

Satan's Wiles to Accuse and Trouble the Saint (Reading)

by William Gurnall

Satan uses various wiles to accuse and trouble the saint, but the Christian can withstand these attacks by being accurate in their duties, humble before God, and understanding the law of the gospel.

Duration: 53:53

Scripture: Genesis 50:20, Psalm 25:7, Psalm 119:105, Isaiah 43:2, Ephesians 2:8-9, Hebrews 6:4-6, Hebrews 10:26

Topics: "Spiritual Warfare", "Justification By Faith"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher discusses the importance of holding on to the receipts of God's forgiveness for our sins. He emphasizes that there are special moments, like jubilee festivals, when God's mercy and grace are more readily available to believers. However, when these moments pass and Satan tries to make us forget the testimony of God's grace, it is crucial to renew our repentance and keep our spiritual standing intact. The preacher also encourages studying the grand gospel truth of justification before God, understanding its causes and the privileges that flow from it. Overall, the sermon emphasizes the need for believers to be vigilant, circumspect, and rooted in the truth of God's forgiveness and justification.

Transcript

From the book *The Christian Incomplete Armor* by the Puritan William Gurnall *Satan's Wiles to Accuse and Trouble the Saint* A main design in which Satan appears such a subtle enemy is a troubler and an accuser for sin, molesting the saint's peace and disquieting the saint's spirit. As the Holy Spirit's work is not only to be a sanctifier, but also a comforter, whose fruits are righteousness and peace, so the evil spirit Satan is both a seducer unto sin and an accuser for sin, a tempter and a troubler, and indeed in the same order. As the Holy Ghost is first a sanctifier and then a comforter, so Satan is first a tempter then a troubler.

Joseph's mischief first tries to draw him to gratify her lust, but that string breaking, she has another to trounce him and charge him, and for a plea she has his coat to cover her malice. Nor is it hard for Satan to pick some hole in the saint's coat when he walks most circumspectly. The proper seat of sin is a will of comfort, the conscience.

Satan has not absolute knowledge of or power over these, they being locked up from any other hand but God, and therefore what he does, either in defiling temptations or disquieting, is by Wiles more than by

open force. And he is not inferior in troubling to himself in tempting. Satan has as a serpent a way by himself.

Other beasts have their motion direct, right on. But the serpent goes askew, as we say, winding and writhing his body, so that when you see a serpent creeping along, you can hardly discern which way it tends. Thus Satan in his vexing temptations hath many intricate policies.

Turning this way and that way, the better to conceal his design from the saint, which will appear in these following methods. First, he vexes the Christian by laying his brats at the saint's door, and charging him with that which is his own creature. And here he has such a notable art, that many dear saints of God are woefully hampered and dejected, as if they were the vilest blasphemers and various atheists in the world, whereas indeed the cop is of his own putting into the sack.

But so slyly is it conveyed into the saint's bosom, that the Christian, though amazed and frightened at the sight of them, yet being jealous of his own heart, and unacquainted with Satan's tricks of this kind, cannot conceive how such motions should come there, if not bred in and vomited out by his own naughty heart. So he bears the blame of the sin himself, because he cannot find the right father. Mourning is one that is forlorn and cast off by God, or else, saith he, I should never have such vermin of hell creeping in my bosom.

And here Satan has the end he proposes, for he is not so silly as to hope he should have welcome with such a horrid crew of blasphemous and atheistical thoughts in that soul, where he has been denied when he came in an enticing way. No, but his design is by way of revenge, because the soul will not prostitute itself to his lust, otherwise, therefore, to haunt it and scare it with those imps of blasphemy. So he served Luther, to whom he appeared, and when repulsed by him, went away and left a noisome stench behind him in the room.

Thus, when the Christian has worsted Satan in his more pleasing temptations, being maddened, he belches forth the stench of blasphemous motions to annoy and affright him, that from them the Christian may draw some sad conclusion or other. And, indeed, the Christian's sins lie commonly more in the conclusion which he draws from them, as that he is not a child of God, than in the motions themselves. All the counsel, therefore, I shall give thee in this case, is to do with these motions as you use to serve those vagrants and rogues that come about the country, whom though you cannot keep them from passing through your towns, yet you look they settle not there, but whip them and send them to their own home.

Thus give these motions the law in mourning for them, resisting of them, and they shall not be your charge. Yea, it is like you shall seldom be troubled with such guests. But if once you come to entertain them and be Satan's nurse to them, then the law of God will cast them upon you.

Second While Another while of Satan as a troubler is in aggravating the saint's sins, against which he hath a notable declamatory faculty, not that he hates a sin, but the saint. Now in this his chief subtlety is so to lay his charge that it may seem to be the act of the Holy Spirit. He knows an arrow out of God's quiver wounds deep, and therefore when he accuses he comes in God's name.

Suppose a child were conscious to himself of displeasing his father, and one that owes him a spite to trouble him, should counterfeit a letter from his father, and cunningly convey it into the son's hand, who receives it as from his father. Therein he charges him with many heavy crimes, disowns him, and threatens he shall never come in his sight, or have any portion from him. And the poor son, conscious to

himself of many undutiful carriages, and not knowing the plot, takes on heavily, and can neither eat nor sleep for grief.

Here is a real trouble begot from a false and imaginary ground. Thus Satan observes how the squares go between God and his children. Such a saint he sees tardy in this duty, faulty in that service.

He knows the Christian is conscious of this, and that the Spirit of God will always show his distaste for these. Both which reasons prompt Satan to draw a charge at length, raking up all the bloody aggravations he can think of, and give it into the saint to sent from God. Thus he taught Job's friends to pick up those infirmities which dropped from him in his distress, and shoot them back in his face, as if indeed they had been sent from God, to declare him a hypocrite, and denounce his wrath for the same.

But how shall we know the false accusation of Satan from the rebukes of God and his Spirit? 1. If they cross any former act or work of the Spirit in your soul, they are Satan's, not the Holy Spirit's. Now you shall observe Satan's scope in accusing the Christian in aggravating a sin as to unsaint him, and persuade him that he is but a hypocrite. O sayest Satan, Now you have shown what you are.

See what a foul spot is on your coat. This is not the spot of a child. Whoever that was a saint committed such a sin after such a sort.

All your comforts and confidence which you have bragged of were false, I warrant you. Thus, you see, Satan at one blow dashes all in pieces. The whole fabric of grace which God has been rearing up many years in the soul must now at one puff of his malicious mouth be blown down.

And all the sweet comforts with which the Holy Spirit has filled up God's love must be defaced with this one blot which Satan draws over the fair copy of the saint's evidence. Well, so, for your comfort, no. If ever the Spirit of God has begun a sanctifying or comforting work, causing you to hope in his mercy, he never is, will, or can be the messenger to bring contrary news to your soul.

His language is not yea and nay, but yea and amen forever. Indeed, when the saint plays a wanton, he can chide, yea, will frown, and tell the soul roundly of his sin as he did David by Nathan. Thou art the man, this thou hast done.

He paints out his sin with such bloody colors as made David's heart melt, as it were, into so many drops of water. But that shall not serve his turn. He tells him what a rod is steeping for him that shall smart to purpose.

One of his own house, no other than his darling son, shall rise up against him. This happens in order that he may the more fully conceive how ill God took the sin of him, a child, a saint, when he shall know what it is to have his beloved child traitorously invade his crown, and unnaturally hunt for his precious life. Yet not a word all this while is heard from Nathan teaching David to unsaint himself, and call in question the work of God in his soul.

No, he had no such commission from God. He was sent to make him mourn for his sin, not from his sin to question his state, which God had so oft put out of doubt. 2. When they asperse the riches of God's grace, and so charge the Christian that withal they reflect upon the good name of God, they are not of the Holy Spirit, but from Satan.

When you find your sins so represented and aggravated to you as exceeding either the mercy of God's nature or the grace of his covenant, this comes from that foul liar. The Holy Spirit is Christ's spokesman to commend him to souls and to woo sinners to embrace the grace of the gospel. And can such words drop from his sacred lips as should break the match and sink Christ's esteem in the thoughts of the creature? You may know where this was mined.

When you hear one commend another for a wise or good man, and at last come in with a butt that dashes all, you will easily think he is no friend to the man, but some sly enemy, that by seeming to commend desires to disgrace some more. Thus, when you find God represented to you as merciful and gracious, but not to such a great sinner as you, to have power and strength, but not able to save you, you may say, Alphonse, Satan, your speech betrays you. THIRD WHILE Another while of Satan lies in cavilling into Christians' duties and performances, by which he puts them to much toil and trouble.

He is at church as soon as you are, Christian, for your heart. Yea, he stands under your closet window and hears what you say to God in secret, all the while studying how he may commence a suit against you from your duty. He is like those that come to sermons to carp and catch at what the preacher says, that they may make him an offender for some word or other misplaced, or like a cunning opponent in the schools, while his adversary is busy in reading his position, he is studying to confute it.

And truly Satan has such an art at this, that he is able to take our duties in pieces, and so disfigure them that they shall appear formal, though never so zealous, hypocritical, though enriched with much sincerity. When you have done your duty, Christian, then stands at this office to rabble out your work. There he will say, You played the hypocrite, zealous, but serving yourself.

Here wandering, there nodding, a little further puffed up with pride. And what wages can you hope for at God's hands, now that you have spoiled his work and cut it all out into chips? Thus he makes many poor souls lead a weary life, nothing they do but he has a fling at, that they know not whether it be best to pray or not, to hear or not. And when they have prayed and heard, whether it be to any purpose or not, thus their souls hang in doubt, and their days pass in sorrow, while their enemy stands in a corner and laughs at the cheat he has put upon them, as one who by putting a counterfeit spider into the dish, makes those that sit at table either out of conceit with the meat, that they dare not eat, or afraid of themselves if they have eaten, lest they should be poisoned with their meat.

Question But you will say, what will you have us to do in this case, to withstand the cavils of Satan in reference to our duties? Answer No. 1 Let us make thee more accurate in all you do. It is the very end God aims at, in suffering Satan thus to watch you, that you his children might be more circumspect, because you have one who overlooks you, that will be sure to tell tales of you to God, and accuse you to your own self.

Does it not behoove thee to write your copy fair, when such a critic reads and scans it over? Does it not concern you to know your heart well, to turn over the Scriptures diligently, that you may know the state of your soul, controversy in all the cases of conscience, in which when you have such a subtle opponent to reply to? Answer No. 2 Let it make thee more humble. If Satan can charge you with so much in your best duties, oh, what then can God do? God suffers sometimes the infirmities of his people to be known by the wicked, who are ready to check and frump them for them, for the end of humbling his people.

How much more low should these accusations of Satan, which are in a great part too true, lay us before God? Answer No. 3 Observe the fallacy of Satan's argument, which discovered will help thee to answer

his cavil. The fallacy is double.

First, he will persuade you that your duty and yourself are hypocritical, proud and formal, because something of these sins are to be found in your duty. Now, Christian, learn to distinguish between pride in a duty and a proud duty, hypocrisy in a person and an hypocrite, wine in a man and a man in wine. The best of saints have the stirrings of such corruptions in them and in their services.

These birds will light on an Abraham's sacrifice, but comfort yourself with this, that if you find a party within your bosom pleading for God and entering its protest against these, you and your services are evangelically perfect. God beholds these as the weaknesses of your sickly state here below and pities you as you would do your lame child. How odious is he to us that mocks one for natural defects, a blear eye or a stammering tongue! Such are these in your new nature.

Observable is that in Christ's prayer against Satan, Zechariah 3, 2, the Lord said unto Satan, The Lord rebuke thee. Is not this a bran plucked out of the fire? As if Christ had said, Lord, will you suffer this envious spirit to twitch your poor child with and charge him for those infirmities that cleave to his perfect state? He is but new plucked out of the fire. No wonder there are some sparks unquenched, some corruptions unmortified, some disorders unreformed in his place in Cali.

And what Christ did for Joshua, he does incessantly for all his saints, for apologizing for their infirmities with his Father. 2. His other fallacy is in arguing from the sin that is in our duty to the nonacceptance of them. Will God, saith he, thinkest thou take such broken growths of thy hand? Is he not a holy God? Now hear, Christian, learn to distinguish and answer Satan.

There is a double acceptance. There is an acceptance of a thing by way of payment of a debt. But then there is an acceptance of a thing offered as a token of love and testimony of gratitude.

He that will not accept of broken money or half the sum for payment of a debt, the same man, if his friend sins him so but a bit sixpence, in token of his love, will take it kindly. It is true, Christian, the debt you owe to God must be paid in good and lawful money. But for your comfort, hear, Christ is your paymaster.

Send Satan to him. Bid him bring his charge against Christ, who is ready at God's right hand to clear his accounts and show his discharge for the whole debt. But now your performances and obedience come under another notion as tokens of your love and thankfulness to God, and such as a gracious disposition to your heavenly Father that he accepts your might.

Love refuses nothing that loves sins. It is not the weight or worth of the gift, but the desire of a man is his kindness. Proverbs 19.22 Fourth While A fourth while of Satan, as the troubler, is to draw the saint into depths of despair under a specious pretense of not being humbled enough for sin.

This we find singled out by the apostle for one of the devil's fetches. We are not ignorant, saith he, of his devices. 2 Corinthians 2.11 His Sophistical Reasonings Satan sets much by this light.

No weapon is oftener in his hand. Where is the Christian that has not met him at this door? Here Satan finds the Christian easy to be wrought on, the humors being stirred to his hand, while the Christian of his own accord complains of the hardness of his heart, and is very prone to believe any who comply with his musing thoughts. Yea, thinks everyone flatters him that would persuade him otherwise.

It is easier to dye that soul in two black, which is of a sad color already, than to make such a one take delight some tincture of joy and comfort. Question But how shall I answer the subtle enemy when he thus perplexes my spirit with not being humbled enough for sin? Answer I answer as to the former labored to spy the fallacy of his argument, and his mouth is soon stopped. Argument 1 Satan argues thus, There ought to be a proportion between sin and sorrow, but there is no proportion between your sins and your sorrow, therefore you are not humbled enough.

What a plausible argument is here at first blush. For the major, that there ought to be a proportion between sin and sorrow, this Satan will show you scripture for. Manasseh was a great sinner, and an ordinary sorrow will not serve his turn.

He humbled himself greatly before the Lord. 2 Chronicles 33 12 Now says Satan, Were your sin in the balance with your sorrow? Are you as great a mourner as you have been a sinner? So many years have you waged war against the Almighty, making havoc of his laws, loading his patience till it groaned again, raking in the sides of Christ with your bloody dagger, while you did grieve his spirit and rejected his grace. And do you think a little remorse, like a rolling cloud letting fall a few drops of sorrow, will now be accepted? No, you must deepen sorrow, as you have soaked in sin.

Now to show you the fallacy, we must distinguish of a twofold proportion of sorrow. First, an exact proportion of sorrow to the inherent nature and demerit of sin. And number two, there is a proportion to the law and rule of the gospel.

Now the first is not a thing feasible, because the injury done in the least sin is infinite, because done to an infinite God. And if it could be feasible, yet according to the tenor of the first covenant, it would not be acceptable, because it had no clause to give any hope for an after game by repentance. But the other, which is a gospel sorrow, is indeed repentance unto life, both given by the spirit of the gospel and to be tried by the rule of the gospel.

This is given for your relief. As you see sometimes in the highway, where the waters are too deep for travelers, you have a footbridge or cause, by which they may escape the flood and safely pass on, so that none but such as have not eyes or are drunk will venture to go through the waters, when they may avoid the danger. You are a dead man, if you think, to answer your sin with proportionable sorrow.

You will soon be above your depth and quackle thyself with thine own tears, but never get over the least sin you commit. Go not on, therefore, as you love your life, but turn aside to this gospel path, and you will escape this danger. O you tempted souls, when Satan says you are not humbled enough, see where you may be relieved.

I am a Roman, says Paul. I appeal to Caesar. I am a Christian.

Say, I appeal to Christ's law. And what is the law of the gospel concerning this? Heart sorrow is gospel sorrow. They were pricked in their heart, Acts 2.37. And Peter, like an honest surgeon, will not keep these bleeding patients longer in pain with their wounds open, but presently collapse on the healing plaster of the gospel.

Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. Now a prick to the heart is more than a wound to the conscience. The heart is the seat of life.

Sin wounded there lies dying. To do anything from the heart makes it acceptable, Ephesians 6.6 and 2 Corinthians 5.11. Now poor soul, had you sat thus long in the devil's docks, if you had understood this aright? Does your heart clear or condemn you when in secret you are bemoaning your sin before God? If your heart be false, I cannot help you, no, not the gospel itself. But if sincere, you have boldness with God, 1 John 3.21. Argument number two.

A second argument Satan uses is this. He whose sorrow falls short of theirs, that never truly repented, he is not humbled enough. But soul, your sorrow falls short of some that never truly repented.

Well, the first proposition is true, but how will Satan prove his minor? Thus Ahab, he took on for his sin, and went in sackcloth. Judas, he made bitter complaint. O says Satan, did you not know such an one that lay under terror of conscience, walking in a sad, mournful condition so many months, and everyone took him for the greatest convert in the country? And yet he at last fell foul, he improved an apostate.

But you never did feel such smart, past so many weary nights, and days, and morning, and bitter lamentation as he has done. And therefore you fall short of one that fell short of repentance. And truly this is a sad stumbling block to a soul in an hour of temptation, like a ship sunk in the mouth of the harbor, which is more dangerous to others than if it had perished in the open sea.

There is less scandal by the sins of the wicked, who sink, as it were, in the broad sea of profaneness, than in those who are convinced of sin, troubled in conscience, and miscarry so near to the harbor, within sight, as it were, of saving grace. Tempted souls can hardly get over these without dashing. Am I better than such an one that proved not, at last? Now to help thee a little to find out the fallacy of this argument, we must distinguish between the tears that accompany sorrow, and the intrinsical nature of this grace.

The first, which are accessory, may be separated from the other, is a region of the sea, which is caused by the wind, from the sea when the wind is down. From this distinction take two conclusions. Number one, one may fall short of an hypocrite in the tears that sometimes accompany sorrow, and yet have the truth of this grace, which the other with all his tears lacks.

Christians run into many mistakes by judging rather according to that which is accessory than that which is essential to the nature of duties and graces. Sometimes you hear one pray with a moving expression, while you can hardly get out a few broken words in duty, and you are ready to accuse yourself and to admire him as if the guilt of the key made it open the door the better. You see another abound with joy, which you lack, and are ready to conclude his grace more and yours less.

Whereas you may have more real grace, only you lack a light to show you where it lies. Take heed of judging by accessories. Perhaps you have not heard so much of the rattling of the chains of hell, nor in your conscience the outcries of the damned to make your flesh tremble.

But have you not seen that in a bleeding Christ which has made your heart melt and mourn, ye loathe and hate your lust more than the devil himself? Truly, Christian, it is strange to hear a patient complain of his physician when he finds his physic work effectually to the evacuating of his distempered humors and the restoring his health, merely because he was not so sick as some others with the working of it. So you have reason to bless God that the convictions of the Spirit wrought so kindly on you to effect that in you without those tears which have cost others so dear. 2. This is so we can argument that contrarywise, the more the tears are, the less sorrow is for sin while they remain.

They are indeed preparatory, sometimes to sorrow. They go before this grace as austere John before meet Jesus. But as John went down when Christ went up, his increase was John's decrease.

So as truly godly sorrow goes up, these tears go down. As the wind gathers the clouds, but those clouds seldom melt into a set rain until the wind falls that gathered them. So these tears raise the clouds of our sins and our consciences.

But when these sins melt into godly sorrow, this lays a storm presently. Indeed, as the loud winds blow away the rain, so these tears do keep off the soul from this gospel sorrow. While the creature is making an outcry, it is damned, it is damned.

It has taken up so much with the fear of hell that sin, as sin, which is a proper object of godly sorrow, is little looked on or mourned for. 4. A murderer condemned to die is so possessed with the fear of death and thought of the gallows that there lies a slain body. It may be before him unlamented by him.

But when his pardon is brought, then he can bestow his tears freely on his murdered friend. They shall look on him whom they have pierced and mourn. Faith is the eye.

This eye beholding its sin, piercing Christ, and Christ pardoning its sin affects the heart. The heart affected sighs. These inward clouds melt and run from the eye of faith and tears.

And all this is done when there is no tempest of terror upon the spirit, but a sweet serenity of love and peace And therefore, Christian, see how Satan abuses you when he would persuade you you are not humbled enough because your sorrow is not attended with these legal tears. Brief application of Satan's subtlety is a troubler and accuser for sin. Use first.

Is Satan so subtle to trouble the saints' peace? This proves him to be the children of Satan who show the same art and subtlety in vexing the spirits of the saints as doth their infernal father. Not to speak of bloody persecutors who are the devil's slaughter slaves to butcher the saints, but of those who more slightly trouble and molest the saints' peace. Number one.

Such as rake up the saints' old sins which God has forgiven and forgotten merely to grieve their spirits and be spattered their names. These show their devilish malice and deed who can take such pains to travel many years back that they may find a handful of dirt to throw on the saints' face. The Shemite twitted David, Come out, thou bloody man! 1 Samuel 16.7 When you that fear God meet with such reproaches, answer them as Beza did to Papas, who for want of other matter charged him for some wanton poems penned by him in his youth.

These men, says he, grudge me the pardoning mercy of God. Number two. Such as watch for the saints' halting and catch at every infirmity to make them odious and themselves merry.

It is a dreadful curse such bring upon themselves though they little think of it. No less than Amalek's, the remembrance of whose name God threatened to blot from under heaven. Deuteronomy 25.19 Why, what had Amalek done to deserve this? They smote the hindermost, those that were feeble and could not march with the rest.

And was it so great a cruelty to do this? Much more to smite with the edge of a mocking tongue the feeble in grace. Number three. Such who fathered their sins upon the saints.

Thus Ahab calls a prophet the troubler of Israel when it was himself in his father's house. What a grief was it, thank you, to Moses' spirit for the Israelites to lay the blood of those that died in the wilderness at his door. Whereas God knows he was their constant bell when at any time God's hand is up to destroy them.

And this was the charge which the best of God's servants in this crooked generation of ours lies under. We may thank them, says the profane, for all our late miseries in the nation. We were well enough till they would reform us.

Oh, for shame! Blame not the good physic that was administered but the corrupt body of the nation that could not bear it. Number four. Such as will themselves sin merrily to trouble the saint spirit.

Thus Rabshakeh blasphemed and when desired to speak in another language he goes on the more to grieve them. Sometimes he shall have a profane wretch knowing one to be conscientious and cannot brook to hear the name of God taken in vain or the ways of God flouted. Will on purpose fall upon such discourse as shall great his chaste ears and trouble his gracious spirit.

Such a one strikes father and child at one blow. He thinks if not enough to dishonor God except the saint stands by to see and hear the wrong done to his heavenly father. You second.

This may afford manner of admiration and thankfulness to any of you O ye saints who are not at this day under Satan's hatches. Is he so subtle to disquiet and have you any peace in your conscience? To whom are you beholden for that serenity that is on your spirit? To none but your God under whose wing you sit so warm and safe. Is there not combustible matter enough in your conscience for his sparks to kindle? Perhaps you have not committed such bloody sins as others.

Then is not the reason of your peace for the least as big enough to damn much more to trouble you? You have not grossly fallen, it may be, since conversion. That is rare if you be of longstanding, yet the ghosts of thy unregenerate sins might walk in your conscience. You have had many testimonies of God's favor, have you not? Who more than David? Psalm 77.

Yet he was at a loss sometimes learning to spell his evidences as if he could never have read them. The sense of God's love comes and goes with the present taste. He that is in the dark while there sees not the more for former light.

O bless God for that light which shines in at your window. Satan is plotting to undermine your comfort every day. This thief sees your pleasant fruits as they hang and his teeth water at him.

But the wall is too high for him to climb. Your God keeps his serpent out of your paradise. It is not the grace of God in you but the favor of God as a shield about you that defends you from the wicked one.

Use third. Let Satan's subtlety to molest your peace make you, O Christian, more wise and wary. You have not a fool to deal with but one that has wit enough to spill your comfort and spoil your joy if not narrowly watched.

This is a dainty bit he gates for. It is not harder to keep the flies out of your cupboards in summer from tainting your provision than Satan out of your consciences. Many a sweet meal hath he robbed the saints of and sent them supperless to bed.

Take heed, therefore, that he roams not yours away also. Directions tending to entrench and fortify the Christian against the assaults of Satan as a troubler and an accuser. Question.

How shall I stand in a defensive posture, may the Christian say, against these wiles of Satan as a troubler? Answer first. If you wouldst be guarded from him as a troubler, take heed of him as a seducer. The half of Satan's hatchet with which he lies chopping at the root of the Christian's comfort is commonly made of the Christian's wood.

First he tempts to sin and then for it. Satan is but a creature and cannot work without tools. He can indeed make much of a little but not anything of nothing, as we see in his assaulting of Christ, where he troubled himself to little purpose because he came and found nothing in him.

John 14, 30 Though the devil throws a stone, yet it is the mud in us which roils our comforts. It was in vain for the Philistines to fall on Samson till his lock was cut. Take heed, therefore, of yielding to his enticing motions.

These are the stumbling blocks at which he hopes you will break your shins and bruise your conscience, which, once done, let him alone to spin out the cure. Indeed, a saint's flesh heals not so easily as others. Drink not of the devil's waffle.

There is poison in the cup. His wine is a mocker. Look not on it as it sparkles in the temptation.

What you drink down with sweetness you will be sure to bring up again as gall and worm would. Above all sins take heed of presumptuous ones. You are not out of the danger of such.

Sad stories we have of saints' falls and what follows in. Psalm 19, 13 Take him, jailer, says God. Deliver such an one unto Satan.

And if a saint be the prisoner and the devil the keeper, you may guess how he shall be used. Oh, how he will tear and wring your conscience! Though that dreadful ordinance is not used as it should be in the church, yet God's court sits, and if he excommunicate a soul from his presence, he falls presently into Satan's clutches. If through his subtlety you have been overtaken, take heed you are yet not in the devil's quarters.

Shake the viper off your hand, ply you to your surgeon. Green wounds cure best. If you neglect, and the winged get to it, your conscience will soon fester.

Ahab, we read, was wounded in battle and was loath to yield to it. It is said he was held up in his chariot, but he died for it. 1 Kings 22, 35 When a soul has received a wound, committed a sin, Satan labors to bolster him up with flattering hopes, holds him up, as it were, in his chariot against God.

What? Yield for this? Afraid for a little scratch and lose the spoil of your future pleasure for this? Oh, take heed of listening to such counsel. The sooner you yield, the fairer quarter you will have. Every step in this way gets you further from your peace.

A rent garment is cashed by every nail, and the rent made whiter. Renew, therefore, your repentance speedily, whereby this breach may be made up and worse prevented, which else will befall you? Answer 2 Study the grand gospel truth of a soul's justification before God. Acquaint yourself with this in all its causes, the moving cause, the free mercy of God, being justified freely by His grace, the meritorious,

which is the blood of Christ, in the instrumental faith, with all the sweet privileges that flow from it.

Romans 3, 24 An effectual door once opened to let the soul into this truth would not only spoil the pope's market, as Gardner said, but the devil's also. When Satan comes to disquiet the Christian's peace for lack of a right understanding here, he is soon worsted by his enemy. It is a silly rabbit which might escape the dogs in some covert or bureau that is at hand, but trusting to her heels as by the print of her own feet and scent, which she leaves behind, followed, till at last weary and spent she falls into the mouth of them.

In all that a Christian does, there is a print of sinful infirmity, an ascent by which Satan is unable to trace and pursue him over hedge and ditch, this grace and that duty, till the soul not able to stand before the accusation of Satan is ready to fall down in despair at his feet. Whereas here is a hiding place where the enemy dares not come, the clefts of the rock, the hole of the stairs which this truth leads to. When Satan charges you for a sinner, perhaps you interpose your repentance and reformation, but soon are beaten out of those works when you are shown the sinful mixtures that are in them.

Whereas this truth would choke all his bullets that you believe on him who has said, Not unto him that worketh, but unto him that believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is imputed for righteousness. Romans 4 verse 5 Get therefore into this tower of the gospel covenant, and roll this truth, as she that stoned on the head of Abimelech, on the head of Satan. Answer third Be sure, Christian, you keep the plains.

Take heed that Satan quaffed thee not up in some straits where you can neither well fight nor fly. Such a trap the Egyptians hoped they had had the Israelites in when they cried, They are entangled, they are entangled. There are three kinds of straits wherein he labors to entrap the Christian.

Nice questions, obscure scriptures, and dark providences. Number one He labors to puzzle him with nice and scrupulous questions on purpose to retard the work and clog him in his notion that meeting with such intricacies in a Christian course which he cannot easily resolve, by this he may be made either to give over or go on heavily. Therefore we have particular charge not to trouble the weak heads of young converts with doubtful disputations.

Romans 14 verse 1 Sometimes Satan will be asking the soul how it knows its election, and where he finds one not so fully resolved as to dare to own the same, he frames his argument against such an one's closing with Christ in the promise, as if it were presumption to assume that, which is the only portion of the elect, before we know ourselves of that number. Now, Christian, keep the plains in thou art safe. It is plain we are not to make election a ground for our faith, but our faith in calling a medium or argument to prove our election.

Election indeed is first in order of divine acting. God chooses before we believe, yet faith is first in our acting. We must believe before we can know we are elected, yea, by believing we know it.

The husbandman knows it is spring by the sprouting of the grass, though he has no astrology to know the position of the heavens. You may know you are elect, as surely by a work of grace in you, as if you had stood by God's elbow when he wrote your name in the book of life. It had been presumption for David to have thought he should have been king till Samuel anointed him, but then none at all.

When you believe first and close with Christ, then is the Spirit of God sent to anoint you to the kingdom of heaven. This is that holy oil, which is poured upon none but heirs of glory. And it is no presumption to read

what God's gracious purpose was toward you of old, when he prints those his thoughts and makes them legible in your effectual calling.

Here you do not go up to heaven and pry into God's secrets, but heaven comes down to you and reveals them. Again he will ask the Christian what was the time of his conversion. Are you a Christian, will he say, and do you not know when you commenced? Now keep the plains and content yourself with this, that you see the streams of grace, though the time of your conversion be like the head of Nihilus not to be found.

God oft comes but times before gross sins have deflowered the soul and steals into the creature's bosom without much noise. In such a case, Satan does but abuse you when he sends you on this errand. You may know the sun is up, though you did not observe when it rose.

Again, what will become of you, says Satan, if God should bring you into such an affliction or trial, when you must burn or turn, or when all your outward estate shall be rent from you? No meal in your barrel, no money in the purse. Dare you have so good an opinion of yourself as to think that your faith will hold out in such an hour of temptation? If you have but half an eye, Christian, you may see what Satan is driving at. This is an ensnaring question.

By the fear of future troubles he labors to bring you into a neglect of your present duty, and indispose you also for such estate whenever it falls. If a man has much business to do on the morrow, it is his wisdom to discharge his mind thereof, when composing to sleep, lest the thoughts thereof break his rest and make him the more unfit in the morning. The less rest the soul has in God, and his promise concerning future events, the less strength it will find to bear them when the pinch comes.

When you, therefore, are molested with such fears, pacify your heart with the three plain conclusions. 1. Every event is a product of God's providence. Not a sparrow, much less a saint, falls to the ground by poverty, sickness, persecution, and so on, but the hand of God is in it.

2. God is put in caution. He will never leave you, nor forsake you. Hebrews 13.5 He that enables you in one condition will in another.

God loans his servants their whole trade. Grace is a universal principle. At the first moment of your spiritual life, suffering grace was infused as well as praying grace.

3. God is wise to conceal the suckers he intends in the several changes of your life, that so he may draw your heart into an entire dependence on his faithful promise. Thus, to try the metal of Abraham's faith, he let him go on, till his hand was stretched forth and then comes to his rescue. Christ sends his disciples to see, but stays behind himself on a design to try their faith and show his love.

Comfort yourself, therefore, with this, though you don't see God in the way, yet ye shall find him in the end.

2. Satan perplexes the tender consciences of doubting Christians with obscure scriptures, whose sense lies too deep for their weakened, distempered judgments readily to find out. And with these he hampers poor souls exceedingly.

Indeed, as melancholy men delight in melancholy walks, so doubting souls, most frequent such places of Scripture in their musing thoughts, as increase their doubts. How many have I known that have looked so long in those difficult places, Hebrews 6, 4 to 6, Hebrews 10, 26, which pass the understanding as a swift stream be I, so that the sense is not perceived without great observation, till their heads have turned round, and they at last not able to untie the difficulties have fallen down in despairing thoughts and words

of their own condition crying out, O, they have sinned against knowledge of the truth, and therefore no mercy remains for them. Now, if they would have refreshed their understandings by looking off these places, whose engraving is too curious to be long poured on by a weak eye, they might have found that in other Scriptures plainly expressed, which would have enabled them as through a mirror more safely to have viewed these.

Therefore, Christian, keep the plains. You may be sure it is your enemy that gives you such stones to break your teeth, when your condition calls rather for bread and wine. Such Scriptures, I mean, as are most apt to nourish your faith and cure your drooping spirit.

When you meet such plain Scriptures, which speak to your case, go over where it is fordable, and do not venture beyond your depth. Are you afraid because you have sinned since the knowledge of the truth, and that therefore no sacrifice remains for you? See David and Peter's case, how it patterns yours, and is left upon record that their recovery may be a key in your hand to open such places as these. May you not safely conclude from these that this is not their meaning, that none can be saved at sin after knowledge? Indeed, in both those places it is neither meant of the falls of such as ever had true grace, nor of a falling away in some particular acts of sin, but of a total universal falling away from the faith, the doctrine of it as well as seeming practice of it.

Now, if the root of the manner were ever in you, other Scriptures will first comfort you against those particular apostasies into which you have relapsed, by sweet promises inviting such to return, and giving precedence of saints who have had peace spoken to them after such folly, and also they will satisfy you against the other, by giving full security to your faith, that your little grace shall not die, being immortal, though not in its proper essence, because but a creature, yet by covenant, as it is a child of promise. Number 3. Dark Providences. From these Satan disputes against God's love to and grace in a soul, first he got a commission to plunder Job of his temporal estate, and bereave him of his children, and then labors to make him question his spiritual estate and sonship.

His wife would have him entertain hard thoughts of God, say, and curse God, and die, and his friends his hard thoughts of himself as if he were an hypocrite, and both upon the same mistake, as if such an afflicted condition and a gracious state were inconsistent. Now, Christian, keep the plains, and neither from this charge God foolishly for your enemy, nor yourself as his. Read the saddest providence with the comment of the word, and you cannot make such a harsh interpretation.

As God can make a straight line with a crooked stick, be righteous when he uses wicked instruments, so also gracious when he dispenses harsh providences. Joseph kept his love when he spake roughly to his brethren. I do not wonder that the wicked think that they have God's blessing, because they are in the warm sun.

Alas, as they are strangers to God's counsels, void of his spirit and sensual judging of God and of his providence, by the report their present feeling makes of them like little children who think everyone loves them that gives them plums. But it is strange that a saint should be at a loss for his afflicted state when he has a key to decipher God's character. Christian, has not God secretly instructed you by a spirit from the word how to read the shorthand of his providence? Do you not know that the saint's afflictions stand for blessings? Every son whom he loves he corrects, and prosperity in a wicked state, must it not be read a curse? Does not God damn such to be rich, honorable, victorious in this world, as well as to be tormented in another world? God gives them more of these than they seem to desire sometimes, and all to bind them

faster up in a deep sleep of security, as jail serves to Sarah.

He shall have milk, though he ask but water, that she might nail him the sure to the ground. Milk having a property is some right to incline to sleep. Judges 5 25.

Answer 4. Be careful to keep your old receipts which you have had from God for the pardon of your sins. There are some gaudy days and jubilee-like festivals, when God comes forth clothed with the robes of his mercy and holds forth the scepter of his grace more familiarly to his children than ordinary, bearing witness to their faith, sincerity and so on, and then the firmament is clear, not a cloud to be seen to darken the Christian's comfort. Love and joy are the souls repast and pastime while this feast lasts.

Now when God withdraws, and this cheer is taken off, Satan's work is how he may deface and wear off the remembrance of this testimony, which the soul so triumphs in for his spiritual standing, that he may not have it as an evidence when he shall bring about the suit again, and put the soul to produce his writings for his spiritual state, or renounce his claim. It behooves you, therefore, to lay them up safely. Such a testimony may serve to non-suit your accuser many years hence.

One affirmative from God's mouth for your pardon state carries more weight, though of old date, than a thousand negative from Satan's. David's songs of old spring in with a light to a soul in his midnight sorrows. Question.

But what counsel would you give me, says a distressed soul, who cannot fasten on my former comforts, nor dare to vouch for those evidences which once I thought true? I find indeed there have been some treaties of old between God and my soul, some hopes I have had, but these are now so defaced and interlined with backslidings, repentances, and falls again, that now I question all my evidences whether true or counterfeit. What should one in this case do? Answer first. Renew your repentance as if you have never repented.

Put forth fresh acts of faith as if you had never believed. This seriously done will stop Satan's mouth with an unexpected answer. Let him object against your former actions as hypocritical.

What can he say against your present repenting and believing? Which of truth sets you beyond his shot? It will be harder for Satan to disprove the present workings of God's gracious spirit, while the impressions of it are fresh, than to pick a hole in your old deeds and evidences. Acts are transient, and as wicked men look at sins committed many years since as little or none, by reason of that breadth of time which interposes, so the Christian, upon the same account, stands at great disadvantage to take the true aspect of those acts of grace which so long ago passed between God and him, though sometimes even these are of great use. As God can make a sinner possess the sins of his youth as if they were newly acted to his tear in his old age, so God can present the comforts and evidences which of old the saint received with those very thoughts he had then of them, as if they were fresh and new.

Answer second. And therefore, if yet he haunts you with the fears of your spiritual estate, ply you to the throne of grace, and beg a new copy of your old evidence, which you have lost. The original is in the pardon office in heaven, whereof Christ is master, and if you be a saint, your name is upon record in that court.

Make your moan to God, hear that news from heaven, rather than listen to the tales which are brought by your enemy from hell. Did such reason less with Satan, and pray over their fears more to God, they might

sooner be resolved. Can you expect truth from a liar, and comfort from an enemy? Did he ever prophesy well of believers? Was not Job the devil's hypocrite, whom God vouched for a nonsuch in holiness, and proved him so at last? If he knew you were a saint, would he tell you so? If a hypocrite, he would be as loath you should know it.

Turn your back, therefore, on him, and go to your God. Fear not, but sooner or later he will give his hand again to your certificate. But look, you do not rashly pass a censure on yourself, because a satisfactory answer is not presently sent at your desire.

The messenger may stay long, and bring good news at last. Answer third. Shun battle with your enemy, while, until you are in a fitter posture, that you may draw into your trenches, and make an honorable retreat into those fastnesses and strength which Christ has provided for his sick and wounded soldiers.

Now there are two places of advantage into which deserted souls may retire, the name of God, and the absolute promises of the gospel. These I may call the fair havens, which are then chiefly of use, when the storm is so great that the ship cannot live at sea. O says Satan, do you hope to see God? None but the pure in heart shall be blessed with that vision.

Do you think to have comfort? That is a portion of the mourners in spirit. Now, soul, though you cannot say in the hurry of temptation that you are the pure in heart and the mourner in spirit, yet then say you believe God is able to work these in you. Yea, has promised such a mercy to poor sinners.

It is his covenant that he will give a new heart, a clean heart, a soft heart. And here I wait, knowing as there was nothing in the creature to move the great God to make such promises, so there can be nothing in the creature to hinder the Almighty his performance of them where and when he pleases. This act of faith, accompanied with a longing desire after that grace, you cannot yet find, and an attendance on the means, though it will not fully satisfy all your doubts, may be, yet, will keep your head above water, that you despair not, in such a shore you need in this case, or the house falls.

Answer forth. If yet Satan dogs you, call in help. Keep not the devil's counsel.

The very strength of some temptations lies in the concealing of them, and the very revealing of them to some faithful friend, like the opening and pricking of an impostume, gives the soul present ease. Satan knows this too well, and therefore if some thieves, when they come to rob an house, either gag them in it, or hold a pistol to their breast, frightening them with death if they cry or speak, thus Satan, that he may more freely rifle the soul of its peace and comfort, overawes it so, that it dares not disclose his temptation. O says Satan, if your brethren or friends know such a thing by you, they will cast you off.

Others will hoot at you. Thus many a poor soul has been kept long in his pangs by biting them in. You lose, Christian, a double help by keeping the devil's secret, the counsel and prayers of your fellow brethren.

And what an invaluable loss is this. That was a reading from the Christian in Complete Armor by William Gurnall.

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