

# Keeping the Heart #1

by John Flavel

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*John Flavel emphasizes the critical importance of diligently keeping the heart to maintain a vibrant spiritual life and true communion with God.*

**Duration:** 1:15:12

**Scripture:** Proverbs 3:11

**Topics:** "Spiritual Growth", "Heart Preparation"

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## Description

The sermon transcript discusses the importance of preparing and keeping the heart in a desirable spiritual frame. It emphasizes the need for frequent observation of the heart's condition and engaging in self-reflection. The transcript also highlights the need for diligence in keeping the heart during times of adversity and troubles. It warns about the dangers of being ensnared by temptations in a pleasant and prosperous condition, particularly for those who are rich. The sermon references biblical passages such as Proverbs 4:23 and Matthew 19:24 to support its teachings.

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## Transcript

On Keeping the Heart, a book by the Puritan John Flavel. Keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life, Proverbs 4, 23. The heart of man is his worst part before he is regenerated, and the best afterwards.

It is the seat of principles and the fountain of actions. The eye of God is, and the eye of the Christian ought to be principally fixed upon it. The greatest difficulty in conversion is to win the heart to God, and the greatest difficulty after conversion is to keep the heart with God.

Here lies the very force and stress of religion. Here is that which makes the way to life a narrow way, and the gate of heaven a straight gate. Direction and help in this great work are the scope of the text, wherein we have, first, an exhortation, Keep thy heart with all diligence.

Number two, the reason or motive enforcing it, for out of it are the issues of life. In the exhortation I shall consider, first, a matter of the duty. Secondly, the manner of performing it.

Number one, the matter of the duty. Keep thy heart. Heart is not here taken properly for the noble part of the body, which philosophers call the first that lives and the last that dies, but by heart, in a metaphor, the scripture sometimes represents some particular noble faculty of the soul.

In Romans 12:1, it is put for the understanding. Their foolish heart, that is, their foolish understanding, was darkened. Psalm 119:11 It is put for the memory.

Thy word have I hid in my heart. In 1 John 3:10, it is put for the conscience, which includes both the light of the understanding and the recognitions of the memory. If our heart condemn us, that is, if our conscience, whose proper office it is to condemn.

But in the text we are to take it more generally for the whole soul or inner man. What the heart is to the body, that the soul is to the man, and what health is to the heart, that holiness is to the soul. The state of the whole body depends upon the soundness and vigor of the heart, and the everlasting state of the whole man upon the good or ill condition of the soul.

By keeping the heart we are to understand the diligent and constant use of all holy means to preserve the soul from sin and maintain its sweet and free communion with God. I say constant for the reason added in the text extends the duty to all the states and conditions of a Christian's life and makes it binding always. If the heart must be kept, because out of it are the issues of life, then as long as these issues of life do flow out of it, we are obliged to keep it.

Lavator on the text will have the word taken from a besieged garrison, beset by many enemies without, and in danger of being betrayed by treacherous citizens within, in which danger the soldiers, upon pain of death, are commanded to watch, and though the expression, Keep thy heart, seems to put it upon us as our work, yet it does not imply a sufficiency in us to do it. We are as able to stop the sun in its course, or to make the rivers run backward, as by our own will and power to rule and order our hearts. We may as well be our own saviors as our own keepers.

And yet Solomon speaks properly enough when he says, Keep thy heart, because the duty is ours, though the power is of God. What power we have depends upon the exciting and assisting strength of Christ. Grace within us is beholden to grace without us.

Without me ye can do nothing. So much for the matter of the duty. 2. The manner of performing it is with all diligence.

The Hebrew is very emphatic. Keep with all keeping, or keep, keep, set double guards. This vehemence of expression which of the duty is urged, plainly implies how difficult it is to keep our hearts, how dangerous to neglect them.

The motive to this duty is very forcible and weighty, for out of the heart turn the issues of life. That is, the heart is the source of all vital operations. It is the spring and original of both good and evil, as the spring in a watch that sets all the wheels in motion.

3. The heart is the treasury, the hand and tongue but the shops. What is in these comes from that. The hand and tongue always begin where the heart ends.

The heart contrives and the members execute. A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth that which is good, and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart brings forth that which is evil. For out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaketh.

So then, if the heart err in its work, these must miscarry in theirs. For heart errors are like the errors of the first concoction, which cannot be rectified afterward, or like the misplacing and inverting of the stamps and

letters in the press, which must cause so many errata in all the copies that are printed. O then, how important a duty is that which is contained in the following.

Proposition The keeping and right managing of the heart in every condition is one great business of a Christian's life. What the philosophers say of waters is as properly applicable to hearts. It is hard to keep them within any bounds.

God has set limits to them, yet how frequently do they transgress not only the bounds of grace and religion, but even of reason and common honesty. This is that which affords the Christian manner of labor and watchfulness to his dying day. It is not the cleaning of the hand that makes the Christian, for many a hypocrite can show as fair a hand as he, but the purifying, watching, and right ordering of the heart.

This is the thing that provokes so many sad complaints and costs so many deep groans and tears. It was the pride of Hezekiah's heart that made him lying in the dust, mourning before the Lord. It was a fear of hypocrisies invading the heart that made David cry, Let my heart be sound in thy statutes, that I be not ashamed.

It was the sad experience he had of the divisions and distractions of his own heart in the service of God that made him pour out the prayer, Unite my heart to fear thy name. The method in which I propose to improve the proposition is this. First, I shall inquire what the keeping of the heart supposes and imports.

Secondly, assign a number of reasons why Christians must make this a leading business of their lives. Thirdly, point out those seasons which especially call for this diligence in keeping the heart. And fourthly, apply the whole.

First, I am to consider what the keeping of the heart supposes and imports. To keep the heart necessarily supposes a previous work of regeneration, which has set the heart right by giving it a new spiritual inclination. For as long as the heart is not set right by grace as to its habitual frame, no means can keep it right with God.

Self is the poise of the unrenewed heart, which biases and moves it in all its designs and actions. And as long as it is so, it is impossible that any external means should keep it with God. Man originally was of one constant uniform frame of spirit, held one straight and even course.

Not one thought or faculty was disordered. His mind had a perfect knowledge of the requirements of God, his will a perfect compliance therewith. All his appetites and powers stood in a most obedient subordination.

Man by the apostasy has become a most disordered and rebellious creature, opposing his maker as a first cause or self-dependence as a chief good, by self-love as the highest Lord, by self-will, and at the last end, by self-seeking. Thus he is quite disordered and all his actions are irregular. But by regeneration the disordered soul is set right, this great change being, as the Scripture expresses it, the renovation of the soul after the image of God, in which self-dependence is removed by faith, self-love by the love of God, self-will by subjection and obedience to the will of God, and self-seeking by self-denial.

The darkened understanding is illuminated, the refractory will sweetly subdued, the rebellious appetite gradually conquered. Thus the soul which sin had universally depraved is by grace restored. This being presupposed, it will not be difficult to apprehend what it is to keep the heart, which is nothing but the constant care and diligence of such a renewed man to preserve his soul in that holy frame to which grace

has raised it.

For though grace has, in a great measure, rectified the soul and given it an habitual heavenly temper, yet sin often actually discomposes it again, so that even a gracious heart is like a musical instrument, which, though it be exactly tuned, a small matcher brings it out of tune again. Yea, hang it aside but a little, and it will need settling again before another lesson can be played upon it. If gracious hearts are in a desirable frame in one duty, yet how dull, dead, and disordered when they come to another! Therefore every duty needs a particular preparation of the heart.

If thou prepare thine heart, and stretch out thine hands toward him, and so on, to keep the heart, then, is carefully to preserve it from sin, which disorders it, and maintains that spiritual frame which fits it for a life of communion with God. This includes in it six particulars. 1. Frequent observation of the frame of the heart.

Carnal and formal persons take no heed to this. They cannot be brought to confer with their own hearts. There are some people who have lived forty or fifty years in the world, and have had scarcely one hour's discourse with their own hearts.

It is a hard thing to bring a man and himself together on such business, but saints know those soliloquies to be very salutary. The heathen can say the soul is made wise by sitting still in quietness. Though bent rups care not to look into their accounts, yet upright hearts will know whether they go backward or forward.

I commune with mine own heart, says David. The heart can never be kept until its case be examined and understood. 2. It includes deep humiliation for heart evils and disorders.

Thus has Achaia humbled himself for the pride of his heart. Thus the people were ordered to spread forth their hands to God in prayer, realizing the plague of their own hearts. Upon this account, many an upright heart has been laid low before God.

O what an heart have I! Saints have in their confession pointed at the heart, the pain place. Lord, here is a wound. It is with the heart well kept as it is with the eye.

If a small dust get into the eye, it will never cease twinkling and watering till it is wept it out. So the upright heart cannot be at rest till it has wept out its troubles and poured out its complaints before the Lord. 3. It includes earnest supplication and instant prayer for purifying and rectifying grace when sin has defiled and disordered the heart.

Cleanse thou me from secret faults. Unite my heart to fear thy name. Saints have always made such petitions before the throne of God's grace.

This is a thing which is most pleaded by them with God. When they are praying for outward mercies, perhaps their spirits may be more remiss. But when it comes to the heart's case, they extend their spirits to the utmost, fill their mouths with arguments, weep and make supplication.

O for a better heart! O for a heart to love God more, to hate sin more, to want more evenly with God! Lord, deny not to me such a heart. Whatever thou deny me, give me a heart to fear thee, to love and delight in thee, if I beg my bread in desolate places. It is observed of an eminent saint that when he was confessing sin, he would never give over confessing until he had some felt brokenness of heart for that sin.

And when praying for any spiritual mercy, he would never give over that suit till he had obtained some relish of that mercy. 4. It includes the imposing of strong engagement upon ourselves to walk more carefully with God and avoid the occasions in which the heart may be induced to sin. Well-advised and deliberate vows are, in some cases, very useful to guard the heart against some special sin.

I have made a covenant with mine eye, says Job. By this means, holy men have overawed their souls and preserved themselves from defilement. 5. It includes a constant and holy jealousy over our own hearts.

Quick-sighted self-jealousy is an excellent preservative from sin. He that will keep his heart must have the eyes of the soul awake and open upon all the disorderly and tumultuous stirrings of his affections. If the affections break loose and the passions be stirred, the soul must discover it and suppress them before they get to a height.

O my soul, does thou well in this? My tumultuous thoughts and passions, where is your commission? Happy is a man that thus feareth always. By this fear of the Lord it is that men depart from evil, shake off sloth, and preserve themselves from iniquity. He that will keep his heart must eat and drink with fear, rejoice with fear, and pass the whole time of his soul-journey here in fear.

All this is little enough to keep the heart from sin. 6. It includes the realizing of God's presence with us and setting the Lord always before us. This the people have found a powerful means of keeping their heart upright and awing them from sin.

When the eye of our faith is fixed upon the eye of God's omniscience, we dare not let out our thoughts and affections to vanity. Holy Job doth not suffer his heart to yield to an impure vain thought, and what was it that moved him to so great circumspection? He tells us, does not he see my ways and count all my steps? In such particulars as these do gracious souls express the care they have of their hearts. They are careful to prevent the breaking loose of the corruptions in time of temptation, careful to preserve the sweetness and comfort they have got from God in any duty.

This is a work, and of all works in religion, it is the most difficult, constant, and important work. 1. It is the hardest work. Heart work is hard work indeed.

To shuffle over religious duties with a loose and heedless spirit will cost no great pains, but to set thyself before the Lord and tie up thy loose and vain thoughts to a constant and serious attendance upon him, this will cost thee something. To attain a facility and dexterity of language and prayer, and put thy meaning into apt and decent expressions is easy, but to get thy heart broken for sin while thou art confessing it, melted with free grace while thou art blessing God for it, to be really ashamed and humbled through the apprehensions of God's infinite holiness, and to keep thy heart in this frame, not only in but after duty, will surely cost thee some groans and pains of soul. To repress the outward acts of sin and compose the external part of your life in a laudable manner is no great manner.

Even carnal persons by the force of common principles can do this, but to kill the root of corruption within, to set up and keep up an holy government over your thought, to have all things light, straight, and orderly in the heart, this is not easy. 2. It is a constant work. The keeping of the heart is a work that is never done till life is ended.

There is no time or condition in the life of a Christian which will suffer an intermission of this work. It is in keeping watch over our hearts that it is with keeping up Moses' hands, while Israel and Amalek were

fighting. No sooner do the hands of Moses grow heavy and sink down than Amalek prevails, intermitting the watch over their own hearts, but for a few minutes cost David and Peter many a sad day and night.

3. It is the most important business of a Christian's life. Without this we are but formalists in religion. All our professions, gifts, and duties signify nothing.

My son, give me thine heart, is God's request. God is pleased to call that a gift, which is indeed a debt. He will put this honor upon the creature to receive it from him in the way of a gift, but if this be not given him, he regards not whatever else you bring to him.

There is only so much of worth in what we do as there is of heart in it. Concerning the hearts, God seems to say, Is Joseph of Benjamin, if you bring not Benjamin with you, you shall not see my face. Among the heathen, when the beast was cut up for sacrifice, the first thing the priest looked upon was the heart, and if that was unsound and worthless, the sacrifice was rejected.

God rejects all duties, how glorious soever in other respects, which are offered him without the heart. He that performs duty without the heart, that is heedlessly, is no more accepted with God than he that performs it with a double heart, that is, hypocritically. Thus I have briefly considered what the keeping of the heart supposes and imports.

I perceive, secondly, to assign some reasons why Christians must make this a great business of their lives. The importance and necessity of making this a great business will manifestly appear from several considerations. The glory of God is much concerned.

Heart evils are very provoking evils to the Lord. The schools correctly observe that outward sins are sins of great infamy, but that the heart sins are sins of deeper guilt. How severely has the great God declared His wrath from heaven against heart wickedness! The crime for which the old world stands indicted is heart wickedness.

God saw that every imagination of their hearts was only evil, in fact continually. For which He sent the most dreadful judgments that were ever inflicted since time began. We find not their murders, adulteries, blasphemies, though they were defiled with these, particularly alleged against them, but the evils of their hearts.

That by which God was so provoked as to give up His peculiar inheritance into the enemy's hand was the evil of their hearts. O Jerusalem, wash thine heart from wickedness, that thou mayest be saved. How long shall thy vain thoughts lodge within thee? Of the wickedness and vanity of their thoughts God took particular notice, and because of this the Chaldeans must come upon them as a lion from his thicket and tear them to pieces.

For the sin of thoughts it was that God threw down the fallen angels from heaven. It still keeps them in everlasting change to the judgment of the great day. By which expression is not obscurely intimated some extraordinary judgment to which they are reserved, as prisoners that of most irons laid upon them may be supposed to be the greatest malefactors.

And what was their sin? Spiritual wickedness. Merely heart evils are so provoked unto God that for them He rejects with indignation all the duties of some men perform. He that kills an ox is as if he slew a man.

He that sacrifices a lamb is as if he cut off a dog's neck. He that offers an oblation is as if he offered swine's blood. He that burns incense is as if he blessed an idol.

In what words could the abhorrence of a creature's actions be more fully expressed by the Holy God? Murder and idolatry are not more vile in his account than their sacrifices, though materially such as himself appointed. And what made their sacrifices so vile? The following words inform us of their soul delighted in their abominations. Such is the vileness of men's heart sins that the Scriptures sometimes intimate the difficulty of pardon for them.

The heart of Simon Magus was not right. He had base thoughts of God and of the things of God. The Apostle bade him repent and pray, if perhaps the thoughts of his heart might be forgiven him.

Oh, then never slight heart evils! For by these God is highly wronged and provoked. For this reason let every Christian keep his heart with all diligence. No.

2 The sincerity of our profession much depends upon the care we exercise in keeping our hearts. Most certainly that man who is careless of the frame of his heart is but a hypocrite in his profession, however eminent he be in the externals of religion. We have a striking instance of this in the history of Jehu.

But Jehu took no heed to walk in the ways of the Lord God of Israel with his heart. The context gives an account of the great service performed by Jehu against the house of Ahab and Baal, and also of the great temporal reward given him by God for that service, even that his children to the fourth generation should sit upon the throne of Israel. Yet in these words Jehu is censured as a hypocrite, though God approved and rewarded the work, yet he abhorred and rejected the person that did it, as hypocritical.

Wherein lay the hypocrisy of Jehu? In this he took no heed to walk in the ways of the Lord with his heart. That is, he did all insincerely and for selfish ends. And though the work he did was materially good, yet he, not purging his heart from those unworthy, selfish designs and doing it, was a hypocrite.

And though Simon Magus appeared such a person that the apostle could not regularly reject him, yet his hypocrisy was quickly discovered. Though he professed piety and associated himself with the saints, he was a stranger to the mortification of heart sins. Thy heart is not right with God.

It is true there is great difference between Christians themselves and their diligence and dexterity about heart work. Some are more conversant with and more successful in it than others. But he that takes no heed to his heart, that is not careful to order it aright before God, is but a hypocrite.

And they come unto thee as a people cometh. And they sit before thee as my people, and thy hear thy words, but they will not do them. For with their mouth they show much love, but their heart goeth after their covetousness.

Here was a company of formal hypocrites, as is evident from that expression, as my people, like them, but not of them. And what made them so? Their outside was fair. Here were reverent postures, high professions, much seeming delight in ordinances.

You are to them as a lovely song. Yea, but for all that, they kept not their hearts with God in those duties. Their hearts were commanded by their lusts.

They went after their covetousness. Had they kept their hearts with God, all had been well. But not regarding which way their hearts went in duty, there lay the essence of their hypocrisy.

If any upright soul should hence infer, I am a hypocrite too, for many times my heart departs from God in duty. Do what I can, yet I cannot hold it close with God. I answer the very objection carries in it its own solution.

You say, Do what I can, yet I cannot keep my heart with God. Soul, if you do what you can, you have the blessing of an upright, though God sees good to exercise thee under the affliction of a discomposed heart. There still remains some wildness in the thoughts and fancies of the best to humble them.

But if you find a care before to prevent them, an opposition against them when they come, and grief and sorrow afterward, you find enough to clear you from the charge of reigning hypocrisy. This precaution is seen partly in laying up the word in your heart to prevent them. Your word have I hid in my heart, and I might not sin against you.

Partly in your endeavors to engage your heart to God, and partly in begging, preventing grace from God in your commencement of duty. It is a good sign to exercise such precaution, and it is an evidence of uprightness to oppose these sins in their first rise. I hate vain thoughts.

The spirit lusteth against the flesh. Your grief also discovers the uprightness of your heart. If with Hezekiah you are humbled for the evils of your heart, you have no reason from those disorders to question the integrity of it, but to allow sin to lodge quietly in the heart, to let your heart habitually and without control wander from God, is a sad, a dangerous symptom indeed.

The beauty of our conversation arises from the heavenly frame of our spirits. There is a spiritual luster and beauty in the conversation of saints. The righteous is more excellent than his neighbor.

Saints shine as the lights of the world, but whatever luster and beauty is in their lives comes from the excellency of their spirits, as a candle within puts luster upon the lantern in which it shines. It is impossible that a disordered and neglected heart should ever produce well-ordered conversation. And since, as the text observes, the issues or streams of life flow out of the heart as a fountain, it must follow that such as the heart is, the life will be.

So in 1 Peter 2.12, Abstain from fleshly lusts, having your conversation honest, or beautiful, as the Greek word imports. So Isaiah 55.7, Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts. His way denotes the course of his life, his thoughts the frame of his heart.

And therefore, since the course of his life flows from his thoughts, or the frame of his heart, both, or neither will be forsaken. The heart is the source of all actions. These actions are virtually and radically contained in our thoughts.

These thoughts, being once made up into affections, are quickly made out into suitable actions. If the heart be wicked, then, as Christ says, out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, and so on. Mark the order.

First wanton or revengeful thoughts, then unclean or murderous practices. And if the heart be holy, then it is as with David. My heart is indicting a good matter.

I speak of the things which I have made, touching the king. My tongue is as the pen of a ready writer. Here is a life richly beautified with good works, some ready made.

I will speak of the things which I have made. Others making my heart is indicting. Both proceed from the heavenly frame of his heart.

Put the heart in frame, and a life will quickly discover that it is so. It is not very difficult to discern by the performances and converse of Christians what frames their spirits are in. Take a Christian in a good frame, and how serious, heavenly, and profitable will his conversation and religious exercises be.

What a lovely companion is he during the continuance of it. It would do anyone's heart good to be with him at such a time. The mouth of the righteous speaks wisdom, and his tongue talks of judgment.

The law of God is in his heart. When the heart is up with God and full of God, how dexterously will he insinuate spiritual discourse, improving every occasion and advantage to some heavenly purpose. Few words then run to waste.

And what can be the reason that the discourses and duties of many Christians are becoming so frothy and unprofitable? Their communion both with God and with one another becomes as a dry stock. But this, their hearts are neglected. Surely this must be the reason of it, and it is an evil greatly to be bewailed.

Thus the attracting beauty that was likely to shine from the conversation of the saints upon the faces and consciences of the world, which if it did not allure and bring them in love with the ways of God, but at least left a testimony in their consciences of the excellency of those men and of their ways, is in a great measure lost to the unspeakable detriment of religion. Time was when Christians conducted in such a manner that the world stood gazing at them. Their life and language were of a different strain from those of others.

Their tongues discovered them to be Galileans wherever they came. But now, since vain speculations and fruitless controversies have so much obtained in hard work, practical godliness is so much neglected among professors, the case is sadly altered. Their discourses become like other men's.

If they come among you now, they may hear every man speak in his own language. And I have little hope to see this evil redressed and the credit of religion repaired till Christians do their first works, till they apply again to heart work. When the salt of heavenly mindedness is cast into the spring, the streams will run more clear and more sweet.

4. The comfort of our souls much depends upon the keeping of our hearts. For he that is negligent in attending to his own heart is ordinarily a great stranger to assurance and the comforts following from it. Indeed, if the antinomian doctrine were true, which teaches you to reject all marks and signs for the trial of your condition, telling you that it is the Spirit that immediately assures you, by witnessing your adoption directly without them, then you might be careless of your hearts, yea, strangers to them, and yet no strangers to comfort.

But since both Scripture and experience confute this, I hope you will never look for comfort in this unscriptural way. I don't deny that it is the work and office of the Spirit to assure you, yet I confidently affirm that if ever you attain assurance in the ordinary way in which God dispenses it, you must take pains with your own hearts. You may expect your comforts upon easier terms, but I am mistaken if ever you enjoy them upon any other.

Give all diligence, prove yourselves. This is the scriptural method. A distinguished writer in his treatise on the covenant tells us that he knew a Christian who, in the infancy of his Christianity, so vehemently panted after the infallible assurance of God's love, that for a long time together he earnestly desired some voice from heaven, yea, sometimes walking in the solitary fields, earnestly desired some miraculous voice from the trees and stones there.

This, after many desires and longings, was denied. But in time a better was afforded in the ordinary way of searching the Word and his own heart. In instance of the like nature, another learned person gives us, of one that was driven by temptation upon the very borders of despair.

At last, being sweetly settled and assured, one asked him how he attained it. He answered, Not by any extraordinary revelation, but by subjecting my understanding to the Scriptures and comparing my heart with them. The Spirit indeed assures by witnessing our adoption, and he witnesses in two ways.

One way is objectively. That is, by producing those graces in our souls which are the conditions of the promise. And so the Spirit and his graces in us are all one.

The Spirit of God dwelling in us is a mark of our adoption. Now the Spirit can be discerned not in his essence, but in his operations. And to discern these is to discern the Spirit.

And how these can be discerned without serious searching and diligent watching of the heart I cannot imagine. The other way of the Spirit's witnessing is effectually. That is, by irradiating the soul with the grace-discovering light, shining upon his own work.

And this, in order of nature, follows a former work. He first infuses a grace, and then opens the eye of the soul to see it. Now since the heart is a subject of that infused grace, even this way of the Spirit's witnessing includes the necessity of carefully keeping our own hearts.

For first, a neglected heart is so confused and dark that the little grace which is in it is not ordinarily discernible. The most accurate and laborious Christians sometimes find it difficult to discover the pure and genuine workings of the Spirit in their hearts. How then shall the Christian who is comparatively negligent about heart work be ever able to discover grace? Sincerity, which is the thing sought, lies in the heart like a small piece of gold on the bottom of a river.

He that would find it must stay till the water is clear, and then he will see it sparkling at the bottom. That the heart may be clear and settled, how much pains and watching, care, and diligence are requisite. 2. God does not usually indulge negligent souls with the comforts of assurance.

He will not so much as seem to patronize loss and carelessness. He will give assurance, but it shall be in his own way. His command has united our care and comfort together.

Those are mistaken who think that assurance may be obtained without labor. Ah, how many solitary hours have the people of God spent in heart examination! How many times have they looked into the Word and been into their hearts! Sometimes they thought they discovered sincerity, and were even ready to draw forth a triumphant conclusion of assurance. Then comes a doubt that they cannot resolve, and destroys it all.

Many hopes and fears, doubtings and reasonings, they have had in their own breasts before they arrived at a comfortable settlement. But suppose it possible for a careless Christian to attain assurance, yet it is

impossible for him long to retain it, for it is a thousand to one if those hearts are filled with the joys of assurance. Long retain those joys, unless extraordinary care be used.

A little pride, vanity, or carelessness will dash to pieces all that for which they have been a long time laboring in many a weary duty. Since then, the joy of our life, the comforts of our souls, rises and falls with our diligence in this work. Keep your heart with all diligence.

5. The improvement of our graces depends on the keeping of our hearts. I never knew grace to thrive in a careless soul. The habits and roots of grace are planted in the heart, and the deeper they are rooted there, the more flourishing grace is.

In Ephesians 3.17 we read of being rooted in grace. Grace in the heart is a root of every gracious word in the mouth, and of every holy work in the hand. It is true, Christ is the root of a Christian, but Christ is the originating root, and grace a root originated, planted, and influenced by Christ.

Accordingly, as this thrives under divine influences, the acts of grace are more or less fruitful or vigorous. Now in a heart not kept with care and diligence, these fruitifying influences are stopped and cut off, multitudes of vanities break in upon it and devour its strength. The heart is, as it were, the enclosure in which multitudes of thoughts are fed every day.

A gracious heart, diligently kept, feeds many precious thoughts of God in a day. How precious are thy thoughts unto me, O God! How great is the sum of them! If I should count them, they are more in number than the sand. When I wake, I am still with thee.

And as a gracious heart nourishes them, so they refresh and feast a heart. My soul is filled as with marrow and fatness, while I think upon thee, and so on. But as a disregarded heart, multitudes of vain and foolish thoughts are perpetually working, and drive out those spiritual thoughts of God by which the soul should be refreshed.

Besides, a careless heart profits nothing by any duty or ordinance it performs or attends upon, and yet these are the conduits of heaven, whence grace is watered and made fruitful. A man may go with a heedless spirit from ordinance to ordinance, abide all his days under the choicest teaching, and yet never be improved by them. For heart neglect is a leak in the bottom, no heavenly influences.

However rich, abide in that soul. When the seed falls upon the heart that lies open and common, like the highway, free for all passengers, the fowls come and devour it. Alas, it is not enough to hear, unless we take heed how we hear.

A man may pray, and never be the better, unless he watch unto prayer. In a word, all means are blessed to the improvement of grace, according to the care and strictness we use in keeping our hearts in them. 6. The stability of our souls in the hour of temptation depends upon the care we exercise in keeping our hearts.

The careless heart is an easy prey to Satan in the hover of temptation. His principal batteries are raised against the heart. If he wins that, he wins all, for it commands the whole man.

And alas, how easy a conquest is a neglected heart! It is not more difficult to surprise such a heart than for an enemy to enter that city whose gates are open and unguarded. It is the watchful heart that discovers and suppresses the temptation before it comes to its strength. Theologians observe this to be the method

in which temptations are ripened and brought to their full strength.

There is the irritation of the object, or that power it has to provoke our corrupt nature, which is neither done by the real presence of the object or by speculation when the object, though absent, is held out by the imagination before the soul. Then follows the motion of the appetite, which is provoked by the fancy representing it as a sensual good. Then there is a consultation in the mind about the best means of accomplishing it.

Next follows the election or choice of the will, and lastly the desire or full engagement of the will to it. All this may be done in a few moments, for the debates of the soul are quick and soon ended. When it comes thus far, the heart is won.

Satan has entered victoriously and displayed his colors upon the walls of that royal fort. But had the heart been well guarded at first, it had never come to this. The temptation had been stopped in the first or second act.

And indeed, there it is, stopped easily. For it is in the motion of a soul tempted to sin as in the motion of a stone falling from the brow of a hill. It is easily stopped at first.

But when once it is set in motion, it acquires strength by defending. Therefore, it is the greatest wisdom to observe the first motions of the heart, to check and stop the sin there. The motions of sin are weakest at first.

A little care and watchfulness may prevent much mischief now. The careless heart not heeding this is brought within the power of temptation, as the Assyrians were brought blindfold into the midst of Samaria before they knew where they were. I hope that these considerations satisfy my readers that it is important to keep the heart with all diligence.

I proceed, thirdly, to point out those special seasons in the life of a Christian which require our utmost diligence in keeping the heart. Though, as was observed before, the duty is always binding, and there is no time or condition of life in which we may be excused from this work. Yet there are some signal seasons, critical hours, requiring more than common vigilance over the heart.

Number one, the first season is a time of prosperity when providence smiles upon us. Now, Christian, keep your heart with all diligence, for it will be very apt to grow secure, proud, and earthly. To see a man humble in prosperity, says Bernard, is one of the greatest rarities in the world.

Even a good Hezekiah could not hide a vainglorious temper in his temptation. Hence that caution to Israel. And it shall be when the Lord thy God shall have brought thee into the land which he swore to thy fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give thee great and goodly cities which thou buildest not, and houses full of all good things which thou fillest not, and so on.

Then beware lest thou forget the Lord. So indeed it happened, for Jeshurun waxed fat and kicked. How then may a Christian keep his heart from pride and carnal security under the smiles of providence and the confluence of creature comfort? There are several helps to secure the heart from the dangerous snares of prosperity.

Number one, consider the dangerous incinerating temptations attending a pleasant and prosperous condition. Few, very few of those that live in the pleasures of this world escape everlasting perdition. It is

easier, says Christ, for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of heaven.

Not many mighty, not many noble are called. We have great reason to tremble when the scripture tells us in general that few shall be saved, much more when it tells us that of that rank of which we are, but few shall be saved. When Joshua called all the tribes of Israel, the calf lost for the discovery of Achan, doubtless Achan feared.

When the tribe of Judah was taken, his fear increased, but when the family of the Zarites was taken, it was time to tremble. So when the scriptures come so near as to tell us that of such a class of men very few shall escape, it is time to be alarmed. I should wonder, says Chrisostom, if any of the rulers be saved.

Oh, how many have been wheeled to hell in the chariots of earthly pleasures, while others have been whipped to heaven by the rod of affliction. How few, like the daughter of Tyre, come to Christ with a gift. How few among the rich entreat his favor.

It may keep one more humble and watchful in prosperity to consider that among Christians, many have been much the worse for it. How good it had been for some of them if they had never known prosperity. When they were in a low condition, how humble, spiritual, and heavenly they were.

But when advanced, what an apparent alteration has been upon their spirits. It was so with Israel when they were in a low condition in the wilderness, and Israel was holiness to the Lord. But when they came into Canaan and were richly fed, their language was, We are lords, we will come no more unto thee.

Outward gains are ordinarily attended with inward losses. It is in a low condition their civil employments were like to have a savor of their religious duties, so in an exalted condition their duties commonly have a savor of the world. He indeed is rich in grace, whose graces are not hindered by his riches.

There are but few Jehoshaphats in the world of whom it is said he had silver and gold in abundance, and his heart was lifted up in the way of God's commands. Will not this keep thy heart humble in prosperity, to think how dearly many godly men have paid for their riches, that through them they have lost that which all the world cannot purchase? Keep down your vain heart by this consideration. God values no man the more for these things.

God values no man by outward excellencies, but by inward graces. They are the internal ornaments of the Spirit, which are of a great price in God's sight. God despises all worldly glory, and accepts no man's person.

But in every nation he that fears God and works righteousness is accepted of him. Indeed, if the judgment of God went by the same rule that man's does, he might value ourselves by these things, and stand upon them. But so much every man is, as he is in the judgment of God.

Does your heart yet swell, and will neither of the former considerations keep it humble? Consider how bitterly many dying persons have bewailed their folly in setting their hearts upon these things, and have wished that they had never known them. How dreadful was the situation of Pius Quintus, who died crying out despairingly. When I was in a low condition, I had some hopes of salvation.

When I was advanced to be a cardinal, I greatly doubted. But since I came to the popedom, I have no hope at all. An author also tells us a real but sad story of a rich oppressor, who has scraped up a great

estate for his only son.

When he came to die, he called his son to him and said, Son, do you indeed love me? The son answered that. Nature, besides his paternal indulgence, obliged him to that. Then said the father, express it by this.

Hold your finger in the candle as long as I am saying a prayer. The son attempted, but could not endure it. Upon that, the father broke out into these expressions.

You cannot suffer the burning of your finger for me. But to get this wealth, I have hazarded my soul for you, and must burn, body and soul, in hell. For your sake, your pains would have been but for a moment, but mine will be unquenchable fire.

5. The heart may be kept humble by considering what a clogging nature earthly things are to a soul heartily engaged in the way to heaven. They shut out much of heaven from us at present, though they may not shut us out of heaven at last. If you consider yourself as a stranger in this world, traveling for heaven, you have then as much reason to be delighted with these things as a weary horse has to be pleased with a heavy burden.

There was a serious truth in the atheistic scoff of Julian. When taking away the Christians' estates, he told them it was to make them more fit for the kingdom of heaven. 6. Is your spirit still vain and lofty? Then urge upon it the consideration of that awful day of reckoning, in which, according to our receipts of mercy, shall be our account for them.

I think this should awe and humble the vainest heart that ever was in the breast of a saint. Know for a certainty that the Lord records all the mercies that ever He gave you, from the beginning to the end of your life. Remember, O my people, from Shittim unto Gilgal, and so on.

Yes, they are exactly numbered and recorded in order to an account, and your account will be suitable. To whomsoever much is given, of him shall much be required. You are but a steward, and your Lord will come and take an account of you.

And what a great account have you to make! You have much of this world in your hands. What swift witness will your mercies be against you, if this be the best fruit of them? 7. It is a very humbling reflection that the mercies of God should work otherwise upon my spirit than they used to do upon the spirits of others to whom they come as sanctified mercies from the love of God. O Lord, what a sad consideration is this! Enough to lay me in the dust when I consider first that thy mercies have greatly humbled them.

The higher God has raised them, the lower they have laid themselves before Him. Thus said Jacob, when God had given him much substance. And Jacob said, I am not worthy of the least of your mercies, and all the truth which you have shown your servant.

For with my staff I have passed over this Jordan, and am now become two bands. Thus also it was with holy David, when God had confirmed the promise to him to build him a house, and not reject him as he did Saul. He goes in before the Lord, and says, Who am I, and what is my father's house, if you have brought me here? So indeed God required, when Israel brought to him the firstfruits of Canaan, they were to say, A Syrian redded a parish was my father, and so on.

Do others raise God the higher for his raising them? And the more God raises me, the more shall I abuse him, and exalt myself. O how wicked is such conduct as this! 2. Others have freely ascribed the glory of all

their enjoyments to God, and magnified not themselves, but Him for their mercies. So says David, Let your name be magnified, and the house of your servant be established.

He does not fly upon the mercy, and suck out its sweetness, looking no further than his own comfort. No, he cares for no mercy, except God be magnified in it. So when God had delivered him from all his enemies, he says, The Lord is my strength and my rock, he is become my salvation.

Saints of old did not put the crown upon their own heads, as I do by my vanity. 3. The mercies of God have been melting mercies unto others, melting their souls in love to the God of their mercies. When Hannah received the mercy of a son, she said, My soul rejoices in the Lord, not in the mercy, but in the God of the mercy.

So also, Mary, my soul doth magnify the Lord, my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour. The word signifies to make more room for God. Their hearts were not contracted, but the more enlarged to God.

4. The mercies of God have been great restraints to keep others from sin. Seeing thou, our God, hast given us such a deliverance as this, should we again break your commandments. Ingenuous souls have felt the force of the obligations of love and mercy upon them.

5. The mercies of God to others have been as oil to the wheels of their obedience, and made them more fit for service. Now if mercies were contrarily upon my heart, what cause have I to be afraid that they come not to me in love? It is enough to damp the spirits of any saint, to see what sweet effects mercies have had upon others, and what bitter effects upon him. 6. The second season in the life of a Christian, requiring more than common diligence to keep his heart, is a time of adversity.

7. When providence frowns upon you, and blasts your outward comforts, then look to your heart. Keep it with all diligence from repining against God, or fainting under his hand. For troubles, though sanctified, are troubles still.

8. Jonah was a good man, and yet how frightful was his heart under affliction! Job was a mirror of patience, yet how was his heart discomposed by trouble! You will find it hard to get a composed spirit under great afflictions. Oh, the hurries and tumults which they occasion even in the best hearts! Let me show you, then, how a Christian under great afflictions may keep his heart from repining or desponding under the hand of God. I will here offer several helps to keep the heart in this condition.

1. By these cross providences God is faithfully pursuing the great design of electing love upon the souls of his people, and orders all these afflictions as means sanctified to that end. 2. Afflictions come not by casualty, but by counsel. By this counsel of God they are ordained as means of much spiritual good to his saints.

3. By this shall the iniquity of Jacob be purged, and so on, but he for our profit, and so on. 4. All things work together for good, and so on. They are God's workmen upon our hearts, to pull down the pride and carnal security of them.

And being so, their nature is changed. They are turned into blessings and benefits. 5. It is good for me that I have been afflicted, says David.

Surely, then, you have no reason to quarrel with God, but rather to wonder that he should concern himself so much in your good as to use any means for accomplishing it. 6. Paul could bless God if by any means

he might attain the resurrection of the dead. 7. My brethren, says James, count it all joy when you fall into diverse temptations.

8. My Father is about a design of love upon my soul, and do I well to be angry with him. 9. All that he does is in pursuance of, and in reference to, some eternal glory of sins upon my soul. It is my ignorance of God's design that makes me quarrel with him.

He says to you in this case, as he did to Peter, What I do, thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter. 2. Though God has reserved to himself a liberty of afflicting his people, yet he has tied up his own hands by promise, never to take away his lovingkindness from them. 3. Can I contemplate this scripture with a repining, discontented spirit? 4. I will be his father, and he shall be my son.

5. If he commit iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of man, and with the stripes of the children of men. Nevertheless, my mercy shall not depart away from him. 6. O my heart, my haughty heart, dost thou well to be discontent when God has given you the whole tree, with all the clusters of comfort growing on it, because he suffers the wind to blow down a few leaves? 7. Christians have two kinds of goods, the goods of the throne, and the goods of the footstool, of movables and movables.

8. If God has secured those, never let your heart be troubled at the loss of these. 9. Indeed, if he had cut off his love, or discovered my soul, I had reason to be cast down. But this he has not done, nor can he do it.

3. It is of great efficacy to keep the heart from sinking under afflictions, to call to mind that your own father has the ordering of them. Not a creature moves hand or tongue against you, but by his permission. 4. Suppose a cup be bitter, yet it is a cup which your father has given you, and can you suspect poison to be in it? Foolish man, put home the case to your own heart.

5. Can you give your child that which would ruin him? No, you would as soon hurt yourself as him. 6. If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more does God? 7. The very consideration of his nature as a God of love, pity, and tender mercies, or of his relation to you as a father, husband, friend, may be security enough, if he had not spoken a word to quiet you in this case. And yet you have his word too, by the prophet Jeremiah, I will do you no hurt.

8. You lie too near his heart for him to hurt you. Nothing grieves him more than your groundless and unworthy suspicions of his designs. 9. Would it not grieve a faithful, tenderhearted physician, when he had studied the case of his patient, and prepared the most excellent medicines to save his life, to hear him cry out, O he has undone me, he has poisoned me, because it pains him in the operation? Then will you be ingenuous? 10.

God respects you as much in a low as in a high condition, and therefore it need not so much trouble you to be made low. Nay, he manifests more of his love, grace, and tenderness in a time of affliction than in a time of prosperity. If God did not at first choose you because you were high, he will not now forsake you because you are low.

Men may look shy upon you, and alter their respects as your condition is altered. When providence has blasted your estate, your summer friends may grow strange, fearing you may be troublesome to them. But will God do so? No, no, I will never leave you nor forsake you, says he.

If adversity and poverty could bar you from access to God, it were indeed a deplorable condition. But so far from this, you may go to him as freely as ever. My God will hear me, says the church.

Poor David, when stripped of all earthly comforts, could encourage himself in the Lord his God, and why cannot you? Suppose your husband or son had lost all his seeing, should come to you in rags, could you deny the relation or refuse to entertain him? If you would not, much less will God. Why then are you so troubled? Though your condition be changed, your father's love is not changed. 5. What if by the loss of outward comforts God preserves your soul from the ruining power of temptation? Surely then you have little cause to sink your heart by such sad thoughts.

Do not earthly enjoyments make men shrilly in warp and times of trials? For the love of these, many have forsaken Christ in such an hour. The young ruler went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions. If this is God's design, how ungrateful to murmur against him for it.

We see mariners in a storm can throw overboard the most valuable goods to preserve their lives. We know it is usual for soldiers in a besieged city to destroy the finest buildings without the walls in which the enemy may take shelter. And no one doubts that it is wisely done.

Those who have mortified limbs willingly stretch them out to be cut off, and not only thank, but pay the surgeon. Must God be murmured against for casting over that which would sink you in a storm? For pulling down that which would assist your enemy in the siege of temptation? For cutting off what would endanger your everlasting life? O inconsiderate, ungrateful man! Are not these things for which you grieve the very things that have ruined thousands of souls? 6. It would much support your heart under adversity to consider that God, by such humbling providences, may be accomplishing that for which you have long prayed and waited. And should you be troubled at that, say, Christian, have you not many prayers descending before God upon such accounts as these, that He would keep you from sin, discover to you the emptiness of the creature, and that He would mortify and kill your lusts? That your heart may never find rest in any enjoyment by Christ? By such humbling and impoverishing strokes God may be fulfilling your desire.

Would you be kept from sin? Lo, He has hedged up your way with thorns. Would you see the creature's vanity? Your affliction is a fair glass to discover it, for the vanity of the creature is never so effectually and sensibly discovered, as in our own experience. Would you have your corruptions mortified? This is a way to have the food and fuel removed that maintains them.

For as prosperity began and fed them, so adversity, when sanctified, is a means to kill them. Would you have your heart rest nowhere but in the bosom of God? What better method could providence take to accomplish your desire than pulling from under your head that soft pillow of creature comforts on which you rested before? And yet you fret at this. Peevish child, how do you try your father's patience? If he delay to answer your prayers, you are ready to say he does not regard you.

If he does that which really answers the end of them, though not in the way in which you expect, you murmur against him for that. Is this instead of answering, he were crossing all your hopes and aims? Is this ingenuous? Is it not enough that God is so gracious as to do what you desire? Must you be so impudent as to expect him to do it in the way in which you prescribe? It may support your heart to consider that in these troubles God is performing that work in which your soul would rejoice if you did see the design of it. We are clouded with much ignorance and are not able to discern how particular providences tend to the fulfillment of God's designs.

And therefore, like Israel in the wilderness, are often murmuring because providence leaves us about in a howling desert where we are exposed to difficulties, though then he led them and is now leading us by the right way to a city of habitations. If you could but see how God in his secret council has exactly laid the whole plan of your salvation, even to the smallest means and circumstances, could you but discern the admirable harmony of divine dispensations, their mutual relations, together with the general respect they all have to the last end? Had you liberty to make your own choice, you would of all conditions in the world choose that in which you are now. Providence is like a curious piece of tapestry made of a thousand shreds, which, single, appear useless, but put together they represent a beautiful history to the eye.

If God does all things according to the council of his own will, of course this is ordained the best method to effect your salvation. Such a one has a proud heart, so many humbling providences appointed for him. Such a one has an earthly heart, so many impoverishing providences for him.

Did you but see this, I need say no more, to support the most dejected heart. It would much conduce to the settlement of your heart to consider that by fretting and discontent you do yourself more injury than all your afflictions could do. Your own discontent is that which arms your troubles with a sting.

You make your burden heavy by struggling under it. Did you but lie quietly under the hand of God, your condition would be much more easy than it is. Impatience in the sick occasions severity in the physician.

This makes God afflict the more, as a father a stubborn child that receives not correction. Beside, it unfits the soul to pray over its troubles or receive the sense of that good which God intends by them. Affliction is a pill which being wrapped up in patience and quiet submission may easily be swallowed, but discontent chews the pill and so embitters the soul.

God throws away some comfort which he saw would hurt you, and will you throw away your peace after it? He shoots an arrow which sticks in your clothes and was never intended to hurt but only to drive you from sin, and will you thrust it deeper to the piercing of your very heart by despondency and discontent? 9. If thy heart, like that of Rachel, still refuses to be comforted, then do one thing more. Compare the condition you are in, and with which you are so much dissatisfied, with the condition in which others are in, and in which you deserve to be. Others are roaring in flames, howling under the scourge of vengeance, and among them I deserve to be.

O my soul, is this hell? Is my condition as bad as that of the damned? What would thousands now in hell give to exchange conditions with me? I have read, says an author, that when the Duke of Cond had voluntarily subjected himself to the inconveniences of poverty, he was one day observed and pitied by a lord of Italy, who from tenderness wished him to be more careful of his person. The good Duke answered, Sir, be not troubled, and think not that I suffer from want, for I send a harbinger before me, who makes ready my lodgings, and takes care that I be royally entertained. The lord asked him who was his harbinger.

He answered, The knowledge of myself, and the consideration of what I deserve for my sins, which is eternal torment. When with this knowledge I arrive at my lodging, however unprovided I find it, he thinks it is much better than I deserve. What does a living man complain? Thus the heart may be kept from desponding, or repining under adversity.

Section 3 The third season calling for more than ordinary diligence to keep the heart at the time of Zion's troubles. When the church, like the ship in which Christ and his disciples were, is oppressed and ready to

perish in the waves of persecution, then good souls are ready to be shipwrecked too, upon the billows of their own fears. It is true most men need the spur rather than the reins in this case, yet some men sit down discouraged under a sense of the church's troubles.

The loss of the ark cost Eli his life. The sad posture in which Jerusalem lay made good Nehemiah's countenance change in the midst of all the pleasures and accommodations of the court. But though God allows, yea, commands the most awakened apprehensions of these calamities, and in such a day calls to mourning, weeping, and girding with sackcloth, and severely threatens the insensible, yet it will not please him to see you sit like pensive Elijah under the juniper tree.

Ah, Lord God, it is enough. Take away my life also. No, a mourner in Zion you may not too be, but a self-tormentor you must not be.

Complain to God you may, but complain of God, though but by the language of your actions, you must not. Now let us inquire how tender hearts may be relieved and supported when they are even overwhelmed with the burdensome sense of Zion's troubles. I granted his heart for him who prefers Zion to his chief joy, to keep his heart that it sink not below the due sense of his troubles, yet this ought to and may be done by the use of such heart-establishing directions as these.

Settle this great truth in your heart that no trouble befalls Zion but by the permission of Zion's God, and he permits nothing out of which he will not ultimately bring much good to his people. Comfort may be derived from reflections on the permitting as well as on the commanding will of God. Let him alone, it may be God has bidden him.

You can have no power against me except that we're given you from above. It should much calm our spirits that it is the will of God to suffer it, and that, had he not suffered it, it could never have been as it is. This very consideration quieted Job, Eli, David, and Hezekiah, that the Lord did it was enough to them, and why should it not be so to us? If the Lord will have Zion plowed as a field, and her goodly stones lie in the dust, if it be his pleasure that antichrist shall rage yet longer, and wear out the saints of the most high, if it will be his will that a day of trouble, and of treading down, and of perplexity by the Lord God of hosts, shall be upon the valley of vision, that the wicked shall devour the man that is more righteous than he, what are we that we should contend with God? It is fit that we should be resigned to that will whence we proceeded, and that he that made us should dispose of us as he pleases.

He may do what seems him good without our consent. Does poor man stand upon equal ground that he may capitulate with his Creator, or that God should render him an account of any of his matters? That we be content, however God may dispose of us, is as reasonable as that we be obedient, whatever he may require of us. But if we pursue this argument further, and consider that God's permissions all meet at last in the real good of his people, this will much more quiet our spirits.

Do the enemies carry away the best among the people into captivity? This looks like a distressing providence, but God sends them there for their good. Does God take the Assyrian to stay in his hand to beat his people with? The end of his so doing is that he may accomplish his whole work upon Mount Zion. If God can bring much good out of the greatest evil of sin, much more out of temporal afflictions, and that he will is as evident as that he can do so, for it is inconsistent with the wisdom of a common agent to permit anything which he might prevent if he please, to cross his great design.

And can it be imagined that the most wise God should do so? As then Luther said to Melancthon, So I say to you, let infinite wisdom, power, and love alone. For by these all creatures are swayed, and all actions guided in reference to the church. It is not our work to rule the world, but to submit to him that does.

The motions of providence are all judicious, the wheels are full of eyes. It is enough that the affairs of Zion are in a good hand. 2. Ponder this heart-supporting truth, how many troubles soever are upon Zion, yet her king is in her.

What, has the Lord forsaken his churches? Has he sold them into the enemy's hands? Does he not regard what evil befalls them, that our heart sinks thus? Is it not shamefully undervaluing the great God and too much magnifying poor impotent man to fear and tremble at creatures, while God is in the midst of us? The church's enemies are many and mighty. Let them be granted. Yet that argument with which Caleb and Joshua strove to raise their own hearts is as much force now as it was then.

The Lord is with us, fear them not. A historian tells us that when Antagonus overheard his soldiers reckoning how many their enemies were, and so discouraging one another, he suddenly stepped in among them with this question, And how many do you reckon me for? Discouraged souls, how many do you reckon the Lord for? Is he not an overmatch for all his enemies? Is not one almighty more than many mighties? If God be before us, who can be against us? What, think you, was the reason of that great examination Gideon made? He questions, he desires a design, and after that, another. And what was the end of all this but that he might be sure the Lord was with him, and that he might but write this motto upon his insides? The sword of the Lord and of Gideon.

So if you can be well assured the Lord is with his people, you will thereby rise above all your discouragements. And that he is so, you need not require a sign from heaven, though you have a sign before you, even their marvelous preservation amidst all their enemies. If God be not with his people, how is it that they are not swallowed up quickly? Do their enemies lack malice, power, or opportunity? No, but there is an invisible hand upon them.

Let then his presence give us rest, and though the mountains be hurled into the sea, though heaven and earth mingle together, fear not. God is in the midst of Zion. She shall not be moved.

If a low and afflicted state in the world be really best for the church, then your dejection is not only irrational but ungrateful. Indeed, if you estimate the happiness of the church by its worldly ease, splendor, and prosperity, then such times of affliction will appear to be unfavorable. But if you reckon its glory to consist in its humility, faith, and heavenly mindedness, no condition so much abounds with advantages for these as an afflicted condition.

It was not persecutions and prisons, but worldliness and wantonness that poisoned the church. Neither was it the earthly glory of its professors, but the blood of its martyrs that was the seed of the church. The power of godliness did never thrive better than in affliction, and was never less thriving than in times of greatest prosperity, when we are left a poor and an afflicted people.

Then we learn to trust in the name of the Lord. It is indeed for the saints' advantage to be weaned from love of and delight in ensnaring earthly vanities, to be quickened in urge forward with more haste to heaven, to have clearer discoveries of their own hearts, to be taught to pray more fervently, frequently, spiritually, to look and long for the rest to come more ardently. If these be for their advantage, experience teaches us that no condition is ordinarily blessed with such fruits as these, like an afflicted condition.

Is it well, then, to repine and droop, because your Father consults the advantage of your soul, rather than the gratification of your humors? Because He will bring you to heaven by a nearer way than you are willing to go? Is this a due requital of His love, who is pleased so much to concern Himself in your welfare, who does more for you than He will do for thousands in the world? Upon whom He will not lay a rod, dispense an affliction to them for their good? But, alas, we judge by sense, and reckon things good or evil according to our present taste. 4. Take heed that you overlook not the many precious mercies which the people of God enjoy amidst all their trouble. It is a pity that our tears on account of our trouble should so blind our eyes that we should not see our mercies.

I will not insist upon the mercy of heaven your life given you for a prey, nor upon the many outward comforts which you enjoy, even above what were enjoyed by Christ and His precious servants of whom the world was not worthy. But what say you to pardon of sin, interest in Christ, the covenant of promise, and an eternity of happiness in the presence of God? After a few days are over, O that a people entitled to such mercies as these should droop under any temporal affliction, or be so much concerned for the frowns of men and the loss of trifles, you have not the smiles of great men, but you have the favor of the great God. You are perhaps diminished in temporal, but you are thereby increased in spiritual and eternal goods.

You cannot live so plentifully as before, but you may live as heavenly as ever. Will you grieve so much for these circumstances as to forget your substance? Shall light troubles make you forget weighty mercies? Remember the true riches of the church are laid out of the reach of all enemies. What, though God do not in His outward dispensations distinguish between His own and others? Yea, what, though His judgments sing aloud the best and spare the worst? What, though an able be killed in love and a cain survive in hatred, a bloody Dionysius die in his bed in a good Josiah fall in battle? What, though the belly of the wicked be filled with hidden treasures and the teeth of the saints with gravel stones, still there is much manner of praise, for electing love has distinguished, though common providence has not.

And while prosperity and impunity slay the wicked, even slaying and adversity shall benefit and save the righteous. 6. Believe that how low soever the church be plunged under the waters of adversity, she shall assuredly rise again. Fear not, for as surely as Christ arose the third day, notwithstanding the seal and watch upon Him, so surely Zion shall arise out of all her troubles and lift up her victorious head over all her enemies.

There is no reason to fear the ruin of that people who thrive by their losses and multiply by their being diminished. Be not too hasty to bury the church before she is dead. Stay till Christ has tried His skill, before you give her up for lost.

The bush may be all in a flame, but shall never be consumed, and that because of the good will of Him that dwells in it. 7. If you can derive no comfort from any of these considerations, try to draw some out of your very trouble. Surely this trouble of yours is a good evidence of your integrity.

Union is a ground of sympathy. If you had not some rich adventure in that ship, you would not tremble as you do when it is in danger. Beside, this frame of spirit may afford you this consolation, that if you are so sensible of Zion's trouble, Jesus Christ is much more sensible of and solicitous about it than you can be, and He will have an eye of favor upon them that mourn for it.

Do not...

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