

The Grace and Duty of Being Spiritually Minded #2

by John Owen

To be spiritually minded, we must have a genuine and abounding interest in spiritual things, and our thoughts of spiritual things should bear a proportion to our thoughts of other things.

Duration: 1:29:08

Scripture: Psalm 145:3-8, Proverbs 1:24-31, Isaiah 26:11, Isaiah 65:12, Isaiah 66:4, Malachi 3:16

Topics: "Audio Books"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the importance of focusing on the word of God to detach our hearts and affections from worldly things. He encourages believers to have a contempt for worldly relationships and enjoyments in comparison to their devotion to Jesus and the gospel. The preacher warns against negligence and security in this matter, urging believers to diligently prioritize their spiritual growth. He also emphasizes the need for a holy resignation to God's will, being ready to let go of everything without complaining. The sermon emphasizes the importance of being spiritually minded and relying on God's wisdom and providence in all aspects of life.

Transcript

Spiritually Minded by Dr. John Owen, number two. With spiritual affections and due preparation of heart to the duty, do excite and animate the gift of prayer, and not the gift itself that makes the impressions on the affections, then are we spiritually minded in them. Gifts are servants, not rulers in the mind, are bestowed on us to be serviceable to grace, not to lead, but to follow it, and to be ready with their assistance on its exercise.

For the most part, where they lead all, they are all alone. This is the natural order of these things. Grace habitually inclines and disposes the heart to this duty.

Providence and rule gives the occasions for its exercise. Sense of duty calls for preparation. Grace comes into actual exercise.

Gifts come in with their assistance. If they lead, that is spiritual gifts, all is out of order. It may be otherwise.

Sometimes a person indisposed and lifeless, engaged in prayer in a way of obedience upon conviction of duty, may in and by the gift have its affections excited and grace engaged to its proper work. It may be so,

I say, but let men take heed how they trust to this order and method. For where it is so, there may be little or nothing of the exercise of true grace and all their fervor and commotion of affections.

But when the genuine actings of faith, love, holy reverence, and gracious desires do stir up the gift to its exercise, calling in its assistance to the expression of themselves, then are the heart and mind in their proper order. 5. It is so when other duties of religion are equally regarded and attended to with prayer itself. He whose religion lies all in prayer and hearing has none at all.

God has an equal respect to all other duties, and so must we have also. So is it expressed as to the instance of alms in Acts 10.31. And James places all religion in this, because there is none without it. Chapter 127.

I shall not value his prayers at all, be he never so earnest and frequent in them, who gives not alms according to his ability. This digression about the rule and spring of spiritual thoughts and prayer I judge not unnecessary in such a time and season in which we ought to be very jealous, lest gifts impose themselves in the room of grace. And be careful that they are employed only unto their proper end, which is to be serviceable to grace in its exercise, and not otherwise.

There is another occasion of thoughts of spiritual things when they do not spring from a living principle within, and so are no evidence of being spiritually minded. And this is the discourse of others. They that fear the Lord will be speaking one to another of the things in which his glory is concerned.

Malachi 3.16. To declare the righteousness, the glory of God, is the delight of his saints. Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised, and his greatness is unsearchable. Psalm 145.3-8. One generation shall praise your works to another, and shall declare your mighty acts.

I will speak of the glorious honor of your majesty, and of your wondrous works. And men shall speak of the might of thy terrible acts, and I will declare thy greatness. They shall abundantly utter the memory of thy great goodness, and shall sing of thy righteousness.

The Lord is gracious, and full of compassion, slow to anger, and of great mercy. And accordingly there are some who are ready on all occasions to be speaking or making mention of things divine, spiritual, and holy, and is to be wished that there were more of them. All the flagellous sins that the world is filled with are not a greater evidence of the degeneracy of the Christian religion than this is that it has grown unusual, yea, a shame or scorn, for men to speak together of the things of God.

It was not so when religion was in its primitive power and glory, nor is it so with them who really fear God and are sensible of their duty. Some, I say, there are who embrace all occasions of spiritual communications. Those with whom they do converse, if they are not profligate, if they have any spiritual light, cannot but so far comply with what they say as to think of the things spoken which are spiritual.

Oftentimes the tracking course of men's thoughts lies so out of the way, or so contrary to such things, that they seem strange to them. They give them no entertainment. You do but cross their way with such discourses, whereon they stand still a little, and so pass on.

Even the countenances of some men will change hereon, and they betake themselves to an unsatisfied silence, until they can divert to other things. Some will make such replies of empty words as shall evidence their hearts to be far enough estranged from the things proposed to them. But with others such occasional discourses will make such impressions on their minds as to stir up present thoughts of spiritual things.

But though frequent occasions of this may be renewed, yet will such thoughts give no evidence that any man of spirit is spiritually minded, for they are not genuine, from an internal spring of grace. From these causes it is, that the thoughts of spiritual things are with many as guests that come into an inn, and not like children that dwell in the house. They enter occasionally, and then there is a great stir about them, to provide meet entertainment for them.

Within a while they are disposed of, and so depart to their own occasions, being neither looked for nor inquired after any more. Things of another nature are attended to. New occasions bring in new guests for a season.

Children are owned in the house, are missed if they are out of the way, and have their daily provision constantly made for them. So it is with these occasional thoughts about spiritual things, by one means or other they enter into the mind, and there are entertained for a season. On a sudden they depart, and men hear of them no more.

But those that are natural and genuine, arising from a living spring of grace in the heart, disposing the mind to them, are as the children of the house. They are expected in their places, and at their seasons. If they are missing, they are inquired after.

The heart calls itself unto an account, whence it is that it has been so long without them, and calls them over into its wanted converse with them. Chapter 4 Other evidences of thoughts about spiritual things arising from an internal principle of grace, in which they are an evidence of our being spiritually minded, the abounding of these thoughts, how far, and wherein, such an evidence? The second evidence that our thoughts of spiritual things do proceed from an internal fountain of sanctified light and affections, or that they are acts or fruits of our being spiritually minded, is that they abound in us, that our minds are filled with them. We may say of them, as the apostle does of other graces, If these things be in you and abound, you shall not be barren.

It is well, indeed, when our minds are like the land of Egypt in the years of plenty, when it brought forth by handfuls, when they flow from the well of living water in us, with a full stream and current. But there is a measure of abounding which is necessary to evidence our being spiritually minded in them. There is a doubtful effect described here to this frame of spirit, first life and then peace.

The nature and being of this grace depend on the former consideration of it, namely its procedure from an internal principle of grace, the effect and consequence whereof is life. But that it is peace also depends on this degree and measure of the actings of this part of it in our spiritual thoughts, and this we must consider. Is the character of all men in a state of depraved nature and apostasy from God, that every imagination of the thoughts of their hearts is only evil continually? Genesis 6 5 All persons in that condition are not swearers, blasphemers, drunkards, adulterers, idolaters, or the like.

These are the vices of particular persons, the effects of particular constitutions and temptations. But thus it is with them, all and every one of them, all the imaginations of the thoughts of their hearts are evil and not continually. Some is to the manner of them, some is to their end, all is to their principle.

For out of the evil treasure of the heart can proceed nothing but what is evil. That infinite multitude of open sins which is in the world does give a clear prospect or representation of the nature and effects of our apostasy from God. But he that can consider the numberless number of thoughts which pass through the minds of every individual person every day, all evil, and that continually, he will have a further

comprehension of it.

We can therefore have no greater evidence of a change in us from this state and condition than a change wrought in the course of our thoughts. A relinquishment of this or that particular sin is not an evidence of a translation from this state. For, as was said, such particular sins proceed from particular lusts and temptations, and are the immediate universal consequence of that deprivation of nature which is equal in all.

Such alone are the vanity and wickedness of the thoughts and imaginations of the heart. A change herein is a blessed evidence of a change of state. He who is cured of a dropsy is not immediately healthy, because he may have the prevailing feats and matter of other diseases in him, and the next day die of a lethargy.

But he who from a state of sickness is restored, in the temperature of the mass of blood and the animal spirits, and all the principles of life and health, to a good crisis in temperature, his state of body is changed. The cure of a particular sin may leave behind it the seeds of eternal death, which they may quickly effect. But he who has obtained a change in this character, which belongs essentially to the state of the brave nature, is spiritually recovered.

And the more the steam of our thoughts is turned, the more our minds are filled by those of a contrary nature. The greater and more firm is our evidence of a translation out of that depraved state and condition. There is nothing so unaccountable as the multiplicity of thoughts of the minds of men.

They fall from them like the leaves of trees when they are shaken with the wind in autumn. To have all these thoughts, all the several figments of the heart, all the conceptions that are framed and agitated in the mind, to be evil, and that continually, what a hell of horror and confusion must it needs be. A deliverance from this loathsome, hateful state is more to be valued than the whole world.

Without it, neither life, nor peace, nor immortality, nor glory can ever be attained. The design of conviction is to put a stop to these thoughts, to take off from their number, and thereby to lessen their guilt. It deserves not the name of conviction of sin, which respects only outward actions, and regards not the inward actings of the mind, and this alone will for a season make a great change in the thoughts, especially will it do so when assisted by superstition directing them to other objects.

These two in conjunction are the rise of all that emotional religion which is in the papacy. Conviction labors to put some stop and bounds to thoughts absolutely evil and corrupt, and superstition suggests other objects for them which they readily embrace, but it is a vain attempt. The minds and hearts of men are continually minting and coining new thoughts and imaginations.

The cogitative faculty is always at work. As the streams of a mighty river running into the ocean, so are the thoughts of a natural man, and through self they run into hell. It is a fond thing to set a dam before such a river to curb its streams, for a little space there may be made a stop, but it will quickly break down all obstacles or overflow all its bounds.

There is no way to divert its course, but only by providing other channels for its waters and turning them thereunto. The mighty stream of the evil thoughts of men will admit of no bounds or dams to put a stop to them. There are but two ways of relief from them, the one respecting their moral evil, the other their natural abundance.

The first is, by throwing salt into the spring, as Elisha cured the waters of Jericho, that is, to get the heart and mind seasoned with grace, for the tree must be made good before the fruit will be sown. The other is to turn their streams into new channels, putting new aims and ends upon them, fixing them on new objects, so shall we abound in spiritual thoughts, for abound in thoughts we shall, whether we will or not. To this purpose is the advice of the Apostle in Ephesians 5, 18 and 19.

Be not drunk with wine wherein is excess, but be filled with the Spirit, speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs. When men are drunk with wine unto excess, they make it quickly evident what vain, foolish, ridiculous imaginations it fills their minds with. In opposition to this, the Apostle advises believers to be filled with the Spirit, to labor for such a participation of Him, as may fill their minds and hearts as others fill themselves with wine.

To what purpose should they desire such a participation of Him, to be so filled with Him? It is to this end, namely, that He by His grace may fill them with holy spiritual thoughts, as on the contrary men drunk unto excess are filled with those that are foolish, vain and wicked. So are the words of verse 19. For He advises us to express our abounding thoughts in such duties as will give a special vent to them.

Wherefore, when we are spiritually minded, we shall abound in spiritual thoughts, or thoughts of spiritual things. That we have such thoughts will not sufficiently evidence that we are so, unless we abound in them. And this leads us to the spiritual inquiry on this head, namely, what measure we ought to assign hereof, that we may know when we abound in spiritual thoughts, as that they may be an evidence of our being spiritually minded.

I answer in general, among other scriptures, read over Psalm 119 with understanding. Consider in this what David expresses of himself as unto his constant delight in and continual thoughts of the law of God, which was the only means of divine revelation at that season. Try yourselves by this pattern.

Examine yourselves whether you can truly speak the same words with him, at least if not in the same degree of zeal, yet with the same sincerity of grace. You will say, That was David. It is not for us.

It is not our duty to be like him, at least not to be equal with him. But as far as I know, we must be like him if ever we intend to come to the place where he is. It will ruin our souls if when we read in the scriptures how the saints of God express their experience in faith, love, delight in God, and constant meditation on him, we grant that it was so with them that they were good and holy men, but it is not necessary that it should be so with us.

These things are not written in the scriptures to show what they were, but what we ought to be. All things concerning them were written for our admonition, 1 Corinthians 10.11. And if we have not the same delight in God as they had, the same spiritual mindedness and thoughts and meditations of heavenly things, we can have no evidence that we please God as they did, or shall go to that place where they are gone. Profession of the life of God passes with many at a very low and easy rate.

Their thoughts are for the most part vain and earthly. Their communication unsavory and sometimes corrupt. Their lives at best uneven and uncertain as to the rule of obedience, yet all is well, all is life and peace.

The holy men of old who obtained as testimony that they pleased God did not so walk before him. They meditated continually on the law, thought of God in the night season, spake of his ways, his works, his

praise. Their whole delight was in him, and in all things they followed hard after him.

It is the example of David in particular that I propose, and it is a promise of this grace to be administered by the gospel, that he that is feeble shall be as David, Zechariah 12.8. And if we are not so in his being spiritually minded, it is to be feared we are not partakers of the promise. But that we may the judge of ourselves in it, I shall add some few rules to this direction by way of example. 1. Consider what proportion your thoughts of spiritual things bear to those about other things.

Our principal interest and concern as we profess lies in things spiritual, heavenly, and eternal. Is it not then a foolish thing to suppose that our thoughts about these things should not hold some proportion with those about other things, nay, that they should not exceed them? No man is so vain in earthly things as to pretend that his principal concern lies in that whereof he thinks very seldom in comparison of other things. It is not so with men in reference to their families, their trades, their occasions of life.

It is a truth not only consecrated by the testimony of him who is truth, but evident also in the light of reason, that where our treasure is there will our hearts be also, and the affections of our hearts do act themselves by the thoughts of our minds. Wherefore, if our principal treasure be, as we profess, in things spiritual and heavenly, and woe unto us if it be not so, on them will our affections, and consequently our desires and thoughts, be principally fixed. 2. That we may the better examine ourselves by this rule, we must consider of what sorts men's other thoughts are, and as to our present purpose they may be reduced to these heads.

First, there are such as are exercised about their callings and lawful occasions. These are numberless and endless, especially among a sort of men who rise early and go to bed late, and eat the bread of carefulness, or are particularly industrious and diligent in their ways. These thoughts men approve themselves in, and judge them their duty, as they are in their proper place and measure.

But no heart can conceive the multitude of these thoughts, which, partly in contrivances, partly in converse, are engaged and spent about these things. And the more men are immersed in them, the more do themselves and others esteem them diligent and praiseworthy. 3. And there are some who have neither necessity nor occasion to be engaged much in the duties of any special calling, who yet by their words and actions declare themselves to be confined almost in their thoughts to themselves, their relations, their children, and all their self-concerns, which though most of them are very impertinent, yet they justify themselves in them.

All sorts may do well to examine what proportion their thoughts of spiritual things do bear to those of other things. I fear with most it will be found to be very small, with many next to none at all. What evidence then can they have that they are spiritually minded, that their principal interest lies in things above? It may be, it will be, asked whether it be necessary that men should think as much and as often about things spiritual and heavenly as they do about the lawful affairs of their callings.

I say, more and more often, if we are what we profess ourselves to be, generally it is the best sort of men as to the things of God and man who are busied in their callings, some of one sort, some of another. But even among the best of these, many will continually spend the strength of their minds and figure of their spirits about their affairs all the day long, and so they can pray in the morning and evening. Some thoughts sometimes of spiritual things occasionally administered, do suppose they acquit themselves very well.

As if a man should pretend that his great design is to prepare himself for a voyage to a far country, where is his patrimony and his inheritance, but all his thoughts and contrivances are about some few trifles, which, if indeed he intend his voyage, he must leave behind, and of his main design he scarce thinketh at all? We all profess that we are bound for heaven, immortality and glory. But is it any evidence that we really design it, if all our thoughts are consumed about the trifles of this world which we must leave behind us, and if we have only the occasional thoughts of things above? I shall elsewhere show, if God will, how men may be spiritually minded in their earthly affairs. If some relief may not be thence obtained, I cannot tell what to say or answer for them whose thoughts of spiritual things do not hold proportion with, yea, exceed them which they lay out about their callings.

This whole rule is grounded on that of our Saviour in Matthew 6, 31, 33-34. Take no thought, saying, What shall we eat, or what shall we drink, or wherewithal shall we be clothed? But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. Take therefore no thought for the morrow, when we have done all we can, when we have made the best of them we are able, all earthly things as to our interest in them, amount to no more, but what we eat, what we drink, and wherewith we are clothed.

About these things our Saviour forbids us to take any thought, not absolutely, but with a double limitation as first, that we take no such thought about them as should carry along with it a disquietude of mind through a distrust of the fatherly care and providence of God. This is a design of the context. Secondly, no thought that for constancy and engagement of spirit should be like to those which we ought to have about spiritual things.

Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness. Let that be the principal thing in your thoughts and consciences. We may therefore conclude that at least they must hold an exceeding proportion with them.

Let a man industriously engaged in the way of his calling try himself by this rule every evening. Let him consider what have been his thoughts about his earthly occasions, and what about spiritual things, and thereon ask of himself whether he be spiritually minded or not. Be not deceived, as a man thinketh, so is he.

And if we accounted a very strange thing, that our thoughts should be more exercised about spiritual things than about the affairs of our callings, we must not think it strange if, when we come to the trial, we cannot find that we have either life or peace. But further, it is known how often, when we are engaged in spiritual duties, other thoughts will interpose and impose themselves on our minds. Those which are about men's secular concernments will do so.

The world will frequently make an inroad on the way to heaven to disturb the passengers and wayfaring men. There is nothing more frequently complained of by such as are awake to their duty and sensibleness of their weakness. Call to mind, therefore, how often, on the other hand, spiritual thoughts do interpose and, as it were, impose themselves on your minds while you are engaged in your earthly affairs.

Sometimes, no doubt, but with all that are true believers it is so. Wherever I was aware, saith the spouse, my soul made me as the chariots of the Minidab, Kenticles 6.12. Grace in her own soul surprised her into a ready, willing frame to spiritual communion with Christ when she was intent on other occasions. But if the thoughts of heavenly things so arising as bear no proportion with the other sort, it is in evidence what frame and principle is predominant in us.

Secondly, there are a multitude of thoughts in the minds of men which are vain, useless, and altogether unprofitable. These ordinarily, through a dangerous mistake, are looked on as not sinful, because, as it is supposed, a manner of them is not so. And therefore men rather shake them off for their folly than their guilt.

But they rise from a fountain and woefully pollute both the mind and conscience. Wherever there are vain thoughts, there is sin, Jeremiah 4.14. Such are those numberless imaginations in which men fancy themselves to be what they are not, to do what they do not, to enjoy what they enjoy not, to dispose of themselves and others at their pleasure. That our nature is liable to such a pernicious folly, which some of tenacious fancies have turned into madness, we are beholding alone to our cursed apostasy from God, and a vanity that possessed our minds thereon.

Hence a prince of Tyre thought he was a god, and sat in the seat of God, Ezekiel 28.2. So it has been with others. And in those in whom such imaginations are kept to some better order and bounds, yet being traced to their original, they will be found to spring some of them immediately from pride, some from sensual lust, some from the love of the world, all from self, and the old ambition to be as God, to dispose of all things as we think meet. I know no greater misery or punishment in this world, and the debasing of our nature to such vain imaginations, and a perfect freedom from them, is a part of the blessedness of heaven.

It is not my present work to show how sinful they are, let them be esteemed only fruitless, foolish, vain, and ludicrous. But let men examine themselves what number of these vain, useless thoughts night and day do rove up and down in their minds. If now it be apprehended too severe that men's thoughts of spiritual things should exceed them that are employed about their lawful callings, let them consider what proportion they bear to those that are vain and useless.

Do not many give more time to them than they do to holy meditations without an endeavor to mortify the one, or to stir up and enliven the other? Are they not more wanted to their seasons than holy thoughts are? And shall we suppose that those with whom it is so are spiritually minded? Thirdly, there are thoughts that are formerly evil. They are so in their own nature, being corrupt contrivances to fulfill the desires of the flesh and the lusts thereof. These also will attempt the minds of believers, but they are always looked on as professed enemies to the soul and are watched against.

I shall not, therefore, make any comparison between them and spiritual thoughts, for they abound only in them that are carnally minded. The second rule to this purpose is that we should consider whether thoughts of spiritual things do constantly take possession of their proper seasons. There are some times and seasons in the course of men's life in which they retire themselves to their own thoughts.

The most busy men in the world have some times of thinking to themselves, and those who design no such thing as being afraid of coming to be wiser and better than they are do yet spend some time therein, whether they will or not. But they who are wise will be at home as much as they can, and have as many reasons for such retirements as is possible for them to attain. If that man be foolish, who busies himself so much abroad in the concerns of others, that he has no time to consider the state of his own house and family, much more is he who spends all the thoughts about other things, and never makes use of them, in an inquiry how it is with himself and his own soul.

However, men can hardly avoid but that they must have some seasons, partly stated, partly occasional, in which they entertain themselves with their own thoughts. The evening and the morning, the times of

waking on the bed, those of the necessary cessation of all ordinary affairs, of walking, journeying, and the like, are such seasons. If we are spiritually minded, if thoughts of spiritual things do abound in us, they will ordinarily, and that was constancy, possess these seasons.

Look upon them as those which are their due, which belong to them, for they are expressly assigned to them in the way of rule, expressed in examples and commands. See Psalm 16, 7, and 8, and 17, 2, and Deuteronomy 6, 7. If they are usually given up to other ends and occasions, or possessed with thoughts of another nature, it is an open evidence that spiritual thoughts have but little interest in our minds, little prevalency in the conduct of our souls. It is our duty to afford to them stated times, taken away from other affairs that call for them.

But if instead of this we rob them of what it is, as it were, their own, which no other things or business can lay any just claim to, how dwells the love of spiritual things in us? Most professors are convinced that it is their duty to pray morning and evening, and it is to be wished that they were all found in the practice of it. But if inordinarily they judge themselves in the performance of that duty to be discharged from any further exercise of spiritual thoughts, applying them to things worldly, useless, or vain, they can make no pretense to be spiritually minded. And it must be averred, which will be found to be true, that if the seasons which are, as it were, due to such meditations be taken from them, they will be the worst employed of all the minutes of our lives.

Vain and foolish thoughts, corrupt imaginations, will make a common haunt to the minds of men and them and habituate themselves to an expectation of entertainment, whence they will grow importunate for admission. Hence with many, those precious moments of time which might greatly influence their souls to life and peace, if they were indeed spiritually minded, make the greatest provision for their trouble, sorrow, and confusion. For the vain and evil thoughts which some persons do accustom themselves to in such seasons are, or ought to be, a burden upon their consciences more than they can bear.

That which providence tenders to their good is turned into a snare, and God does righteously leave them to the fruits of their own folly, who so despises gracious provision for their good. If we cannot afford to God our spare time, it is evident that indeed we can afford nothing at all. Micah 2.1. They devise iniquity upon their beds.

The season proper for holy contemplation they make use of to fill their minds with wicked imaginations. When the morning is light they practice it, walking all day on all occasions suitable to their devices and imaginations of the night. Many will have cause to complain to eternity of those leisure times which might have been improved for their advantage and to eternal blessedness.

If we intend, therefore, to maintain a title to this grace of being spiritually minded, if we would have any evidence of it in ourselves, without which we can have none of life or peace, and what we pretend thereof is but an effect of security, we must endeavor to preserve the claim and right of spiritual thoughts to such seasons, and actually put them in possession of them. Micah 2.3. Consider how we are affected with our disappointments about these seasons. Have we by negligence, by temptations, have we by occasional diversions or affairs of life been taken off from thoughts of God, of Christ, of heavenly things, when we ought to have been engaged in them? How are we affected with a view of this? A carnal mind is well enough satisfied with the omission of any duty, so it have the pretense of a necessary occasion.

If it has lost a temporal advantage through attendance to a spiritual duty, it will deeply reflect upon itself, and it may be, like the duty, the worse afterward. But a gracious soul, one that is truly spiritually minded,

will mourn under a review of such omissions, and by every one of them is stirred up to more watchfulness for the future. Lasset will say, How little have I been with Christ this day! How much time has passed me without a thought of Him! How foolish was I to be lacking to such or such an opportunity! I am in arrears to myself, and have no rest until I be satisfied.

I say, if indeed we are spiritually minded, we will duly and carefully call over to consideration of those times and seasons in which we ought to have exercised ourselves in spiritual thoughts, and if we have lost them, or any of them, mourn over our own negligence. But if we can omit and lose such seasons or opportunities from time to time without regret or self-reflection, it is to be feared that we wax worse and worse. They will be made hereby for further omissions until we grow wholly cold about them.

And indeed that woeful loss of time that is found amongst many professors is greatly to be bewailed. Some lose it on themselves by a continual track of fruitless and pertinent thoughts about their own concerns. Some in vain converse with others, in which, for the most part, they edify one another unto vanity.

How much of this time might, nay, ought to be redeemed for holy meditation! The good Lord may call professors sensible of their loss of former seasons, that they may be the more watchful for the future in this great concernment of their souls. Little do some think what light, what assurance, what joy, what readiness for the cross or for heaven they might have attained had they laid hold on all just seasons of exercise in their thoughts about spiritual things which they have enjoyed, who are now at a loss in all, and surprised with every fear or difficulty that doth befall them. This is the first thing that belongs to our being spiritually minded.

For though it does not absolutely or essentially consist in it, yet it is inseparable from it. And the most undeceiving indication of it, and thus of abounding and abiding in thoughts about spiritual things, such as arise and spring naturally from a living principle, a spiritual frame and disposition of heart within. Chapter 5 The objects of spiritual thoughts are what they are conversant about, evidencing them in whom they are to be spiritually minded, rules directing to steadiness in the contemplation of heavenly things, motives to fix our thoughts with steadiness in them.

Before I proceed to the next general head, and which is the principal thing, the foundation of the grace and duty inquired after, some things must be spoken to render what has been already insisted on yet more particularly useful. And this is, to inquire what are or what ought to be the special objects of those thoughts which, under the qualifications laid down, are the evidences of our being spiritually minded. And it may be we may be useful to many herein by helping them to fix their minds which are apt to rove into all uncertainty.

For this has befallen us through the disorder and weakness of the faculties of our souls, that sometimes what the mind guides, leads, and directs to, in things spiritual and heavenly, our wills and affections, through their deprivation and corruption, will not comply with. And so the good designings of minds are lost. Sometimes what the will and affections are inclined to and ready for, the mind, through its weakness and inconstancy, cannot lead them to the accomplishment of.

So to will is present with us, but how to perform that will we know not. So many are barren in this duty because they know not what to fix upon, nor how to exercise their thoughts when they have chosen a subject for their meditation. Hence they spend their time in fruitless desires that they could use their thoughts unto more purpose, rather than make any progress in the duty itself.

They tire themselves, not because they are not willing to go, but because they cannot find their way. Therefore both these things shall be spoken to, both what are the proper objects of our spiritual thoughts, and how we may be steady in our contemplation of them. And I shall to this purpose first give some general rules, and then some particular instances and a way of direction.

1. Observe, ye, the special calls of providence, and apply your minds to thoughts of the duties required in them and by them. There is a voice in all signal dispensations of providence. The Lord's voice cries unto the city, and the man of wisdom shall see thy name.

Hear ye the rod and who is appointed in Micah 6, 9. There is a call, a cry in every rod of God, in every chastising providence, and therein he makes a declaration of his name. His holiness, his power, his greatness. This every ways substantial man will labor to discern, and so comply with the call.

God is greatly provoked when it is otherwise. Lord, when your hand is lifted up, they will not see, but they shall see and be ashamed. Isaiah 26, 11.

If therefore we would apply ourselves to our present duty, we are wisely to consider what is the voice of God in his present providential dispensations in the world. Harken not to any who would give another interpretation of them, but that they are plain declarations of his displeasure and indignation against the sins of men. Is not his wrath and them revealed from heaven against the ungodliness of men, especially such as retain the truth in unrighteousness, or false hypocritical professors of the gospel? Does he not also signally declare the uncertainty and instability of earthly enjoyments from life itself to a shoelatchet? Is also how vain and foolish it is to adhere ordinantly unto them.

The fingers that appeared writing on the wall, the doom of Belshazzar, did it in characters that none could read, in words that none could understand but Daniel. But the present call of God in these things is made plain upon tables that he may run who readeth it. If the heavens gather blackness with clouds, and it thunders over us, if any that are on their journey will not believe that there is a storm coming, they must bear the severity of it.

Suppose then, as to be the voice of providence, suppose there be in it these indications of the mind and will of God. What are the duties that we are called unto thereby? They may be referred to two heads. First, a diligent search into ourselves, and a holy watch over ourselves with respect to those ways and sins which the displeasure of God is declared against.

That present providences are indications of God's anger and displeasure we take for granted. But when this is done, the most are apt to cast the causes of them on others, and to excuse themselves. So long as they see others more wicked and profligate than themselves, openly guilty of such crimes as they abhor the thoughts of, they cast all the wrath on them, and fear nothing but that they shall suffer with them.

But alas, when the storm came on, the ship at sea, in which there was but one person that feared God, upon an inquiry, for whose sake it came, the lot fell on Jonah 1.7. The cause of the present storm may as well be the secret sins of professors, as the open provocations of ungodly men. God will punish severely those which he has known. Emma 3.2. It is therefore certainly our duty to search diligently that nothing be found resting in us against which God is declaring his displeasure.

Take heed of negligence and security in this. When our Savior foretold his disciples that one of them should betray him, he alone guilty was the last that said, Master, is it I? Let no ground of hopes you have

of your spiritual condition and acceptance with God, no sense of your sincerity in any of your duties, no visible difference between you and others in the world, impose themselves on your minds to divert them from diligence in this duty. The Lord's voice cries unto the city, and a man of wisdom will see his name.

2. A diligent endeavor to live in a holy resignation of our persons, our lives, our families, all our enjoyments, unto the sovereign will and wisdom of God, so as that we may be in readiness to part with all things upon his call without repining. This also is plainly declared in the voice of present providences. God is making wings for men's riches.

He is shaking their habitations, taking away the visible defenses of their lives, proclaiming the instability and uncertainty of all things here below. And if we are not minded to contend with him, we have nothing left to give us rest and peace for a moment but a holy resignation of all unto his sovereign pleasure. 3. Would you now know what you should fix and exercise your thoughts upon, so as that they may be evidences of your being spiritually minded? I say, be frequently conversant in them about these things.

They lie before you, they call upon you, and will find you a just employment. Count them part of your business, allow them some part of your time. Cease not until you have the testimony of your consciences that you have sincerely stated both these duties in your minds, which will never be done without many thoughts about them.

Unless it be so with you, God will be greatly displeased at the neglect of his coming and call. Now it is so plain and articulate. Fear the woeful dooms recorded in Proverbs 1, 24-31, and Isaiah 65, 12, 66-4, to this purpose.

And if any calamity, public or private, do overtake you under a neglect of these duties, you will be woefully surprised and not know which way to turn for relief. This, therefore, is the time and season in which you may have a special trial and experiment, whether you be spiritually minded or not. It is the wisdom of faith to excite and draw forth grace and to exercise according to present occasions.

If this grace be habitually prevalent in you, it will put itself forth in many thoughts about these present duties. But, alas, for the most part men are apt to walk contrary to God in these things, as the wisdom of the flesh is contrary to him in all things. A great instance we have with respect to these duties, especially the latter of them, for first, who almost makes a diligent search into and trial of his heart, and weighs with respect unto the procuring causes of the displeasure and judgments of God.

Generally, when the tokens and evidences of them do most abound, the world is full of outrageous, provoking sins. These visibly proclaim themselves to be the causes of the coming of the wrath of God on the children of disobedience. Hence most men are apt to cast the whole reason of present judgments upon them, and to put it wholly from themselves.

Hence commonly there is never less of self-examination than when it is called for in a peculiar manner. But, as I will not deny, but the open, daring sins of the world are the procuring cause of the wrath of God against it in temporal judgments, so the wisest course for us is to refer them to the great judgment of the last day. This the apostle directs us to, 2 Thessalonians 1, 6-10.

Our duty it is to consider on what account judgment begins at the house of God, and to our examine ourselves with respect unto this. Secondly, again the other part of our present duty in compliance with the voice of providence is in humble resignation of ourselves and all our concernments to the will of God,

sitting loose in our affections from all earthly temporal enjoyments. This we neither do nor can do, let us profess what we will, unless our thoughts are greatly exercised about the reasons for it and motives unto it.

For this is the way in which faith puts forth its efficacy to the mortification of self and all earthly enjoyments. Therefore, without this we can make no resignation of ourselves to the will of God. But alas, how many at present do openly walk contrary to God in this! The ways, the countenances, and discourses of men do give evidence hereunto.

Their love to present things, or contrivances for their increase and continuance, do grow and thrive under the calls of God to the contrary. So it was of old, they did eat, they drank, they married wise, they were given in marriage until the day that Noah entered the ark. Can the generality of professors at this day give testimony to the exercise of their thoughts upon such things as should dispose them to this holy resignation, that they meditate on the calls of God and thus make themselves ready to part with all at his time and pleasure? How can persons pretend to be spiritually minded, the current of whose thoughts lies in direct contrariety to the mind of God? Here lies the ground of their self-deceivings.

They are professors of the gospel in a peculiar manner. They judge themselves believers. They hope they shall be saved, and have many evidences for it.

But one negative evidence will render a hundred that are positive useless. All these things have I done, saith the young man, yet lackest thou one thing, saith the Savior. And the lack of that one rendered his all things of no avail to him.

Many things you have done, many things you do, many grounds of hope abide with you. Neither yourselves nor others do doubt of your condition, but are you spiritually minded? If this one thing be wanting, all the rest will not avail you. You have indeed neither life nor peace.

On what grounds have you to judge that you are so, if the current of your thoughts lies in direct contrariety to the present calls of God? If at such a time as this your love to the world be such as ever it was, and perhaps increased, if your desires are strong to secure the things of this life to you and yours, if the daily contrivance of your minds be not how you may attain a constant resignation of yourselves and all your all to the will of God, which will not be done without much thoughtfulness and meditations on the reasons of it and motives to it, I cannot understand how you can judge yourselves to be spiritually minded. If any, therefore, shall say that they would abound more in spiritual thoughts, only they know not what to fix them upon, I propose this in the first place, as that which will lead them to the due performance of the present due. 2. The special trials and temptations of men call for the exercise of their thoughts in a peculiar manner with respect to them.

If a man has a bodily disease, pain, or distemper, it will cause him to think much of it, whether he will or not. At least, if he be wise, he will do so, nor will he always be complaining of the smart, but he will inquire into the causes and seek their removal. Better there are some distempers, as lethargies, which in their own nature take away all sense and thoughts of themselves, and some are of such a slow secret progress, as hectic fevers, that they are not taken notice of, but both these are mortal.

3. And shall men be more negligent about the spiritual distempers of their souls, so as to have multiplied temptations the cause of all spiritual diseases, and take no thought about them? Is it not to be feared that where it is so, they are such as either in their own nature have deprived them of spiritual sense, or by their

deceitfulness are leading on insensibly to death eternal? 4. Not to have our minds exercised about these things is to be stupidly secure, Proverbs 23, 34, and 35. There is, I confess, some difficulty in this manner, how to exercise our thoughts aright about our temptations. For the great way of the prevalency of temptations is by stirring up multiplied thoughts about their objects, or what they do lead to.

And this is done, or occasioned, several ways. First, from the previous power of lust in the affections. This will fill the thoughts.

The hearts will coin imaginations in compliance with it. They are the way and means in which lust draws away the heart from duty and entices to sin, James 1, 14. The means, at least, in which men come to have eyes full of adultery, 2 Peter 2, 14, or to live in constant contemplation of the pleasures of sin.

Secondly, they arise in our occasion by renewed representations of the object of sin. And this is twofold. That which is real is they can see the wedge of gold and covet it, Joshua 7, 21, Proverbs 23, 31.

Against this and that prayer of the psalmist, turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity, in the covenant of Job, in chapter 31, verse 1. Number two, imaginary. When the imagination, being tainted or infected by lust, continually represents the pleasure of sin and the actings of it unto the mind. In this do men make provision for the flesh to fulfill its lusts, Romans 13, 14.

Number three, from the suggestions of Satan, who uses all his wiles and artifices to stir up thoughts about that sin in which the temptation leads. And the temptation seldom fails of its end, when it can stir up a multitude of unprofitable thoughts about its object. For when temptations do multiply thoughts about sin, proceeding from some or all of these causes, and the mind hath wanted itself to give them entertainment, those in whom they are do lack nothing but opportunities and occasions, taking off the power of outward restraints for the commission of actual sin.

When men have so devised mischief, they practice it when it is in the power of their hand, Micah 2, 1. It is no way safe to advise such persons to have many thoughts about their temptations, they will all turn to their disadvantage. I speak to them only, whom their temptations are their affliction and their burden. And such persons also must be very careful how they suffer their thoughts to be exercised about the manner of their temptation, lest it be a snare and be too hard for them.

Men may begin their thoughts of any object with abhorrency and detestation, and, if it be the case of temptation, end them in complacency and approbation. The deceitfulness of sin lays hold on something or other that lust in the mind stays upon with delectation, and so corrupts the whole frame of spirit which began the duty. There have been instances in which persons have entered with a resolution to punish sin, and have been ensnared by the occasion to the commission of the sin they thought to punish.

Therefore it is seldom that the mind of any one exercised with an actual temptation is able safely to conflict with it, if it entertain abiding thoughts of the manner of it, or of the sin in which it leads. For sin has an ability to transfuse its poison into the affections from everything it has once made a bait of, especially if it have already defiled the mind with pleasing contemplations of it. Yea, oftentimes a man that has some spiritual strength in therein engages to the performance of duties, if in the midst of them the manner of his temptation is so presented to him as to take hold of his thoughts in a moment, as if he has seen, as they say, Medusa's head is turned into a stone, his spirits are all frozen, his strength is gone, a lacteans of grace do cease, his armor falls from him, and he gives up himself a prey to his temptation.

It must be a new supply of grace that can give him any deliverance. Therefore, while persons are exercised with any temptation, I do not advise them to be conversant in their thoughts about the manner of it. For sometimes remembrances of former satisfaction of their lusts, sometimes present surprisals with the suitableness of it to corruption not yet mortified, sometimes the craft of Satan fixing their imagination on it will be too hard for them and carry them to a fresh compliance with that sin which they would be delivered from.

But the season calls in a special manner for the exercise of the thoughts of men about the ways and means of deliverance from the snare in which they are taken, or the danger they find themselves exposed to. Think of the guilt of sin, that you may be humble. Think of the power of sin, that you may seek strength against it.

Think not of the manner of sin, the things that are in the world suited to the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, lest you be more and more entangled. But the present direction is, think much of the ways of relief from the power of your own temptation leading to sin. But these men, unless they are spiritually minded, are very loath to come to.

I speak not of them that love their shackles, that glory in their yoke, that like their temptations well enough, as those which give the most satisfactory entertainment to their minds. Such men know not well what to do unless they may in their minds converse with the objects of their lusts, and do multiply thoughts about them continually. The apostle calls it making provision for the the lusts thereof.

Their principal trouble is that they cannot comply with them to the utmost by reason of some outward restraints. These well near unto fools who make a mock of sin, and will ere long take up their habitation among them. But I speak, as I said before, them only whose temptations are their afflictions, and who groan for deliverance from them.

Acquaint such persons with the great, indeed, only way of relief in this distress, as it is expressed in Hebrews 2, 17 and 18. He is a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God. For in that he himself has suffered being tempted, he is able to succor them that are tempted.

In chapter 4, 15 and 16. We have not in high priesthood cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.

Let them know that the only way for their deliverance is by acting faith and thoughts on Christ, his power to succor them that are tempted, with the ways in which he administers a sufficiency of grace to that end. Retreating for relief to him on the urgency of temptations, they can hardly be brought to a compliance therewith. They are ready to say, Are not Abana and Farpar rivers of Damascus better than all the waters of Israel? Is it not better to partake ourselves, and to trust our own promises, resolutions, and endeavors with such other ways of escape as are in our own power? I shall speak nothing against any of them in their proper place, so far as they are warranted by scripture rule.

But this I say, none shall ever be delivered from perplexing temptations to the glory of God in their own spiritual advantage, but by the acting and exercising of faith on Christ Jesus, and the sufficiency of his grace for our deliverance. But when men are not spiritually minded, they cannot fix their thoughts on spiritual things. Therefore do men daily pine away under their temptations.

They get ground upon them until their breach grows great like the sea, and there be no healing of it. I mention this only to show the weight and necessity of the duty proposed. For when men, under the power of conviction, are pressed with temptation, they will do anything rather than betake themselves to the only efficacious relief.

Some will groan and cry out under their vexation from the torture they are put into in the conflict between their temptations and convictions. Some will betake themselves to the pretended relief that any false religion tenders to them. But to apply themselves and thoughts of faith to Jesus Christ, whose grace alone is sufficient for all, that they will not be persuaded to.

We are all of us liable to temptations. Those who are not sensible of it are under the power of what the temptation leads to. And they are of two sorts.

First, such as are extraordinary when the hand of God is in them in a peculiar manner for a rebuke. It is true God tempts none if temptation formerly leads to sin. But he orders temptation so far forth as they are afflictive and chastisement.

Thus it is when he suffers in a special corruption to fall in conjunction with a special temptation without, and to obtain a prevalency by it. Of these there is no doubt, but any man not judicially hardened may know both his disease and the remedy. But that ordinary course of temptations which we are exercised with needs a diligent attendance for their discovery, as well as for our deliverance from them.

And it is to be feared that many are kept in spiritual weakness, useless, and in darkness all their day through the power of their temptations, yet never know what they are, or in what they consist. These gray hairs are sprinkled on them, yet they know it not. Some approve themselves in those very things in ways which are their temptations.

Yet in the exercise of due watchfulness, diligence, and prudence, men may know both the plague of their own hearts and their prevailing corruptions, and the ways in which it is excited through temptation with the occasions it makes use of and the advantages it takes. For instance, one may have an immanency in gifts and usefulness or success in his labors which give him great acceptance with others. Such an one shall hardly avoid a double temptation, first of spiritual pride and self-exaltation.

Hence the apostle will not admit a novice, one unexperienced in the ways of grace and deceits of sin, into the office of the ministry, lest he should be lifted up with pride and fall into the condemnation of the devil. 1 Timothy 3.6 He himself was not without danger of this. 2 Corinthians 12.1-7 The best of men can hardly fortify their minds against the secret workings of pride upon successes and applause, unless they keep themselves constantly balanced with thoughts of their own vileness in the sight of God, and, secondly, remissness unto exact universal mortification, which they countenance themselves against by their acceptance and success above others in the ministry.

For much to be desired that all who are ministers would be careful in these things. For although some of us may not much please others, yet we may so far please ourselves as to expose our souls unto these snares. And the effects of negligence in this do openly appear to be a disadvantage of the gospel.

Others are much conversant in the world and the affairs of it. Negligence is, unto a spiritual watch, vanity and converse. Love of earthly things with conformity to the world will on all occasions impose themselves upon them.

If they understand not their temptations in this, spiritual mindedness will be impaired in them continually. Those that are rich have their special temptations, which for the most part are many, plausible and effectual, and those that are poor have theirs also. The snares of some lie in their constitutions, of others in their society, of most in the various circumstances of life.

Those who are upon their watch in any due measure, who exercise any wisdom or observation concerning themselves, may know in which their temptations do lie. What are the advantages whereby they perplex their minds and endanger their souls? In these cases, generally men are taught what are the means of their deliverance and preservation. Wherefore, there are three things required to this duty, in spiritual wisdom, unto them all.

1. To know what are the special temptations from whence you suffer, and in which the life of God is obstructed in you. If this be neglected, if it be disregarded, no man can maintain either life or peace, or is spiritually minded. 2. To know your remedy, your relief, in which alone it doth consist.

Many duties are required of us to the sin, and are useful to it. But know assuredly that no one of them, nor all of them in conjunction, will bring in relief to the glory of God in your own peace, without application by faith to him who is able to succor them that are tempted. 3. Therefore, and this lies your great duty, with respect to your temptations, namely in a constant exercise of your thoughts on the love, care, compassion, and tenderness of Christ, with his ability to help, succor, and save them that do believe, so as to strengthen your faith and trust in him, which will assuredly prove successful and victorious.

The same duty is incumbent on us with respect to any urgent, prevalent, general temptation. There are seasons in which an hour of temptation comes on the earth to try them that dwell in it. What if a man should judge that now it is such an hour, that the power of darkness is put forth therein? What if he should be persuaded that a general security, coldness, deadness, and decaying grace, especially as to the vigorous actings of zeal, love, and delight in God, with an indifference to holy duties, are the effects of this hour of temptation? I do not say determinately that so it is.

Let others judge as they see cause. But if anyone do so judge, undoubtedly it is his duty to exercise in the thoughts how he may escape in this day of trial, and be counted worthy to stand before the Son of Man. He will find it his concernment to be conversant in his mind with the reasons and motives to watchfulness, and how he may obtain such supplies of grace as may effectually preserve him from such decays.

Thirdly, all things in religion, both in faith and practice, are to be the objects of such thoughts, as they are proposed or occur in our minds in great variety, on all sorts of occasions. So we ought to give them entertainment in our meditations, to hear things, to have them proposed to us that may be in the way of a divine ordinance, and to let them slip out or flow from us, as water that is poured into a leaking vessel is the ruin of many souls. A shell, therefore, shews out some instances, as was before proposed, of those things which I judge that they who would be spiritually minded ought to abide and abound in thoughts concerning.

It is our duty greatly to mind the things that are above, eternal things, both as to their reality, their present state, and our future enjoyment of them. And this consists the life of this grace and duty, to be heavenly minded, that is, to mind the things of heaven, and to be spiritually minded as all one, or it is the effect of being spiritually minded as to its original and essence, or the first proper actings of it. It is the cause of it as to its growth and degrees, and it is the evidence of inexperience.

Nor do I understand how it is possible for a man to place his chief interest in things above, and not have many thoughts of them. It is a great advice of the apostle, on a supposition of our interest in Christ, and conformity to him, Colossians 3, 1 and 2. If ye be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection, or your thoughts, mind much things above.

Becomes those who, through the virtue of the resurrection of Christ, are raised to newness of life, to have their thoughts exercised on us, they to think above, with respect to the presence of Christ among them. In the singular use of our prospect into these things, or our meditations on them, he instructs us in 2 Corinthians 4, 16 to 18. For which cause we faint not, but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day.

For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory. While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.

Not to faint under the daily decays of our outward man, and the approaches of death thereby, to bear afflictions of things light and momentary, to thrive under all in the inward man, are unspeakable mercies and privileges. Can you attain a better frame? Is there anything that you would more desire if you were believers? Is it not better to have such a mind in us, than to enjoy all the peace and security that the world can afford? One principal means in which we are made partakers of these things, is a due meditation on things unseen and eternal. These are the things that are within the veil, on which we ought to cast the anchor of our hope in all the storms we meet with.

Hebrews 6, 19 and 20. In which we shall speak more afterward. Without doubt, the generality of Christians are greatly defective in this duty, partly for lack of light into them, partly for lack of delight in them.

They think little of an eternal country. Wherever men are, they do not use to neglect thoughts of that country in which their inheritance lies. If they are absent from it for a season, yet will they labor to acquaint themselves with the principal concernments of it.

But this heavenly country, in which lies our eternal inheritance, is not regarded. Men do not exercise themselves as they ought to thoughts of things eternal and invisible. It were impossible, if they did so, that their mind should be so earthly, and their affections cleave so as they do to present things.

He that looks deadly on the sun, although he cannot bear the luster of its beams fully, yet his sight is so affected with it, that when he calls off his eyes from it, he can see nothing as it were of the things about him. They are all dark to him. And he who looks deadly in his contemplations on things above, eternal things, though he cannot comprehend their glory, yet a veil will be cast by it on all the desirable beauties of earthly things, and take off its affections from them.

Men live and act under the power of a conviction that there is a state of immortality and glory to come. With the persuasion of this, they must relieve themselves in their sorrows, sufferings, and temptations. Yet with many it is only a reserve, and they can be here no more.

And as unto daily contemplation of the nature and causes of it, or as unto any entrance into it by faith and hope, the most are strangers to it. If we are spiritually minded, nothing will be more natural to us than to have many thoughts of eternal things, as those in which all our principal concerns lie, as well as those

which are excellent and glorious in themselves. The direction thereon is, that we should make heavenly things, the things of the future state of blessedness and glory, a principal object of our thoughts, that we would think much about them, that we would meditate much upon them.

Many are discouraged in this by their ignorance and darkness, by their lack of due conceptions and steady apprehensions of invisible things. Hence one of these two things doth befall them when they would meditate on things above. First, the glory of them, the glory of God in them, being essentially infinite and incomprehensible, does immediately overwhelm them, and, as it were, in a moment put them to an utter loss, so that they cannot frame one thought in their minds about them.

Or, secondly, they lack skill and ability to conceive a right of invisible things, and to dispose of them in such order in their minds, as that they may sedately exercise their thoughts about them. Both these shall be afterward spoken to. At present I shall only say, that whosoever shall sincerely engage in this duty according to what he has, and shall abide constant in it, he will make such a refreshing progress in his apprehension of heavenly things, as he will be greatly satisfied with.

We are kept in darkness, ignorance, and unsteadiness of meditations about them, not from the nature of the things themselves, but from our own sloth, negligence, and readiness to be turned aside by apprehensions of difficulties of the lying in the way. Therefore I shall consider two things. What are the principal motives to this duty of fixing our thoughts on the things that are above, and the advantages which we receive by it? It also gives some directions how and on what in particular we may exercise our thoughts on those things above.

Firstly, faith will be increased and strengthened by it. Invisible things are the proper objects of faith. It is the evidence of things not seen, Hebrews 11.1. Therefore in our thoughts of them faith is in its proper exercise, which is a principal means of its growth and increase.

And hereon two things will ensue. First, the soul will come to a more satisfactory abiding sense of the reality in them. Things of imagination, which maintain a value of themselves by darkness, will not bear a diligent search into them.

They lose of their reputation on every serious inquiry. If rational men would but give themselves the liberty of free indignation by their own thoughts, it would quickly cashier the fool's paradise of Mohammed, the purgatory of the Papists, and all such creatures of imagination and superstition. But where things are real and substantial, the more they are inquired into, the more they evidence their being and subsistence.

It is not, therefore, every profession of a faith of a future state of blessedness that will realize it in our minds. And therefore, for the most part, it is rather a notion that men have of heavenly things, which they do not contradict, than any solid satisfaction in or spiritual sense of their reality. For these are things that I have not seen, nor heard, nor will enter into the heart of man to conceive, whose existence, nature, and real state are not easily comprehended.

But through the continual exercise of holy thoughts about them, the soul obtains an entrance into the midst of them, finding in them both durable substance and riches. There is no way, therefore, to strengthen faith to any degree but by a daily contemplation on the things themselves. They who do not think of them frequently shall never believe them sincerely.

They admit not of any collateral evidence where they do not evidence themselves to our souls. Faith, as we have said, thus exercised, will give them a subsistence not in themselves, which they have antecedent thereunto, but in us, in our hearts, in the minds of them that do believe. Imagination creates its own object.

Faith finds it prepared beforehand. It will not leave a bare notion of them in the understanding, but give them a spiritual subsistence in the heart, as Christ himself dwells in our hearts by faith. And there are two things that will discover this subsistence of them in us first, when we find them in a continual readiness to rise up in our minds on all occasions, in which the thoughts and remembrance of them are needful and useful to us.

There are many seasons, some whereof shall we be immediately spoken to, and many duties in which, and whereunto, the faith and thoughts of things invisible and eternal are needful to us, so as that we cannot fill up those seasons, nor perform those duties in a due manner without them. If on all such occasions they do from the inward frame of our minds present themselves to us, or through our acquaintance and familiarity with them, we recur in our thoughts about them, they seem to have a real subsistence given to them in our souls. But if on such occasions in which alone they will yield us help and relief, we accustom ourselves to other thoughts, if those concerning them are, as it were, out of the way, and arise not in our minds of their own accord, we are yet strangers to this effect of faith.

Secondly, they are realized to us, they have a subsistence in us, when the soul continually longs to be in them, when they have given such a relish to our hearts as the first fruits of glory, that we cannot but desire on all opportune occasions to be in the full enjoyment of them. Faith seems to have had its effectual work herein upon us. For lack of these things do many among us walk in disconsolation all their days.

Secondly, it will gradually give the heart an acquaintance with the especial nature and use of these things. General thoughts and notions of heaven and glory do but fluctuate up and down in the mind, and very little influence it to other duties. But assiduous contemplation will give the mind such distinct apprehensions of heavenly things, it shall duly affect it with the glory of them.

The more we discern of the glory and excellency of them in their own nature, of their suitableness to ours as our only proper rest and blessedness, as a perfection and complement of what has already begun in us by grace, of the restless tendency of all gracious dispositions and inclination of our hearts towards their enjoyment, the more will faith be established in us cleaving to them. So when the contemplation of these things consists, the principal food of faith, in which it is nourished and strengthened, we are not to expect much work where there is not provision of proper food for them that labor. No wonder if we find faith faint and weak in the work it has to do, which oft times is great and weighty, if we neglect to guide it daily to that which should administer strength to it.

Number two, it will give life and exercise to the grace of hope. Hope is a glorious grace in which blessed effects are ascribed in the Scripture, and in effectual operation to the supportment and consolation of believers. By it we are purified, sanctified, saved.

And to sum up the whole of its excellency and efficacy, it is a principal way of the working of Christ as inhabiting in us, Colossians 1.27. Christ in you, the hope of glory. Where Christ evidences his presence with us, he gives us an infallible hope of glory. He gives us an assured pledge of it and works our souls into an expectation of it.

Hope in general is an uncertain expectation of a future good which we desire. But as it is a gospel grace, all uncertainty is removed from it which would hinder us of the advantage intended in it. It is an earnest expectation proceeding from faith, trust, and confidence, accompanied with longing desires of enjoyment.

From a mistake of its nature, it is that few Christians labor after it, exercise themselves to it, or have the benefit of it. For to live by hope they suppose infers a state not only beneath the life of faith and all assurance in believing, but also exclusive of them. They think to hope to be saved is a condition of men who have no grounds of faith or assurance.

But this is to turn a blessed fruit of the Spirit into a common affection of nature. Gospel hope is a fruit of faith, trust, and confidence. Yea, the height of the actings of all grace issues in a well-grounded hope, nor can it rise any higher.

Romans 5.2-5. Now the reason why men have no more use of, no more benefit by this excellent grace is because they do not abide in thoughts and contemplation of the things hoped for. The special object of hope is eternal glory. Colossians 1.27, Romans 5.2. The peculiar use of it is to support, comfort, and refresh the soul in all trials, under all weariness and despondencies, with a firm expectation of a speedy entrance into that glory, with an earnest desire after it.

Wherefore, unless we acquaint ourselves by continual meditation with the reality and nature of this glory, it is impossible it should be the object of a vigorous act of hope, such as in which the apostle says we are saved. With all this, we neither can have that evidence of eternal things, nor that valuation of them, nor that preparedness in our minds for them. It should keep us in the exercise of gracious hope about them.

Suppose a number of persons engaged in a voyage to a most remote country, in which all of them have an apprehension that there is a place of rest and an inheritance provided for them. Under this apprehension they all put themselves on their voyage to possess what is so prepared. However, some of them have only a general notion of these things, they know nothing distinctly concerning them, and are so busy about other affairs that they have no leisure to inquire into them, or do suppose that they cannot come to any satisfactory knowledge of them in particular, and so are content to go on with general hopes and expectations.

Others there are who, by all possible means, acquaint themselves particularly with the nature of the climate in which they are going, with the excellency of the inheritance and provision that is made for them. Their voyage proves long and worrisome, their difficulties many, and their dangers great, and they have nothing to relieve and encourage themselves with but the hope and expectation of the country where they are going. Those of the first sort will be very apt to despond and feign, their general hopes will not be able to relieve them, but those who have a distinct notion and apprehension of the state of things where they are going, and of their incomparable excellency, have always a readiness in which to cheer their minds to support themselves.

In that journey or pilgrimage in which we are engaged towards a heavenly country, we are sure to meet with all kinds of dangers, difficulties, and perils. It is not a general notion of blessedness that will excite and work in us a spiritual refreshing hope, but when we think and meditate on future glory as we ought, that grace which is neglected for the most part as to its benefit, and dead as to its exercise, will of all others be most vigorous and active, putting itself forth on all occasions. This therefore is an inestimable benefit of the duty exhorted to, in which they find the advantage of, who are really spiritually minded.

This alone will make us ready for the cross, for all sorts of sufferings that we may be exposed to. There is nothing more necessary to believers of this season than to have their minds furnished with provision of such things as may prepare them for the cross and sufferings. Various intimations of the mind of God, circumstances of providence, the present state of things in the world, with the instant peril of the latter days, do all call them hereunto.

If it be otherwise with them, they will at one time or other be woefully surprised, and think strange of their trials, as if some strange thing did befall them. Nothing is more useful to this end than constant thoughts and contemplations of eternal things and future glory. From hence alone can the soul have in a readiness what to lay in balance against all sorts of sufferings.

When a storm begins to arise at sea, the mariners bestir themselves in the management of the tackling of the ship, and other applications of their art for their safety. But if the storm increase, and come to extremity, they are forced to forgo all other means, and betake themselves to a sheet anchor, to hold their ship steady against its violence. So when a storm of persecution and troubles begin to arise, men have various ways and considerations for their relief.

But if at once come to extremity, if sword, nakedness, famine, and death are inevitably coming upon them, they have nothing to betake themselves to what will yield them solid relief, but the consideration and faith of things invisible and eternal. So the apostle declares the state of things, 2 Corinthians 4, 16 to 18, the words before insisted on, For which cause we faint not, but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh forth a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.

While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal. He lays all sorts of afflictions in one scale, and, on the consideration of them, declares them to be light, and but for a moment.

Then he lays glory in the other scales, and finds it to be ponderous, weighty, and eternal, an exceeding weight of glory. In the one is sorrow for a little while, in the other eternal joy, in the one pain for a few moments, in the other everlasting rest. In the one is the loss of some few temporary things, in the other the full fruition of God in Christ who is all in all.

Hence the same apostle casts up the account of these things, and gives us his judgment concerning them in Romans 8.18. I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us. There is no comparison between them, as if one had as much evil and misery in them as the other has of good and blessedness, as though his state were any way to be complained of, who must undergo the one while he has an interest in the other, as though to escape the one he hazard the enjoyment of the other. It is inseparable from our nature to have fear of and aversion from great distressing sufferings that are above the power of nature to bear.

Even our Lord Jesus himself, having taken on him all the sinless properties of our nature, had a fear and aversion, though holy and gracious, with respect to his own. Those who, through stoutheartedness, do contend them before their approach, boasting in themselves of their abilities to undergo them, censuring such as will not unadvisedly engage in them, are such as seldom glorify God when they are really called to conflict with them. Peter alone trusted to himself that he would not forsake his master, and seemed to take the warning ill that they should all do so, and so he alone denied him.

All church stories are filled with instances as such, as having borne themselves high before the approach of trials, have shamefully miscarried when their trials have come. Therefore it is, moreover, allowed to us to use all lawful means for the avoiding of them. Both rules and examples of the Scripture give sufficient warranty for it.

But there are times and seasons in which, without any to-giversation, they are to be undergone to the glory of God, and in the discharge of our duty, confessing Christ before men, as we would be owned by him before his Father in heaven. All things do now call us to prepare for such a season, to be martyrs in resolution, though we should never really lose our lives by violence. Nothing will give us this preparation but to have our minds exercised in the contemplation of heavenly things, of things that are invisible and eternal.

He who is thus spiritually minded, who has his thoughts and affections set on things above, will have always in a readiness what to oppose to any circumstances of his sufferings. Those views which such an one has had by faith of the uncreated glories above, of the things in heavenly places where Christ sits at the right hand of God, of the glory within the veil in which they have been realized and made present to a soul, will now visit him every moment, abide with him continually, and put forth their efficacy to his supportment and refreshment. Alas, what will become of many of us who are grovelling continually on the earth, whose bellies cleave to the dust, who are strangers to the thoughts of heavenly things when distressing troubles shall befall us? Why shall we think that refreshing thoughts of things above will then visit our souls when we resisted their admittance in days of peace? Do you come to me in your distress, saith Jephthah, when in the time of your peace ye drove me from you? When we would thus think of heavenly things to our refreshment, we shall hardly get them to make an abode with us.

I know God could come in by the mighty power of his Spirit and grace to support and comfort the souls of them who are called and even surprised into the greatest of sufferings. Yet I also know that it is our duty not to tempt him in the neglect of the ways and means which he has appointed for the communication of his grace to us. Our Lord Jesus Christ himself is the author and finisher of our faith, for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame.

His mediatory glory in the salvation of the church was a manner of the joy set before him. This he took the view and prospect of in all his sufferings to his refreshment and supportment. And his example as the author and finisher of our faith is more efficaciously instructive than any other rule or precept.

Eternal glory is set before us also. It is the design of God's wisdom and grace that by the contemplation of it we should relieve ourselves in all our sufferings, yea, and rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory. How many of those blessed souls now in the enjoyment of God and glory, who passed through fiery trials and great tribulations, were enabled to sing and rejoice in the flames by prepossession of this glory in their mind through believing? Yea, some of them have been so filled with them as to take off all sense of pain under the most exquisite tortures.

When Stephen was to be stoned, to encourage him in his suffering and comfort him in it, the heavens were opened and he saw Jesus standing at the right hand of God. Who can conceive what contempt of all the rage and madness of the Jews, what a neglect of all the pains of death as do you raise his holy soul to? To obtain, therefore, such views frequently by faith as they do who are truly spiritually minded is the most effectual way to encourage us to all our sufferings. The Apostle gives us a force of this encouragement in a comparison with earthly things, 1 Corinthians 9.25. Every man that striveth for the

mastery is temperate in all things.

Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown, but we an incorruptible. If men, when a corruptible crown of vain honor and applause is proposed to them, will do and endure all that is needful for the attainment of it, and relieve themselves in their hardship with thoughts and imaginations of attaining it, grounded on uncertain hopes, shall not we who have a crown, immortal and invisible, propose to us, and that with the highest assurance of the enjoyment of it, cheerfully undergo, endure, and suffer what we are to go through in the way to it? Fourth, this is the most effectual means to wean the heart and affections from things here below, to keep the mind to an undervaluation, yea, a contempt of them as occasion shall require. For there is a season in which there is such a contempt required in us of all relations and enjoyments as our Savior calls the hating of them, that is, not absolutely, but comparatively, in comparison of Him, and the gospel, with the duties which belong to our profession.

Luke 14.26 If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, in his own life also, he cannot be my disciple. Some, I fear, if they did but consider it, would be apt to say, This is the hard saying, who can bear it? And others would cry out with the disciple in another case, Lord, who then can be saved? But it is a word in which we must be judged, nor can we be the disciples of Christ on any other terms. But here, and in a special manner, lies the wound and weakness of faith and profession in these our days.

The bellies of men cleave to the dust, or their affections to earthly things. I don't speak of those who, by repining defeat and oppression, strive to enrich themselves, nor of those who design nothing more than the attainment of greatness and promotion in the world, though not by ways of open wickedness. Least of all of them who make religion, and perhaps their ministry in it, a means for the attaining of secular ends and preferments.

No wise man can suppose such persons, any of them, to be spiritually minded, and it is most easy to disprove all their pretences. But I intend only those of present, whose ways and means of attaining riches are lawful, honest, and unblameable, who use them with some moderation, and do profess that their portion lies in better things, so that it is hard to fasten a conviction on them in the manner of their conversation. Whatever may seem to reflect upon them, they esteem it to be that whose omission would make them foolish in their affairs, or negligent in their duty.

But even among these also there is oft times that inordinate love to present things, that esteem and valuation of them, that concernment in them, as they are not consistent with their being spiritually minded. With some their relations, with some their enjoyments, with most both in conjunction, are an idol which they set up in their hearts, and secretly bow down to. About these are their hopes and fears exercised.

On them is their love, and them is their delight. They are wholly taken up with their own concerns, count all loss that is not spent on them, and all time misspent that is not engaged about them. Yet the things which they do, they judge to be good in themselves.

Their hearts do not condemn them as to the manner of them. Their valuation they have of their relations and enjoyments they suppose to be lawful within the bounds which they have assigned to it. They care about them in their own minds, but their duty.

It is no easy matter. It requires much spiritual wisdom to fix right boundaries to our affections and their actings about earthly things. But let men plead and pretend what they please.

I shall offer one rule in this case which will not fail, and this is, that when men are so confident in the good state and measure of their affections and their actings toward earthly things, that they will oppose their engagements into them to known duties of religion, piety, and charity, they are gone into a sinful excess. Is there a state of the poor that requires their liberality and bounty? You must excuse them. They have families to provide for, when what is expected from them signifies nothing at all as to a due provision for their families, nor is what would lessen their inheritances or portions one penny in the issue.

Are they called to an attendance on seasons of religious duties? They are so full of business that it is impossible for them to have leisure for any such occasions. So by always declaring that they are under the power of a prevalent predominant affection to earthly things, this fills all places with lifeless, sapless, useless professors who approve themselves in their condition, while it is visibly unspiritual and withering. The heart will have something in which, in a way of preeminence, it will fix itself and its affections.

This, in all its perpetual motions, it seeks for rest and satisfaction in. And every man has an edge. The edge of his affections is set one way or other, though it be more keen in some than others.

And whereas all sorts of things that the heart can fix on, or turn the edge of its affections to, are distributed by the Apostle into things above, and things beneath, things heavenly, and things earthly, if we have not such a view and prospect of heavenly things as to cause our hearts to cleave to them and delight in them, let us pretend what we will. It is impossible but that we shall be under the power of a predominant affection unto the things of this world.

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