

# The Grace and Duty of Being Spiritually Minded #1

by John Owen

---

*The sermon emphasizes the importance of being spiritually-minded and the dangers of being earthly-minded, highlighting the benefits of a spiritually-minded life and the need for a renewed mind.*

**Duration:** 1:32:31

**Scripture:** Proverbs 23:7, Isaiah 26:3, Matthew 22:37, Romans 8:6, 2 Corinthians 10:5, Philipians 4:8, Colossians 3:2

**Topics:** "Audio Books"

---

## Description

The sermon transcript discusses the importance of being spiritually minded and the dangers of being influenced by the world. The preacher emphasizes that the preaching and publishing of a discourse on being spiritually minded is timely and necessary for Christians in the present circumstances. The sermon highlights the need for individuals to be aware of the ways in which the world tries to impose itself on their minds and distract them from faith and obedience. The preacher also explains that being spiritually minded is essential for experiencing life and peace, and provides insights into the nature and requirements of this mindset.

---

## Transcript

The Grace and Duty of Being Spiritually-Minded by Dr. John Owen Preface I think it is necessary to give the reader a brief account of the nature and design of the ensuing Plain Discourse, which may both direct him in the reading and be some kind of apology for myself in the publishing of it. You may know, therefore, that the thoughts here communicated were originally private meditations for my own use, since in the season wherein I was every way unable to do anything for the edification of others, and far from expectation that ever I should be so able any more in this world. Receiving, as I thought, some benefit and satisfaction in the exercise of my own meditations therein, when God was graciously pleased to restore a little strength to me, I insisted on the same subject in the instruction of a private congregation.

In this I did, partly out of a sense of the advantage I had received myself by being conversant in them, and partly from an apprehension that the duties directed and pressed to in the whole discourse were seasonable, from all sorts of present circumstances, to be declared and urged on the minds and consciences of professors for leaving others to the choice of their own methods and designs. I acknowledge that these are the two things in which I regulate my work in the whole course of my ministry. To impart these truths, of whose power I hope I have had in some measure a real experience, and

oppress those duties which present occasions, temptations, and other circumstances, to render necessary to be attended to in a peculiar manner, are the things which I would principally apply myself to in the work of teaching others, for as, in the work of the ministry in general, the whole counsel of God concerning the salvation of the Church by Jesus Christ is to be declared.

So, in particular, we are not to fight uncertainly, as men beat in the air, nor shoot our arrows at random, without a certain scope and design. Knowledge of the flock in which we are overseers, with a due consideration of their wants, their graces, their temptations, their light, their strength, and weakness, are required in this. And when, in pursuance of that design, the preparation of the word to be dispensed proceeds from zeal for the glory of God and compassion to the souls of men, when it is delivered from the demonstration of a due reverence to God, whose word it is, and of authority towards them to whom it is dispensed, with a deep sense of that great account which both they that preach and they that hear the word preached must shortly give before the judgment seat of Christ, there may be a comfortable expectation of a blessed issue of the whole work.

But my present design is only to declare, in particular, the reasons why I judge the preaching and publishing of the small and plain discourse concerning the grace and duty of being spiritually minded, not to be altogether unseasonable at this time in the present circumstances of most Christians. And the fourth thing which I would observe to this end is the present importunity of the world to impose itself on the minds of men, and the various ways of insinuation in which it possesses and feels them. If it attain hereunto, if it can feel the minds, the thoughts, and affections of men with itself, it will in some fortify the soul against faith and obedience, and in others weaken all grace and endanger eternal ruin.

For if we love the world, the love of the Father is not in us, and when the world feels our thoughts, it will entangle our affections. And first, the present state of all public affairs in it, with an apprehended concernment of private persons therein, continually exercises the thoughts of many, and is almost the only subject of their mutual converse. For the world is at present in a mighty hurry, and being in many places cast off from all foundations of steadfastness, it makes the minds of men giddy with its revolutions, or disorderly in the expectations of them.

Thoughts about these things are both allowable and unavoidable, if they take not the mind out of its own power by their multiplicity, vehemency, and urgency, until it be enframed as unto spiritual things, retaining neither room nor time for their entertainment. Hence men walk and talk as if the world were all, when comparatively it is nothing. And when men come with their warmed affections, reeking with thoughts of these things, unto the performance of or attendance unto any spiritual duty, it is very difficult for them, if not impossible, to stir up any grace unto a due and vigorous exercise.

And lest this plausible advantage which the world has obtained of insinuating itself in its occasion into the minds of men, so as to feel them and possess them, be washed against and obviated, so far at least as that it may not transform the mind into its own image and likeness, this grace of being spiritually minded, which is life and peace, cannot be attained nor kept unto its due exercise. Nor can we be any of us delivered from this narrative season without a watchful endeavor to keep and preserve our minds in the constant contemplation of things spiritual and heavenly, proceeding from the prevalent adherence of our affections to them, as will appear in the ensuing discourse. Again, there are so great and pregnant evidences of the prevalency of an earthly-worldly frame of spirit in many who make profession of religion, that it is high time they were called to a due consideration how unanswerable they are in this to the power and spirituality of that religion which they do profess.

There is no way in which such a frame may be evinced to prevail in many, yea, in the generality of such professors, it is not manifest to all. In their habits, attires, investments, in their usual converse and mis-spence of time, in their over-liberal entertainment of themselves and others, to the borders of excess and sundry other things of a like nature, there is in many such a conformity to this world, a thing severely forbidden, that it is hard to make a distinction between them. And these things do manifest such a predominancy of carnal affections in the minds of men, as whatever may be pretended to the contrary is inconsistent with spiritual peace.

To calm and offer on this evil frame of heart and mind, to discover the sin and danger of it, to direct them to the ways and means in which it may be effected, to supply their thoughts and affections with better objects, to discover and press that exercise of them, which is indispensably required of all believers, if they design life and peace as some part of the work of the ensuing discourse. It may be that it will be judged, but a weak attempt is to the attaining of that end. But it cannot be denied to have these two advantages, first, that it is seasonable, and secondly, that it is sincerely intended.

And if it have this only success, that it may occasion others who have more ability and opportunity than I have, to bring in their assistance for an opposition unto that vehement and importunate insinuation of the world and these things, to have an entertainment of the minds of professors, this labor will not be lost. But things are come to that pass amongst us, and unless a more than ordinary vigorous exercise of the ministry of the word, with other means appointed to the same end, be engaged in to recall professors to that strict mortification, that sincerity of conversation, that separation from the ways of the world, that heavenly mindedness, that delight in the contemplation of spiritual things, which the gospel and the whole nature of Christian religion do require, we shall lose the glory of our profession and leave it very uncertain what will be our eternal condition. The same may be spoken concerning the love of the world as to the advantages and the monuments which men trust to attain unto themselves by this.

This is that which renders men earthly minded and most remote from having their conversation above. In the pursuit of this corrupt affection do many professors of religion grow withering, useless, sapless, giving no evidence that the love of God abides in them. On these and many other accounts do many Christians evidence themselves to be strangers from spiritual mindedness, from a life of meditation and holy contemplation on things above.

Yet unless we are found in these things in some good measure, no grace will thrive or flourish in us, no duty will be rightly performed by us, no condition sanctified or improved, nor are we prepared in a due manner or made meet for the inheritance of the saints in light. Wherefore it was said, To direct and provoke men to that which is the only remedy of all these evils, which alone is a means of giving them a view into and a foretaste of eternal glory, especially to such who are in my own condition, namely in a very near approach unto a departure out of this world, is the design and scope of the ensuing discourse which is recommended to the grace of God for the benefit of the reader. The Grace and Duty of Being Spiritually Minded Part 1, Chapter 1 The words of the text explain to be spiritually minded is life and peace.

Romans 8, 6 The expression in our translations sounds differently from that in the original. In the margin we read the minding of the flesh and the minding of the spirit, and there is great variety in the rendering of the words in all translations, both ancient and modern. The wisdom, the understanding, the mind, the thought or contrivance, the discretion of the spirit, that which his spirit savors, are used to express it.

All our English translations from Tyndale's, the first of them, have constantly used to be spiritually minded. Neither do I know any words in which the emphasis of the original, considering the design of the apostle and the place, can be better expressed. But the meaning of the Holy Ghost in them must be further inquired into.

In the whole verse, there are two entire propositions containing a double antithesis, the one in which there are subjects, the other in their predicates. And this opposition is the highest and greatest, that is beneath the eternal blessedness and eternal ruin. But the opposite subjects are the minding of the flesh and the minding of the spirit, or the being carnally minded and spiritually minded.

And these two do constitute two states of mankind, unto the one of which every individual person in the world doth belong. And it is of the highest concernment to the souls of men to know whether of them they appertain to. As to the qualities expressed by the flesh and the spirit, there may be a mixture of them in the same persons at the same time.

There are so in all that are regenerate. For in them the flesh lusteth against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh, and these are contrary. Galatians 5.17 Thus different contrary actings in the same subject constitute not distant states, but where either of them is predominate or hath a prevalent role in the soul, there it makes a different state.

This distation of states the apostle expresses in Romans 8.9 But you are not in the flesh, but in the spirit. Some are in the flesh and cannot please God. Verse 8 They are after the flesh.

Verse 5 They walk after the flesh. Verse 1 They live after the flesh. Verse 13 This is one state.

Others are in the spirit. Verse 9 After the spirit. Verse 5 Walk after the spirit.

Verse 1 This is the other state. The first sort are carnally minded. The other are spiritually minded.

Unto one of these does every living man belong. He is under the ruling conduct of the flesh or of the spirit. There is no middle state, though there are different degrees in each of these as to good and evil.

The difference between these two states is great, and the distance in a manner infinite, because an eternity in blessedness or misery depends upon it. And this is present as evidence by the different fruits and effects of the principles and their operations which constitute these different states, which is expressed in the opposition that is between the predicates of the propositions. For the minding of the flesh is death, but the minding of the spirit is life and peace.

To be carnally minded is death. Death, as it is absolutely penal, is either spiritual or eternal. The first of these it is formally, the other meritoriously.

It is formally death spiritual for those that are carnally minded are dead in trespasses and sins. Ephesians 2.1 For those who fulfill the desires of the flesh and of the mind are by nature children of wrath. Verse 3 Are penally under the power of spiritual death.

They are dead in sins and the uncircumcision of the flesh. Colossians 2.13 And it is death eternal meritoriously, for if you live after the flesh you shall die. Romans 8.13 As the wages of sin is death.

Chapter 6.23 The reason why the apostle denounces the woeful of doom, so dreadful a sentence on the carnal mind, he declares in the two next verses, because the carnal mind is enmity against God. For it is

not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. So the things that are in the flesh cannot please God.

If it be thus with the carnal mind, it is no wonder that to be carnally minded is death. It is not mean it should be anything else. That which is enmity against God is under the curse of God.

In opposition to this, it is affirmed that to be spiritually minded, or the minding of the spirit, is life and peace. These are the things which we are particularly to inquire into. Namely, what is a minding of the spirit? And then, how is it life and peace? Number one.

The spirit in this context is evidently used in a double sense. As is usual where both the Holy Spirit Himself and His work on the souls of men are related unto. First, the person of the Spirit of God Himself or the Holy Ghost is intended by it.

Romans 8, 9. If so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. And so also, verse 11. The Spirit of Him that raised up Jesus from the dead.

He is spoken of as the principal, efficient cause of all the spiritual mercies and benefits here and afterward insisted on. Secondly, it is used for the principal of spiritual life wrought in all that are regenerate by the Holy Ghost. For that which is born of the Spirit is Spirit.

John 3, 6. It is most probable that the name Spirit is here used in the latter sense. Not for the Spirit Himself, but for that which is born of the Spirit. The principal of spiritual life in them that are born of God.

For it is in its nature, actings, inclinations, and operations opposed to the flesh. Romans 8, 9. 1, 4, and 5. But the flesh here intended is that inherent corrupt principal of depraved nature when so evil actions do proceed and wherewith the actions of all evil men are vitiated. The opposition between them is the same with that mentioned and declared by the Apostle in Galatians 5, 17.

Wherefore the Spirit in this place is the holy, vital principal of new obedience wrought in the souls of believers by the Holy Ghost enabling them to live to God. 2. Unto the Spirit there is ascribed that which, as we have intimated, is translated with great variety. It is the principal power and act of the mind.

It is its light, wisdom, prudence, knowledge, understanding, and discretion. It is not so with respect to speculation or ratiocination merrily, but is its power as it is practical, including the habitual frame and inclination of the affections also. It is its faculty to conceive of things with delight in them and an adherence unto them, from that suitableness which it finds in them unto all its affections.

Hence we translate it sometimes to think, that is, to conceive and judge, Romans 12.3, sometimes to set the affection, Colossians 3.2, to have such an apprehension of things as to cleave to them with our affections, sometimes to mind, or to mind earthly things, Philippians 3.19, which includes that relish and savor which the mind finds in the things it is fixed on. Nowhere does it design a notional conception of things only, but principally the engagement of the affections to the things which the mind apprehends. The word here used in the original expresses the actual exercise of the power of the mind before described.

Wherefore, the minding of the spirit is the actual exercise of the mind as renewed by the Holy Ghost, as furnished with the principle of spiritual life and light, in its conception of spiritual things, and the setting of its affections on them as finding that relish and savor in them in which it is pleased and satisfied. There is something we must yet further observe to give light to this description of the minding of the spirit, as it is here spoken of. 1. It is not spoken of absolutely as to what it is in itself, but with respect to its power and

prevalency in us, significantly rendered to be spiritually minded, that is, to have the mind changed and renewed by a principle of spiritual life and light, so as to be continually acted and influenced by it to thoughts and meditations of spiritual things, from the affections cleaving to them with delight and satisfaction.

So on the contrary, it is when men mind earthly things, from a principle of love to them, arising from their suitableness to their corrupt affections, their thoughts, meditations, and desires are continually engaged about them. Therefore, three things may be distinguished in the great duty of being spiritually minded, under which notion it is here recommended unto us. First, the actual exercise of the mind in its thoughts, meditations, and desires about things spiritual and heavenly.

So is it expressed in the verse foregoing, They that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh. They think on them. Their contrivances are about them and their desires after them.

But they that are after the Spirit, the things of the Spirit, they mind them by fixing their thoughts and meditations upon them. Secondly, the inclination, disposition, and frame of the mind in all its affections, in which it adheres and clings to spiritual things. This minding of the Spirit resides habitually in the affections.

Therefore, the minding of the Spirit as renewed and acted by a spiritual principle of light and life is the exercise of its thoughts, meditations, and desires on spiritual things, proceeding from the love and delight of its affections in them and engagement to them. Thirdly, a complacency of mind from that gust, relish, and savor which it finds in spiritual things from their suitableness to its constitution, inclinations, and desires. There is a salt in spiritual things in which they are condited and made savory to a renewed mind, though to others there is a white of an egg that hath no taste or savor in it.

In this gust and relish lies the sweetness and satisfaction of spiritual life. Speculative notions about spiritual things when they are alone are dry, sapless, and barren. In this gust, we taste by experience that God is gracious and that the love of Christ is better than wine or whatever else has a most grateful relish to a spiritual appetite.

This is a proper foundation of that joy which is unspeakable and full of glory. All these things do concur in the minding of the Spirit or to constitute any person spiritually minded. And although the foundation of the whole duty included in it lies in the affections and their immediate adherence to spiritual things, with the thoughts and meditations of the mind about them do proceed, yet I shall treat of the distinct parts of this duty in the order laid down, beginning with the exercise of our thoughts and meditations about them.

For they, being the first genuine actings of the mind, according to the prevalence of affections in it, they will make the best and most evident discovery of what nature the spring is from whence they do arise. And I shall not need to speak distinctly to what is mentioned in the third place concerning the complacency of the mind and what its affections are fixed on, for it will fall in with different other things that are to be spoken to. But before we do proceed, it is not amiss, as I suppose, to put a remark upon those important truths which are directly contained in the words proposed as a foundation of the present discourse, as, first, to be spiritually minded is the great distinguishing character of true believers from all unregenerate persons.

As such is it here asserted by the apostle, O those who are carnally minded, who are in the flesh, they are unregenerate, they are not born of God. They please him not, nor can they do so, but must perish forever. But those who are spiritually minded are born of God, do live to him, and shall come to the enjoyment of

him.

Hereon depend the trial and determination of what state we belong unto. Secondly, where any are spiritually minded, there and there alone is life and peace. What these are, and what they consist, what is their excellency and preeminence above all things in this world, how they are the effects and consequence of our being spiritually minded, shall be afterwards declared.

There is neither of these considerations, but it is sufficient to demonstrate of how great concernment to us it is to be spiritually minded, and diligently to inquire whether we are so or not. It will therefore be no small advantage to us to have our souls and consciences always affected with, and induce objection to the power of this truth, namely, that to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Whence it will follow that whatever we may think otherwise, if we are not so, we have neither of them, neither life nor peace.

It will, I say, be of use to us if we are affected with the power of it, for many greatly deceive themselves in hearing the word. They admit a sacred truth in their understanding, and assent to them, but take not the power of them in their consciences, nor strictly judge of their state and condition by them, which proves their ruin. For hereby they seem to themselves to believe that whereof in truth they believe not, one syllable is they ought.

They hear it, they understand it in the notion of it, they assent to it, at least they do not contradict it, yea, they commend it oftentimes and approve of it, but yet they believe it not, for if they did, they would judge themselves by it, and reckon on it that it will be with them at the last day, according as things are determined in it. For such persons are, as the apostle James declares, like a man beholding his natural face in a glass. For he beholds himself, and goes his way, and straightway forgets what manner of man he was.

Chapter 1, 23 and 24 There is a representation made of them, their state and condition, to them in the word. They behold it, and conclude that it is even so with them as the word does declare. But immediately their minds are filled with other thoughts, acted by other affections, taken up with other occasions, and they forget in a moment the representation made of themselves and their condition.

Therefore all that I have to offer on this subject will be utterly lost unless a firm persuasion hereof be fixed on our minds, unless we are under the power of it that to be spiritually minded is life and peace, so that whatever our light and profession be, our knowledge or our duty, without this we have indeed no real interest in life and peace. These things being premise, I shall more practically open the nature of this duty and what is required to this frame of spirit. To be spiritually minded may be considered either as to the nature and essence of it, or as to its degrees.

For one may be so more than another, or the same person may be more so at one time than another. In the first way, it is opposed to being carnally minded, and in the other to being earthly minded. To be carnally minded is, as the apostle speaks, death.

It is so every way. They who are so are dead in trespasses and sins. This is opposed to being spiritually minded as to its nature or essence.

When a man, as to the substance and being of the grace and duty intended, is not spiritually minded, he is carnally minded, that is, under the power of death spiritual and obnoxious to death eternal. This is the principal foundation we proceed on whence we demonstrate the indispensable necessity of the frame of

mind inquired after. There are two ways in which men are earthly minded.

The one is absolute, when the love of earthly things is wholly predominant in the mind. This is not formally and properly to be carnally minded, which is of a larger extent. The one denomination is from the root and principle, namely the flesh, the other from the object or the things of the earth.

The latter is a branch from the former as its root. To be earthly minded is an operation and effect of the carnal mind in one special way and instance, and it is as exclusive of life and salvation as the carnal mind itself, Philippians 3.19, 1 John 2, 15 and 16. This, therefore, is opposed to the being of a spiritual mindedness, no less than to be carnally minded is.

When there is in any a love of earthly things that is predominant, once a person may be rightly denominated to be earthly minded, he is not nor can be spiritually minded at all. He has no interest in the frame of heart and spirit intended by it, and thus it is evidently with the greatest part of them who are called Christians in the world. Let them pretend what they will to the contrary.

Again, there is a being earthly minded which consists in an inordinate affection to the things of this world. It is that which is sinful which ought to be mortified, yet it is not absolutely inconsistent with the substance and being of the grace inquired after. Some who are really and truly spiritually minded yet may for a time at least be under such an inordinate affection to and care about earthly things that if not absolutely yet comparatively as to what they ought to be and might be, they may be justly said to be earthly minded.

They are so in respect of those degrees in being spiritually minded which they ought to aim at and may attain to. And where it is thus is grace can never thrive or flourish. It can never advance to any imminent degree.

This is the zohar of many professors, that little one in which they would be spared. Such an earthly mindedness is as wholly inconsistent with being spiritually minded as to the staining condition which depends thereon they would avoid for this they know would be absolutely exclusive of life and peace. They cannot but know that such a frameness as inconsistent with salvation is living in the file of sin that any man can contract the guilt of.

There are more ways of spiritual and eternal death than one as well as of natural. All that dies have not to plague and all that perish eternally are not guilty of the same profligate sins. The covetous are excluded from the kingdom of God no less severely than fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, and thieves.

1 Corinthians 6, 9, 10 But there is a degree in being earthly minded which they suppose their interests, advantages, relations, and occasions of life do call for which they would be a little indulged in. They may abide in such a frame without a disbarment of their profession. And the truth is they have too many companions to fear in a special reflection on themselves.

The multitude of the guilty take away the sense and shame of the guilt. But besides, they hope well that it is not inconsistent absolutely with being spiritually minded. Only they cannot well deny but that it is contrary to such degrees in that grace, such thriving in that duty as is recommended to them.

They think well of others who are spiritually minded in an imminent degree. At least they do so as to the thing itself in general. For when they come into particular instances of this or that man, for the most part they esteem what is beyond their own measure to be little better than pretense.

But in general to be spiritually minded in an imminent degree they cannot but esteem it a thing excellent and desirable. But it is for them who are more at leisure than they are. Their circumstances and occasions require them to satisfy themselves with an inferior measure.

To obviate such pretenses I shall insist on nothing in the declaration of this duty and the necessity of it but what is incumbent on all that believe and without which they have no grounds to assure their conscience before God. And at present in general I shall say, whoever he be who does not sincerely aim at the highest degree of being spiritually minded which the means he enjoys would lead him to and which the light he has received doth call for whoever judges it necessary to his present advantages occasions and circumstances to rest in such measures or degrees of it as he cannot but know comes short of what he ought to aim at and so does not endeavor after completeness in the will of God in it can have no satisfaction in his own mind has no one fell and drowns in which to believe that he has anything at all of the reality of this grace in him. Such a person possibly may have life which accompanies the essence of this grace but he cannot have peace which follows on his degree in a due improvement.

And it is to be feared that for the greatest number of them who satisfy themselves in this apprehension willingly neglecting an endeavor after the further degrees of this grace and growth in this duty which their lighter convictions and the means they enjoy do suggest to them are indeed carnally minded in every way obnoxious unto death. The Grace and Duty of Being Spiritually Minded Chapter 2 A particular account of the nature of this grace and duty of being spiritually minded how it is stated in and evidenced by our thoughts. Having stated the general concernments of that frame of mind which is here recommended unto us we may proceed to inquire more particularly into the nature of it according unto the description before given in distinct propositions.

And we shall carry on both these intentions together first to show what it is and wherein it doth consist and then how it does evidence itself so as that we may frame a right judgment whether it be in us or not. And we shall have no regard to them who either neglect or despise these things on any pretense whatever. For this is a word according to which we shall all shortly be judged to be carnally minded as death but to be spiritually minded as life and peace.

Thoughts and meditations as proceeding from spiritual affections are the first things in which the spiritual mindedness does consist and in which it does evidence itself. Our thoughts are like the blossoms on a tree in the spring. You may see a tree in the spring all covered with blossoms so that nothing else of it appears.

Multitudes of them fall off and come to nothing. Oft times where there are most blossoms there is least fruit. But yet there is no fruit be it of what sort it will good or bad but it comes in and from some of those blossoms.

The mind of man is covered with thoughts as a tree with blossoms. Most of them fall off vanish and come to nothing end in vanity and sometimes where the mind does most abound with them there is the least fruit. The sap of the mind is wasted and consumed in them.

However there is no fruit which we actually bring forth be it good or bad but it proceeds from some of these thoughts. Therefore ordinarily these give the best and surest measure of the frame of men's minds. As a man thinketh in his heart so is he.

Proverbs 23 7 In case of strong and violent temptations the real frame of a man's heart is not to be judged by the multiplicity of thoughts about any object for whether they are from Satan's suggestions or from inward darkness trouble and horror they will impose such a continual sense of themselves on the mind it shall engage all its thoughts about them. As when a man is in a storm at sea the current of his thoughts run quite another way than when he is in safety about his occasions. But ordinarily voluntary thoughts are the best measure and indication of the frame of our minds.

As the nature of the soil is judged by the grass which it brings forth so may the disposition of the heart by the predominance of voluntary thoughts they are the original actings of the soul the way in which the heart puts forth and empties the treasure that is in it. The waters at first rise and flow from that fountain. Every man's heart is his treasury and the treasure that is in it is either good or evil as our Savior tells us.

There is a good and bad treasure of the heart that whatever a man has be it good or evil there it is. This treasure is opening emptying and spinning itself continually though it can never be exhausted for it has a fountain in nature or grace which no expense can diminish yet it increases and gives strength by it. The more you spend of the treasure of your heart in any kind the more you abound in treasure of the same kind.

Whether it be good or evil it grows by expense and exercise and the principle way in which it puts forth itself is by the thoughts of the mind. If the heart be evil they are for the most part vain, filthy, corrupt, wicked, foolish. If it be under the power of the principle of grace and so have a good treasure in it it puts forth itself by thoughts suitable to its nature and compliant with its inclinations.

Wherefore, these thoughts give the best measure of the frame of our minds and hearts I mean such as are voluntary such as the mind of its own accord is apt for inclines and ordinarily betakes itself to. Men may have a small multitude of thoughts about the affairs of their callings and the occasions of life which may yet give no due measure of the inward frame of their hearts. So men whose calling and work it is to study the Scripture or the things revealed in them and to preach them to others cannot but have many thoughts about spiritual things and yet may be and often times are most remote from being spiritually minded.

They may be forced by their work and calling to think of them early and late evening and morning and yet their minds be no way rendered or proved spiritual by it. It were well if all of us who are preachers would diligently examine ourselves in this. So is it with them who oblige themselves to read the Scriptures it may be so many chapters every day.

Notwithstanding the diligent performance of their task they may be most remote from being spiritually minded. Ezekiel 33, 31 But there is a certain track and course of thoughts of men ordinarily betake themselves to when not affected with present occasions. If these be vain, foolish, proud, ambitious, sensual, or filthy such is a mind in its frame.

If they be holy, spiritual, and heavenly such may the frame of the mind be judged to be. But these things must be more fully explained. It is a great character and description of the frame of men's minds in an unregenerate condition or before the renovation of their natures that every imagination of the thoughts of their hearts is only evil continually.

Genesis 6, 5 They are continually coining figments and imaginations in their hearts, stamping them into thoughts that are vain, foolish, and wicked. Although their thoughts in them are occasional, these are the natural genuine products of their hearts. Hence the clearest of sometimes first discovery of the bottomless

evil treasure of filth, folly, and wickedness that is in the heart of man by nature is from the innumerable multitude of evil imaginations which are there coined and thrust forth every day.

So the wicked are said to be like the troubled sea when it cannot rest whose waters cast up mire and dirt. Isaiah 57, 20 There is a fullness of evil in their hearts like that of water in the sea. This fullness is troubled or put into continual motions by their lusts and impetuous desires hence the mire and dirt of evil thoughts are continually cast up in them.

It is therefore evident that the predominancy of voluntary thoughts is the best and most sure indication of the inward frame and state of the mind. For if it be so on the one side as to the carnal mind it is so on the other as unto the spiritual. Therefore to be spiritually minded in the first place is to have the course and stream of those thoughts which we ordinarily retreat to which we approve of as suited to our affections to be about spiritual things and this consists the minding of the spirit.

But because all men unless horribly profligate have thoughts about spiritual things yet we know that all men are not spiritually minded we must consider what is required to such thoughts to render them a certain indication of the state of our minds and there are these three things required unto this first that they be natural arising from ourselves and not from outward occasions.

The psalmist mentions the inward thought of men Psalm 49 11 and 64 6 but whereas all thoughts are the inward acts of the mind it should seem that this expression makes no distinction of the especial kind of thoughts intended from those of another sort but the difference is not in the formal nature of them but in the causes springs and occasions inward thoughts are such as arise merely and solely from men's inward principles dispositions and inclinations they are not suggested or excited by any outward objects such in wicked men are those actings of their lusts in which they entice and seduce themselves James 1 14 their lusts stir up thoughts leading and encouraging them to make provision for the flesh these are their inward thoughts of the same nature are those thoughts which are the

minding of the spirit they are the first natural egress and genuine acting of the habitual disposition of the mind and soul thus in covetous men there are two sorts of thoughts in which their covetousness acts itself first such as are occasional by outward objects and opportunities so it was with Achan in Joshua 7 21 when he says I saw among the spoils a goodly Babylonish garment and two hundred shekels of silver and a wedge of gold then I coveted them he cited them with an opportunity of possessing himself of them excited coveted thoughts and desires in him so was it with others every day whose occasions called them to converse with the objects of their lusts and some by such objects may be surprised into thoughts that their minds are not habitually inclined to and therefore when they

are known it is our duty to avoid them but the same sort of persons have thoughts of this nature arising from themselves only their own dispositions and inclinations without any outward provocations the vile person will speak villainy and his heart will work iniquity Isaiah 32 6 and this he does as a liberal devises liberal things verse 8 from his own disposition and inclination he is contriving in his thoughts how to act according to them so the unclean person has two sorts of thoughts with respect unto the satisfaction of his lust for such is the occasion in his mind by the external objects of it here unto stage plays revelings dancings with the society of old persons persons of corrupt communication do contribute their wicked service for the avoidance of this snare Job made a covenant

with his eyes chapter 31 1 and our savior gives that holy declaration of the evil of it Matthew 5 28 but he hath an habitual spring of those thoughts in himself constantly inclining and disposing him there unto

hence the apostle Peter tells us that such persons have eyes full of an adulteress that cannot seize from sin 2 Peter 2 14 their own affections make them restless in their thoughts and contrivances about sin so it is with them who are given to excess in wine or strong drink they have pleasing thoughts raised in them from the object of their lust represented to them hence Solomon gives that advice against the occasion of them in Proverbs 23 31 but it is their own habitual disposition which carries them to pleasing thoughts of the satisfaction of their lust which he describes in

verses 33 to 35 so it is in other cases the thoughts of this latter sort are men's inward thoughts and such must these be as spiritual things which we may be esteemed spiritually minded Psalm 45 1 saith the psalmist my heart is inditing a good matter I speak of the things which I have made touching the king he was meditating on spiritual things on the things of the person and kingdom of Christ hence his heart bubbled up as it is in the original a good matter it is an illusion taken from a quick spring of living waters from its own life and fullness it bubbles up the water that runs and flows from it so is it with the thoughts in them that are spiritually minded there is a living fullness of spiritual things in their minds and affections that springs up into holy thoughts about them from

hence does our savior give us a great description of spiritual life it is a well of living water springing up into everlasting life the spirit with his graces residing in the heart of a believer is a well of living water nor is it such a well as content with its own fullness does not of its own accord without any instrument or pains in drawing send out its refreshing waters as it is with most wells though of living water for this is spoken of our savior in answer in opposition to that objection of the woman upon his mention of giving living water verse 10 sir she says you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep where will this living water come from verse 11 true he says such is the nature of this well and water dead earthly things they are of no use unless we have instruments

lines and buckets to draw with but the living water which i shall give is of another nature it is not water to be kept in a pit or cistern for so is it with the principle of the new creature of the new nature the spirit and his graces in the hearts of them that do believe it doth of itself and from itself without any external influence on it inclined and disposed a whole soul to spiritual actings that tend to eternal life such are the thoughts of them that are spiritually minded they arise from the inward principle inclination and disposition of the soul are the bubblings of the swell of living water they are the mindings of the spirit so our savior describes them in Matthew 12 35 a good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things first a man is good as he said

before make the tree good or the fruit cannot be good verse 33 he is made so by grace and the change and renovation of his nature for in ourselves we are every way evil this good man hath a treasure in his heart so all men have is the next words are the evil man out of the evil treasure of the heart and this is the great difference that is between men in this world every man hath a treasure in his heart that is a prevailing inexhaustible principle of all his actings and operations but in some this treasure is good in others it is evil that is a prevailing principle in the heart which carries along with it its dispositions and inclinations is in some good and gracious in others it is evil out of this good treasure a good man brings forth good things the first opening of it the first

bringing of it forth is by these thoughts the thoughts that arise out of the heart are the same nature with the treasure that is in it the thoughts that naturally arise and spring up in us are for the most part vain foolish sensual earthly selfish such as the treasure that is in our hearts and such are we but where the thoughts that thus naturally proceed from the treasure that is in the heart are spiritual and holy it is an argument that

we are spiritually minded it is not thus with our hearts that given no such evidence is that inquired after men may have thoughts of spiritual things and that many of them and that frequently which do not arise from this principle but may be resolved in two other causes number one inward force and number two outward occasions number one inward force as

it may be called this is by convictions convictions put a kind of force upon a mind or an impression that causes it to act contrary to its own habitual disposition and inclination it is the nature of water to descend but apply an instrument to it that shall make a compression of it and force it into a vent it will fly upwards vehemently as if that were its natural motion but so soon as the force of the impression ceases it returns immediately to its proper tendency descending towards its center so it is with men's thoughts oftentimes they are earthly their natural course and motion is downwards to the earth and the things of it but when any efficacious conviction presses on the mind it forces the egress of its thoughts upwards towards heavenly things it will think much infrequently of

them as if they were the proper motion and course but so soon as the power of conviction decays or wears off that the mind is no more sensible of its force and impression the thoughts of it return again to their old course and track as a water tent when he slew them then they sought him and they returned and inquired early after God and they remembered that God was their rock and the high God their redeemer nevertheless they did flatter him with their mouth and they lied to him with their tongues for their heart was not right with him neither were they steadfast in this covenant men in troubles dangers sickness fears or death are under a factual conviction of sin from the preaching of the word will endeavor to think and meditate on spiritual things yea there will be greatly troubled that

they cannot think of them more than they do and esteem it their folly that they think of anything else but as freedom and deliverance so these thoughts decay and disappear the mind will not be compelled to give place to them anymore the prophet gives a reason of it in jeremiah 13 23 can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard his spot then may ye also do good that are accustomed to do evil they have had another haunt being taught another course the habitat and inclination of the mind lies another way and they will no longer tend towards spiritual things than an impression is on them from their conviction and it is an argument of the very mean attainments of a low and weak degree in this frame of heart or in our being spiritually minded when our thoughts of spiritual things do rise or

fall according to renewed occasional convictions if when we are under rebukes from God in our persons or relations and fears of death and the like and with all has some renewed convictions of sin and commission for omission of duties and thereon do endeavor to be more spiritually minded in the constant exercise of our thoughts on spiritual things which we fail in and these thoughts decay as our convictions and the causes of them do wear off or are removed we have attained a very low degree in this grace if we have any interest in it at all water that rises and flows from a living spring runs equally and constantly unless it be obstructed or diverted by some violent opposition but that which is from thunder showers runs seriously for a season but is quickly dried up so are those spiritual

thoughts which arise from a prevalent eternal principle of grace in the heart they are even and constant unless an interruption be put upon them for a season by temptations but those which are excited by the thunder of convictions however their streams may be filled for a season they quickly dry up and utterly decay number two such thoughts may arise in the minds of men not spiritually minded from outward means and occasions such I intend as are indeed useful yea appointed of God for this end among others that they may engenerate and stir up holy thoughts and affections in us but there is a difference in their

use and operation and some may excite the inward principle of the mind to act in holy thoughts according to its own sanctified disposition and prevalent affections there is their

proper end and use in others they occasionally suggest such thoughts to the minds of men which spring only from the notions of the things proposed to them with respect to this end also they are of singular use to the souls of men albeit such thoughts do not prove men to be spiritually minded when you till and manure your land if it springs forth plentiful crops of corn it is an evidence that the soil itself is good and fertile the dressing of it only gives occasion and advantage to put forth its own fruit bearing virtue but if in the tilling of land you lay much dung upon it and it brings forth here and there a handful worth of dung lay you will say the soil is barren it brings forth nothing of itself these means that we shall treat of as the tilling of a fruitful soil which helps it in

bringing forth its fruit by exciting its own virtue and power they stir up holy affections to holy thoughts and desires but in others whose thoughts hearts are barren they only serve as it were some of them here and there to stir up spiritual thoughts which give no evidence of a gracious heart or spirit but because this is a manner of great importance it shall be handled distinctly by itself the grace and duty of spiritual mindedness by Dr.

John Owen chapter 3 outward means and occasions to set thoughts of spiritual things that do not prove men to be spiritually minded preaching of the word exercise of gifts prayer how we may know whether our thoughts of spiritual things in prayer are truly spiritual thoughts proving us to be spiritually minded such a means is a preaching of the word itself it is observed concerning many in the gospel that they heard it willingly received it with joy and did many things gladly upon the preaching of it and we see the same thing exemplified in multitudes every day but none of these things can be without many thoughts in the minds of such persons about the spiritual things of the word for there are the effects of such thoughts and being wrought in the minds of men will produce more of the same

nature yet were they all hypocrites concerning whom these things were spoken and were never spiritually minded the cause of this miscarriage is given us by our Savior in Matthew 13 20 and 21 he that received the seed in the stony places the same as he that heareth the word and anon with joy receives it yet hath he not rooted himself but doeth for a while the good thoughts they have proceed not from any principle in themselves neither their affections nor their thoughts of these things have any internal root whereon they should grow so is it with many who live under the present dispensation of the gospel they have thoughts of spiritual things continually suggested to them and they do abide with them more or less according as they are affected for I speak not of them who are either

despisers of what they hear or wayside hearers who understand nothing of what they hear and immediately lose all sense of it all thoughts about it but I speak of them who attend with some diligence and receive the word with some joy these insensibly grow in knowledge and understanding and therefore cannot be without some thoughts of spiritual things albeit for the most part they are as was said but like to waters that run after a shower of rain they pour out themselves as if they proceeded from some strong living spring whereas indeed they have none at all when once the waters of the shower are spent their channel is dry there is nothing in it but stones and dirt when the doctrine of the rude falls on such persons as showers of rain it gives a course sometimes greater sometimes less to

their thoughts towards spiritual things but they have not a well of water in them springing up into everlasting life as it is the spiritual food of the soul in which its principle of life and grace is maintained and

strengthened the more this is done the more we shall thrive in being spiritually minded number two is that it ministers occasion to the exercise of grace for proposing the proper object of faith love fear trust reverence to the soul it draws forth all those graces to exercise wherefore although the vigorous actings of spiritual thoughts be occasioned from the word be more under and after the preaching of it than at other times it is no more but what arises from the nature and use of the ordinance by God's own appointment nor is it any evidence that those with whom it is so are

not spiritually minded but on the contrary that they are yet where men have no other thoughts of this manner but what are occasioned by the outward dispensation of the word such thoughts do not prove them to be spiritually minded their endeavors in them are like those of men in a dream under some oppression of their spirits their imagination fixes on something or other that is most earnestly to be desired or avoided herein they seem to themselves to strive with all their might to endeavor to go run or contend but all in vain everything fails them and they are not relieved until they are awakened so such persons and impressions they receive from the word seem to strive and contend in their thoughts and resolutions to comply with what is proposed to them but their strength fails they find

no success for lack of a principle of spiritual life and after a time give over their endeavors until they are occasionally renewed again now the thoughts which in the dispensation of the word do proceed from an inward principle of grace excited to its due exercise are indistinguishable from them which are only occasionally suggested to the mind by the word outwardly preached for they are a special actings of faith and love towards the things themselves that are preached they belong to our receiving the truth and the love of it and love respects the goodness of the things themselves and not merely the truth of the propositions in which they are expressed the other thoughts are only the sense of the mind and the mind is affected with light and truth without any cordial love to the things

themselves number two they are accompanied with complacency of soul arising from love and experience more or less of the power of them and their suitableness to the nature or principle of grace in them for when our minds find that it so indeed it is in us as it is in the word that this is that which we would be more conformable to it gives a secret complacency with satisfaction to the soul the other thoughts which are only occasional have none of these concomitants or effects that are dry and barren unless it be in a few words or transient discourse number three the former are means of spiritual growth so some say the natural growth of vegetables is not by insensible motion but by gusts and sensible eruptions of increase these are both in spiritual growth and the latter consists much in

those thoughts which the principle of the new nature is excited to by the word in the latter secondly the duty of prayer is another means of the like nature when principle in of it is to excite stir up and draw forth the principle of grace of faith and love in the heart to do exercise in holy thoughts of God and spiritual things with affection suitable to them those who desire not to sin in prayer knew not at all what it is to pray now all sorts of persons have frequent occasion to join with others in prayer and many are under the conviction that it is their own duty to pray every day it may be in their families and otherwise and it is hard to conceive how men can constantly join with others in prayer much more how they can pray themselves but that they must have thoughts of spiritual

things every day how be it it is possible that they may have no root or living spring of them in themselves but they are only occasional impressions on their minds from the outward performance of the duty I shall give some instances of the grounds of this which on many reasons require our diligent consideration number one spiritual thoughts may be raised in a person in his own duty by the exercise of his gifts when

there is no acting of grace in them at all for they lead and guide the mind to such things as are the manner of prayer that is spiritual things gifts are nothing but a spiritual improvement of our natural faculties or abilities and a man cannot speak or utter anything but what proceeds from his rational faculties by invention or memory or both managed in and by his thoughts

unless he speaks by rote and that which is not rational what therefore proceeds from a man's rational faculty in and by the exercise of his gifts that his thoughts must be exercised about a man may read along prayer that expresses spiritual things and yet never have one spiritual thought arise in his mind about them for there is no exercise of any faculty of his mind required to such reading but only to attend to the words that are to be read this I say may be so I do not say that it is always so or that it must be so but as was said in the exercise of gifts it is impossible there must be an exercise of reason by invention judgment in memory and consequently thoughts of spiritual things yet may they all be merely occasional from the present external performance of the duty without any

living spring or exercise of grace in such a course may men of tolerable gifts continue all their days to the satisfaction of themselves and others deceiving both them and their own souls this being evident from the scripture and experience an inquiry may be made thereon as to our own concernment in these things especially of those who have received these spiritual gifts of their own and of them also in some degree who usually enjoy the gifts of others in this duty for it may be asked how we shall know whether the thoughts which we have of spiritual things in and upon prayer do arise from gifts only those of our own or other men as given occasion to them or are influenced from a living principle and spring of grace in our hearts the case is however by some it may be apprehended of great

importance and which would require much time fully to resolve for there is nothing in which the refined sort of hypocrites do more deceive themselves than others nothing in which some men do give themselves more countenance and an indulgence to their lust than by this part of the form of godliness when they deny the power thereof and besides it is that wherein the best of believers ought to keep a diligent watch over themselves in every particular instance of the performance of this duty with respect to this and in a special manner are they to watch to prayer if they are in any time negligent in it they may rest in a bare exercise of gifts when on a due examination and trial they have no evidence of the acting of grace in what they have done I shall therefore with what brevity I can give

a resolution to this inquiry and to this end observe it is an ancient complaint that spiritual things are filled with great obscurity and difficulty and it is true not that there is any such thing in themselves for they all come forth from the Father of Lights and are full of light order beauty and wisdom and light and order are the only means whereby anything makes a discovery of itself but the ground of all darkness and difficulty in these things lies in ourselves we can more clearly and steadily see and behold the moon and stars and we can see the sun when it shines in its greatest luster it is not because there is more light in the moon and stars than in the sun but because the light of the sun is greater than our vis of faculty can directly bear and behold so we can more clearly

discover the truth and distinct nature of things moral and natural than we can of things that are heavenly and spiritual see John 3.12 not that there is more substance or reality in them but because the ability of our understanding is more suited to the comprehension of them the others are above us we know but in part and our minds are liable to be hindered and disordered in their apprehension of things heavenly and spiritual by ignorance temptations and prejudices of all sorts nothing are men more subject to mistakes than in the application of things to themselves and the judgment of their interest in them fear self-love with

the prevalence of temptations and corruptions do all engage their powers to darken the light of the mind and to pervert its judgment in no case does the

deceitfulness of the heart or of sin which is all one more act itself hence multitudes say peace to themselves to whom God does not speak peace and some who are children of light do yet walk in darkness hence it is that fervent prayer of the apostle for help in this case Ephesians 1 15 and 19 there is also a great similitude between temporary faith and that which is saving and durable and between gifts and graces in their operations which is that that is under present consideration it is acknowledged therefore that without the special light and conduct of the spirit of God no man can make such a judgment of his state and his actions as shall be a stable foundation of giving glory to God and of obtaining peace to his own soul and therefore the greatest part of mankind do constantly deceive

themselves in these things but ordinarily under this blessed conduct in the search of ourselves and the concernments of our duty we may come to a satisfaction whether they are influenced by faith and have grace exercised in them especially this duty of prayer or whether it derive from the power of our natural faculties raised by light and spiritual gifts only and so whether our spiritual thoughts therein do spring from a vital principle of grace or whether they come from occasional impressions on the mind by the performance of the duty itself if men are willing to deceive themselves or to hide themselves from themselves to walk with God at all per adventures to leave all things at hazard to put off all trials to that at the last day and so never call themselves to an account as to the

nature of their duties in any particular instance it is no wonder if they neither do nor can make any distinction in this manner as to the true nature of their thoughts and spiritual duties two things are required herein too number one that we impartially and severely examine and try the frames and actings of our minds and holy duties by the word of truth and therein be not afraid to speak that plainly to our souls which the word speaks to us this diligent search ought to respect our principles aims ends actings with the whole department of our soul in every duty see 2 corinthians 13 5 if a man receive much money and look only on the outward form and superscription when he supposes that he has great store of current coin and gold and silver he may have only heaps of lead or copper by him

but he that trades in it is the comfort and support of his natural life and condition he will try what he receives both by the balance and the touchstone as the occasion requires especially if it be in a time when much adulterated coin is possant in the world and if a man reckon on his duties by tell and number he may be utterly deceived and be spiritually poor and a bankrupt when he esteems himself rich increased in goods and lacking nothing some duties may apparently hold in the balance as to weight which will not hold it as a touchstone as to worth both means are to be used if we would not be mistaken in our accounts thus God himself in the midst of a multitude of duties calls the people to try and examine themselves whether or not they are such as have faith and grace in them and so

like to have acceptance with him Isaiah 58 2-7 2 Add we must unto our own diligent inquiry fervent prayers unto God that he would search and try us unto our sincerity and discover to us a true frame of mind I know a doubt but that in the impartial use of these means a man may come to assured satisfaction in his own mind such as wherein he shall not be deceived whether he doth animate and quicken his thoughts to spiritual things and duties with inward vital grace or whether they are impressions on his mind by the occasion of the duty a duty this is of great importance and necessity now hypocrisy is made so great an inroad on profession and gives him deflowered grace in his principal operations no persons or creatures in greater danger of walking in hazard with God than those who live in

the exercise of spiritual gifts and duty to their own satisfaction and that of others.

For they may countenance themselves with an appearance of everything that should be in them in reality and power, when there is nothing of it in them, and so it has fallen out.

We have seen many earnest in the exercise of this gift, who have turned vile and debauched apostates. Some have been known to live in sin and in indulgence of their lusts, and yet to abide constant in their duties. Isaiah 1.10-15 And we may hear prayers sometimes that openly discover themselves to spiritual sense to be the labor of the brain, by the help of gifts and memory and invention, without an evidence of any mixture of humility, reverence, or godly fear, without any acting of faith and love.

They flow as wine, yet smell and taste of the unsavory cask from whence they proceed. It is necessary, therefore, that we should put ourselves on the severest trial, lest we should be found not to be spiritually minded in spiritual duties. Gifts are gracious vouchsafements of Christ to make grace useful to ourselves and others, yea, they may make them useful to the grace of others who have no grace in themselves.

But as to our own souls, they are of no other advantage or benefit but to stir up grace to its proper exercise, and to be a vehicle to carry it on in its proper use. If we do not always regard this in their exercise, we had better be without them. If instead, hereof, they once begin to impose themselves practically upon us, so as that we rest in spiritual light, acting our inventions, memories, and judgments with a ready utterance, or such as it is, there is no form of prayer can be more prejudicial to our souls.

As wine, if taken moderately and seasonably, helps the stomach in digestion, and quickens the natural spirits, enabling the powers of nature to their duty, and is useful and helpful to it. But if it be taken in excess, it does not help nature, but oppress it, and takes on itself to do what nature should be assisted to. It fills men's carcasses with diseases, as well as their souls with sin.

So while spiritual gifts are used and employed only to excite, aid, and assist grace in its operations, they are unutterably useful. But if they put themselves in the room thereof, to do all that grace should do, they are hurtful and pernicious. We have need, therefore, to be very diligent in this inquiry, whether our spiritual thoughts, even in our prayers, be not rather occasioned from the duty than the spring from a gracious principle in our hearts, or the actings of real saving grace.

2. Where thoughts of spiritual things in prayer are occasional only, in the way before described, such prayers will not be a means of spiritual growth to the soul. They will not make the soul humble, holy, watchful, intelligent, and universal obedience. Grace will not thrive under the greatest constancy in such duties.

It is an astonishing thing to see how, under frequency of prayer and the seeming fervency therein, many of us are to stand as to visible thriving in the fruits of grace, and it is to be feared without any increase of strength in the root of it. 3. Nor his hand is not shortened, that it cannot save, nor his ear heavy, that it cannot hear. He is the same as in the days of old, when our fathers cried to him, and were delivered, when they trusted in him, and were not confounded.

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever. Prayer is the same that it was, and shall lose nothing of its prevalency, whilst this world endures. 4. Whence is it, then, that there is so much prayer amongst us, and so little success? I speak not with respect to the outward dispensations of the fine providence, and afflictions, or persecutions, wherein God always acts in a way of sovereignty, and

oftentimes gives a most useful answer to our prayers by denying our requests.

I intend that only whereof the psalmist gives us his experience, is Psalm 138, verse 3. In the days when I cry, thou answerest me, and strengthenest me with strength in my soul. Where prayers are effectual, they will bring in spiritual strength. But the prayers of many seem to be very spiritual, and to express all conceivable supplies of grace, and they are persisted in with constancy, and, God forbid, we should judge them to be hypocritical and holy in some sphere.

Yet there is a defect somewhere, which should be inquired after, for if they are not so answered as that they who pray them are strengthened with strength in their souls, there is not that spiritual thriving, that growth in grace, which might be expected to accompany such supplications. I know that a man may pray often, pray sincerely and frequently, for in a special mercy, grace, or deliverance from a particular temptation, and yet no spiritual supply of strength to his own experience come in thereby. So Paul prayed thrice for the removal of his temptation, and yet had the exercise of it continued.

In such a case there may be no defect in prayer, and yet the grace in particular aimed at may not be attained, for God has other holy ends to accomplish hereby on the soul. But how persons should continue in prayer in general according to the mind of God, so far as could be outwardly discovered, and yet thrive not at all as to spiritual strength in their souls is hard to be understood. And which is yet more astonishing, men abide in the duty of prayer as that with constancy in their families and otherwise, and yet live in known sins.

Whatever spiritual thoughts such men have in and by their prayers, they are not spiritually minded. Shall we now say that all such persons are gross hypocrites, such as know they do but mock God and man, know that they have not desires nor aims after the things which they mention in their own prayers? But do these things either from some corrupt end, or at best to satisfy their convictions? Could we thus resolve? The whole difficulty of the case were taken off, for such double-minded men have no reason to think that they shall receive anything of the Lord, as James speaks in chapter 1 7. Indeed, they do not, they never act faith with reference to their own prayers. But it is not so with all this sort.

Some judge themselves sincere and in good earnest in their prayers, not without some hopes and expectations of success. I will not say of all such persons that they are among the number of them concerned whom the wisdom of God says, Because I called and they refused, they shall call upon me, but I will not answer. They shall seek me early, but they shall not find me.

Proverbs 1 24 and 28. And although we may say to such a person in general, Either leave your singing or leave your praying, from Psalm 50, 16 and 17, and that with respect to present scandal and certain miscarriages in the end, if both be continued in, yet in particular I would not advise any such person to leave off his praying until he had left off his sin. This were to advise a sick man to use no remedies until he were well cured.

Who knows but that the Holy Spirit, who works when and how he pleases, may take a time to animate these lifeless prayers, and make them a means of deliverance from the power of this sin. In the meantime, the fault and guilt is wholly their own, who have effected a consistency between a way in sinning and a course in praying, and it arises from hence that they have never labored to fill up their requests with grace. What there has been of earnestness or diligence in them has been from a force put upon them by their convictions and fears.

For no man was ever absolutely prevailed on by sin who prayed for deliverance according to the mind of God. Every praying man that perishes was a hypocrite. The faithfulness of God and His promises will not allow us to judge otherwise.

Wherefore, the thoughts that such persons have of spiritual things, even in their duties, do not arise from within, nor are a natural emanation of the frames of their hearts and affections. 3. EARNESTNESS AND APPEARING SERVENY IN PRAYER IS TO THE OUTWARD DELIVERY OF THE WORDS OF IT. Yea, though the mind be so affected as to contribute much thereunto, will not of themselves prove that the thoughts of men therein do arise from an eternal spring of grace.

There is a fervency of spirit in prayer that is one of the best properties of it, being an earnest acting of love, faith, and desire. But there is a fervency wherewith the mind itself may be affected that may arise from other causes as first. It may do so from the engagement of natural affections unto the objects of their prayer or the things prayed for.

Men may be mighty, earnest, and intent in their minds in praying for a dear relation or for deliverance from imminent troubles or imminent dangers. And yet all this fervor may arise from the vehement actings of natural affections about the things prayed for, excited and in a special manner by the present duty. With God calls the earnest cries of some for temporal things not a crying unto him, but a howling.

Hosea 7.14. That is, the cry of hungry, ravenous beasts that would be satisfied. Secondly, sometimes it arises from the sharpness of convictions, which will make men even roar in their prayers for disquietment of heart. And this may be where there is no true grace as yet received, nor it may be ever will be so, for the perplexing work of conviction goes before real conversion.

And as it produces many other effects and changes in the mind, so it may do this of great fervency in vocal prayers, especially if it be accompanied with outward afflictions, pains, or troubles. Psalms 78, 34, and 35. Thirdly, oft times the mind and affections are very little concerned in that fervor and earnestness which appear in the outward performance of the duty, but in the exercise of gifts.

And through their own utterance men put their natural affections into such an agitation as shall carry them out into a great vehemency in their expressions. It has been so with a number of persons who have been discovered to be rotten hypocrites, and have afterwards turned cursed apostates. Wherefore all these things may be where there is no gracious spring or vital principle acting itself from within in spiritual thoughts.

Some it may be will design an advantage by these conceptions to the interest of profaneness and scoffing. For if there may be these evils under the exercise of the gift of prayer, both in constancy and with fervency, if there may be a total lack of the exercise of all true grace with it and under it, then it may be all that is pretended of this gift and its use is but hypocrisy and talk. But I say, firstly, it may be as well pretended that because the sun shining on a dunghill doth occasion offensive and noisome steams, therefore all that is said of its influence on spices and flowers causing them to give out their fragrance is utterly false.

No man ever thought that spiritual gifts did change or renew the minds and natures of men. Where they are alone, they only help and assist to the useful exercise of natural faculties and powers. And therefore where the heart is not savingly renewed, no gifts can stir up a saving exercise of faith, but where it is so, they are a means to cause a savour of it to flow forth.

Secondly, be it so that there may be some evils found under the exercise of the gift of prayer, what remedy for them may be proposed? Is it that men should renounce their use of it and betake themselves to the reading of prayers only? The same may be said of all spiritual gifts, whatever, for they are all of them liable unto abuse. And shall we reject all the powers of the world to come, the whole complex of gospel gifts, for the communication in which the Lord Christ has promised to continue his spirit with his church to the end of the world, because by some they are abused? Not only the same, but far greater evils may be found in and under the reading of prayers, which needs no further demonstration than what it gives of itself every day. It is hard to understand how any benefit at all can accrue to any by this relief, when the advantages of the other way are evident.

Therefore the inquiry remains how we may know to our own satisfaction that the thoughts we have of spiritual things and the duty of prayer are from an internal fountain of grace, and so are an evidence that we are spiritually minded, whereunto all these things do tend. Some few things I shall offer toward satisfaction herein first. I take it for granted on the evidence before given that persons who have any spiritual light and will diligently examine and try their own hearts will be able to discern what real actings of faith, of love, and delight in God there are in their duties, and consequently what is the spring of their spiritual thoughts.

In general we are assured that he that believeth hath the witness in himself. 1 John 5.10. Sincere faith will be its own evidence, and where there are sincere actings of faith they will evidence themselves if we try all things impartially by the word. But if men do, as for the most part they do, content themselves with the performance of any duty, without an examination of their principles, frames, and actings of grace in it, it is no wonder if they walk in all uncertainty.

2. When the soul finds a sweet spiritual complacency in and after its duties, it is an evidence that grace has been acted in the spiritual thoughts and desires. Jeremiah 31. The prophet receives a long, gracious message from God filled up with excellent promises and pathetic exhortations to the church.

The whole is, as it were, summed up in the close of it. Verse 25. For I have satiated the weary soul, and I have replenished every sorrowful soul.

Whereon the prophet adds, Upon this I awaked and beheld, and my sleep was sweet unto me. God's gracious message had so composed his spirit and freed his mind from trouble as that he was at quiet repose in himself, like a man asleep. But after the end of it he stirs up himself unto review and consideration of what had been spoken to him.

I awaked and beheld, or I stirred up myself, and considered what had been delivered to me. And he says, My sleep was sweet to me. I found a gracious complacency in and refreshment to my soul from what I had heard and received.

So it is oft times with a soul that has had real communion with God in the duty of prayer. It finds itself both in it and afterwards when it is awakened to the consideration of it spiritually refreshed. It is sweet to him.

This holy complacency, this rest and sweet repose of mind, is the foundation of the delight of believers in this duty. They do not pray only because it is their duty so to do, nor yet because they stand in need of it, so that they cannot live without it, but they have delight in it. And to keep them from it is all one is to keep them from their daily food and refreshment.

Now we can have no delight in anything but what we have found some sweetness, rest, and complacency in. Without any such experience we may do or use anything, but cannot do it with delight. And it arises from the approach that is made to God in it.

It is in its own nature an access to God on a throne of grace, Ephesians 2.18, Hebrews 10, 19, and 20. And when this access is animated by the actings of grace, a soul hath a spiritual experience of a nearness in that approach. Now God is the fountain and center of all spiritual refreshment, rest, and complacency, and in such an access to Him there is a refreshing taste of them communicated to the soul.

Psalms 36, 7, and 9. How excellent is thy lovingkindness, O God! Therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of thy wings. They shall be abundantly satisfied with the fatness of your house, and you shall make them drink of the river of your pleasures. For with you is a fountain of life, and your light shall we see light.

God is proposed in the excellency of His lovingkindness, which is comprehensive of His goodness, grace, and mercy. And so He is also as the spring of life and light all spiritual powers and joys. Those that believe are described by putting their trust under the shadow of His wings.

In His worship, the fatness of His house, they make their approaches to Him. And the fruit of it is that He makes them to drink of the river of His pleasures, the satisfying, refreshing streams of His grace and goodness. They approach to Him as to the fountain of life, so as to drink of that fountain in renewed communications of life and grace, and in the light of God, the light of His countenance, to see light and satisfying joy.

As these things doth consist, and from them arises that spiritual complacency which the souls of believers find in their duties. Secondly, from the due exercise of faith, love, and delight, the graces in which the life of the new creature principally consists. There is a suitableness to our natural constitution, and the secret complacency of our natures, and the proper actings of life natural for its own preservation and increase.

There is so in our spiritual constitution, and the proper actings of the power of our spiritual life to its preservation and increase. These graces, in their due exercise, do compose and refresh the mind, as those which are perfective of its state, and which quell and cast out whatever troubles it. This a blessed satisfaction and complacency befall the soul, and this he that believeth has a witness in himself.

Besides, faith and love are never really acted on Christ, but they prepare and make meet the soul to receive communications of love and grace from Him, which it never fails of, although it be not always sensible of it. Thirdly, from the testimony of conscience bearing witness unto our sincerity, both in aims, ends, and performances of the duty, hence a gracious repose of mind and great satisfactoriness do ensue. If we have no experience of these things, it is evident that we walk at random in the best of our duties, for they are among the principal things that we do or ought to pray for.

And if we have not experience of the effects of our prayers in our hearts, we neither have advantage by them, nor give glory to God in them. But yet here, as in most other spiritual things, one of the worst of vices is ready to impose itself in the room and place of the best of our graces, and this is self-pleasing in the performance of the duty. This instead of a grace steeped in humility, as all true grace is, is a vile effect of spiritual pride, or the offering of a sacrifice to our own net and drag.

It is a glorying in the flesh, for whatever self any doth glory in, it is but flesh. When men have had enlargements in their expressions, and especially when they apprehend that others are satisfied or affected by them also, they are apt to have a secret self-pleasing in what they have done, which, before they are aware, turns into pride and a noxious elation of mind. The same may befall men in their most secret duties, performed outwardly by the aid of spiritual gift.

But this is most remote from, and contrary to, that spiritual complacency in duty which we speak of, which yet it will pretend to until it is diligently examined. The language of spiritual complacency is, I will go in the strength of the Lord God, I will make mention of your righteousness of yours only. Psalm 71, 16, that a spiritual pride is, God, I thank thee that I have done thus and thus, as it was expressed by the Pharisee.

That is, in God alone, this is in self. That draws forth the safer of all graces, this counterfeit immediately covers and buries them all if there be any in the soul. The true grace fills the soul imminently with humility and self-abasement, but the counterfeit with a lifting up of the mind and proud self-conceit.

The true grace casts out all remembrance of what we have done ourselves, retaining only a sense of what we have received from God, of the impressions of his loving grace. But the counterfeit blots out all remembrance of what we have freely received from God and retains only what we have done ourselves. Wherever it is, there is no due sense either of the greatness or goodness of God.

Some, it may be, will say that if it be so, they for their parts are cut off. They have no experience of any such spiritual rest and complacency in God in or after their prayers. At the best, they begin them with tears and end them with sorrow, and sometimes they don't know what has become of them but fear that God is not glorified by them, nor their own souls bettered.

I answer, number one, there is a great spiritual refreshment in that godly sorrow which is at work in our prayers, where the Holy Ghost is the spirit of grace and supplication. He causes mourning, and in that mourning there is joy. Secondly, the secret encouragement which we receive by praying to adhere to God constantly in prayer arises from some experience of this holy complacency, though we have not a sensible evidence of it.

Thirdly, perhaps some of them who make this complaint, if they would awaken and consider, will find that their souls, at least sometimes, have been thus refreshed and brought to a holy rest in God. Fourthly, then shall you know the Lord if you follow on to know Him, abiding and seeking after this complacency and satisfaction in God, and ye shall attain it. Thirdly, it is a sure evidence that our thoughts of spiritual things and our supplications are from an internal spring of grace and are not merely occasioned by the duty itself.

When we find the daily fruit and advantage of them, especially in the preservation of our souls in a holy, humble, watchful frame, innumerable are the advantages, benefits and effects of prayer which are commonly spoken unto. Growth in grace and consolation is a substance of them. Where there is continuance in prayer, there will be spiritual growth in some proportion.

For men to be earnest in prayer and thriftless in grace is a certain indication of prevalent corruptions and lack of being spiritually minded in prayer itself. If a man eat his daily food, let him eat never so much or so often. If he be not nourished by it, his body is under the power of prevalent distempers, and so is his spiritual condition, who does not thrive in the use of the food of the new creature.

But that which I fix on with respect to the present inquiry is a frame that it preserves a soul in. It will keep it humble, and upon a diligent watch is to its dispositions and actings. He who prays as he ought will endeavor to live as he prays.

This none can do who does not with diligence keep his heart to the things he has prayed about. To pray earnestly and live carelessly is to proclaim that a man is not spiritually minded in his prayer. By this, then, we shall know what is the spring of those spiritual thoughts which our minds are exercised with in our supplications.

If they are influenced to a constant daily watch for the preservation of that frame of spirit, those dispositions and inclinations to spiritual things which we pray for, they are from an internal spring of grace. If there be generally an unsuitableness in our minds to what we seem to contend for in our prayers, the gift may be an exercise, but the grace is lacking. If a man be every day on the exchange, and there talks diligently and earnestly about merchandise and the affairs of trade, but when he comes home thinks no more of them, because, indeed, he has nothing to do, no interest in them, he may be a very poor man, notwithstanding his pretenses.

And he may be spiritually very poor, who is on occasion fervent in prayer, if when he retires to himself he is not careful and diligent about the matter of it. For the continuation of this book, please go to the second download at this time. There is a low sense of debt and obligation to Christ which is the amount of the whole matter.

Where sin is not felt at all, nothing is done, and where sin is little felt, little is done. The man who is deeply conscious of his own guilt and corruption, and deeply convinced that without the blood and intercession of Christ he would sink deservedly into the lowest hell, this is a man who will spend and be spent for Jesus, and think that he can never do enough to show forth his praise. Let us daily pray that we may see the sinfulness of sin and the amazing grace of Christ more clearly and distinctly.

Then and then only shall we cease to be cruel and lukewarm and slovenly in our work for Jesus. Then and then only shall we understand such burning zeal as that of Mary, and comprehend what Paul meant when he said, The love of Christ constrains us, because we thus judge that if one died for all, then we are all dead, and that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them and rose again. 2 Corinthians 5.14.15 We are taught in these verses also that there may be much ignorance even in true believers.

This is a point which is brought out here with singular force and distinctness. John himself, the writer of this gospel, records of himself and his companion Peter, as yet they knew not the Scripture, that he must rise again from the dead. How truly wonderful this seems! For three long years these two leading apostles had heard our Lord speak of his own resurrection as a fact, and yet they had not understood him.

Again and again he had staked the truth of his messiahship on his rising from the dead, and yet they had never taken in his meaning. We will realize a power over the mind which is exercised by wrong teachings in childhood and by early prejudices imbibed in our youth. After all, we must remember that true grace and not head knowledge is the one thing needful.

We are in the hands of a merciful and compassionate Savior, who passes by and pardons much ignorance when he sees a heart right in the sight of God. Some things, indeed, we must know, and without knowing them we cannot be saved. Our own sinfulness and guilt, the office of Christ as a Savior, the

necessity of repentance and faith, such things as these are essential to salvation.

But he that knows these things may in other respects be a very ignorant man. In fact, the extent to which one man may have grace together with much ignorance and another may have much knowledge and yet no grace is one of the greatest mysteries in religion. And one wish the last day alone will unfold.

Let us always seek knowledge and be ashamed of ignorance. But let us not despair because our knowledge is imperfect. And above all, let us make sure that, like Peter and John, we have faith.

---

Audio: <https://sermonindex1.b-cdn.net/14/SID14990.mp3>

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/john-owen/the-grace-and-duty-of-being-spiritually-minded-1/>

# *Grow in Your Walk with Christ*

---

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

**[www.sermonindex.net](http://www.sermonindex.net)**