firebrand out of the burning." (Amos 4:11) But, alas! their remonstrances you will not regard; and as for their prayers, what should they ask for you? What but that you may see yourself to be undone; and that utterly despairing of any help from yourself, or from any created power, you may lie before God in humility and brokenness of heart; that, submitting yourself to his righteous judgment and in an utter renunciation of all self-dependence and of all creature dependence, you may lift up an humble look towards him, as almost from the depths of hell, if peradventure he may have compassion upon you, and may himself direct you to that only method of rescue, which, while things continue as in present circumstances they are, neither earth, nor hell, nor heaven can afford you. The Lamentation of a Sinner in this miserable Condition.

"O! doleful, uncomfortable, helpless state! O wretch that I am, to have reduced myself to it! Poor, empty, miserable, abandoned creature! Where is my pride and the haughtiness of my heart? Where are my idol deities. `whom I have loved and served, after whom I have walked, and whom I have sought,' (Jeremiah 8:2) while I have been multiplying my transgressions against the majesty of heaven? Is there no heart to have compassion upon me? Is there no hand to save me? `Have pity upon me, have pity upon me, O my friends, for the hand of God bath touched me;' (Job 19:21) hath seized me! I feel it pressed upon me hard, and what shall I do? Perhaps they have pity upon me; but, alas! how feeble a compassion! Only, if there be any where in the whole compass of nature any help, tell me where it may be found! O point it out, direct me toward it; or rather, confounded and astonished as my mind is, take me by the hand and lead me to it!

"O ye ministers of the Lord, whose office it is to guide and comfort distressed souls, take pity upon me! I fear I am a pattern of many other helpless creatures who have the like need of your assistance. Lay aside your other cares to care for my soul, to care for this precious soul of mine, which lies as it were bleeding to death, (if that expression may be used) while you perhaps hardly afford me a look, or, glancing an eye upon me, `pass over to the other side.' (Luke 10:32) Yet, alas! in a case like mine, what can your interposition avail if it be alone: `If the Lord do not help me, how can you help me?' (2 Kings 6:27)

"'O God, the God of the spirits of all flesh,' (Numbers 16:22) I lift up mine eyes unto thee, and `cry unto thee as out of the belly of hell.' (Jonah 2:2) I cry unto thee, at least from the borders of it. Yet, while I lie before thee in this infinite distress, I know that thine Almighty power and boundless grace can still find out a way for my recovery.

"Thou art he whom I have most of all injured and affronted; and yet from thee alone must I now seek redress. `Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done evil in thy sight;' so that `thou mightest- be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest,' (Psalms 51:4) though thou shouldst at this moment adjudge me to eternal misery. And yet I find something that secretly draws me to thee, as if I might find rescue there, where I have deserved the most aggravated destruction. Blessed God, I `have destroyed myself; but in thee is my help,' (Hosea 13:9) if there can be help at all.

"I know, in the general, that `thy ways are not as our ways, nor thy thoughts as our thoughts;' but are as `high above them as the heavens are above the earth.' (Isaiah 55:8-9) `Have mercy,' therefore, `upon me, O God, according to thy loving-kindness, according to the multitude of thy tender mercies!' (Psalms 51:1) O point out the path to the city of refuge! O `lead me' thyself `in the way everlasting!' (Psalms 139:24) I know, in the general, that thy Gospel is the only remedy: O teach thy servants to administer it! O prepare my heart to receive it! and suffer not, as in many instances, that malignity which has spread itself through all my nature, to turn that noble medicine into poison!"

02.08. News Of Salvation By Christ Brought To The Convinced

Chapter 8 News Of Salvation By Christ Brought To The Convinced And Condemned Sinner

1. The awful things which have hitherto been said, intended not to grieve, but to help.--2. After some reflection on the pleasure with which a minister of the Gospel may deliver at message with which he is charged.--3.And some reasons for the repetition of what is in speculation so generally known.--4. 6. The author proceeds briefly to declare the substance of these glad tidings: viz. that God having in his infinite compassion sent his Son to die for sinners, is now reconcilable through him.--7.8. So that the most heinous transgressions shall be entirely pardoned to believers, and they made completely and eternally happy. The sinner’s reflection on this good news.

1. My dear reader, it is the great design of the Gospel, and wherever it is cordially received, it is the glorious effect of it, to fill the heart with sentiments of love; to teach us to abhor all unnecessary rigor and severity, and to delight not in the grief but in the happiness of our fellow-creatures. I can hardly apprehend how he can be a Christian who takes pleasure in the distress which appears even in a brute, much less in that of a human mind; and especially in such distress as the thoughts I have been proposing must give, if there be any due attention to their weight and energy. I have often felt a tender regret while I have been representing these things; and I could have wished from my heart that it had not been necessary to have placed them in so severe and so painful a light. But now I am addressing myself to a part of my work which I undertake with unutterable pleasure, and to that which indeed I had in view in all those awful things which I have already been laying before you. I have been showing you, that, if you hitherto have lived in a state of impenitence and sin, you are condemned by God’s righteous judgment, and have in yourself no spring or hope and no possibility of deliverance. But I mean not to leave you under this sad apprehension, to lie down and die in despair, complaining of that cruel zeal which has "tormented you before your time." (Matthew 8:29)

2. Arise, O thou dejected soul, that art prostrate in the dust before God, and trembling under the terror of his righteous sentence; for I am commissioned to tell thee, that, though "thou hast destroyed thyself, in God is thine help." (Hosea 13:9) I bring thee "good tidings of great joy," (Luke 2:10) which delight mine own heart while I proclaim them, and will, I hope, reach and revive thine--even the tidings of salvation by the blood and righteousness of the Redeemer. And I give it thee for thy greater security, in the words of a gracious and forgiving God, that "he is in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, and not imputing to them their trespasses." (2 Corinthians 5:19)

3. This in the best news that ever was heard, the most important message which God ever sent to his creatures; and though I doubt not that, living as you have done in a Christian country, you have heard it often, perhaps a thousand and a thousand times; I will, with all simplicity and plainness, repeat it to you again, and repeat it as if you bad never heard it before. If thou, O sinner, shouldst now for the first time feel it, then will it be as a new Gospel unto thee, though so familiar to thine ear; nor shall it be "grievous to me" to speak what is so common, "since to you it is safe" and necessary. (Php 3:1) They who are most deeply and intimately acquainted with it, instead of being

cloyed and satiated, wilt hear it with distinguished pleasure; and as for those who have hitherto slighted it, I am sure they had need to hear it again. Nor is it absolutely impossible that some one soul at least may read these lines who hath never been clearly and fully instructed in this important doctrine, though his everlasting all depends on knowing and receiving it. I will therefore take care that such a one shall not have it to plead at the bar of God, that, though he lived in a Christian country, he was never plainly and faithfully taught the doctrine of salvation by Jesus Christ, "the way, the truth, and the life, by whom alone we come unto the Father." (John 14:6)

4. I do therefore testify unto you this day, that the holy and gracious Majesty of heaven and earth, foreseeing the fatal apostacy into which the whole human race would fall, did not determine to deal in a way of strict and rigorous severity with us, so as to consign us over to universal ruin and inevitable damnation; but, on the contrary, he determined to enter into a treaty of peace and reconciliation, and to publish to all whom the Gospel should reach, the express offers of life and glory, in a certain method which his infinite wisdom judged suitable to the purity of his nature and the honor of his government. This method was indeed a most astonishing one, which, familiar as it is to our thoughts and our tongues, I cannot recollect and mention without great amazement. He determined to send his own Son into the world, "the brightness of his glory and the express image of his person," (Hebrews 1:3) partaker of his own divine perfections and honors, to be, not merely a teacher of righteousness and a messenger of grace, but also a sacrifice for the sins of men; and would consent to his saving them on no other condition but this, that he should not only labor, but die in the cause.

5. Accordingly, at such a period of time as infinite wisdom saw most convenient, the Lord Jesus Christ appeared in human flesh; and after he had gone through incessant and long-continued fatigue, and borne all the preceding injuries which the ingratitude and malice of men could inflict, he voluntarily "submitted himself to death, even the death of the cross;" (Php 2:8) and having been "delivered for our offences, was raised again for our justification." (Romans 4:25) After his resurrection he continued long enough on earth to give his followers most convincing evidences of it, and then "ascended into heaven in their sight;" (Acts 1:9-11) and sent down his Spirit from thence unto his apostles, to enable them, in the most persuasive and authoritative manner, "to preach the Gospel;" and he has given it in charge to them, and to those who in every age succeed them in this part of their office, that it should be published "to every creature," (Mark 16:15) that all who believe in it may be saved by virtue of its abiding energy, and the immutable power and grace of its divine Author, who is "the same yesterday. today, and for ever." (Hebrews 13:8)

6. This Gospel do I therefore now preach and proclaim unto thee, O reader, with the sincerest desire that, through divine grace, it may "this very day be salvation to thy soul." (Luke 19:9) Know therefore and consider it, whosoever thou art, that as surely as these words are now before thine eyes, so sure it is that the incarnate Son of God was "made a spectacle to the world, and to angels, and to men;" (1 Corinthians 4:9) his back torn with scourges, his head with thorns, his limbs stretched out as on a rack, and nailed to the accursed tree; and in this miserable condition he was hung by his hands and feet, as an object of public infamy and contempt. Thus did he die in the midst of all the taunts and insults of his cruel enemies, who thirsted for his blood; and, which was the saddest circumstance of all, in the midst of those agonies with which he closed the most innocent, perfect, and useful life that ever was spent on earth, he had not those supports of the divine presence which sinful men have often experienced when they have been suffering for the

testimony of their conscience. They have often burst out into transports of joy and songs of praise, while their executioners have been glutting their hellish malice, and more than savage barbarity, by making their torments artificially grievous; but the crucified Jesus cried out, in the distress of his spotless and holy soul, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Matthew 27:46)

7. Look upon your dear Redeemer! look up to this mournful, dreadful, yet, in one view, delightful spectacle! and then ask thine own heart, Do I believe that Jesus suffered and died thus? And why did he suffer and die? Let me answer in God's own words, "He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities, and the chastisement of our peace was upon him, that by his stripes we might he healed: it pleased the Lord to bruise him, and put him to grief, when he made his soul an offering for sin; for the Lord laid on him the iniquity of us all." (Isaiah 53:5-6, Isaiah 53:10) So that I may address you in the words of the apostle, "Be it known unto you therefore, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins;" (Acts 13:38) as it was his command, just after he arose from the dead, "that repentance and remission of sins should be, preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem," (Luke 24:47) the very place, where his blood had so lately been shed in such a cruel manner. I do thereby testify to you, in the words of another inspired writer, that Christ was made sin, that is, a sin offering, "for; though he knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him:" (2 Corinthians 5:21) that is, that through the righteousness he has fulfilled, and the atonement he has made, we might be accepted by God as righteous, and be not only pardoned, but received into his favor. "To you is the word of this salvation sent," (Acts 13:26) and to you, O reader, are the blessings of it even now offered by God, sincerely rely offered; so that, after all that I have said under the former heads, it is not your having broken the law of God that shall prove your ruin, if you do not also reject his Gospel. It is not all those legions of sins which rise up in battle array against you that shall be able to destroy you, if unbelief do not lead them on, and final impenitency do not bring up the rear I know that guilt is a timorous thing; I wilt therefore speak in the words of God himself nor can any be more comfortable: "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life," (John 3:36) "and he shall never come into condemnation." (John 5:24) "There is therefore now no condemnation," no kind or degree of it, "to them," to any one of them, "who are in Jesus Christ, who walk not after the flesh, but after the spirit." (Romans 8:1) You have indeed been a very great sinner, and your offences have truly been attended with most heinous aggravations; nevertheless you may rejoice in the assurance, that "where sin hath abounded, there shall grace much more abound; "that where sin bath reigned unto death," where it has had its most unlimited sway and most unresisted triumph, there "shall righteousness reign to eternal life, through Jesus Christ our Lord." (Romans 5:21) That righteousness, to which on believing on him thou wilt be entitled, shall not only break those chains by which sin is, as it were, dragging thee at its chariot-wheels with a furious pace to eternal ruin, but it shall clothe thee with the robes of salvation, shall fix thee on a throne of glory, where thou shalt live and reign for ever among the princes uf heaven, shalt reign in immortal beauty and joy. without one remaining scar of divine displeasure upon thee, without any single mark by which it could be known that thou hadst even been obnoxious to wrath and a curse, except it be an anthem of praise to "the Lamb that was slain, and has washed thee from thy sins in his own blood." (Revelation 1:5)

8. Nor is it necessary, in order to thy being released from guilt, and entitled to this high and complete felicity, that thou shouldst, before thou wilt venture to apply to Jesus, bring any good

works of thine own to recommend thee to his acceptance. It is indeed true, that, if thy faith be sincere, it will certainly produce them; but I have the authority of the word of God to tell thee that if thou this day sincerely believest in the name of the Son of God, thou shalt this day be taken under his care, and be numbered among those of his sheep to whom he hath graciously declared that "he will give eternal life, and that they shall never perish." (John 10:28) Thou hast no need therefore to say, "Who shall go up into heaven, or who shall descend into the deep for me? For the word is nigh thee, in thy mouth, and in thy heart." (Romans 10:6-8) With this joyful message I leave thee; with this faithful saying, indeed "worthy of all acceptation;" (1 Timothy 1:15) with this Gospel, O sinner, which is my life; and which, if thou dost not reject, will be thine too. The Sinner's Reflection on this Good News.

"O my soul, how astonishing is the message which thou hast this day received! I have indeed often heard it before and it is grown so common to me, that the surprise is not sensible. But reflect, O my soul, what it is thou hast heard, and say whether the name of a Savior whose message it is, may not well be called `Wonderful, counsellor,' (Isaiah 9:6) when he displays before thee such wonders of love, and proposes to thee such counsels of peace!

"Blessed Jesus, is it indeed thus? Is it not the fiction of the human mind? Surely it is not! What human mind could have invented or conceived it? It is a plain, a certain fact, that thou didst leave the magnificence and joy of the heavenly world in compassion to such a wretch as I! Oh! hadst thou from that height of dignity and felicity only looked down upon me for one moment, and sent some gracious word to me for my direction and comfort, even by the least of thy servants, justly might I have prostrated myself in grateful admiration, and have kissed `the very footsteps' of him `that published the salvation.' (Isaiah 52:7) But didst thou condescend to be thyself the messenger? What grace had that been, though thou hadst but once in person made the declaration, and immediately returned back to the throne from whence divine compassion brought thee down? But this is not all the triumph of thine illustrious grace. It not only brought thee down to earth, but kept thee here in a frail and wretched tabernacle, for long successive years; and at length it cost thee thy life, and stretched thee out as a malefactor upon the cross, after thou hadst borne insult and cruelty which it may justly wound my heart so much as to think of. And thus thou hast atoned injured justice, and `redeemed me to God with thine own blood.' (Revelation 5:9)

"What shall I say! `Lord, I believe; help thou my unbelief!' (Mark 9:24) It seems to put faith to tile stretch, to admit what it indeed exceeds the utmost stretch of imagination to conceive. Blessed, for ever blessed be thy name, O thou Father of mercies, that thou hast contrived the way! Eternal thanks to the Lamb that was slain, and to that kind Providence that sent the word of this salvation to me! O let me not, for ten thousand worlds, `receive the grace of God in vain!' (2 Corinthians 6:1) O impress this Gospel upon my soul, till its saving virtue be diffused over every faculty! Let it not only be heard, and acknowledged, and professed, but felt! Make it `thy power to my eternal salvation;' (Romans 1:16) and raise me to that humble, tender gratitude, to that active, unwearied zeal in thy service, which becomes one `to whom so much is forgiven.' (Luke 7:47) and forgiven upon such terms as these.

"I feel a sudden glow in mine heart while these tidings are sounding in mine ears; but, oh! let it not be a slight superficial transport! O let not this, which I would fain call my Christian joy, be as that foolish laughter, with which I have been so madly enchanted, `like the crackling blaze of thorns

under a pot!' (Ecclesiastes 7:6) O teach me to secure this mighty blessing, this glorious hope, in the method which thou hast appointed; and preserve me from mistaking the joy of nature, while it catches a glimpse of its rescue from destruction, for that consent of grace which embraces and ensures the deliverance!"

02.09. The Way By Which This Salvation Is To Be Obtained

Chapter 9 A More Particular Account Of The Way By Which This Salvation Is To Be Obtained

1. An inquiry into the way of salvation by Christ being supposed.--2. The sinner is in general directed to repentance and faith.--3. And urged to give up all self-dependence.--4. And to seek salvation by free grace.--5. A summary of more particular directions is proposed.--6. That the sinner should apply to Christ.--7. With a deep abhorrence of his former sins.--8. And a firm resolution of forsaking them.--9. That he solemnly commits his soul into the hands of Christ, the great vital act of faith.--10. Which is exemplified at large.--11. That he make it in fact the governing care of his future life to obey and imitate Christ.--12. This is the only method of obtaining Gospel salvation. The Sinner deliberating on the necessity of accepting it.

1. I now consider you, my dear reader, as coming to me with the inquiry which the Jews once addressed to our Lord, "What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?" (John 4:28) "What method shall I take to secure that redemption and salvation which I am told Christ has procured for his people?" I would answer it as seriously and carefully as possible, as one that knows of what importance it is to you to be rightly informed; and that knows also how strictly he is to answer to God for the sincerity and care with which the reply is made. May I be enabled to "speak as his oracle," (1 Peter 4:11) that is in such a manner as faithfully to echo back what the sacred oracles teach!

2. And here, that I may be sure to follow the safest guides and the fairest examples, I must preach salvation to you in the way of "repentance toward God, and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ," (Acts 20:21) that good old doctrine which the apostles preached, and which no man can pretend to change but at the peril of his own souls and of theirs who attend to him.

3. I suppose that you are by this time convinced of your guilt and condemnation, and of your own inability to recover yourself. Let me nevertheless urge you to feel that conviction yet more deeply, and to impress it with yet greater weight upon your soul; that you have "undone yourself," and that "in yourself is not your help found." (Hosea 13:9) Be persuaded, therefore, expressly, and solemnly, and sincerely, to give up all self-dependence; which, if you do not guard against it, will be ready to return secretly before it is observed, and will lead you to at-tempt building up what you have just been destroying.

4. Be assured, that, if ever you are saved, you must ascribe that salvation entirely to the free grace of God. If, guilty and miserable as you are, you are not only accepted, but crowned, you must "lay down your crown," with all humble acknowledgment, "before the throne." (Revelation 4:10.) "No flesh must glory in his presence; but he that glorieth must glory in the Lord; for of him are we in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption." (1 Corinthians 1:29-31) And you must be sensible you are in such a state, as, having none of these in yourself; to need them in another. You must therefore be sensible that you are ignorant and guilty, polluted and enslaved; or, as our Lord expresses it, with regard to some who

were under a Christian profession, that as a sinner "you are wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked." (Revelation 3:17)

5. If these views be deeply impressed upon your mind you will be prepared to receive what I am now to say. Hear, therefore, in a few words, your duty, your remedy, and your safety; which consists in this, "That you must apply to Christ, with a deep abhorrence of your former sins, and a firm resolution of forsaking them; forming that resolution in the strength of his grace, and fixing your dependence in him for your acceptance with God, even while you are purposing to do your very best, and when you have actually done the best you ever will do in consequence of that purpose.

6. The first and most important advice that I can give you in your present circumstances, is, that you look to Christ and apply yourself to him. And here, say not in your heart, "who shall ascend into heaven, to bring him down to me?" (Romans 10:6) or, "who shall raise me up thither, to present me before him?" The blessed "Jesus, by whom all things consist," (Colossians 1:17) by whom the whole system of them is supported. "forgotten as he is by most that bear his name," "is not far from any of us;" (Acts 17:27) nor could he have promised to have been "wherever two or three are met together in his name," (Matthew 18:20) but in consequence of those truly divine perfections, by which he is every where present. Would you therefore, O sinner, desire to be saved? Go to the Savior. Would you desire to be delivered? Look to that great Deliverer; and though you should be overwhelmed with guilt, and shame, and fear, or horror, that you should be incapable of speaking to him, fall down in this speechless confusion at his feet, "and behold him as the Lamb or God, that taketh away the sins of the world." (John 1:29)

7. Behold him therefore with an attentive eye, and say whether the sight does not touch, and even melt thy very heart! Dost thou not feel what a foolish and what a wretched creature thou hast been, that, for the sake of such low and sordid gratifications and interests as those which thou hast been pursuing thou shouldst thus "kill the Prince of Life?" (Acts 3:15) Behold the deep wounds which he bore for thee, "look on him whom thou hast pierced, and sorely thou must mourn," (Zechariah 12:10) unless thine heart be hardened into stone. Which of thy past sins canst thou reflect upon, and say. "For this it is worth my while to have thus injured my Savior, and to have exposed the Son of God to such sufferings?" And what future temptations can arise so considerable that thou shouldst say. "For the sake of this I will crucify my Lord again?" (Hebrews 6:6) Sinner, thou must repent, thou must repent of every sin, and must forsake it; but, if thou doest it to any purpose I well know it must be at the foot or the cross. Thou must sacrifice every lust, even the dearest, though it should be like a "right hand or a right eye;" (Matthew 5:29-30) and therefore that thou mayest. if possible, be animated to it, I have led thee to that altar on which "Christ himself was sacrificed for thee an offering of a sweet smelling savor?" (Ephesians 5:2) Thou must "yield up thyself to God as one alive from the dead." (Romans 6:15) And therefore I have showed thee at what a price he purchased thee; "for thou wast not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, but with the precious blood of the Son of God, that Lamb without blemish and without spot." (1 Peter 1:18-19) And now I would ask thee, as before the Lord, what does thine own heart say to it? Art thou grieved for thy former offences? Art thou willing to forsake thy sins? Art thou willing to become the cheerful, thankful servant of him who hath purchased thee with his own blood?

8. I will suppose such a purpose as this rising in thine heart. How determinate it is, and how effectual it may be, I know not; what different views may arise hereafter, or how soon the present sense may wear off. But this I assuredly know, that thou wilt never see reason to change these views; for however thou mayest alter, the "Lord Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and for ever." (Hebrews 13:8) And the reasons that now recommend repentance and faith as fit and necessary, will continue invariable as long as the perfections the blessed God are the same, and as long as his Son continues the same.

9. But while you have these views and these purposes, I must remind you that this is not all which is necessary to your salvation. You must not only purpose, but, as God gives opportunity, you must act as those who are convinced of the evil of sin, and of the necessity and excellence of holiness. And that you may be enabled to do so in other instances, you must in the first place, and as the first great work of God, (as our Lord himself calls it) "believe in him whom God hath sent;" (John 6:29) you must, confide in him; must commit your soul into the hands of Christ to be saved by him in his own "appointed method of salvation." This is the great act of saving faith, and I pray God that you may experimentally know what it means, so as to be able to say with the apostle Paul, in the near view of death itself, "I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed to him until that day;" (2 Timothy 1:12) that great decisive day, which, if we are Christians, we have always in view. To this I would urge you; and O that I could be so happy as to engage you to it while I am illustrating it in this and the following addresses! Be assured you must not apply yourself immediately to God absolutely, or in himself considered, in the neglect of a Mediator. It will neither be acceptable to him, nor safe for you, to rush into his presence without any regard to his own Son, whom he hath appointed to introduce sinners to him. And if you come otherwise, you come as one who is not a sinner. The very manner of presenting the address will be interpreted as a denial of that guilt with which he knows you are chargeable; and therefore he will not admit you, nor so much as look upon you. And accordingly our Lord, knowing how much every man living was concerned in this, says, in the most universal terms, "No man cometh unto the Father but by me." (John 14:6)

10. Apply therefore to this glorious Redeemer, amiable as be will appear to every believing eye in the blood which he shed upon the cross, and in the wounds which he received there. Go to him, O sinner! this day, this moment, with all thy sins about thee. Go just as thou art; for if thou wilt never apply to him till thou art first righteous and holy, thou wilt never be righteous and holy at all; nor canst be so on this supposition, unless there were some way of being so without him; and then there would be no occasion for applying to him for righteousness and holiness. It were indeed as if it should be said that a sick man should defer his application to a physician till his health is recovered. Let me therefore repeat it without offence, go to him just as thou art, and say, (O that thou mayest this moment be enabled to say it from thy very soul!) "Blessed Jesus, I am surely one of the most sinful and one of the most miserable creatures that ever fell prostrate before thee; nevertheless I come, because I have heard that thou didst once say, `Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.' (Matthew 12:28) I come, because I have heard that thou didst graciously say, `Him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out.' (John 6:35) O thou Prince of Peace, O thou King of Glory!! I am a condemned, miserable sinner; I have ruined my own soul, and am condemned forever, if thou dost not help me and save me. I have broken thy Father's law and thine; for thou art `one with him.' (John 10:30) I have deserved condemnation

and wrath; and I am, even at this very moment, under a sentence of everlasting destruction, a destruction which will he aggravated by all the contempt that I have cast upon thee, O thou bleeding Lamb of God! for I cannot and will not dissemble it before thee, that I have wronged thee, most basely and ungratefully wronged thee, under the character of a Savior as well as or a Lord. But now I am willing to submit to thee; and I have brought my poor trembling soul to lodge it in thine hands, if thou wilt condescend to receive it; and if thou dost not, it must perish. O Lord, I lie at thy feet: stretch out `thy golden scepter that I may live.' (Esther 4:11) `Yea, if it please the King, let the life of my soul be given me at my petition!' (Esther 8:3) I have no treasure wherewith to purchase it, I have no equivalent to give thee for it; but if that compassionate heart of thine can find a pleasure in saving one of the most distressed creatures under heaven, that pleasure thou mayest here find. O Lord, I have foolishly attempted to be my own savior, but it will not do. I am sensible the attempt is vain, and therefore I give it over, and look unto thee. On thee, blessed Jesus, who art sure and steadfast, do I desire to fix my anchor. On thee, as the only sure foundation, would I build my eternal hopes. To thy teaching, O thou unerring Prophet of the Lord, would I submit: be thy doctrines ever so mysterious, it is enough for me that thou thyself hast said it. To thine atonement, obedience, and intercession, O thou holy and ever-acceptable High Priest, would I trust. And to thy government, O thou exalted Sovereign, would I yield a willing, delightful subjection: in token of reverence and love, `I kiss the Son:' (Psalms 2:12) I kiss the ground before his feet. I admit thee, O my Savior! and welcome thee, with unutterable joy, to the throne in my heart. Ascend it and reign there for ever! Subdue mine enemies, O Lord, for they are thine; and make me thy faithful and zealous servant: faithful to death, and zealous to eternity."

11. Such as this must be the language of your very heart before the Lord. But then remember, that, in consequence thereof it must be the language of your life too. The unmeaning words of the lips would be a vain mockery. The most affectionate transport of the passions, should it be transient and ineffectual, would be but like a blaze of straw, presented, instead of incense, at his altar. With such humility, with such love, with such cordial self-dedication and submission of soul must thou often prostrate thyself in the presence of Christ; and then thou must go away, and keep him in thy view; must go away, and live unto God through him, defying ungodliness and worldly lusts, and behaving thyself "soberly, righteously, and godly, in this vain ensnaring world." (Titus 2:12) You must make it your care to show your love by obedience, by forming yourself, as much as possible, according to the temper and manner of Jesus, in whom you believe. You must make it the great point of your ambition, and a nobler view you cannot entertain, to be a living image of Christ; that, so far as circumstances will allow, even those who have heard and read but little of him may, by observing you, in some measure see and know what kind of a life that of the blessed Jesus was. And this must be your constant care, your prevailing character, as long as you live. You must follow him whithersoever he leads you; must follow with a cross on your shoulder, when he commands you to "take it up;" (Matthew 16:24) and so must be faithful even unto death, expecting "the crown of life." (Revelation 2:10)

12. This, so far as I have been able to learn from the word of God, is the way to safety and glory: the surest, the only way you can take. It is the way which every faithful minister of Christ has trod, and is treading; and the way to which, as he tenders the salvation of his own soul, he must direct others. We cannot, we would not alter it in favor of ourselves, or of our dearest friends. It is the way in which alone, so far as we can judge, it becomes the blessed God to save his apostate

creatures. And therefore, reader, I beseech and entreat you seriously to consider it; and let your own conscience answer, as in the presence of God, whether you are willing to acquiesce in it or not. But know, that to reject it is thine eternal death. For as "there is no other name under heaven given among men whereby we can be saved," (Acts 4:12) but this of Jesus of Nazareth, so there is no other method but this in which Jesus himself will save us. The Sinner deliberating on the Expediency of falling in with this Method of Salvation.

"Consider, O my soul! what answer wilt thou return to such proposals as these? Surely, if I were to speak the first dictate of this corrupt and degenerate heart, it would be, `This is a hard saying, and who can hear it?' (John 6:60) To be thus humbled, thus mortified, thus subjected! To take such a yoke upon me, and to carry it as long as I live! To give up every darling lust, though dear to me as a right eye, and seemingly necessary as a right hand! To submit not only my life, but my heart, to the command and discipline of another! To have a master there, and such a master as will control many of its favorite affections, and direct them quite into another channel! a master, who himself represents his commands, by taking up the cross and following him! To adhere to the strictest rules of godliness and sobriety, of righteousness and truth; not departing from them in any allowed instance, great or small, upon any temptation, for any advantage, to escape any inconvenience and evil, no, not even for the preservation of life itself; but, upon a proper call of Providence, to act as if I `hated even my own life!' (Luke 14:26) Lord, it is hard to flesh and blood; and yet I perceive and feel there is one demand yet harder than this.

"With all these precautions, with all these mortifications, the pride of my nature would find some inward source of pleasure, might I but secretly think that I had been my own savior, that my own wisdom and my own resolution had broken the bands and chains of the enemy, and that I had drawn out of my own treasures the price with which my redemption was purchased. But must I lie down before another, as guilty and condemned, as weak and helpless? And must the obligation be multiplied, and must a Mediator have his share too? Must I go to the cross for my salvation, and seek my glory from the infamy of that? Must I be stripped of every pleasing pretence to righteousness, and stand, in this respect, upon a level with the vilest of men; stand at the bar amongst the greatest criminals, pleading guilty with them, and seeking deliverance by that very act of grace whereby they have obtained it.

"I dare not deliberately say this method is unreasonable. My conscience testifies that I have sinned, and cannot be justified before God as an innocent and obedient creature. My conscience tells me that all these humbling circumstances are fit; that it is fit a convicted criminal should be brought upon his knees; that a captive rebel should give up the weapons of his rebellion and bow before his sovereign, if he expects his life. Yea, my reason as well as my conscience tells me that it is fit and necessary that, if I am saved at all, I should be saved from the power and love of sin, as well as from the condemnation of it; and that, if sovereign mercy gives me a new life, after having deserved eternal death, it is most fit I should `yield myself to God as alive from the dead.' (Romans 6:13) But, `O wretched man that I am! I feel a law in my members that wars against the law of my mind,' (Romans 7:23-24) and opposes the conviction of my reason and conscience. Who shall deliver me from this bondage? Who shall make me willing to do that which I know in my own soul to be most expedient? O Lord, subdue any heart, and let it not be drawn so strongly one way, while the nobler powers of my mind would direct it another! Conquer every licentious principle within, that it may be my joy to be so wisely governed and restrained! Especially subdue my pride

that lordly corruption which so ill suits an impoverished and condemned creature, that thy way of salvation may be made amiable to me in proportion to the degree in which it is humbling! I feel a disposition to `linger in Sodom, but O be merciful to me, and pull me out of it,' (Genesis 19:16) before the storm of thy flaming vengeance fall, and there be no more escaping!"

02.10. The Sinner Seriously Urged To Accept Salvation

Chapter 10 The Sinner Seriously Urged And Entreated To Accept Of Salvation In This Way

1. Since many who have been impressed with these things suffer the impression to wear off.--2. Strongly as the ease speaks for itself, sinners are to be entreated to accept this salvation.--3. Accordingly the reader is entreated--by the majesty and mercy of God.--4. By the dying love of our Lord Jesus Christ.--5. By the regard due to our fellow-creatures.--6. By the worth of his own immortal soul.--7. The matter is solemnly left with the reader, as before God. The sinner yielding to these entreaties, and declaring his acceptance of salvation by Christ.

1. Thus far have I often known convictions and impressions to arise, (if I might judge by the strongest appearances) which after all have worn off again. Some unhappy circumstance of external temptation, ever joined by the inward reluctance of an unsanctified heart to this holy and humbling scheme of redemption, has been the ruin of multitudes. And, "through the deceitfulness of sin, they have been hardened," (Heb. 3:25) till they seem to have been "utterly destroyed, and that without remedy." (Proverbs 29:1) And therefore, O thou immortal creature who art now reading these lines, I beseech thee, that, while affairs are in this critical situation, while there are these balancings of mind between accepting and rejecting that glorious Gospel, which, in the integrity of my heart, I have now been laying before you, you would once more give me an attentive audience while I plead, in God’s behalf shall I say? or rather in your own; while, "as an ambassador for Christ, and as though God did beseech you by me, I pray you in Christ’s stead that you would be reconciled to God," (2 Corinthians 5:20) and would not, after these awakenings and these inquiries, by a madness which it will surely be the doleful business of a miserable eternity to lament, reject this compassionate counsel of God towards you.

2. One would indeed imagine there should be no need of importunity here. One would conclude, that as soon as perishing sinners are told that an offended God is ready to be reconciled, that he offers them a full pardon for all their aggravated sins, yea, that he is willing to adopt them into his family now, that he may at length admit them to his heavenly presence; all should, with the utmost readiness and pleasure, embrace so kind a message, and fall at his feet in speechless transports of astonishment. gratitude, and joy. But, alas! we find it much otherwise. We see multitudes quite unmoved, and the impressions which are made on many more are feeble and transient. Lest it should be thus with you, O reader! let me urge the message with which I have the honor to be charged; let me entreat you to be reconciled to God, and to accept of pardon and salvation in the way in which it is so freely offered to you.

3. I entreat you, "by the majesty of that God in whose name I come," whose voice fills all heaven with reverence and obedience. He speaks not in vain to legions of angels; but if there could be any contention among those blessed spirits, it would be, who should be first to execute his commands. Oh! let him not speak in vain to a wretched mortal I entreat you, "by the terrors of his wrath," who could speak to you in thunder; who could, by one single act of his will, cut off this precarious life of yours, and send you down to hell. I beseech you by his mercies, by his tender mercies, by the

bowels of his compassion, which still yearn over you as those of a parent over "a dear son," over a tender child, whom, notwithstanding his former ungrateful rebellion, "he earnestly remembers still." (Jeremiah 31:20) I beseech and entreat you, "by all this paternal goodness," that you do not, as it were, compel him to lose the character of the gentle Parent in that of the righteous Judge; so that, as he threatens with regard to those whom he had just called his sons and his daughters, "a fire shall be kindled in his anger, which shall burn unto the lowest hell." (Deuteronomy 32:19, Deuteronomy 32:22)

4. I beseech you further, "by the name and love of your dying Savior." I beseech you by all the condescension of his incarnation, by that poverty to which he voluntarily submitted, "that you might be enriched" with eternal treasures; (2 Corinthians 8:9) by all the gracious invitations which he gave, which still sound in his word, and still coming, as it were, warm from his heart, are "sweeter than honey, or the honey-comb." (Psalms 19:10) I beseech you by all his glorious works of power and of wonder, which were also works of love. I beseech you by the memory of the most benevolent person and the most generous friend. I beseech you by the memory of what he suffered, as well as of what he said and did; by the agony which he endured in the garden when his body was covered "with a dew of blood." (Luke 22:44) I beseech you by all that tender distress which he felt when his dearest friends "forsook hint and fled," (Matthew 26:56) and his blood-thirsty enemies dragged him away like the meanest of slaves, and like the vilest of criminals. I beseech you by the blows and bruises, by the stripes and lashes which this injured Sovereign endured while in their rebellious hands; by the shame of spitting, from which he hid not that kind and venerable countenance. (Isaiah 50:6) I beseech you by the purple robe, the scepter of reed, and the crown of thorns which this King of Glory wore that he might set us among the princes of heaven. (Psalms 113:8) I beseech you by the heavy burden of "the cross," under which he panted, and toiled, and fainted in the painful way "to Golgotha," (John 19:17) that he might free us from the burden of our sins. I beseech you by the remembrance of those rude nails that tore the veins and arteries, the nerves and tendons of his sacred hands and feet; and by that invincible, that triumphant goodness, which, while the iron pierced his flesh, engaged him to cry out, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." (Luke 23:34) I beseech you by that unutterable anguish which he bore when lifted up upon the cross, and extended there, as on a rack, for six painful hours, that you open your heart to those attractive influences which have "drawn to him thousands and ten thousands." (John 12:32) I beseech you by all that insult and derision which the "Lord of Glory bore there;" (Matthew 27:29-44) by that parching thirst which could hardly obtain the relief of "vinegar," (John 19:28-29) by that doleful cry so astonishing in the mouth of the only begotten of the Father, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Matthew 27:46) I beseech you by that grace that subdued and pardoned "a dying malefactor;" (Luke 23:42-43) by that compassion for sinners, by that compassion for you, which wrought in his heart, long as its vital motion continued, and which ended not when "he bowed his head, saying, It is finished, and gave up the ghost." (John 19:30) I beseech you by the triumphs of that resurrection by which he was "declared to be the Son of God with power;" by the spirit of holiness which wrought to accomplish it, (Romans 1:4) by that gracious tenderness which attempered all those triumphs, when he said to her out of whom he had cast seven devils, concerning his disciples who had treated him so basely, "Go, tell my brethren, I ascend unto my Father and your Father, unto my God and your God." (John 20:17) I beseech you by that condescension with which he said to Thomas, when his unbelief had made such an unreasonable demand, "Reach hither thy finger,

and behold mine hands, and reach hither thine hand, and thrust it into my side; and be not faithless, but believing." (John 20:27) I beseech you by that generous and faithful care of his people which he carried up with him to the regions of glory, and which engaged him to send down "his Spirit," in that rich profusion of miraculous gifts, to spread the progress of his saving word. (Acts 2:33) I beseech you by that voice of sympathy and power with which he said to Saul, while injuring his church, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?" (Acts 9:4) by that generous goodness which spared that prostrate enemy when he lay trembling at his feet, and raised him to so high a dignity as to be "not inferior to the very chiefest apostles." (2 Corinthians 12:11) I beseech you by the memory of all that Christ hath already done; by the expectation of all he will farther do for his people. I beseech you, at once, by the scepter of his grace, and by that sword of his justice with which all his incorrigible "enemies" shall be "slain before him," (Luke 19:20) that you do not trifle away these precious moments while his Spirit is this breathing upon you; that you do not lose an opportunity which may never return, and on the improvement of which your eternity depends.

5. I beseech you "by all the bowels of compassion which you owe to the faithful ministers of Christ," who are studying and laboring, preaching and praying, wearing out their time, exhausting their strength, and very probably shortening their lives, for the salvation of your soul, and of souls like yours. I beseech you by the affection with which all that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity long to see you brought back to him. I beseech you by the friendship of the living, and by the memory of the dead, by the ruin of those who have trifled away their days and perished in their sins, and by the happiness of those who have embraced the Gospel, and are saved by it. I beseech you by the great expectation of that important "day, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven;" (2 Thessalonians 1:7) by "the terrors of a dissolving world;" (2 Peter 3:10) by the "sound of the archangel’s trumpet," (1 Thessalonians 4:16) and of that infinitely more awful sentence, "Come, ye blessed," and "Depart, ye cursed," with which that grand solemnity shall close. (Matthew 25:34, Matthew 25:41)

6. I beseech you, finally, by your own precious and immortal soul; by the sure prospect of a dying bed, or of a sudden surprise into the invisible state and as you would feel one spark of comfort in your departing spirit, when your flesh and your heart are failing. I beseech you, by your own personal appearance before the tribunal of Christ, (for a personal appearance it must be, even to them who now sit on thrones of their own;) by all the transports of the blessed, and by all the agonies of the damned, then one or the other of which must be your everlasting portion. I affectionately entreat and beseech you, in the strength of all these united considerations, as you will answer it to me who may in that day be summoned to testify against you, and, which is unspeakably more, as you will answer it to your conscience, as you will answer it to the eternal Judge that you dismiss not these thoughts, these meditations, and these cares, till your have brought matters to a happy issue; till you have made resolute choice of Christ, and his appointed way of salvation; and till you have solemnly devoted yourself to God in the, bonds of an everlasting covenant.

7. And thus I leave the matter before you, and before the Lord. I have told you my errand; I have discharged embassy. Stronger arguments I cannot use; more endearing and mores awful considerations I cannot suggest. Choose, therefore, whether you will go out, as it were clothed in sackcloth, to cast yourself at the feet of him who now sends you these equitable and gracious terms of peace and pardon; or whether you will hold it out till he appears sword in hand to reckon

with you for your treasons and your crimes, and for this neglected embassy among the rest of them. Fain would I hope the best; nor can I believe that this labor of love shall be so entirely unsuccessful, that not one soul shall be brought to the foot of Christ in cordial submission and humble faith. "Take with you," therefore, "words, and turn unto the Lord;" (Hosea 14:2) and O that those which follow might, in effect at least, be the genuine language of every one that reads them.

Sinner yielding to these Entreaties, and declaring acceptance of Salvation by Christ.

"Blessed Lord, it is enough! It is too much! Surely there needs not this variety of arguments this importunity of persuasion, to court me to be happy, to prevail on me to accept of pardon, of life, of eternal glory. Compassionate Savior, my soul is subdued; so that I trust the language of thy grief is become that of my penitence, and I may say, `my heart is melted like wax in the midst of my bowels.' (Psalms 22:14)

"O gracious Redeemer! I have already neglected thee too long. I have too often injured thee: have crucified thee afresh by my guilt and impenitence, as if I had taken pleasure in `putting thee to an open shame.' (Hebrews 6:6) But my heart now bows itself before thee in humble, unfeigned submission. I desire to make no terms with thee but these--that I may be entirely thine. I cheerfully present thee with a blank, entreating thee that thou will do me the honor to signify upon it what is thy pleasure. Teach me, O Lord, what thou wouldst have me to do; for I desire to learn the lesson, and to learn it that I may practice it. If it be more than my feeble powers can answer, thou wilt, I hope, give me more strength; and in that strength I will serve thee. O receive a soul which thou hast made willing to be thine!

"No more, O blessed Jesus, no more is it necessary to beseech and entreat me. Permit me rather to address myself to thee with all the importunity of a perishing sinner, that at length sees and knows `there is salvation in no other' (Acts 4:12) Permit me now, Lord, to come and throw myself at thy feet like a helpless outcast that has no shelter but in thy gracious compassion! like one `pursued by the avenger of blood,' and seeking earnestly an admittance `into the city of refuge!' (Joshua 20:2-3)

"'I wait for the Lord; my soul doth wait; and in thy word do I hope,' (Psalms 130:5) that thou wilt `receive me graciously.' (Hosea 14:2) My soul confides in thy goodness, and adores it. I adore the patience which has borne with me so long; and the grace that now makes me heartily willing to be thine: to be thine on thine own terms, thine on any terms. O secure this treacherous heart to thyself! O unite me to thee in such inseparable bonds, that none of the allurements of flesh and blood, none of the vanities of an ensnaring world, none of the solicitations of sinful companions, may draw me back from thee, and plunge me into new guilt and ruin! `Be surety, O Lord, for thy servant for good,' (Psalms 119:122) that I may stilt keep my hold on thee, and so on eternal life; till at length I know more fully, by joyful and everlasting experience, how complete a Savior thou art. Amen."

02.11. To Those Who Will Not Be Persuaded...

Chapter 11 To Those Who Will Not Be Persuaded To Fall In With The Design Of The Gospel

1. Universal success not to be expected.--2-4. Yet, as unwilling absolutely to give up any, the author addresses thou who doubt the truth of Christianity, urging an inquiry into its evidences, and directing to prayer methods for that purpose.--5 Those who determine to give it up without further examination.--6. And presume to set themselves to oppose it.--7, 8. Those who speculatively assent to Christianity as true, and yet will sit down without any practical regard to its most important and acknowledged truths. Such are dismissed with a representation of the absurdity of their conduct on their own principles.--9, 10. With a solemn warning of its fatal consequences.--11. And a compassionate prayer, which concludes this chapter, and this part of the work.

1. I would humbly hope that the preceding chapters will be the means of awakening some stupid and insensible sinners, the means of convincing them of their need of Gospel-salvation, and of engaging some cordially to accept it. Yet I cannot flatter myself so far as to hope this should be the case with regard to all into whose hands this book shall come. "What am I, alas! better than my fathers," (1 Kings 19:4) or better than my brethren, who have in all ages been repeating their complaint, with regard to multitudes, that they "have stretched out their hand all day long to a disobedient and gainsaying people!" (Romans 10:21) Many such may perhaps be found in the number of my readers; many, on whom neither considerations of terror nor of love wilt make any deep and lasting impression; many, who, as our Lord learned by experience to express it, "when we pipe to them, will not dance; and when we mourn unto them; will not lament." (Matthew 11:17) I can say no more to persuade them; if they make light of what I have already said. Here, therefore, we must part: in this chapter I must take my leave of them; and O that I could do it in such a manner as to fix, at parting, some conviction upon their hearts, that though I seem to leave them for a little while, and send them back to review again the former chapters, as those in which alone they have any present concern, they might soon, as it were, overtake me again, and find a suitableness in the remaining part of this treatise, which at present they cannot possibly find. Unhappy creatures. I quit you as a physician quits a patient whom he loves, and is just about to give over as incurable: he returns again and again and re-examines the several symptoms, to observe whether there be not some one of them wore favorable than the rest, which may encourage a renewed application.

2. So would I once more return to you. You do not find in yourself any disposition to embrace the Gospel, to apply yourself to Christ, to give yourself up to thee service of God, and to make religion the business of your life. But if I cannot prevail upon you to do this, let me engage you, at least, to answer me, or rather to answer your own conscience, "Why you will not do it?" is it owing to any secret disbelief of the great principles of religion? If it be, the case is different from what I have yet considered, and the cure must be different. This is not a place to combat with the scruples of infidelity. Nevertheless, I would desire you seriously to inquire "How far those scruples extend?" Do they affect any particular doctrine of the Gospel on which my argument hath turned; or do they

affect the whole Christian revelation? Or do they reach yet farther, and extend themselves to natural religion, as well as revealed; so that it should be a doubt with you, whether there be any God, and providence, and future state, or not? As these cases are all different, so it will be of great importance to distinguish the one from the other; that you may know on what principles to build as certain, in the examination of those concerning which you are yet in doubt. But, whatever these doubts are, I would farther ask you, "How long have they continued, and what method have you taken to get them resolved?" Do you imagine, that, in matters of such moment, it will be an allowable case for you to trifle on, neglecting to inquire into the evidence of these things, and then plead your not being satisfied in that evidence, as an excuse for not acting according to them? Must not the principles of common sense assure you, that, if these things be true, as when you talk of doubting about them, you acknowledge it at least possible they may be, they are of infinitely greater importance than any of the affairs of life, whether of business or pleasure, for the sake of which you neglect them? Why then do you continue indolent and unconcerned, from week to week, and from month to month, which probably conscience tells you is the case?

3. Do you ask, "What method you should take to be resolved?" It is no hard question. Open your eyes: set yourself to think: let conscience speak, and verily do I believe, that, if it be not seared in an uncommon degree, you will find shrewd forebodings of the certainty both of natural and revealed religion, and of the absolute necessity of repentance, faith, and holiness, to a life of future felicity. If you area person of any learning, you cannot but know by what writers, and in what treatises, these great truths are defended. And if you are not, you may find, in almost every town and neighborhood, persons capable of informing you in thee main evidences of Christianity, and of answering such scruples against it as unlearned minds may have met with. Set yourself, then, in the name of God, immediately to consider the matter. If you study at all, bend your studies close this way, and trifle not with mathematics, or poetry or history, or law, or physic, which are all comparatively light as a feather, while you neglect this. Study the argument as for your life; for much more than life depends on it. See how far you are satisfied, and why that satisfaction reaches no farther. Compare evidences on both sides. And, above all, consider the design and tendency of the New Testament. See to what it will lead you, and all them that cordially obey it, and then say whether it be not good. And consider how naturally its truth is connected with its goodness. Trace the character and sentiments of its authors, whose living image, if I may be allowed the expression, is still preserved in their writings; and then ask your heart, can you think this was a forgery, an impious, cruel forgery? for such it mast have been, if it were a forgery at all: a scheme to mock God, and to ruin men, even the best of men, such as reverenced Conscience, and would abide all extremities for what they apprehended to be truth. Put the question to your own heart, Can I in my conscience believe it to be such an imposture? Can I look up to an omniscient God, and say, "O Lord, thou knowest that it is in reverence to thee, and in love to truth and virtue, that I reject this book, and the method to happiness here laid down."

4. But there are difficulties in the way. And what then? Have those difficulties never been cleared? Go to the living advocates for Christianity, to those of whose abilities, candor and piety you have the best opinion, if your prejudices will give you leave to have a good opinion of any such; tell them your difficulties; hear their solutions; weigh them seriously, as those who know they must answer it to God; and while doubts continue, follow the truth as far as it will lead you, and take heed that you do not a "imprison it in unrighteousness." (Romans 11:8) Nothing appears more inconsistent and

absurd than for a man solemnly to pretend dissatisfaction in the evidences of the Gospel, as a reason why he cannot in conscience be a thorough Christian; when at the same time he violates the most apparent dictates of reason and conscience, and lives in vices condemned even by the heathen. O sirs! Christ has judged concerning such, and judged most righteously and most wisely: "They do evil, and therefore they hate the light; neither come they to the light, lest their deeds should be made manifest, and be reproved." (John 3:20) But there is a light that will make manifest and reprove their works, to which they will be compelled to come, and the painful scrutiny of which they shall be forced to abide.

5. In the mean time, if you are determined to inquire no farther into the matter now, give me leave, at least, from a sincere concern that you may not heap upon your head more aggravated ruin, to entreat you that you would be cautious how you expose yourself to yet greater danger. by what you must yourself own to be unnecessary; I mean attempts to prevent others from believing the truth of the Gospel. Leave them; for God’s sake, and for your own, in possession of those pleasures and those hopes which nothing but Christianity can give them; and act not as if you were solicitous to add to the guilt of an infidel the tenfold damnation which they, who have been the perverters and destroyers of the souls of others, must expect to meet, if that Gospel, which they have so adventurously opposed, shall prove. as it certainly will, a serious, and to them a dreadful truth.

6. If I cannot prevail here, (but the pride of displaying a superiority of understanding should bear on such a reader, even in opposition to his own favorite maxims of the innocence of error and the equality of all religions consistent with social virtue, to do his utmost to trample down the Gospel with contempt) I would, however, dismiss him with one proposal which I think the importance of the affair may fully justify. If you have done with your examination into Christianity, and determine to live and conduct yourself as it were assuredly false, sit down, then, and make a memorandum of that determination. Write it down:

"On such a day of such a year, I deliberately resolved that I would live and die rejecting Christianity myself, and doing all I could to overthrow it. This day I determined, not only to renounce all subjection to, and expectation from Jesus of Nazareth, but also to make it a serious part of the business of my life to destroy, as far as I possibly can, all regard to him in the minds of others, and to exert my most vigorous efforts, in the way of reasoning or of ridicule to sink the credit of his religion, and, if it be possible, to root it out of the world; in calm, steady defiance of that day, when his followers say, He shall appear in so much majesty and terror, to execute the vengeance. threatened to his enemies."

Dare you write this, and sign it? I firmly believe that many a man, who would be thought a deist. and endeavors to increase the number, would not. And if you in particular dare not do it, whence does that small remainder of caution arise? The cause is plain. There is in your conscience some secret apprehension that this rejected, this opposed, this derided Gospel may, after all, prove true. And if there be such an apprehension, then let conscience do its office, and convict you of the impious madness of acting as if it were most certainly and demonstrably false. Let it tell you at large, how possible it is that "haply you may be found fighting against God," (Acts 5:39) that, hold as you are in defying the terrors of the Lord, you may possibly fall into his hands; may chance to hear that despised sentence, which, when: you hear it from the mouth of the eternal Judge, you

will not be able to despise. I will repeat it again. In spite of all your scorn: you may hear the King say to you. "Depart, accursed. into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels." (Matthew 25:41) And now, go and pervert and burlesque the Scripture, go and satirize the character of its heroes, and ridicule the sublime discourses of its prophets and its apostles, as some have done, who have left behind them but the short lived monuments of their ignorance. their profaneness. and their malice. Go and spread like them, the banners of infidelity and pride thyself in the number of credulous creatures listed under them. But take heed lest the insulted Galilean direct a secret arrow to thine heart, and stop thy licentious breath before it has finished the next sentence thou wouldst utter against him.

7. I will turn myself from the deist or the sceptic, and direct my address to the nominal Christian; if he may upon any terms be called a Christian, who feels not, after all I have pleaded a disposition to subject himself to the government and the grace of that Savior whose name he hears: O sinner, thou art turning away from my Lord, in whose cause I speak; but let me earnestly entreat thee seriously to consider why thou art turning away; and "to whom thou wilt go," from him whom thou acknowledgst "to have the words of eternal life." (John 6:63.) You call yourself a Christian and yet will not by any means be persuaded to seek salvation in good earnest from and through Jesus Christ, whom you call your Master and Lord. How do you for a moment excuse this negligence to your own conscience? If I had urged you on any controverted point it might have altered the case. If I had labored hard to make you the disciple of any particular party of Christians, your delay might have been more reasonable; nay, perhaps your refusing to acquiesce might have been an act of apprehended duty to our common Master. But is it matter of controversy among Christians, whether there be a great, holy, and righteous God; and whether such a Being, whom we agree to own, should be reverenced and loved, or neglected and dishonored? Is it matter of controversy whether a sinner should deeply and seriously repent of his sins, or whether be should go on in them? Is it a disputed point amongst us, whether Jesus became incarnate, and died upon the cross for the redemption of sinners, or not? And if it be not, can it be disputed by them who believe him to be the Son of God and the Savior of men, whether a sinner should seek to him, or neglect hint; or whether one who professes to be a Christian should depart from iniquity, or give himself up to the practice or it? Are the precepts of our great Master written so obscurely in his word, that there should be room seriously to question whether he require a devout, holy, humble, spiritual, watchful, self-denying life, or whether he allow the contrary? Has Christ, after all big pretensions of bringing life and immortality to light, left it more uncertain than he found it, whether there be any future state of happiness and misery, or for whom these states are respectively intended? Is it a matter of controversy whether God will, or will not, "bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil?" (Ecclesiastes 12:14) or whether, at the conclusion of that judgment, "the wicked shall go away into everlasting punishment, and the righteous into life eternal?" (Matthew 25:46) You will not I am sure, for very shame, pretend any doubt about these things, and yet call yourself a Christian. Why then will you not be persuaded to lay them to heart, and to act as duty and interest so evidently require? O sinner, the cause is too obvious, a cause indeed quite unworthy of being called a reason. It is because thou art blinded and besotted with thy vanities and thy lusts. It is because thou hast some perishing trifle, which charms thy imagination and thy senses, so that it is dearer to thee than God and Christ, than thy own soul and its salvation. It is, in a word, because thou art still under the influence of that carnal mind, which, whatever pious forms it may sometimes admit and pretend, "is enmity against God,

and is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be." (Romans 8:7) And therefore thou art in the very case of those wretches, concerning whom our Lord said in the days of his flesh, "Ye will not come unto me, that ye might have life," (John 5:40) and therefore "ye shall die in your sins." (John 8:24)

8. In this case I see not what it can signify, to renew those expostulations and addresses which I have made in the former chapters. As our blessed Redeemer says of those who reject his Gospel, "Ye have both seen and hated both me and my Father," (John 15:24) so may I truly say with regard to you, I have endeavored to show you, in the plainest and the clearest words, both Christ and the Father; I have urged the obligations you are under to both; I have laid before you your guilt and your condemnation; I have pointed out the only remedy; I have pointed out the rock on which I have built my own eternal hopes, and the way in which alone I expect salvation. I have recommended those things to you, which, if God gives me an opportunity, I will, with my dying breath, earnestly and affectionately recommend to my own children, and to all the dearest friends that I have upon earth, who may then be near me, esteeming it the highest token or my friendship, the surest proof of my love to them. And if, believing the Gospel to be true, you resolve to reject it, I have nothing farther to say, but that you must abide the consequence. Yet as Moses, when he went out from the presence of Pharaoh for the last time, finding his heart yet more hardened by all the judgments and deliverances with which he had formerly been exercised, denounced upon him "God’s passing through the land in terror to smite the firstborn with death, and warned him of that great and lamentable cry, which the sword of the destroying angel should raise throughout all his realm;" (Exodus 11:4-6) so will I, sinner, now when I am quitting thee, speak to thee yet again, "whether thou wilt hear, or whether thou wilt forbear," (Ezekiel 2:7) and denounce that much more terrible judgment; which the sword of divine vengeance, already whetted and drawn, and "bathed, as it were, in heaven," (Isaiah 34:5) is preparing against thee; which shall end in a much more doleful cry, though thou wert greater and more obstinate than that haughty monarch. Yes, sinner, that I may, with the apostle Paul, when turning to others who are more likely to hear me, "shake my raiment, and say, I am pure from your blood," (Acts 18:6) I will once more tell you what the end of these things will be. And, O that I could speak to purpose! O that I could thunder in thine ear such a peal of terror as might awaken thee, and be too loud to be drowned in all the noise of carnal mirth, or to be deadened by those dangerous opiates with which thou art contriving to stupify thy conscience!

9. Seek what amusements and entertainments thou wilt, O sinner! I tell thee, if thou wert equal in dignity, and power, and magnificence, to the "great monarch of Babylon, thy pomp shalt be brought down to the grave, and all the sound of thy viols; the worm shall be spread under thee, and the worm shall cover thee;" (Isaiah 14:11) yes, sinner, "the end of these things is death!" (Romans 6:21) death in its most terrible sense to thee, if this continue thy governing temper. Thou canst not avoid it; and, if it be possible for any thing that I can say to prevent, thou shalt not forget it. Your "strength is not the strength of stones, nor is your flesh of brass." (Job 6:12) You are accessible to disease, as well as others; and if some sudden accident do not prevent it, we shall soon see how heroically you will behave yourself on a dying bed, and in the near views of eternity. You, that now despise Christ, and trifle with his Gospel, we shall see you droop and languish; shall see all your relish for your carnal recreations and your vain companions lost. And if perhaps one and another of them bolt in upon you, and is brutish and desperate enough to attempt to entertain

a dying man with a gay story, or a profane jest, we shall see how you will relish it. We shall see what comfort you will have in reflecting on what is past, or what hope in looking forward to what is to come. Perhaps, trembling and astonished, you will then be inquiring; in a wild kind of consternation, "what you shall do to be saved:" calling for the ministers of Christ, whom you now despise for the earnestness with which they would labor to save your soul! and it maybe falling into a delirium, or dying convulsions, before they can come. Or perhaps we may see you flattering yourself, through a long, lingering illness, that you shall still recover, and putting off any serious reflection and conversation, for fear it should overset your spirits. And the cruel kindness of friends and physicians, as if they were in league with Satan to make the destruction of your soul as sure as possible, may perhaps abet this fatal deceit.

10. And if any of these probable cases happen, that is, in short, unless a miracle of grace snatch you "as a brand out of the burning," when the flames have, as it were, already taken hold of you; all these gloomy circumstances, which pass in the chambers of illness and on the bed of death, are but the forerunners of infinitely more dreadful things. Oh! who can describe them? Who can imagine them? When surviving friends are tenderly mourning over the breathless corpse, and taking a fond farewell of it before it is laid to consume away in the dark and silent grave, into what hands, O sinner! will thy soul be fallen? What scenes will open upon thy separate spirit, even before thy deserted flesh be cold, or thy sightless eyes are closed? It shall then know what it is to return to God, to be rejected by him as having rejected his Gospel and his Son, and despised the only treaty of reconciliation; and that so amazingly condescending and gracious! Thou shalt know what it is to be disowned by Christ, whom thou hast refused to entertain; and what it is, as the certain and immediate consequence of that, to be left in the hands of the malignant spirits of hell. There will be no more-friendship then: none to comfort, none to alleviate thy agony and distress; but, on the contrary, all around thee laboring to aggravate and increase them. Thou shalt pass away the intermediate years of the separate state in dreadful expectation, and bitter outcries of horror and remorse. And then thou shalt hear the trumpet of the archangel, in whatever cavern of that gloomy world thou art lodged. Its sound shall penetrate thy prison, where, doleful and horrible as it is, thou shalt nevertheless wish that thou mightest still be allowed to hide thy guilty head, rather than show it before the face of that awful Judge; before whom "heaven and earth are fleeing away." (Revelation 20:11) But thou must come forth, and be reunited to a body now formed for ever to endure agonies, which in this mortal state would have dissolved it in a moment. You would not be persuaded to come to Christ before: you would stupidly neglect him, in spite of reason, in spite of conscience, in spite of all the tender solicitations of the Gospel, and the repeated admonitions of its most faithful ministers. But now, sinner, you shall have an interview; with him; if that may be called an interview, in which you will not dare to lift up your head to view the face of your tremendous and inexorable Judge. There, at least, how distant soever the time of our life and the place of our abode may have been, there shall we see how courageously your heart will endure, and how "strong your hands will be when the lord doth this." (Ezekiel 22:14) There shall I see thee, O reader! whoever thou art that goest on in thine impenitency, among thousands and ten thousands of despairing wretches, trembling and confounded. There shall I hear thy cries among the rest, rending the very heavens in vain. The Judge will rise from his throne with majestic composure, and leave thee to be hurried down to those everlasting burnings, to which his righteous vengeance hath doomed thee, because thou wouldst not be saved from them. Hell shall shut its mouth upon thee for ever, and the sad echo of thy groans and outcries shall be lost, amidst

the hallelujahs of heaven, to all that find mercy of the Lord in that day.

11. This will most assuredly be the end of these things; and thou, as a nominal Christian, professest to know, and to believe it. It moves my heart at least, if it moves not thine. I firmly believe, that every one, who himself obtains salvation and glory will bear so much of his Savior's image in wisdom and goodness, in zeal for God, and a steady regard to the happiness of the whole creation, that he will behold this sad scene with calm approbation, and without any painful commotion of mind. But as yet I am flesh and blood; and therefore my bowels are troubled, and mine eyes often overflow with grief to think that wretched sinners will have no more compassion upon their own souls; to think that in spite of all admonition, they will obstinately run upon final, everlasting destruction. It would signify nothing here to add a prayer or a meditation for your use. Poor creature, you will not meditate! you will not pray! Yet as I have often poured out my heart in prayer over a dying friend, when the force of his distemper has rendered him incapable of joining with me, so I will now apply myself to God for you, O unhappy creature! And if you disdain so much as to read what my compassion dictates, yet I hope, they who have felt the power of the Gospel on their own souls, as they cannot but pity such as you, will join with me in such cordial, though broken petitions as these: A prayer in behalf of an Impenitent Sinner, in the case just described.

"Almighty God! `with thee all things are possible." (Matthew 10:26) To thee therefore do I humbly apply myself in behalf of this dear immortal soul, which thou here seest perishing in its sins, and hardening itself against that everlasting Gospel which has been the power of God to the salvation of so many thousands and millions. Thou art witness, O blessed God! thou art witness to the plainness and seriousness with which the message has been delivered. It is in thy presence that these awful words have been written; and in thy presence have they been read. Be pleased, therefore, to record it in the book of thy remembrance, that `so, if this wicked man dieth in his iniquity, after the warning has been so plainly and solemnly given him, his blood may not be required at my hand,' (Ezekiel 33:8-9) nor at the hand of that Christian friend, whoever he is, by whom this book has been procured for him, with a sincere desire for the salvation of his soul. Be witness, O blessed `Jesus, in the day in which thou shalt judge the secrets of all hearts,' (Romans 2:16) that thy Gospel hath been preached to this hardened wretch, and salvation by thy blood hath been offered him, though he continued to despise it. And may thy unworthy messenger be `unto God a sweet savor in Christ,' in this very soul, even though it should at last perish! (2 Corinthians 2:15)

"But, oh! that after all his hardness and impenitence, thou wouldst still be pleased, by the sovereign power of thine efficacious grace, to awaken and convert him! Well do we know, O thou Lord of universal nature! that he who made the soul can cause the sword of conviction to come near and enter into it. O that, in thine infinite wisdom and love, thou wouldst find out a way to interpose, and save this sinner from death, from eternal death! O that, if it be thy blessed will, thou wouldst immediately do it! Thou knowest, O God, he is a dying creature! thou knowest that if any thing be done for him, it must be done quickly! thou seest, in the book of thy wise and gracious decrees, a moment marked, which must seal him up in an unchangeable state! O that thou wouldst lay hold on him while he is yet `joined to the living, and hath hope!' (Ecclesiastes 9:4) Thy immutable laws, in the dispensation of grace, forbid that a soul should be converted and renewed after its entrance into the invisible world: O let thy sacred Spirit work while he is yet as it were

within the sphere of its operations! Work, O God, by whatever method thou pleasest; only have mercy upon him! O Lord! have mercy upon him, that he sink not into these depths of damnation and ruin, on the very brink of which he so evidently appears! O that thou wouldst bring him, if that be necessary, and seem to thee most expedient, into any depths of calamity and distress! O that, with Manasseh, he may be `taken in the thorns, and laden with the fetters of affliction,' if that may but cause him to `seek the God of his fathers.' (2 Chronicles 33:11-12)

"But I prescribe not to thine infinite wisdom. Thou hast displayed thy power in glorious and astonishing instances; which I thank thee that I have so circumstantially known, and by the knowledge of them have been fortified against the rash confidence of those who weakly and arrogantly pronounce that to be impossible, which is actually done. Thou hast, I know, done that, by a single thought in retirement, when the happy man reclaimed by it hath been far from means, and far from ordinances, which neither the most awful admonitions, nor the most tender entreaties, nor the most terrible afflictions. nor the most wonderful deliverances, had been able to effect.

"Glorify thy name, O Lord, and glorify thy grace, in the method which to thine infinite wisdom shall seem most expedient! Only grant, I beseech thee, with all humble submission to thy will, that this sinner may be saved! or if not, that the labor of this part of this treatise may not be altogether in vain; but that if some reject it to their aggravated ruin, others may hearken and live! That those thy servants, who have labored for their deliverance and happiness may view them in the regions of glory, as the heaven, `to him who hath loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us,' of condemned rebels, and accursed, polluted sinners, `kings and priests unto God; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever!' (Revelation 1:5-6) Amen."

02.12. An Address To A Soul So Overwhelmed Sins

Chapter 12 An Address To A Soul So Overwhelmed With A Sense Of The Greatness Of Its Sins

1--4. The case described at large.--5. As it frequently occurs.--6. Granting all that the dejected soul charges on itself.--7. The invitations and promises of Christ give hope.--8 The reader urged, under all his burdens and fears, to an humble application to him. Which is accordingly exemplified in the concluding Reflection and Prayer.

1. I have now done with those unhappy creatures who despise the Gospel, and with those who neglect it. With pleasure do I now turn myself to those who will hear me with more regard. Among the various cases which now present themselves to my thoughts, and demand my tender, affectionate, respectful care, there is none more worthy of compassion than that which I have mentioned in the title of this chapter, none which requires a more immediate attempt of relief.

2. It is very possible some afflicted creature may be ready to cry out, "It is enough: aggravate my grief and my distress no more. The sentence you have been so awfully describing, as what shall he passed and executed on the impenitent and unbelieving, is my sentence; and the terrors of it are my terrors. `For mine iniquities have gone up into the heavens,' and my transgressions have reached unto the clouds. (Revelation 18:5) My case is quite singular. Surely there never was so great a sinner as I. I have received so many mercies, have enjoyed so many advantages, I have heard so many invitations or Gospel grace; and yet my heart has been so hard, and my nature is so exceeding sinful, and the number and aggravating circumstances of my provocations have been such, that I dare not hope. It is enough that God hath supported me thus long; it is enough, that, after so many years of wickedness, I am yet out of hell. Every day's reprieve is a mercy at which I am astonished. I lie down, and wonder that death and damnation have not seized me in my walks the day past. I arise, and wonder that my bed has not been my grave; wonder that my soul is not separated from my flesh, and surrounded with devils and damned spirits."

3. "I have indeed heard the message of salvation; but, alas! it seems no message of salvation to me. There are happy souls that have hope; and their hope is indeed in Christ and the grace of God manifest in him. But they feel in their hearts an encouragement to apply to him, whereas I dare not do it. Christ and grace are things in which I fear I have no part, and must expect none. There are exceeding rich and precious promises in the word of God; but they are to me as a sealed book, and are hid from me as to any personal use. I know Christ is able to save: I know he is willing to save some. But that he should be willing to save me--such a polluted, such a provoking creature, as God knows, and as conscience knows, I have been, and to this day am--this I know not how to believe; and the utmost that I can do towards believing it, is to acknowledge that it is not absolutely impossible, and that I do not lie down in complete despair; though, alas! I seem upon the borders of it, and expect every day and hour to call into it."

4. I should not, perhaps, have entered so fully into this case, if I had not seen many in it; and I will add, reader, for your encouragement, if it be your case, several, who now are in the number of the

most established, cheerful, and useful Christians. And I hope divine grace will add you to the rest, if "out of these depths you he enabled to cry unto God;" (Psalms 130:1) and though, like Jonah, you may seem to be cast out from his presence, yet still, with Jonah, you "look towards his holy temple." (Jonah 2:4)

5. Let it not be imagined, that it is in any neglect of that blessed Spirit, whose office it is to be the great Comforter, that I now attempt to reason you out of this disconsolate frame; for it is as the great source or reason, that he deals with rational creatures; and it is in the use of rational means and considerations that he may most justly be expected to operate. Give me leave, therefore, to address myself calmly to you, and to ask you, what reason you have for all these passionate complaints and accusations against yourself? What reason have you to suggest that your case is singular, when so many have told you they have felt the same? What reason have you to conclude so hardly against yourself, when the Gospel speaks in such favorable terms? Or, what reason to imagine, that the gracious things it says are not intended for you? You know, indeed, more of the corruption of your own heart, than you know of the hearts or others; and you make a thousand charitable excuses for their visible failings and infirmities, which you make not for your own. And it may be, some of those whom you admire as eminent saints when compared with you, are on their part humbling themselves in the dust, as unworthy to be numbered among the least of God’s people, and wishing themselves like you; in whom they think they see much more good, and much less of evil, than in themselves.

6. But to suppose the worst, what if you were really the vilest sinner that ever lived upon the face of the earth? What if "your iniquities had gone up into the heavens" every day, and "your transgressions had reached unto the clouds," (Revelation 18:5) reached thither with such horrid aggravations, that earth and heaven should have had reason to detest you as a monster of impiety? Admitting all this, "is any thing too hard for the Lord?" (Genesis 18:14) Are any sins, of which a sinner can repent, of so deep a dye, that the blood of Christ cannot wash them away! Nay, though it would be daring wickedness and monstrous folly, for any "to sin that grace may abound," (Romans 6:1) yet had you indeed raised your account beyond all that divine grace has ever yet pardoned, who should "limit the holy One of Israel?" (Psalms 78:41) or who shall pretend to say, that it is impossible that God may, for your very wretchedness, choose you out from others, to make you a monument of mercy, and a trophy of hitherto unparalleled grace? The apostle Paul strongly intimates this to have been the case with regard to himself; and why might not you likewise, if indeed "the chief of sinners," obtain mercy, that in you, as the chief, "Jesus Christ might show forth all long-suffering, for a pattern to them who shall hereafter believe?" (1 Timothy 1:15-16)

7. Gloomy as your apprehensions are, I would ask you plainly, do you in your conscience think that Christ is not able to save you? What! is he not "able to save, even to the uttermost, them that come unto God by him?" (Hebrews 7:25) Yes, you will say, abundantly able to do it; but I dare not imagine that he will do it. And how do you know that he will not? He has helped the very greatest sinners or all that have yet applied themselves to him; and he has made thee offers of grace and salvation in the most engaging and encouraging terms. "If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink:" (John 7:37) "let him that is a-thirst come; and whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely." (Revelation 22:17) "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." (Matthew 11:28) And once more, "Him that cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast

out." (John 4:37) "True," will you say, "none that are given him by the Father: could I know I were of that number, I could then apply cheerfully to him." But, dear reader, let me entreat you to look into the text itself, and see whether that limitation he expressly added there. Do you there read, none of them whom the Father hath given me shall be cast out? The words are in a much more encouraging form; and why should you frustrate his wisdom and goodness by such an addition of your own? "Add not to his words, lest he reprove thee;" (Proverbs 30:6) take them as they stand, and drink in the consolation of them. Our Lord knew into what perplexity some serious minds might possibly be thrown by what he had before been saying, "All that the Father hath given me shall come unto me;" and therefore, as it were on purpose to balance it, he adds those gracious words, "him that cometh unto me I will in no wise," by no means, on no consideration whatsoever, "cast out."

8. If, therefore, you are already discouraged and terrified at the greatness of your sins, do not add to their weight and number that one greater, and worse than all the rest, a distrust of the faithfulness and grace of the blessed Redeemer. Do not, so far as in you lies, oppose all the purposes of his love to you. O distressed soul! whom dost thou dread? To whom dost thou tremble to approach? Is there any thing so terrible in a crucified Redeemer, in the Lamb that was slain? If thou carriest thy soul, almost sinking under the burden of its guilt, to lay it down at his feet, what dost thou offer him, but the spoil which he bled and died to recover and possess? And did he purchase it so dearly, that he might reject it with disdain? Go to him directly, and fall down in his presence, and plead that misery of thine, which thou hast now been pleading in a contrary view, as an engagement to your own soul to make the application, and as an argument with the compassionate Savior to receive you. Go, and be assured, that "where sin hath abounded, there grace shall much more abound." (Romans 5:20) Be assured, that, if one sinner can promise himself a more certain welcome than another, it is not he that is least guilty and miserable, but he that is most deeply humbled before God tinder a sense of that misery and guilt, and lies the lowest in the apprehension of it.

Reflections on these Encouragements, ending in an humble and earnest Application to Christ for Mercy.

"O my soul! what sayest thou to these things? Is there not at least a possibility of help from Christ? And is there a possibility of help any other way? Is any other name given under heaven, whereby we can be saved? I know there is none. (Acts 4:12) I must then say, like the lepers of Israel, (2 Kings 7:4) `If I sit here, I perish; and if I make my application in vain, I can but die.' But peradventure he may save my soul alive. I will therefore arise, and go 'into him; or rather, believing him here, by his spiritual presence, sinful and miserable as I am, I will this moment fall down on my face before him, and pour out my soul unto him.

"Blessed Jesus, I present myself unto thee, as a wretched creature, driven indeed by necessity to do it. For surely, were not that necessity urgent and absolute, I should not dare, for very shame, to appear in thine holy and majestic presence. I am fully convinced that my sins and my follies have been inexcusably great, more than I can express, more than I can conceive. I feel a source of sin in my corrupt and degenerate nature, which pours out iniquity as a fountain sends out its water, and makes me a burden and a terror to myself. Such aggravations have attended my transgressions, that it looks like presumption so much as to ask pardon for them. And yet, would it

not be greater presumption to say, that they exceed thy mercy, and the efficacy of thy blood; to say, that thou host power and grace enough to pardon and save only sinners of a lower order, while such as I lie out of thy reach? Preserve me from that blasphemous imagination! Preserve me from that unreasonable suspicion! Lord, thou canst do all things, neither is there any thought of mine heart withholden from thee. (Job 42:2) Thou art indeed, as thy word declares able to save unto the uttermost. (Hebrews 7:25) And therefore, breaking through all the oppositions of shame and fear that would keep me from thee, I come and lie down as in the dust before thee. Thou knowest, O Lord! all my sins, and all my follies. (Psalms 69:5) I cannot, and I hope! may say, I would not disguise them before thee, or set myself to find out plausible excuses. Accuse me, Lord, as thou pleasest; and I will ingenuously plead guilty to all thine accusations. I will own myself as great a sinner as thou callest me; but I am still a sinner that comes unto thee for pardon. If I must die, it shall be submitting, and owning the justice of the fatal stroke. If I perish, it shall be laying hold, as it were, on the horns of the altar: laying myself down at thy foot-stool, though I have been such a rebel against thy throne. Many have received a full pardon there; have met with favor even beyond their hopes. And are all thy compassions, O blessed Jesus! exhausted? And wilt thou now begin to reject an humble creature who flies to thee for life, and pleads nothing but mercy and free grace? Have mercy upon me, O most gracious Redeemer! have mercy upon me, and let my life be precious in thy sight! (2 Kings 1:14) O do not resolve to send me down to that state of final misery and despair from which it was thy gracious purpose to deliver and save so many!

"Spurn me not away, O Lord! from thy presence, nor be offended when I presume to lay hold on thy royal robe, and say that I cannot and will not let thee go till my suit is granted! (Genesis 32:26) Oh! remember that my eternity is at stake! Remember, O Lord, that all my hopes of obtaining eternal happiness, and avoiding everlasting, helpless, hopeless destruction, are anchored upon thee; they hang upon thy smiles, or drop at thy frown,. O have mercy upon me, for the sake of this immortal soul of mine! Or if not for the sake of mine alone, for the sake of many others, who may, on the one hand, be encouraged by thy mercy to we, or, on the other, may be greatly wounded and discouraged by my helpless despair! I beseech thee, O Lord, for thine own sake, and for the display of thy Father’s rich and sovereign grace! I beseech thee by the blood thou didst shed on the cross! I beseech thee by the covenant of grace and peace, into which the Father did enter with thee for the salvation of believing and repenting sinners! save me, save me, O Lord, who earnestly desire to repent and believe! I am indeed a sinner, in whose final and everlasting destruction thy justice might be greatly glorified; but oh! if thou wilt pardon me, it will be a monument raised to the honor of thy grace and the efficacy of thy blood, in proportion to the degree in which the wretch, to whom thy mercy is extended, was mean and miserable without it. Speak, Lord, by thy blessed Spirit, and banish my fears! Look unto me with love and grace in thy countenance, and say to me, as in the days of thy flesh thou didst to many an humble supplicant, `Thy sins are forgiven thee, go in peace.'"

02.13. The Doubting Soul

Chapter 13 The Doubting Soul

1. Transient impressions liable to be mistaken for conversion, which would be a fatal error.--2. General scheme for self-examination.--3. Particular inquiries--what views there have been of sin?--4. What views there have been of Christ?--5. As to the need the soul has of him;--6. And its willingness to receive him with a due surrender of heart to his service.--7. Nothing short of this sufficient. The soul submitting to Divine examination the sincerity of its faith and repentance.

1. IN consequence of all the serious things which have been said in the former chapters, I hope it will be no false presumption to imagine that some religious impressions may be made on hearts which had never felt them before; or may be revived where they have formerly grown cold and languid. Yet I am very sensible, and I desire that you may be so, how great danger there is of self-flattery on this important head, and how necessary it is to caution men against too hasty a conclusion that they are really converted, because they have felt some warm emotions on their minds, and have reformed the gross irregularities of their former conduct. A mistake here may be infinitely fatal; it may prove the occasion of that false peace which shall lead a man to bless himself in his own heart, and to conclude himself secure, while "all the threatenings and curses of God’s law" are sounding in his ears, and lie indeed directly against him: (Deuteronomy 19:19-20) while in the mean time he applies to himself a thousand promises in which he has no share; which may prove therefore like generous wines to a man in a high fever, or strong opiates to one in a lethargy. "The stony ground hearers received the word with joy," and a promising harvest seemed to be springing up; yet "it soon withered away," (Matthew 13:5-6) and no reaper filled his arms with it. Now, that this may not he the case with you, that all my labors and yours hitherto may not be lost, and that a vain dream of security and happiness may not plunge you deeper into misery and ruin, give me leave to lead you into a serious inquiry into your own heart, that so you may be better able to judge of your ease, and to distinguish between what is at most being only near the kingdom of heaven, and becoming indeed a member of it.

2. Now this depends upon the sincerity of your faith in Christ, when faith is taken in the largest extent, as explained above: that is, as comprehending repentance, and that steady purpose of new and universal obedience, of which, wherever it is real, faith will assuredly be the vital principle. Therefore, to assist you in judging of your state, give me leave to ask you, or rather to entreat you to ask yourself, what views you have had, and now have, of sin and of Christ? and what your future purposes are with regard to your conduct in the remainder of life that may lie before you? I shall not reason largely upon the several particulars I suggest under these heads, but rather refer you to your own reading and observation, to judge how agreeable they are to the word of God, the great rule by which our characters must quickly be tried, and out eternal state unalterably determined.

3. Inquire seriously, in the first place, "what views you have had of sin, and what sentiments you have felt in your soul with regard to it?" There was a time when it wore a flattering aspect, and

made a fair, enchanting appearance, so that all your heart was charmed with it, and it was the very business of your life to practice it. But you have since been undeceived. You have felt it "bite like a serpent, and sting like an adder." (Proverbs 23:32) You have beheld it with an abhorrence far greater than the delight which it ever gave you. So far it is well it is thus with every true penitent, and with some, I fear, who are not of that number. Let me therefore inquire farther, whence arose this abhorrence? Was it merely from a principle of self-love? Was it merely because you had been wounded by it? Was it merely because you had thereby brought condemnation and ruin upon your own soul? Was there no sense of its deformity, of its baseness, of its malignity, as committed against the blessed God, considered as a glorious, a bountiful, and a merciful Being? Were you never pierced by the apprehension of its vile ingratitude? And as for those purposes which have arisen in your heart against it, let me beseech you to reflect how they have been formed, and how they have hitherto been executed. Have they been universal? Have they been resolute? And yet, amidst all that resolution, have they been humble? When you have declared war with sin, was it with every sin? And is it an irreconcilable war which you determine, by divine grace, to push on till you have entirely conquered it, or die in the attempt? And are you accordingly active in your endeavors to subdue and destroy it? If so, what are "the fruits worthy of repentance which you bring forth?" (Luke 3:8) It does not, I hope, all flow away in floods of grief. Have you "ceased to do evil?" Are you "learning to do well?" (Isaiah 1:16-17) Doth your reformation show that you repent of your sins? or do your renewed relapses into sin prove that you repent even of what you call your repentance? Have you an inward abhorrence of all sin, and an unfeigned zeal against it? And doth that produce a care to guard against the occasions of it, and temptations to it? Do you watch against the circumstances that have ensnared you? and do you particularly double your guard against "that sin which does most easily beset you?" (Hebrews 12:1) Is that laid aside, that the Christian race may be run: laid aside with firm determination that you will return to it no more, that you hold no more parley with it, that you will never take another step toward it?

4. Permit me also farther to inquire, "what your views of Christ have been? What think you of him, and your concern with him?" Have you been fully convinced that there must be a correspondence settled between him and your soul? And do you see and feel, that you are not only to pay him a kind of distant homage, and transient compliment, as a very wise, benevolent, and excellent person, for whose name and memory you have a reverence; but that, as he lives and reigns, as he is ever near you, and always observing you, so you must look to him, must approach him, must humbly transact business with him, and that business of the highest importance, on which your salvation depends?

5. Yon have been brought to inquire, "Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the most high God? (Micah 6:6) And once perhaps you were thinking of sacrifices which your own stores might have been sufficient to furnish out. Are you now convinced they will not suffice; and that you must have recourse to the Lamb which God has provided? Have you had a view of "Jesus as taking away the sin of the world?" (John 1:29) "as made a sin-offering for us, though he knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him?" (2 Corinthians 5:21) Have you viewed him as perfectly righteous in himself; and, despairing of being justified by any righteousness of your own, have you "submitted to the righteousness of God?" (Romans 10:3) Has your heart ever been brought to a deep conviction of this important truth, that if ever you are saved at all, it must be through Christ; that if ever God extends mercy to you at all, it must be for

his sake; that if ever you are fixed in the temple of God above, you must stand there as an everlasting trophy of that victory which Christ has gained over the powers of hell, who would otherwise have triumphed over you?

6. Our Lord says, "Look unto me, and be ye saved." (Isaiah 45:22) He says, "If I be lifted up I will draw all men unto me." (John 12:32) Have you looked to him as the only Savior, have you been drawn unto him by that sacred magnet, the attracting influence of his dying love? Do you know what it is to come to Christ, as a poor "weary and heavy laden sinner, that you may find rest?" (Matthew 11:28) Do you know what it is, in a spiritual sense, "to eat the flesh and drink the blood of the Son of man;" (John 6:53) that is, to look upon Christ crucified as the great support or your soul, and to feel a desire after bitterness as the appetite of nature after its necessary food? Have you known what it is cordially to surrender yourself to Christ, as a poor creature whom love has made his property? Have you committed your immortal soul to him, that he may purify and save it; that he may govern it by the dictates of his word and the influences of his Spirit; that be may use it for his glory; that he may appoint it to what exercises and discipline he pleases, while it dwells wells here in flesh; and that he may receive it at death, and fix it among those spirits, who with perpetual songs of praise surround his throne, and are his servants forever? Have you heartily consented to this? And do you, on this account of the matter, renew your content! Do you renew it deliberately and determinately, and feel your whole soul, as it were, saying Amen, while you read this? If this be the case, then I can, with great pleasure, give you, as it were, the right hand of fellowship, and salute and embrace you as a sincere disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ; as One who is delivered from the powers of darkness, and is "translated into the kingdom of the Son of God." (Colossians 1:13) I can then salute you in the Lord, as one to whom, as a minister of Jesus, I am commissioned and charged to speak comfortably, and tell you not that I absolve you from your sins, for it is a small mall matter to be judged of man’s judgment, but that the blessed God himself absolveth you: that you are one to whom he hath said in his Gospel, and is continually saying, "Your sins are forgiven you;" (Luke 7:48) therefore go in peace, and take the comfort of it.

7. But if you are a stranger to these experiences, and to this temper which I have now described, the great work is yet undone: you are an impenitent and unbelieving sinner, and "the wrath of God abideth on you." (John 3:36) However you may have been awakened- and alarmed, whatever resolutions you may have formed for amending your life, how right soever your notions may be, how pure soever your forms of worship, how ardent soever your zeal, how severe soever your mortification, how humane soever your temper, how inoffensive soever your life may be, I can speak no comfort to you. Vain are all your religious hopes, if there has not been a cordial humiliation before the presence of God for all your sins; if there has not been this avowed war declared against every thing displeasing to God; if there has not been this sense of your need of Christ, and of your ruin without him; if there has not been this earnest application to him, this surrender of your soul into his hands by faith, this renunciation of yourself, that you might fix on Him the anchor of your hope: if there has not been this unreserved deification of yourself, to be at all times, and in an respects, the faithful servant of God through him; and if you do not with all this acknowledge, that you are an unprofitable servant, who have no other expectations of acceptance or of pardon but only through his righteousness and blood, and through the riches of divine grace in Him; I repeat it to you again, that all your hopes are vain, and you are "building on the sand." (Matthew 7:26) The house you have already raised must ho thrown down to the ground, and the

foundation be removed and laid anew, or you, and all your hopes, will shortly be swept away with it, and buried under it in everlasting ruin. The soul submitting to Divine Examination the Sincerity of its Repentance and Faith.

Lord God! thou searchest all hearts. and triest the reins of the children of men! (Jeremiah 17:10) Search me, O Lord, and know my heart; try me, and know my thoughts; and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting. (Psalms 139:23-24) Doth not conscience, Lord! testify in thy presence, that my repentance and faith are such as have been described, or at least that it is my earnest prayer that they may be so? Come, therefore, O thou blessed Spirit! who art the author of all grace and consolation, and work this temper more fully in my soul. O represent sin to mine eyes in all its most odious colors, that I may feel a mortal and irreconcilable hatred to it! O represent the majesty and mercy of the blessed God in such a manner that my heart may be alarmed, and that it may be melted! Smite the rock, that the waters may flow: (Psalms 78:20) waters of genuine, undissembled, and filial repentance! Convince me, O thou blessed Spirit! of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment! (John 16:8) Show me that I have undone myself; but that my help is found in God alone, (Hosea 13:9) in God through Christ, in whom alone he will extend compassion and help to me! According to thy peculiar office, take of Christ and show it unto me. (John 16:15) Show me his power to save! Show me his willingness to exert that power I teach my faith to behold him as extended on the cross, with open arms, with a pierced, bleeding side; and so telling me, in the most forcible language, what room there is in his very heart for me! May I know what it is to have my whole heart subdued by love; so subdued as to be crucified with him; (Romans 6:6) to he dead to sin and dead to the world, but alive unto God. through Jesus Christ. (Romans 6:11) In his power and love may I confide! To him may I without any reserve commit my spirit! His image may I bear! His laws may I observe! His service may I pursue! And may I remain, through time and eternity, a monument of the efficacy or his Gospel, and a trophy of his victorious grace!

"O blessed God! if there be any thing wanting towards constituting me a sincere Christian, discover it to me, and work it in me! Beat down, I beseech thee, every false and presumptuous hope, how costly soever that building may have been which it thus laid in ruins, and how proud soever I may have been of its vain ornaments! Let me know the worst of my case, be that knowledge edge ever so distressing; and if there be remaining danger, O let my heart be fully sensible of it, sensible while yet there is a remedy!

"If there be any secret sin yet lurking in my soul, which I have not sincerely renounced, discover it to me, and rend it out of my heart, though it may have shot its roots ever so deep, and have wrapped them all around it, so that every nerve shall be pained by the separation! Tear it away, O Lord, by a hand graciously severe! And by degrees, yea, Lord, by speedy advances, go on, I beseech thee, to perfect what is still lacking in my faith. (1 Thessalonians 3:10) Accomplish in me all the good pleasure of thy goodness. (2 Thessalonians 1:11) Enrich me, O Heavenly Father, with all the graces of thy Spirit; form me to the complete image of thy dear Son; and then, for his sake, come unto me, and manifest thy gracious presence in my soul, (John 14:21, John 14:28) till it is ripened for that state of glory for which all these operations are intended to prepare it Amen."

02.14. The Several Branches Of The Christian Temper

Chapter 14 A More Particular View Of The Several Branches Of The Christian Temper

1, 2. The importance of the case engages to a more particular survey what manner of spirit we are of.--3. Accordingly the Christian temper is described, by some general views of it, as a new and divine temper.--4. As resembling that of Christ.--5. And as engaging us to be spiritually minded, and to walk by faith.--6. A plan of the remainder.--7. In which the Christian temper is more particularly considered-with regard to the blessed God: as including fear, affection, and obedience.--8, 9. Faith and love to Christ.--10. Joy in Him.--11-13. And a proper temper towards the Holy Spirit, particularly as a spirit of adoption and of courage.--14. With regard to ourselves; as including preference of the soul to the body, humility, purity.--15. Temperance.--16. Contentment.--17. And Patience.--18. With regard to our fellow creatures; as including Love.--19. Meekness.--20. Peaceableness.--21. Mercy.--22. Truth.--23. And candor in judging.--24. General qualifications of each branch.--25. Such as Sincerity.--26. Constancy.--27. Tenderness.--28. Zeal.--29. And Prudence.--30. These things should frequently be recollected.--A review of all in a scriptural prayer.

1. WHEN I consider the infinite importance of eternity, I find it exceedingly difficult to satisfy myself in any thing which I can say to men, where their eternal interests are concerned. I have given you a view, I hope I may truly say, a just as well as a faithful view, of a truly Christian temper already. Yet, for your farther assistance, I would offer it to your consideration in various points of light, that you maybe assisted in judging of what you are and what you ought to be. And in this I aim, not only at your conviction, if you are yet a stranger to real religion, but at your farther edification, if, by the grace of God, you are by this time experimentally acquainted with it. Happy you will be, happy beyond expression, if, as you go on from one article to another, you can say, "This is my temper and character." Happy in no inconsiderable degree, if you can say, "This is what I desire, what I pray for, and what I pursue, in preference to every opposite view, though it be not what I have as yet attained."

2. Search, then, and try "what manner of spirit you are of" (Luke 9:55) And may he that searcheth all hearts direct the inquiry, and enable you "so to judge yourself; that you may not be condemned of the Lord." (1 Corinthians 11:31-32)

3. Know in the general, "that, if you are a Christian indeed, you have been `renewed in the spirit of your mind,' (Ephesians 4:23) so renewed as to be regenerated and born again." It is not enough to have assumed a new name, to have been brought under some new restraints, or to have made a partial change in some particulars of your conduct. The change must be great and universal. Inquire, then, whether you have entertained new apprehensions or things, have formed a practical judgment different from what you formerly did; whether the ends you propose, the affections which you feel working in your heart, and the course of action to which, by those affections, you are directed, be, on the whole, new or old. Again, "If you are a Christian indeed, you are a `partaker of a divine nature,' (2 Peter 1:4) divine in its original, its tendency, and its resemblance." Inquire,

therefore, whether God hath implanted a principle in your heart, which tends to him, and which makes you like him. Search your soul attentively, to see if you have really the image there of God's moral perfections, of his holiness and righteousness his goodness and fidelity; for "the new man is, after God, created in righteousness and true holiness," (Ephesians 4:24) "and is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him." (Colossians 3:10)

4. For your farther assistance, inquire "whether `the same mind be in you which was always in Christ.' (Php 2:5) Whether you bear the image of God's incarnate Son, the brightest and fairest resemblance of the Father which heaven or earth has ever beheld." The blessed Jesus designed himself to be a model for all his followers; and he is certainly a model most fit for our imitation: an example in our own nature and in circumstances adapted to general use: an example recommended to us at once by its spotless perfection, and by the endearing relations in which he stands to us, as our Master, our Friend, and our Head; as the person by whom our everlasting state is to be fixed, and in resemblance to whom our final happiness is to consist, if ever we are happy at all. Look then, into the life and temper of Christ, as described and illustrated in the Gospel, and search whether you can find any thing like it in your own. Have you any thing of his devotion, love, and resignation to God? Any thing of his humility, meekness, and benevolence to men? Any thing of his purity and wisdom, his contempt of the world, his patience, his fortitude, his zeal? And indeed all the other branches of the Christian temper, which do not imply previous guilt in the person by whom they are exercised, may be called in to illustrate and assist your inquiries under this head.

5. Let me add, "If you are a Christian, you are in the main `spiritually-minded,' as knowing `that is life and peace;' whereas, `to be carnally-minded is death.'" (Romans 8:6) Though you "live in the flesh, you will not war after it," (2 Corinthians 10:3) you will not take your orders and your commands from it. You will indeed attend to its necessary interests as matter of duty; but it will still be with regard to another and a noble? interest, that of the rational and immortal spirit. Your thoughts, your affections, your pursuits, your choice, will be determined by a regard to things spiritual rather than carnal. In a word, "you will walk by faith, and not by sight." (2 Corinthians 5:7) Future, invisible, and in some degree incomprehensible objects, will take up your mind. Your faith will act on the being of God, his perfections, his providences his precepts, his threatenings, and his promises. It will act upon Christ, "whom having not seen," you will "love and honor." (1 Peter 1:8) It will act on that unseen world, which it knows to be eternal, and therefore infinitely more worthy of your affectionate regard than any of "those things which are seen and are temporal." (2 Corinthians 4:18)

6. These are general views of the Christian temper on which I would entreat you to examine yourself; and now I would go on to lead you into a survey of the grand branches of it, as relating to God, our neighbor, and ourselves; and of those qualifications which must attend each of these branches; such as sincerity, constancy, tenderness, zeal and prudence. And I beg your diligent attention, while I lay before you a few hints with regard to each, by which you may judge the better, both of your state and your duty.

7. Examine, then, I entreat you. "the temper of your heart with regard to the blessed God." Do you find there a reverential fear, and a supreme love and veneration for his incomparable excellencies, a desire after him as the highest good, and a cordial gratitude towards him as your supreme

benefactor? Can you trust his care? Can you credit his testimony? Do you desire to pay an unreserved obedience to all that he commands, and an humble submission to all the disposals of his providence? Do you design his glory as your noblest end, and make it the great business of your life to approve yourself to him? Is it your governing care to imitate him, and to "serve him in spirit and in truth?" (John 4:24)

8. Faith in Christ I have already described at large, and therefore shall say nothing farther, either of that persuasion of his power and grace, which is the great foundation of it, or of that acceptance of Christ under all his characters, or that surrender of the soul into his hands, in which its peculiar and distinguishing nature consists.

9. If this faith in Christ be sincere, "it will undoubtedly produce a love to him:" which will express itself in affectionate thoughts of him; in strict fidelity to him; in a careful observation of his charge; in a regard to his spirit, to his friends, and to his interests; in a reverence to the memorials of his dying love which he has instituted; and in an ardent desire after that heavenly world where he dwells, and where he will at length "have all his people to dwell with him." (John 17:2)

10. I may add, agreeably to the word or God, "that thus believing in Christ and loving him, you will also rejoice in him:" in his glorious design, and in his complete fitness to accomplish it; in the promises of his word, and in the privileges of his people. It will be matter of joy to you, that such a Redeemer has appeared in this world of ours; and your joy for yourself will be proportionable to the degree of clearness with which you discern your interest in him, and relation to him.

11. Let me farther lead you into some reflections on "the temper of your heart towards the blessed Spirit." If "we have not the Spirit of Christ, we are none of his. (Romans 8:19) If we are not "led by the Spirit of God, we are not the children of God." (Romans 8:14) You will then, if you are a real Christian, desire that you may "be filled with the Spirit;" (Ephesians 5:18) that you may have every power of your soul subject to his authority; that his agency on your heart may be more constant, more operative, and more delightful. And to cherish these sacred influences, you will often have recourse to serious consideration and meditation: you will abstain from those sins which tend to grieve him; you will improve the tender seasons, in which he seems to breathe upon your soul; you will strive earnestly with God in prayer, that you may have him "shed on you still more abundantly through Jesus Christ;" (Titus 3:6) and you will be desirous to fall in with the end of his mission, which was to glorify Christ, (John 16:14) and to establish his kingdom. "You will desire his influences as the Spirit of adoption," to render your acts of worship free and affectionate, your obedience vigorous, your sorrow for sin overflowing and tender, your resignation meek, and your love ardent: in a word, to carry you through life and death with the temper of a child who delights in his father, and who longs for his more immediate presence.

12. Once more, "if you are a Christian indeed, you will be desirous to obtain the spirit of courage." Amidst all that humility of soul to which you will be formed, you will wish to commence a hero in the cause of Christ, opposing, with a rigorous resolution, the strongest efforts of the powers of darkness, the inward corruptions of your own heart, and all the outward difficulties you may meet with in the way of your duty, while in the cause and in the strength or Christ you go on "conquering and to conquer."

13. All these things may be considered as branches of godliness; of that godliness which is "profitable unto all things," and hath the "promise of the life which now is, and of that which is to come." (1 Timothy 4:8)

14. Let me now farther lay before you some branches of the Christian temper "which relate more immediately to ourselves." And here, if you are a Christian indeed, you will undoubtedly prefer the soul to the body, and things eternal to those that are temporal. Conscious of the dignity and value of your immortal part, you will come to a firm resolution to secure its happiness, whatever is to be resigned, whatever is to be endured in that view. If you are a real Christian, you will be so "clothed with humility." (1 Peter 5:5) You will have a deep sense of your own imperfections, both natural and moral; of the short extent of your knowledge; of the uncertainty and weakness of your resolutions; and of your continual dependence upon God, and upon almost every thing about you. And especially will you be deeply sensible of your guilt; the remembrance of which will fill you with shame and confusion, even when you have some reason to hope it is forgiven. This will forbid all haughtiness and insolence of your behavior to your fellow-creatures. It will teach you, under afflictive providences, with all holy submission to bear the indignation of the Lord as those that know they "have sinned against him." (Micah 7:9) Again, if you are a Christian indeed, "you will labor after purity of soul," and maintain a fixed abhorrence of all prohibited sensual indulgence. A recollection of past impurities will fill you with shame and grief, and you will endeavor for the future to guard your thoughts and desires, as well as your words and actions, and to abstain, not only from the commission of evil, but "from the" distant "appearance" and probable occasions "of it:" (1 Thessalonians 5:22) as conscious of the perfect holiness of that God with whom you converse, and of the "purifying nature of that hope," (1 John 3:3) which by his Gospel he hath taught you to entertain.

15. With this is nearly allied "that amiable virtue of temperance" which will teach you to guard against such a use of meats and drinks as indisposes the body for the service of the soul; or such an indulgence in either, as will rob you of that precious jewel, your time, or occasion an expense beyond what your circumstances will admit, and beyond what will consist with what you owe to the cause of Christ, and those liberalities to the poor which your relation and theirs to God and each other will require. In short, you will guard against whatever has a tendency to increase a sensual disposition against whatever would alienate the soul from communion with God, and would diminish its zeal and activity in his service.

16. The divine philosophy of the blessed Jesus will also teach you "a contented temper." It will moderate your desires of those worldly enjoyments after which many feel such an insatiable thirst, ever growing with indulgence and success. You will guard against an immoderate care about those things which would lead you into a forgetfulness of your heavenly inheritance. If Providence disappoint your undertakings, you will submit; if others be more prosperous you will not envy them, but rather will be thankful for what God is pleased to bestow upon them, as well as for what he gives you. No unlawful methods will be used to alter your present condition; and whatever it is, you will endeavor to make the best of it, remembering it is what infinite wisdom and goodness have appointed you, and that it is beyond all comparison better than you have deserved; yea, that the very deficiencies and inconveniences of it may conduce to the improvement of your future and complete happiness.

17. With contentment, if you are a disciple of Christ, "you will join patience too," and "in patience will possess your soul." (Luke 21:19) You cannot indeed be quite insensible either of afflictions or injuries; but your mind will be calm and composed under them, and steady in the prosecution of proper duty, though afflictions press, and though your hopes, your dearest hopes and prospects be delayed. Patience will prevent hasty and rash conclusions, and fortify you against seeking irregular methods of relief; disposing you, in the mean time, till God shall be pleased to appear for you, to go on steadily in the way of your duty; "committing yourself to him in well-doing." (1 Peter 4:19) You will also be careful that "patience may have its perfect work," (James 1:4) and prevail in proportion to those circumstances which demand its peculiar exercise. For instance, when the successions of evil are long and various, so that "deep calls to deep," and "all God's waves and billows seem to be going over you," one after another; (Psalms 42:7) when God touches you in the most tender part; when the reasons of his conduct to you are quite unaccountable; when your natural spirits are weak and decayed; when unlawful methods of redress seem near and easy; still your reverence for the will of your heavenly Father will carry it against all, and keep you waiting quietly for deliverance in his own time and way.

18. I have thus led you into a brief review of the Christian temper, with respect to God and ourselves: permit me now to add, "that the Gospel will teach you another set of very important lessons with respect to your fellow-creatures." They all are summed up in this, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself;" (Romans 13:9) and whatsoever thou wouldst (that is, whatsoever thou couldst, in an exchange of circumstances, fairly and reasonably desire) that others should do unto thee, do thou like-wise the same unto them." (Matthew 7:12) The religion of the blessed Jesus, when it triumphs in your soul, will conquer the predominancy of an irregular self-love, and will teach you candidly and tenderly to look upon your neighbor as another self. As you are sensible of your own rights, you will be sensible of his: as you support your own character you will support his. You will desire his welfare, and be ready to relieve his necessity, as you would have your own consulted by another. You will put the kindest construction upon his most dubious words and actions. You will take pleasure in his happiness; you will feel his distress, in some measure, as your own. And most happy will you be, when this obvious rule is familiar to your mind, when this golden law is written upon your heart, and when it is habitually and impartially consulted by you upon every occasion, whether great or small.

19. The Gospel will also teach you "to put on meekness," (Colossians 3:12) not only with respect to God, submitting to the authority of his word, and the disposal of his providence, as was urged before; but also with regard to your brethren of mankind. Its gentle instructions will form you to calmness of temper under injuries and provocations, so that you may not be angry without, or beyond just cause. It will engage you to guard your words, lest you provoke and exasperate those you should rather study by love to gain, and by tenderness to heal. Meekness will render you slow in using any rough and violent methods, if they can by any means be lawfully avoided; and ready to admit, and even to propose a reconciliation, after they have been entered into, if there may yet be hope of succeeding. So far as this branch of the Christian temper prevails in your heart, you will take care to avoid every thing which might give unnecessary offence to others; you will behave you yourself in a modest manner, according to your station; and it will work, both with regard to superiors and inferiors, teaching you duly to honor the one, and not to overbear or oppress, to grieve or insult the other. And in religion itself; it will restrain all immoderate sallies and harsh

censure; and will command down "that wrath of man, which, instead of working, so often opposes the righteousness of God," (James 1:20) and shames and wounds that good badge, in which it is boisterously and furiously engaged.

20. With this is naturally connected "a peaceful disposition." If you are a Christian indeed, you will have such a value and esteem for peace, as to endeavor to obtain, and to preserve it, "as much as lieth in you," (Romans 12:18) as much as you fairly and honorably can. This will have such an influence upon your conduct, as to make you not only cautious of giving offence, and slow in taking it, but earnestly desirous to regain peace as soon as may be, when it is in any measure broken, that the wound may be healed while it is green, and before it begins to rankle and fester. And more especially, this disposition will engage you "to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace," (Ephesians 4:3) "with all that in every very place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ," (1 Corinthians 1:2) whom if you truly love, you will also love all those whom you have reason to believe to he his disciples and servants.

21. If you be yourselves indeed of that number, "you will also put on bowels of mercy." (Colossians 3:12) the mercies of God, and those of the blessed Redeemer, will work on your heart, to mould it to sentiments of compassion and generosity, so that you will feel the wants and sorrows of others; you will desire to relieve their necessities; and as you have an opportunity, you will do good, both to their bodies and their souls; expressing your kind affections in suitable actions, which may both evidence their sincerity and render them effectual

22. As a Christian, "you will also maintain truth inviolable," not only in your solemn testimonies, when confirmed by an oath, but likewise in common conversation. You will remember, too, that your promises bring an obligation upon you, which you are by no means at liberty to break through. On the whole, you will be careful to keep a strict correspondence between your words and your actions, in such a manner as becomes a servant of the God of truth.

23. Once more, as, amidst the strictest care to observe all the divine precepts, you will still find many imperfections on account of which you will be obliged to pray, that "God would not enter into strict judgment with you," as well knowing "that in his sight you cannot be justified," (Psalms 143:2) you will be careful not to judge others "in such a manner as should awaken the severity of `his judgment against yourself.'" (Matthew 7:1-2) You will not, therefore. judge them impertinently, when you have nothing to do with their actions; nor rashly, without inquiring into circumstances; nor partially, without weighing them attentively and fairly; nor uncharitably. putting the worst construction upon things in their own nature dubious; deciding upon intentions as evil, farther than they certainly appear to be so; pronouncing on the state of men, or on the whole of their character, from any particular action, and involving the innocent with the guilty. There is a moderation contrary to all these extremes, which the Gospel recommends; and if you receive the Gospel in good earnest into your heart, it will lay the ax to the root of such evils as these.

24. Having thus briefly illustrated the principal branches of the Christian temper and character, I shall conclude the representation. with reminding you of "some general qualifications which must be mingled with all, and give a tincture to each of them; such as sincerity, constancy, tenderness, zeal, and prudence."

25. Always remember, that "sincerity is the very soul of true religion." A single intention to please God, and to approve ourselves to him, must animate and govern all that we do in it. Under the influence of this principle you will impartially inquire into every intimation of duty, and apply to the practice of it so far as it is known to you. Your heart will be engaged in all you do. Your conduct, in private and in secret, will be agreeable to your most public behavior. A sense of the Divine authority will teach you "to esteem all God's precepts concerning all things to be right, and to hate every false way." (Psalms 119:128)

26. Thus are you, "in simplicity and godly sincerity to have your conversation in the world." (2 Corinthians 1:12) And "you are also to charge it upon your soul `to be steadfast and immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord.'" (1 Corinthians 15:58) There must not only be some sudden fits and starts of devotion, or of something which looks like it, but religion must be an habitual and permanent thing. There must be a purpose to adhere to it at all times. It must be made the stated and ordinary business of life. Deliberate and presumptuons sins must be carefully avoided; a guard must be maintained against the common infirmities of life; and falls of one kind or of another must be matter of proportionable humiliation before God, and must occasion renewed resolution for his service. And thus you are to go on to the end of your life, not discouraged by the length and difficulty of the way, nor allured on the one hand, or terrified on the other, by all the various temptations which may surround and assault you. Your soul must be fixed on this basis, and you are still to behave yourself as one who knows he serves an unchangeable God, and who expects from him "a kingdom which cannot be moved." (Hebrews 12:28)

27. Again, so far as the Gospel prevails in your heart, "your spirit will be tender, and the stone will be transformed into flesh." You will desire that your apprehensions of divine things may be quick, your affections ready to take proper impressions, your conscience always easily touched, and, on the whole, your resolutions pliant to the divine authority, and cordially willing to be, and to do whatever God shall appoint. You will have a tender regard to the word of God, a tender caution against sin, a tender guard against the snares of prosperity, a tender submission to God's afflicting hand: in a word, you will be tender wherever the divine honor is concerned; and careful, neither to do anything yourself; nor to allow any thing in another, so far as you can influence, by which God should be offended, or religion reproached.

28. Nay, more than all this, you will, so far as true Christianity governs in your mind, "exert a holy zeal in the service of your Redeemer and your Father." You will be "zealously affected in every good thing," (Galatians 4:18) in proportion to its apprehended goodness and importance. You will be zealous, especially, to correct what is irregular in yourself; and to act to the utmost of your ability for the cause of God. Nor will you be able to look with an indifferent eye on the conduct of others in this view; but, so far as charity, meekness, aid prudence will admit, you will testify your disapprobation of every thing in it which is dishonorable to God and injurious to men. And you will labor, not only to reclaim men from such courses, but to engage them to religion, and quicken them in it.

29. And once more, you will desire "to use the prudence which God bath given you," in judging what is, in present circumstances, your duty to God, your neighbor, and yourself; what will be, on the whole, the most acceptable manner of discharging it, and how far it may be most advantageously pursued; as remembering that he is indeed the wisest and the happiest man, who,

by constant attention of thought, discovers the greatest opportunities of doing good, and with ardent and animated resolution breaks through every opposition, that he may improve those opportunities.

30. This is such a view of the Christian temper as could conveniently be thrown within such narrow limits; and I hope it may assist many in the great and important work of self-examination. Let your own conscience answer, how far you have already attained it, and how far you desire it; and let the principal topics here touched upon be fixed in your memory and in your heart, that you may be mentioning them before God in your daily addresses to the throne of grace, in order to receive from him all necessary assistance for bringing them into practice. A Prayer, chiefly in Scripture Language, in which the several Branches of the Christian temper are more briefly enumerated in the order laid down above.

"Blessed God, I humbly adore thee as the great Father of lights, and the Giver of every good and every perfect gift. (James 1:17) From thee, therefore, I seek every blessing, and especially those which may lead me to thyself, and prepare me for the eternal enjoyment of thee. I adore thee as the God who searches the hearts and tries the reins of the children of men. (Jeremiah 17:10) Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my thoughts; and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting. (Psalms 139:23-24) May I know what manner of spirit I am of; (Luke 9:55) and be preserved from mistaking, where the error might be infinitely fatal!

"May I, O Lord, be renewed in the spirit of my mind. (Ephesians 4:24) A new heart do thou give me, and a new spirit do thou put within me. (Ezekiel 34:26) Make me partaker of divine nature; (2 Peter 1:4) and as he who hath called me is holy, may I be holy in all manner of conversation. (1 Peter 1:15) May the same mind be in me which was also in Christ Jesus; (Php 2:5) may I so walk even as he walked. (1 John 2:6) Deliver me from being carnally-minded, which is death; and make me spiritually-minded, since that is life and peace. (Romans 8:6) And may I, while I pass through this world of sense, walk by faith and not by sight (2 Corinthians 5:7) and be strong in faith, giving glory to God. (Romans 4:20)

"May thy grace, O Lord, which hath appeared unto all men, and appeared to me with such glorious evidence and lustre, effectually teach me to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly. (Titus 2:11-12) Work in my heart that godliness which is profitable unto all things; (1 Timothy 4:8) and teach me by the influence of thy blessed Spirit, to love thee, the Lord my God, with all my heart, and with all my soul, and with all my mind, and with all my strength. (Mark 12:30) May I yield myself unto thee, as alive from the dead, (Romans 6:13) and present my body a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable in thy sight, which is my most reasonable service! (Romans 12:1) May I entertain the most faithful and affectionate regard to the blessed Jesus, thine incarnate Son, the brightness of thy glory, and the express image of thy person. (Hebrews 1:3) Though I have not seen him, may I love him; and in him, though now I see him not, yet believing, may I rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory, (1 Peter 1:8) and may the life which I live in the flesh be daily by the faith of the Son of God. (Galatians 2:20) May I be filled with the Spirit, (Ephesians 5:18) and may I be led by it; (Romans 8:14) and so may it be evident to others, and especially to my own soul, that I am a child of God, and an heir of glory. May I not receive the spirit of bondage unto fear, but the spirit of adoption, whereby I may be enabled to cry,

Abba, Father. (Romans 8:15) May he work in me, as the spirit of love, and of power, and of a sound mind, (2 Timothy 1:17) that so I may add to my faith virtue. (2 Peter 1:5) May I be strong, and very courageous. (Joshua 1:7) and quit myself like a man, (1 Corinthians 14:13) and like a Christian, in the work to which I am called, and in that warfare which I had in view when I listed under the banner of the great Captain of my salvation.

"Teach me, O Lord, seriously to consider the nature of my own soul, and to set a suitable value upon it. May I labor, not only or chiefly, for the meat that perisheth, but for that which endureth to eternal life. (John 6:27) May I humble myself under thy mighty hand, and be clothed with humility, (1 Peter 5:5-6) decked with the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which in the sight of God is of great price. (1 Peter 3:4) May I be pure in heart, that I may see God, (Matthew 5:8) mortifying my members which are on the earth, (Colossians 3:5) so that if a right eye offend me, I may pluck it out, and if a right hand offend me, I may cut it off. (Matthew 5:29-30) May I be temperate in all things, (1 Corinthians 9:25) content with such things as I have, (Hebrews 13:5) and instructed to be so in whatever state I am. (Php 4:11) May patience also have its perfect work in me, that I may be in that respect complete, and wanting nothing. (James 1:4)

"Form me, O Lord, I beseech thee, to a proper temper toward my fellow-creatures! May I love my neighbor as myself, (Galatians 5:14) and whatsoever I would that others should do unto me, may I also do the same unto them. (Matthew 7:12) May I put on meekness under the greatest injuries and provocations, (Colossians 3:12) and, if it be possible, as much as lieth in me, may I live peaceably with all men. (Romans 12:18) May I be merciful, as my Father in heaven is merciful. (Luke 6:36) May I speak the truth from my heart; (Psalms 15:2) and may I speak it in love, (Ephesians 4:15) guarding against every instance of a censorious and malignant disposition; and taking care not to judge severely, as I would not be judged with the severity which thou, Lord, knowest, and which mine own conscience knows, I should not be able to support.

"I entreat thee, O Lord, to work in me all those qualifications of the Christian temper which may render it peculiarly acceptable to thee, and may prove ornamental to my profession in the world. Renew, I beseech thee, a right spirit within me, (Psalms 51:10) make me an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no allowed guile. (John 1:47) And while I feast on Christ, as my passover sacrificed for me, may I keep the feast with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. (1 Corinthians 5:7-8) Make me, I beseech thee, O thou Almighty and unchangeable God! steadfast and immovable, always abounding in thy work, as knowing that my labor in the Lord shall not be finally in vain. (1 Corinthians 15:58) May my heart be tender, (2 Kings 17:19) easily impressed with thy word and providence, touched with an affectionate concern for thy glory, and sensible of every impulse of thy Spirit. May I be zealous for my God, (Numbers 25:13) with a zeal according to knowledge and charity, (1 Corinthians 14:14) and teach me in thy service to join the wisdom of the serpent with the boldness of the lion and the innocence of the dove. (Matthew 10:16) Thus render me, by thy grace, a shining image of my dear Redeemer; and at length bring me to wear the bright resemblance of his holiness and his glory, in that world where he dwells; that I may ascribe everlasting honors to him, and to thee, O thou Father of mercies, whose invaluable gift he is, and to thine Holy Spirit, through whose gracious influence, I would humbly hope, I may call thee my Father, and Jesus my Savior! Amen."

Chapter 28

02.15. How Much He Needs The Assistance Of The Spirit Of God

Chapter 15 The Reader Reminded How Much He Needs The Assistance Of The Spirit Of God

1. Forward resolutions may prove ineffectual.--2. Yet religion is not to be given up in despair, but Divine grace to be sought.--3. A general view of its reality and necessity, from reason.--4. And Scripture.--5. The spirit to be sought as the spirit of Christ.--6. And in that view the great strength of the soul.--7. The encouragement there is to hope for the communication of it.--8. A concluding exhortation to pray for it. And an humble address to God pursuant to that exhortation.

I HAVE now laid before you a plan of that temper and character which the Gospel requires, and which, if you are a true Christian, you will desire and pursue. Surely there is, in the very description of it, something which must powerfully strike every mind which has any taste for what is truly beautiful and excellent. And I question not, but you, my dear render, will feel some impression of it upon your heart. You will immediately form some lively purpose of endeavoring after it; and perhaps you may imagine, you shall certainly and quickly attain to it. You see how reasonable it is, and what desirable consequences necessarily attend it, and the aspect which it bears on your present enjoyment and your future happiness; and therefore are determined you will act accordingly. But give me leave seriously to remind you how many there have been, (would to God that several such instances had not happened within the compass of my own personal observation!) whose goodness hath been "like a morning cloud and the early dew," which soon "passeth away." (Hosea 6:4) There is not room indeed absolutely to apply the words of Joshua, taken in the most rigorous sense, when he said to Israel, that he might humble their too hasty and sanguine resolutions, "You cannot serve the Lord." (Joshua 24:12) But I will venture to say, you cannot easily do it. Alas! you know not the difficulties you have to break through; you know not the temptations which Satan will throw in your way; you know not how importunate your vain and sinful companions will be, to draw you back into the snare you may attempt to break; and, above all, you know not the subtle artifices which your own corruptions will practice upon you in order to recover their dominion over you. You think the views you now have of things will be lasting, because the principles and objects to which they refer are so: but perhaps tomorrow may undeceive you, or rather deceive you anew: tomorrow may present some trifle in a new dress, which shall amuse you into a forgetfulness of all this. Nay, perhaps before you lie down on your bed, the impressions you now feel may wear off. The corrupt desires of your own heart, now perhaps a little charmed down, and lying as if they were dead, may spring up again with new violence, as if they had slept only to recruit their vigor; and if you are not supported by a better strength than your own, this struggle for liberty will only make your future chains the heavier, the more shameful, and the more fatal.

2. What then is to be done? Is the convinced sinner to lie down in despair? to say, "I am a helpless captive, and by exerting myself with violence, may break my limbs sooner than my bonds, and increase the evil I would remove?" God forbid! You cannot, I am persuaded, be so little acquainted with Christianity, as not to know "that the doctrine of divine assistance bears a very considerable part in it." You have often, I doubt not, read of "the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus, as

making us free from the law of sin and death," (Romans 8:2) and have been told, "that through the Spirit we mortify the deeds of the body." (Romans 8:13) You have read of "doing all things through Christ, who strengtheneth us," (Php 4:15) whose grace "is sufficient for us," and whose "strength is made perfect in weakness." (2 Corinthians 12:9) Permit me, therefore, flow to call your attention to this, as a truth of the clearest evidence, and of the utmost importance.

3. Reason, indeed, as well as the whole tenor of Scripture, agrees with this.*.' The whole created world has a necessary dependence on God: from him ever, the knowledge of "natural things" is derived, (Psalms 94:10) and "skill in them is to be ascribed to him." (Exodus 31:3-6) Much more loudly does so great and excellent a work, as the new-forming the human mind, bespeak its divine Author. When you consider how various the branches of the Christian temper are, and how contrary many of them also are to that temper, which hath prevailed in your heart, and governed your life in time past, you must really see divine influences as necessary to produce and nourish them, as the influences of the sun and rain are to call up the variety of plants and flowers, and grains and fruits, by which the earth is adorned, and our life supported. You will be yet more sensible of this, if you reflect on the violent opposition which this happy work must expect to meet with; of which I shall presently warn you more largely, and which if you have not already experienced, it must be because you have but very lately begun to think of religion.

4. Accordingly, if you give yourself leave to consult Scripture on this head, (and if you would live like a Christian, you must be consulting it every day, and forming your notions and actions by it) you will see that the whole tenor of it teaches that dependence upon God which I am now recommending. You will particularly see, that the production of religion in the soul is matter of divine promise; that when it has been effected, Scripture ascribes it to a divine agency; and that the increase of grace and piety in the heart of those who are truly regenerate, is also spoken of as the word of God, who begins and "carries it on until the day of Jesus Christ." (Php 1:6)

5. Inconsequence of all these views, lay it down to yourself as a most certain principle, that no attempt in religion is to be made in your own strength. If you forget this, and God purposes finally to save you, he will humble you by repeated disappointments, till he teach you better. You will be ashamed of one scheme and effort, and of another, till you settle upon the true basis. He will also probably show you, not only in the general, that your strength is to be derived from heaven, but particularly that it is the office of the blessed Spirit to purify the heart, and to invigorate holy resolutions; and also that, in all these operations, he is to be considered as the Spirit of Christ, working under his direction, and as a vital communication from him under the character of the great Head of the Church, the grand Treasurer and Dispenser of these holy and beneficial influences. On which account it is called "the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ," (Php 1:19) who is "exalted at the right hand" of the Father, "to give repentance and remission of sins," (Acts 5:31) "in whose grace alone we can be strong," (2 Timothy 2:1) and "of whose fullness we receive even grace for grace." (John 1:16)

6. Resolve, therefore, strenuously for the service of God, and for the care of your soul: but "resolve modestly and humbly." Even "the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men utterly fall; but they who wait on the Lord" are the persons who "renew their strength." (Isaiah 40:30-31) When a soul is almost afraid to declare, in the presence of the Lord, that it will not do this or that, which has formerly offended him; when it is afraid absolutely to promise that it will perform this or that

duty with vigor and constancy, but only expresses its humble and earnest desire that it may by grace be enabled to avoid the one or pursue the other; then, so far as my observation and experience have reached, it is in the best way to learn the happy art of conquering temptation, and of discharging duty.

7. On the other hand, let not your dependence upon this Spirit, and your sense of your own weakness and insufficiency for any thing spiritually good, without his continual aid, discourage you from devoting yourself to God, and engaging in a religious life, considering "what abundant reason you have to hope that these gracious influences will be communicated to you." The light of nature, at the same time that it teaches the need we have of help from God in a virtuous course, may lead us to conclude that so benevolent a Being, who bestows on the most unworthy and careless part of mankind so many blessings, will take a peculiar pleasure in communicating to such as humbly ask them, those gracious assistances which may form their deathless souls into his own resemblance, and fit them for that happiness to which their rational nature is suited, and for which it was in its first constitution intended. The word of God will much more abundantly confirm such a hope. You there hear divine wisdom crying even to those who bad long trifled with her instructions, "Turn ye at my reproof, and I will pour out my Spirit upon you" (Proverbs 1:23) You hear the apostle saying, "Let us come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in every time of need." (Hebrews 4:16) Yea, and you there hear our Lord himself arguing in this sweet and convincing manner: "If ye, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give his Holy Spirit unto them that ask him?" (Luke 11:13) This gift and promise of the Spirit was given unto Christ when he ascended up on high, in trust for all his true disciples. God hath "shed it abroad abundantly upon us in him." (Titus 3:6) And I may add, that the very desire you feel after the farther communication of the Spirit, is the result of the fruits of it already given; so that you may, with peculiar propriety, interpret it as a special call "to open your mouth wide, that he may fill it." (Psalms 81:10) You thirst, and therefore you may cheerfully plead, that Jesus has "invited you to come unto him and drink;" with a promise not only that you shall drink if you come unto him, but also that "out of your belly shall flow," as it were, "rivers of living water," for the edification and refreshment of others. (John 7:37-38)

8. Go forth, therefore, with humble cheerfulness, to the prosecution of all the duties of the Christian life. Go and prosper "in the strength of the Lord, making mention of his righteousness, and of his only." (Psalms 71:16) And as a token of farther communication, may your heart be quickened to the most earnest desire after the blessings I have been now recommending to your pursuit!" May you be stirred up to pour out your soul before God in such holy breathings as these! and may they he your daily language in his gracious presence! An humble Supplication for the Influences of Divine Grace, to form and strengthen Religion in the Soul.

"Blessed God! I sincerely acknowledge before thee my own weakness and insufficiency for any thing that is spiritually good. I have experienced it a thousand times; and yet my foolish heart would again `trust itself,' (Proverbs 28:26) and form resolutions in its won strength. But let this be the first fruits of thy gracious influence upon it, to bring it to an humble distrust of itself, and to a repose on thee!

"Abundantly do I rejoice, O Lord, in the kind assurances which thou givest me of thy readiness to bestow libera1ly and richly so great a benefit. I do therefore, according to thy condescending invitation, come with boldness to the throne of grace, that I may find grace to help in every time of need. (Hebrews 4:16) I mean not, O Lord God, to turn thy grace into wantonness or perverseness (Jude 1:4) or to make my weakness an excuse for negligence and sloth. I confess that thou hast already given me more strength than I have used; and I charge it upon myself, and not on thee, that I have not long since received still more abundant supplies. I desire for the future to be found diligent in the use of all appointed means; in the neglect of which I well know that petitions like these would be a profane mockery, and might much more probably provoke thee to take away what I have, than prevail upon thee to impart more. But firmly resolving to exert myself to the utmost, I earnestly entreat the communication of thy grace, that I may be enabled to fulfil that resolution.

"Be surety, O Lord! unto thy servant for good. (Psalms 119:122) Be pleased to shed abroad thy sanctifying influences on my soul, to form me for every duty thou requirest. Implant, I beseech thee; every grace and virtue deep in my heart, and maintain the happy temper in the midst of those assaults from within and from without, to which I am continually liable while I am still in this world and carry about with me so many infirmities. Fill my breast, I beseech thee, with good affections towards thee, my God, and towards my fellow-creatures. Remind me always of thy presence, and may I remember that every secret sentiment of my soul is open to thee. May I therefore guard against the first risings of sin, and the first approaches to it; and that Satan may not find room for his evil suggestions, I earnestly beg that thou, Lord, wouldst fill my heart with thine Holy Spirit, and take up thy residence there. Dwell in me, and walk with me, (2 Corinthians 6:16) and let my body be the temple of the Holy Ghost. (1 Corinthians 6:19)

"May I be so joined to Christ Jesus my Lord, as to be one spirit with him, (1 Corinthians 6:17) and feel His invigorating influences continually bearing me on, superior to every temptation, and to every corruption; that while the youths shall faint and he weary, and the young men utterly fall; I may so wait upon the Lord as to renew my strength, (Isaiah 40:30-31) and may go on from one degree of faith, and love, and zeal, and holiness, to another, till I appear perfect before thee in Zion; (Psalms 84:7) to drink in immortal vigor and joy from thee, as the everlasting fountain of both, through Jesus Christ my Lord, in whom I have righteousness and strength, (Isaiah 45:24) and to whom I desire ever to ascribe the praise of all my improvements in both. Amen."

02.16. The Christian Convert Warned Of Discouragments

Chapter 16 The Christian Convert Warned Of Those Discouragements Which He Must Expect

1. Christ has instructed his disciples to expect opposition and difficulties in the way to heaven.--2. Therefore a more particular view of them is taken, as arising-from the remainder of indwelling sin.--3. From the world, and especially from former sinful companions.--4. From the temptations and suggest ions of Satan.--5, 6. The Christian is animated and encouraged, by various considerations, to oppose them; particularly by the presence of God; the aids of Christ; the example of others, who, though feeble, have conquered; and the crown of glory to be expected.--7. Therefore, though apostacy be infinitely fatal, the Christian may press on cheerfully. Accordingly the soul, alarmed by these view; is represented as committing itself to God, in the prayer which concludes the chapter.

1. WITH the utmost propriety has our Divine Master required us "to strive to enter in at the strait gate," (Luke 13:23) thereby intimating, not only that the passage is narrow, but that it is beset with enemies; beset on the right hand and on the left with enemies cunning and formidable. And be assured, O reader! that whatever your circumstances in life are, you must meet and: encounter them. It will therefore be your prudence to survey them attentively in your own reflections, that you may see what you are to expect; and may consider in what armor it is necessary you shall be clothed, and with what weapons you must be furnished to manage the combat. You have often heard them marshalled, as it were, under three great leaders, the flesh, the world, and the devil; and; according to this distribution, I would call you to consider the forces of each, as setting themselves in array against you. O that you may be excited "to take to yourself the whole armor of God," (Ephesians 6:13) and to "acquit yourself like a man," and a Christian! (1 Corinthians 16:13)

2. Let your conscience answer, whether do you not carry about with you a corrupt and degenerate nature? You will, I doubt not, feel its effects. You will feel, in the language of the apostle, who speaks of it as the case of Christians themselves, "the flesh lusting against the spirit, so that you will not be able," in all instances, "to do the things that you would." (Galatians 5:17) You brought irregular propensities into the world along with you; and you have so often indulged those sinful inclinations, that you have greatly increased their strength; and you will find, in consequence of it, that these habits cannot be broken through without great difficulty. You will, no doubt, often recollect the strong figures in which the prophet describes a case like yours; and you will own that it is justly represented by that "of an Ethiopian changing his skin, and the leopard his spots." (Jeremiah 13:23) It is indeed possible, that, at first, you may find such an edge and eagerness upon your spirits, as may lead you to imagine that all opposition will immediately fall before you. But, alas! I fear that in a little time these enemies, which seemed to be slain at your feet, will revive, and recover their weapons, and renew the assault in one form or another. And perhaps your most painful combats may be with such as you had thought most easy to be vanquished; and your greatest danger may arise from some of those enemies from whom you apprehended the least, particularly from pride and from indolence of spirit; from a secret alienation or heart from

God, and from an indisposition for conversing with him, through an immoderate attachment to "things seen and temporal," which may be oftentimes exceedingly dangerous to your salvation, though perhaps they be not absolutely and universally prohibited. In a thousand of these instances you must learn to deny yourself, or you "cannot be Christ's disciple." (Matthew 16:24)

3. You must also lay your account to find great difficulties from the world, from its manners, customs, and examples. The things of the world will hinder you one way, and the men of the world another. Perhaps you may meet with much less assistance in religion than you are now ready to expect from good men. The present generation of them is generally so cautious to avoid every thing that looks like ostentation, and there seems something so insupportably dreadful in the charge of enthusiasm, that you will find most of your Christian brethren studying to conceal their virtue and their piety, much more than others study to conceal their vices and their profaneness. But while, unless your situation be singularly happy, you meet with very little aid one way, you will, no doubt, find great opposition another. The enemies of religion will be bold and active in their assaults, while many any or its friends seem unconcerned; and one sinner will probably exert himself more to corrupt you, than ten Christians to secure and save you. They who have been once your companions in sin, will try a thousand artful methods to allure you back again to their forsaken society: some of them perhaps with an appearance of tender fondness, and many more by the almost irresistible art of ridicule: that boasted test of right and wrong, as it has been wantonly called, will be tried upon you, perhaps without any regard to decency, or even to common humanity. You will be derided and insulted. by those whose esteem-and affection you naturally desire; and may find much more proprietary than you imagine, in that expression of the apostle, "the trial of cruel mockings," (Heb. 9:36) which some fear more than either sword or flames. This persecution of the tongue you must expect to go through, and perhaps may be branded as a lunatic, for no other cause than that you now begin to exercise your reason to purpose, and will not join with those that are destroying their own souls in their wild career of folly and madness.

4. And it is not at all improbable, that in the meantime Satan may be doing his utmost to discourage and distress you. He will, no doubt, raise in your imagination the most tempting idea of the gratifications, the indulgences, and the companions you are obliged to forsake; and give you the most discouraging and terrifying view of the difficulties, severities, and dangers, which are, as he will persuade you, inseparable from religion. He will not fail to represent God himself, the fountain of goodness and happiness, as a hard Master, whom it is impossible to please. He will perhaps fill you with the most distressful fears, and with cruel and insolent malice, glory over you as his slave, when he knows you are the Lord's freeman. At one time he will study, by his vile suggestions, to interrupt you in your duties, as if they gave him an additional power over you. At another time he will endeavor to weary you of your devotion, by influencing you to prolong it to an immoderate and tedious length, lest his power should be exerted upon you when it ceases. In short, this practiced deceiver has artifices which it would require whole volumes to display, with particular cautions against each. And he will follow you with malicious arts and pursuits to the very end of your pilgrimage, and will leave no method unattempted which may be likely to weaken your hands and to sadden your heart, that if through the gracious interposition of God, he cannot prevent your final happiness, he may at least impair your peace and your usefulness as you are passing to it.

5. This is what the people of God feel, and what you will feel in some degree or other, if you have your lot and portion among them. But, after all, be not discouraged: Christ is the "Captain of your salvation." (Hebrews 2:10) It is delightful to consider him under this view. When we take a survey of these host of enemies, we may lift up our head amidst them all, and say, "More and greater is he that is with us, than all those that are against us." (2 Kings 6:16) "Trust in the Lord, and you will he like Mount Zion, which cannot be removed, but abideth for ever." (Psalms 125:1) When your enemies press upon you, remember you are to "fight in the presence of God." (Zechariah 10:5) Endeavor, therefore, to act a gallant and a resolute part; endeavor to "resist them steadfast in the faith." (1 Peter 5:9) Remember, "He can give power to the faint, and increase strength to them that have no might." (Isaiah 40:29) He hath done it in ten thousand instances already, and he will do it in ten thousand more. How many striplings have conquered their gigantic foes in all their most formidable armor, when they have gone forth against them; though but as it were "with a staff and a sling, in the name of the Lord God of Israel!" (1 Samuel 17:40-45) How many women and children have trodden down the force of the enemy, "and out of weakness have been made strong!" (Hebrews 11:34)

6. Amidst all the opposition of earth and hell, look upward and look forward, and you will feel your heart animated by the view. Your General is near; he is near to aid you, he is near to reward you. When you feel the temptation press the hardest, think of him who endured even the cross itself for your rescue. View the fortitude of your Divine Leader, and endeavor to march on in his steps. Hearken to his voice, for he proclaims it aloud, "Behold, I come quickly, and my reward is with me." (Revelation 22:12) "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life." (Revelation 2:10) And, oh! how bright will it shine! and how long will its lustre last! When the gems that adorn the crowns of monarchs, and pass (instructive thought!) from one royal head to another through succeeding centuries, are melted down in the last flame, it is "a crown of glory which fadeth not away." (1 Peter 5:4)

7. It is indeed true, "that such as turn aside to crooked paths" will be "led forth with the workers of iniquity," to that terrible execution which divine justice is preparing for them, (Psalms 125:5) and it would have been "better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after having known it, to turn aside from the holy commandment." (2 Peter 2:21) But I would, by divine grace, "hope better things of you." (Hebrews 6:9) And I make it my hearty prayer for you, my reader, that you may be "kept by the mighty power of God," kept, as in a garrison on all sides fortified in the securest manner, "through faith, unto salvation." The Soul, alarmed by a sense of these difficulties, committing itself to Divine Protection.

"Blessed God! it is to thine Almighty power that I flee. Behold me surrounded with difficulties and dangers, and stretch out thine omnipotent arm to save me, `O thou that savest by thy right hand them that put their trust in thee, from those that rise up against them.' (Psalms 17:7) this day do I solemnly put myself under thy protection: exert thy power in my favor, and permit me `to make the shadow of thy wings my refuge.' (Psalms 57:1) Let `thy grace be sufficient for me,' and `thy strength be made perfect in my weakness.' (2 Corinthians 12:9 0 I dare not say, `I will never forsake thee, I will never deny thee,' (Mark 14:31) but I hope! can truly say, O Lord, I would not do it; and according to my present apprehension and purpose, death would appear to me much less terrible, than in any willful and deliberate instance to offend thee. O root out those corruptions from my heart, which in an hour of pressing temptation might incline me to view things in a different

light, and so might betray me into the hands of the enemy! Strengthen my faith, O Lord, and encourage my hope! Inspire me with heroic resolution in opposing every thing that lies in my way to heaven; and let me `set my face like a flint' against all the assaults of earth and hell! (Isaiah 50:7) `If sinners entice me, let me not consent;' (Proverbs 1:10) if they insult me, let me not regard it; if they threaten me, let me not fear! Rather may a holy and ardent, yet prudent and well-governed zeal, take occasion from that malignity of heart which they discover, to attempt their conviction and reformation! At least, let me never be ashamed to plead thy cause against the most profane deriders of religion! `Make me to hear joy and gladness' in my soul, and I will endeavor to `teach transgressors thy ways, that sinners may be converted unto thee' (Psalms 51:8, Psalms 51:13) Yea, Lord, while my fears continue, though I should apprehend myself condemned, I am condemned so righteously for my own folly, that I would be thine advocate, though against myself.

Keep me, O Lord, now, and at all times! Never let me think, whatever age or station I attain, that I am strong enough to maintain the combat without thee! Nor let me imagine myself, even in this infancy of religion in my soul, So weak that thou canst not support me! Wherever thou leadest me, there let me follow; and whatever station thou appointest me, there let me labor: there let me maintain the holy war against all the enemies of my salvation, and rather fall in it, than basely abandon it.

"And thou, O glorious Redeemer; `the Captain of my salvation,' the great `Author and Finisher of my faith,' (Hebrews 12:2) when I am in danger of denying thee, as Peter did, look upon me with that mixture of majesty and tenderness, (Luke 22:61) which may either secure me from falling, or may speedily recover me to God and my duty again! and teach me to take occasion, even from my miscarriages, to humble myself more deeply for all that has been amiss, and to redouble my future diligence and caution! Amen."

02.17. The Christian Urged To An Express Act Of Self-Dedication

Chapter 17 The Christian Urged To An Express Act Of Self-Dedication To The Service Of God

1. The advantages of such a surrender are briefly suggested.-- 2, 3, 4. Advice for the manner of doing it; that it be deliberate, cheerful, entire, perpetual.--5. And that it be expressed with some affecting solemnity.--6. A written instrument to be signed and declared before God, at some season of extraordinary devotion, reposed. The chapter concludes with a specimen of such an instrument, together with an abstract of it, to be used with proper and requisite alterations.

1. AS I would hope, that, notwithstanding all the forms of opposition which do or may arise, yet in consideration of those noble supports and motives which have been mentioned in the two preceding chapters, you are heartily determined for the service of God, I would now urge you to make a solemn surrender of yourself unto it. Do not only form such a purpose in your heart, but expressly declare it in the divine presence. Such solemnity in the manner of doing it is certainly very reasonable in the nature of things; and surely it is highly expedient for binding to the Lord such a treacherous heart as we know our own to be. It will be pleasant to reflect upon it, as done at such and such a time, with such and such circumstances of place and method, which may serve to strike the memory and the conscience. The sense of the vows of God which are upon you, will strengthen you in an hour of temptation; and the recollection may also encourage your humble boldness and freedom in applying to him, under the character and relation of your Covenant God and Father, as future exigencies may require.

2. Do it therefore; but do it deliberately. Consider what it is that you are to do, and consider how reasonable it is that it should be done, and done cordially and cheerfully; "not by constraint, but willingly," (1 Peter 5:2) for in this sense, and in every other, "God loves a cheerful giver." (2 Corinthians 9:7) Now surely there is nothing we should do with greater cheerfulness or more cordial consent, than making such a surrender of ourselves to this Lord, to the God who created us, who brought us into this pleasant and well-furnished world, who supported us in our tender infancy, who guarded us in the thoughtless days of childhood and youth, who has hitherto continually helped, sustained, and preserved us. Nothing can be more reasonable than that we should acknowledge him as our rightful owner and our Sovereign Ruler; than that we should devote ourselves to him us our most gracious Benefactor, and seek him as our supreme felicity. Nothing can be more apparently equitable than that we, the product of his power, and the price of his Son’s blood, should be his, and his for ever. If you see the matter in its just view, it will be the grief of your soul that you have ever alienated yourself from the blessed God and his service: so far will you be from wishing to continue in that state of alienation another year, or another day, you will rejoice to bring back to him his revolted creature; and as you have in times past "yielded your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin," you will delight to "yield yourselves unto God as alive from the dead," and to employ "your members as instruments of righteousness unto God." (Romans 6:13)

3. The surrender will also be as entire as it is cheerful and immediate. All you are, and all you have, and all you can do, your time, your possessions, your influence over others, will be devoted to him, that for the future it may be employed entirety for him, and to his glory. You will desire to keep back nothing from him; but will seriously judge that you are then in the truest and noblest sense your own, when you are most entirely his. You are also, on this great occasion, to resign all that you have to the disposal of his wise and gracious providence; not only owning his power, but consenting to his undoubted right to do what he pleases with you, and all that he has given you; and declaring a hearty approbation of all that he has done, and of all that he may farther do.

4. Once more, let me remind you that this surrender must be perpetual. Yon must give yourself up to God in such a manner as never more to pretend to be your own; for the rights of God are, like his nature, eternal an immutable; and with regard to his rational creatures, are the same yesterday, today, and for ever.

5. I would farther advise and urge that this dedication may be made with all possible solemnity. Do it in express words. And perhaps it may be in many cases most expedient, as many pious divines have recommended, to do it in writing. Set your hand and seal to it, "that on such a day of such a month and year, and at such a place, on full consideration and serious reflection, you came to this happy resolution, that, whatsoever others might do, you would serve the Lord." (Joshua 24:15)

6. Such an instrument you may, if you please draw up for yourself; or, if you rather choose to have it drawn up to your hand, you may find something of this nature below, in which you may easily make such alterations as shall suit your circumstances, where there is any thing peculiar in them. But whatever you use, weigh it well, meditate attentively upon it, that you may "not be rash with your mouth to utter any thing before God." (Ecclesiastes 5:2) And when you determine to execute this instrument, let the transaction be attended with some more than ordinary; religious retirement. Make it, if you conveniently can, a day of secret fasting and prayer; and when your heart is prepared with a becoming awe of the Divine Majesty, with an humble confidence in his goodness, and an earnest desire of his favor, then present yourself on your knees before God, and read it over deliberately and solemnly; and when you have signed it, lay it by in some secure place, where you may review it whenever you please; and make it a rule with yourself to review it, if possible, at certain seasons of the year, that you may keep up the remembrance of it. And God grant that you may be enabled to keep it, and in the whole of your conversation to walk according to it. May it be an anchor to your soul in every temptation, and a cordial to it in every affliction. May the recollection or it embolden your addresses to the throne of grace now, and give additional strength to your departing spirit, in a consciousness that it is ascending to your covenant God and Father, and to that gracious Redeemer, whose power and faithfulness will securely "keep what you commit to him unto that day." (2 Timothy 1:12) An Example of Self-Dedication.

"Eternal and unchangeable Jehovah! thou great Creator of heaven and earth, and adorable Lord of angels and men, I desire, with the deepest humiliation and abasement of soul, to fall down at this time in thine awful presence, and earnestly pray that thou wilt penetrate ’my heart with a suitable sense of thine unutterable and inconceivable glories.

"Trembling may justly take bold upon me, (Job 20:6) when I, a sinful worm, presume to lift up my head to thee, presume to appear in thy majestic presence on such an occasion as this. Who am I, O Lord God! or what is my house? What is my nature or descent, my character and desert, that I

should thus address the King of kings, and Lord of lords! I blush and am confounded before thee. But, O Lord! great as is thy majesty, so also is thy mercy. If thou wilt hold converse with any of thy creatures, thy superlatively exalted nature must stoop, must stoop infinitely low. And I know, that in and through Jesus, the Son of thy love, thou condescendest to visit sinful mortals, and to allow their approach to thee, and their covenant intercourse with thee; nay, I know that the scheme and plan is thine own, and that thou hast graciously sent to propose it to us; as none untaught by thee would have been able to form it, or inclined to embrace it, even when actually proposed.

"To thee therefore do I now come, invited by the name of thy Son, and trusting in his righteousness and grace. Laying myself at thy feet, `with shame and confusion of face,' and `smiting, upon my breast,' I say, with the humble publican, `God be merciful to me a sinner!' (Luke 18:13) I acknowledge, O Lord! that I have been a great transgressor. `My sins have reached unto heaven,' (Revelation 18:5) and `my iniquities are lifted up unto the skies.' (Jeremiah 51:9) The irregular propensities of my corrupted and degenerated nature have, in ten thousand aggravated instances, `wrought to bring forth fruit unto death.' (Romans 8:5) And if thou shoudst be strict to mark my offences, I must be silent under a load of guilt, and immediately sink into destruction. But thou hast graciously healed me to return unto thee, though I have been a wandering sheep, a prodigal son, a backsliding child. (Jeremiah 3:22) Behold, therefore, O Lord! I come unto thee. I come, convinced not only of my sin, but of my folly. I come, from my very heart ashamed of myself, and with an acknowledgment, in the sincerity and humility of my soul, that `I have played the fool, and have erred exceedingly.' (1 Samuel 26:21) I am confounded myself at the remembrance of these things; but be thou `merciful to my unrighteousness, and do not remember against me my sins and my transgressions!' (Hebrews 8:12) Permit me, O Lord, to bring back unto thee those powers and faculties which I have ungratefully and sacrilegiously alienated from thy service; and receive, I beseech thee, thy poor revolted creature, who is now convinced of thy right to him, and desires nothing in the whole world: so much as to be thine!

"Blessed God! it is with the utmost solemnity that I make this surrender of myself unto thee. `Hear, O heavens! and give ear, O earth! I avouch the Lord this day to be my God, (Deuteronomy 26:17) and I avouch and declare myself this day to be one of his covenant children and people. Hear, O thou God of heaven! and record it in the book of thy remembrance,' (Matthew 3:16) that henceforth I am thine, entirely thine. I would not merely consecrate unto thee some of my powers, or some of my possessions, or give thee a certain proportion of my services, or all I am capable of for a limited time; but I would be wholly thine, and thine for ever. From this day I would solemnly renounce all the `former lords which have had dominion over me,' (Isaiah 26:13) every sin and every lust; and bid, in thy name, an eternal defiance to the powers of hell, which have most unjustly usurped the empire over my soul, and to all the corruptions which their fatal temptations have introduced into it. The whole frame of my nature, all the faculties of my mind, and all the members of my body, would I present before thee this day, `as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable unto God, which' I know to be `my most reasonable service.' (Romans 12:1) To thee I consecrate all my worldly possessions: in thy service I desire to spend all the remainder of my time upon earth, and beg thou wouldst instruct and influence me, so that, whether my abode here be longer or shorter, every year and month, every day and hour, may be used in such a manner as shall most effectually promote thine honor, and subserve the designs of thy wise and gracious providence. And I earnestly pray, that, whatever influence thou givest me over others, in any of the

superior relations of life in which I may stand, or in consequence of any peculiar regard which may be paid to me, thou wouldst give me the strength and courage to exert myself to the utmost for thy glory; resolving not only that I will myself do it, but that all others, so far as I can rationally and properly influence them, 'shall serve the Lord' (Joshua 24:15) In this course, O blessed God! would I steadily persevere to the very end of life; earnestly praying, that every future day of it may supply the deficiencies and correct the irregularities of the former; and that I may, by divine grace, be enabled not only to hold on in that happy way, but daily to grow more active in it!

"Nor do I only consecrate all that I am and have to thy service, but I also most humbly resign, and submit to thy holy and sovereign will, myself, and all that I can call mine. I leave, O Lord! to thy management and direction, all I possess, and all I wish; and set every enjoyment and every interest before thee, to be disposed of as thou pleasest. Continue or remove what thou hast given me; bestow or refuse what I imagine I want, as thou, Lord, shalt see good! And though I dare not say I will never repine, yet I hope I may venture to say, that I will labor not only to submit, but to acquiesce; not only to bear what thou doest in thy most afflictive dispensations, but to consent to it, and to praise thee for it; contentedly resolving, in all thou appointest for me, my will into thine, and looking on myself as nothing, and on thee, O God! as the great eternal ALL, whose word ought to determine every thing, and whose government ought to be the joy of the whole rational creation.

"Use me, O Lord! I beseech thee, as the instrument of thy glory; and honor me so far, as, either by doing or suffering what thou shalt appoint, to bring some revenue of praise to thee, and of benefit to the world in which I dwell! And may it please thee, from this day forward, to number me among thy peculiar people! that I may `no more be a stranger and foreigner, but a fellow-citizen with the saints, and of the household of God!' (Ephesians 2:19) Receive, O heavenly Father! thy returning prodigal! Wash me in the blood of thy dear Son; clothe me with his perfect righteousness; and sanctify me throughout by the power of thy Spirit! Destroy, I beseech thee, more and more the power of sin in my heart! Transform me more into thine own image, and fashion me to the resemblance of Jesus, whom henceforward I would acknowledge as my teacher and sacrifice, my intercessor and my Lord! Communicate to me, I beseech thee, all needful influences of thy purifying. thy cheering, and thy comforting Spirit! And lift up that 'light of thy countenance upon me,' which will put the sublimest joy and `gladness into my soul.' (Psalms 4:6-7)

"Dispose my affairs, O God! in a manner which may be most subservient to thy glory and my own truest happiness; and when I have done and borne thy will upon earth, call me from hence at what time and in what manner thou pleasest: only grant, that in my dying moments, and in the near prospect of eternity, I may remember these my engagements to thee, and may employ my latest breath in thy service. And do thou, Lord, when thou seest the agonies of dissolving nature upon me, remember this covenant too, even though I should then be incapable of recollecting it. Look down, O my heavenly Father! with a pitying eye, upon thy languishing, thy dying child; place thine everlasting arms underneath me for my support; put strength and confidence into my departing spirit, and receive it to the embraces of thine everlasting love. Welcome it to the abodes of them that sleep in Jesus, (1 Thessalonians 4:14) to wait with them that glorious day, when the last off thy promises to thy covenant people shall be fulfilled in their triumphant resurrection, and in that abundant entrance which shall be administered to them into that everlasting kingdom, (2 Peter 1:12) of which thou hast assured them by thy covenant, and in the hope of which I now lay hold of

it, desiring to live and to die, as. with mine hand on that hope.

"And when I am thus numbered among the dead, and all the interests of mortality are over with me for ever, if this solemn memorial should chance to fall into the hands of my surviving friends, may it be the means of making serious impression on their minds. May they read it, not only as my language, but as their own; and learn to fear the Lord my God, and with me, to put their trust under the shadow of his wing for time and for eternity! And may they also learn to adore with me that grace which inclines our hearts to enter into the covenant, and condescends to admit us into it when so inclined; ascribing, with me, and with all the nations of the redeemed, to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, that glory, honor, and praise, which is so justly due to each divine person for the part he bears " in this illustrious work. Amen.

N.B. For the sake of those who may think the preceding Form of Self-Dedication too long to be transcribed, as it is possible many will, I have, at the desire of a much esteemed friend, added the following Abridgment of it, which should, by all means, be attentively weighed in every clause before it is executed; and any word or phrase which may seem liable to exception, changed, that the whole heart may consent to it all.

"Eternal and ever-blessed God! I desire to present myself before thee, with the deepest humiliation and abasement of soul, sensible how unworthy such a sinful worm is to appear before the holy Majesty of heaven, the King of kings and Lord of lords, and especially on such an occasion as this, ever to dedicate myself, without reserve, to thee. But the scheme and plan is thine own. Thine infinite condescension hath offered it by thy Son, and thy grace hath inclined my heart to accept of it.

"I come, therefore, acknowledging myself to have been a great offender; smiting upon my breast, and saying with the humble publican, `God be merciful to me a sinner!' I come, invited by the name of thy Son, and wholly trusting in his perfect righteousness, entreating that for his sake thou wilt be merciful to my unrighteousness, and wilt no more remember my sins. Receive, I beseech thee, thy revolted creature, who is now convinced of thy right to him, and desires nothing so much as that he may be thine

"This day do I, with the utmost solemnity, surrender myself to thee. I renounce all former lords that have had dominion over me; and I consecrate to thee all that I am, and all that I have; the faculties of my mind, the members of my body, my worldly possessions, my time, and my influence over others; to be all used entirely for thy glory, and resolutely employed in obedience to thy commands, as long as thou continuest me in life; with an ardent desire and humble resolution to continue thine through all the endless ages of eternity; ever holding myself in an attentive posture to observe the first intimations of thy will, and ready to spring forward with zeal and joy to the immediate execution of it.

"To thy direction also I resign myself, and all I am and have, to be disposed of by thee in such a manner as thou shalt in thine infinite wisdom judge most subservient to the purposes of thy glory. To thee I leave the management of all events, and say without reserve, `Not my will, but thine be done,' rejoicing with a loyal heart in thine unlimited government, as what ought to be the delight of the whole rational creation.

"Use me, O Lord, I beseech thee, as an instrument of thy service! number me among thy peculiar people! Let me be washed in the blood of thy dear Son! Let me be clothed with his righteousness!. Let me be sanctified by his Spirit! Transform me more and more into his image! Impart to me through him, all needful influences of thy purifying, cheering, and comforting Spirit! And let my life be spent under those influences, and in the light of thy gracious countenance, as my Father and my God!

"And when the solemn hour of death comes, may I remember thy covenant, `well ordered in all things and sure, as all my salvation and all my desire,' (2 Samuel 23:5) though every hope and enjoyment is perishing; and do thou, O Lord! remember it too. Look down with pity, O my heavenly Father, on thy languishing, dying child! Embrace me in thine everlasting arms! Put strength and confidence into my departing spirit, and receive it to the abodes of them that sleep in Jesus, peacefully and joyfully to wait the accomplishment of thy great promise to all thy people, even that of a glorious resurrection, and of eternal happiness in thine heavenly presence!

"And if any surviving friend should, when I am in the dust, meet with this memorial of my solemn transactions with thee, may he make the engagement his own; and do thou graciously admit him to partake in all the blessings of thy covenant, through Jesus the great Mediator of it; to whom, with thee, O Father, and thy Holy Spirit, be ever-lasting praises ascribed, by all the millions who are thus saved by thee, and by all those other celestial spirits in whose work and blessedness thou shalt call them to share! Amen."

02.18. On Communion In The Lords Supper

Chapter 18 On Communion In The Lords Supper

1. If the reader has received the Ordinance of Baptism, and; as above recommended, dedicated himself to God.--2. He is urged to ratify that engagement at the Table of the Lord.-- 3. From a view of the ends for which that Ordinance was instituted.--4. Whence its usefulness is strongly inferred.--5. And from the Authority of Christ's Appointment; which is solemnly pressed on the conscience.--6. Objections from apprehensions of Unfitness.--7. Weakness of grace, &c. briefly answered.--8. At least, serious thoughtfulness on this subject is absolutely insisted upon.--9. The chapter is closed with a prayer for one who desires to attend, yet finds himself pressed with remaining doubts.

1. I hope this chapter will find you, by a most express consent, become one of God's covenant people, solemnly and most cordially devoted to his service; and it is my hearty prayer, that the engagements you have made on earth may be ratified in heaven. But for your farther instruction and edification; give me leave to remind you, that our Lord Jesus Christ hath appointed a peculiar manner of expressing our regard to him, by commemorating his dying love, which, though it does not forbid any other proper way of doing it, must by no means be set aside or neglected for any human methods, how prudent and expedient soever they may appear to us.

2. Our Lord has wisely ordained, that the advantages of society should be brought into religion; and as, by his command, professed Christians assemble together for other acts of public worship, so He has been pleased to institute a social ordinance, in which a whole assembly of them is to come to his table, and there to eat the same bread; and drink the same cup. And this they are to do, as a token of their affectionate remembrance of his dying love, of their solemn surrender of themselves to God, and of their sincere love to one another, and to all their fellow-Christians.

3. That these are indeed the great ends of the Lord's supper, I shall not now stay to argue at large. You need only read what the apostle Paul hath written in the tenth and eleventh chapters or his first epistle to the Corinthians, to convince you fully of this. He there expressly tells us, that our Lord commanded "the bread to be eaten," and "the wine to be drunk, in remembrance of him," (1 Corinthians 11:24-25) or as a commemoration or memorial of him; so that, as often as we attend this institution, "we show forth the Lord's death," which we are to do "even until he come," (1 Corinthians 11:26) And it is particularly asserted, that "the cup is the New Testament in his blood;" that is, it is a seal of that covenant which was ratified by his blood. Now, it is evident, that, in consequence of this, we are to approach it with a view to that covenant, desiring its blessings, and resolving, by divine grace, to comply with its demands. On the whole, therefore, as the apostle speaks, we have "communion in the body and the blood of Christ," (1 Corinthians 10:16) and partaking of his table and of his cup, we converse with Christ, and join ourselves to him as his people; as the Jews, by eating their sacrifices, conversed with Jehovah, and joined themselves to him. He farther reminds them, that, though many, they were "one bread and one body," being "all partakers of that one bread," (1 Corinthians 10:17) and being "all made to drink into one Spirit;" (1

Corinthians 12:13) that is, meeting together as if they were but one family, and joining in the commemoration of that one blood which was their common ransom and of the Lord Jesus, their common head. Now, it is evident, all these reasonings are equally applicable to Christians in succeeding ages. Permit me, therefore, by the authority of our divine Master, to press upon you: the observation or this precept.

4. And let me also urge it, from the apparent tendency which it has to promote your truest advantage. You are setting out in the Christian life; and I have reminded you at large of the opposition you must expect to meet in it. It is the love of Christ which must animate you to break through all. What then can be more desirable than to bear about with you a lively sense of it? and what can awaken that sense more than the contemplation of his death as there represented? Who can behold the bread broken, and the wine poured out, and not reflect how the body of the blessed Jesus was even torn in pieces by his sufferings, and his sacred blood poured forth like water on the ground? Who can think of the heart-rending agonies of the Son of God as the price of our redemption and salvation, and not feel his soul melted with tenderness, and inflamed with grateful affection? What an exalted view doth it give us of the blessings of the Gospel-covenant, when we consider it as established in the blood of God’s only-begotten Son! And when we make our approach to God as our heavenly Father, and give up ourselves to his service in this solemn manner, what an awful tendency has it to fix the conviction, that we are not our own, being bought with such a price! (1 Corinthians 6:19-20) What a tendency has it to guard us against every temptation, to those sins which we have so solemnly renounced, and to engage our fidelity to him to whom we have bound our souls as with an oath! Well may our hearts be knit together in mutual love, (Colossians 2:2) when we consider ourselves as "one in Christ:" (Galatians 3:28) his blood becomes the cement of the society, joins us in spirit, not only to each other, but "to all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours," (1 Corinthians 1:2) and we anticipate in pleasing hope that blessed day, when the assembly shall be complete, and we shall all "be for ever with the Lord." (1 Thessalonians 4:17) Well may these views engage us to deny ourselves, and to "take up our cross and follow our crucified Master." (Matthew 16:24) Well may they engage us to do our utmost, by prayer, and all other suitable endeavors, to serve his followers and his friends; to serve those whom he hath purchased with his blood, and who are to be his associates and ours, in the glories of a happy immortality.

5. It is also the express institution and command of our blessed Redeemer that the members of such societies should be tenderly solicitous for the spiritual welfare of each other: and that, on the whole, his churches may be kept pure and holy, that they should "withdraw themselves from every brother that walketh disorderly;" (2 Thessalonians 3:6) that they should "mark such as cause offences" or scandals among them, "contrary to the doctrine which they have learned, and avoid them;" (Romans 16:17) "that if any obey not the word of Christ by his apostles," they should "have no fellowship or communion with such, that they may be ashamed;" (2 Thessalonians 3:14) that they should "not eat with such as are notoriously irregular" in their-behavior, but, on the contrary, should "put away from among themselves such wicked persons," (1 Corinthians 5:11-13) It is evident, therefore, that the institution of such societies is greatly for the honor of Christianity, and for the advantage of its particular professors. And consequently, every consideration of obedience to our common Lord, and of prudent regard to our own benefit and that of our brethren, will require that those who love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity should enter into them, and assemble

among them, in these their most solemn and peculiar acts of communion, at his table.

6. I entreat you, therefore, and if I may presume to say it, in his name and by his authority, I charge it on your conscience, that this precept of our dying Lord go not, as it were, for nothing with you; but that, if you indeed love him, you keep this, as well as the rest of his commandments. I know you may be ready to form objections. I have elsewhere debated many of the chief of them at large, and I hope not without some good effect.* The great question is that which relates to your being prepared for a worthy attendance; and in conjunction with what has been said before, I think that may be brought to a very short issue. Have you, so far as you know your own heart, been sincere in that deliberate surrender of yourself to God, through Christ, which I recommended in the former chapter? If you have, whether it were with or without the particular form or manner of doing it there recommended, you have certainly taken hold of the covenant, and therefore should devote yourself to God, in obedience to all his commands. And there is not, and cannot be, any other view of the ordinance in which you can have any further objection to it. If you desire to remember Christ's death; if you desire to renew the dedication of yourself to God through him; if you would list yourself among his people; if you would love them, and do them good according to your ability, and, on the whole, would not allow yourself in the practice of anyone known sin, or in the omission of any one known duty, then I will venture confidently to say, not only that you will be welcome to the ordinance, but that it was instituted for such as you.

7. As for other objections, a few words may suffice by way of reply. The weakness of the religious principle in your soul, if it be really implanted there, is so far from being an argument against your seeking such a method to strengthen it, that it rather strongly enforces the necessity of doing it. The neglect of this solemnity, by so many that call themselves Christians, should rather engage you so much the more to distinguish your zeal for an institution in this respect so much slighted and injured. And as for the fears of aggravated guilt, in case of apostacy, do not indulge them. This may, by the divine blessing, be an effectual remedy against the evil you fear; and it is certain, that after what you must already have known and felt, before you could be brought into your present situation, (on the supposition I have now been making) there can be no room to think or a retreat; no room, even for the wretched hope of being less miserable than the generality of those that have perished. Your scheme, therefore, must be to make your salvation as sure, and to make it as glorious, as possible; and I know not any appointment of our blessed Redeemer which may have a more comfortable aspect upon that blessed end, than this which I flat recommending to you.

8. One thing I would at least insist upon, and I see not with what face it can be denied. I mean, that you should take this matter into serious consideration; that you should diligently inquire, "whether you have reason in your conscience to believe it is the will of God you should now approach to the ordinance or not;" and that you should continue your reflections, your inquiries, and your prayers, till you find farther encouragement to come, if that encouragement be hitherto wanting. For of this be assured, that a state in which you are on the whole unfit to approach this ordinance, is a state in which you are destitute of the necessary preparations for death and heaven; in which, therefore, if you would not allow yourselves to slumber on the brink or destruction, you ought not to rest so much as one single day. A Prayer for one who earnestly desires ins to approach the Table of the Lord, yet has some remaining doubts concerning his right to that solemn ordinance.

"BLESSED LORD! I adore thy wise and gracious appointments, for the edification of thy church in holiness and in love. I thank thee that thou hast commanded thy servants to form themselves into churches; and I adore my gracious Savior, who hath instituted, as with his dying breath, the holy solemnity of his Supper, to be through all ages a memorial of his dying love, and a bond of that union which it is his sovereign pleasure that his people should preserve. I hope thou, Lord, art witness to the sincerity with which I desire to give myself up to thee; and that I may call thee to record on my soul, that, if I now hesitate about this particular manner of doing it, it is not because I would allow myself to break any of thy commands, or to slight any of thy favors. I trust thou knowest that my present delay arises only from my uncertainty as to my duty, and a fear of profaning holy things by an unworthy approach to them. Yet surely, O Lord! if thou hast given me a reverence for thy command, a desire of communion with thee, and a willingness to devote myself wholly to thy service, I may regard it as a token for good, that thou art disposed to receive me, and that I am not wholly unqualified for an ordinance which I so highly honor and so earnestly desire. I therefore make it my humble request unto thee, O Lord! this day, that than wouldst graciously he pleased to instruct me in my duty, and to teach me the way which I should take `Examine me, O Lord! and prove me, try my reins and my heart!' (Psalms 26:2) Is there any secret sin, in the love and practice of which I would indulge? Is there any of thy precepts in the habitual breach of which I would allow myself? I trust I can appeal to thee as a witness, that there is not. Let me not, then, wrong my own soul, by a causeless and sinful absence from thy sacred table! But grant, O Lord! I beseech thee, that thy word, thy providence. and thy Spirit, may so concur as to `make my way plain before me!" (Proverbs 15:19) Scatter my remaining doubts. if thou seest that they have no just foundation! Fill me with more assured faith, with a more ardent love, and plead thine own cause with mine heart in such a manner as that I may not be able any longer to delay that approach, which, if I am thy servant indeed, is equally my duty and my privilege! In the mean time, grant that it may never be long out of my thoughts; but that I may give all diligence. If there be any remaining occasion of doubt, to remove it by a more affectionate concern to avoid whatever is displeasing to the eyes of thine holiness, and to practice the full extent of my duty. May the views of Christ crucified be so familiar to my mind; and may a sense of his dying love so powerfully constrain my soul, that my own growing experience may put it out of all question that I am one of those for whom he intended this feast of love!

"And even now, as joined to thy church in spirit and in love, though not in so express and intimate a bond as I could wish, would I heartily pray that thy blessing may be on all thy people; that thou wouldst `feed thine heritage, and lift them up for ever!' (Psalms 28:9) May every Christian church flourish in knowledge, in holiness, and in love! May all thy priests be clothed with salvation, that by their means thy chosen people may be made joyful. (Psalms 132:16) And may there be a glorious accession to thy churches every where, of those who may fly to them `as a cloud, and as doves to their windows.' (Isaiah 60:8) May thy table, O Lord! be `furnished with guests,' (Matthew 22:10) and may all that `love thy salvation say, Let the Lord be magnified, who hath pleasure in the prosperity of his servants.' (Psalms 35:27) And I earnestly pray, that all who profess `to have received Christ Jesus the Lord,' may be duly careful to `walk in him,' (Colossians 2:6) and that we may all be prepared for the general assembly of the first-born, and may join in that nobler and more immediate worship where all these types and shadows shall be laid aside; where even these memorials shall be no longer necessary; but a living, present Redeemer shall be the everlasting joy of those who here his absence have delighted to commemorate his death. Amen'

02.19. Continual Communion With God

Chapter 19 Some More Particular Directions For Maintaining Continual Communion With God

1. A letter to a pious friend on this subject introduced here.--2. General plan of directions.--3. For the beginning of the day.--4. Lifting up the heart to God at our first awakening.--5, 10. Setting ourselves to the secret devotions of the morning, with respect to which particular advice is given.--11. For the progress of the day.--12. Directions are given concerning seriousness in devotion.--13. Diligence in business.--14. Prudence in recreations.--15. Observations of Providence.--16. Watchfulness against temptations.--17. Dependence on divine influence.--18. Government of the thoughts when in solitude.--19. Management of Discourse in company.--20. For the conclusion of the day.--21. With the secret devotions of the evening.--22, 23. Directions for self-examination at large.--24. Lying down with a proper temper.--25. Conclusion of the letter.--26. And of the chapter. With a serious view of death, proper to be taken at the close of the day.

1. I would hope, that upon serious consideration, self-examination, and prayer, the reader has given himself up to God; and that his concern flow is to inquire, how he may act according to the vows of God which are upon him. Now, for his farther assistance here, besides the general view I have already given of the Christian temper and character, I will propose some more particular directions relating to maintaining that devout, spiritual, and heavenly character, which may, in the language of Scripture, be called "a daily walking with God, or being in his fear all the day long." (Proverbs 23:17) And I know not how I can express the idea and plan which I have formed of this, in a more clear and distinct manner than I did in a letter which I wrote many years ago [in 1727] to a young person of eminent piety, with whom I had then an intimate friendship; and who, to the great grief of all that knew him, died a few months after he received it Yet I hope he lived long enough to reduce the directions to practice, which I wish and pray that every reader may do, so far as they may properly suit his capacities and circumstances in life, considering it as if addressed to himself. I say, and desire it may be observed, that I wish my reader may act on these directions so far as they may properly suit his capacity and circumstances in life; for I would be far from laying down the following particulars as universal rules for all, or for any one person in the world, at all times. Let them be practiced by those that are able, and when they have leisure; and when you cannot reach them all, come as near the most important of them as you conveniently can. With this precaution I proceed to the letter, which I would hope, after this previous care to guard against the danger of mistaking it, will not discourage any, the weakest Christian. Let us humbly and cheerfully do what we can, and rejoice that we have so gracious a Father, who knows all our infirmities, and so compassionate a High Priest, to recommend to divine acceptance the feeblest efforts of sincere duty and love! My dear Friend,

Since you desire my thoughts in writing, and at large, on the subject of our late conversation, viz. "By what particular methods, in our daily conduct, devotion and usefulness may be most happily maintained and secured "--I set myself with cheerfulness to recollect and digest the hints which I then gave you; hoping it may be of some service to you in your most important interests; and may

also fix on my own mind a deeper sense of my obligations to govern my own life by the rules I offer to others. I esteem attempts of this kind among the pleasantest fruits, and the surest cements of friendship; and as I hope ours will last for ever, I am persuaded a mutual care to cherish sentiments of this kind will add everlasting endearments to it.

2. The directions you will expect from me on this occasion naturally divide themselves into three heads: How we are to regard God in the beginning; the progress; and the close of the day. I will open my heart freely to you with regard to each, and will leave you to judge how far these hints may suit your circumstances; aiming at least to keep between the extremes of a superstitions strictness in trifles, and an indolent remissness, which, if admitted in little things, may draw after it criminal neglects, and at length more criminal indulgences.

3. In the beginning of the day: It should certainly be our care to lift up our heads to God as soon as we wake, and while we are rising; and then, to set ourselves seriously and immediately to the secret devotions of the morning.

4. For the first of these it seems exceedingly natural. There are so many things that may suggest a great variety of pious reflections and ejaculations which are so obvious that one would think a serious mind could hardly miss them. The ease and cheerfulness of our minds on our first awaking; the refreshment we find from sleep; the security we have enjoyed in that defenceless state; the provision of warm and decent apparel; the cheerful light of the returning sun; or even (which is not unfit to mention to you) the contrivances of art, taught and furnished by the great Author of all our conveniences, to supply us with many useful hours of life in the absence of the sun; the hope of returning to the dear society of our friends; the prospect of spending another day in the service of God and the improvement of our own minds; and above all, the lively hope of a joyful resurrection to an eternal day of happiness and glory: any of these particulars, and many more which I do not mention, may furnish its with matter of pleasing reflection and cheerful praise while we are rising. And for our farther assistance, when we are alone at this time, it may not be improper to speak sometimes to ourselves, and sometimes to our heavenly Father, in the natural expressions of joy and thankfulness. Permit me, Sir, to add, that, if we find our hearts in such a frame at our first awaking, even that is just matter of praise, and the rather, as perhaps it is an answer to the prayer with which we lay down.

5. For the exercise of secret devotion in the morning, which I hope will generally be our first work, I cannot prescribe an exact method to another. You must, my dear friend, consult your own taste in some measure. The constituent pans of the service are, in the general, plain. Were I to propose a particular model for those who have half or three quarters of an hour at command, which, with prudent conduct, I suppose most may have, it should he this:

6. To begin the stated devotions of the day with a solemn act of praise, offered to God on our knees, and generally with a low, yet distinct voice; acknowledging the mercies we have been reflecting on while rising, never forgetting to mention Christ as the great foundation of all our enjoyments and our hopes, or to return thanks for the influences of the blessed Spirit which have led our beans to God, or are then engaging us to seek him. This, as well as other offices of devotion afterwards mentioned, must be done attentively and sincerely; for not to offer our praises heartily, is, in the sight of God, not to praise him at all. This address of praise may properly be concluded with an express renewal of our dedication to God, declaring our continued repeated

resolution of being devoted to him, and particularly of living to his glory the ensuing day.

7. It may be proper, after this, to take a prospect of the day before us, so far as we can probably foresee, in the general, where and how it may be spent; and seriously to reflect, "How shall I employ myself for God this day? What business is to be done, and in what order? What opportunities may I expect, either of doing or of receiving good? What temptations am I likely to be assaulted with, in any place, company, or circumstances, which may probably occur? In what instance have I lately failed? And how shall I be safest now?"

8. After this review it will be proper to offer up a short prayer, begging that God would quicken us to each of these foreseen duties; that he would fortify us against each of these apprehended dangers; that he would grant us success in such or such a business undertaken for his glory; and also that he would help us to discover and improve unforeseen opportunities to resist unexpected temptations, and to bear patiently, and religiously, any afflictions which may surprise us in the day on which we are entering.

9. I would advise you after this to read some portion of Scripture: not a great deal, nor the whole Bible in its course; but some select portions out of its most useful parts, perhaps ten or twelve verses, not troubling yourself much about the exact connection, or other critical niceties which may occur, though at other times I would recommend them to your inquiry, as you have ability and opportunity, but considering them merely in a devotional and practical view. Here take such instructions as readily present themselves to your thoughts, repeat them over to your own conscience, and charge your heart religiously to observe them, and act upon them, under a sense of the divine authority which attends them. And if you pray over the substance of this Scripture with your Bible open before you, it may impress your memory and your heart yet more deeply, and may form you to a copiousness and variety, both of thought and expression, in prayer.

10. It might be proper to close these devotions with a psalm or hymn; and I rejoice with you, that through the pious care of our sacred poets, we are provided with so rich a variety for the assistance of the closet and family on these occasions, as well as for the service of the sanctuary.

11. The most material directions which have occurred to me relating to the progress of the day, are these: That we be serious in the devotions of the day; that we be diligent in the business of it, that is, in the prosecution of our worldly callings; that we be temperate and prudent in the recreations of it; that we carefully mark the providences of the day; that we cautiously guard against the temptations of it; that we keep up a lively and humble dependence upon the divine influence, suitable to every emergency of it; that we govern our thoughts well in the solitude of the day, and our discourses well in the conversations of it. These, Sir, were the heads of a sermon which you have lately heard me preach, and to which I know you referred in that request which I am now endeavoring to answer. I will therefore touch upon the most material hints which fall under each of these particulars.

12. For seriousness in devotion, whether public or domestic, let us take a few moments before we enter upon such solemnities, to pause, and reflect on the perfections of the God we are addressing, on the importance of the business we are coming about, on the pleasure and advantage of a regular and devout attendance, and on the guilt and folly of an hypocritical formality. When engaged, let us maintain a strict watchfulness over our own spirits and check the

first wanderings of thought. And when the duty is over, let us immediately reflect on the manner in which it has been performed, and ask our own consciences whether we have reason to conclude that we are accepted of God in it? For there is a certain manner of going through these offices, which our own hearts will immediately tell us "it is impossible for God to approve;" and if we have inadvertently fallen into it, we ought to be deeply humbled before God for it, lest "our very prayer become sin." (Psalms 109:7)

13. As for the hours of worldly business, whether it be that of the hands, or the labor of a learned life not immediately relating to religious matters, let us set to the prosecution of it with a sense of God's authority, and with a regard to his glory. Let us avoid a dreaming, sluggish, indolent temper, which nods over its work, and does only the business of one hour in two or three. In opposition to this, which runs through the life of some people, who yet think they are never idle, let us endeavor to dispatch as much as we well can in a little time; considering that it is but a little we have in all. And let us be habitually sensible of the need we have or the divine blessing to make our labors successful.

14. For seasons of diversion, let us take care that our recreations be well chosen; that they be pursued with a good intention, to fit us for a renewed application to the labors of life; and thus that they be only used in subordination to the honor of God, the great end of all our actions. Let us take heed, that our hearts be not estranged from God by them; and that they do not take up too much of our time; always remembering that the facilities of human nature, and the advantages of the Christian revelation, were not given us in vain; but that we are always to be in pursuit of some great and honorable end, and to indulge ourselves in amusements and diversions no farther than as they make a part in a scheme of rational and manly, benevolent and pious conduct.

15. For the observation of Providence, it will be useful to regard the divine interposition in our comforts and in our afflictions. In our comforts, whether more common or extraordinary: that we find ourselves in continued health; that we are furnished with food for support and pleasure; that we have so many agreeable ways of employing our time; that we have so many friends, and those so good, and so happy; that our business goes on so prosperously; that we go out and come in safely; and that we enjoy composure and cheerfulness of spirit, without which nothing else could be enjoyed: all these should be regarded as providential favors, and due acknowledgments should be made to God on these accounts, as we pass through such agreeable scenes. On the other hand, Providence is to be regarded in every disappointment, in every loss, in every pain, in every instance of unkindness from those who have professed friendship; and we should endeavor to argue ourselves into a patient submission, from this consideration, that the hand of God is always mediately, if not immediately, in each of them; and that, if they are not properly the work of Providence, they are at least under his direction. It is a reflection which we should particularly make with relation to those little cross accidents, (as we are ready to call them) and those infirmities and follies in the temper and conduct of our intimate friends, which may else be ready to discompose us. And it is the more necessary to guard our minds here, as wise and good men often lose the command of themselves on these comparatively little occasions; who, calling lip reason and religion to their assistance, stand the shock of great calamities with fortitude and resolution.

16. For watchfulness against temptations, it is necessary, when changing our place, or our employment, to reflect, "What snares attended me here?" And as this should be our habitual care, so we should especially guard against those snares which in the morning we foresaw. And when we are entering on those circumstances in which we expected the assault, we should reflect, especially if it be a matter of great importance, "Now the combat is going to begin: now God and the blessed angels are observing what constancy, what fortitude there is in my soul, and how far the divine authority, and the remembrance of my own prayers and resolutions, will weigh with me when it comes to a trial."

17. As for dependence on divine grace and influence, it must be universal; and since we always need it, we must never forget that necessity. A moment spent in humble fervent breathings after the communications of the divine assistance, may do more good than many minutes spent in mere reasonings; and though indeed this should not be neglected, since the light of reason is a kind of divine illumination, yet still it ought to be pursued in a due sense of our dependence on the Father of Lights, or where we think ourselves wisest, we may "become vain in our imaginations," (Romans 1:21-22) Let us therefore always call upon God, and say, for instance, when we are going to pray, "Lord, fix my attention! Awaken my holy affections, and pour out upon me the spirit of grace and of supplication!" (Zechariah 12:10) When taking up a Bible or any other good book, "Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law! (Psalms 119:18) Enlighten my understanding! Warm my heart! May my good resolutions be confirmed, and all the course of my life be in a proper manner regulated!" When addressing ourselves to any worldly business, "Lord, prosper thou the work of mine hands upon me, (Psalms 90:17) and give thy blessing to my honest endeavors!" When going to any kind of recreation, "Lord, bless my refreshments! Let me not forget thee in them, but still keep thy glory in view!" When coming into company, "Lord, may I do, and get good! Let no corrupt communication proceed out of my mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace to the hearers!" (Ephesians 4:29) When entering upon difficulties, "Lord, give me that wisdom which is profitable to direct!" (Ecclesiastes 10:10) "Teach me thy way, and lead me in a plain path!" (Psalms 27:11) When encountering with temptations, "Let thy strength, O gracious Redeemer, be made perfect in my weakness!" (2 Corinthians 12:9) These instances may illustrate the design of this direction, though they may be far from a complete enumeration of all the circumstances in which it is to be regarded.

18. For the government of our thoughts in solitude: let us accustom ourselves, on all occasions, to exercise a due command over our thoughts. Let us take care of those entanglements of passion, or those attachments to any present interest in view, which would deprive us of our power over them. Let us set before us some profitable subject of thought; such as the perfection of the blessed God, the love of Christ, the value of time, the certainty and importance of death and judgment, and the eternity of happiness or misery which is to follow. Let us also, at such intervals, reflect on what we have observed as to the state of our own souls, with regard to the advance or decline of religion; or on the last sermon we have heard or the last portion of Scripture we have read. You may perhaps, in this connection, Sir, recollect what I have, if I remember right, proposed to you in conversation; that it might be very useful to select some one verse of Scripture which we have met with in the morning, and to treasure it up in our mind, resolving to think of that at any time when we are at a loss for matter of pious reflection, in any intervals of leisure for entering upon it. This will often be as a spring from whence many profitable and delightful thoughts may

rise, which perhaps we did not before see in that connection and force. Or if it should not be so, yet I am persuaded it will be much better to repent the same scripture in our mind a hundred times in a day, with some pious ejaculation formed upon it, than to leave our thoughts at the mercy of al1 those various trifles which may otherwise intrude upon us, the variety of which will be far from making amends for their vanity.

19. Lastly, for the government of our discourse in company. We should take great care that no-thing may escape us which can expose us, or our Christian profession, to censure and reproach; nothing injurious to those that are absent, or those that are present; nothing malignant, nothing insincere, nothing which may corrupt, nothing which may provoke, nothing which may mislead those about us. Nor should we by any means be content that what we say is innocent: it should be our desire. that it may be edifying to ourselves and others. In this view, we should endeavor to have some subject of useful discourse always ready; in which we may be assisted by the hints given about furniture for thought, under the former head. We should watch for decent opportunities of introducing useful reflections; and if a pious friend attempt to do it, we should endeavor to second it immediately. When the conversation does not turn directly on religious subjects, we should endeavor to make it improving some other way; we should reflect on the character and capacities of our company, that we may lead them to talk of what they understand best; for their discourses on those subjects will probably be most pleasant to themselves, as well as most useful to us. And in pauses of discourse, it may not be improper to lift up a holy ejaculation to God, that his grace may assist us and our friends in our endeavors to do good to each other; that all we say or do may be worthy the character of reasonable creatures and of Christians.

20. The directions for a religious closing or the day which I shall here mention, are only two: let us see to it, that the secret duties of the evening be well performed; and let us lie down on our beds in a pious frame.

21. For the secret devotion in the evening, I would propose a method something different from that in the morning; but still, as then, with due allowances for circumstances which may make unthought-of alterations proper. I should advise to read a portion of Scripture in the first place, with suitable reflections and prayer, as above; then to read a hymn, or psalm; after this to enter on self-examination, to be followed by a longer prayer than that which followed reading, to be formed on this review of the day. In this address to the throne of grace, it will be highly proper to entreat that God would pardon the omissions and offences of the day; to praise him for mercies temporal and spiritual; to recommend ourselves to his protection for the ensuing night; with proper petitions for others, whom we ought to bear on our hearts before him; and particularly for those friends with whom we have conversed or corresponded in the preceding day. Many other concerns will occur, both in morning and evening prayer, which I have not here hinted at; but I did not apprehend that a full enumeration of these things belonged, by any means, to our present purpose.

22. Before I quit this head I must take the liberty to remind you, that self-examination is so important a duty, that it will be worth our while to spend a few words upon it. And this branch of it is so easy, that, when we have proper questions before us, any person of a common understanding may hope to go through it with advantage, under a divine blessing. I offer you therefore the following queries, which I hope you will, with such alterations as you may judge requisite, keep

near you for daily use. "Did I awake as with God this morning, and rise with a grateful sense of his goodness? How were the secret devotions of the morning performed? Did I offer my solemn praises, and renew the dedication of myself to God. with becoming attention and suitable affections? Did I lay my scheme for the business of the day wisely and well? How did I read the Scriptures, and any other devotional or practical piece which I afterwards found it convenient to review? Did it do my heart good, or was it a mere amusement? How have the other stated devotions of the day been attended, whether in the family or in public? Have I pursued the common business of the day with diligence and spirituality, doing every thing in season, and with all convenient dispatch, and as `unto the Lord?' (Colossians 3:23) What time have I lost this day, in the morning, or the forenoon, in the afternoon, or the evening?" for these divisions will assist your recollection "and what has occasioned the loss of it? With what temper, and under what regulations have the recreations of this day been pursued? Have I seen the hand of God in my mercies, health, cheerfulness, food, clothing, books, preservation in journies, success of business, conversation, and kindness of friends, &c.? Have I seen it in afflictions, and particularly in little things, which had a tendency to vex and disquiet me? Have I received my comforts thankfully, and my afflictions submissively? How have I guarded against the temptations of the day, particularly against this or that temptation which I foresaw in the morning? Have I maintained a dependence on divine influence? Have I `lived by faith on the Son of God,' (Galatians 2:20) and regarded Christ this day as my teacher and governor, my atonement and intercessor, my example and guardian, my strength and forerunner? Have I been looking forward to death and eternity this day, and considered myself as a probationer for heaven, and, through grace, an expectant of it? Have I governed my thoughts well, especially in such or such an interval of solitude? How was my subject of thought this day chosen, and how was it regarded? Have I governed my discourses well, in such and such company? Did I say nothing passionate, mischievous, slanderous, imprudent, impertinent? Has my heart this day been full of love to God, and to all mankind? and have I sought, and found, and improved, opportunities of doing and of getting good? With what attention and improvement have I read the Scripture this evening? How was self-examination performed the last night? and how have I profited this day by any remarks I then made on former negligences and mistakes? With what temper did I then lie down, and compose myself to sleep?"

22. You will easily see, Sir, that these questions are so adjusted as to be an abridgment of the most material advice I have given in this letter; and I believe I need not, to a person of your understanding, say any thing as to the usefulness of such inquiries. Conscience will answer them in a few minutes; but if you think them too large and particular, you may make still a shorter abstract for daily use, and reserve these, with such obvious alteration as will then be necessary for seasons of more than ordinary exactness in review, which I hope will occur at least once a week. Secret devotion being thus performed, before drowsiness render us unfit for it, the interval between that and our going to rest must be conducted by the rules mentioned under the next head. And nothing will farther remain to be considered here, but,

24. The sentiments with which we should lie down and compose ourselves to sleep. Now here it is obviously suitable to think of the divine goodness, in adding another day, and the mercies of it, to the former days and mercies of our life; to take notice of the indulgence of Providence in giving us commodious habitations and easy beds, and continuing to us such health of body that we can lay ourselves down at ease upon them, and such serenity of mind as leaves us any room to hope for

refreshing sleep; a refreshment to be sought, not merely as an indulgence to animal nature, but as whit our wise Creator, in order to keep us humble in the midst of so many infirmities, has been pleased to make necessary to our being able to pursue his service with renewed alacrity. Thus may our sleeping, as well as our waking hours, be in some sense devoted to God. And when we are just going to resign ourselves to the image of death, to what one of the ancients beautifully calls "its lesser mysteries," it is also evidently proper to think seriously of that end of all the living, and to renew those actings of repentance and faith which we should judge necessary if we were to wake no more here. You have once, Sir, seen a meditation of that kind in my hand: I will transcribe it for you in the postscript; and therefore shall add no more to this head, but here put a close to the directions you desired.

25. I am persuaded the most important of them have, in one form or another, been long regarded by you, and made governing maxims of your life. I shall greatly rejoice if the review of these, and the examination and trial of the rest, may be the means of leading you into more intimate communion with God, and so of rendering your life more pleasant and useful, and your eternity, whenever that is to commence, more glorious. There is not a human creature upon earth whom I should not delight to serve in these important interests; but I can faithfully assure you, that I am, with particular respect,

Dear Sir, Your very affectionate friend and servant.

26. This, reader, with the alteration of a very few words, is the letter I wrote to a worthy friend (now, I doubt not with, God) about sixteen years ago; and I can assuredly say, that the experience of each of these years has confirmed me in these views, and established me in the. persuasion, that one day thus spent is far preferable to whole years of sensuality, and the neglect of religion. I chose to insert the letter as it is, because I thought the freedom and particularity of the advice I had given in it would appear most natural in its original form; and as I propose to enforce these counsels in the next chapter, I shall conclude this with that meditation which I promised my friend as a postscript, and which I could wish you to make so familiar to yourself as that you may be able to recollect the substance of it whenever you compose. yourself to sleep. A serious view of death, proper to be taken as we lie dawn on our beds.

"O my soul! look forward a little with serious-ness and attention, and learn wisdom by the consideration of thy latter end, (Deuteronomy 22:29) Another of thy mortal days is now numbered and finished; and as I have put off my clothes, and laid myself upon my bed for the repose of the night; so will the day of life quickly come to its period, so must the body itself be put off and laid to its repose in a bed of dust. There let it rest; for it will be no more regarded by me than the clothes which I have now laid aside. I have another far more important concern to attend. Think, O my soul! when death comes, thou art to enter upon the eternal world, and to be fixed either in heaven or in hell. All the schemes and cares, the hopes and fears, the pleasures and sorrows of life, will come to their period, and the world of spirits will open upon thee. And oh! how soon may it open! Perhaps before the returning sun bring on the light of another day. Tomorrow’s sun may not enlighten my eyes, but only shine round a senseless corpse which may lie in the place of this animated body. At least the death of many in the flower of their age, and many who were superior to me in capacity, piety, and the prospects of usefulness, may loudly warn me not to depend on a long life, and engage me rather to wonder that I am continued here so many years, than to be

surprised if I am speedily removed

"And now, O my soul! answer as in the sight of God, Art thou ready? Art thou ready? Is there no sin unforsaken, and so unrepented of to fill me with anguish in my departing moments, and to make me tremble on the brink of eternity? Dread to remain under the guilt of it, and this moment renew thy most earnest applications to the mercy of God, and the blood of a Redeemer, for deliverance from it.

"But if the great account be already adjusted, if thou hast cordially repented of thy numerous of-fences? if thou hast sincerely committed thyself, by faith, into the hands of the blessed Jesus, and hast not renounced thy covenant with him, by turning to the allowed practice of sin, then start not at the thought of a separation; it is not in the power of death to hurt a soul devoted to God, and united to the great Redeemer. It may take from me my worldly comforts, it may disconcert and break my schemes for service on earth; but, O my soul, diviner entertainments and nobler services `wait thee beyond the grave!' For ever blessed be the name of God and the love of Jesus, for these quieting, encouraging joyful views! I will now lay me down in peace, and sleep, (Psalms 4:8) free from the fears of what shall be the issue of this night, whether life or death be appointed for me. Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit, (Luke 23:46) for thou hast redeemed me, O God of truth! (Psalms 31:5) and therefore I can cheerfully refer it to thy choice, whether I shall wake in this world or another."

02.20. Spending Our Days As Is Represented In The Former Chapter

Chapter 20 Spending Our Days As Is Represented In The Former Chapter

1, 2. Christians fix their views too low, and indulge too indolent a disposition, which makes it more necessary to urge such a life as that under consideration.--3. It is therefore enforced, from its being apparently reasonable, considering ourselves as the creatures of God, and as redeemed by the blond of Christ.--4. From its evident tendency to conduce to our comfort in life.--5. From the influence it will have to promote our usefulness to others.--6. From its efficacy to make afflictions lighter.--7. From its happy aspect on death.--8. And on eternity.--9. Whereas not to desire improvement would argue a soul destitute of religion. A prayer suited to the state of a soul who longs to attain the life recommended above.

1. I have been assigning, in the preceding chapter, what, I fear, will seem to some of my readers so hard a task, that they will want courage to attempt it; and indeed it is a life in many respects so far above that of the generality of Christians, that I am not without apprehensions that many, who deserve the name, may think the directions, after all the precautions with which I have proposed them, are carried to an unnecessary degree of nicety and strictness. But I am persuaded, much of the credit and comfort of Christianity is lost, in consequence of its professors fixing their aims too low, and not conceiving of their high and holy calling in so elevated and sublime a view as the nature of religion would require, and the word of God would direct. I am fully convinced, that the expressions of' "walking with God," of "being in the fear of the Lord all the day long." (Proverbs 23:17) and, above all that of "loving the Lord our God with all our heart, and soul, and mind, and strength," (Mark 12:30) must require, if not all these circumstances, yet the substance of all that I have been recommending, so far as we have capacity, leisure, and opportunity; and I can not but think that many might command more of the latter, and perhaps improve their capacities too, if they would take a due care in the government of themselves; if they would give up vain and unnecessary diversions, and certain indulgences, which only suit to delight the lower part of our nature, and, to say the best of them, deprive us of pleasures much better than themselves, if they do not plunge us into guilt. Many of these rules would appear easily practicable, if men would learn to know the value of time, and particularly to redeem it from unnecessary sleep, which wastes many golden hours of the day: hours in which many of God’s servants are delighting themselves in him, and drinking in full draughts of the water of life; while these their brethren are slumbering upon their beds, and lost in vain dreams, as far below the common entertainments of a rational creature as the pleasures of the sublimest devotion are above them.

2. I know likewise, that the mind is very fickle and inconstant and that it is a hard thing to preserve such a government and authority over our thoughts as would be very desirable, and as the plan I have laid down will require. But so much of the honor of God, and so much of our true happiness depends upon it, that I beg you will give me a patient and attentive hearing while I am pleading with you, and that you will seriously examine the arguments, and then judge, whether a care and conduct like that which I have advised be not in itself reasonable, and whether it will not be highly

conducive to your comfort and usefulness in life, your peace in death, and the advancement and increase of your eternal glory.

3. Let conscience say, whether such a life as I have described above be not in itself highly reasonable. Look over the substance of it again, anti bring it under a close examination; for I am very apprehensive that some weak objections may rise against the whole, which may in their consequence affect particulars, against which no reasonable man would presume to make any objection at all. Recollect, O Christian! carry it with you in your memory and your heart, while you are pursuing this review, that you are the creature of God; that you are purchased with the blood of Jesus; and then say whether these relations in which you stand do not demand all that application and resolution which I would engage you to. Suppose all the counsels I have given you reduced into practice; suppose every day begun and concluded with such devout breathings after God, and such holy retirements for morning and evening converse with him and with your own heart; suppose a daily care, in contriving how your time may be managed, and in reflecting how it has been employed; suppose this regard to God, this sense of his presence, and zeal for his glory, to run through your acts of worship, your hours of business and recreation; suppose this attention to Providence, this guard against temptation, this dependence upon divine influence, this government of the thoughts in solitude, and of the discourse in company; nay, I will add farther, suppose every particular direction given to be pursued, excepting when particular cases occur, with respect to which you shall be able in conscience to say, "I wave it not from indolence and carelessness, but because I think it will be just now more pleasing to God to be doing something else," which may often happen in human life, where general rules are best concerted: suppose, I say, all this to be done, not for a day or a week, but through the remainder of life, whether longer or shorter; and suppose this to be reviewed at the close of life, in the full exercise of your rational faculties; will there be reason to say in the reflection, "I have taken too much pains in religion; the Author of my being did not deserve all this from me; less diligence, less fidelity, less zeal than this, might have been an equivalent for the blood which was shed for my redemption. A part of my heart, a part of my time, a part of my labors, might have sufficed for him, who hath given me all my powers; for him who hath delivered me from that destruction which would have made them my everlasting torment; for him who is raising me to the regions of a blissful immortality." Can you with any face say this? If you cannot, then surely your conscience bears witness, that all I have recommended, under the limitations above, is reasonable; that duty and gratitude require it; and consequently, that, by every allowed failure in it, you bring guilt upon your own soul, you offend God, and act unworthy of your Christian profession.

4. I entreat you farther to consider whether such a conduct as I have now been recommending, would not conduce much to your comfort and usefulness in life. Reflect seriously what is true happiness! Does it consist in distance from God, or in nearness to him? Surely you cannot be a Christian, surely you cannot be a rational man, if you doubt whether communion with the great Father of our spirits be a pleasure and felicity; and if it be, then surely they enjoy most of it who keep him most constantly in view. You cannot but know, in your own conscience, that it is this which makes the happiness of heaven; and therefore the more of it any man enjoys upon earth, the more of heaven comes down into his soul. If you have made any trial of religion, though it be but a few months or weeks since you first became acquainted with it, you must be some judge, from your own experience, which have been the most pleasant days of your life. Have they not

been those in which you have acted most upon these principles? those in which you have most steadily and resolutely carried them through every hour of time, and every circumstance of life? The check which you must, in many instances, give to your own inclinations, might seem disagreeable; but it would surely be overbalanced, in a most happy manner, by the satisfaction you would find in a consciousness of self-government; in having such a command of your thoughts, affections, and actions, as is much more glorious than any authority over others can be.

5. I would also entreat you to consider the influence which such a conduct as this might have upon the happiness of others. And it is easy to be seen that it must be very great; as you would find your heart always disposed to watch every opportunity of doing good, and to seize it with eagerness and delight. It would engage you to make it the study and business of your life, to order things in such a manner that the end of one kind and useful action might be the beginning of another; in which you would go on as naturally as the inferior animals do in those productions and actions by which mankind are relieved or enriched; or as the earth bears her successive crops of different vegetable supplies. And though mankind be, in this corrupt state, so unhappily inclined to imitate evil examples rather than good, yet it may be expected, that while "your light shines before men," some, "seeing your good works," will endeavor to transcribe them in their own lives, and so to "glorify your Father which is in heaven." (Matthew 5:16) The charm of such beautiful models would surely impress some, and incline them at least to attempt an imitation; and every attempt would dispose to another. And thus, through the divine goodness, you might be entitled to a share in the praise, and the reward, not only of the good you had immediately done yourself; but likewise of that which you had engaged others to do. And no eye, but that of the all-searching God, can see into what distant times or places the blessed consequences may reach. In every instance in which these consequences appear, it will put a generous and sublime joy into your heart which no worldly prosperity could afford, and which would be the liveliest emblem of that high delight which the blessed God feels in seeing and making his creatures happy.

6. It is true indeed, that amidst all these pious and benevolent cares, afflictions may come, and in some measure interrupt you in the midst of your projected schemes. But surely these afflictions will be much lighter, when your heart is gladdened with the peaceful and joyful reflections of your own mind, and with so honorable a testimony of conscience before God and man. Delightful will it be to go back to past scenes in your pleasing review, and to think that you have not only been sincerely humbling yourself for those past offences which afflictions may bring to your remembrance; but that you have given substantial proofs of the sincerity of that humiliation, by a real reformation of what has been amiss, and by adding with strenuous and vigorous resolution on the contrary principle. And while converse with God, and doing good to men, are made the great business and pleasure of life, you will find a thousand opportunities of enjoyment, even in the midst of these afflictions, which would render you so incapable of relishing the pleasures of sense, that the very mention of them might, in those circumstances, seem an insult and a reproach.

7. At length death will come, that solemn and important hour, which has been passed through by so many thousands who have in the main lived such a life, and by so many millions who have neglected it. And let conscience say, if there was ever one of all these millions who had any reason to rejoice in that neglect; or any one, among the most strict and exemplary Christians, who then lamented that his heart and life had been too zealously devoted to God. Let conscience say, whether they have wished to have a part of that time, which they have thus employed, given back

to them again, that they might be more conformed to this world; that they might plunge themselves deeper into its amusements, or pursue its honors, its possessions, or its pleasures, with greater eagerness than they had done. If you were yourself dying, and a dear friend or child stood near you, and this book and the preceding chapter should chance to come into your thoughts, would you caution that friend or child against conducting himself by such rules as I have advanced? The question may perhaps seem unnecessary, where the answer is so plain and certain. Well, then, let me beseech you to learn how you should live, by reflecting how you would die, and what course you would wish to look back upon, when you are just quitting this world and entering upon another. Think seriously; what if death should surprise you on a sudden, and you should be called into eternity at an hour's or a minute's warning, would you not wish that your last day should have been thus begun; and the course of it, if it were a day of health and activity, should have been thus managed? Wou1d you not wish that your Lord should find you engaged in such thoughts and such pursuits? Would not the passage, the flight from earth to heaven, be most easy, most pleasant, in this view and connection? And, on the other hand, if death should make more gradual approaches. would not the remembrance of such a pious, holy, humble, diligent, and useful life, make a dying bed much softer and easier than it would otherwise be? You would not die, depending upon these things. God forbid that you should! Sensible of your many imperfections, you would, no doubt, desire to throw yourself at the feet of Christ, that you might appear before God, "adorned with his righteousness, and washed from your sins in his blood." You would also, with your dying breath, ascribe to the riches of his grace every good disposition you had found in your heart, and every worthy action you had been enabled to perform. But would it not give you a delight, worthy of being purchased with ten thousand worlds, to reflect that his "grace, bestowed on you, had not been in vain," (1 Corinthians 15:10) but that you had, from a humble principle of grateful love, glorified your heavenly Father on earth, and, in some degree. though not with the perfection you could desire, "finished the work which he had given you to do:" (John 17:4) that you had been living for many past years as on the borders of heaven, and endeavoring to form your heart and life to the temper and manners of its inhabitants?

8. And once more, let me entreat you to reflect on the view you will have of this matter when you come into a world of glory, if (which I hope will be the happy case) divine mercy conduct you thither. Will not your reception there be affected by your care, or negligence, in this holy course? Will it appear an indifferent thing in the eye or the blessed Jesus, who distributes the crowns, and allots the thrones there, whether you have been among the most zealous, or the most indolent of his servants? Surely you must wish to have "an entrance administered unto you abundantly into the kingdom of your Lord and Savior," (2 Peter 1:11) and what can more certainly conduce to it, than to he "always abounding in this work?" (1 Corinthians 15:58) You cannot think so meanly of that glorious state, as to imagine that you shall there look round about with a secret disappointment, and say in your heart that you over-valued the inheritance you hare received, and pursued it with too much earnestness. You will not surely complain that it had too many of your thoughts and cares; but, on the contrary, you have the highest reason to believe, that, if any thing were capable of exciting your indignation and your grief there, it would be, that, amidst so many motives and so many advantages, you exerted yourself no more in the prosecution of such a prize.

9. But I will not enlarge on so clear a case, and therefore conclude the chapter with reminding you, that to allow yourself deliberately to sit down satisfied with any imperfect attainments in religion,

and to look upon a more confirmed and improved state of it as what you do not desire, nay, as what you sincerely resolve that you will not pursue, is one of the most fatal signs we can well imagine that you are an entire stranger to the first principles of it. A Prayer suited to the State of a Soul who desires to attain the Life above recommended.

"Blessed God! I cannot contradict the force of these reasonings: O that I may feel more than ever the lasting effects of them! Thou art the great fountain of being and of happiness; and as from thee my being was derived, so from thee my happiness directly flows; and the nearer I am to thee, the purer and more delicious is the stream. `With thee is the fountain of life; in thy light may I see light!' (Psalms 36:9) The great object of my final hope is to dwell for ever with thee. Give me now some foretaste of that delight! Give me, I beseech thee, to experience `the blessedness of that man who feareth the Lord, and who delighteth greatly in his commandments,' (Psalms 112:1) and so form my heart by thy grace, that I may `be in the fear of the Lord all the day long.' (Proverbs 23:17)

"To thee may my awakening thoughts be directed: and with the first ray of light that visits my opening eyes, `lift up, O Lord, the light of thy countenance upon me!' (Psalms 4:6) When my faculties are roused from that broken state in which they lay, while buried, and, as it were, annihilated in sleep, may my first actions be consecrated to thee, O God, who givest me light; who givest me, as it were, every morning a new life and a new reason? Enable my heart to pour out itself before thee with a filial reverence, freedom, and endearment! And may I hearken to God, as I desire that he should hearken unto me! May thy word be read with attention and pleasure! May my soul be delivered into the mold of it, and may I `hide it in my heart that I may not sin against thee!' (Psalms 119:111) Animated by the great motives there suggested, may I every morning by renewing the dedication of myself to thee, through Jesus Christ thy beloved Son; and be deriving from him new supplies of that blessed Spirit of thine, whose influences are the life of my soul.

"And being thus prepared, do thou, Lord, lead me forth by the hand to all the duties and events of the day! In that calling, wherein thou hast been pleased to call me, may I abide with thee, (1 Corinthians 7:20) not `being slothful in business,' but `fervent in spirit, serving the Lord!' (Romans 12:11) May I know the value of time, and always improve it to the best advantage, in such duties as thou hast assigned me, how low soever they may seem, or how painful soever they may be! To thy glory, O Lord, may the labors of life be pursued; and to thy glory may the refreshments of it be sought! `Whether I eat, or drink, or whatever I do,' (1 Corinthians 10:31) may that end still be kept in view, and may it be attained! And may every refreshment, and release from business, prepare me to serve thee with greater vigor and resolution!

"May my eye be watchful to observe the descent of mercies from thee; and may a grateful sense of thy hand in them add a savor and relish to all! And when afflictions come, which in a world like this I would accustom myself to expect, may I remember that they come from thee; and may that fully reconcile me to them, while I firmly believe that the same love which gives us our daily bread, appoints us our daily crosses; which I would learn to take up, that I may follow my dear Lord, (Mark 8:34) with a temper like that which he manifested when ascending Calvary for my sake: saying, like him, `The cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?' (John 18:11) And when I `enter into temptation,' do thou, Lord, `deliver me from evil.' (Matthew 6:13) Make me sensible, I entreat thee, of my own weakness, that my heart may he raised to thee for present communications of proportionable strength. When I am engaged in the society of others, may it be

my desire and my care that I may do and receive as much good as possible; and may I continually answer the great purposes of life, by honoring thee; and diffusing useful knowledge and happiness in the world. And when I am alone, may I remember my `heavenly Father is with me;' and may I enjoy the pleasure of thy presence, and fed the animating power of it awakening my soul to an en earnest desire to think and act as in thy sight.

"Thus let my days be spent; and let them always be closed in thy fear, and under a sense of thy gracious presence. Meet me, O Lord, in my evening retirements. May I choose the most proper time for them; may I diligently attend to reading and prayer; and when I review my conduct, may I do it with an impartial eye. Let not self-love spread a false coloring over it; but may I judge myself; as one that expects to be judged of the Lord, and is very solicitous he may be approved by thee, who `searchest all hearts,' and `canst not forget any of my works.' (Amos 8:7) `Let my prayer come before thee as incense,' add `let the lifting up of my hands be as the morning and the evening sacrifice.' (Psalms 141:2) May I resign my powers to sleep in sweet calmness and serenity; conscious that I have lived to God in the day, and cheerfully persuaded that I am `accepted of thee in Christ Jesus my Lord,' and humbly `hoping in thy mercy through him,' whether my days on earth be prolonged; or `the residue of them be cut off in the midst.' (Isaiah 37:10) If death comes by a leisurely advance, may it find me thus employed; and if I am called on a sudden to exchange worlds, may my last days and hours be found to have been conducted by such maxims as these; that I may have a sweet and easy passage from the services of time to the infinitely nobler services of an immortal state. I ask it through him, who, while on earth, was the fairest pattern and example of every virtue and grace, and who now lives and reigns with thee, `able to save unto the uttermost:' (Hebrews 7:25) to him, having done all, I would fly, with humble acknowledgment that I am an `unprofitable servant;' (Luke 17:10) `to him be glory for ever and ever.' Amen "

02.21. A Caution Against Various Temptations

Chapter 21 A Caution Against Various Temptations

1. Dangers continue, after the first difficulties (considered Chap. xvi.) are broken through.--2. Particular cautions--against a sluggish and indolent temper.--3. Against the excessive love of sensitive pleasure.--4. Leading to a neglect of business and needless expense.--5. Against the snares of evil company.--6. Against excessive hurry of worldly business.--7. Which is enforced by the fatal consequences these have had in many cases.--8. The chapter concludes with an exhortation to die to this world, and to live to another. And the young Convert’s prayer for Divine protection against the dangers arising from these snares.

1. THIS representation I have been making of the pleasure and advantage of a life spent in devotedness to God and communion with him, as I have described it above, will, I hope, engage you, my dear reader, to form some purposes, and make some attempt to obtain it. But from considering the nature, and observing the course of things, it appears exceedingly evident, that, besides the general opposition which I formerly mentioned as like to attend you in your first entrance on a religious life, you will find even that, after you have resolutely broke through this, a variety of hindrances in any attempts or exemplary piety, and in the prosecution of a remarkably strict and edifying course, will present themselves daily in your path; and whereas you may, by a few resolute efforts, baffle some of the former sorts of enemies, these will be perpetually renewing their onsets, and a vigorous struggle must be continually maintained with them. Give me leave now, therefore, to be particular in my cautions against some of the chief of them. And here I would insist upon the difficulties which will arise from indolence and the love of pleasure from vain company, and worldly cares. Each of these may prove ensnaring to any, and especially to young persons, to whom I would now have some particular regard.

2. I entreat you, therefore, in the first place, that you will guard against a sluggish and indolent temper. The love of ease insinuates itself into the heart under a variety of plausible pretences, which are often allowed to pass, when temptations of a grosser nature would not be admitted. The misspending a little time seems to wise and good men a small matter; yet this sometimes runs them in into great inconveniencies. It often leads them to break in upon the seasons regularly allotted to devotion, and to defer business which might immediately be done, but being put off from day to day, is not done at all, and thereby the services of life are at least diminished, and the rewards of eternity diminished proportionably: not to insist upon it, that very frequently this lays the soul open to farther temptations, by which it falls, in consequence of being found unemployed. Be therefore suspicious of the first approaches of this kind. Remember that the soul of man is an active being, and that it must find its pleasure in activity. "Gird up," therefore, "the loins of your mind." (1 Peter 1:13) Endeavor to keep yourself always well employed. Be exact, if I may with humble reverence use the expression, in your appointments with God. Meet him early in the morning; and say not with the sluggard, when the proper hour of rising is come, "A little more sleep, a little more slumber." (Proverbs 6:10) That time which prudence shall advise you, give to

conversation and to other recreations. But when that is elapsed, and no unforeseen and important engagement prevents, rise and begone. Quit the company of your dearest friends, and retire to your proper business, whether it be in the field, the shop, or the closet. For by acting contrary to the secret dictates of your mind as to what it is just at the present moment best to do, though it be but in the manner of spending half an hour, some degree of guilt is contracted, and a habit is cherished, which may draw after it much worse consequences. Consider, therefore, what duties are to be dispatched, and in what seasons. Form your plan as prudently as you can, and pursue it resolutely; unless an unexpected incident arises, which leads you to conclude that duty calls you another way. Allowances for such unthought-of interruptions must be made; but if, in consequence of this, you are obliged to omit any thing of importance which you proposed behave done to-day, do it if possible to-morrow; and do not cut yourself out new work, till the former plan be dispatched; unless you really judge it, not merely more amusing, but more important. And always remember, that a servant of Christ should see to it, that he determine on these occasions as in his Master’s presence.

3. Guard also against an excessive love of sensitive and animal pleasure, as that which will be a great hindrance to you in that religious course which I have now been urging. You cannot but know that Christ has told us, "that a man must deny himself, and take up his cross daily," (Luke 9:23) if he desire to become his disciple. Christ, the Son of God, "the former and the heir of all things, pleased not himself," (Romans 15:3) but submitted to want, to difficulties, and hardships, in the way of duty, and some of them of the extremest kind and degree, for the glory of God and the salvation of men. In this way we are to follow him; and as we know not how soon we may be called, even to "resist unto blood, striving against sin," (Hebrews 12:4) it is certainly best to accustom ourselves to that discipline which we may possibly be called out to exercise, even in such rigorous heights. A soft and delicate life will give force to temptations, which might easily be subdued by one who has habituated himself to "endure hardships as a good soldier of Jesus Christ." (2 Timothy 2:3) It also produces an attachment to this world, and an unwillingness to leave it, which ill becomes those who are strangers and pilgrims on earth, and who expect so soon to be called away to that better country which they "profess to seek." (Hebrews 11:13, Hebrews 11:16) Add to this, that, what the world calls a life of pleasure, is necessarily a life of expense too, and may perhaps lead you, as it has many others, and especially many who have been setting out in the world, beyond the limits which Providence has assigned; and so, after a course of indulgence, may produce a proportionable want. And while in other cases it is true that pity should be shown to the poor, this is a poverty that is justly contemptible, because it is the effect of a man’s own folly; and when your "want thus comes upon you as an armed man," (Proverbs 6:11) you will not only find yourself striped of the capacity you might otherwise have secured for performing those works of charity which are so ornamental to a Christian profession, but probably will be under strong temptations to some low artifice or mean compliance, quite beneath the Christian character and that of an upright man. Many, who once made a high profession, after a series of such sorry and scandalous shifts, have fallen into the infamy of the worst kind of bankrupts; I mean such as have lavished away on themselves what was indeed the property of others, and so have injured, and perhaps ruined, the industrious, to feed a foolish, luxurious, or ostentatious humor, which, while indulged, was the shame of their own families, and when it can be indulged no longer, is their torment. This will be a terrible reproach to religion: such a reproach to it, that a good man would rather choose to live on bread and water, or indeed to die for want of them, than to occasion it

4. Guard, therefore, I beseech you, against any thing which might tend that way, especially by diligence in business, and by prudence and frugality in expense, which, by the Divine blessing, may have a very happy influence to make your affairs prosperous, your health vigorous, and your mind easy. But this cannot be attained without keeping a resolute watch over yourself, and strenuously refusing to comply with many proposals which indolence and sensuality will offer in very plausible forms, and for which it will plead, "that it asks but very little." Take heed, lest in this respect you imitate those fond parents, who, by indulging their children in every little thing they have a mind to, encourage them, by insensible degrees, to grow still more encroaching and imperious in their demands; as if they chose to be ruined with them, rather than to check them in what seems a trifle. Remember, and consider that excellent remark, sealed by the ruin of so many thousands: "He that despiseth small things, shall fall by little and litt1e."

5. In this view, give me leave also seriously and tenderly to caution you, my dear reader, against the snares of vain company. I speak not, as before, of that company which is openly licentious and profane. I hope there is something now in your temper and views, which would engage you to turn away from such with detestation and horror. But I beseech you to consider, that those companions may be very dangerous, who might at first give you but very little alarm: I mean those who, though not the declared enemies of religion, and professed followers of vice and disorder, yet nevertheless have no practical sense of divine things on their hearts, so far as can be judged by their conversation and behavior. You must often of necessity be with such persons; and Christianity not only allows, but requires, that you should, on all expedient occasions of intercourse with them, treat them with civility and respect; but choose not such for your most intimate friends, and do not contrive to spend most of your leisure moments among them. For such converse has a sensible tendency to alienate the soul from God, and to render it unfit for all spiritual communion with him. To convince you of this, do but reflect on your own experience, when you have been for many hours together among persons of such a character. Do you not find yourself more indisposed for devotional exercises? Do you not find your heart, by insensible degrees, more and more inclined to a conformity to this world, and to look with a secret disrelish on those objects and employments to which reason directs as the noblest and best? Observe the first symptoms, and guard against the snare in time: and for this purpose, endeavor to form friendships founded in piety, and supported by it. "Be a companion of them that fear God, and of them that keep his precepts." (Psalms 119:63) You well know, that in the sight of God "they are the excellent of the earth;" let them therefore "be all your delight." (Psalms 16:3) And that the peculiar benefit of their friendship may not be lost, endeavor to make the best of the hours you spend with them. The wisest of men has observed that when "counsel in the heart of a man is like deep waters," that is, when it lies low and concealed, `a man of understanding will draw it out.' (Proverbs 20:5)

5. Endeavor, therefore, on such occasions, so far as you can do it with decency and convenience, give the conversation a religious turn. And when serious and useful subjects are started in your presence, lay hold of them, and cultivate them; and for that purpose "let the word of Christ dwell richly in you," (Colossians 3:1) and be continually made "the man of your counsel." (Psalms 119:24)

6. If it be so, it will secure you not only from the snares of idleness and luxury, but from the contagion of every bad example. And it will also engage you to guard against those excessive hurries of worldly business, which would fill up all your time and thoughts, and thereby "choke the

good word" of God, and render it in a great measure, if not quite, unfruitful. (Matthew 13:22) Young people are generally of an enterprising disposition: having experienced comparatively little of the fatigue of business, and of the disappointments and incumbrances of life, they easily swallow them up and annihilate them in their imagination, and fancy that their spirit, their application, and address, will be able to encounter and, surmount every obstacle or hinderance. But the event proves it otherwise. Let me entreat you, therefore, to be cautious how you plunge yourself into a greater variety of business than you are capable of managing as you ought, that is, in consistency with the care of your soul and the service of God, which certainly ought not on any pretence to be neglected. It is true indeed, that a prudent regard to your worldly interest would require such a caution; as it is obvious to every careful observer, that multitudes are undone by grasping at more than they can conveniently manage. Hence it has frequently been seen, that, while they have seemed resolved to be rich, they have "pierced themselves through with many sorrows," (1 Timothy 6:10) have ruined their own families, and drawn down many others into desolation with them. Whereas, could they have been contented with moderate employments and moderate gains, they might have prospered in their business, and might, by sure degrees, under a divine blessing, have advanced to great and honorable increase. But if there were no danger at all to be apprehended on this bend, if you were as certain of becoming rich and great, as you are of perplexing and fatiguing yourself in the attempt, consider, I beseech you, how precarious these enjoyments are. Consider how often "a plentiful table becomes a snare, and that which should have been for a man’s welfare, becomes a trap." (Psalms 69:22) Forget not that short lesson, which is so comprehensive of the highest wisdom: "One thing is needful." (Luke 10:42) Be daily thinking, while the gay and the great things of life are glittering before your eyes, how soon death will come, and impoverish you at once: how soon it will strip you of all possessions but those which a naked soul can carry along with it into eternity, when it drops the body into the grave. ETERNITY! ETERNITY! ETERNITY! Carry the view of it about with you; if it be possible, through every hour of waking life; and be fully persuaded that you have no business, no interest in life, that is inconsistent with it; for whatsoever would be injurious in view of eternity. is not your business, is not your interest. You see indeed, that the generality of men act as if they thought the great thing which God requires of them, in order to secure his favor, was to get as much of the world as possible: at least as much us they can without any gross immorality, and without risking the loss of all. Such persons may tell others, and perhaps flatter themselves, that they only seek opportunities of greater usefulness. But in effect, if they mean any thing more by this than a capacity of usefulness, which, when they have it, they will not exert, they generally deceive themselves; and, one way or another, it is a vain pretence. In most instances men seek the world--either that they may hoard up riches for the mean and scandalous satisfaction of looking upon them while they are living, and of thinking, that, when they are dead, it will be said of them that they have left so many hundreds or thousands of pounds behind them; very probably, to ensnare their children, or their heirs, (for the vanity is not peculiar to those who have children of their own)--or else that they may lavish away their riches on their lusts, and drown themselves in a gulf of sensuality in which, if reason be not lost, religion is soon swallowed up, and with it all the noblest pleasures which can enter into the heart of man. In this view, the generality of rich people appear to me objects of much greater compassion than the poor: especially as, when both live (which is frequently the case) without any fear of God before their eyes, the rich abuse the greater variety and abundance of their favors, and therefore will probably feel, in that world of future ruin which awaits impenitent

sinners, a more exquisite sense of their misery.

7. And let me observe to you, my dear reader, lest you should think yourself secure from any such danger that we have great reason to apprehend there are many now in a very wretched state, who once thought seriously of religion, when they were first setting out, in lower circumstances of life; but they have since forsaken God for Mammon and are now priding themselves in those golden chains, which, in all probability. before it be long, will leave them to remain in those of darkness. When, therefore, an attachment to the world may be followed with such fatal consequences, "let not thine heart envy sinners," (Proverbs 23:17) and do not, out of a desire of gaining what they have, be guilty of such folly as to expose yourself to this double danger or failing in the attempt, or of being undone by the success of it. Contract your desires; endeavor to be easy and content with a little; and if Providence call you out to act in a larger sphere, submit to it in obedience to Providence, but number it among the trials of life, which it will require a larger proportion of grace to bear well. For be assured, that, as affairs and interests multiply, cares and duties will certainly increase, and probably disappointments and sorrows will increase in an equal proportion.

8. On the whole, learn, by divine grace, to die to the present world: to look upon it as a low state of being, which God never intended for the final and complete happiness, or the supreme care of any one of his children: a world, where something is indeed to be enjoyed, but chiefly from himself; where a great deal is to be borne with patience and resignation; and where some important duties are to be performed, and a course of discipline to be passed through, by which you are to be formed for a better state, to which, as a Christian, you are near, and to which God will call you, perhaps on a sudden, but undoubtedly, if you hold on your way, in the fittest time and the most convenient manner. Refer, therefore, all this to him. Let your hopes and fears, your expectations and desires, with regard to this world, be kept as low as possible; and all your thoughts be united, as much as may be, in this one centre: what is it that God would, in present have you to be: and what is that method of conduct by which you may most effectually please and glorify him. The Young Convert’s Prayer for Divine Protection against the Danger of these Snares.

"Blessed God! in the midst of ten thousand snares and dangers, which surround me from without and from within, permit me to look up unto thee with my humble entreaty, that thou wouldst `deliver me from them that rise up against me,’ (Psalms 59:1) and that `thine eyes may be upon me for good.’ (Jeremiah 24:6) When sloth and indolence are ready to seize me, awaken me from that idle dream, with lively and affectionate views of that invisible and eternal world to which I am tending! Remind me of what infinite importance it is, that I diligently improve those transient moments which thou hast allotted me as the time of my preparation for it.

"When sinners entice me, may I not consent! (Proverbs 1:10) May holy converse with God give me a disrelish for the converse of those who are strangers to thee, and who would separate my soul from thee! May I `honor them that fear the Lord,’ (Psalms 15:4) and walking with such wise and holy men, may I find I am daily advancing in wisdom and holiness! (Proverbs 13:20) Quicken me, O Lord! by their means; that by me thou mayest also quicken others! Make me the happy instrument of enkindling and animating the flame of divine love in their breasts; and may it catch from heart to heart, and grow every moment in its progress!

"Guard me, O Lord! from the love of sensual pleasure! May I seriously remember, `that to be carnally-minded is death!’ (Romans 8:6) May it please thee, therefore, to purify and refine my soul

by the influence of thine Holy Spirit, that I may always shun unlawful gratifications more solicitously than others pursue them; and that those indulgences of animal nature which thou hast allowed, and which the constitution of things renders necessary, may be soberly and moderately used! May I still remember the superior dignity of my spiritual and intelligent nature, and may the pleasures of the man and the Christian be sought as my noblest happiness! May my soul rise on the wings of holy contemplation to the regions of invisible glory; and may I be endeavoring to form myself, under the influences of divine grace, for the entertainments of those angelic spirits that live in thy presence in a happy incapacity of those gross delights by which spirits dwelling in flesh are so often ensnared, and in which they so often lose the memory of their high original, and of those noble hopes which alone are proportionable to it!

"Give me, O Lord! to know the station in which thou hast fixed me, and steadily to pursue the duties of it! But deliver me from those excessive cares of this world, which would so engross my time and my thoughts, that `the one thing needful' should be forgotten! May my desires after worldly possessions be moderated, by considering their uncertain and unsatisfying nature; and, while others are laying up treasures on earth, may I be `rich towards God!' (Luke 12:21) May I never be too busy to attend to those great affairs which lie between thee and my soul; never be so engrossed with the concerns of time, as to neglect the interests of eternity! May I pass through earth with my heart and hopes set upon heaven, and feel the attractive influence stronger and stronger as I approach still nearer and nearer to that desirable centre; till the happy moment come, when every earthly object shall disappear from my view, and the shining glories of the heavenly world shall fill my improved and strengthened sight, which shall then be cheered with that which would now overwhelm me! Amen."

02.22. The Case Of Spiritual Decay And Languor In Religion

Chapter 22 The Case Of Spiritual Decay And Languor In Religion

1. Declension in religion, and relapses into sin, with their sorrowful consequences, are in the general too probable.--2. The ease of declension and langour in religion described, negatively.--3. And positively.--4. As discovering itself by a failure in the duties of the closet.--5. By a neglect of social worship.--6. By want of love to our fellow Christians.--7. By an undue attachment to sensual pleasures or secular cares.--8. By prejudices against some important principles in religion.--9,10. A symptom peculiarly sad and dangerous.--11. Directions for recovery.--12. Immediately to be pursued. A prayer for one under spiritual decays.

1. IF I am so happy as to prevail upon you in the exhortations and cautions I have given, you will probably go on with pleasure and comfort in religion, and your path will generally be "like the morning light, which shineth more and more until the perfect day." (Proverbs 18:1) Yet I dare not flatter myself with an expectation of such success as shall carry you above those varieties of temper, conduct, and state, which have been more or less the complaint of the best of men. Much do I fear, that, how warmly soever your heart may now be impressed with the representation I have been making, though the great objects of your faith and hope continue unchangeable, your temper towards them will be changed. Much do I fear that you will feel your mind languish and tire in the good ways of God; nay, that you may be prevailed upon to take some step out of them, and may thus fall a prey to some of those temptations which you now look upon with a holy scorn. The probable consequence of this will be, that God will hide his face from you; that he will stretch forth his afflicting hand against you, and that you still will see your sorrowful moments, how cheerfully soever you now "be rejoicing in the Lord, and joying in the God of your salvation." (Habakkuk 3:18) I hope, therefore, it may be of some service, if this too probable event should happen, to consider these cases a little more particularly; and I heartily pray, that God would make what I shall say concerning them the means of restoring, comforting, and strengthening your soul, if he ever suffers you in any degree to deviate from him.

2. We will first consider the case of Spiritual Declensions and Languor in religion. And here I desire, that, before I proceed any farther, you would observe that I do not comprehend under this head every abatement of that fervor which a young convert may find when he first becomes experimentally acquainted with divine things. Our natures are so framed, that the novelty of objects strikes them in something of a peculiar manner: not to urge how much more easily our passions are impressed in the earlier years of life, than when we are more advanced in the journey of it. This, perhaps, is not sufficiently considered. Too great a stress is commonly laid on the flow of affections; and for want or this, a Christian, who is ripened in grace, and greatly advanced in his preparation for glory, may sometimes be led to lament imaginary rather than real decays, and to say, without any just foundation, "O that it were with me as in months past!" (Job 29:2) Therefore, you can hardly be too frequently told, that religion consists chiefly "in the `resolution of the will for God,' and in a constant care to avoid whatever we are persuaded he would disapprove, to

despatch the work he has assigned us in life, and to promote his glory in the happiness of mankind." To this we are chiefly to attend, looking in all to the simplicity and purity of those motives from which we act, which we know are chiefly regarded by that God who searches the heart; humbling ourselves before him at the same time under a sense of our many imperfections, and flying to the blood of Christ and the grace of the Gospel.

3. Having given this precaution, I will now a little more particularly describe the case, which I call the state of a Christian who is declining in religion; so far as it does not fall in with those which I shall consider in the following chapters. And I must observe that it chiefly consists "in a forgetfulness of divine objects, and a remissness in those various duties to which we stand engaged by that solemn surrender which we have made of ourselves to the service of God." There will be a variety of symptoms, according to the different circumstances and relations in which the Christian is placed; but some will be of a more universal kind. It will be peculiarly proper to touch on these; and so much the rather, as these declensions are often unobserved, like the gray hairs which were upon Ephraim, when he knew it not. (Hosea 7:9)

4. Should you, my reader, fall into this state, it will probably first discover itself by a failure in the duties of the closet. Not that I suppose they will at first, or certainly conclude that they will at all, be wholly omitted, but they will be run over in a cold and formal manner. Sloth, or some of those other snares which I cautioned you against in the former chapter, will so far prevail upon you, that though perhaps you know and recollect that the proper season of retirement is come, you will sometimes indulge yourself upon your bed in the morning, sometimes in conversation or business in the evening, so as not to have convenient time for it. Or perhaps, when you come into your closet at that season, some favorite book you are desirous to read, some correspondence that you choose to carry on, or some other amusement, will present itself, and plead to be despatched first. This will probably take up more time than you imagined; and then secret prayer will be hurried over, and perhaps reading the Scriptures quite neglected. You will plead, perhaps, that it is but for once; but the same allowance will be made a second and a third time; and it will grow more easy and familiar to you each time than it was the last. And thus God will be mocked, and your own soul will be defrauded of its spiritual meals, if I may be allowed the expression; the word of God will be slighted, and self-examination quite disused; and secret prayer itself wilt grow a burden rather than a delight; a trifling ceremony, rather than a devout homage, fit for the acceptance of "our Father who is in heaven."

5. If immediate and resolute measures be not taken for your recovery from these declensions, they will spread farther, and reach the acts of social worship. You will feel the effects in your family and in public ordinances. And if you do not feel them, the symptoms will be so much the worse. Wandering thoughts will, as it were, eat out the very heart of these duties. It is not, I believe, the privilege of the most eminent Christians to be entirely free from them; but probably in these circumstances you will find but few intervals of strict attention, or of any thing which wears the appearance of inward devotion. And when these heartless duties are concluded, there will scarce be a reflection made, how little God hath been enjoyed in them, how little he hath been honored by them. Perhaps the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper, being so admirably adapted to fix the attention of the soul, and to excite its warmest exercise of holy affections, may be the last ordinance in which these declensions will be felt. And yet, who can say that the sacred table is a privileged place? Having been unnecessarily straitened in your preparations, you will attend with less

fixedness and enlargement of heart than usual. And perhaps a dissatisfaction in the review, when there has been a remarkable alienation or insensibility of mind, may occasion a disposition to forsake your place and your duty there. And when your spiritual enemies have once gained this point upon you, it is probable you will fall by swifter degrees than ever, and your resistance to their attempts will grow weaker and weaker.

6. When your love to God our Father and to the Lord Jesus Christ fails, your fervor of Christian affection to your brethren in Christ will proportionably decline; and your concern for usefulness in life abate, especially where any thing is to be done for spiritual edification. You will find some one excuse or another for the neglect of religious discourse, perhaps not only among neighbors and Christian friends, when very convenient opportunities offer; but even with regard to those who are members of your own families, and to those who, if you are fixed in the superior relations of life, are committed to your care.

7. With this remissness, an attachment either to sensual pleasures or to worldly business will increase. For the soul must have something to employ it, and something to delight itself in; and as it turns to the one or the other of these, temptations of one sort or another will present themselves. In some instances, perhaps the strictest bonds of temperance, and the regular appointments or life, may be broken in upon, through a fondness for company, and the entertainments which often attend it. In other instances, the interests of life appearing greater than they did before, and taking up more of the mind, contrary interests of other persons may throw you into disquietude, or plunge you in debate and contention, in which it is extremely difficult to preserve either the serenity or the innocence of the soul. And perhaps, if ministers and other Christian friends observe this, and endeavor in a plain and faithful way to reduce you from your wandering, a false delicacy of mind, often contracted in such a state as this, will render these attempts extremely disagreeable. The ulcer of the soul, if I may be allowed the expression, will not bear being touched when it most needs it; and one of the most generous and self-denying instances of Christian friendship shall be turned into an occasion of coldness and distaste, yea, perhaps of enmity.

8. And possibly, to sum up all, this disordered state of mind may lead you into some prejudices against those very principles which might be most effectual for your recovery; and your great enemy may succeed so far in his attempts against you, as to persuade you that you have lost nothing in religion, when you have almost lost all. He may very probably lead you to conclude that your former devotional frames were mere fits of enthusiasm, and that the holy regularity of your walk before God was an unnecessary strictness and scrupulosity. Nay, you may think it a great improvement in understanding, that you have learnt from some new masters, that, if a man treat his fellow creatures with humanity and good nature, judging and reviling only those who would disturb others by the narrowness of their notions, (for these are generally exempted from other objects of the most universal and disinterested benevolence so often boasted of) he must necessarily be in a very good state, though he pretend not to converse much with God, provided that he think respectfully of him, and do not provoke him by any gross immoralities.

9. I mention this in the last stage of religious declension, because I apprehend that to be its proper place; and I fear it will be found, by experience, to stand upon the very confines of that gross apostacy into deliberate and presumptuous sin, which wilt claim our consideration under the next head. And because, too, it is that symptom which most effectually tends to prevent the success,

and even the use, of any proper remedies, in consequence of a fond and fatal apprehension that they are needless. It is, if I may borrow the simile, like those fits of lethargic drowsiness which often precede apoplexies and death.

10. It is by no means my design at this time to reckon up, much less to consider at large, those dangerous principles which are now ready to possess the mind, and to lay the foundation of a false and treacherous peace. Indeed they are in different instances various, and sometimes run into opposite extremes. But if God awaken you to read your Bible with attention, and give you to feel the spirit with which it is written, almost every page will flash conviction upon the mind, and spread a light to scatter and disperse these shades of darkness.

11. What I chiefly intend in this address, is to engage you, if possible, as soon as you perceive the first symptoms of these declensions, to be upon your guard, and to endeavor, as speedily as possible, to recover yourself from them. And I would remind you, that the remedy must begin where the first cause or complaint prevailed, I mean, in the closet, Take some time for recollection, and ask your own con-science, seriously, how matters stand between the blessed God and your soul? Whether they are as they once were, and as you could wish them to be, if you saw your life just drawing to a period, and were to pass immediately into the eternal state? One serious thought of eternity shames a thousand vain excuses, with which, in the forgetfulness of it, we are ready to delude our own souls. And when you feel that secret misgiving of heart which will naturally arise on this occasion, do not endeavor to palliate the matter, and to find out slight and artful coverings for what you cannot forbear secretly condemning, but honestly fall under the conviction, and be humbled for it. Pour out your heart before God, and seek the renewed influences of his Spirit and grace.. Return with more exactness to secret devotion, and to self-examination. Read the Scripture with yet greater diligence, and especially the more devotional and spiritual parts of it. Labor to ground it in your heart, and to feel what you have reason to believe the sacred penmen felt when they wrote, so far as circumstances may agree. Open your soul, with all simplicity; to every lesson which the word of God would teach you; and guard against those things which you perceive to alienate your mind from inward religion, though there be nothing criminal in the things themselves. They may perhaps in the general be lawful; to some possibly they may be expedient; but if they produce such an effect as was mentioned above, it is certain they are not convenient for you in these circumstances, above all, seek the converse of those Christians whose progress in religion seems most remarkable, and who adorn their profession in the most amiable manner. Labor to obtain their temper and sentiments, and lay open your case and your heart to them, with all the freedom which prudence will permit. Employ yourself, at seasons of leisure, in reading practical and devotional books, in which the mind and heart of the pious author is transfused into the work, and in which you can, as it were, taste the genuine spirit of Christianity. And to conclude, take the first opportunity that presents, of making an approach to the table of the Lord, and spare neither time nor pains in the most serious preparation for it. There renew your covenant with God; put your soul anew into the hands of Christ, and endeavor to view the wonders of his dying love, in such a manner as may rekindle the languishing flame, and quicken you to more vigorous resolution than ever, "to live unto him who died for you." (2 Corinthians 5:15) And watch over your own heart, that the good impressions you then felt may continue. Rest not, till you have obtained as confirmed a state of religion as you ever knew. Rest not, till yon have made a greater progress than before; for it is only by a zeal to go forward, that you can be secure from the danger of going

backward, and revolting more and more.

12. I only add, that it is necessary to take these precautions as soon as possible, or you will probably find a much swifter progress than you are aware in the downhill road; and you may possibly be left of God, to fall into some gross and aggravated sin, so as to fill your conscience with an agony and horror which the pain of "broken bones" (Psalms 51:8) can but imperfectly express. A Prayer for one under Spiritual Decays.

"Eternal and unchangeable Jehovah! thy perfections and glories are, like thy being, immutable. Jesus thy Son is `the same yesterday, to-day, and forever.' (Hebrews 13:8) The eternal world, to which I am hastening, is always equally important, and presses upon the attentive mind for a more fixed and solemn regard, in proportion to the degree in which it comes nearer and nearer. But, alas! my views, and my affections, and my best resolutions, are continually varying, like this poor body, which goes through daily and hourly alterations in its state and circumstances. Whence, O Lord! whence this sad change which I now experience in the frame and temper of my mind toward thee? Whence this alienation of my soul from thee? Why can I not come to thee with all the endearments of filial lover as I once could? Why is thy service so remissly attended, if attended at all? And why are the exercises of it, which were once my greatest pleasure, become a bur den to me? Where, O God! is the blessedness I once spake of, (Galatians 4:15) when my joy in thee as my Heavenly Father was so conspicuous that strangers might have observed it, and when my heart did so overflow with love to thee, and with zeal for thy service, that it was a matter of self-denial to me, to limit and restrain the genuine expressions of those strong emotions of my soul, even where prudence and duty required it?

"Alas, Lord! whither am I fallen? Thine eye sees me still; but, oh! how unlike what it once saw me! Cold and insensible as I am, I must blush on the reflection. Thou `seest me in secret,' (Matthew 6:6) and seest me, perhaps often amusing myself with trifles, in those seasons which I used solemnly to devote to thine immediate service. Thou seest me coming into thy presence as by constraint; and when I am before thee, so straitened in my spirit, that I hardly know what to say to thee, though thou art the God with whom I have to do; and though the keeping up a humble and dutiful correspondence with thee is, beyond all comparison, the most important business in my daily life, And even when I am speaking to thee, with how much coldness and formality is it! It is perhaps the work of imagination, the labor of the lips; but where are those ardent designs, those intense breathings after God, which I once felt? Where is that pleasing repose in thee, which I once was conscious of, as being near my divine rest, as being happy in that nearness, and resolving that, if possible, I would no more be removed from it? But, oh! how far am I now removed? When these short devotions, if they may be called devotions, are over, in what long intervals do I forget thee, and appear so little animated with thy love, so little devoted to thy service, that a stranger might converse with me a considerable time, without knowing that I had ever formed any acquaintance with thee, without discovering that I had so much as known or heard any thing of God? Thou callest me to thine house, O Lord! on thine own day: but how heartless are my services there! I present thee no more than my body: my thoughts and affections are engrossed with other objects, while I `draw near thee with my mouth, and honor thee with my lips.' (Isaiah 29:13) Thou callest me to thy table; but my heart is so frozen, that it hardly melts even at the foot of the cross, hardly feels any efficacy in the blood of Jesus. O wretched creature that I am! Unworthy of being called thine! Unworthy of a place among thy children, or of the meanest

situation in thy family: rather worthy to be case out, to be forsaken, yea, to be utterly destroyed!

"Is this, Lord, the service which I once promised, and which thou hast so many thousand reasons to expect? Are these the returns I am making for thy daily providential care, for the sacrifice of thy Son, for the communications of thy Spirit, for the pardon of my numberless aggravated sins, for the hopes, the undeserved and so often forfeited hopes of eternal glory! Lord, I am ashamed to stand or to kneel before thee. But pity me, I beseech thee, and help me; for I am a pitiable object indeed; my soul cleaveth unto the dust, and lays itself as in the dust before thee; but, O quicken me according to thy word! (Psalms 119:25) Let me trifle no longer, for I am upon the brink of a precipice! I am thinking of my ways. O give me grace to turn my feet unto thy testimonies, to make haste without any farther delay, that I may keep thy commandments! (Psalms 119:59-60) Search me, O Lord! and try me. (Psalms 139:23) Go to the first root of this distemper, which spreads itself over my soul, and recover me from it! Represent sin unto me, O Lord! I beseech thee, that I may see it with abhorrence! and represent the Lord Jesus Christ to me in such a light that I may look upon him and mourn, (Zechariah 12:10) that I may look upon him and love! May I awaken from this stupid lethargy into which I am sinking, and may Christ give me more abundant degrees of spiritual life and activity than I have ever yet received! and may I be so quickened and animated by him, that I may more than recover the ground I have lost, and may make a more speedy and exemplary progress than in my best days I have ever yet done! Send down upon me, O Lord! in a more rich and abundant effusion, thy good Spirit. May he dwell in me as a temple which he has consecrated to himself! (1 Corinthians 3:16) and while all the service is directed and governed by him, may holy and acceptable sacrifices be continually offered! (Romans 12:1) May the incense be constant, and may it be fragrant! May the sacred fire burn and blaze perpetually! (Leviticus 6:13) And may none of its vessels ever be profaned, by being employed to an unholy or forbidden use! Amen."

02.23. The Sad Case Of A Relapse Into Known And Deliberate Sin

Chapter 23 The Sad Case Of A Relapse Into Known And Deliberate Sin

1. Unthought of relapses may happen.--2. And bring the soul into a miserable case.--3. Yet the case is not desperate.--4. The backslider urged immediately to return, by deep humiliation before God for so aggravated an offence.--5. By renewed regards to the divine mercy in Christ.--6. By an open profession of repentance, where the crime hath given public offence.--7. Falls to be reviewed for future caution.--8. The chapter concludes with a prayer for the use of one who hath fallen into gross sins, after religious resolutions and engagements.

1. THE declensions which I have described in the foregoing chapter, must be acknowledged worthy of deep lamentations; but happy will you be, my dear reader, if you never know, by experience, a circumstance yet more melancholy than this. Perhaps, when you consider the view of things which you now have, you imagine that no consideration can ever bribe you, in any single instance, to act contrary to the present dictates or suggestions of your conscience, or of the Spirit of God by which it has been enlightened and directed. No: you think it would be better for you to die. And you think rightly: but Peter thought and said so too; "Though I should die with thee, yet will I not deny thee," (Matthew 26:35) and yet, after all. he fell; and therefore, "be not high-minded, but fear." (Romans 11:20) It is not impossible but you may fall into that very sin of which you imagine you are least in danger, or into that against which you have most solemnly resolved and of which you have already most bitterly repented. You may relapse into it again and again. But, O! if you do, nay, if you should deliberately and presumptuously fall but once, how deep will it pierce your heart! How dear will you pay for all the pleasure with which the temptation has been accompanied! How will this separate between God and you! What a desolation, what a dreadful desolation will it spread over your soul! It is grievous to think of it. Perhaps in such a state you may feel more and agony and distress in your own conscience, when you come seriously to reflect, than you ever felt when you were first awakened and reclaimed: because the sin will be attended with some very high aggravations, beyond those of your unregenerate state. I well know the person that said, "the agonies of a sinner, in the first pangs of his repentance, are not to be mentioned on the same day with those of the `backslider in heart,' when he comes to be filled with his own way." (Proverbs 14:14)

2. Indeed, it is enough to wound one’s heart to think how yours will be wounded; how all your comforts, all your evidences, all your hopes, will be clouded; what thick darkness will spread itself on every side; so that neither sun, nor moon, nor stars will appear in your heaven. Your spiritual consolations will be gone; and your temporal enjoyments will also be rendered tasteless and insipid. And if afflictions be sent, as they probably may, in order to reclaim you, a consciousness of guilt will sharpen and envenom the dart. Then will the enemy of your soul, with all his art and power, rise up against you, encouraged by your fall, and laboring to trample you down in utter, hopeless ruin. He will persuade you that you are already undone beyond recovery. He will suggest that it signifies nothing to attempt it any more; for that every effort, every amendment, every act of

repentance, will but make your case so much the worse, and plunge you lower and lower into hell.

3. Thus will he endeavor by terrors to keep you from that sure remedy which yet remains. But yield not to him. Your case will indeed be sad; and if it be now your case, it is deplorably so; and to rest in it, would be still much worse. Your heart would be hardened yet more and more; and nothing could be expected but sudden and aggravated destruction. Yet, blessed be God, it is not quite hopeless. Your "wounds are corrupted, because of your foolishness," (Psalms 38:5) but the gangrene is not incurable. "There is a balm in Gilead, there is a physician there." (Jeremiah 8:22) Do not therefore render your condition hopeless, by now saying, "There is no hope," (Jeremiah 2:25) and by drawing a fatal argument from a false supposition, "for going after the idols you have loved." Let me address you in the language of God to his backsliding people, when they were ready to apprehend that to be their case, and to draw such a conclusion from it: "only return unto me, saith the Lord." (Jeremiah 3:13) Cry for renewed grace; and in the strength of it labor to return. Cry with David, under the like guilt, "I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek thy servant, for I do not forget thy commandments;" (Psalms 119:176) and that remembrance of them is, I hope, a token for good. But if thou wilt return at all, do it immediately. Take not one step more in that fatal path, to which thou bast turned aside. Think not to add one more sin to the account, and then to repent; as if it would be but the same thing on the whole. The second error may be worse than the first; it may make way for another and another, and draw on a terrible train of consequences, beyond all you can now imagine. Make haste, therefore, and do not delay. "Escape, and fly as for thy life," (Genesis 19:17) before "the dart strike through thy liver." (Proverbs 7:23) "Give not sleep to thine eyes, nor slumber to thine eyelids," (Proverbs 6:4) lie not down upon thy bed under unpardoned guilt, lest evil overtake thee, lest the sword of divine justice should smite thee, and, whilst thou purposest to return tomorrow, thou shouldst this night go and take possession of hell.

4. Return immediately, and, permit me to add, return solemnly. Some very pious and excellent divines have expressed themselves upon this head, in a manner which seems liable to dangerous abuse: when they urge men after a fall, "not to stay to survey the ground, nor consider how they came to be thrown down, but immediately to get up and renew the race." In slighter cases the advice is good; but when conscience has suffered such violent outrage, by the commission of known, willful, and deliberate sin, (a case which one would hope should but seldom happen to those who have once sincerely entered on a religious course) I can by no means think that either reason or Scripture encourages such a method. Especially would it be improper, if the action itself had been of so heinous a nature, that even to have fallen into it on the most sudden surprise of temptation, must have greatly ashamed, and terrified, and distressed the soul. Such an affair is dreadfully solemn, and should be treated accordingly. If this has been the sad case with you, my then unhappy reader, I would pity you, and mourn over you; and would beseech you, as you value your peace, your recovery, the health and the very life of your soul, that you would not loiter away an hour. Retire immediately for serious reflection. Break through other engagements and employments unless they be such as you cannot in conscience delay for a few hours, which can seldom happen in the circumstance I now suppose. Set yourself to it, therefore, as in the presence of God, and hear at large, patiently and humbly, what conscience has to say, though it chide and reproach severely. Yea, earnestly pray that God would speak to you by conscience, and make you more thoroughly to know and feel "what an evil and bitter thing it is, that you have thus forsaken him." (Jeremiah 2:19) Think of all the aggravating circumstances attending your offence; and

especially think of those which arise from abused mercy and goodness which arise, not only from your solemn vows and engagements to God, but from the views you have had of a Redeemer's love, sealed even in blood. And are these the returns? Was it not enough that Christ should have been thus injured by his enemies? Must he be "wounded in the house of his friends" too? (Zechariah 13:6) Were "you delivered to work such abominations as these?" (Jeremiah 7:10) Did the blessed Jesus groan and die for you, that you might sin with boldness and freedom, that you might extract, as it were, the very spirit and essence of sin, and offend God to a height of ingratitude and baseness, which would otherwise have been, in the nature of things, impossible? O think, how justly God might "cast you out from his presence!" How justly he might number you among the most signal instances of his vengeance! And think how "your heart would endure or your hands be strong,"if he should " deal thus with you!" (Ezekiel 22:14) Alas! all your former experiences would enhance your sense of the ruin and misery that must be felt in an eternal banishment from the divine presence and favor.

5. Indulge such reflections as these. Stand the humbling sight of your sins in such a view as this. The more odious and the more painful it appears, the greater prospect there will be of your benefit by attending to it. But the matter is not to rest here. All these reflections are intended, not to grieve, but to cure; and to grieve no more than may promote the cure. You are indeed to look upon sin; but you are also, in such circumstances, if ever, to look upon Christ, to look upon him whom you have now pierced deeper than before, and to mourn for him with sincerity and tenderness. (Zechariah 12:10) The God whom you have injured and affronted, whose laws you have broken, and whose justice you have, as it were, challenged by this foolish, wretched apostasy, is nevertheless "a most merciful God." (Deuteronomy 4:21) You cannot be so ready to return to him, as he is to receive you. Even now does he, as it were, solicit a reconciliation, by those tender impressions which lie is making upon your heart. But remember how he wilt be reconciled. It is in the very same way in which you made your first approach to him, in the name and for the sake of his dear Son. Come therefore in an humble dependence upon him. Renew your application to Jesus, that his blood may, as it were, be sprinkled upon your soul, that your soul may thereby be purified, and your guilt removed. This very sin of yours, which the blessed God foresaw, increased the weight of your Redeemers sufferings: it was concerned in shedding his blood. Humbly go, and place your wounds, as it were, under the droppings of that precious balm, by which alone they can be healed. That compassionate Savior will delight to restore you, when you lie as an humble suppliant at his feet, and will graciously take part with you in that peace and pleasure which he gives. Through him renew your covenant with God, that broken covenant, the breach of which divine justice might teach you to know "by terrible things in righteousness:" (Psalms 65:5) but mercy allows of an accommodation. Let the consciousness and remembrance of that breach engage you to enter into covenant anew, tinder a deeper sense than ever of your own weakness, and a more cordial dependence on divine grace for your security, than you have ever yet entertained. I know you will be ashamed to present yourself among the children of God in his sanctuary, and especially at his table, under a consciousness of so much guilt; but break through that shame, if Providence open you the way. You would be humbled before your offended Father; but surely there is no place where you are more likely to be humbled, than when you see yourself in his house, and no ordinance administered there can lay you lower than that in which "Christ is evidently set forth as crucified before your eyes." (Galatians 3:1) Sinners are the only persons who have business there. The best of men come to that sacred table as sinners. As such make your

approach to it; yea, as the greatest of sinners, as one who needs the blood of Jesus as much as any creature upon earth.

6. And let me remind you of one thing more. If your fall has been of such a nature as to give any scandal to others, be not at all concerned to save appearances, and to moderate those mortifications which deep humiliation before them would occasion. The depth and pain of that mortification is indeed an excellent medicine, which God has in his wise goodness appointed for you in such circumstances as these. In such a case, confess your fault with the greatest frankness; aggravate it to the utmost; entreat pardon and prayer from those whom you have offended. Then, and never till then, will you be in the way to peace; not by palliating a fault not by so making vain excuses, not by objecting to the manner in which others may have treated you; as if the least excess or rigor in a faithful admonition were a crime equal to some great immorality that occasioned it. This can only proceed from the madness of pride and self-love; it is the sensibility of a wound, which is hardened, swelled, and inflamed; and it must be reduced, and cooled, and suppled, before it can possibly be cured. To be censured and condemned by men, will be but a little grievance to a sour thoroughly humbled and broken under a sense of having incurred the condemning sentence of God. Such a one will rather desire to glorify God, by submitting to deserved blame; and will fear deceiving others into a more favorable opinion of himself than he inwardly knows that lie deserves. These are the sentiments which God gives to the sincere penitent in such a case; and by this means he restores him to that credit and regard among others, which he does not know how to seek; but which, nevertheless, for the sake both of his comfort and usefulness, God wills that he should have, and which it is, humanly speaking, impossible for him to recover any other way. But there is something so honorable in the frank acknowledgment of a fault, and in deep humiliation for it, that all who see it must needs approve it. They pity an offender who is brought to such a disposition, and endeavor to comfort him with returning expressions, not only of their love, but of their esteem too.

7. Excuse this digression, which may suit some cases; and which would suit many more, if a regular discipline were to be exercised in churches; for, on such a supposition, the Lord’s Supper could not be approached, after visible and scandalous falls, without solemn confession of the offence, and declarations of repentance. On the other hand, there may be instances of sad apostacy, where the crime, though highly aggravated before God, may not fall under human notice. In this case, remember that your business is with Him to whose piercing eye every thing appears in its just light before him, therefore, prostrate your soul, and seek a solemn reconciliation with him, confirmed by the memorials of his dying Son; And when this is done, imagine not, that, because you have received the tokens of pardon, the guilt of your apostacy is to be forgotten at once. Bear it still in your memory for future caution: lament it before God, especially in the frequent returns of secret devotion; and view with humiliation the scars of those wounds which your own folly occasioned, even when by divine grace they are thoroughly healed. For God establishes his covenant, not to remove the sense of every past abomination, but "that thou mayest remember thy ways, and be confounded, and never open thy mouth any more because of thy shame, even when I am pacified towards thee for all that thou hast done, saith the Lord." (Ezekiel 16:63)

8. And now, upon the whole, if you desire to attain such a temper, and to return to such steps as these, then immediately fall down before God, and pour out your heart in his presence, in language like this. A Prayer for one who has fallen into gross Sin, after religious Resolutions and

Engagements.

"O most Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God! when I seriously reflect on thy spotless purity, and on the strict and impartial methods of thy steady administration, together with that almighty power of thine, which is able to carry every thought of thine heart into immediate and full execution, I may justly appear before thee this day with shame and terror, in confusion and consternation of spirit. This day, O my God! this dark, mournful day, would I take occasion to look back to that sad source of our guilt and our misery, the apostacy of our common parents, and say with thine offending servant David, `Behold, I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me.' (Psalms 51:5) This day would I lament all the fatal consequences of such a descent, with regard to myself. And, oh how many have they been! The remembrance of the sins of my unconverted state, and the failings and infirmities of my after life, may justly confound me! How much more such a scene as now lies before my conscience, and before thine all-seeing eye! For thou, O Lord! `knowest my foolishness, and my sins are not hid from thee.' (Psalms 69:5) Thou tellest all my wanderings from thy statutes, (Psalms 56:8) thou seest and thou recordest every instance of my disobedience to thee, and of my rebellion against thee. Thou seest them in every aggravated circumstance which I can discern, and many more which I have never observed or reflected upon. How then shall I appear in thy presence, or lift up my face to thee! (Ezra 9:6) 1 am full of confusion, (Job 10:15) and fed a secret regret in the thought of applying to thee; but; `O Lord, to whom shall I go but unto thee?' (John 6:68) Unto thee, on whom depends my life or my death; unto thee, who alone canst take away the burden of guilt which now presses me down to the dust; who alone canst restore to my soul that rest and peace which I have lost, and which I deserve for ever to lose!

"Behold me, O Lord God! falling down at thy feet! Behold me pleading guilty in thy presence, and surrendering myself to that justice which I cannot escape! I have not one word to offer in my own vindication, in my own excuse. Words, far from being able to clear up my innocence, can never sufficiently describe the enormity and demerit of my sin. Thou, O Lord! and thou only, knowest to the full, how heinous and how aggravated it is. Thine infinite understanding alone can fathom the infinite depth of its malignity. I am, on many accounts, most unable to do it. I cannot conceive the glory of thy sacred Majesty, whose authority I have despised, nor the number and variety of those mercies which I have sinned against. I cannot conceive the value of the blood of thy dear Son, which I have ungratefully trampled under my feet; nor the dignity of that blessed Spirit of thine, whose agency I have, as far as I could, been endeavoring to oppose, and whose work I have been, as with all my might, laboring to undo; and to tear up, as it were, that plantation of his grace which I should rather have been willing to have guarded with my life, and watered with my blood. O the baseness and madness of my conduct! That I should thus, as it were, rend open the wounds of my soul, of which I had died long ere this, had not thine own hand applied a remedy, had not thine only Son bled to prepare it! that I should violate the covenant I had made with thee by sacrifice, (Psalms 50:5) by the memorials of such a sacrifice too, even of Jesus, my Lord, whereby I am become guilty of his body and blood. (1 Corinthians 11:27) That I should bring suck dishonor upon religion too, by so unsuitable a walk, and perhaps open the mouths of its greatest enemies to insult it upon my account, and prejudice some against it to their everlasting destruction!

"I wonder, O Lord God! that I am here to own all this. I wonder that thou hast not long ago appeared as a swift witness against me, (Malachi 3:5) that thou hast not discharged the thunderbolts of thy flaming wrath against me, and crushed me into hell; making me there a terror

to all about me, as well as to myself, by a vengeance and ruin, to be distinguished even there, where all are miserable, and all hopeless.

"O God! thy patience is marvellous! But how much more marvellous is thy grace, which, after all this, invites me to thee. While I am here giving judgment against myself that I deserve to die, to die for ever, thou art sending me the words of everlasting life, and `calling me, as a backsliding child, to return unto thee.' (Jeremiah 3:22) Behold, therefore, O Lord! invited by thy word, and encouraged by thy grace, I come; and great as my transgressions are, I humbly beseech thee freely to pardon them; be-cause I know, that, though `my sins have reached unto heaven,' (Revelation 18:5) and are `lifted up even unto the skies,' (Jeremiah 51:9) `thy mercy,' O Lord! is above the heavens.' (Psalms 108:4) Extend that mercy to me, O heavenly Father! and display, in this illustrious instance, the riches of thy grace and the prevalency of thy Son's blood! For surely, if such crimson sins as mine may be made `white as snow and as wool,' (Isa. 50:12) and if such a revolter as I am be brought to eternal glory, earth must, so far as it is known, be filled with wonder and heaven with praise; and the greatest sinner may cheerfully apply for pardon, if I, `the chief of sinners,' find it. And, oh! that, when I have lain mourning, and as it were bleeding at thy feet, as long as thou thinkest proper, thou wouldst at length `heal this soul of mine' which has sinned against thee, (Psalms 41:4) and `give me beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness!' (Isaiah 61:3) O that thou wouldst at length `restore unto me the joy of thy salvation, and make me to hear songs of gladness, that the bones which thou hast broken may rejoice!' (Psalms 51:8, Psalms 51:12) Then, when a sense of thy forgiving love is shed abroad upon my heart, and it is cheered with the voice of pardon, I will proclaim thy grace to others; `I will teach transgressors thy ways, and sinners shall be converted unto thee:' (Psalms 51:13) those that have been backsliding from thee shall be encouraged to seek thee, by my happy experience, which I will gladly proclaim for thy glory, though it be to my own shame and confusion of face. And may this `joy of the Lord be my strength!' (Nehemiah 8:10) so that in it I may serve thee henceforward with a vigor and zeal far beyond what I have hitherto known! This I would ask with all humble submission to thy will, for! presume not to insist upon it. If thou shouldst see fit to make me a warning to others, by appointing that I should walk all my days in darkness, and at last die under a cloud, `thy will be done!' But, O God! extend mercy, for thy Son's sake, to this sinful soul at last, and give me some place, though it were at the feet of all thy other servants, in the regions of glory! O bring me at length, though it should be through the gloomiest valley that any one ever passed, into that blessed world, where I shall depart from God no more where I shall wound my own conscience, and dishonor thy holy name no more! Then shall my tongue be loosed, how long soever it might here be bound under the confusion of guilt; and immortal praises shall be paid to that victorious blood which has redeemed such an infamous slave of sin as I must acknowledge myself to be, and brought me, from returns into bondage and repeated pollution, to share the dignity and holiness of those who are `kings and priests unto God.' (Revelation 1:6) Amen."

02.24. The Case Of The Christian Under The Hiding Of God's Face

Chapter 24 The Case Of The Christian Under The Hiding Of God’s Face

1. The phrase scriptural.--2. It signifies the withdrawing the tokens of the divine favor.--3 chiefly as to spiritual considerations.--4. This may become the case of any Christian.--5. and will be found a very sorrowful one.--6. The following directions, therefore, are given to those who suppose it to be their own: To inquire whether it be indeed a case of spiritual distress, or whether a disconsolate frame may not proceed from indisposition of body,--7. or difficulties as to worldly circumstances.--8, 9. If it be found to be indeed such as the title of the chapter proposes, be advised--to consider it as a merciful dispensation of God, to awaken and bestir the soul, and excite to a strict examination of conscience, and reformation of what has been amiss.--10. To be humble and patient while the trial continues.--11. To go on steadily in the way of duty.--12. To renew a believing application to the blood of Jesus. An humble supplication for one under these mournful exercises of mind, when they are found to proceed from the spiritual cause supposed.

1. THERE is a case which often occurs in the Christian life, which they who accustom themselves much to the exercise of devotion have been used to call the "hiding of God’s face." It is a phrase borrowed from the word of God, which I hope may shelter it from contempt at the first hearing. It will be my business in this chapter to state it as plainly as I can, and then to give some advice as to your own conduct when you fall into it, as it is very probable you may before you have finished your journey through this wilderness.

2. The meaning of it may partly be understood by the opposite phrase of God’s "causing his face to shine upon a person, or lifting up upon him the light of his countenance." This seems to carry in it an allusion to the pleasant and delightful appearance which the face of a friend has, and especially if in a superior relation of life, when he converses with those whom be loves and delights in. Thus Job, when speaking of the regard paid him by his attendants, says, "If I smiled upon them, they believed it not, and the light of my countenance they cast not down," (Job 29:24) that is, they were careful, in such agreeable circumstances, to do nothing to displease me, or (as we speak) to cloud my brow. And David, when expressing his desire of the manifestation of God’s favor to him, says, "Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon me;" and, as the effect of it, declares, "thou hast put gladness into my heart, more than if corn and wine increased." (Psalms 4:6-7) Nor is it impossible, that, in this phrase, as used by David, there may be some allusion to the bright shining forth of the Shekinah, that is, the lustre which dwelt in the cloud as the visible sign of the divine presence with Israel, which God was pleased peculiarly to manifest upon some public occasions, as a token of his favor find acceptance. On the other hand, therefore, for God "to hide his face," must imply his withholding the tokens of his favor and must be esteemed a mark of his displeasure. Thus Isaiah uses it, "Your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear." (Isaiah 59:2) And again, "Thou hast hid thy face from us," as not regarding the calamities we suffer, "and hast consumed us because of our iniquities." (Isaiah 64:7) So likewise for God "to hide his face from our sins?"

(Psalms 51:9) signifies to overlook them, and to take no farther notice of them. The same idea is, at other times, expressed by "God’s hiding his eyes," (Isaiah 1:15) from persons of a character disagreeable to him, when they come to address him with their petitions, not vouchsafing, as it were, to look toward them. This is plainly the scriptural sense of the word; and agreeably to this, it is generally used by Christians in our day, and every thing which seems a token of divine displeasure toward them is expressed by it.

3. It is farther to be observed here, that the things which they judge to be manifestations of divine favor toward them, or complacency in them, are not only, nor chiefly of a temporal nature, or such as merely relate to the blessings of this animal and perishing life. David, though the promises of the law had a continual reference to such, yet was taught to look farther, and describes them as preferable to, and therefore plainly distinct from "the blessings of the corn-floor or the wine-press." (Psalms 4:7) And if you whom I am now addressing do not know them to be so, it is plain you are quite ignorant of the subject we are inquiring into, and indeed have yet to learn the first lessons of true religion. All that David says, of "beholding the beauty of the Lord," (Psalms 27:4) or being "satisfied as with marrow and fatness, when he remembered him upon his bed," (Psalms 3:5-6) as well as "with the goodness of his house, even of his holy temple," (Psalms 65:4) is to be taken in the same sense, and can need very little explication to the truly experienced soul. But those who have known the light of God’s countenance, and the shinings of his face, will, in proportion to the degree of that knowledge, be able to form some notion of the hiding of his face, or the withdrawing of the tokens he has given his people of his presence and favor, which sometimes greatly imbitters prosperity; as, where the contrary is found, it sweetens affliction, and often swallows up the sense of it.

4. And give me leave to remind you, my Christian friend, (for under that character I now address my reader) that to be thus deprived of the sense of God’s love, and of the tokens of his favor, may soon be the case with you, though you may now have the pleasure to see the candle of the Lord shining upon you, or though it may even seem to he sunshine and high noon in your soul. You may lose your lively views of the divine perfections and glory, in the contemplation of which you now find that inward satisfaction. You may think of the divine wisdom and power, of the divine mercy and fidelity, as well as of his righteousness and holiness, and feel little inward complacency of soul in the view: it may be, with respect to any lively impressions, as if it were the contemplation merely of a common object. It may seem to you as if you had lost all idea of those important words, though the view has sometimes swallowed up your whole soul in transports of astonishment, admiration, and love. You may lose your delightful sense of the divine favor. It may be matter of great and sad doubt with you, whether you do indeed belong to God; and all the work of his blessed Spirit may be so veiled and shaded in the soul, that the peculiar characters by which the hand of that sacred Agent might be distinguished, shall be in a great measure lost; and you may he ready to imagine you have only deluded yourself in all the former hopes you have entertained. In consequence of this, those ordinances in which you now rejoice, may grow very uncomfortable to you, even when you do indeed desire communion with God in them. You may hear the most delightful evangelical truths opened, you may hear the privileges of God’s children most affectionately represented, and not be aware that you have any part or lot in the matter; and from that very coldness and insensibility may be drawing a farther argument that you have nothing to do with them. And then "your heart" may "meditate terror," (Isaiah 33:18) and under the distress

that overwhelms you, your dearest enjoyments may he reflected upon as adding to the weight of it, and making it more sensible, white you consider that you bad once such a taste for these things, and have now lost it all. So that perhaps it may seem to you, that they who never felt any thing at all of religious impressions, are happier than you, or at least are less miserable. You may, perhaps, in these melancholy hours, even doubt whether you have ever prayed at all, and whether all that you called your enjoyment of God, was not some false delight, excited by the great enemy of souls, to make you apprehend that your state was good, that so you might continue his more secure prey.

5. Such as this may be your case for a considerable time; and ordinances maybe attended in vain, and the presence of God may be in vain sought in them. You may pour out your soul in private, and then come to public worship, and find little satisfaction in either, but be forced to take up the Psalmist's complaint, "My God, I cry in the day-time, but thou hearest not; and in the night-season, and am not silent;" (Psalms 22:2) or that of Job, "Behold, I go forward, but he is not there; and backward, but I cannot perceive him: on the left hand, where he doth work, but I cannot behold him: he hideth himself on the right hand, that I cannot see him." (Job 23:8-9) So that all which looked like religion in your mind, shall seem as it were to be melted into grief or chilled into fear, or crushed into a deep sense of your own unworthiness; in consequence of which, you shall dare not so much as lift up your eyes before God, and be almost ashamed to take your place in a worshipping assembly among any that you think his servants. I have known this to be the case of some excellent Christians, whose improvements in religion have been distinguished, and whom God hath honored above many of their brethen in what he hath done for them, and by them. Give me leave, therefore, having thus described it, to offer you some plain advice with regard to it; and let not that be imputed to enthusiastic fancy which proceeds from an intimate and frequent view of facts on the one hand; and from a sincere affectionate desire on the other, to relieve the tender, pious heart, in so desolate a state. At least I am persuaded the attempt will not be overlooked or disapproved by "the great Shepherd of the sheep," (Hebrews 13:20) who has charged us to "comfort the feeble-minded." (1 Thessalonians 5:14)

6. And here I would first advise you most carefully to inquire whether your present distress does indeed arise from causes which are truly spiritual, or whether it may not rather have its foundation in some disorder of the body, or in the circumstances of life in which you are providentially placed, which may break your spirits and deject your mind. The influence of the inferior part of our nature on the nobler, the immortal spirit, while we continue in this embodied state, is so evident, that no attentive person can, in the general, fail to observe it: and yet there are cases in which it seems not to be sufficiently considered; and perhaps your own may be one of them. The state of the blood is often such as necessarily to suggest gloomy ideas, even in dreams, and to indispose the soul for taking pleasure in any thing; and when it is so, why should it be imagined to proceed from any peculiar divine displeasure, if the soul does not find its usual delight in religion? Or why should God be thought to have departed from us, because he suffers natural causes to produce natural effects, without interposing, by miracle, to break the connection? When this is the case, the help of the physician is to be sought, rather than that of the divine; or at least, by all means, together with it; and medicines, diet, exercise and air, may in a few weeks effect what the strongest reasonings, the most pathetic exhortations or consolations might for many months have attempted in vain.

7. In other instances, the dejection and feebleness of the mind may arise from something uncomfortable in our worldly circumstances. These may cloud as well as distract the thoughts, and imbittter the temper, and thus render us in a great degree unfit for religious services and pleasures; and when it is so, the remedy is to be sought in submission to Divine Providence, in abstracting our affections as far as possible from the present world, in a prudent care to ease ourselves of the burden so far as we can, by moderating unnecessary expenses, and by diligent application to business, in humble dependence on the divine blessing; in the mean time, endeavoring, by faith, to look up to him who sometimes suffers his children to be brought into such difficulties, that he may endear himself more sensibly to them by the method he shall take for their relief.

8. On the principles here laid down, it may perhaps appear, on inquiry, that the distress complained of may have a foundation very different from what was at first supposed. But where the health is sound, and the circumstances easy; when the animal spirits are disposed for gayety and entertainment, while all taste for religious pleasure is in a manner gone; when the soul is seized with a kind of lethargic insensibility, or what I had almost called a paralytic weakness with respect to every religious exercise, even though there should not be that deep terrifying distress, or pungent amazement, which I before re-presented as the effect of melancholy, nor that anxiety about the accommodations of life which strait circumstances naturally produce; I would in that case vary my advice, and urge you, with all possible attention and impartiality, to search into the cause which has brought upon you that great evil under which you justly mourn. And probably, in the general, the cause is sin--some secret sin, which has not been discovered or observed by the eye of the world; for enormities that draw on them the observation and censure of others, will probably fall under the case mentioned in the former chapter, as they must be instances of known and deliberate guilt. Now the eye of God hath seen these evils which have escaped the notice of your fellow-creatures; and in consequence of this care to conceal them from others, while you could not but know they were open to him, God has seen himself in a peculiar manner affronted and injured, I had almost said insulted by them; and hence his righteous displeasure. Oh! let that never be forgotten, which is so plainly said, so commonly known, so familiar to almost every religious ear, yet too little felt by any of our hearts, "Your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear." (Isaiah 59:1-2) And this is, on the whole, a merciful dispensation of God, though it may seem severe, regard it not, therefore, merely as your calamity, but as intended to awaken you, that you may not content yourself, even with lying in tears of humiliation before the Lord, but, like Joshua, rise and exert yourself vigorously, to "put away from you that accursed thing," whatever it be. Let this be your immediate and earnest care, that your pride may be humbled, that your watchfulness may be maintained, that your affections to the world may be deadened, and that, on the whole, your fitness for heaven may in every respect be increased. These are the designs of your heavenly Father, and let it be your great concern to cooperate with them.

9. Receive it therefore, on the whole, as the most important advice that can be given you, immediately to enter on a strict examination of your conscience. Attend to its gentlest whispers. If a suspicion arises in your mind that any thing has not been right, trace that suspicion, search into every secret folding of your heart: improve to the purposes of a fuller discovery the advice of your friends, the reproaches of your enemies; recollect for what your heart hath smitten you at the table

of the Lord, for what it would smite you if you were upon a dying bed, and within this hour to enter on eternity. When you have made any discovery, note it down; and go on in your search, till you can say these are the remaining incorruptions of my heart, these are the sins and follies of my life; this have I neglected; this have I done amiss. And when the account is as complete as you can make it, set yourself in the strength of a God, to a serious reformation; or rather begin the reformation of every thing that seems amiss, as soon as ever you discover it; "return to the Almighty, and thou shalt be built up; put iniquity far from thy tabernacle, and then shalt thou have thy delight in the Almighty, and shalt lift up thy face unto God. Thou shalt make thy prayer unto him, and he shall bear thee; thou shalt pay thy vows unto him, and his light shall shine upon thy ways." (Job 22:23, Job 22:26-27)

10. In the meantime, be waiting for God with the deepest humility, and submit yourself to the discipline of your heavenly Father, acknowledging his justice, and hoping in his mercy; even when your conscience is least severe in its remonstrances, and discovers nothing more than the common infirmities of God's people; yet still bow yourself down before him, and own that so many are the evils of your best days, so many the imperfections of your best services, that by them you have deserved all, and more than all that you suffer: deserved, not only that your sun should be clouded, but that it should go down, and arise no more, but leave your soul in a state of everlasting darkness. And while the shade continues, be not impatient. Fret not yourself in any wise, but rather, with a holy calmness and gentleness of soul, "wait on the Lord." (Psalms 37:8, Psalms 37:34) Be willing to stay his time, willing to bear his frown, in humble hope that he will at length "return and have compassion on you." (Jeremiah 12:15) He has not utterly forgotten to be gracious, nor resolved that "he will be favorable no more." (Psalms 77:7, Psalms 77:9) "For the Lord will not cast off for ever; but though he cause grief, yet will he have compassion according to the multitude of his mercies." (Lam. 31:32) It is comparatively but "for a small moment that he hides his face from you;" but you may humbly hope, that with great mercies he will gather you, and that "with everlasting kindness he will have mercy on you." (Isaiah 54:7-8) These suitable words are not mine, but his; and they wear this, as in the very front of them, "That a soul under the hidings of God's face may at last be one whom be will gather, and to whom he will extend everlasting favor."

11. But while the darkness continues, "go on in the way of your duty." Continue the use of means and ordinances: read and meditate: pray, yes, and sing the praises of God too, though it may be with a heavy heart. Follow the "footsteps of his flock," (Song of Solomon 1:8) you may perhaps meet the Shepherd of souls in doing it. Place yourself at least in his way. It is possible you may by this means get a kind look from him; and one look, one turn of thought, which may happen in a moment, may, as it were, create a heaven in your soul at once. Go to the table of the Lord. If you cannot rejoice, go and mourn there. Go and "mourn for that Savior whom," by your sins, "you have pierced:" (Zechariah 12:10) go and lament the breaches of that covenant which you have there so often confirmed. Christ may perhaps make himself known unto you "in the breaking of the bread," (Luke 24:35) and you may find, to your surprise, that he hath been near you, when you imagined he was at the greatest distance from you; near you, when you thought you were cast out from his presence. Seek your comfort in such enjoyments as these, and not in the vain amusements of this world, and in the pleasures of sense. I shall never forget that affectionate expression, which I am well assured broke out from an eminently pious heart, then almost ready to break under its

sorrows of this kind: "Lord, if I may not enjoy thee, let me enjoy nothing else; but go down mourning after thee to the grave!" I wondered not to hear, that, almost as soon as the sentiment had been breathed out before God in prayer, the burden was taken off, and "the joy of God's salvation restored."

12. I shall add but one advice more, and that is, that "you renew your application to the blood of Jesus, through whom the reconciliation between God and your soul has been accomplished." It is he that is our peace, and by his blood it is that "we are made nigh:" (Ephesians 2:13-14) it is in him, as the beloved of his soul, that God declares he is well-pleased; (Matthew 3:17) and it is in him that "ye are made accepted, to the glory of his grace." (Ephesians 1:6) Go therefore, O Christian, and apply by faith to a crucified Savior: go, and apply to him, as to a merciful high-priest, "and pour out thy complaint before him, and show before him thy trouble:" (Psalms 142:2) Lay open the distress and anguish of thy soul to him, who once knew what it was to say, (O astonishing, that he should ever have said it!) "My God! my God! why hast thou forsaken me?" (Matthew 27:46) Look up for pity and relief to him, who himself suffered, being not only tempted, but, with regard to sensible manifestations, deserted, that he might thus know how to pity those that are in such a melancholy case, and be ready, as well as able, "to succor them." (Hebrews 2:18) "He is Immanuel, God with us," (Matthew 1:23) and it is only in and through him that his Father shines forth upon us with the mildest beams of mercy and of love. Let it be therefore your immediate care to renew your acquaintance with him. Review the records of his life and death; and when you do so, surely you will feel a secret sweetness diffusing itself over your soul. You will be brought into a calm, gentle, silent frame, in which faith and love will operate powerfully, and God may probably cause "the still small voice" of his comforting Spirit to be heard, (1 Kings 19:12) till your soul burst out into a song of praise, and you are "made glad according to the days in which you have been afflicted." (Psalms 90:15) In the mean time, such language as the following supplication speaks, may be suitable. An Humble Supplication for one under the Hidings of God's Face.

"Blessed God! `with thee is the fountain of life' and of happiness. (Psalms 36:9) I adore thy name that I have ever tasted of thy streams; that I have ever had the peculiar pleasure arising from the light of thy countenance, and the shedding abroad of thy love in my soul. But alas! these delightful seasons are now to me no more; and the remembrance of them engages me to `pour out my soul within me.' (Psa. 42:40 I would come, as I have formerly done, and call thee, with the same endearment, `my Father and my God;' but alas! I know not how to do it. Guilt and fears arise, and forbid the delightful language. I seek thee, O Lord! but I seek in vain. I would pray, but my lips are sealed up. I would read thy word, but all the promises of it are veiled from mine eyes. I frequent those ordinances which have been formerly most nourishing and comfortable to my soul, but, alas! they are only the shadows of ordinances: the substance is gone: the animating spirit is fled, and leaves them now, at best, but the image of what I once knew them.

"But, Lord, hast `thou cast off forever, and wilt thou be favorable no more?' (Psalms 77:7) Hast thou in awful judgment determined that my soul must be left to a perpetual winter, the sad emblem of eternal darkness? Indeed, I deserve it should be so. I acknowledge, O Lord! I deserve to be cast away from thy presence with disdain, to be sunk lower than I am, much lower: I deserve to have `the shadow of death upon my eyelids,' (Job 16:16) and even to be surrounded with the thick gloom of the infernal prison. But hast thou not raised multitudes, who have `deserved, like me, to

be delivered into chains of darkness,' (2 Peter 2:4) to the vision of thy glory above, where no cloud can ever interpose between thee and their rejoicing spirits? `Have mercy upon me, O Lord! have mercy upon me!' (Psalms 123:3) And though my iniquities have now justly `caused thee to hide thy face from me,' (Isaiah 59:2) yet be thou rather pleased, agreeably to the gracious language of thy word, `to hide thy face from my sins, and to blot out all my iniquities.' (Psalms 51:9) Cheer my heart with the tokens or thy returning favor, and `say unto my soul, I am thy salvation!' (Psalms 35:3)

"Remember, O Lord God! remember that dreadful day, in which Jesus thy dear Son endured what my sins have deserved! Remember that agony, in which he poured out his soul before thee and said `My God! My God! why hast thou forsaken me?' (Matthew 27:46) Did he not, O Lord! endure all this, that humble penitents might, through him, be brought near unto thee, and might behold thee with pleasure, as their Father and their God? Thus do I desire to come unto thee. Blessed Savior, art thou not appointed `to give unto them that mourn in Zion, beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness?' (Isaiah 61:3) O wash away my tears, anoint my head with `the oil of gladness, and clothe me with the garments of salvation.' (Isaiah 61:10)

"'O that I knew where I might find thee' (Job 23:3) O that I knew what it is that hath engaged thee to depart from me! I am `searching and trying my ways.' (Lamentations 3:40) O that thou wouldst `search me, and know my heart; try me, and know my thoughts;' and if `there be any wicked way in me,' discover it, and `lead me in the way everlasting;' (Psalms 139:23-24) in that way in which I may find rest and peace `for my soul,' (Jeremiah 6:16) and feel the discoveries of thy love in Christ!

"O God! `who didst command the light to shine out of darkness,' (2 Corinthians 4:6) speak but the word, and light shall dart into my soul at once! `Open thou my lips, and my mouth shall show forth thy praise.' (Psalms 51:15) shall burst out into a cheerful song, which shall display, before those whom my present dejections may have discouraged, the pleasures and supports of religion.

"Yet, Lord, on the whole, I submit to thy will. If it is thus that my faith must be exercised, by walking in darkness for days, and months, and years to tome, how long soever they may seem, how long so ever they may be, I submit. Still will I adore thee as the `God of Israel,' and the Savior, though `thou art a God that hidest thyself.' (Isaiah 45:15) Still will I `trust in the name of the Lord, and stay myself upon my God,' (Isaiah 1:10) `trusting in thee, though thou slay me,' (Job 13:15) and waiting for thee, more than they that watch for the morning, yea, more than they that watch for the morning. (Psalms 130:6) Peradventure `in the evening time it may be light' (Zechariah 14:7) I know thou hast sometimes manifested thy compassion to thy dying servants, and given them, in the lowest ebb of their natural spirits, a full tide of divine glory; thus turning `darkness into light before them.' (Isaiah 42:15) So may it please thee to gild `the Valley of the Shadow of Death' with the light of thy presence, when I am passing it, and to stretch forth `thy rod and thy staff to comfort me,' (Psalms 23:4) that my tremblings may cease, and the gloom may echo with songs of praise! But if it be thy sovereign pleasure, that distress and darkness should still continue to the last motion of my pulse, and the last gasp of my breath, O let it cease with the parting struggle, and bring me to that light which is sown for the righteous, and to that gladness which is reserved `for the upright in heart;' (Psalms 97:11) to the unclouded regions of everlasting splendor and joy,

where the full anointings of thy Spirit shall be poured out upon all thy people, and thou wilt no more `hide thy face from any of them!' (Ezekiel 39:29)

"This, Lord, is `thy salvation for which I am waiting,' (Genesis 49:18) and whilst I feel the desires of my soul drawn out after it, I will never despair of obtaining it. Continue and increase those desires, and at length satisfy and exceed them aim through the riches of thy grace in Christ Jesus . Amen."

Chapter 38

02.25. The Christian Struggling Under Great And Heavy Affliction

Chapter 25 The Christian Struggling Under Great And Heavy Affliction

1. Here it is advised--that afflictions should only be expected.--2. That the righteous hand of God should be acknowledged in them when they come.--3. That they should be borne with patience.--4. That the divine conduct in them should be cordially approved.--5. That thankfulness should be maintained in the midst of trials.--6. That the design of afflictions should be diligently inquired into, and all proper assistance taken in discovering it.--7. That, when it is discovered, it should humbly be complied with and answered. A prayer suited to such a case.

1. SINCE "man is born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upward," (Job 5:7) and Adam has entailed on all his race the sad inheritance of calamity in their way to death, it will certainly be prudent and necessary that we should all expect to meet with trials and afflictions; and that you, reader, whoever you are, should be endeavoring to gird on your armor, and put yourself in a posture to encounter those trials which will fall to your lot as a man and a Christian. Prepare yourself to receive your afflictions, and to endure them, in a manner agreable to both these characters. In this view, when you see others under the burden, consider how possible it is that you may be called out to the very same difficulties, or to others equal to them. Put your soul as in the place of theirs. Think how you could endure the load under which they lie, and endeavor at once to comfort them, and to strengthen your own heart, or rather pray that God would do it. And observing how liable mortal life is to such sorrows, moderate your expectations from it; raise your thoughts above it; and form your schemes of happiness only for that world where they cannot be disappointed; in the mean time, blessing God that your prosperity is lengthened out thus far, and ascribing it to his special providence that you continue so long unwounded, when so many showers of arrows are flying around you, and so many are falling by them, on the right hand and on the left.

2. When at length your turn comes, as it certainly will, from the first hour in which an affliction seizes you, realize to yourself the hand of God in it, and lose not the view of him in any second cause, which may have proved the immediate occasion. Let it be your first care to "humble yourself under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time." (1 Peter 5:6) Own that "he is just in all that is brought upon you," (Nehemiah 9:33) and that in all these things "he punishes you less than your iniquities deserve." (Ezra 9:13) Compose yourself to bear his hand with patience, to glorify his name by a submission to his will, and to fall in with the gracious design of his visitation, as well as to wait the issue of it quietly, whatsoever the event may be.

3. Now, that "patience may have its perfect work," (James 1:4) reflect frequently, and deeply upon your own unworthiness and sinfulness. Consider how often every mercy has been forfeited, and every judgment deserved. And consider, too, how long the patience of God hath borne with you, and how wonderfully it is still exerted towards you; and indeed not only his patience, but his bounty too. Afflicted as you are, (for I speak to you now as actually under the pressure) look around and survey your remaining mercies, and be gratefully sensible of them. Make the supposition of their being removed: what if God should stretch out his hand against you, and add poverty to pain, or

pain to poverty, or the loss of friends to both, or the death of surviving friends to that of those whom you are now mourning over; would not the wound be more grievous? Adore his goodness that this is not the case; and take heed lest your unthankfulness should provoke him to multiply your sorrows. Consider also the need you have of discipline, how wholesome it may prove to your soul, and what merciful designs our Heavenly Father has in all the corrections he sends upon his children.

4. Nay, I will add, that, in consequence of all these considerations, it may be well expected, not only that you should submit to your afflictions, as what you cannot avoid, but that you should sweetly acquiesce in them, and approve them; that you should not only justify, but glorify God in sending them; that you should glorify him with your heart and with your lips too. Think not praises unsuitable on such an occasion; nor that praise alone to be suitable, which takes its rise from remaining comforts; but know that it is your duty, not only to be thankful in your afflictions, but to be thankful on account of them.

5. God himself hath said, "in every thing give thanks," (1 Thessalonians 5:18) and he has taught his servants to say, "Yea, also we glory in tribulation." (Romans 5:3) And most certain it is, that to true believers, afflictions are tokens of divine mercy; for "whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth," with peculiar and distinguishing endearment. (Hebrews 12:6) View your present afflictions in this light, as chastisements of love; and then let your own heart say, whether love does not demand praise. Think with yourself, "it is thus that God is making me conformable to his own Son; it is thus that he is training me up for complete glory. Thus he kills my corruptions; thus he strengthens my graces; thus he is wisely contriving to bring me nearer to himself and to ripen me for the honors of his heavenly kingdom. It is, if need be, that `I am in heaviness,' (1 Peter 1:6) and he surely knows what that need is better than I can pretend to teach him, and knows what peculiar propriety there is in this affliction to answer my present necessity, and to do me that peculiar good which he is graciously intending me by it. This tribulation shall `work patience, and patience experience,' and `experience a more assured hope,' even a hope which `shall not make ashamed,' while the love of God is shed abroad in my heart, (Romans 5:3, Romans 5:5) and shines through my affliction, like the sun through a gentle descending cloud, darting in light upon the shade, and mingling fruitfulness with weeping."

6. Let it be then your earnest care, while you thus look on your affliction, whatever it may be, as coming from the hand of God, to improve it to the purposes for which it was sent. And that you may so improve it, let it be your first concern to know what those purposes are. Summon up all the attention of your soul to bear the rod, and him "who hath appointed it," (Micah 6:9) and pray earnestly that you may understand its voice. Examine your life, your words and your heart; and pray that God would so guide your inquiries, that you may "return unto the Lord that smiteth you." (Isaiah 9:13) To assist you in this, call in the help of pious friends, and particularly of your minister: entreat not only their prayers, but their advice too, as to the probable design of Providence; and encourage them freely to tell you any thing which occurs to their minds upon this head. And if such an occasion should lead them to touch upon some of the imperfections of your character and conduct look upon it as a great token of their friendship, and take it, not only patiently, but thankfully. It does but ill become a Christian, at any time, to resent reproofs and admonitions; and least of all does it become him, when the rebukes of his Heavenly Father are upon him. He ought rather to seek admonitions at such a time as this, and voluntarily offer his wounds to be searched

by a faithful and skillful band.

7. And when, by one means or another, you have got a ray of light to direct you in the meaning and language of such dispensations, take heed that you do not, in any degree, "harden yourself against God, and walk contrary to him." (Leviticus 26:27) Obstinate reluctance to the apprehended design of any providential stroke is inexpressibly provoking to him. Set yourself therefore, to an immediate reformation of whatever you discover amiss, and labor to learn the general lessons of greater submission to God's will, of a more calm indifference to the world, and of a closer attachment to divine converse, and to the views of an approaching invisible state. And whatever particular proportion or correspondence you may observe between this or that circumstance in your affliction and your former transgressions, be especially careful to act according to that more peculiar and express voice of the rod. Then you may perhaps have speedy and remarkable reasons to say, that "it hath been good for you that you have been afflicted," (Psalms 119:71) and, with a multitude of others, may learn to number the times of your sharpest trials among the sweetest and most exalted moments of your life. For this purpose, let prayer be your frequent employment; and let such sentiments as these, if not in the very same terms be often and affectionately poured out before God. An humble Address to God under the Pressure of heavy Affliction.

"O thou Supreme, yet all righteous and gracious Governor of the whole universe! mean and inconsiderable as this little province of thy spacious empire may appear, thou dost not disregard the earth and its inhabitants, but attendest to its concerns with the most condescending and gracious regard. `Thou reignest, and I rejoice in it;' as it is indeed `matter of universal joy.' (Psalms 97:1) I believe thy providence and care; and I firmly believe thy wise, holy, and kind interposition in everything which relates to me and to the circumstances of my abode in this world. I would look through all inferior causes unto thee, whose eyes are upon all thy creatures; to thee, `who formest light and createst darkness' who `makest peace and createst evil;' (Isaiah 45:7) to thee, Lord, who at thy pleasure canst exchange the one for the other, canst turn the brightest noon into midnight, and the darkest midnight into noon.

"O thou wise and merciful Governor of the world! I have often said, `Thy will be done;' and now, thy will is painful to me. But shall I upon that account unsay what I have so often said? God forbid! I come rather to lay myself down at thy feet, and to declare my full and free submission to all thy sacred pleasure. O Lord! thou art just and righteous in all! I acknowledge, in thy venerable and awful presence, that `I have deserved this,' and ten thousand times more. (Ezra 9:13) I acknowledge that `it is of thy mercy that I am not utterly consumed,' (Lamentations 3:22) and that any, the least degree, of comfort yet remains. O Lord! I most readily confess that the sins of one day of my life have merited all these chastisements; and that every day of my life has been more or less sinful. Smite, therefore, O thou Righteous Judge! and I will still adore thee, that, instead of the scourge, thou hast not given a commission to the sword, to do all the dreadful work of justice, and to pour out my blood in thy presence.

"But shall I speak unto thee only as my Judge? O Lord! thou hast taught me a tenderer name: thou condescendest to call thyself my Father, and to speak of correction as the effect of thy love. O welcome, welcome, those afflictions which are the tokens of thy paternal affection, the marks of my adoption into thy family! Thou knowest what discipline I need. Thou seest, O Lord! that bundle

of folly which there is in the heart of thy poor, froward, and thoughtless child, and knowest what rods and what strokes are needful to drive it away. I would therefore `be in humble subjection to the Father of spirits,' who `chastened me for my profit;' would `be in subjection to him and live.' (Hebrews 12:9-10) I would bear thy strokes, not merely because I cannot resist them, but because I love and trust in thee. I would sweetly acquiesce and rest in thy will, as well as stoop to it; and would say, `Good is the word of the Lord;' (2 Kings 20:19) and I desire that not only my lips, but my soul may acquiesce. Yea, Lord, I would praise thee, that thou wilt show so much regard to me as to apply such remedies as these to the diseases of my mind, and art thus kindly careful to train me up for glory. I have no objection against being afflicted, against being afflicted in this particular way. `The cup which my Father puts into my hand, shall I not drink it?' (John 18:11) By thine assistance and support I will. Only be pleased, O Lord! to stand by me, and sometimes to grant me a favorable look in the midst of my sufferings! Support my soul, I beseech thee, by thy consolations mingled with my tribulations, and I shall glory in those tribulations that are thus allayed! It has been the experience of many, who have reflected on afflicted days with pleasure, and have acknowledged that their comforts have swallowed up their sorrows. And after all that thou hast done, `are thy mercies restrained?' (Isaiah 63:15) `Is thy hand waxed short?' (Numbers 11:25) Or canst thou not do the same for me?

"If my heart be less tender, less sensible, thou canst cure that disorder, and canst make this affliction the means of curing it. Thus let it be; and at length, in thine own due time, and in the way which thou shalt choose, work out deliverance for me, `and show me thy marvellous loving-kindness, O thou that savest by thy right band them that put their trust in thee!' (Psalms 17:7) For I well know, that how dark soever this night of affliction may seem, if thou sayest, `Let there be light,' there shall be light. But I would urge nothing before the time thy wisdom and goodness shall appoint. I am much more concerned that my afflictions may be sanctified, than that they may be removed. Number me, O God! among the happy persons whom, whilst thou chastenest, thou `teachest out of thy law!' (Psalms 94:12) Show me, I beseech thee, `wherefore thou, contendest with me,' (Job 19:2) and purify me by the fire, which is to painful to me while I am passing through it? Dost thou not chasten thy children for this very end, `that they may be partakers of thy holiness?' (Hebrews 12:10) Thou knowest, O God! it is this my soul is breathing after. I am partaker of thy bounty every day and moment of my life: I am partaker of thy Gospel, and I hope, in some measure too, a partaker of the grace of it operating on my heart. O may it operate more and more, that I may largely partake of thine holiness too; that I may come nearer and nearer in the temper of my mind to thee, O blessed God! the supreme model of perfection! Let my soul be, as it were, melted, thought with the intensest heat or the furnace, if I may but thereby be made fit for being delivered into the mold of the Gospel, and bearing thy bright and amiable image!"

"O Lord, `my soul longeth for thee; it crieth out for the living God!' (Psalms 84:2) In thy presence, and under the support of thy love, I can bear anything; and am willing to bear it, if I may grow more lovely in thine eyes, and more meet for thy kingdom. The days of my affliction will have an end; the hour will at length come, when thou `wilt wipe away all my tears.' (Revelation 21:4) `Though it tarry,' I would `wait for it.' (Hebrews 2:3) My foolish heart, in the midst of all its trials, is ready to grow fond of this earth, disappointing and grievous as it is; and graciously, O God, dost thou deal with me, in breaking those bonds that would tie me faster to it. O let my soul be girding itself up,

and, as it were, stretching its wings in expectation of that blessed hour when it shall drop all its sorrows and incumbrances at once, and soar away, to expatiate with infinite delight in the regions of liberty, peace and joy. Amen.

02.26. The Christian Assisted In Examining Into His Growth In Grace

Chapter 26 The Christian Assisted In Examining Into His Growth In Grace

1. The examination important.--2. False marks of growth to be avoided.--3. True marks proposed; such as--increasing love to God.--4. Benevolence to men.--5. Candor of disposition.--6. Meekness under injuries.--7. Serenity amidst the uncertainties of life.--8. Humility,--especially as expressed in evangelical exercises of mind toward Christ end the Holy Spirit.--10. Zeal for the divine honor.--11. Habitual and cheerful willingness to exchange worlds when ever God shall appoint.--12. Conclusion. The Christian breathing after growth in grace.

1. IF by divine grace you have "been born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible," (1 Peter 1:2-3) even "by that word of God which liveth and abideth for ever," not only in the world and the church, but in particular souls in which it is sown; you will, "as new born babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that you may grow thereby." (1 Peter 2:2) And though in the most advanced state of religion on earth, we are but infants in comparison to what we hope to be, when, in the heavenly world, we arrive "unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ," (Ephesians 4:13) yet, as we have some exercise of a sanctified reason, we shall be solicitous that we may be growing and thriving. And you, my reader, "if so be you have tasted that the Lord is gracious," (1 Peter 2:3) will, I doubt not, feel this solicitude. I would, therefore, endeavor to assist you in making the inquiry, whether religion be on the advance in your soul. And here I shall warn you against some false marks of growth, and then shall endeavor to lay down others on which you may depend as more solid. In this view I would observe, that you are not to measure your growth in grace only or chiefly by your advances in knowledge, or in zeal, or any other passionate impression of the mind, no, nor by the fervor of devotion alone; but by the habitual determination of the will for God, and by your prevailing disposition to obey his commands, submit to his disposal, and promote the highest welfare of his cause in the earth.

2. It must be allowed that knowledge and affection in religion are indeed desirable. Without some degree of the former, religion cannot be rational and it is very reasonable to believe, that without some degree of the latter it cannot be sincere, in creatures whose natures are constituted like ours. Yet there may be a great deal of speculative knowledge, and a great deal of rapturous affection, where there is no true religion at all; and still more, where religion exists, though there be no advanced state of it. The exercise of our rational faculties, upon the evidences of divine revelation, and upon the declaration of it as contained in Scripture, may furnish a very wicked man with a well-digested body of orthodox divinity in his head, when not one single doctrine of it has ever reached his heart. An eloquent description of the sufferings of Christ, of the solemnities of judgment, of the joys of the blessed, and the miseries of the damned, might move the breast even of a man who did not firmly believe them; as we often find ourselves strongly moved by well-wrought narrations or discourses, which at the same time we know to have their foundation in fiction. Natural constitution, or such accidental causes as are (some of them) too low to be here mentioned, may supply the eyes with a flood of tears, which may discharge itself plenteously upon

almost any occasion that shall first arise. And a proud impatience of contradiction directly opposite as it is to the gentle spirit of Christianity, may make a man’s blood boil when he hears the notions he has entertained, and especially those which he has openly and vigorously espoused, disputed and opposed. This may possibly lead him, in terms of strong indignation, to pour out his zeal and his rage before God!, in a fond conceit, that, as the God of truth, he is the pattern of those favorite doctrines by whose fair appearances perhaps he himself is misled. And if these speculative refinements, or these affectionate sallies of the mind, be consistent with a total absence of true religion, they are much more apparently consistent with a very low state of it. I would desire to lead you, my friend, into sublimer notions and juster marks, and refer you to other practical writers, arid, above all, to the book of God, to prove how material they are. I would therefore entreat you to bring your own heart to answer, as in the presence of God, such inquiries as these:

3. Do you find "divine love, on the whole, advancing in your soul?" Do you feel yourself more and more sensible of the presence of God? and does that sense grow more delightful to you than it formerly was? Can you, even when your natural spirits are weak and low, and you are not in any frame for the ardors and ecstacies of devotion, nevertheless find a pleasing rest, a calm repose of heart, in the thought that God is near you, and that he sees the secret sentiments of your soul, while you are, as it were, toward those whom an unsanctified heart might be ready to imagine it had some just excuse for excepting out of the list of those it loves, and from whom you are ready to feel some secret alienation or aversion. How does your mind stand affected toward those who differ from you in their religious sentiments and practices? I do not say that Christian charity will require you to think every error harmless. It argues no want of love to a friend, in some cases, to fear lest his disorder should prove more fatal than he seems to imagine: nay, sometimes the very tenderness of friendship may increase that apprehension. But to hate persons because we think they are mistaken, and to aggravate every difference in judgment or practice into a fatal and damnable error that destroys all Christian communion and love, is a symptom generally much worse than the evil it condemns. Do you love the image of Christ in a person who thinks himself obliged in conscience to profess and worship in a manner different from yourself? Nay, farther, can you love and honor that which is truly amiable and excellent in those in whom much is defective; in those in whom there is a mixture of bigotry and narrowness of spirit, which may lead them perhaps to slight, or even to censure you? Can you love them as the disciples and servants of Christ, who, through a mistaken zeal, may be ready to "cast out your name as evil," (Luke 6:22) and to warn others against you as a dangerous person? This is none of the least triumphs of charity, nor any despicable evidence of an advance in religion.

6. And, on this head, reflect farther, "How can you bear injuries?" There is a certain hardness of soul in this respect, which argues a confirmed state in piety and virtue. Does every thing of this kind hurry and ruffle you, so as to put you on contrivances how you may recompense, or, at least, how you may disgrace and expose him who has done you the wrong? Or can you stand the shock calmly, and easily divert your mind to other objects, only (when you recollect these things) pitying and praying for those who with the worst tempers and views are assaulting you? This is a Christ-like temper indeed, and he will own it as such; will own you as one of his soldiers, as one of his heroes; especially if it rises so far, as, instead of being "overcome of evil, to overcome evil with good." (Romans 12:21) Watch over your spirit and over your tongue, when injuries are offered, and see whether you be ready to meditate upon them, to aggravate them in your own view, to

complain of them to others, and to lay on all the load of blame that you in justice can; or, whether you be ready to put the kindest construction upon the offence, to excuse it as far as reason will allow, and (where, after all, it will wear a black and odious aspect) to forgive it, heartily to forgive it, and that even before any submission is made, or pardon asked; and in token of the sincerity of that forgiveness, to be contriving what can be done, by some benefit or other, toward the injurious person, to teach him a better temper.

7. Examine farther, "with regard to other evils and calamities of life, and even with regard to its uncertainties, how you can bear them." Do you find your soul is in this respect gathering strength? Have you fewer foreboding fears and disquieting alarms than you once had, as to what may happen in life? Can you trust the wisdom and goodness of God to order your affairs for you, with more complacency and cheerfulness than formerly? Do you find yourself able to unite your thoughts more in surveying present circumstances, that you may collect immediate duty from them, though you know not what God will next appoint or call you to? And when you feel the smart of affliction, do you make a less matter of it? Can you transfer your heart more easily to heavenly and divine objects, without an anxious solicitude whether this or that burden be removed, so it may but be sanctified to promote your communion with God and your ripeness for glory?

8. Examine also, "whether you advance in humility." This is a silent but most excellent grace; and they who are most eminent in it, are dearest to God, and most fit for the communications of his presence to them. Do you then feel your mind more emptied of proud and haughty imaginations, not prone so much to look back upon past services which it has performed, as forward to those which are yet before you, and inward upon the remaining imperfections of your heart? Do you more tenderly observe your daily failures and miscarriages, and find yourself disposed to mourn over those things before the Lord, that once passed with you as slight matters, though, when you come to survey them as in the presence of God, you find they were not wholly involuntary or free from guilt? Do you feel in your breast a deeper apprehension of the infinite majesty of the blessed God, and of the glory of his natural and moral perfections, so as, in consequence of these views, to perceive yourself as it were annihilated in his presence, and to shrink into "less than nothing, and vanity?" (Isaiah 40:17) If this be your temper, God will look upon you with peculiar favor, and will visit you more and more with the distinguishing blessings of his grace.

9. But there is another great branch and effect of Christian humility, which it would be an unpardonable negligence to omit. Let me therefore farther inquire, are you more frequently renewing your application, your sincere, steady, determined application, to the righteousness and blood of Christ, as being sensible how unworthy you are to appear before God otherwise than in him? And do the remaining corruptions of your heart humble you before him, though the disorders of your life are in a great measure cured? Are you more earnest to obtain the quickening influences of the Holy Spirit? And have you such a sense of your own weakness as to engage you to depend, in all the duties you perform, upon the communications of his grace to "help your infirmities?" (Romans 8:26) Can you, at the close of your most religious, exemplary, and useful days, blush before God for the deficiencies of them, while others perhaps may he ready to admire and extol your conduct? And while you give the glory of all that has been right to him from whom the strength and grace has been derived, are you coming to the blood of sprinkling, to free you from the guilt which mingles itself even with the best of your services? Do you learn to receive the bounties of Providence, not only with thankfulness, as coming from God, but with a mixture of

shame and confusion too, under a consciousness that you do not deserve them, and are continually forfeiting them? And do you justify Providence in your afflictions and disappointments, even while many are flourishing around you full in the bloom of prosperity, whose offences have been more visible at least, and more notorious than yours?

10. Do you also advance "in zeal and activity" for the service of God and the happiness of mankind? Does your love show itself solid and sincere, by a continual flow of good works from it? Can you view the sorrows of others with tender compassion, and with projects and contrivances what you may do to relieve them? Do you feel in your breast that you are more frequently "devising liberal things," (Isaiah 32:8) and ready to waive your own advantage or pleasure that you may accomplish them ? Do you find your imagination teeming, as it were, with conceptions and schemes for the advancement of the cause and interest of Christ in the world, for the propagation of his Gospel, and for the happiness of your fellow-creatures ? And do you not only pray, but act for it act in such a manner as to show that you pray in earnest, and feel a readiness to do what little you can in this cause, even though others, who might, if they pleased, very conveniently do a vast deal more, will do nothing?

11. And, not to enlarge upon this copious head, reflect once more, "how your affections stand with regard to this world and another." Are you more deeply and practically convinced of the vanity of these "things which are seen, and are temporal?" (2 Corinthians 4:18) Do you perceive your expectations from them, and your attachments to them to diminish? You are willing to stay in this world as long as your Father pleases; and it is right and well; but do you find your bonds so loosened to it; that you are willing, heartily willing, to leave it at the shortest warning; so that if God should see fit to summon you away on a sudden, though it should be in the midst of your enjoyments, pursuits, expectations, and hopes, you would cordially consent to that remove without saying, "Lord, let me stay a little while longer, to enjoy this or that agreeable entertainment, to finish this or that scheme?" Can you think, with an habitual calmness and hearty approbation, if such be the divine pleasure, of waking no more when you lie down on your bed, of returning home no more when you go out of your house? And yet on the other hand, how great soever the burdens of life are, do you find a willingness to bear them, in submission to the will of your heavenly Father, though it should be to many future years, and though they should be years of far greater affliction than you have ever yet seen? Can you say calmly and steadily, if not with such overflowings of tender affection as you could desire, "Behold, `thy servant,' thy child is `in thine hand, do with me as seemeth good in thy sight!' (2 Samuel 15:26) My will is melted into thine; to be lifted up or laid down, to be carried out or brought in, to be here or there, in this or that circumstance, just as thou pleasest, and as shall best suit with thy great extensive plan, which it is impossible that I, or all the angels in heaven, should mend."

12. These, if I understand matters aright, are some of the most substantial evidences of growth and establishment in religion. Search after them: bless God for them, so for as you discover them in yourself, and study to advance in them daily, under the influences of divine grace; to which I heartily recommend you, and to which I entreat you frequently to recommend yourself. The Christian breathing earnestly after growth in Grace.

"O thou ever-blessed Fountain of natural and spiritual life! I thank thee that I live, and know the exercises and pleasures of a religious life. I bless thee that thou hast infused into me thine own

vital breath, though I was once `dead in trespasses and sins,' (Ephesians 2:1) so that I am become, in a sense peculiar to thine own children, `a living soul.' (Genesis 2:7) But it is my earnest desire that I may not only live but grow, `grow in grace, and in the knowledge of my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ,' (2 Peter 3:18) upon an acquaintance with whom my progress in it so evidently depends. In this view, I humbly entreat thee that thou wilt form my mind to right notions in religion, that I may not judge of grace by any wrong conceptions of it, nor measure my advances in it by those things which are merely the effects of nature, and possibly its corrupt effects!

"May I be seeking after an increase of divine love to thee, my God and Father in Christ, of unreserved resignation to thy wise and holy will, and of extensive benevolence to my fellow-creatures! May I grow in patience and fortitude of soul, in humility and zeal, in spirituality and a heavenly disposition of mind, and in a concern, `that, whether present or absent, I may be accepted of the Lord,' (2 Corinthians 5:9) that whether I live or die, it may be for thy glory. In a word, as thou knowest I hunger and thirst after righteousness, make me whatever thou wouldst delight to see me! Draw on my soul, by the gentle influences of thy gracious Spirit, every trace, and every feature, which thine eye, O Heavenly Father, may survey with pleasure, and which thou mayest acknowledge as thine own image.

"I am sensible, O Lord, I have not as yet attained, yea, my soul is utterly confounded to think how far I am from being already perfect; but this one thing (after thy great example of thine apostle) I would endeavor to do: `forgetting the things which are behind, I would press forward to those which are before.' (Php 3:12-13) O that thou wouldst feed my soul by thy word and Spirit! Having been, as I humbly hope and trust, regenerated by it, `being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, even by thy word, which liveth and abideth for ever;' (1 Peter 1:23) `as a new-born babe, I desire the sincere milk of the word, that I may grow thereby.' (1 Peter 2:2) And may `my profiting appear unto all men,' (1 Timothy 4:15) till at length `I come unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ,' (Ephesians 4:13) and after having enjoyed the pleasure of those that flourish eminently in thy courts below, be fixed in the paradise above! I ask and hope it through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ; `to him be glory, both now and for ever' (2 Peter 3:18) Amen"

Chapter 40

02.27. The Advanced Shristian Reminded Of The Mercies Of God

Chapter 27 The Advanced Christian Reminded Of The Mercies Of God

1. A holy joy in God, our privilege as well as our duty.--2. The Christian invited to the exercise of it.--3. By the consideration of temporal mercies.--4. And of spiritual favors.--5. By the views of eternal happiness.--6. And of the mercies of God to others, the living and the dead.--7. The chapter closes with an exhortation to this heavenly exercise. And with an example of the genuine workings of this grateful joy in God.

1. I WOULD now suppose my reader to find, on an examination of his spiritual state, that he is growing in grace. And if you desire that this growth may at once be acknowledged and promoted, let me call your soul "to that more affectionate exercise of love to God and joy in him," which suits, and strengthens, and exalts the character of the advanced Christian; and which I beseech you to regard, not only as your privilege, but as your duty too. Love is the most sublime, generous principle, of all true and acceptable obedience; and with love, when so wisely and happily fixed, when so certainly returned, JOY, proportionable JOY, must naturally be connected. It may justly grieve a man that enters into the spirit of Christianity, to see how low a life even the generality of sincere Christians commonly live in this respect. "Rejoice then in the Lord, ye righteous, and give thanks at the remembrance of his holiness," (Psalms 97:12) and of all those other perfections and glories which are included in that majestic, that wonderful, that delightful name, THE LORD THY GOD. Spend not your sacred moments merely in confession or in petition, though each must have their daily share; but give a part, a considerable part, to the Celestial and angelic work of praise. Yea, labor to carry about with you continually, a heart overflowing with such sentiments, warmed and inflamed with such affections.

2. Are there not continually rays enough diffused from the great Father of light and love to enkindle it in our bosom? Come, my Christian friend and brother, come and survey with me the goodness of our heavenly Fattier. And oh! that he would give me such a sense of it, that I might represent it in a suitable manner, that "while I am musing, the fire may burn" in my own heart, (Psalms 39:3) and be communicated to yours! And oh! that it might pass, with the lines I write, from soul to soul, awakening in the breast of every Christian that reads them, sentiments more worthy the children of God and the heirs of glory, who are to spend end an eternity in those sacred exercises to which I am now endeavoring to excite you.

3. Have you not reason to adopt the words of David, and say, `How many are thy gracious thoughts unto me, O Lord!' how great is the sum of them! When I would count them, they are more in number than the sand." (Psalms 139:17-18) You indeed know where to begin the survey, for the favors of God to you began with your being. Commemorate it therefore with a grateful heart, that the eyes which "saw your substance, being yet imperfect," beheld you with a friendly care "when you were made in secret," and have watched over you ever since--and that the hand which "drew the plan of your members, when as yet there was none of them," (Psalms 139:15-16) not only fashioned them at first, but from that time has been concerned in "keeping all your bones, so that

none of them is broken," (Psalms 34:20) and that, indeed, it is to this you owe it that you live. Look back upon the path you have trod, from the day that God brought you out of the womb, and say whether you do not, as it were, see all the road thick set with the marks and memorials of the divine goodness. Recollect the places where you have lived, and the persons with whom you have most intimately conversed, and call to mind the mercies you have received in those places, and from those persons, as the instruments of the divine care and goodness. Recollect the difficulties and dangers with which you have been surrounded, and reflect attentively on what God hath done to defend you from them, or to carry you through them. Think how often there has been but a step between you and death, and how suddenly God has sometimes interposed to set you in safety, even before you apprehended your danger. Think of those chambers of illness in which you have been confined; and from whence, perhaps, you once thought you should go forth no more; but said, with Hezekiah, in the cutting off of your days, "I shall go to the gates of the grave: I am deprived of the residue of my years." (Isaiah 38:10) God has, it may be, since that time, added many years to your life; and you know not how many are in reserve, or how much usefulness and happiness may attend each. Survey your circumstances in relative life; how ninny kind friends are surrounding you daily, and studying how they may contribute to your comfort. Reflect on those remarkable circumstances in Providence, which occasioned the knitting of some bonds of this kind, which, next to those which join your soul to God, you number among the happiest. And forget not in how many instances, when these dear lives have been threatened, lives perhaps more sensibly dear than your own God has given them back from the borders of the grave, and so added new endearments, arising from that tender circumstance, to all your after converse with them. Nor forget, in how gracious a manner he hath supported some others in their last moments, and enabled them to leave behind a sweet odor of piety, which hath embalmed their memories, revived you when ready to faint under the sorrows of the last separation, and, on the whole, made even the recollection of their death delightful.

4. But it is more than time that I lead on your thoughts to the many spiritual mercies which God has bestowed upon you. Look back, as it were, to "the rock from whence you were hewn, and to the hole of the pit from whence you were digged." (Isaiah 1:1) Reflect seriously on the state wherein divine grace found you: under how much guilt, under how much pollution! in what danger, in what ruin! Think what was, and O think with yet deeper reflection. what would have been the case! The eye of God, which penetrates into eternity, saw what your mind, amused with the trifles of the present time and sensual gratification, was utterly ignorant and regardless of: it saw you on the borders of eternity, and pitied you; saw that you would in a little time have been such a helpless, wretched creature as the sinner that is just now dead, and has, to his infinite surprise and everlasting terror, met his unexpected doom; and would, like him, stand thunderstruck in astonishment and despair. This God saw, and he pitied you; and being merciful to you, he provided, in the counsel of his eternal love and grace, a Redeemer for you, and purchased you to himself, through the blood of his Son: a price which, if you will pause upon it, and think seriously what it was, must surely affect you to such a degree as to make you to fall down before God in wonder and shame, to think it should ever have been given for you. To accomplish these blessed purposes, he sent his grace into your heart; so that, though "you were once darkness, you are now light in the Lord." (Ephesians 5:8) He made that happy change which you now feel in your soul, and "by his Holy Spirit, which is given to you," he shed abroad that principle of love (Romans 5:5) which is enkindled by this review, and now flames with greater ardor than before. Thus far he hath

supported you in your Christian course, and "having obtained help from him," it is that you continue even to this day. (Acts 26:22) He hath not only blessed you, but "made you a blessing;" (Genesis 12:2.) and though you have not been so useful as that holy generosity of heart which he has excited would have engaged you to desire, yet some good you have done in the station in which he has fixed you. Some of your brethren of mankind have been relieved; perhaps, too, some thoughtless creature reclaimed to virtue and happiness by his blessing on your endeavors. Some in the way to heaven are praising God for you; and some, perhaps, already there, are longing for your arrival, that they may thank you, in nobler and more expressive forms, for benefits, the importance of which they now sufficiently understand, though while here, they could never conceive it.

5. Christian, look around on the numberless blessings, of one kind and of another, with which you are already encompassed; and advance your prospect still farther, to what faith yet discovers within the veil. Think of those now unknown transports with which thou shalt drop every burden in the grave; and thine immortal spirit shall mount, light and joyful, holy and happy to God, its original, its support, and its hope; to God, the source of being, of holiness, and of pleasure; to Jesus, through whom all these blessings are derived to thee, and who will appoint thee a throne near to his own, to be for ever a spectator and partaker of his glory. Think of the rapture with which thou shalt attend his triumph in the resurrection-day, and receive this poor, moldering, corruptible body, transformed into his glorious image; and then think, "These hopes are not mine alone, but the hopes of thousands and millions. Multitudes, whom I number among the dearest of my friends upon the earth, are rejoicing with me in these apprehensions and views; and God gives me sometimes to see the smiles on their cheeks, the sweet, humble hope that sparkles in their eyes and shines through the tears of tender gratitude, and to hear that little of their inward complacency and joy which language can express. Yea, and multitudes more, who were once equally dear to me with these, though I have laid them in the grave, and wept over the dust, are living to God, living in the possession of inconceivable delights, and drinking large draughts of the water of life, which flows in perpetual streams at his right hand."

6. O Christian! thou art still intimately united and allied to them. Death cannot break a friendship thus cemented, and it ought not to render thee insensible of the happiness of those friends for whose memory thou retainest so just an honor. They live to God as his servants; they "serve him and see his face,"(Revelation 22:3-4) and they make but a small part of that glorious assembly. Millions, equally worthy of thine esteem and affection with themselves, inhabit those blissful regions; and wilt thou not rejoice in their joy? And wilt thou not adore that everlasting spring of holiness and happiness from whence each of their streams is derived? Yea, I will add, while the blessed angels are so kindly regarding us, while they are ministering to thee, O Christian! and bearing thee in their arms, "as an heir of salvation," (Hebrews 1:14) wilt thou not rejoice in their felicity too? And wilt thou not adore that God who gives them all the superior glory of their more exalted nature, and gives them a heaven, which fills them with blessedness even while they seem to withdraw from it, that they may attend on thee?

7. This, and infinitely more than this the blessed God is, and was, and shall ever be. The felicities of the blessed spirits that surround his throne, and thy felicities, O Christian! are immortal. These heavenly luminaries shall glow with an undecaying flame, and thou shalt shine and burn among them when the sun and the stars are gone out. Still shall the unchanging Father of lights pour forth

his beams upon them; and the lustre they reflect from him, and their happiness in him, shall be everlasting, shall be ever growing. Bow down, O thou child of God, thou heir of glory; bow down, and let all that is within thee unite in one act of grateful love; and let all that is around thee, all that is before thee in the prospects of an unbounded eternity, concur to elevate and transport thy soul, that thou mayest, as far as possible, begin the work and blessedness of heaven, in falling down before the God of it, in opening thine heart to his gracious influences, and in breathing out before him that incense of praise which these warm beams of his presence and love have so great a tendency to produce, and to ennoble with a fragrancy resembling that of his paradise above. The grateful Soul rejoicing in the Blessings of Providence and Grace, and pouring out itself before God in vigorous and affectionate Exercises of Love and Praise.

"O my God, it is enough! I have mused, and `the fire burneth!' (Psalms 39:3) But oh! in what language shall the flame break forth? What can a say but this, that my heart admires thee, and adores thee, and loves thee? My little vessel is as full as it can hold; and I would pour out all that fullness before thee, that it may grow capable of receiving more and more. Thou art `my hope and my help; my glory, and the lifter up of my head.' (Psalms 3:3) `My heart rejoiceth in thy salvation' (Psalms 13:5) and when I set myself under the influences of thy good Spirit to converse with thee, a thousand delightful thoughts spring up at once; a thousand sources of pleasure are unsealed, and flow in upon my soul with such refreshment and joy, that they seem to crowd into every moment the happiness of days, and weeks, and months.

"I bless thee, O God, for this soul of mine which thou hast created; which thou hast taught to say, and I hope to the happiest purpose, `Where is God my Maker!' (Job 35:10) I bless thee for the knowledge with which thou hast adorned it. I bless thee for that grace with which I trust I may (not without humble wonder) say, thou hast sanctified it; though, alas! the celestial plant is fixed in too barren a soil, and does not flourish to the degree I could wish.

"I bless thee also for that body which thou hast given me, and which thou preservest as yet in its strength and vigor, not only capable of relishing the entertainments which thou providest for its various senses, but (which I esteem far more valuable than any of them for its own sake) capable of acting with some vivacity in thy service. I bless thee for that case and freedom with which these limbs of mine move themselves, and obey the dictates of my spirit, I hope as guided by thine. I bless thee that `the keepers of my house do not tremble, nor the strong men bow themselves;' that they `that look out of the windows are not yet darkened, nor the daughters of music brought low.' I bless thee, O God of my life! that `the silver cord is not yet loosed, nor the golden bowl broken;' (Ecclesiastes 12:3-4, Ecclesiastes 12:6) for it is thine hand that braces all my nerves, and thine infinite skill that prepares those spirits that flow in so freely; and when exhausted, recruit so soon and so plentifully. I praise thee for that royal bounty with which thou providest for the daily support of mankind in general, and for mine in particular; for the various tables which thou spreadest before me, and for the overflowing cup which thou `puttest into my hands.' (Psalms 23:5) I bless thee that these bounties of thy providence do not serve, as it were, to upbraid a disabled appetite, and are not `like messes of meat set before the dead.' I bless thee too, that I `eat not my morsel of meat alone,' (Job 31:17) but share it with so many agreeable friends, who add the relish of a social life to that of the animal, at our seasons of common repast. I thank thee for so many dear relatives at home, for so many kind friends abroad, who are capable of serving me in various instances, and disposed to make an obliging use of that capacity.

"Nor would I forget to acknowledge thy favor in rendering me capable of serving others, and giving me in any instance to know how much `more blessed it is to give than to receive.' (Acts 20:35) I thank thee for a heart which feels the sorrows of the necessitous, and a mind which can make it my early care and refreshment to contrive, according to my little ability, for their relief; for `this also cometh forth from thee, O Lord!' (Isaiah 28:29) the great Author of every benevolent inclination, of every prudent scheme, of every successful attempt to spread happiness around us, or in any instance to lessen distress.

"And surely, O Lord, if I thus acknowledge the pleasures of sympathy with the afflicted, much more must I bless thee for those of sympathy with the happy, with those that are completely blessed. I adore thee for the streams that water Paradise, and maintain it in ever-flourishing, ever-growing delight. I praise thee for the rest, the joy, the transport, thou art giving to many that were once dear to me on earth, whose sorrows it was my labor to soothe, and whose joys, especially in thee, it was the delight of my heart to promote. I praise thee for the blessedness of every saint, and of every angel that surrounds thy throne above; and I praise thee, with accents of distinguished pleasure for that reviving hope which thou hast implanted in my bosom, that I shall, ere long, know, by clear sight, and by everlasting experience, what that felicity of theirs is which I now only discover at a distance, through the comparatively obscure glass of faith. Even now, through thy grace, do I feel myself borne forward by thy supporting arm to those regions of blessedness. Even now am I `waiting for thy salvation,' (Genesis 49:18) with that ardent desire, on the one hand, which its sublime greatness cannot but inspire into the believing soul, and that calm resignation on the other, which the immutability of thy promise establishes.

"And now, O my God, what shall I say unto thee? what, but that I love thee above all the powers of language to express! That I love thee for what thou art to thy creatures, who are, in their various forms, every moment deriving being, knowledge and happiness from thee, in numbers and degrees far beyond what my narrow imagination can conceive. But, oh! I adore and love thee yet far more for what thou art in thyself; for those stores of perfection which creation has not diminished, and which can never be exhausted by all the effects of it which thou impartest to thy creatures; that infinite perfection which makes thee thine own happiness, thine own end; amiable, infinitely amiable and venerable, were all derived excellence and happiness forgot.

"O thou first, thou greatest, thou fairest of all objects! thou only great, thou only fair, possess all my soul! And surely thou dost possess it. While I thus feel thy sacred Spirit breathing on my heart, and exciting these fervors of love to thee, I cannot doubt it any more than I can doubt the reality of this animal life, while I exert the actings of it, and feel its sensations. Surely, if ever I knew the appetite of hunger, my soul `hungers after righteousness, (Matthew 5:6) and longs for a greater conformity to thy blessed nature and holy will. If ever my palate felt thirst, `my soul thirsteth for God, even for the living God,' (Psalms 42:2) and panteth for the more abundant communication of his favor. If ever this body, when wearied with labor or journies, knew what it was to wish for the refreshment of my bed, and rejoice to rest there, my soul, with sweet acquiescence, rests upon thy gracious bosom, O my heavenly Father, and returns to its repose in the em-braces of its God, `who hath dealt so bountifully with it.' (Psalms 116:7) And if ever I saw the face of a beloved friend with complacency and joy, I rejoice in beholding thy face, O Lord, and in calling thee my Father in Christ. Such thou art, and such thou wilt be, for time and for eternity. What have I more to do, but to commit myself to thee for both? Leaving it to thee to `choose my inheritance' and to order my

affairs for me, (Psalms 47:4) while all my business is to serve thee, and all my delight to praise thee. `My soul follows hard after God,' because `his right hand upholds me.' (Psalms 63:8) Let it still bear me up, and I shall press on toward thee, till all my desires be accomplished in the eternal enjoyment of thee! Amen'

02.28. The Established Christian UUrged To Exert Himself

Chapter 28 The Established Christian Urged To Exert Himself For Purposes Of Usefulness

1, 2. A sincere love to God will express itself not only in devotion, but in benevolence to men.--3. This is the command of God.--4. The true Christian feels his soul wrought to a holy conformity to it.--5. And therefore will desire instruction on this head.--6. Accordingly, directions are given for the improvement of various talents: particularly genius and learning.--7. Power.--8. Domestic authority.--9. Esteem.--10. Riches.--11. Several good ways of employing them hinted at.--12, 13. Prudence in expense urged, for the support of charity.--14. Divine direction in this respect to be sought. The Christian breathing after more extensive usefulness.

1. SUCH as I have described in the former chapter, I trust, are and will be the frequent exercises or your soul before God. Thus will your love and gratitude breathe itself forth in the divine presence and will, through Jesus the great Mediator, come up before it as incense, and yield an acceptable savor. But then, you must remember, this will not be the only effect of that love to God which I have supposed so warm in your heart. If it be sincere, it will not spend itself in words alone, but will discover itself in actions, and wilt produce, as its genuine fruit, an unfeigned love to your fellow-creatures, and an unwearied desire and labor to do them good continually.

2. "Has the great Father of mercies," will you say, "looked upon me with so gracious an eye? has he not only forgiven me ten thousand offences, but enriched me with such a variety of benefits? O what shall render to him for them all? Instruct me, O ye oracles of eternal truth! Instruct me, ye elder brethren in the family of my heavenly Father! Instruct me, above all, O thou Spirit of wisdom and love! what I may be able to do, to express my love to the great eternal fountain of love, and to approve my fidelity to him who has already done so much to engage it, and who will take so much pleasure in owning and rewarding it!"

3. This, O Christian! is the command which we have heard from the beginning, and it will ever continue in unimpaired force, "that he who loveth God," should "love his brother also," (1 John 4:21) and should express that love, "not in word and profession alone, but in deed and in truth." (1 John 3:18) You are to love your neighbor as yourself; to love the whole creation of God; and, so far as your influence can extend, must endeavor to make it happy.

4. "Yes," will you not say, and "I do love it. I feel the golden chain of divine love encircling us all, and binding us close to each other, joining us in one body, and diffusing as it were, one soul through all. May happiness, true and sublime, perpetual and ever-growing happiness, reign through the whole world of God’s rational and obedient creatures in heaven and on earth! And may every revolted creature, that is capable of being recovered and restored, be made obedient! Yea, may the necessary punishment of those who are irrecoverable, be overruled by infinite wisdom and love to the good of the whole!"

5. These are right sentiments, and if they are indeed the sentiments of your heart, O reader! and not an empty form of vain words, they will be attended with a serious concern to act in

subordination to this great scheme of divine Providence, according to your abilities in their utmost extent. And to this purpose, they will put you on surveying the peculiar circumstances of your life and being, that you may discover what opportunities of usefulness they now afford, and how those opportunities and capacities may be improved. Enter therefore into such a survey, not that you may pride yourself in the distinctions of divine Providence or grace towards you, or, "having received, may glory as if you had not received;" (1 Corinthians 4:7) but that you may deal faithfully with the great Proprietor, whose steward you are, and by whom you are entrusted with every talent, which, with respect to any claim from your fellow-creatures, you may call your own. And here, "having gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us," (Romans 12:6) let us hold the balance with an impartial hand, that so we may determine what it is that God requires of us; which is nothing less than doing the most we can invent, contrive, and effect, for the general good. But, oh! how seldom is this estimate faithfully made! And how much does the world around us, and how much do our own souls suffer for want of that fidelity!

6. Hath God given you genius and learning? It was not that you might amuse or deck yourself with it, and kindle a blaze which should only serve to attract and dazzle the eyes of men. It was intended to be the means of heading both yourself and them to the Father of lights. And it will be your duty, according to the peculiar turn of that genius and capacity, either to endeavor to improve and adorn human life, or, by a more direct application of it to divine subjects, to plead the cause of religion, to defend its truths, to enforce and recommend its practicer to deter men from courses which would be dishonorable to God and fatal to themselves, and to try the utmost efforts of all the solemnity and tenderness with which you can clothe your addresses, to lead them into the paths of virtue and happiness.

7. Has God invested you with power, whether it be in a larger or smaller society? Remember that this power was given you that God might be honored, and those placed under your government, whether domestic or public, might be made happy. Be concerned, therefore, that, whether you be entrusted with the rod, or the sword, it may "not be" borne in vain. (Romans 13:4) Are you a magistrate? Have you any share in the great and tremendous charge of enacting laws? Reverence the authority of the supreme Legislator, the great Guardian of society: promote none, consent to none, which you do not in your own conscience esteem, in present circumstances, an intimation of his will, and in the establishment of which you do not firmly believe you shalt be "his minister for good." (Romans 13:4) Have you the charge of executing laws? Put life into them by a vigorous and strenuous execution, according to the nature of the particular office you bear. Retain not an empty name of authority. Permit not yourself, as it were, to fall asleep on the tribunal. Be active, be wakeful, be observant of what passes around you. Protect the upright and the innocent. Break in pieces the power of the oppressor. Unveil every dishonest heart. Disgrace as well as defeat the wretch that makes his distinguished abilities the disguise or protection of the wickedness which he ought rather to endeavor to expose, and to drive out of the world with abhorrence.

8. Are you placed only at the head of a private family? Rule it for God. Administer the concerns of that little kingdom with the same views, and on the same principles, which I have been inculcating oil the powerful and the great, if, by any unexpected accident, any of them should suffer their eyes to glance upon the passage above. Your children and servants are your natural subjects. Let good order be established among them, and keep them under a regular discipline. Let them be

instructed in the principles of religion, that they may know how reasonable such a discipline is; and let them be accustomed to act accordingly. You cannot indeed change their hearts, but you may very much influence their conduct, and by that means may preserve them from many snares, may do a great deal to make them good members of society, and may set them, as it were, "in the way of God’s steps," (Psalms 85:13) if peradventure passing by be may bless them with the riches of his grace. And fail not to do your utmost to convince them of their need of those blessings; labor to engage them to a high esteem of them, and to an earnest desire of them, as incomparably more valuable than any thing else.

9. Again, has God been pleased to raise you to esteem among your fellow-creatures, which is not always in proportion to a man’s rank or possession in human life? Are your counsels heard with attention? Is your company sought? Does God give you good acceptance in the eyes of men, so that they do not only put the fairest constructions on your words, but overlook faults of which you are conscious to yourself, and consider your actions and performances in the most indulgent and favorable light? You ought to regard this, not only as a favor of Providence, and as an encouragement to you cheerfully to pursue your duty, in the several branches of it, for the time to come, but also, as giving you much greater opportunities of usefulness than in your present station you could otherwise have had. If your character has any weight in the world, throw it into the right scale. Endeavor to keep virtue and goodness in countenance. Affectionately give your hand to modest worth, where it seems to be depressed or overlooked; though shining, when viewed in its proper light, with a lustre which you may think much superior to your own. Be an advocate for truth; be a counsellor for peace; be an example of candor; and do all you can to reconcile the hearts of men, especially of good men, to each other, however they may differ in their opinions about matters which it is impossible for good men to dispute. And let the caution and humility of your behavior, in circumstances of such superior eminence, and amidst so many tokens of general esteem, silently reprove the rashness and haughtiness of those who perhaps are remarkable for little else; or who, if their abilities were indeed considerable, must be despised, and whose talents must be in a great measure lost to the public, till that rashness and haughtiness of spirit be subdued. Nor suffer yourself to he interrupted in this generous and worthy course, by the little attacks or envy and calumny which you may meet. Be still attentive to the general good, and steadily resolute in your efforts to promote it; and leave it to Providence to guard or to rescue your character from the base assaults of malice and falsehood, which will often, without your labor, confute themselves, and heap upon the authors greater shame, or (if they are inaccessible to that} greater infamy, than your humanity will allow you to wish them.

10. Once more, Has God blessed you with riches? Has he placed you in such circumstances that you have more than you absolutely need for the subsistence of yourself and your family? Remember your approaching account. Remember what an incumbrance these things often prove to men in the way of their salvation, and how often, according to our Lord’s express declaration, they render it "as difficult to enter into the kingdom of God, as it is for a camel to go through the eye of a needle." (Matthew 19:24) Let it therefore be your immediate, your earnest, and your daily prayer, that riches may not be a snare and a shame to you, as they are to by far the greater part of their possessors. Appropriate, I beseech you, some certain part and proportion of your estate and revenue to charitable uses; with a provisional increase, as God shall prosper you in any extraordinary instance. By this means you will always have a fund of charity at hand; and you will

probably be more ready to communicate, when you look upon what is so deposited as not in any sense your own, but as already actually given away to those uses, though not yet affixed to particular objects. It is not for me to say what that proportion ought to be. To those who have large revenues, and no children, perhaps a third or one half may be too little; to those whose incomes are small, and their charge considerable, though they have something more than is absolutely necessary, it is possible a tenth may be too much. But pray that God would guide your mind; make a trial for one year, on such terms as in your conscience you think will be most pleasing to him; and let your observations on that teach you to fix your proportion for the next always remembering, that he requires justice in the first place, and alms-deeds only so far as may consist with that. Yet, at the same time, take heed of that treacherous, delusive, and, in many instances, destructive imagination, "that justice to your own family requires that yon should leave your children very rich; which has perhaps cost some parsimonious parents the lives of those darlings for whom they laid up the portion of the poor; and what fatal consequences of divine displeasure may attend it to those that yet survive, God Only knows; and I heartily pray that you or yours may never learn by experience.

11. And that your heart may be yet more opened, and that your charity may be directed to the best purposes, let me briefly mention a variety of good uses which may call for the consideration of those whom God has in this respect distinguished by an ability to do good. To assist the hints I am to offer, look round on the neighborhood in which you live. Thank how many honest and industrious, perhaps too, I might add, religious people, are making very hard shifts to struggle through life. Think what a comfort that would be to them, which you might without any inconvenience spare from that abundance which God hath given you. Hearken also to any extraordinary calls of charity which may happen, especially those of a public nature, and help them forward with your example, and your interest in them, which perhaps may be of much greater importance than the sum which you contribute, considered in itself. Have a tongue to plead for the necessitous, as well as a hand to relieve them; and endeavor to discountenance those poor, shameful excuses, which covetousness often dictates to those whose art may indeed set some varnish on what they suggest, but so slight a one, that the coarse ground will appear through it. See how many poor children are wandering naked and ignorant about the streets, and in the way to all kinds of vice and misery; and consider what can be done toward clothing some of them at least, and instructing them in the principles of religion. Would every thriving family in a town, who are able to afford help on such occasions, cast a pitying eye on one poor family in its neighborhood, and take it under their patronage, to assist in feeding, and clothing, and teaching the children, in supporting it in affliction, in defending it from wrongs, and in advising those that have the management of it, as circumstances might require, how great a difference would soon be produced in the character and circumstances of the community! Observe who are sick, that, if there be no public infirmary at hand to which you can introduce them, (where your contribution will yield the largest increase) you may do something towards relieving them at home, and supplying them with advice and medicines, as well as with proper diet and attendance. Consider also the spiritual necessities of men: in providing for which, I would particularly recommend to you the very important and noble charity of assisting young persons of genius and piety with what is necessary to support the expense of their education for the ministry, in the proper course of grammatical or academical studies. And grudge not some proportion of what God hath given you, to those who, resigning all temporal views to minister to you the Gospel of Christ, have surely an equitable claim

to be supported by you, in a capacity of rendering you those services, however laborious, to which, for your sakes, and that of our common Lord, they have devoted their lives. And while you are so abundantly "satisfied with the goodness of Gal's house, even of his own temple," (Psalms 65:4) have compassion on those who dwell in a desert land; and rejoice to do something toward sending among the distant nations of the heathen world, that glorious Gospel which bath so long continued unknown to multitudes, though the knowledge of it, with becoming regard, be life everlasting. These are a few important charities which I would point out to those whom Providence has enriched with its peculiar bounties; and it renders gold more precious than it could appear in any other light, that it is capable of being employed for such purposes. But if you should not have gold to spare for them, contribute your silver; or, as a farthing or a mite is not overlooked by God, when it is given from a truly generous and charitable heart, (Mark 12:42-43) let that be cheerfully dropped into the treasury, where richer offerings cannot be afforded.

12. And that, amidst so many pressing demands for charity, you may be better furnished to answer them, seriously reflect on your manner of living. I say not that God requires you should become one of the many poor relieved out of your income. The support of society, as at present established, will not only permit, but require, that some persons should allow themselves in the elegancies and delights of life; by furnishing which, multitudes of poor families are much more creditably and comfortably subsisted, with greater advantage to themselves and safety to the public, than they could be, if the price of their labors, or of the commodities in which they deal, were to be given them as alms; nor can I imagine it grateful to God, that his gifts should be refused, as if they were meant for snares and curses rather than benefits. This were to frustrate the benevolent purposes of the gracious Father of mankind, and if carried to its rigor, would be a sort of conspiracy against the whole system of nature. Let the bounties of Providence be used; but let us carefully see to it, that it be in a moderate and prudent manner, lest, by our own folly, "that which should have been for our welfare become a trap." (Psalms 69:22) Let conscience say, my dear reader, with regard to yourself, what proportion of the good things you possess your Heavenly Father intends for yourself, and what for your brethren; and live not as if you had no brethren--as if pleasing yourself in all the magnificence and luxury you can devise, were the end for which you were sent into the world. I fear this is the excess of the present age, and not an excess of rigor and mortification. Examine, therefore, your expenses, and compare them with your income. That may be shamefully extravagant in you, which may not only be pardonable, but commendable in another of superior estate. Nor can you be sure that you do not exceed, merely because you do not plunge your-self into debt, nor render yourself incapable of laying up any thing for your family. If you be disabled from doing any thing for the poor, or any thing proportionable to your rank in life, by that genteel and elegant way of living which you affect, God must disapprove of such a conduct; and you ought, as you will answer to him, to retrench it. And though the divine indulgence will undoubtedly be exercised to those in whom there is a sincere principle of faith in Christ, and undissembled love to God and man, though it act not to that height of beneficence and usefulness which might have been attained; yet be assured of this, that he, who rendereth to every one according to his works, will have a strict regard to the degrees of the goodness in the distribution of final rewards: so that every neglected opportunity draws after it an irreparable loss, which will go into eternity along with you. And let me add, too, that every instance of negligence indulged, renders the mind still more and more indolent and weak, and consequently more indisposed to recover the ground which has been lost, or even to maintain that which has been

hitherto kept.

18. Complain not that this is imposing hard things upon you. I am only directing your pleasures into a nobler channel; and indeed that frugality, which is the source of such a generosity, far from being at all injurious to your reputation, will rather, among wise and good men, greatly promote it. But you have far nobler motives before you than those which arise from their regards. I speak to you as to a child of God, and a member of Christ; as joined, therefore, by the most intimate union, to all the poorest of those that believe in him. I speak to you as to an heir of eternal glory, who ought therefore to have sentiments great and sublime, in some proportion to that expected inheritance.

14. Cast about therefore in your thoughts what good is to be done, and what you can do, either in your own person or by your interest with others; and go about it with resolution, as in the name and presence of the Lord. And as "the Lord giveth wisdom, and out of his mouth cometh knowledge and understanding," (Proverbs 2:6) go to the footstool of his throne, and there seek that guidance and that grace which may suit your present circumstances, and may be effectual to produce the fruits of holiness and usefulness, to his more abundant glory, and to the honor of your Christian profession. The established Christian breathing after more extensive Usefulness.

"O bountiful Father, and sovereign Author of all good, whether natural or spiritual! I bless thee for the various talents with which thou hast enriched so undeserving a creature as I must acknowledge myself to be. My soul is in the deepest confusion before thee, when I consider to how little purpose I have hitherto improved them. Alas! what have I done, in proportion to what than mightest reasonably have expected, with the gifts of nature which thou hast bestowed upon me, with my capacities of life, with my time, with my talents, with my possessions, with my influence over others! Alas! through my own negligence and folly, I look back on a barren wilderness, where I might have seen a fruitful field, and a springing harvest! Justly do I indeed deserve to be stripped of all, to be brought to an immediate account for all; to be condemned, as in many respects unfaithful to thee, and to the world, and to my own soul; and, in consequence of that condemnation, to be cast into the prison of eternal darkness! But thou, Lord, hast freely forgiven the dreadful debt of ten thousand talents. Adored be thy name for it! Accept, O Lord, accept that renewed surrender which I would now make of myself, and of all I have, unto thy service! I acknowledge that it is `of thine own that I give thee.' (1 Chronicles 29:14) Make me, I beseech thee, a faithful steward for my great Lord; and may I think of no separate interest of my own, in opposition to thine!

"I adore thee, O thou God of all grace! if, while I am thus speaking to thee, I feel the love of thy creatures arising in my soul; if I feel my heart opening to embrace my brethren of mankind! O make me thy faithful almoner, in distributing to them all that thou hast lodged in mine hand for their relief! And in determining what is my own share, may I hold the balance with an equal hand, and judge impartially between myself and them! The proportion thou allowest, may I thankfully take for myself and those who are immediately mine! The rest may I distribute with wisdom, and fidelity, and cheerfulness! Guide my hand, O ever-merciful Father! while thou dost me the honor to make me thine instrument in dealing out a few of thy bounties, that I may bestow them where they are most needed, and where they will answer the best end! And if it be thy gracious will, do thou `multiply the seed sown;' (2 Corinthians 9:10) prosper me in my worldy affairs, that I may have more to impart to them that need it; and thus lead me on to the region of everlasting plenty, and

everlasting benevolence! There may I meet with many to whom I have been an affectionate benefactor on earth; and if it be thy blessed will, with many whom I have also been the means of conducting into the path to that blissful abode! There may they entertain me in their habitations of glory! And in time and eternity, do thou, Lord, accept the praise of all, through Jesus Christ; at whose feet I would bow; and at whose feet, after the most useful course, I would at last die, with as much humility as if I were then exerting the first act of faith upon him, and had never had any opportunity, by one tribute of obedience and gratitude in the services of life, to approve its sincerity!"

02.29. The Christian Rejoicing In The Views Of Death And Judgment

Chapter 29 The Christian Rejoicing In The Views Of Death And Judgment

1. Death and judgment are near: but the Christian has reason to welcome both.--2. Yet nature recoils from the solemnity of them.--3. An attempt to reconcile the mind to the prospect of death.--4. From the considerations of the many evils that surround us in this mortal life.--5. Of the remainder of sin which we feel within us.--6, 7. And of the happiness which is immediately to succeed death.--8. All which might make the Christian willing to die in the most agreeable circumstances of human life.--9. The Christian has reason to rejoice in the prospect of judgment.--10. Since, however awful it may be, Christ will then come to vindicate his honor, to display his glory, and to triumph over his enemies.--11. As also to complete the happiness of every believer.--12, 13. And of the whole church.--The mediation of a Christian whose heart is warm with these prospects.

1. WHEN the visions of the Lord were closing upon John, the beloved disciple, in the island of Patmos, it is observable that he who gave him that revelation, even Jesus, the faithful and true witness, concludes with these lively and important words: "He who testifieth these things saith, Surely I come quickly:" and John answered with the greatest readiness and pleasure--"Amen, even so come, Lord Jesus!" Come, as thou hast said, surely and quickly. And remember, O Christian! whoever you are that are now reading these words, your divine Lord speaks in the same language to you--"Behold, I come quickly." Yes, very quickly will become by death, to turn the key, to open the door of the grave for thine admittance thither, and to lead thee through it into the now unknown regions of the invisible world. Nor is it long before "the Judge who standeth at the door," (James 5:9) will appear also for universal judgment; and though, perhaps, not only scores, but hundreds of years will lie between that period and the present moment, yet it is but a very small point of time to him who views at once all the unmeasurable ages or a past and future eternity. "A thousand years are with him but as one day, and one day as a thousand years." (2 Peter 3:8) In both these senses, then, does he come quickly. And I trust you can answer, with a glad Amen, that the warning is not terrible or unpleasant to your ears; but rather that his coming, his certain, his speedy coming, is the object of your delightful hope, and of your longing expectation.

2. I am sure it is reasonable it should be so; and yet perhaps nature, fond of life, and unwilling to part with along known abode, to enter on a state to which it is entirely a stranger, may recoil from the thoughts of dying; or, struck with the awful pomp or an expiring and dissolving world, may look on the judgement-day with some mixture of terror. And therefore, my dear brother in the Lord, (for such I can now esteem you) I would reason with you a little on this head, and would entreat you to look more attentively on this solemn subject; which will, I trust, grow less disagreeable to you, as it is more familiarly viewed. Nay, I hope that, instead of starting back from it, you wilt rather spring forward toward it with joy and delight.

3. Think, O Christian! when Christ comes to call you away by death, he comes--to set you at liberty from your present sorrows--to deliver you from your struggles with remaining corruption--and to

receive you to dwell with himself in complete holiness and joy. You shall "be absent from the body, and be present with the Lord." (2 Corinthians 5:8)

4. He will indeed call you away from this world; but oh! what is this world, that you should be fond of it, and cling to it with so much eagerness? How low are all those enjoyments that are peculiar to it, and how many its vexations, its snares, and its sorrows! Review your pilgrimage thus far; and though you must acknowledge that "goodness and mercy have followed you all the days of your life," (Psalms 23:6) yet has not that very mercy itself planted some thorns in your path, and given you some wise and necessary, yet painful intimations, that "this is not your rest?" (Micah 2:10) Review the monuments of your withered joys, of your blasted hopes, if there be yet any monuments of them remaining more than a mournful remembrance they have left behind in your afflicted heart. Look upon the graves that have swallowed up many of your dearest and most amiable friends, perhaps in the very bloom of life, and in the greatest intimacy of your converse with them, and reflect, that if you continue a few years more, death will renew his conquests at your expense, and devour the most precious of those that yet survive. View the living as well as the dead: behold the state of human nature under the many grievous marks of its apostacy from God, and say, whether a wise and good man would wish to continue always here. Methinks, were I myself secure from being reached by any of the arrows that fly around me, I could not but mourn to see the wounds that are given by them, and to hear the groans of those that are continually falling under them. The diseases and calamities of mankind are so many, and (which is most grievous of all) the distempers of their minds are so various, and so threatening, that the world appears like a hospital; and a man whose heart is tender, is ready to feel his spirits broken as he walks through it and surveys the sad scene; especially when he sees how little he can do for the recovery of those whom he pities. Are you a Christian? and does it not pierce your heart to see how human nature is sunk in vice and in shame? To see with what amazing insolence some are making themselves openly vile, and how the name of Christ is dishonored by too many that call themselves his people? To see the unlawful deeds and filthy practices of them that live ungodly; and to behold, at the same time, the infirmities, at least, and irregularities of those, concerning whom we have better hopes? And do you not wish to escape from such a world, where a righteous and compassionate soul must be vexed from day to day by so many spectacles of sin and misery? (2 Peter 2:8)

5. Yea, to come nearer home, do you not feel something within you, which you long to quit, and which would embitter even Paradise itself? Something which, were it to continue, would grieve and distress you even in the society of the blessed? Do you not feel a remainder of indwelling sin, the sad consequence of the original revolt of our nature from God? Are you not struggling every day with some residue of corruption, or at least mourning on account of the weakness of your graces? Do you not often find your spirits dull and languid, when you would desire to raise them to the greatest fervor in the service of God ? Do you not find your heart too often insensible of the richest instances of his love, and your hands feeble in his service, even when "to will is present with you?" (Romans 7:18) Does not your life, in its best days and hours, appear a low, unprofitable thing, when compared with what you are sensible it ought to be, and with what you wish that it were ? Are you not frequently, as it were, "stretching the pinions of the mind," and saying, "O that I had wings like a dove, that I might fly away and be at rest!" (Psalms 55:6)

6. Should you not then rejoice in the thought, that Jesus comes to deliver you from these complaints? That he comes to answer your wishes, and to fulfill the largest desires of your hearts,

those desires that he himself has inspired? That he comes to open upon you a world of purity and joy; of active, exalted, and unwearied services?

7. O Christian! how often have you cast a longing eye toward those happy shores, and wished to pass the sea, the boisterous, unpleasant, dangerous sea, that separates you from them! When your Lord has condescended to make you a short visit in his ordinances on earth, how have you blessed the time and the place, and pronounced it, amidst many other disadvantages of situation, to be "the very gate of heaven!" (Genesis 28:17) And is it so delightful to behold this gate? and will it not be much more so to enter into it ? Is it so delightful to receive the visits of Jesus for an hour? and will it not be infinitely more so to dwell with him for ever ? "Lord," may you well say, "when I dwell with thee, I shall dwell in holiness, for thou thyself art holiness; in love, for thou thyself art love:I shall dwell in joy, for thou art the fountain of joy, as thou art in the Father, and the Father in thee." (John 17:21) Bid welcome to his approach, therefore, to take you at your word, and to fulfill to you that saying of his, on which your soul has so often rested with heavenly peace and pleasure: "Father, I will that they whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory which thou hast given me." (John 17:24)

8. Surely you may say in this view, "The sooner Christ comes the better." What though the residue of your days be cut off in the midst ? What though you leave many expected pleasures in life untasted, and many schemes unaccomplished ? Is it not enough, that what is taken from a mortal life, shall be added to a glorious eternity; and that you shall spend those days and years in the presence and service of Christ in heaven, which you might otherwise have spent with him and for him, in the imperfect enjoyment and labors of earth?

9. But your prospects reach, not only beyond death, but beyond the separate state. For with regard to his final appearance to judgment, our Lord says, "Surely I come quickly," in the sense illustrated before; and so it will appear to us, if we compare this interval of time with the blissful eternity which is to succeed it; and probably, if we compare it with those ages which have already passed since the sun began to measure out to earth its days and its years. And will you not here also sing your part in the joyful anthem, "Amen; even so come, Lord Jesus!"

10. It is true, Christian, it is an awful day; a day in which nature shall be thrown into a confusion as yet unknown. No earthquake, no eruption of burning mountains, no desolation of cities by devouring flames, or of countries by overflowing rivers or seas, can give any just emblem of that dreadful day, when "the heavens, being on fire, shall be dissolved; the earth also, and all that is therein, shall be burnt up;" (2 Peter 3:10-12) when all nature shall flee away in amazement "before the face of the universal Judge," (Revelation 20:11) and there shall be a great cry, far beyond what was known "in the land of Egypt, when there was not a house in which there was not one dead." (Exodus 12:30) Your flesh may be ready to tremble at the view; yet your spirit must surely "rejoice in God your Savior." (Luke 1:47) You may justly say, "Let this illustrious day come, even with all its horrors!" Yea, like the Christians described by the apostle, (2 Peter 3:12) you may be looking for, and hastening to that day of terrible brightness and universal doom. For your Lord will then come, to vindicate the justice of those proceedings which have been in many instances so much obscured, and because they have been obscured, have been also blasphemed. He will come to display his magnificence, descending from heaven "with a shout, with the voice of the Archangel, and the trump of God," (1 Thessalonians 4:16) taking his seat upon a throne infinitely exceeding

that of earthly, or even of celestial princes, clothed with "his Father's glory and his own," (Luke 9:26) surrounded with a numberless host of "shining attendants, when coming to be glorified in his saints, and admired in all them that believe." (2 Thessalonians 1:10) His enemies shall also be produced to grace his triumph. The serpent shalt be seen there rolling in the dust, and trodden under foot by him and by all his servants; those who once condemned him shall tremble at his presence; and those who bowed the knee before him in profane mockery, shall, in wild despair, "call to the mountains to fall upon them, and to the rocks to hide them from the face of that Lamb of God," (Revelation 6:16) whom they once led away to the most inhuman slaughter.

11. O Christian! does not your loyal heart bound at the thought? And are you not ready, even while reading these lines, to begin the victorious shout in which you are then to join ? He justly expects that your thoughts should be greatly elevated and impressed with the views of his triumph; but at the same time he permits you to remember your own personal share in the joy and glory of that blessed day; and even now he has the view before him, of what his power and love shall then accomplish for your salvation. And what shall it not accomplish? He shall come to break the bars of the grave, and to re-animate your sleeping clay. Your bodies must indeed be laid in dust, and be lodged there as a testimony of God's displeasure against sin, against the first sin that ever was committed, from the sad consequences of which the dearest of his children cannot be exempted. But you shall then have an ear to hear the voice of the Son of God, and an eye to behold the lustre of his appearance; and shall "shine forth like the sun" arising in the clear heaven, "which is as a bridegroom coming out of his chamber." (Psalms 19:5) Your soul shall be new dressed to grace this high solemnity, and be clothed, not with rags of mortality, but with the robes of glory; for he "shall change this vile body, to fashion it like his own glorious body." (Php 3:21) And when you are thus royally arrayed, he shall confer public honors on you, and on all his people, before the assembled world. You may now perhaps be loaded with infamy, called by reproachful names, and charged with crimes, or with views which your very soul abhors; but he will "then bring forth your righteousness as the light," (Psalms 37:6) "and your salvation as a lamp that burneth." (Isaiah 62:1) Though you have been dishonored by men, you shall be acknowledged, by God; and though treated "as the filth of the world, and the off-scouring of all things," (1 Corinthians 4:13) he will show that he regards you "as his treasure, in the day that he makes up his jewels." (Matthew 3:17) When he shall "put away all the wicked of the earth like dross, (Psalms 119:119) you shall be pronounced righteous in that full assembly; and though indeed you have broken the divine law, and might in strict justice have been condemned, yet, being clothed with the righteousness of the great Redeemer, even "that righteousness which is of the great God by faith," (Php 3:9) justice itself shall acquit you, and join with mercy in "bestowing upon you a crown of life." (2 Timothy 4:8) Christ will "confess you before men and angels," (Luke 12:8) will pronounce you good and faithful servants, and call you to "enter into the joy of your Lord:" (Matthew 25:21) he will speak of you with endearment as his brethren, and will acknowledge the kindnesses which have been shown to you, as if he had "received them in his own person." (Matthew 25:40) Yea, then shall you, O Christians! who may perhaps have sat in some of the lowest places in our assemblies, to whom, it may be, none of the rich and great of the earth would condescend to speak; then shall you be called to be assessors with Christ on his judgment-seat, and to join with him in the sentence he shall pass on wicked men and rebellious angels.

12. Nor is it merely one day of glory and triumph. But when the Judge arises, and ascends to his Father's court, all the blessed shall ascend with him, and you among the rest: you shall ascend together with your Savior, "to his Father and your Father, to his God and your God." (John 20:17) You shall go to make your appearance in the new Jerusalem, in those new shining forms that you have received, which will no doubt be attended with a correspondent improvement of mind; and take up your perpetual abode in that fullness of joy, with which you shall be filled and satisfied "in the presence of God," (Psalms 16:11.) upon the consummation of that happiness which the saints, in the intermediate state, have been wishing and waiting for. You shall go from the ruins of a dissolving world, to "the new heavens and new earth, wherein righteousness for ever dwells." (2 Peter 3:13) There all the number of God's elect shall be accomplished, and the happiness of each shall be completed. The whole society shall be "presented before God, as the bride, the Lamb's wife," (Revelation 21:9) whom the eye of its celestial bridegroom shall survey with unutterable delight, and confess to be "without spot or wrinkle, or any such thing," (Ephesians 5:27) its character and state being just what he originally designed it to be, when he first engaged to "give himself for it, to redeem it to God by his blood." (Revelation 5:9) "So shall you ever be" with each other, and "with the Lord," (1 Thessalonians 4:17) and immortal ages shall roll away and find you still unchanged: your happiness always the same, and your relish for it the same; or rather ever growing, as your souls are approaching nearer and nearer to him who is the source of happiness, and the centre of infinite perfection.

13. And now look round about upon earth, and single out, if you can, the enjoyments or the hopes, for the sake of which you would say, Lord, delay thy coming; or for the sake of which you any more should hesitate to express your longing for it, and to cry, "Even so, come, Lord Jesus, come quickly!" The Meditation or Prayer of a Christian whose Heart is warmed with these Prospects.

"O blessed Lord! my soul is enkindled with these views, and rises to thee in a flame." (Judges 13:20) Thou hast testified, thou comest quickly; and I repeat my joyful assent, "Amen, even so, come, Lord Jesus." (Revelation 22:20) Come, for I long to have done with this low life; to have done with its burdens, its sorrows, anti its snares! Come, for I long to ascend into thy presence, and to see the court thou art holding above.

"Blessed Jesus, death is transformed, when I view it in this light. The king of terrors is seen no more as such, so near the King of Glory and of Grace. I hear with pleasure the sound of thy feet approaching still nearer and nearer. Draw aside the veil whenever thou pleasest. Open the bars of my prison, that my eager soul may spring forth `to thee, and cast itself at thy feet;' at the feet of that Jesus, `whom, having not seen, I love,' and `in whom, though now I see thee not, yet believing, I rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory.' (1 Peter 1:8) Thou, Lord, `shalt show me the path of life;' thine hand shall guide me to thy blissful abode, where `there is fullness of joy, and rivers of everlasting pleasure. (Psalms 16:11) Thou shalt assign me a habitation with thy faithful servants, whose separate spirits are now living with thee, while their bodies sleep in the dust. Many of them have been my companions in thy laborious work, and in the `patience and tribulation of thy kingdom,' (Revelation 1:9) my dear companions, and my brethren. O show me, blessed Savior, how glorious and how happy thou hast made them. Show me to what new forms of better life thou hast conducted them whom we call the dead! In what nobler and more extensive services thou hast employed them! That I may praise thee better than I now can, for thy goodness to them. And O give me to share with them in their blessings and their services, and to raise a song of

grateful love, like that which they are breathing forth before thee!

"Yet, O my blessed Redeemer! even there will my soul be aspiring to yet a nobler and more glorious hope; and from this as yet unknown splendor and felicity shall I be drawing new arguments to look and long for the day of thy final appearance, There shall I long more ardently than I now do, to see thy conduct vindicated, and thy triumph displayed; to see the dust of thy servants re-animated, and `death, the last of their enemies and of thine, swallowed up in victory.' (1 Corinthians 15:26, 1 Corinthians 15:54) I shall long for that superior honor that thou intendest me, and that complete bliss to which the whole body of thy people shall be conducted. Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly, will mingle itself with the songs of paradise, and sound from the tongues of all the millions of thy saints whom thy grace hath transplanted thither

"In the meantime. O my divine Master, accept the homage which a grateful heart now pays thee, in a sense of the glorious hopes with which thou bast inspired it! It is thou that hast put this joy into it, and hast raised my soul to this glorious ambition whereas I might otherwise have now been groveling in the lowest trifles of time and sense, and been looking with horror on that hour which is now the object of my most ardent wishes.

"O be with me always, even to the end of this mortal life. And give me, while waiting for thy salvation, to be doing thy commandments. May `my loins be girded about, and my lamp burning,' (Luke 12:35) and my ears be still watchful for the blessed signal of thine arrival; that my glowing soul may with pleasure spring to meet thee, and be strengthened by death to bear those visions of glory, under the ecstasies of which feeble mortality would now expire!"

02.30. Maintaining Continual Commmunion With God

Chapter 30 Some More Particular Directions For Maintaining Continual Communion With God

1. Reflections on the sincerity with which the preceding counsel has been given.--2, 3. The author is desirous that (if Providence permit) he may assist the Christian to die honorably and comfortably.--4. With this view, it is advised--to rid the mind of all earthly cares.--5. To renew the humiliation of the soul before God, and its application to the blood of Christ.--6. To exercise patience under bodily pains and sorrows.--7. At leaving the world, to bear an honorable testimony to religion.--8 To give a solemn charge to surviving friends.--9. especially recommending faith in Christ.--10, 11. To keep the promises of God in view.--12. And to commit the departing spirit to God, in the genuine exercises of gratitude and repentance, faith and charity, which are exemplified in the concluding meditation and prayer.

1. THUS, my dear reader, I have endeavored to lead you through a variety of circumstances, and those not fancied or imaginary, but such as do indeed occur in the human and Christian life. And I can truly and cheerfully say, that I have marked out to you the path which I myself have trod, and in which it is my desire still to go on. I have ventured my own everlasting interests on that foundation on which I have directed you to adventure yours. What I have recommended as the grand business of your life, I desire to make the business or my own; and the most considerable enjoyments which I expect or desire in the remaining days of my pilgrimage on earth, are such as I have directed you to seek and endeavored to assist you in attaining. Such love to God, such constant activity in his service, such pleasurable views of what lies beyond the grave, appear to me (God is my witness) a felicity incomparably beyond anything else which can offer itself to our affection and pursuit; and I would not for ten thousand worlds resign my share in them, or consent even to the suspension of the delights which they afford, during the remainder of my abode here.

2. I would humbly hope, through the divine blessing, that the hours you have spent in the review of these plain things, may have turned to some profitable account; and that, in consequence of what you have read, you have been either brought into the way or life and peace, or been induced to quicken your pace in it. Most heartily should I rejoice in being further useful to you, and that even to the last. Now there is one scene remaining, a scene through which you must infallibly pass, which has something in it so awful, that I cannot but attempt doing a little to assist you in it: I mean the dark Valley of the Shadow of Death. I could earnestly wish, that, for the credit of your profession, the comfort of your own soul, and the joy and edification of your surviving friends, you might die, not only safely, but honorably too; and therefore I would offer you some parting advice. I am sensible, indeed, that Providence may determine the circumstances of your death in such a manner, as that you may have no opportunity of acting upon the hints I now give you. Some unexpected accident from without, or from within, may, as it were, whirl you to heaven before you are aware; and you may find yourself so suddenly there, that it may seem a translation rather than a death. Or it is possible the force of a distemper may affect your understanding in such a manner, that you may be quite insensible of the circumstances in which you are; and so your dissolution

(though others may see it visibly and certainly approaching) may be as great a surprise to you as if you had died in full health.

3. But as it is, on the whole, probable you may have a more sensible passage out of time into eternity, and as much may, in various respects, depend on your dying behavior, give me leave to propose some plain directions with relation to it, to be practiced, if God give you opportunity, and remind you of them. It may not be improper to look over the 29th chapter again, when you find the symptoms of any threatening disorder. And I the rather hope that what I say may be useful to you, as methinks I find myself disposed to address you with something of that peculiar tenderness which we feel for a dying friend; to whom, as we expect that we shall speak to him no more, we send out, as it were, all our hearts in every word.

4. I would advise, then, in the first place, "that as soon as possible, you would endeavor to get rid of all further care with regard to your temporal concerns, by settling them in time, in as reasonable and Christian a manner as you can." I could wish there may be nothing of that kind to hurry your mind when you are least able to bear it, or to distress or divide those who come after you. Do that which in the presence of God you judge most equitable. and which you verily believe will be most pleasing to him. Do it in as prudent and effectual a manner as you can; and then consider the world as a place you have quite done with, and its affairs as nothing further to you, more than to one actually dead, unless as you may do any good to its inhabitants while yet you continue among them, and may by any circumstance in your last actions or words in life, leave a blessing behind you to those who have been your friends and fellow-travelers, while you have been despatching that journey through it which you are now finishing.

5. That you may be the more at leisure, and the better prepared for this, "enter into some sermons review of your own state, and endeavor to put your soul into as fit a posture as possible for your solemn appearance before God." For a solemn thing indeed it is, to go into his immediate presence; to stand before him, not as a supplicant at the throne of his grace, but at his bar as a separate spirit, whose time of probation is over, and whose eternal state is to be immediately determined. Renew your humiliation before God for the imperfections of your life, though it has, in the main, been devoted to his service. Renew your application to the mercies of God as promised in the covenant of grace, and to the blood of Christ as the blessed channel in which they flow. Resign yourself entirely to the divine disposal and conduct, as willing to serve God, either in this world or the other, as he shall see fit. And sensible of your sinfulness on the one hand, and of the divine wisdom and goodness on the other, summon up all the fortitude of your soul to bear, as well as you can, whatever his afflicting hand may further lay upon you, and to receive the last stroke of it, as one who would maintain the most entire subjection to the great and good Father of spirits.

6. Whatever you suffer, endeavor to show "yourself an example of patience." Let that amiable grace "have its perfect work;" (James 1:4) and since it has so little more to do, let it close the scene nobly. Let there not be a murmuring word; and that there may not, watch against every repining thought. And when you feel any thing of that kind arising, look by faith upon a dying Savior, and ask your own heart, "Was not his cross much more painful than the bed on which I lie? Was not his situation, among blood-thirsty enemies, infinitely more terrible than mine amidst the tenderness and care of so many affectionate friends? Did not the heavy load of my sins press him in a much more overwhelming manner than I am pressed by the load of these afflictions ? And yet

he bore all, `as a lamb that is brought to the slaughter.'" (Isaiah 53:7) Let the remembrance of his sufferings be a means to sweeten yours; yea, let it cause you to rejoice, when you are called to bear the cross for a little while, before you wear the crown. Count it all joy, that you have an opportunity yet once more of honoring God by your patience, which is now acting its last part, and will, in a few days, and perhaps in a few hours, he superseded by complete, everlasting blessedness. And I am willing to hope, that in these views you will not only suppress all passionate complaints, but that your mouth will be filled with the praises of God; and that you will be speaking to those who are about you, not only of his justice, but of his goodness too. So that you will be enabled to communicate your inward joys in such a manner as may be a lively and edifying comment upon those words of the Apostle, "Tribulation worketh patience; and patience, experience; and experience, hope; even a hope which maketh not ashamed, while the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost, which is given unto us," (Romans 5:3-5)

7. And now, my dear friend, "now is the time, when it is especially expected from you, that you bear an honorable testimony to religion." Tell those that are about you, as well as you can, (for you will never be able fully to express it) what comfort and support you have found in it. Tell them how it has brightened the darkest circumstances of your life: tell them how it now reconciles you to the near views of death. Your words will carry with them a peculiar weight at such a season: there will be a kind of eloquence, even in the infirmities with which you are struggling, while you give them utterance; and you will be heard with attention, with tenderness, with credit. And therefore, when the time of your departure is at hand, with unaffected freedom breathe out your joy, if you then feel (as I hope you will) a holy joy and delight in God. Breathe out, however, your inward peace and serenity of mind, if you be then peaceful and serene:others will mark it, and be encouraged to tread the steps which lead to so happy an end. Tell them what you feel of the vanity of the world, and they may learn to regard it less. Tell them what you feel of the substantial supports of the Gospel, and they may learn to value it more; for they cannot but know that they must he down on a dying bed too, and must then need all the relief which the Gospel itself can give them.

8. And to enforce the conviction the more, "give a solemn charge to those that are about you, that they spend their lives in the service of God, and govern themselves by the principles of real religion." You may remember that Joshua and David, and other good men did so, when they perceived that the days drew near in which they should die. And you know not how the admonitions of a dying friend, or (as it may be with respect to some) of a dying parent, may impress those who may have disregarded what you and others may have said to them before. At least, make the trial, and die, laboring to glorify God, to save souls, and generously to sow the seeds of goodness and happiness in a world where you have no more harvest to reap. Perhaps they may spring up in a plentiful crop, when the clods of the valley are covering your body: but if not, God will approve it; and the angels that wait around your bed to receive your departing soul will look upon each other with marks of approbation in their countenance, and own that this is to expire like a Christian, and to make a glorious improvement of mortality.

9. And in this last address to your fellow-mortals, whoever they are that Providence brings near you, "be sure that you tell them how entirely and how cheerfully your hopes and dependence in this season of the last extremity are fixed, not upon your own merits and obedience, but on what the great Redeemer has done and has suffered for sinners." Let them see that you die, as it were, at the foot of the cross: nothing will be so comfortable to yourself, nothing so edifying to them. Let

the name of Jesus, therefore, be in your mouth while you are able to speak, and when you can speak no longer, let it be in your heart; and endeavor that the last act of your soul, while it continues in the body, may be an act of bumble faith in Christ. Come unto God by him: enter into that which is within the veil, as with the blood of sprinkling fresh upon you. It is an awful thing for such a sinner (as you, my Christian friend, with all the virtues the world may have admired, know yourself to be) to stand before that infinitely pure and holy Being who has seen all your ways, and all your heart, and has a perfect knowledge of every mixture of imperfection which has attended the best of your duties: but venture in that way, and you will find it both safe and pleasant.

10. Once more, "to give you comfort in a dying hour, and to support your feeble steps while you are traveling through this dark and painful way, take the word of God as a staff in your hand." Let books, and mortal friends, now do their last office for you. Call, if you can, some experienced Christian, who has felt the power of the word of God upon his own heart, and let him bring the Scripture, and turn you to some of those precious promises which have been the food and rejoicing of his own soul. It is with this view that I may carry the good office I am now engaged in as far as possible, that I shall here give you a collection of a few such admirable scriptures, each of them "infinitely more valuable than thousands of gold and silver." (Psalms 119:72) And to convince you of the degree in which I esteem them, I will take the freedom to add, that I desire they may (if God give an opportunity) be read over to me, as I lie on my dying bed, with short intervals between them, that I may pause upon each, and renew something of that delightful relish which, I bless God, I have often found in them. May your soul and mine be then composed to a sacred silence, (whatever be the commotion of animal nature) while the voice of God speaks to us in the language which he spake to his servants of old, or in which he instructed them how they should speak to him in circumstances of the greatest extremity!

11. Can any more encouragement be wanting, when he says, "Fear not, for I am with thee; be not dismayed, for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee, yea, I will help thee, yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness?" (Isaiah 41:10) And "he is not man that he should lie, or the son of man that he should repent. Hath he said, and shall he not do it ? Or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?" (Numbers 23:19) "The Lord is my light and my salvation, whom shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life, of whom shall I be afraid?" (Psalms 27:1) "This God is our God for ever and ever:he will be our guide even unto death." (Psalms 48:14) Therefore, "though I walk through the valley of the Shadow of Death, I will fear no evil; for thou art with me, thy rod and thy staff they comfort me." (Psalms 23:4) "I have waited for thy salvation, O Lord." (Genesis 49:18) "O continue thy loving-kindness unto them that know thee, and thy righteousness to the upright in heart! For with thee is the fountain of life; in thy light shall we see light." (Psalms 36:9-10) "Thou wilt show we the path of life; in thy presence is fullness of joy, at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore," (Psalms 16:11) "As for me, I shall behold thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied when I awake with thy likeness." (Psalms 17:15) "For I know in whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep what I have committed to him until that day." (2 Timothy 1:12) "Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoiceth; my flesh also shall rest in hope." (Psalms 16:9) "For if we believe that Jesus died, and rose again; those also that sleep in Jesus will God bring with him." (1 Thessalonians 4:14) "I give unto my sheep eternal life," said Jesus, the good Shepherd, "and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of my hand." (John 10:28) "This is the will of him that sent me, that every one that believeth on me should have

everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day." (John 6:40) "Let not your heart be troubled; ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you: I go to prepare a place for you; and if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you to myself, that where I am, there ye may be also." (John 14:1-3) "Go tell my brethren, I ascend unto my Father and your Father, and to my God and your God." (John 20:17) "Father, I will that they whom thou hast given me be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory which thou hast given me; that the love wherewith thou hast loved me, may be in them, and I in them." (John 17:24, John 17:26) "He that testifieth these things saith, "Surely I come quickly; Amen: even so come, Lord Jesus." (Revelation 22:20) "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? Thanks be to God, who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!" (1 Corinthians 15:55, 1 Corinthians 15:57)

12. Thus may that God, who "knows the souls of his children in alt their adversities," (Psalms 31:7) and in "whose sight the death of his saints is precious," (Psalms 116:15) cheer and support you and me in those last extremities of nature! May he add us to the happy number of those who have been more than conquerors in death! And may he give us those supplies of his Spirit which may enable us to pour out our departing souls in such sentiments as those I would now suggest, though we should be no longer able to utter words, or to understand them if they were read to us. Let us, at least, review them with all proper affections now, and lay up one prayer more for that awful moment. O that this, and all we have ever offered with regard to it, may then "come to remembrance before God!" (Acts 10:4, Acts 10:31) A Meditation, or Prayer, suited to the case of a Dying Christian.

"O thou supreme Ruler of the visible and invisible worlds! thou Sovereign of life and of death, of earth and of heaven, blessed be thy name, I have often been taught to seek thee. And now once more do I pour out my soul, my departing soul unto thee. `Bow down thy gracious ear, O God! and let my cry come before thee with acceptance.'

"The hour is come, when thou wilt separate me from this world, with which I have been so long and so familiarly acquainted, and lead me to another, as yet unknown. Enable me, I beseech thee, to make the exchange as becomes a child of Abraham, who being `called of thee to receive an inheritance, obeyed and went out,' though he knew not particularly whither he went: (Hebrews 11:8) as becomes a child of God, who knows that, through sovereign grace, `it is his Father's good pleasure to give him the kingdom.' (Luke 12:32)

"I acknowledge, O Lord! the justice of that sentence by which I am expiring! and own thy wisdom and goodness in appointing my journey through this gloomy vale which is now before me. Help me to turn it into the happy occasion of honoring thee, and adorning my profession! and I will bless the pangs by which thou art glorified, and this mortal and sinful part of my nature dissolved.

"Gracious Father! I would not quit this earth of thine, and this house of clay, in which I have sojourned during my abode upon the face of it, without my grateful acknowledgments to thee for all that abundant goodness which thou hast caused to pass before me here: (Exodus 33:19) with my dying breath I bear witness to thy faithful care: I have `wanted no good thing.' (Psalms 34:10) I thank thee, O my God! that this guilty, forfeited, unprofitable life, was so long spared; that it hath still been maintained by such a rich variety of thy bounty. I thank thee that thou hast made this beginning of my existence so pleasant to me. I thank thee for the mercies of my days and nights,

of my months and years, which are now come to their period: I thank thee for the mercies of my infancy, and for those of my riper age; for all the agreeable friends which thou hast given me in this house of my pilgrimage, `the living and the dead;' for all the help I have received from others, and for all opportunities which thou hast given me of being helpful to the bodies and souls of my brethren of mankind. `Surely goodness and mercy have followed me all the days of my life,' (Psalms 23:6) and I have reason to rise a thankful guest from the various and pleasant entertainments with which my table has been furnished by thee. Nor, shall I have reason to repine, or to grieve at quitting them; for, O my God! are thy bounties exhausted? I know that they are not. I will not wrong thy goodness and thy faithfulness so much as to imagine, that, because I am going from this earth, I am going from happiness. I adore thy mercy, that thou hast taught me to entertain nobler views through Jesus thy Son. I bless thee with all the powers of my nature, that I ever heard his name, and heard of his death; and would fain exert a more vigorous act of thankful adoration than in this broken state I am capable of, while I am extolling thee for the riches of thy grace manifested in him, for his instructions and his example, for his blood and his righteousness, and for that blessed Spirit of thine which thou hast given me, to turn my sinful heart unto thyself, and to bring me `into the bonds of thy covenant,' of that covenant which `is ordered in all things and sure,' (2 Samuel 23:5) and which this death, though now separating my soul from my body, shall never be able to dissolve.

"I bless thee, O Lord! that I am not dying in an unregenerate and impenitent state; but that thou didst graciously awaken and convince me, that thou didst renew and sanctify my heart, and didst, by thy good Spirit, work in it an unfeigned faith, a real repentance, and the beginning of a divine life. I thank thee for faithful ministers and for gospel ordinances: I thank thee for my Sabbaths and seasons of communion at the table of my Lord; and for the weekly and monthly refreshments which they gave me. I -thank thee for the fruits of Canaan which were sent me in the wilderness, and are now sent me on the brink of Jordan. I thank thee for thy blessed word, and for those exceeding rich and precious promises of it, which now lie, as a cordial, warm at my heart in this chilling hour: promises of support in death, and of glory beyond it, and of the resurrection of my body to everlasting life. O my God! I firmly believe them all, great and wonderful as they are, and am waiting for the accomplishment of them through Jesus Christ; `in whom they are all Yea and Amen.' (2 Corinthians 1:20) `Remember thy word unto thy servant, on which thou hast caused me to hope.' (Psalms 119:49) I covenanted with thee, not only for worldly enjoyments which thy love taught me comparatively to despise: but for eternal life, as `the gift of thy free grace through Jesus Christ my Lord:' (Rom. 6:28) and now permit me, in his name, to enter my humble claim to it. Permit me to consign `this departing spirit to thine hand; for thou hast redeemed it O Lord God of truth!' (Psalms 31:5) `I am thine: save me, and make me happy' (Psalms 119:94)

"But may I indeed presume to say I am thine? O God! now I am standing on the borders of both worlds, now I view things as in the light of thy presence and of eternity, how unworthy do I appear that I should be taken to dwell with thy angels and taints in glory! Alas! I have reason to look back with deep humiliation on a poor, unprofitable sinful life, in which I have daily been deserving to be cast into hell. But I have this one comfortable reflection, that I have fled to the cross of Christ; and I now renew my application to it. To think of appearing before God in such an imperfect righteousness as my own, were ten thousand times worse than death. No, Lord, I come unto thee as a sinner; but as a sinner who has believed in thy Son for pardon and life: I fall down before thee

as a guilty, polluted wretch; but thou hast made him to be unto thy people for `wisdom and righteousness, for sanctification and redemption.' (1 Corinthians 1:20) Let me have my lot among the followers of Jesus! Treat me, as thou treatest those who are his friends and his brethren! For thou knowest my soul has loved him and trusted in him, and solemnly ventured itself on the security of his Gospel. And `I know in whom I have believed.' (2 Timothy 1:12) The infernal lion may attempt to dismay me in the awful passage; but I rejoice that I am `in the hands of the good shepherd,' (John 10:11, John 10:28) and I defy all my spiritual enemies, in a cheerful dependence on his faithful care. I lift up my eyes and my heart to him, who `was dead and is alive again; and behold he liveth for evermore, and hath the keys of death and of the unseen world.' (Revelation 1:18) Blessed Jesus, I die by thine hand, and I fear no harm from the hand of a Savior! I fear not that death which is allotted to me by the hand of my dearest Lord, who himself died to make it safe and happy. I come, Lord, I come, not only with a willing, but with a joyful consent. I thank thee that thou rememberest me for good; that thou art breaking my chains, and calling me to `the glorious liberty of the children of God.' (Romans 8:21) I thank thee, that thou wilt no longer permit me to live at a distance from thine arms; but, after this long absence, wilt have me at home, at home for ever.

"My feeble nature faints in the view of that glory which is now dawning upon me; but thou knowest, gracious Lord, how to let it in upon my soul by just degrees, and to `make thy strength perfect in my weakness.' (2 Corinthians 7:9) Once more, for the last time, would I look down on this poor world which I am going to quit, and breathe out my dying prayer for its prosperity, and that of thy church in it. I have loved it, O Lord! as a living member of the body; and I love it to the last I humbly beseech thee, therefore, that thou wilt guard it, and purify it, and unite it more and more. Send down more of thy blessed Spirit upon it, even the Spirit of wisdom, of holiness, and of love; till in due time `the wilderness he turned into the garden of the Lord,' (Isaiah 51:3) and `all flesh shall see thy salvation!' (Luke 3:6)

"As for me, bear me, O my heavenly Father! on the wings of everlasting love, to that peaceful, that holy, that joyous abode, which thy mercy has prepared for me, and which the blood of my Redeemer has purchased! Bear me `to the general assembly and church of the first-born, to the innumerable company of angels, and to the spirits of just men made perfect.' (Hebrews 12:22-23) And whatever this flesh may suffer, let my steady soul be delightfully fixed on that glory to which it is rising! Let faith perform its last office in an honorable manner! Let my few remaining moments on earth be spent for thy glory, and so let me ascend, with love in my heart, and praise on my faltering tongue. to the world where love and praise shall be complete! Be this my last song on earth, which I am going to tune in heaven: `Blessing, and honor, and glory, and power, be unto Him that sitteth on the throne and to the Lamb for ever and ever.' Amen!"

DR. DODDRIDGE was born in London, June 26, 1709. He was of a consumptive habit from infancy, was brought up in the early knowledge of religion, and was left an orphan before he arrived at the age of 14. At 16 be made a profession of religion; at 20 commenced preaching the Gospel; and at 21 was settled over a small congregation, in an obscure village, where be devoted himself to the acquisition of useful knowledge with indefatigable zeal. At 27 he was removed to the pastoral care of the church in Northampton, where, for 22 years, amidst other diversified labors, he acted as an instructor of youth preparing for the ministry, having had under his charge, during that period, upwards of 200 young men. At the age of 37 and 38 he published two volumes of his Family Expositor; and about the age of 43 wrote "The Rise and Progress of Religion in the Soul."

At 46 he published the third volume of the Family Expositor, and two Dissertations.--1. On Sir Isaac Newton's System of the Harmony. 2. On the Inspiration of the New Testament. In December, 1750, in the 49th year of his age, he went to St. Albans and preached the funeral sermon of his early patron and benefactor, Dr. Clark, in which journey he contracted a cold that laid the foundation for his death. In July, 1751, he addressed his flock for the last time from the pulpit; and having found all medical aid ineffectual, embarked, in October, for Lisbon, as the last resort in so threatening a disorder, at which place he died on the 26th of October, aged 49 years.

He was not handsome in person; was very thin and slender, in stature somewhat above the middle size, with a stoop in his shoulders; but when engaged in conversation, or employed in the pulpit, there was a remarkable sprightliness in his countenance and manner, which commanded general attention. This volume is stereotyped and perpetuated, through the liberality of Col. Henry Rutgers and Col. Richard Varick, of New-York; Nicholas Brown, Esq. of Providence; and Hon. Stephen Van Rensselaer, of Albany.

Chapter 44

S. Submission to Divine Providence in the Death of Children

Submission to Divine Providence in the Death of Children By Phillip Doddridge Produced by Keith G Richardson Submission to Divine Providence in the Death of Children, recommended and inforced, IN A SERMON PREACHED at NORTHAMPTON, On the DEATH Of a very amiable and hopeful CHILD, about Five Years old.

Published out of Compassion to mourning PARENTS. By P. DODDRIDGE, D. D.

Neve Liturarum pudeat; qui viderit illas, De Lachrymis factas sentiat esse meis. OVID. The SECOND EDITION.

LONDON, Printed for R. HETT, at the Bible and Crown in the Poultry. MDCCXL. THE PREFACE. THE Discourse which I now offer to the Publick was drawn up on a very sorrowful Occasion; the Death of a most desirable Child, who was formed in such a Correspondence to my own Relish and Temper, as to be able to give me a Degree of Delight, and consequently of Distress, which I did not before think it possible I could have received from a little Creature who had not quite compleated her Fifth Year.

Since the Sermon was preached, it has pleased GOD to make the like Breaches on the Families of several of my Friends; and, with Regard to some of them, the Affliction hath been attended with Circumstances of yet sorer Aggravation. Tho' several of them are removed to a considerable Distance from me, and from each other I have born their Afflictions upon my Heart with cordial Sympathy; and it is with a particular Desire of serving them, that I have undertaken the sad Task of reviewing and transcribing these Papers; which may almost be called the Minutes of my own Sighs and Tears, over the poor Remains of my eldest and (of this Kind) dearest Hope, when they were not as yet buried out of my Sight.

They are, indeed, full of Affection, and to be sure some may think they are too full of it: But let them consider the Subject, and the Circumstances, and surely they will pardon it. I apprehend, I could not have treated such a Subject coldly, had I writ upon it many years ago, when I was untaught in the School of Affliction, and knew nothing of such a Calamity as this, but by Speculation or Report: How much less could I do it, when GOD had touched me in so tender a Part, and (to allude to a celebrated ancient Story,) called me out to appear on a publick Stage, as with an Urn in my Hand, which contained the Ashes of my own Child! In such a sad Situation Parents, at least, will forgive the Tears of a Parent, and those Meltings of Soul which overflow in the following Pages. I have not attempted to run thro' the Common place of immoderate Grief, but have only selected a few obvious Thoughts which I found peculiarly suitable to myself; and, I bless GOD, I can truly say, they gave me a solid and substantial Relief, under a Shock of Sorrow, which would otherwise have broken my Spirits. On my own Experience, therefore, I would recommend them to others, in the like Condition, And let me intreat my Friends and Fellow-Sufferers to remember, that it is not a low Degree of Submission to the Divine Will, which is called for in the ensuing Discourse. It is comparatively an easy Thing to behave with external Decency, to refrain

from bold Censures and outragious Complaints, or to speak in the outward Language of Resignation. But it is not, so easy to get rid of every repining Thought, and to forbear taking it, in some Degree at least, unkindly, that the GOD whom we love and serve, in whose Friendship we have long trusted and rejoiced, should act what, to Sense, seems so unfriendly a Part: That he should take away a Child; and if a Child, that Child; and if that Child, at that Age; and if at that Age, with this or that particular Circumstance, which seems the very Contrivance of Providence to add double Anguish to the Wound; and all this, when he could so easily have recalled it; when we know him to have done it for so many others; when we so earnestly desired it; when we sought it with such Importunity, and yet, as we imagine, with so much Submission too:—That, notwithstanding all this; he should tear it away with an inexorable Hand, and leave us, it may be for a while, under the Load, without any extraordinary Comforts and Supports, to balance so grievous a Tryal.—In these Circumstances, not only to justify, but to glorify GOD in all,—chearfully to subscribe to his Will,—cordially to approve it as merciful and gracious,—so as to be able to say, as the pious and excellent Archbishop of Cambray did, when his Royal Pupil, and the Hopes of a Nation were taken away [+], “If there needed no more than to move a Straw to bring him to Life again, I would not do it, since the Divine Pleasure is otherwise”.—This, this is a difficult Lesson indeed; a Triumph of Christian Faith and Love, which I fear many of us are yet to learn. But let us follow after it, and watch against the first Rising of a contrary Temper, as most injurious to GOD, and prejudicial to ourselves. To preserve us against it, let us review the Considerations now to be proposed, as what we are to digest into our Hearts, and work into our Thoughts and our Passions. And I would hope, that if we do in good earnest make the Attempt, we shall find this Discourse a cooling and sweetening Medicine, which may allay that inward Heat and Sharpness, with which, in a Case like ours, the Heart is often inflamed and corroded. I commend it, such as it is, to the Blessing of the great Physician, and could wish the Reader to make up its many Deficiencies, by Mr. Flavel’s Token for Mourners, and Dr. Grosvenor’s Mourner; to which, if it suit his Relish, he may please to add Sir William Temple’s Essay on the Excess of Grief: Three Tracts which, in their very different Strains and Styles, I cannot but look upon as in the Number of the best which our Language, or, perhaps, any other, has produced upon this Subject. As for this little Piece of mine, I question not, but, like the Generality of single Sermons, it will soon be worn out and forgot. But in the mean time, I would humbly hope, that some tender Parent, whom Providence has joined with me in sad Similitude of Grief, may find some Consolation from it, while sitting by the Coffin of a beloved Child, or mourning over its Grave. And I particularly hope it, with Regard to those dear and valuable Friends, whose Sorrows, on the like Occasion, have lately been added to my own. I desire that, tho’ they be not expressly named, they would please to consider this Sermon as most affectionately and respectfully dedicated to them; and would, in Return, give me a Share in their Prayers, that all the Vicissitudes of Life may concur to quicken me in the Duties of it, and to ripen me for that blessed World, where I hope many of those dear Delights, which are now withering around us, will spring up in fairer and more durable Forms. Amen.

Northampton, Jan. 31, 1736-7.

POSTSCRIPT.

I could easily shew, with how much Propriety I have called the dear Deceased an amiable and hopeful Child, by a great many little Stories, which Parents would perhaps read with Pleasure, and Children might hear with some Improvement: Yet as I cannot be sure that no others may happen

to read the Discourse, I dare not trust my Pen and my Heart, on so delicate a Subject. One Circumstance I will however venture to mention, (as I see here is a Blank Page left,) which may indeed be consider'd as a Specimen of many others. As she was a great Darling with most of our Friends that knew her, she often received Invitations to different Places at the same Time; and when I once asked her, on such an Occasion, what made every Body love her so well; she answer'd me, (with that Simplicity and Spirit, which alas! Charm'd me too much,) Indeed, Pappa, I cannot think, unless it be because I love every Body. A Sentiment obvious to the Understanding of a Child, yet not unworthy the Reflection of the wisest Man[*].

2 Kings 4:25-26. And it came to pass when the Man of GOD saw her afar off, that he said to Gehazi his Servant, Behold, yonder is that Shunamite: Run now, I pray thee, to meet her, and say unto her, Is it well with thee? Is it well with thine Husband? Is it well with the Child? And she answered, It is well. WHEN the Apostle would encourage our Hope and Trust in the Tenderness of Christ as the great High Priest and convince us that he is capable of being touched with a sympathetick Sense of our Infirmities, he argues at large from this Consideration, that Jesus was in all Points tempted like us; so that as he himself has suffer'd, being tempted, he knows how more compassionately to succour those that are under the like Trials[a]. Now this must surely intimate, that it is not in human Nature, even in its most perfect State, so tenderly to commiserate any Sorrows, as those which our own Hearts have felt: As we cannot form a perfect Idea of any bitter Kind of Draught, by the most exact Description, till we have ourselves tasted it. It is probably for this Reason, amongst others, that GOD frequently exercises such, as have the Honour to be inferior Shepherds in the Flock of Christ, with a long Train of various Afflictions, that we may be able to comfort them who are in the like Trouble, with those Consolations with which we have ourselves been comforted of GOD[b]. And, if we have the Temper which becomes our Office, it will greatly reconcile us to our Trials, to consider, that from our weeping Eyes, and our bleeding Hearts, a Balm may be extracted to heal the Sorrows of others, and a Cordial to revive their fainting Spirits. May we never be left to sink under our Burden, in such a manner, that there should be room, after all that we have boasted of the Strength of religious Supports, to apply to us the Words of Eliphaz to Job[c], Thou hast strengthen'd the weak Hands, and upheld him that was ready to fall; but now it is come upon thee, and thou faintest; it touches thee, and thou art troubled! May we never behave, as if the Consolations of GOD were small [d]; lest it should be as when a Standard-Bearer fainteth[e], and whole Companies of Soldiers are thrown into Confusion and Distress! MY Friends, you are Witnesses for me, that I have not stood by as an unconcerned Spectator amidst the Desolations of your respective Families, when GOD's awful Hand hath been lopping off those tender Branches from them, which were once our common Hope and Delight. I have often put my Soul in the stead of yours, and endeavour'd to give such a Turn to my publick as well as my private Discourses, as might be a means of composing and chearing your Minds, and forming you to a submissive Temper, that you might be subject to the Father of Spirits, and live[f]. In this View I have, at different Times, largely insisted on the Example of Aaron, who held his peace[g], when his two eldest Sons were struck dead in a Moment by Fire from the Lord, which destroyed them in the very Act of their Sin; and I have also represented that of Job, who, when the Death of ten Children by one Blow was added to the Spoil of his great Possessions, could say, The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the Name of the Lord[h]. The Instance which is here before us, is not indeed so memorable as these; but to present Circumstances it is, in many Respects, more suitable: And it may the rather deserve our Notice, as it shews us the

Wisdom, Composure, and Piety of one of the weaker and tenderer Sex, on an Occasion of such aggravated Distress, that had Aaron or Job behaved just as she did, we must have acknowledged, that they had not sunk beneath the Dignity of their Character, nor appear'd unworthy of our Applause, and our Imitation.

INDEED there may be some Reason to imagine, that it was with Design to humble those who are in distinguish'd Stations of Life, and who have peculiar Advantages and Obligations to excel in Religion, that GOD has shewn us in Scripture, as well as in common Life, some bright Examples of Piety, where they could hardly have been expected in so great a Degree; and hath, as it were, perfected Praise out of the Mouths of Babes and Sucklings[i]. Thus when Zacharias[k], an aged Priest, doubted the Veracity of the Angel which appeared to assure him of the Birth of his Child, which was to be produced in an ordinary Way; Mary, an obscure young Virgin, could believe a far more unexampled Event, and said, with humble Faith and thankful Consent, Behold the Hand-maid of the Lord, be it unto me according to thy Word[l]. Jonah the Prophet, tho' favour'd with such immediate Revelations, and so lately delivered, in a miraculous Way, from the very Belly of Hell[m], was thrown into a most indecent Transport of Passion, on the withering of a Gourd; so that he presumed to tell the Almighty to his Face, that he did well to be angry even unto Death[n]: Whereas this pious Woman preserves the Calmness and Serenity of her Temper, when she had lost a Child, a Son, an only Child, who had been given beyond all natural Hope, and therefore to be sure was so much the dearer, and the Expectation from him so much the higher. Yet are these Expectations dash'd almost in a Moment; and this, when he was grown up to an Age when Children are peculiarly entertaining; for he was old enough to be with his Father in the Field, where no doubt he was diverting him with his fond Prattle; yet he was not too big to be laid on his Mother's Knees[o], when he came home complaining of his Head; so that he was probably about five or six Years old. This amiable Child was well in the Morning, and dead by Noon; a pale Corpse in his Mother's Arms! and he now lay dead in the House; and yet they had the Faith, and the Goodness to say, "It is well." THIS good Woman had found the Prophet Elisha grateful for all the Favours he had received at her House; where she had from time to time accommodated him in his Journies, and thought it an Honour rather than an Incumbrance. She had experienced the Power of his Prayers, in answer to which the Child had been given; and 'tis extremely probable, that she also recollected the Miracle which Elijah had wrought a few Years before, tho' till that Time the like had not been known in Israel, or on Earth; I mean, in raising from the Dead the Child of that Widow of Sarepta[p], who had nourished him during the Famine. She might therefore think it a possible Case, that the Miracle might be renewed; at least, she knew not how to comfort herself better, than by going to so good a Friend, and asking his Counsels and his Prayers, to enable her to bear her Affliction, if it must not be removed[*].

ACCORDINGLY she hasted to him; and he, on the other side, discovered the Temper of a real Friend, in the Message with which he sent Gehazi his Servant to meet her, while she was yet afar off. The Moment she appeared, the Concerns of her whole Family seem to have come into his kind Heart at once, and he particularly asks, Is it well with thee? Is it well with thine Husband? Is it well with the Child? A beautiful Example of that affectionate Care for the Persons and Families of their Friends, which Christian Ministers (who, like the Prophets of old, are called Men of GOD[q]) should habitually bear about in their Hearts; which should be awakened by every Sight of them, and expressed on every proper Occasion. HER Answer was very remarkable: She said, It is well.

Perhaps she meant this, to divert the more particular Enquiry of the Servant; as she had before made the same Answer to her Husband, when he had examined into the Reason of her intended Journey, as probably not knowing of the sad Breach which had been made: She said, It is well [r]; which was a civil way of intimating her Desire that he would not ask any more particular Questions. But I cannot see any Reason to restrain the Words to this Meaning alone: We have ground to believe, from the Piety she expressed in her first Regards to Elisha, and the Opportunities which she had of improving in Religion by the frequent Converse of that holy Man, that when she used this Language, she intended thereby to express her Resignation to the Divine Will in what had lately pass'd: And this might be the Meaning of her Heart, (tho' one ignorant of the Particulars of her Case, might not fully understand it from such ambiguous Words;) "It is well on the whole. Though my Family be afflicted, we are afflicted in Faithfulness; tho' my dear Babe be dead, yet my Heavenly Father is just, and he is good in all. He knows how to bring Glory to himself, and Advantage to us, from this Stroke. Whether this Application do, or do not succeed, whether the Child be, or be not restored, it is still well ; well with him, and well with us; for we are in such wise and such gracious Hands, that I would not allow one murmuring Word, or one repining Thought." So that, on the whole, the Sentiment of this good Shunamite was much the same with that of Hezekiah, when he answered to that dreadful Threatning which imported the Destruction of his Children, Good is the Word of the Lord which he hath spoken[s]; or that of Job, when he heard that all his Sons and his Daughters were crushed under the Ruins of their elder Brother's House, and yet (in the fore-cited Words) blessed the Name of the Lord.

Now this is the Temper to which, by divine Assistance, we should all labour to bring our own Hearts, when GOD puts this bitter Cup into our Hands, and takes away with a Stroke those dear Little-ones, which were the Desire of our Eyes[t], and the Joy of our Hearts. Let us not content ourselves, in such Circumstances, with keeping the Door of our Lips[u], that we break not out into any Indecencies of Complaint; let us not attempt to harden ourselves against our Sorrows by a stern Insensibility, or that sullen Resolution which sometimes says, It is a Grief, and I must bear it[w]; but let us labour, (for a great Labour it will indeed be,) to compose and quiet our Souls, calmly to acquiesce in this painful Dispensation, nay, cordially to approve it as in present Circumstances every Way fit.

IT will be the main Business of this Discourse, to prove how reasonable such a Temper is, or to shew how much Cause Christian Parents have to borrow the Language of the Text, when their Infant Offspring is taken away, and to say with the pious Shunamite, in the noblest Sense that her Words will bear,—It is well. AND here I would more particularly shew,—It is well in the general, because GOD does it:—It is surely well for the pious Parents in particular, because it is the Work of their Covenant GOD:—They may see many Respects in which it is evidently so, by observing what useful Lessons it has a Tendency to teach them:—And they have Reason to hope, it is well with those dear Creatures whom GOD hath removed in their early Days.

THESE are surely convincing Reasons to the Understanding: Yet who can say, that they shalt be Reasons to the Heart? Arise, O GOD, and plead thine own Cause[x] in the most effectual Manner! May thy powerful and gracious Voice appease the swelling Billows of the Passions, and produce a great and delightful Calm in our Souls, in which we may yet enjoy thee and ourselves, tho' a Part of our Treasure be for the present swallowed up!

I. THERE is surely Reason, in such a Case, to say it is well,—because GOD doth it. THIS pass'd for an unanswerable Reason with David, I was dumb, I opened not my Mouth, because thou didst it[y], and with good old Eli, under a severer Tryal than ours, It is the Lord, let him do as seemeth good in his Sight[z]. And shall We object against the Force of it? Was it a Reason to David, and to Eli, and is it not equally so to us? Or have We any new Right to reply against GOD[a], which those eminent Saints had not? His kingdom ruleth over all[b]; and there is not so much as a Sparrow that falls to the Ground without our Father, but the very Hairs of our Head are all number'd[c] by him. Can we then imagine that our dear Children fall into their Graves without his Notice or Interposition? Did that watchful Eye that keepeth Israel, now, for the first time, slumber and sleep[d], and an Enemy lay hold on that fatal Moment to bear away these precious Spoils, and bury our Joys and our Hopes in the Dust? Did some malignant Hand stop up the Avenues of Life, and break its Springs, so as to baffle all the Tenderness of the Parent, and all the Skill of the Physician? Whence does such a Thought come, and whither would it lead? Diseases and Accidents are but second Causes, which owe all their Operations to the continued Energy of the great original Cause. Therefore GOD says, I will bereave them of Children[e]; I take away the Desire of thine Eyes with a Stroke[f]. He changeth their Countenance, and sendeth them away[g]. Thou Lord turnest Man to Destruction, and sayest, Return ye Children of Men[h]. And what shall we say? Are not the Administrations of his Providence wise and good? Can we teach him Knowledge[i]? Can we tax him with Injustice? Shall the Most High GOD learn of us how to govern the World, and be instructed by our Wisdom when to remove his Creatures from one State of Being to another? Or do we imagine that his Administration, in the general Right and Good, varies when he comes to touch our Bone and our Flesh [k]? Is that the secret Language of our Soul, "That it is well, others should drink of the Cup, but not We; that any Families but ours should be broken, and any Hearts but ours should be wounded?" Who might not claim the like Exemption? and what would become of the Divine Government in general; or where would be his obedient Homage from his Creatures, if each should begin to complain, as soon as it comes to his own Turn to suffer? Much fitter is it for us to conclude, that our own Afflictions may be as reasonable as those of others; that amidst all the Clouds and Darkness of this present Dispensation, Righteousness and Judgment are the Habitation of his Throne[l]; and, in a word, that it is well, because GOD hath done it. It suits the general Scheme of the Divine Providence, and to an obedient submissive Creature that might be enough; but it is far from being all. For,

II. PIOUS PARENTS, under such a Dispensation, may conclude it is well for them in particular,—because he, who hath done it, is their Covenant GOD. THIS is the great Promise, to which all the Saints under the Old and New Testament are Heirs, I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a People[m]: And if we are interested in it, the happy Consequence is, that we being his, all our Concerns are his also; all are humbly resigned to him,—and graciously administer'd by him,—and incomparably better Blessings bestowed and secured, than any which the most afflictive Providence can remove.

IF we have any Share in this everlasting Covenant, all that we are or have, must, of course, have been solemnly surrender'd to GOD. And this is a Thought peculiarly applicable to the Case immediately in view. "Did I not," may the Christian, in such a sad Circumstance, generally say, "did I not, in a very solemn Manner, bring this my Child to God in Baptism, and in that Ordinance recognize his Right to it? Did I not, with all humble Subjection to the Father of Spirits[n], and

Father of Mercies[o], lay it down at his Feet, perhaps with an express, at least to be sure with a tacit Consent, that it should be disposed of by him, as his infinite Wisdom and Goodness should direct, whether for Life or for Death? And am I now to complain of him, because he has removed not only a Creature of his own, but one of the Children of his Family? Or shall I pretend, after all, to set up a Claim in Opposition to his? A Heathen Parent, even from the Light of Nature, might have learn'd silent Submission: How much more then a Christian Parent, who hath presented his Child to GOD in this initiatory Ordinance; and perhaps also many a time, both before and since, hath presented himself at the Table of the Lord! Have I not there taken that Cup of Blessings, with a declared Resolution of accepting every other Cup how bitter soever it might be, which my heavenly Father should see fit to put into my Hand[p]? When I have perhaps felt some painful Fore-bodings of what I am now suffering; I have, in my own Thoughts, particularly singled out that dear Object of my Cares and my Hopes, to lay it down anew at my Father's Feet, and say, Lord thou gavest it to me, and I resign it to thee; continue, or remove it, as thou pleasest. And did I then mean to trifle with GOD? Did I mean in effect to say, Lord, I will give it up, if thou wilt not take it?"

REFLECT farther, I beseech you, on your secret Retirements, and think, as surely some of you may, "How often have I there been on my Knees before GOD on account of this Child; and what was then my Language? Did I say, Lord, I absolutely insist on its Recovery; I cannot, on any Terms or any Considerations whatsoever, bear to think of losing it?" Sure we were none of us so indecently transported with the fondest Passion, as to be so rash with our Mouths as to utter such Things before the Great GOD[q]. Such Presumption had deserv'd a much heavier Punishment than we are now bearing, and, if not retracted, may perhaps still have it.—Did not one or another of us rather say, "Lord, I would humbly intreat, with all due Submission to thy superior Wisdom and sovereign Pleasure, that my Child may live; but if it must be otherwise, not my Will, but thine be done[r]? I and mine are in thine Hand, do with me, and with them, as seemeth good in thy Sight[s]". And do we now blame ourselves for this? Would we unsay it again, and, if possible, take ourselves and our Children out of his Hands, whom we have so often owned as all-wise and all-gracious, and have chosen as our great Guardian and theirs?

LET it farther be consider'd, it is done by that GOD who has accepted of this Surrender, so as to undertake the Administration of our Affairs: "He is become my Covenant GOD in Christ," may the Christian say; "and, in consequence of that Covenant, he hath engaged to manage the Concerns and Interests of his People so, that all Things shall work together for good to them that love him[t]: And do I not love him? Answer, Oh my Heart, dost thou not love thy GOD much better than all the Blessings which Earth can boast, or which the Grave hath swallowed up? Wouldst thou resign thine Interest in him to recover these precious Spoils, to receive this dear Child from the Dust, a thousand times fairer and sweeter than before? Rather let Death devour every remaining Comfort, and leave me alone with him; with whom when I indeed am, I miss not the Creatures, but rather rejoice in their Absence, as I am then more intire with him whom my Soul loveth. And if I do indeed love him, this Promise is mine, and all Things, and therefore this sad Event in particular, shall work together for my good. Shall I not then say, It is well? What if it exceeded all the Stretch of my Thoughts, to conceive how it could, in any Instance, be so? What are my narrow Conceptions, that they should pretend to circumscribe infinite Wisdom, Faithfulness, and Mercy? Let me rather, with Abraham, give Glory to God, and in Hope believe against Hope[u]".

ONCE more; let us consider how many invaluable Blessings are given us by this Covenant, and then judge whether we have not the utmost Reason to acquiesce in such an Event of Providence. “If I am in Covenant with God,” may the Believer say, “then he hath pardoned my Sins, and renewed my Heart, and hath made his blessed Spirit dwelling in me, the sacred Bond of an everlasting Union between him and my Soul. He is leading me through the Wilderness, and will, ere long, lead me out of it to the heavenly Canaan. And how far am I already arrived in my Journey thither, now that I am come to the Age of losing a Child! And when GOD hath done all this for me, is he rashly to be suspected of Unkindness? He that spared not his own Son[w], he that gave me with him his Spirit and his Kingdom, why doth he deny, or why doth he remove, any other Favour? Did he think the Life of this Child too great a Good to grant, when he thought not Christ and Glory too precious? Away with that Thought, Oh my unbelieving Heart, and with every Thought which would derogate from such rich amazing Grace, or would bring any thing in comparison with it. Art thou under these Obligations to him, and wilt thou yet complain? With what Grace, with what Decency canst thou dispute this, or any other Matter, with thy GOD? What Right have I yet to cry any more to the King?[x]” Would any of you, my Brethren, venture to say, “What tho’ I be a Child of GOD, and an Heir of Glory, it matters not, for my Gourd is withered; that pleasant Plant which was opening so fair and so delightful, under the Shadow of which I expected long to have sate, and even the Rock of Ages cannot shelter me so well? I can behold that beloved Face no more, and therefore I will not look upward to behold the Face of GOD, I will not look forward to Christ and to Heaven?” Would this, my Friends, be the Language of a real Christian? Nay, are there not many abandon’d Sinners who would tremble at such Expressions? Yet is it not in effect the Language of our tumultuous Passions, when, like Rachel, we are mourning for our Children, and will not be comforted, because they are not [y]? Is it not our Language while we cannot, like the pious Shunamite in the Text, bring our afflicted Hearts to say, It is well?

III. PIOUS PARENTS, in such a Circumstance, have farther Reason to say, It is well,—as they may observe an apparent Tendency in such a Dispensation to teach them a Variety of the most instructive and useful Lessons, in a very convincing and effectual Manner.

’TIS a just Observation of Solomon, that the Rod and Reproof give Wisdom[z]; and ’tis peculiarly applicable to such a Chastisement of our heavenly Father. It should therefore be our great Care to bear the Rod and him that hath appointed it[a]; and so far as it hath a Tendency to teach us our Duty, and to improve the divine Life in our Souls, we have the highest Reason to say, that it is indeed well.

EVERY Affliction hath in its Degree this kind of Tendency, and ’tis the very Reason for which we are thus chastened, that we may profit by our Sorrows, and be made Partakers of God’s Holiness[b]. But this Dispensation is peculiarly adapted, in a very affecting Manner,—to teach us the Vanity of the World,—to warn us of the Approach of our own Death,—to quicken us in the Duties incumbent upon us, especially to our surviving Children,—and to produce a more intire Resignation to the Divine Will, which is indeed the surest Foundation of Quiet, and Source of Happiness.

I SHALL insist a little more particularly on each of these; and I desire that it may be remembered, that the Sight and Knowledge of such mournful Providences as are now before us, should, in some Degree, be improved to these Purposes, even by those Parents whose Families are most

prosperous and joyful: May they learn Wisdom and Piety from what we suffer, and their Improvements shall be acknowledged as an additional Reason for us to say, It is well.

1. WHEN GOD takes away our Children from us, it is a very affecting Lesson of the Vanity of the World.

THERE is hardly a Child born into it, on whom the Parents do not look with some pleasing Expectation that it shall comfort them concerning their Labour[c]. This makes the Toil of Education easy and delightful: And truly 'tis very early that we begin to find a Sweetness in it, which abundantly repays all the Fatigue. Five, or four, or three, or two Years, make Discoveries which afford immediate Pleasure, and which suggest future Hopes. Their Words, their Actions, their very Looks touch us, if they be amiable and promising Children, in a tender, but very powerful Manner; their little Arms twine about our Hearts; and there is something more penetrating in their first broken Accents of Indearment, than in all the Pomp and Ornament of Words. Every Infant-Year increases the Pleasure, and nourishes the Hope. And where is the Parent so wise and so cautious, and so constantly intent on his Journey to Heaven, as not to measure back a few Steps to Earth again, on such a plausible and decent Occasion, as that of introducing the young Stranger into the Amusements, nay perhaps, where Circumstances will admit it, into the Elegancies of Life, as well as its more serious and important Business? What fond Calculations do we form of what it will be, from what it is! How do we in Thought open every Blossom of Sprightliness, or Humanity, or Piety, to its full Spread, and ripen it to a sudden Maturity! But, oh, who shall teach those that have never felt it, how it tears the very Soul; when GOD roots up the tender Plant with an inexorable Hand, and withers the Bud in which the Colours were beginning to glow! Where is now our Delight? Where is our Hope? Is it in the Coffin? Is it in the Grave? Alas! all the Loveliness of Person, of Genius, and of Temper, serves but to point and to poison the Arrow, which is drawn out of our own Quiver to wound us. Vain, delusive, transitory Joys! "And such, Oh my Soul," will the Christian say, "such are thine earthly Comforts in every Child, in every Relative, in every Possession of Life; such are the Objects of thy Hopes, and thy Fears, thy Schemes, and thy Labours, where Earth alone is concerned. Let me then, once for all, direct mine Eyes to another and a better State. From these broken Cisterns, the Fragments of which may hurt me indeed, but can no longer refresh me, let me look to the Fountain of living Waters [d]. From these setting, Stars, or rather these bright but vanishing Meteors, which make my Darkness so much the more sensible, let me turn to the Father of Lights. Oh Lord, What wait I for? my Hope is in thee[e], my Pure Abode, my everlasting Confidence! My Gourds wither, my Children die; but the Lord liveth, and blessed be my Rock, and let the God of my Salvation be exalted[f]. I see, in one Instance more, the sad Effects of having over-loved the Creature; let me endeavour for the future, by the Divine Assistance, to fix my Affections there where they cannot exceed; but where all the Ardor of them will be as much my Security and my Happiness, as it is now my Snare and my Distress."

2. THE Removal of our Children by such awful Strokes may warn us of the Approach of our own Death.

HEREBY GOD doth very sensibly shew us, and those around us, that all Flesh is as Grass, and all the Glory and Loveliness of it like the Flower of the Field[g]. And when our own Habitations are made the Houses of Mourning, and ourselves the Leaders in that sad Procession, it may surely be expected that we should lay it to Heart, so as to be quicken'd and improved by the View. "Have my

Children died in the Morning of their Days, and can I promise myself that I shall see the Evening of mine? Now perhaps may I say, in a more literal Sense than ever, The Graves are ready for me[h]. One of my Family, and some of us may add, the Firft-born of it, is gone as it were to take Possession of the Sepulchre in all our Names; and ere long I shall lie down with my Child in the same Bed; yea perhaps many of the Feet that followed it shall attend me thither. Our Dust shortly shall be blended together; and who can tell but this Providence might chiefly be intended as a Warning Blow to me, that these concluding Days of my Life might be more regular, more spiritual, more useful than the former?"

3. THE Providence before us may be farther improved to quicken us in the Duties of Life, and especially in the Education of surviving Children.

IT is, on the Principles I hinted above, an Engagement, that whatever our Hand findeth to do, we should do it with all our Might, since it so plainly shews us that we are going to the Grave, where there is no Device, nor Knowledge, nor Working[j]: But permit me especially to observe, how peculiarly the Sentiments we feel on these sad Occasions, may be improved for the Advantage of our dear Offspring who yet remain, and quicken us to a proper Care in their religious Education.

We all see that it is a very reasonable Duty, and every Christian Parent resolves that he will ere long apply himself to it; but I am afraid, great Advantages are lost by a Delay, which we think we can easily excuse. Our Hands are full of a Variety of Affairs, and our Children are yet very young: We are therefore ready to imagine 'tis a good Husbandry of Time to defer our Attempts for their Instruction to a more convenient Season[k], when they may be able to learn more in an Hour, than the Labour of Days could now teach them; besides that we are apprehensive of Danger in over-loading their tender Spirits, especially when they are perhaps under Indisposition, and need to be diverted, rather than gravely advised and instructed. BUT I beseech you, my Friends, let us view the Matter with that Impartiality, which the Eloquence of Death hath a Tendency to produce. "That lovely Creature that GOD hath now taken away, tho' its Days were few, tho' its Faculties were weak, yet might it not have known a great deal more of Religion than it did, and felt a great deal more of it too, had I faithfully and prudently done my Part? How did it learn Language so soon, and in such a Compass and Readiness? Not by multiplied Rules, nor labour'd Instruction, but by Conversation. And might it not have learn'd much more of Divine Things by Conversation too, if they had been allowed a due Share in our Thoughts and our Discourses; according to the Charge given to the Israelites, to talk of them going out and coming in, lying down and rising up[l]? How soon did it learn Trifles, and retain them, and after its little way observe and reason upon them, perhaps with a Vivacity that sometimes surprized me! And had I been as diligent as I ought, who can tell what Progress it might have made in Divine Knowledge? Who can tell but, as a Reward to these pious Cares, GOD might have put a Word into its dying Lips, which I might all my Life have recollected with Pleasure, and out of its feeble Mouth might have perfected Praise[m]?" MY Friends, let us humble ourselves deeply before GOD under a Sense of our past Neglects, and let us learn our future Duty. We may perhaps be ready fondly to say, "Oh that it were possible my Child could be restored to me again, tho' it were but for a few Weeks or Days! how diligently would I attempt to supply my former Deficiencies!" Unprofitable Wish! Yet may the Thought be improved for the good of surviving Children. How shall we express our Affection to them? Not surely by indulging all the Demands of Appetite and Fancy, in many early Instances so hazardous, and so fatal; not by a Solicitude to treasure up Wealth for them, whose only Portion may perhaps be a

little Coffin and Shrowd. No; our truest Kindness to them will be to endeavour, by Divine Grace, to form them to an early Inquiry after GOD, and Christ, and Heaven, and a Love for real Goodness in all the Forms of it which may come within their Observation and Notice. Let us apply ourselves immediately to this Talk, as those that remember there is a double Uncertainty, in their Lives, and in ours. In a Word, let us be that with regard to every Child that yet remains, which we proposed and engaged to be to that which is taken away, when we pleaded with GOD for the Continuance of its Life, at least for a little while, that it might be farther assisted in the Preparations for Death and Eternity. If such Resolutions be formed and pursued, the Death of one may be the Means of spiritual Life to many; and we shall surely have Reason to say it is well, if it teach us so useful a Lesson.

4. THE Providence before us may have a special Tendency to improve our Resignation to the Divine Will; and if it does so, it will indeed be well.

THERE is surely no imaginable Situation of Mind so sweet and so reasonable, as that which we feel, when we humbly refer ourselves in all Things to the Divine Disposal, in an intire Suspension of our own Will, seeing and owning the Hand of GOD, and bowing before it with a filial Acquiescence. This is chiefly to be learn'd from suffering; and perhaps there is no Suffering which is fitter to teach it, than this. In many other Afflictions there is such a Mixture of human Interposition, that we are ready to imagine, we may be allowed to complain, and to chide a little. Indignation mingles itself with our Grief; and when it does so, it warms the Mind, tho' with a feverish Kind of Heat, and in an unnatural Flow of Spirits, leads the Heart into a Forgetfulness of GOD. But here it is so apparently his Hand, that we must refer it to him, and it will appear bold Impiety to quarrel at what is done. In other Instances we can at least flatter ourselves with Hope, that the Calamity may be diverted, or the Enjoyment recovered; but here alas! there is no Hope. "Tears will not," as [*]Sir William Temple finely expresses it, "water the lovely Plant so as to cause it to grow again; Sighs will not give it new Breath, nor can we furnish it with Life and Spirits by the Waste of our own." The Sentence is finally gone forth, and the last fatal Stroke irrecoverably given. Opposition is vain; a forced Submission gives but little Rest to the Mind; a cordial Acquiescence in the Divine Will is the only thing in the whole World that can ease the labouring Heart, and restore true Serenity. Remaining Corruption will work on such an Occasion, and a painful Struggle will convince the Christian how imperfect his present Attainments are: And this will probably lead him to an attentive Review of the great Reasons for Submission; it will lead him to urge them on his own Soul, and to plead them with GOD in Prayer; till at length the Storm is laid, and Tribulation worketh Patience, and Patience Experience, and Experience a Hope which maketh not ashamed, while the Love of God is so shed abroad in the Heart[n], as to humble it for every preceding Opposition, and to bring it even to a real Approbation of all that so wise and good a Friend hath done; resigning every other Interest and Enjoyment to his Disposal, and fitting do with the sweet Resolution of the Prophet, Tho' the Fig-tree do not blossom, and there be no Fruit in the Vine, &c. yet will I rejoice in the Lord, and joy in the God of my Salvation[o]. And when we are brought to this, the whole Horizon clears, and the Sun breaks forth in its Strength.

NOW I appeal to every sincere Christian in the Assembly, whether there will not be Reason indeed to say it is well, if by this painful Affliction we more sensibly learn the Vanity of the Creature and we are awakened to serious Thoughts of our own latter End; if by it we are quickned in the Duties of Life, and formed to a more intire Resignation of Soul, and Acquiescence in the Divine Will. I shall

only add once more, and ’tis a Thought of delightful Importance, IV. THAT pious Parents have Reason to hope it is well with those dear Creatures who are taken away in their early Days.

I SEE not that the Word of GOD hath any whit passed a damnatory Sentence on any Infants; and it has not, I am sure we have no Authority to doubt, especially considering with how much Compassion the Divine Being speaks of them in the Instance of the Ninevites[p], and on some other Occasions. Perhaps, as some pious Divines have conjectured, they may constitute a very considerable Part of Number of the Elect, and, as in Adam they all died, they may in Christ all be made alive[q]. At least, methinks, from the Covenant which GOD made with Abraham, and his Seed, the Blessings of which are come upon the believing Gentiles[r], there is Reason to hope well concerning the Infant Offspring of GOD’S People, early devoted, and often recommended to him, that their Souls will be bound in the Bundle of Life[s], and be loved for their Parents Sakes[t].

IT is, indeed, impossible for us to say, how soon Children may be capable of contracting personal Guilt. They are quickly able to distinguish, some Degree, between Right and Wrong; and ’tis too plain, that they as quickly, in many Instances, forget the Distinction. The Corruptions of Nature begin early to work, and shew the Need of sanctifying Grace; yet, without a Miracle, it cannot be expected that much of the Christian Scheme should be understood by these little Creatures, in the first dawning of Reason, tho’ a few evangelical Phrases may be taught, and, sometimes, by a happy kind of Accident, may be rightly applied. The tender Heart of a Parent may, perhaps, take a Hint, from hence to terrify itself, and exasperate all its other Sorrows, by that sad Thought, “What if my dear Child be perished for ever? gone from our Embraces, and all the little Pleasures we could give it, to everlasting Darkness and Pain?” Horrible Imagination! And Satan may, perhaps, take the Advantage of these gloomy Moments, to aggravate every little Infirmity into a Crime, and to throw us into an Agony, which no other View of the Affliction can possibly give, to a Soul penetrated with a Sense of Eternity. Nor do I know a Thought, in the whole Compass of Nature, that hath a more powerful Tendency to produce suspicious Notions of GOD, and a secret Alienation of Heart from him.

NOW for this very Reason, methinks, we should guard against so harsh a Conclusion, lest we, at once, injure the Divine Being, and torture ourselves. And, surely, we may easily fall on some Reflections which may incourage our Hopes, where little Children are concerned; and ’tis only of that Case that I am now speaking. Let us think of the blessed GOD, as the great Parent of universal Nature; whose tender Mercies are over all his Works[t]; who declares that Judgment is his strange Work[u]; who is very pitiful, and of tender Mercy [w], gracious and full of Compassion[x]; who delighteth in Mercy[y]; who waiteth to be gracious[z]; and endureth, with much Long-suffering, even the Vessels of Wrath fitted to Destruction[a]. He intimately knows our Frame[b], and our Circumstances; he sees the Weakness of the unformed Mind; how forcibly the volatile Spirits are struck with a thousand new amusing Objects around it, and born away as a Feather before the Wind; and, on the other hand, how, when Distempers seize it, the feeble Powers are over-born in a Moment, and render’d incapable of any Degree of Application and Attention. And, Lord, wilt thou open thine Eyes on such a one, to bring it into strict Judgment with thee [c]? Amidst all the Instances of thy Patience, and thy Bounty, to the most abandon’d of Mankind, are these little helpless Creatures the Objects of thy speedy Vengeance, and final Severity?

LET us farther consider, as it is a very comfortable Thought in these Circumstances, the compassionate Regard which the blessed Jesus expressed to little Children. He was much displeased with those who forbad their being brought to him; and said, Suffer them to come unto me, and forbid them not, for of such is the Kingdom of GOD; and taking them up in his Arms, he laid his Hands upon them, and blessed them[d]. In another Instance we are told, that he took a little Child, (who appears to have been old enough to come at his Call,) and set him in the Midst of his Disciples, and said, Except ye become as little Children, you shall in no wise enter into the kingdom of Heaven[e]. May we not then hope that many little Children are admitted into it? And may not that Hope be greatly confirmed from whatever, of an amiable and regular Disposition, we have observed in those that are taken away? If we have seen [+]_a Tenderness of Conscience in any thing which they apprehended would displease the great and good GOD; a Love to Truth; a Readiness to attend on Divine Worship, from some imperfect Notion of its general Design, though the Particulars of it could not be understood; an open, candid, benevolent Heart; a tender Sense of Obligation, and a Desire, according to their little Power, to repay it; may we not hope that these were some of the first Fruits of the Spirit[f], which he would, in due Time, have ripened into Christian Graces, and are now, on a sudden, perfected by that great Almighty Agent who worketh all, and in all[g]?

SURE I am, that this blessed Spirit hath no inconsiderable Work to perform on the most established Christians, to finish them to a complete Meetness for the Heavenly World: Would to GOD, there were no greater Blemishes to be observed in their Character, than the little Vanities of Children! With infinite Ease then can he perfect what is lacking in their unfinished Minds, and pour out upon them, in a Moment, that Light and Grace, which shall qualify them for a State, in Comparison of which, ours on Earth is but Childhood or Infancy.

NOW what a noble Source of Consolation is here! Then may the affectionate Parent say, “It is well, not only with me, but with the Child too: Incomparably better than if my ardent Wishes, and importunate Prayers for its Recovery, had been answered. It is indeed well, if that beloved Creature be fallen asleep in Christ[h]; if that dear Lamb be folded in the Arms of the compassionate Shepherd, and gathered into his gracious Bosom. Self-love might have led me to wish its longer Continuance here; but if I truly loved my Child with a solid, rational Affection, I should much rather rejoice, to think it is gone to a heavenly Father[i], and to the World of perfected Spirits above. Had it been spared to me, how slowly could I have taught it! and in the full Ripeness of its Age, what had it been, when compared with what it now is! How is it shot up on a sudden, from the Converse and the Toys of Children, to be a Companion with Saints and Angels, in the Employment, and the Blessedness of Heaven! Shall I then complain of it as a rigorous Severity to my Family, that GOD hath taken it to the Family above? And what if he hath chosen to bestow the distinguished Favour on that one of my little Flock, who was formed to take the tenderest Hold of my Heart? Was there Unkindness in that? What if he saw, that the very Sprightliness and Softness which made it to me so exquisitely delightful, might, in Time, have betrayed it into Ruin; and took this Method of sheltering it from Trials which had, otherwise, been too hard for it, and so fixing a Seal on its Character and Happiness? What if that strong Attachment of my Heart to it, had been a Snare to the Child, and to me? Or what if it had been otherwise? Do I need additional Reasons to justify the Divine Conduct, in an Instance which my Child is celebrating in the Songs of Heaven? If it is a new and untasted Affliction to have such a tender Branch lopp’d off, it is also a new Honour

to be the Parent of a glorified Saint." And, as good Mr. Howe expressed it on another Occasion, "If GOD be pleased, and his glorified Creature be pleased, who are we that we should be displeased?"[*]

"Could I wish, that this young Inhabitant of Heaven should be degraded to Earth again? Or would it thank me for that With? Would it say, that it was the Part of a wife Parent, to call it down from a Sphere of finch exalted Services and Pleasures, to our low Life here upon Earth? Let me rather be thankful for the pleasing Hope, that tho' GOD loves my Child too well to permit it to return to me, he will ere long bring me to it. And then that endeared paternal Affection, which would have been a Cord to tie me to Earth, and have added new Pangs to my Removal from it, will be asa golden Chain to draw me upwards, and add one farther Charm and Joy even to Paradise itself." And oh, how great a Joy to view the Change, and to compare that dear Idea, so fondly laid up, so often reviewed, with the now glorious Original, in the Improvements of the upper World! To borrow the Words of the sacred Writer, in a very different Sense? "I said, I was desolate and bereaved of Children, and who hath brought up these? I was left alone, and these where have they been?[k] Was this my Desolation? this my Sorrow? to part with thee for a few Days, that I might receive thee for Ever[l], and find thee what thou now art!" It is for no Language, but that of Heaven, to describe the sacred Joy which such a Meeting must occasion. IN the mean time, Christians, let us keep up the lively Expectation of it, and let what has befallen us draw our Thoughts upwards. Perhaps they will sometimes, before we are aware, sink to the Grave, and dwell in the Tombs that contain the poor Remains of what was once so dear to us. But let them take Flight from thence to more noble, more delightful Scenes. And I will add, let the Hope we have of the Happiness of our Children render GOD still dearer to our Souls. We feel a very tender Sense of the Kindness which our Friends expressed towards them, and think, indeed very justly, that their affectionate Care for them lays a lasting Obligation upon us. What Love then, and what Service do we owe to thee, oh gracious Father, who hast, we hope, received them into thine House above, and art now entertaining them there with unknown Delight, tho' our former Methods of Commerce with them be cut off! "Lord," should each of us say in such a Case, "I would take what thou art doing to my Child as done to my self, and as a Specimen and Earnest of what shall shortly be done." It is therefore well.

IT only remains, that I conclude with a few Hints of farther Improvement.

1. LET pious Parents, who have lost hopeful Children in a maturer Age, join with others in saying, It is well. MY Friends, the Reasons which I have been urging at large, are common to you with us; and permit me to add, that as your Case has its peculiar Distress, it has, I think, in a yet greater Degree, its peculiar Consolations too.

I KNOW you will say, that it is inexpressibly grievous and painful, to part with Children who were grown up into most amiable Friends, who were your Companions in the Ways of GOD, and concerning whom you had a most agreeable Prospect, that they would have been the Ornaments and Supports of Religion in the rising Age, and extensive Blessings to the World, long after you had quitted it. These Reasonings have, undoubtedly, their Weight; and they have so, when considered in a very different View. Must you not acknowledge it is well, that you enjoyed so many Years of Comfort in them? that you reaped so much solid Satisfaction from them? and saw those Evidences of a Work of Grace upon their Hearts, which give you such abundant Reason to

conclude that they are now received to that Inheritance of Glory, for which they were so apparently made meet? Some of them, perhaps, had already quitted their Father's House: As for others, had GOD spared their Lives, they might have been transplanted into Families of their own: And if, instead of being removed to another House, or Town, or County, they are taken by GOD into another World, is that a Matter of so great Complaint; when that World is so much better, and you are yourselves so near it? I put it to your Hearts, Christians, Would you rather have chosen to have buried them in their Infancy, or never to have known the Joys and the Hopes of a Parent, now you know the Vicissitude of Sorrow, and of Disappointment? But perhaps, you will say, that you chiefly grieve for that Loss which the World has sustained by the Removal of those, from whom it might reasonably have expected so much future Service. This is, indeed, a generous, and a Christian Sentiment, and there is something noble in those Tears which flow on such a Consideration. But do not so remember your Relation to Earth, as to forget that which you bear to Heaven; and do not so wrong the Divine Wisdom and Goodness, as to suppose, that when he takes away from hence promising Instruments of Service, he there lays them by as useless. Much more reasonable is it to conclude, that their Sphere of Action, as well as Happiness, is inlarged, and that the Church above hath gained incomparably more, than that below can be supposed to have lost by their Death. ON the whole, therefore, far from complaining of the Divine Conduct in this Respect, it will become you, my Friends, rather to be very thankful that these dear Children were spared so long; to accompany and entertain you in so many Stages of your short Journey thro' Life, to answer so many of your Hopes, and to establish so many more beyond all Fear of Disappointment. Reflect on all that GOD did in, and upon them, on all he was beginning to do by them, and on what you have great Reason to believe he is now doing for them; and adore his Name, that he has left you these dear Memorials, by which your Case is so happily distinguished from ours, whose Hopes in our Children withered in the very Bud; or from theirs, who saw those who were once so dear to them, perishing, as they have Cause to fear, in the Paths of the Destroyer. BUT while I speak thus, methinks I am alarmed, lest I should awaken the far more grievous Sorrows of some mournful Parent, whom it will not be so easy to comfort. My Brethren and Friends, what shall I say to you, who are lamenting over your Absaloms, and almost wishing you had died for them[m]? Shall I urge you to say it is well? Perhaps you may think it a great Attainment, if, like Aaron, when his Sons died before the Lord, you can hold your Peace[n], under the awful Stroke. My Soul is troubled for you; my Words are almost swallowed up. I cannot unsay what I have elsewhere said at large on this melancholy Subject[*]. Yet let me remind you of this, that you do not certainly know what Almighty Grace might do for these lamented Creatures, even in the latest Moments, and have therefore no Warrant confidently to pronounce that they are assuredly perished. And if you cannot but tremble in the too probable Fear of it, labour to turn your Eyes from so dark a Prospect, to those better Hopes which GOD is setting before you. For surely you still have abundant Reason to rejoice in that Grace, which gives your own Lives to you as a Prey, and has brought you so near to that blessed World, where, hard as it is now to conceive it, you will have laid aside every Affection of Nature, which interferes with the Interests of GOD, and prevents your most chearful Acquiescence in every Particular of his wise and gracious Determinations.

2. FROM what we have heard, let us learn not to think of the Loss of our Children with a slavish Dread.

IT is to a Parent indeed such a cutting Stroke, that I wonder not if Nature shrink back at the very Mention of it: And, perhaps, it would make those to whom GOD hath denied Children more easy, if they knew what some of the happiest Parents feel in an uncertain Apprehension of the Loss of theirs: An Apprehension which strikes with peculiar Force on the Mind, when Experience hath taught us the Anguish of such an Affliction in former Instances. But let us not anticipate Evils: Perhaps all our Children, who are hitherto spared, may follow us to the Grave Or, if otherwise, we sorrow not as those who have no Hope [p]. We may have Reason still to say; It is well, and, thro' Divine Grace, we may also have Hearts to say it. Whatever we lose, if we be the Children of GOD, we shall never lose our Heavenly Father, He will still be our Support, and our Joy. And therefore let us turn all our Anxiety about uncertain, future Events, into a holy Solicitude to please him, and to promote religious Impressions in the Hearts of our dear Offspring; that if GOD should see fit to take them away, we may have a Claim to the full Consolations, which I have been representing in the preceding Discourse.

3. LET us not sink in hopeless Sorrow, or break out into clamorous Complaints, if GOD has brought this heavy Affliction upon us. A STUPID Indifference would be absurd and unnatural: GOD and Man might look upon us as acting a most unworthy Part, should we be like the Ostrich in the Wilderness, which hardeneth herself against her young ones, as if they were not hers; because GOD hath deprived her of Wisdom, neither hath he imparted to her Understanding[q]. Let us sorrow like Men, and like Parents; but let us not, in the mean time, forget that we are Christians. Let us remember how common the Calamity is; few Parents are exempt from it; some of the most pious and excellent have lost amiable Children, with Circumstances perhaps of peculiar Aggravation. 'Tis a Trial which GOD hath chosen for the Exercise of some who have been eminently dear to him, as we may learn from a Variety of Instances both ancient and modern. Let us recollect our many Offences against our heavenly Father, those Sins which such a Dispensation may properly bring to our Remembrance[r]; and let that silence us, and teach us to own, that 'tis of the Lord's Mercies we are not consumed[s], and that we are punished less than our Iniquities deserve[t]. Let us look round on our surviving Comforts; let us look forward to our future, our eternal Hopes; and we shall surely see, that there is still Room for Praise, still a Call for it. Let us review the Particulars mentioned above, and then let Conscience determine whether it doth not become us, in this particular Instance, to say it steadily, and chearfully too, Even this is well. And may the GOD of all Grace and Comfort apply these Considerations to our Mind, that we may not only own them, but feel them, as a reviving Cordial when our Heart is overwhelmed within us! In the mean Time, let me beseech you whose tabernacles are in Peace[u], and whose Children are yet about you[w], that you would not be severe in censuring our Tears, till you have experimentally known our Sorrows, and yourselves tasted the Wormwood and the Gall, which we, with all our Comforts, must have in a long and a bitter Remembrance [x].

4. LET those of us who are under the Rod, be very solicitous to improve it aright, that in the End it may indeed be well.

HEAR, my Brethren, my Friends and Fellow-Sufferers, hear and suffer the word of Exhortation[y]. Let us be much concerned, that we may not bear all the Smart of such an Affliction, and, through our own Folly, lose all that Benefit which might, otherwise, be a rich Equivalent. In Proportion to the Grievousness of the Stroke, should be our Care to attend to the Design of it. Let us, now GOD is calling us to Mourning and Lamentation, be searching and trying our Ways, that we may turn

again unto the Lord[z]. Let us review the Conduct of our Lives, and the State and Tenour of our Affections, that we may observe what hath been deficient, and what irregular; that proper Remedies may be applied, and those important Lessons more thoroughly learnt, which I was mentioning under the former Branch of my Discourse. Let us pray, that through our Tears we may read our Duty, and that by the Heat of the Furnace we may be so melted, that our Dross may be purged away, and the Divine Image instamped on our Souls in brighter and fairer Characters. To sum up all in one Word, let us endeavour to set our Hearts more on that GOD, who is infinitely better to us than ten Children[a], who hath given us a Name better than that of Sons or of Daughters[b], and can abundantly supply the Place of all earthly Enjoyments with the rich Communications of his Grace: Nay, perhaps, we may add, who hath removed some Darling of our Hearts, lest to our infinite Detriment it should fill his Place there, and, by alienating us from his Love and Service, have a fatal Influence on our present Peace, and our future Happiness.

ETERNAL Glory, my Friends, is so great a Thing, and the compleat Love and Enjoyment of GOD so unutterably desirable, that it is well worth our while to bear the sharpest Sorrows, by which we may be more perfectly formed for it. We may even congratulate the Death of our Children, if it bring us nearer to our heavenly Father; and teach us, (instead of filling this Vacancy in our Heart with some new Vanity, which may shortly renew our Sorrows,) to consecrate the whole of it to him who alone deserves, and can alone answer the most intense Affection. Let us try what of this kind may be done. We are now going to the Table of the Lord[*], to that very Table where our Vows have often been sealed, where our Comforts have often been reigned, where our Isaac's have been conditionally sacrificed, and where we commemorate the real Sacrifice which GOD hath made even of his only begotten Son for us. May our other Sorrows be suspended, while we mourn for him whom we have pierced, as for an only Son, and are in Bitterness as for a First-born[c]. From his Blood Consolations spring up, which will flourish even on the Graves of our dear Children; and the Sweetness of that Cup which he there gives us, will temper the most distasteful Ingredients of the other. Our Houses are not so with GOD, as they once were, as we once expected they would have been, but he hath made with us an everlasting Covenant, and these are the Tokens of it. Blessed be his Name, we hold not the Mercies of that Covenant by so precarious a Tenure as the Life of any Creature. It is well ordered in all things and sure: May it be all our Salvation, and all our Desire[d]; and then it is but a little while, and all our Complaints will cease. GOD will wipe away these Tears from our Eyes[e], our peaceful and happy Spirits shall ere long meet with those of our Children which he hath taken to himself. Our Bodies shall sleep, and ere long also awake, and arise with theirs. Death, that inexorable Destroyer, shall be swallowed up in Victory[f], while we and ours surround the Throne with everlasting Hallelujahs, and own, with another Evidence than we can now perceive; with another Spirit than we can now express, that All was indeed well. Amen.

FINIS.

Footnotes.

+ The Duke of Burgundy. See Cambray's Life, p. 329.

* Tibi monstrabo Amatorium sine Medicamento, sine Herbis, sine ullius Veneficae; Carmine, Si vis amari, ama. SEN. a Hebrews 4:15.—Hebrews 2:18. b 2 Corinthians 1:4. c Job 4:3-5. d Job 15:11. e Isaiah 10:18. f Hebrews 12:9. g Leviticus 10:3. h Job 1:21. i Matthew 21:16. k Luke 1:18. l Luke

1:38. m Jonah 2:2. n Jonah 4:9. o 2 Kings 4:18, 2 Kings 4:20. p 1 Kings 17:17, &seq.

* See Henry, in loc. q 1 Timothy 6:11; 2 Timothy 3:17. r 2 Kings 4:23. s Isaiah 39:8. t Ezekiel 24:16. u Psalms 141:3. w Jeremiah 10:19. x Psalms 74:22. y Psalms 39:9. z 1 Samuel 3:18. a Romans 9:20. b Psalms 103:19. c Matthew 10:29-30. d Psalms 121:4. e Jeremiah 15:7. f Ezekiel 24:16. g Job 14:20. h Psalms 100:3. i Job 21:22. k Job 2:5. l Psalms 107:2. m Hebrews 8:10. n Hebrews 12:9. o 2 Corinthians 1:3. p John 18:11. q Ecclesiastes 5:2. r Matthew 26:39. s 2 Samuel 15:26. t Romans 8:28. u Romans 4:18, Romans 4:20. w Romans 8:32. x 2 Samuel 19:28. y Jeremiah 31:15. z Proverbs 29:15. a Micah 6:9. b Hebrews 12:10. c Genesis 5:29. d Jeremiah 2:13. e Psalms 39:7. f Psalms 18:46. g 1 Peter 1:24. h Job 17:1. j Ecclesiastes 9:10. k Acts 24:25. l Deuteronomy 6:7. m Matthew 21:16.

* Temple’s Essays, Vol. I. p. 178. n Romans 5:3-5. o Habakkuk 3:17-18. p Jonah iv. ult. q 1 Corinthians 15:22. r Galatians 3:14. s 1 Samuel 25:29. t Romans 11:28. t Psalms 145:9. u Isaiah 28:21. w James 5:11. x Psalms 111:4. y Micah 7:18. z Isaiah 30:18. a Romans 9:22. b Psalms 103:14. c Job 14:3. d Mark 10:13-16. e Matthew 18:2-3. f Romans 8:23. g 1 Corinthians 12:6.

+ I bless GOD, all these Things were very evident in that dear Child, whose Death occasioned this Discourse. h 1 Corinthians 15:18. i John 14:28.

* Howe’s Life, pag. 32. Fal. Edit. k Isaiah 49:21. l Philemon 1:13. m 2 Samuel 18:33. n Leviticus 10:3.

* In the Sixth of my Sermons to young Persons, intitled, The Reflections of a pious Parent on the Death of a wicked Child. p 1 Thessalonians 4:13. q Job 39:16-17. r 1 Kings 17:18. s Lamentations 3:22. t Ezra 9:13. u Job 5:24. w Job 29:5. x Lamentations 3:19-20. y Hebrews 13:22. z Lamentations 3:40. a 1 Samuel 1:8. b Isaiah 56:5.

* N. B. This Sermon was preached October 3, 1736. it being Sacrament Day. The Child died October 1. c Zechariah 12:10. d 2 Samuel 23:5. e Revelation 21:4. f 1 Corinthians 15:54.

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