

True Grace Distinguished From the Experience of Devils

by Jonathan Edwards

According to Jonathan Edwards' sermon, nothing in the mind of man that is of the same nature with what the devils experience is any sure sign of saving grace.

Scripture: Proverbs 4:11, Isaiah 2:10, Luke 13:28, Romans 9:22, James 2:19

Topics: "Saving Grace", "True Conversion"

Description

Jonathan Edwards preaches about the distinction between true grace and the experiences of devils, emphasizing that mere intellectual belief, earnest desires for salvation, a sense of divine things, and a knowledge of God's attributes are not sure signs of saving grace. He explains that even the devils have these experiences and knowledge, yet lack true holiness. Edwards warns against relying on external manifestations or emotional experiences as evidence of genuine conversion, highlighting the need for spiritual fruits and a transformed heart as the true marks of God's work in a person's life.

Transcript

True Grace Distinguished From The Experience Of Devils

Dated September 28, 1752. Preached before the Synod of New York, convened at Newark, in New Jersey. Also preached in 1746.

James 2:19

Thou believest that there is one God; thou dost well: the devils also believe, and tremble.

Subject: No such experiences as the devils in hell are the subjects of are any sure sign of grace.

Observe in these words, -- 1. Something that some depended on, as an evidence of their good estate and acceptance, as the objects of God's favor, viz. a speculative faith, or belief of the doctrines of religion. The great doctrine of the existence of one only God is particularly mentioned probably because this was a doctrine wherein, especially, there was a visible and noted distinction between professing Christians and the heathens, amongst whom the Christians in those days were dispersed. And therefore, this was what many trusted in, as what recommended them to, or at least was an evidence of their interest in, the great spiritual and eternal privileges, in which real Christians were distinguished from the rest of the world.

2. How much is allowed concerning this faith, viz. that it is a good attainment. "Thou dost well." It was good, as it was necessary. This doctrine was one of the fundamental doctrines of Christianity and, in some respects, above all others fundamental. It was necessary to be believed, in order to salvation. To be without the belief of this doctrine, specially in those that had such advantage to know as they had to whom the apostle wrote, would be a great sin, and what would vastly aggravate their damnation. This belief was also good, as it had a good tendency in many respects.

3. What is implicitly denied concerning it, viz. that is any evidence of a person's being in a state of salvation. The whole context shows this to be the design of the apostle in the words. And it is particularly manifest by the conclusion of the verse, which is,

4. The thing observable in the words, viz. the argument by which the apostle proves that this is no sign of a state of grace, viz. that it is found in the devils. They believe that there is one God, and that he is a holy, sin-hating God and that he is a God of truth, and will fulfill his threatenings by which he has denounced future judgments, and a great increase of misery on them, and that he is an almighty God, and able to execute his threatened vengeance upon them.

Therefore, the doctrine I infer from the words to make the subject of my present discourse is this, viz. nothing in the mind of man that is of the same nature with what the devils experience, or are the subjects of, is any sure sign of saving grace.

If there be anything that the devils have, or find in themselves, which is an evidence of the saving grace of the Spirit of God, then the apostle's argument is not good; which is plainly this: "That which is in the devils, or which they do, is no certain evidence of grace. But the devils believe that there is one God. Therefore, thy believing that there is one God is no sure evidence that thou art gracious." So that the whole foundation of the apostle's argument lies in that proposition: "That which is in the devils, is no certain sign of grace." -- Nevertheless, I shall mention two or three further reasons, or arguments of the truth of this doctrine.

I. The devils have no degree of holiness. And therefore those things which are nothing beyond what they are the subjects of cannot be holy experiences.

The devil once was holy. But when he fell, he lost all his holiness and became perfectly wicked. He is the greatest sinner, and in some sense the father of all sin. John 8:44, "Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do: he was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there was no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it." 1 John 3:8, "He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning." He is often spoken of, by way of eminence, as "the wicked one." So, Mat. 13:19, "Then cometh the wicked one, and catcheth away that which was sown in his heart." Verse 38, "The tares are the children of the wicked one." 1 John 2:13, "I write unto you, young men, because ye have overcome the wicked one." Chap. 3:12, "Not as Cain, who was of that wicked one." Chap. 5:18, "Whosoever is born of God -- keepeth himself, and that wicked one toucheth him not." So the devils are called evil spirits, unclean spirits, powers of darkness, rulers of the darkness of this world, and wickedness itself. Eph. 6:12, "For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places."

Therefore, surely those things which the minds of devils are the subjects of can have nothing of the nature of true holiness in them. The knowledge and understanding which they have of the things of God and

religion cannot be of the nature of divine and holy light, nor any knowledge that is merely of the same kind. No impressions made on their hearts can be of a spiritual nature. That kind of sense which they have of divine things, however great, cannot be a holy sense. Such affections as move their hearts, however powerful, cannot be holy affections. If there be no holiness in them as they are in the devil, there can be no holiness in them as they are in man, unless something be added to them beyond what is in the devil. And if anything be added to them, then they are not the same things. But [they] are something beyond what devils are the subjects of, which is contrary to the supposition, for the proposition which I am upon is, that those things which are of the same nature, and nothing beyond what devils are the subjects of, cannot be holy experiences. It is not the subject that makes the affection, or experience, or quality holy. But it is the quality that makes the subject holy.

And if those qualities and experiences which the devils are the subjects of have nothing of the nature of holiness in them, then they can be no certain signs that persons which have them are holy or gracious. There is no certain sign of true grace, but those things which are spiritual and gracious. It is God's image that is his seal and mark, the stamp by which those that are his are known. But that which has nothing of the nature of holiness, has nothing of this image. That which is a sure sign of grace, must either be something which has the nature and essence of grace, or flows from, or some way belongs to, its essence. For that which distinguishes things one from another is the essence, or something appertaining to their essence. And therefore, that which is sometimes found wholly without the essence of holiness or grace, can be no essential, sure, or distinguishing mark of grace.

II. The devils are not only absolutely without all true holiness, but they are not so much as the subjects of any common grace.

If any should imagine, that some things may be signs of grace which are not grace itself, or which have nothing of the nature and essence of grace and holiness in them; yet, certainly they will allow, that the qualifications which are sure evidences of grace, must be things that are near akin to grace, or having some remarkable affinity with it. But the devils are not only wholly destitute of any true holiness, but they are at the greatest distance from it, and have nothing in them in any wise akin to it.

There are many in this world who are wholly destitute of saving grace who yet have common grace. They have no true holiness, but nevertheless have something of that which is called moral virtue. And [they] are the subjects of some degree of the common influences of the Spirit of God. It is so with those in general that live under the light of the gospel and are not given up to judicial blindness and hardness. Yea, those that are thus given up, yet have some degree of restraining grace while they live in this world, without which the earth could not bear them, and they would in no measure be tolerable members of human society. But when any are damned, or cast into hell, as the devils are, God wholly withdraws his restraining grace and all merciful influences of his Spirit whatsoever. They have neither saving grace nor common grace; neither the grace of the Spirit, nor any of the common gifts of the Spirit; neither true holiness, nor moral virtue of any kind. Hence arises the vast increase of the exercise of wickedness in the hearts of men when they are damned. And herein is the chief difference between the damned in hell and unregenerate and graceless men in this world. Not that wicked men in this world have any more holiness or true virtue than the damned, or have wicked men, when they leave this world, any principles of wickedness infused into them. But when men are cast into hell, God perfectly takes away his Spirit from them, as to all its merciful common influences, and entirely withdraws from them all restraints of his Spirit and good providence.

III. It is unreasonable to suppose that a person's being in any respect as the devil is, should be a certain sign that he is very unlike and opposite to him, and hereafter shall not have his part with him. True saints are extremely unlike and contrary to the devil, both relatively and really. They are so relatively. The devil is the grand rebel, the chief enemy of God and Christ, the object of God's greatest wrath, a condemned malefactor, utterly rejected and cast off by him, forever shut out of his presence, the prisoner of his justice, an everlasting inhabitant of the infernal world. The saints, on the contrary, are the citizens of the heavenly Jerusalem, members of the family of the glorious King of heaven, the children of God, the brethren and spouse of his dear Son, heirs of God, joint-heirs with Christ, kings and priests unto God. And they are extremely different really. The devil, on account of his hateful nature, and those accursed dispositions which reign in him, is called Satan, the adversary, Abaddon and Apollyon, the great destroyer, the wolf, the roaring lion, the great dragon, the old serpent. The saints are represented as God's holy ones, his anointed ones, the excellent of the earth, the meek of the earth, lambs and doves, Christ's little children, having the image of God, pure in heart, God's jewels, lilies in Christ's garden, plants of paradise, stars of heaven, temples of the living God. The saints, so far as they are saints, are as diverse from the devil, as heaven is from hell. And much more contrary than light is to darkness. And the eternal state that they are appointed to is answerably diverse and contrary.

Now it is not reasonable to suppose that being in any respect as Satan is, or being the subject of any of the same properties, qualifications, affections, or actions, that are in him, is any certain evidence that persons are thus exceeding different from him, and in circumstances so diverse, and appointed to an eternal state so extremely contrary in all respects. Wicked men are in Scripture called the children of the devil. Now is it reasonable to suppose, that men's being in any respect as the devil is can be a certain sign that they are not his children, but the children of the infinitely holy and blessed God? We are informed, that wicked men shall hereafter have their part with devils, shall be sentenced to the same everlasting fire which is prepared for the devil and his angels. Now, can a man's being like the devil in any respect be a sure token that he shall not have his part with him, but with glorious angels, and with Jesus Christ, dwelling with him, where he is, that he may behold and partake of his glory?

IMPROVEMENT

The first use may lie in several inferences, for our instruction.

I. From what has been said, it may be inferred, by parity of reason, that nothing that damned men do, or ever will experience, can be any sure sign of grace.

Damned men are like the devils, are conformed to them in nature and state. They have nothing better in them than the devils, have no higher principles in their hearts, experience nothing and do nothing of a more excellent kind, as they are the children and servants of the devil, and as such, shall dwell with him, and be partakers with him of the same misery. As Christ says, concerning the saints in their future state, Mat. 22:30, "That they shall be as the angels of God in heaven." So it may be said concerning ungodly men in their future state, that they shall be as the fallen wicked angels in hell.

Each of the aforementioned reasons, given to show the truth of the doctrine with respect to devils, holds good with respect to damned men. Damned men have no degree of holiness. And therefore those things which are nothing beyond what they have, cannot be holy experiences. Damned men are not only absolutely destitute of all true holiness, but they have not so much as any common grace. And lastly, it is unreasonable to suppose that a person's being in any respect as the damned in hell are, should be a

certain sign that they are very unlike and opposite to them, and hereafter shall not have their portion with them.

II. We may hence infer, that no degree of speculative knowledge of things of religion is any certain sign of saving grace. The devil, before his fall, was among those bright and glorious angels of heaven, which are represented as morning-stars and flames of fire that excel in strength and wisdom. And though he be now become sinful, yet his sin has not abolished the faculties of the angelic nature. As when man fell, he did not lose the faculties of the human nature. -- Sin destroys spiritual principles, but not the natural faculties. It is true, sin, when in full dominion, entirely prevents the exercise of the natural faculties in holy and spiritual understanding, and lays many impediments in the way of their proper exercise in other respects. It lays the natural faculty of reason under great disadvantages by many and strong prejudices, and in fallen men the faculties of the soul are, doubtless, greatly impeded in their exercise, through that great weakness and disorder of the corporeal organ to which it is strictly united, and which is the consequence of sin. -- But there seems to be nothing in the nature of sin, or moral corruption, that has any tendency to destroy the natural capacity, or even to diminish it, properly speaking. If sin were of such a nature as necessarily to have that tendency and effect, then it might be expected that wicked men, in a future state, where they are given up entirely to the unrestrained exercise of their corruptions and lusts, and sin is in all respects brought to its greatest perfection in them, would have the capacity of their souls greatly diminished. This we have no reason to suppose, but rather on the contrary, that their capacities are greatly enlarged and that their actual knowledge is vastly increased. And that even with respect to the Divine Being, and the things of religion, and the great concerns of the immortal souls of men, the eyes of wicked men are opened, when they go into another world.

The greatness of the abilities of devils may be argued from the representation in Eph. 6:12. "We wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers," etc. The same may also be argued from what the Scripture says of Satan's subtlety. Gen. 3:1; 2 Cor. 11:3; Acts 13:10. And as the devil has a faculty of understanding of large capacity, so he is capable of a great speculative knowledge of the things of God, and the invisible and eternal world, as well as other things. And must needs actually have a great understanding of these things, as these have always been chiefly in his view, and as his circumstances, from his first existence, have been such as have tended chiefly to engage him to attend to these things. Before his fall, he was one of those angels who continually beheld the face of the Father in heaven. And sin has no tendency to destroy the memory, and therefore has no tendency to blot out of it any speculative knowledge that was formerly there.

As the devil's subtlety shows his great capacity, so the way in which his subtlety is exercised and manifested -- which is principally in his artful management with respect to things of religion, his exceeding subtle representations, insinuations, reasonings, and temptations, concerning these things -- demonstrates his great actual understanding of them. As, in order to be a very artful disputant in any science, though it be only to confound and deceive such as are conversant in it, a person had need to have a great and extensive acquaintance with the things which pertain to that science.

Thus the devil has undoubtedly a great degree of speculative knowledge in divinity, having been, as it were, educated in the best divinity school in the universe, viz. the heaven of heavens. He must needs have such an extensive and accurate knowledge concerning the nature and attributes of God, as we, worms of the dust, in our present state, are not capable of. And he must have a far more extensive knowledge of the works of God, as of the work of creation in particular. For he was a spectator of the creation of this visible world.

He was one of those morning-stars (Job 38:4-7), "who sang together, and of those sons of God, that shouted for joy, when God laid the foundations of the earth, and laid the measures thereof, and stretched the line upon it." And so he must have a very great knowledge of God's works of providence. He has been a spectator of the series of these works from the beginning. He has seen how God has governed the world in all ages. And he has seen the whole train of God's wonderful successive dispensations of providence towards his church, from generation to generation.

And he has not been an indifferent spectator. But the great opposition between God and him, in the whole course of those dispensations, has necessarily engaged his attention in the strictest observation of them. He must have a great degree of knowledge concerning Jesus Christ as the Savior of men, and the nature and method of the work of redemption, and the wonderful wisdom of God in this contrivance. It is that work of God wherein, above all others, God has acted in opposition to him, and in which he has chiefly set himself in opposition to God.

It is with relation to this affair, that the mighty warfare has been maintained, which has been carried on between Michael and his angels, and the devil and his angels, through all ages from the beginning of the world, and especially since Christ appeared. The devil has had enough to engage his attention to the steps of divine wisdom in this work. For it is to that wisdom he has opposed his subtlety. And he has seen and found, to his great disappointment and unspeakable torment, how divine wisdom, as exercised in that work, has baffled and confounded his devices.

He has a great knowledge of the things of another world. For the things of that world are in his immediate view. He has a great knowledge of heaven, for he has been an inhabitant of that world of glory. And he has a great knowledge of hell, and the nature of its misery. For he is the first inhabitant of hell. And above all the other inhabitants, has experience of its torments and has felt them constantly for more than fifty-seven hundred years. He must have a great knowledge of the Holy Scriptures, for it is evident he is not hindered from knowing what is written there, by the use he made of the words of Scripture in his temptation of our Savior.

And if he can know, he has much opportunity to know, and must needs have a disposition to know, with the greatest exactness; that he may, to greater effect, pervert and wrest the Scripture, and prevent such an effect of the Word of God on the hearts of men, as shall tend to overthrow his kingdom. He must have a great knowledge of the nature of mankind, their capacity, their dispositions, and the corruption's of their hearts. For he has had long and great observation and experience.

The heart of man is what he had chiefly to do with, in his subtle devices, mighty efforts, restless and indefatigable operations and exertions of himself, from the beginning of the world. And it is evident that he has a great speculative knowledge of the nature of experimental religion, by his being able to imitate it so artfully, and in such a manner as to transform himself into an angel of light.

Therefore it is manifest from my text and doctrine that no degree of speculative knowledge of religion is any certain sign of true piety. Whatever clear notions a man may have of the attributes of God, the doctrine of the Trinity, the nature of the two covenants, the economy of the persons of the Trinity, and the part which each person has in the affair of man's redemption, if he can discourse never so excellently of the offices of Christ, and the way of salvation by him, and the admirable methods of divine wisdom, and the harmony of the various attributes of God in that way; if he can talk never so clearly and exactly of the method of the justification of a sinner, and of the nature of conversion, and the operations of the Spirit of

God, in applying the redemption of Christ, giving good distinctions, happily solving difficulties, and answering objections, in a manner tending greatly to enlighten the ignorant, to the edification of the church of God, and the conviction of gainsayers, and the great increase of light in the world. If he has more knowledge of this sort than hundreds of true saints of an ordinary education, and most divines; yet all is no certain evidence of any degree of saving grace in the heart.

It is true, the Scripture often speaks of knowledge of divine things as what is peculiar to true saints. As in John 17:3, "This is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou has sent." Mat. 11:27, "No man knoweth the Son, but the Father: neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him." Psa. 9:10, "They that know thy name will put their trust in thee." Phil. 3:8, "I count all things but loss, for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord." But then, we must understand it of a different kind of knowledge from that speculative understanding which the devil has to so great a degree. It will also be allowed, that the spiritual saving knowledge of God and divine things, greatly promotes speculative knowledge, as it engages the mind in its search into things of this kind, and much assists to a distinct understanding of them. So that, other things being equal, they who have spiritual knowledge are much more likely than others to have a good doctrinal acquaintance with things of religion. But yet such acquaintance may be no distinguishing characteristic of true saints.

III. It may also be inferred from what has been observed, that for persons merely to yield a speculative assent to the doctrines of religion as true is no certain evidence of a state of grace. My text tells us that the devils believe. And as they believe that there is one God, so they believe the truth of the doctrines of religion in general. The devil is orthodox in his faith. He believes the true scheme of doctrine. He is no Deist, Socinian, Arian, Pelagian, or antinomian. The articles of his faith are all sound, and in them he is thoroughly established.

Therefore, for a person to believe the doctrines of Christianity merely from the force of arguments, as discerned only by speculation, is no evidence of grace.

It is probably a very rare thing for unregenerate men to have a strong persuasion of the truth of the doctrines of religion, specially such of them as are very mysterious, and much above the comprehension of reason. Yet if he be very confident of the truth of Christianity and its doctrines, and is able to argue most strongly for the proof of them, in this he goes nothing beyond the devil, who doubtless has a great knowledge of the rational arguments by which the truth of the Christian religion and its several principles are evinced.

And therefore when the Scripture speaks of believing that Jesus is the Son of God, as a sure evidence of grace, as in 1 John 5:1, and other places, it must be understood, not of a mere speculative assent, but of another kind and manner of believing, which is called the faith of God's elect, Tit. 1:1. There is a spiritual conviction of the truth, which is a believing with the whole heart, peculiar to true saints, of which I shall speak more particularly.

IV. It may be inferred from the doctrine which has been insisted on that it is no certain sign of persons being savingly converted that they have been subjects of very great distress and terrors of mind, through apprehensions of God's wrath, and fears of damnation.

That the devils are the subjects of great terrors, through apprehensions of God's wrath, and fears of its future effects is implied in my text, which speaks not only of their believing, but trembling. It must be no

small degree of terror which should make those principalities and powers, those mighty, proud, and sturdy beings, to tremble.

There are many terrors that some persons who are concerned for their salvation are the subjects of, which are not from any proper awakenings of conscience, or apprehensions of truth, but from melancholy or frightful impressions on their imagination, or some groundless apprehensions, and the delusions and false suggestions of Satan. But if they have had never so great and long continued terrors from real awakenings, and convictions of truth, and views of things as they are, this is no more than what is in the devils, and will be in all wicked men in another world. However stupid and senseless most ungodly men are now, all will be effectually awakened at last. There will be no such thing as slumbering in hell. There are many that cannot be awakened by the most solemn warnings and awful threatenings of the Word of God -- the most alarming discourses from the pulpit, and the most awakening and awful providences -- but all will be thoroughly awakened by the sound of the last trumpet and the appearance of Christ to judgment. All sorts will then be filled with most amazing terrors, from apprehensions of truth, and seeing things as they are, when "the kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men (such as were the most oftly and stout-hearted, most ready to treat the things of religion with contempt) shall hide themselves in the dens, and in the rocks of the mountains, and say to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb; for the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?" Rev. 6:15-17. -- Therefore if persons have been first awakened, and afterwards have had comfort and joy, it is no certain sign that their comforts are of the right hand, because they were preceded by very great terrors.

V. It may be further inferred from the doctrine, that no work of the law on men's hearts, in conviction of guilt, and just desert of punishment, is a sure argument that a person has been savingly converted.

Not only are no awakenings and terrors any certain evidence of this, but no mere real work whatsoever, though carried to the utmost extent. Nothing wherein there is no grace or spiritual light, but only the mere conviction of natural conscience, and those acts and operations of the mind which are the result of this -- and so are, as it were, merely forced by the clear light of conscience, without the concurrence of the heart and inclination with that light -- is any certain sign of the saving grace of God, or that a person was ever savingly converted.

The evidence of this, from my text and doctrine, is demonstrative because the devils are the subjects of these thing. And all wicked men that shall finally perish, will be the subjects of the same. Natural conscience is not extinguished in the damned in hell, but, on the contrary, remains there in its greatest strength, and is brought to its most perfect exercise, most fully to do its proper office as God's vicegerent in the soul, to condemn those rebels against the King of heaven and earth, and manifest God's just wrath and vengeance, and by that means to torment them, and be as a never-dying worm within them.

Wretched men find means in this world to blind the eyes and stop the mouth of this vicegerent of a sin-revenging God. But they shall not be able to do it always. In another world, the eyes and mouth of conscience will be fully opened. God will hereafter make wicked men to see and know these things from which now they industriously hide their eyes. Isa. 26:10, 11, "Let favour be showed to the wicked, yet will he not learn righteousness: in the land of uprightness will he deal unjustly, and will not behold the majesty of the Lord.

Lord, when thy hand is lifted up, they will not see: but they shall see, and be ashamed for their envy at the people, yea, the fire of thine enemies shall devour them." We have this expression often annexed to God's threatenings of wrath to his enemies; "And they shall know that I am the Lord." This shall be accomplished by their woeful experience and clear light in their consciences, whereby they shall be made to know, whether they will or not, how great and terrible, holy and righteous, a God Jehovah is, whose authority they have despised.

And they shall know that he is righteous and holy in their destruction. This all the ungodly will be convinced of at the day of judgment, by the bringing to light of all their wickedness of heart and practice, and setting all their sins, with all their aggravations, in order, not only in the view of others, even of the whole world, but in the view of their own consciences. This is threatened, Psa. 50:21, "These things thou hast done, and I kept silence: thou thoughtest that I was altogether such a one as thyself: but I will reprove thee, and set them in order before thine eyes."

Compare this with the four first verses of the Psalm. -- The design of the day of judgment is not to find out what is just, as it is with human judgments. But it is to manifest what is just; to make known God's justice in the judgment which he will execute to men's own consciences, and to the world. And therefore that day is called "the day of wrath, and revelation of the righteous judgment of God," Rom. 2:5. Now sinners often cavil against the justice of God's dispensations, and particularly the punishment which he threatens for their sins, excusing themselves, and condemning him.

But when God comes to manifest their wickedness in the light of that day and to call them to an account, they will be speechless. Mat. 22:11, 12, "And when the king came in to see the guests, he saw there a man which had not on a wedding-garment. And he saith unto him, Friend, how camest thou in hither, not having a wedding-garment? And he was speechless." When the King of heaven and earth comes to judgment, their consciences will be so perfectly enlightened and convinced by the all-searching Light they shall then stand in, that their mouths will be effectually stopped, as to all excuses for themselves, all pleading of their own righteousness to excuse or justify them, and all objections against the justice of their Judge, that their conscience will condemn them only, and not God.

Therefore it follows from the doctrine, That it can be no certain sign of grace, that persons have had great convictions of sin. Suppose they have had their sins of life, with their aggravations, remarkably set before them, so as greatly to affect and terrify them. And withal, have had a great sight of the wickedness of their hearts, the greatness of the sin of unbelief, and of the unexcusableness and heinousness of their most secret spiritual iniquities. Perhaps they have been convinced of the utter insufficiency of their own righteousness, and they despair of being recommended to God by it. [They] have been convinced that they are wholly without excuse before God, and deserve damnation. And that God would be just in executing the threatened punishment upon them, though it be so dreadful. All these things will be in the ungodly at the day of judgment, when they shall stand with devils, at the left hand, and shall be doomed as accursed to everlasting fire with them.

Indeed there will be no submission in them. Their conscience will be convinced that God is just in their condemnation. But yet their wills will not be bowed to God's justice. There will be no acquiescence of mind in that divine attribute, no yielding of the soul to God's sovereignty, but the highest degree of enmity and opposition. A true submission of the heart and will to the justice and sovereignty of God is therefore allowed to be something peculiar to true converts, being something which the devils and damned souls are and ever will be far from. And to which a mere work of the law, and convictions of conscience,

however great and clear, will never bring men.

When sinners are the subjects of great convictions of conscience, and a remarkable work of the law, it is only transacting the business of the day of judgment in the conscience before-hand. God sits enthroned in the conscience, as at the last day he will sit enthroned in the clouds of heaven. The sinner is arraigned as it were at God's bar. And God appears in his awful greatness as a just and holy, sin-hating and sin-revenging God, as he will then. The sinner's iniquities are brought to light. His sins set in order before him. The hidden things of darkness, and the counsels of the heart are made manifest, as it will be then. Many witnesses do as it were rise up against the sinner under convictions of conscience, as they will against the wicked at the day of judgment; and the books are opened particularly the book of God's strict and holy law is opened in the conscience, and its rules applied for the condemnation of the sinner, which is the book that will be opened at the day of judgment, as the grand rule to all such wicked men as have lived under it. And the sentence of the law is pronounced against the sinner, and the justice of the sentence made manifest, as it will be at the day of judgment. The conviction of a sinner at the day of judgment will be a work of the law, as well as the conviction of conscience in this world. And the work of the law (if the work be merely legal) is never carried further in the consciences of sinners now than it will be at that day, when its work will be perfect in thoroughly stopping the sinner's mouth. Rom. 3:19, "Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law; that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God." Every mouth shall be stopped by the law, either now or hereafter; and all the world shall become sensibly guilty before God, guilty of death, deserving of damnation. And therefore, if sinners have been the subjects of a great work of the law, and have thus become guilty, and their mouths have been stopped, it is no certain sign that ever they have been converted.

Indeed the want of a thorough sense of guilt, and desert of punishment, and conviction of the justice of God in threatening damnation is a sign that a person never was converted, and truly brought with the whole soul to embrace Christ as a Savior from this punishment. For it is easily demonstrable, that there is no such thing as entirely and cordially accepting an offer of a Savior from a punishment which we think we do not deserve. But having such a conviction is no certain sign that persons have true faith, or have ever truly received Christ as their Savior. And if persons have great comfort, joy, and confidence suddenly let into their minds, after great convictions, it is no infallible evidence that their comforts are built on a good foundation.

It is manifest, therefore, that too much stress has been laid by many persons on a great work of the law preceding their comforts, who seem not only to have looked on such a work of the law as necessary to precede faith, but also to have esteemed it as the chief evidence of the truth and genuineness of succeeding faith and comforts. By this means it is to be feared very many have been deceived and established in a false hope. And what is to be seen in the event of things, in multitudes of instances, confirms this. It may be safely allowed that it is not so usual for great convictions of conscience to prove abortive, and fail of a good issue, as for lesser convictions. And that more generally when the Spirit of God proceeds so far with sinners, in the work of the law, as to give them a great sight of their hearts, and of the heinousness of their spiritual iniquities, and to convince them that they are without excuse, and that all their righteousness can do nothing to merit God's favor. But they lie justly exposed to God's eternal vengeance with mercy -- a work of saving conversion follows. But we can have no warrant to say, it is universally so, or to lay it down as an infallible rule, that when convictions of conscience have gone thus far, saving faith and repentance will surely follow. If any should think they have ground for such a

determination, because they cannot conceive what end God should have, in carrying a work of conviction to such a length, and so preparing the heart for faith, and after all, never giving saving faith to the soul, I desire it may be considered, where will be the end of our doubts and difficulties, if we think ourselves sufficient to determine so positively and particularly concerning God's ends and designs in what he does. It may be asked such an objector, what is God's end in giving a sinner any degree of the strivings of his Spirit and conviction of conscience, when he afterwards suffers it to come to nothing?

If he may give some degree that may finally be in vain, who shall set the bounds, and say how great the degree shall be? Who can, on sure grounds, determine that when a sinner has so much of that conviction which the devils and damned in hell have, true faith and eternal salvation will be the certain consequence? This we may certainly determine, that, if the apostle's argument in the text be good, not anything whatsoever that the devils have is certainly connected with such a consequence. Seeing sinners, while such, are capable of the most perfect convictions, and will have them at the day of judgment, and in hell, who shall say, that God never shall cause reprobates to anticipate the future judgment and damnation in that respect? And if he does so, who shall say to him, What dost thou? Or call him to account concerning his ends in so doing? Not but that many possible wise ends might be thought of, and mentioned, if it were needful, or I had now room for it. -- The Spirit of God is often quenched by the exercise of the wickedness of men's hearts, after he has gone far in a work of conviction, so that their convictions never have a good issue. And who can say that sinners, by the exercise of their opposition and enmity against God, which is not at all mortified by the greatest legal convictions, neither in the damned in hell nor sinners on earth, may not provoke God to take his Spirit from them, even after he has proceeded the greatest length in a work of conviction? Who can say, that God never is provoked to destroy some, after he has brought them, as it were, through the wilderness, even to the edge of the land of rest? As he slew some of the Israelites, even in the plains of Moab.

And let it be considered, where is our warrant in Scripture, to make use of any legal convictions, or any method or order of successive events in a work of the law, and consequent comforts, as a sure sign of regeneration. The Scripture is abundant, in expressly mentioning evidences of grace, and of a state of favor with God, as characteristics of true saints. But where do we ever find such things as these amongst those evidences? Or where do we find any other signs insisted on, besides grace itself, its nature, exercises, and fruits? These were the evidences that Job relied upon. These were the things that the Psalmist everywhere insists upon as evidences of his sincerity, and particularly in the 119th Psalm, from the beginning to the end: these were the signs that Hezekiah trusted to in his sickness.

These were the characteristics of those that are truly happy given by our Savior in the beginning of his sermon on the mount. These are the things that Christ mentions, as the true evidences of being his real disciples, in his last and dying discourse to his disciples, in the 14th, 15th, and 16th chapters of John, and in his intercessory prayer, chap. 17. These are the things which the apostle Paul often speaks of as evidences of his sincerity, and sure title to a crown of glory. And these are the things he often mentions to others, in his epistles, as the proper evidences of real Christianity, a justified state, and a title to glory. He insists on the fruits of the spirit; love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance as the proper evidences of being Christ's, and living in the Spirit: Gal. 5:22-25. It is that charity, or divine love, which is pure, peaceable, gentle, easy to be entreated, full of mercy, etc. that he insists on, as the most essential evidence of true godliness. Without which, all other things are nothing. Such are the signs which the apostle James insists on, as the proper evidence of a truly wise and good man. Jam. 3:17, "The wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be

entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy." And such are the signs of true Christianity, which the apostle John insists on throughout his epistles. And we never have anywhere in the Bible, from the beginning to the end of it, any other signs of godliness given, than such as these. If persons have such things as these apparently in them, it ought to be determined that they are truly converted, without its being first known what method the Spirit of God took to introduce these things into the soul, which oftentimes is altogether untraceable. All the works of God are in some respects unsearchable. But the Scripture often represents the works of the Spirit of God as peculiarly so. Isa. 40:13, "Who hath directed the Spirit of the Lord, or being his counselor, hath taught him?" Ecc. 11:5, "As thou knowest not what is the way of the Spirit, nor how the bones do grow in the womb of her that is with child: so thou knowest not the works of God, who maketh all." John 3:8, "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit."

VI. It follows from my text and doctrine, that it is no certain sign of grace that persons have earnest desires and longings after salvation.

The devils, doubtless, long for deliverance from the misery they suffer and from that greater misery which they expect. If they tremble through fear of it, they must necessarily, earnestly desire to be delivered from it. Wicked men are, in Scripture, represented as longing for the privileges of the righteous, when the door is shut, and they are shut out from among them. They come to the door, and cry, Lord, Lord, open to us. Therefore, we are not to look on all desires that are very earnest and vehement, as certain evidences of a pious heart. There are earnest desires of a religious nature, which the saints have, that are the proper breathings of a new nature, and distinguishing qualities of true saints. But there are also longings which unregenerate men may have, which are often mistaken for marks of godliness. They think they hunger and thirst after righteousness, and have earnest desires after God and Christ, and long for heaven. When, indeed, all is to be resolved into self-love. And so [it] is a longing which arises from no higher principles than the earnest desires of devils.

VII. It may be inferred from what has been observed, that persons who have no grace may have a great apprehension of an external glory in things heavenly and divine, and of whatsoever is external pertaining to religion.

If persons have impressed strongly on their minds ideas obtained by the external senses, whether by the ear, as any kind of sound, pleasant music, or words spoken of excellent signification, words of Scripture, suitable to their case, or adapted to the subject of their meditations, or ideas obtained by the eye, as of a visible beauty and glory, a shining light, golden streets, gates of precious stone, a most magnificent throne surrounded by angels and saints in shining ranks, or anything external belonging to Jesus Christ, either in his humbled state, as hanging on the cross with his crown of thorns, his wounds open, and blood trickling down, or in his glorified state, with awful majesty, or ravishing beauty and sweetness in his countenance, his face shining above the brightness of the sun, and the like. These things are no certain signs of grace.

Multitudes that are now in hell will have ideas of the external glory that pertains to things heavenly, far beyond whatever any have in this world. They will see all that external glory and beauty, in which Christ will appear at the day of judgment, when the sun shall be turned into darkness before him, which, doubtless, will be ten thousand times greater than ever was impressed on the imagination of either saints or sinners in this present state, or ever was conceived by any mortal man.

VIII. It may be inferred from the doctrine that persons who have no grace may have a very great and affecting sense of many divine things on their hearts.

The devil has not only great speculative knowledge, but he has a sense of many divine things, which deeply affects him, and is most strongly impressed on his heart. As,

First, the devils and damned souls have a great sense of the vast importance of the things of another world. They are in the invisible world, and they see and know how great the things of that world are. Their experience teaches them in the most affecting manner. They have a great sense of the worth of salvation, and the worth of immortal souls, and the vast importance of those things that concern men's eternal welfare. The parable in the latter end of the 16th chapter of Luke teaches this, in representing the rich man in hell, as entreating that Lazarus might be sent to his five brothers to testify unto them, lest they should come to that place of torment. They who endure the torments of hell have doubtless a most lively and affecting sense of the vastness of an endless eternity, and of the comparative momentariness of this life, and the vanity of the concerns and enjoyments of time. They are convinced effectually, that all the things of this world, even those that appear greatest and most important to the inhabitants of the earth, are despicable trifles, in comparison of the things of the eternal world. They have a great sense of the preciousness of time, and of the means of grace, and the inestimable value of the privileges which they enjoy which live under the gospel. They are fully sensible of the folly of those that go on in sin, neglect their opportunities, make light of the counsels and warnings of God, and bitterly lament their exceeding folly in their own sins, by which they have brought on themselves so great and remediless misery. When sinners, by woeful experience, know the dreadful issue of their evil way, they will mourn at the last, saying, How have I hated instruction, and my heart despised reproof, and have not obeyed the voice of my teachers, nor inclined mine ear to them that instructed me! Pro. 4:11, 12, 13.

Therefore, however true godliness is attended with a great sense of the importance of divine things -- and it is rare that men who have no grace maintain such a sense in any steady and persevering manner -- yet it is manifest those things are no certain evidences of grace. Unregenerate men may have a sense of the importance of eternity, and the vanity of time, the worth of immortal souls, the preciousness of time and the means of grace, and the folly of the way of allowed sin. They may have such a sense of those things, as may deeply affect them, and cause them to mourn for their own sins, and be much concerned for others. Though it be true, they have not these things in the same manner, and in all respects from the same principles and views, as godly men have them.

Second, devils and damned men have a strong and most affecting sense of the awful greatness and majesty of God. This is greatly made manifest in the execution of divine vengeance on his enemies. Rom. 9:22, "What if God, willing to show his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much long-suffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction?" The devils tremble before this great and terrible God and under a strong sense of his awful majesty. It is greatly manifested to them and damned souls now. But shall he be manifested in a further degree, in that day when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven in flaming fire, to take vengeance upon them. And when they shall earnestly desire to fly, and be hid from the face of him that sits on the throne (which shall be, "because of the glory of his majesty," Isa. 2:10) and when they shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power. When Christ comes at the last day, in the glory of his Father, every eye shall see him in that glory (in this respect, that they shall see his terrible majesty), and they also that pierced him, Rev. 1:7. Both those devils, and wicked men, which tormented and insulted him when he appeared in meanness and ignominy, shall then see him in the glory of his Father.

It is evident, therefore, that a sense of God's terrible majesty is no certain evidence of saving grace. For we see that wicked men and devils are capable of it. Yea, many wicked men in this world have actually had it. This is a manifestation which God made of himself in the sight of that wicked congregation at mount Sinai, which they saw, and with which they were deeply affected, so that all the people in the camp trembled.

Third, devils and damned men have some kind of conviction and sense of all attributes of God, both natural and moral, that is strong and very affecting.

The devils know God's almighty power. They saw a great manifestation of it when they saw God lay the foundation of the earth, etc. and were much affected with it. They have seen innumerable other great demonstrations of his power, as in the universal deluge, the destruction of Sodom, the wonders in Egypt, at the Red sea, and in the wilderness, causing the sun to stand still in Joshua's time, and many others. -- And they had a very affecting manifestation of God's mighty power on themselves in casting all their hosts down from heaven into hell.

And have continual affecting experience of it, in God's reserving them in strong chains of darkness, and in the strong pains they feel. They will hereafter have far more affecting experience of it, when they shall be punished from the glory of God's power, with that mighty destruction in expectation of which they now tremble. So the devils have a great knowledge of the wisdom of God. They have had unspeakably more opportunity and occasion to observe it in the work of creation, and also in the works of providence, than any mortal man has ever had.

And have been themselves the subjects of innumerable affecting manifestations of it, in God's disappointing and confounding them in their most subtle devices, in so wonderful and amazing a manner. So they see and find the infinite purity and holiness of the divine nature, in the most affecting manner, as this appears in his infinite hatred of sin, in what they feel of the dreadful effects of that hatred. They know already by what they suffer, and will know hereafter to a greater degree, and far more affecting manner, that such is the opposition of God's nature to sin, that is like a consuming fire, which burns with infinite vehemence against it.

They also will see the holiness of God, as exercised in his love to righteousness and holiness, in the glory of Christ and his church, which also will be very affecting to devils and wicked men. And the exact justice of God will be manifested to them in the clearest and strongest, most convincing and most affecting, light, at the day of judgment; when they will also see great and affecting demonstrations of the riches of his grace, in the marvelous fruits of his love to the vessels of mercy, when they shall see them at the right hand of Christ, shining as the sun in the kingdom of their Father, and shall hear the blessed sentence pronounced upon them, and will be deeply affected with it, as seems naturally implied in Luke 13:28, 29.

The devils know God's truth, and therefore they believe his threatenings, and tremble in expectation of their accomplishment. And wicked men that now doubt his truth, and dare not trust his word, will hereafter, in the most convincing, affecting manner, find his word to be true in all that he has threatened, and will see that he is faithful to his promises in the rewards of his saints. Devils and damned men know that God is eternal and unchangeable. And therefore they despair of there ever being an end to their misery. Therefore it is manifest, that merely persons having an affecting sense of some, or even of all God's attributes, is no certain sign that they have the true grace of God in their hearts.

Object. Here possibly some may object against the force of the foregoing reasoning, that ungodly men in this world are in exceeding different circumstances from those in which the devils are, and from those which wicked men will be in at the day of judgment. Those things which are visible and present to these, are now future and invisible to the other. And wicked men in this world are in the body, that clogs and hinders the soul, and are encompassed with objects that blind and stupefy them. Therefore it does not follow, that because the wicked in another world have a great apprehension and lively sense of such things without grace, ungodly men in their present state may have the same.

Ans. To this I answer: It is not supposed that ever men in this life have all those things which have been mentioned to the same degree that the devils and damned have them. -- None supposes that ever any in this life have terrors of conscience to an equal degree with them. It is not to be supposed that any mortal man, whether godly or ungodly, has an equal degree of speculative knowledge with the devil. And, as was just now observed, the wicked at the day of judgment, will have a vastly greater idea of the external glory of Christ than ever any have in the present state. So, doubtless, they will have a far greater sense of God's awful greatness and terrible majesty, than any could subsist under in this frail state. So we may well conclude, that the devils and wicked men in hell have a greater and more affecting sense of the vastness of eternity, and (in some respects) a greater sense of the importance of the things of another world than any here have. And they have also longings after salvation to a higher degree than any wicked men in this world.

But yet it is evident that men in this world may have things of the same kind with devils and damned men, the same sort of light in the understanding, the same views and affections, the same sense of things, the same kind of impressions on the mind and on the heart. The objection is against the conclusiveness of that reasoning which is the apostle's more properly than mine. The apostle judged it a conclusive argument against such as thought their believing there was one God an evidence of their being gracious, that the devils believed the same. So the argument is exactly the same against such as think they have grace, because they believe God is a holy God, or because they have a sense of the awful majesty of God. -- The same may be observed of other things that have been mentioned. My text has reference, not only to the act of the understandings of devils in believing, but to that affection of their hearts which accompanies the views they have, as trembling is an effect of the affection of the heart. Which shows, that if men have both the same views of understanding and also the same affections of heart that the devils have, it is no sign of grace.

And as to the particular degree to which these things may be carried in men in this world without grace, it appears not safe to make use of it as an infallible rule to determine men's state. I know not where we have any rule to go by, to fix the precise degree in which God by his providence, or his common influences on the mind, will excite in wicked men in this world, the same views and affections which the wicked have in another world. Which it is manifest, the former are capable of as well as the latter, having the same faculties and principles of soul, and which views and affections, it is evident, they often are actually the subjects of in some degree, some in a greater and some in a less degree. The infallible evidences of grace which are laid down in Scripture are of another kind. They are all of a holy and spiritual nature. And therefore things of that kind which a heart that is wholly carnal and corrupt cannot receive or experience, 1 Cor. 2:14. I might also here add that observation and experience, in very many instances, seem to confirm what Scripture and reason teaches in these things.

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