

Direct. x. 'Set yourselves faithfully to the use of all those holy means, which God hath appointed for the overcoming of your sins; and to that life of holiness, righteousness, love and sobriety, which is contrary to them.' Otherwise your repentance is fraudulent and insufficient: these means and no less than all these, must be used by him, that will make sure of the pardon of his sins from God: and he that thinketh all this too much, must look for pardon some other way, than from the mercy of God, or the grace of Christ: for God's pardon is not to be had upon any other terms, than those of God's appointment. He that will make new conditions of his own, must pardon himself if he can, on those conditions: for God will not be tied to the laws of sinners.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

Cases and Directions about Self-judging.

Tit. 1. Cases of Conscience about Self-judging.

BECAUSE I have said so much of this subject in the third part of my "Saints' Rest," and in a "Treatise of Self-acquaintance," and in my "Directions for Peace of Conscience," and before in this book, I shall be here the briefer in it.

Quest. 1. 'What are the uses and reasons of self-judging, which should move us to it?'

Answ. In the three foresaid Treatises I have opened them at large. In a word, without it, we shall be strangers to ourselves; we can have no well-grounded comfort, no true repentance and humiliation, no just estimation of Christ and grace, no just observance of the motions of God's Spirit, no true application of the promises or threatenings of the Scripture, yea, we shall pervert them all to our own destruction; no true understanding of the providence of God, in prosperity or adversity; no just acquaintance with our duty: a man that knoweth not himself, can know neither God, or any thing aright, nor do any thing aright;

he can neither live reasonably, honestly, safely nor comfortably, nor suffer or die with solid peace.

Quest. 11. 'What should ignorant persons do, whose natural capacity will not reach to so high a work, as to try and judge themselves in matters so sublime?'

Answ. 1. There is no one who hath reason and parts sufficient to love God, and hate sin, and live a holy life, and believe in Christ, but he hath reason and parts sufficient to know (by the use of just means) whether he do these things indeed or not. 2. He that cannot reach assurance, must take up with the lower degrees of comfort, of which I shall speak in the Directions.

Quest. 111. 'How far may a weak Christian take the judgment of others, whether his pastor, or judicious acquaintance, about his justification and sincerity?'

Answ. 1. No man's judgment must be taken as infallible about the sincerity of another; nor must it be so far rested on, as to neglect your fullest search yourself; and for the matter of fact, what you have done, or what is in you, no man can be so well acquainted with it as yourselves. 2. But in judging whether those acts of grace which you describe, be such as God hath promised salvation to, and in directing you in your self-judging, and in conjecturing at your sincerity by your expressions and your lives, a faithful friend or pastor may do that, which may much support you, and relieve you against inordinate doubts and fears, and shew you that your sincerity is very probable. Especially if you are assured that you tell him nothing but the truth yourselves; and if he be one that is acquainted with you and your life, and hath known you in temptations, and one that is skilful in the matters of God and conscience, and one that is truly judicious, experienced and faithful, and is not blassed by interest or affection; and especially when he is not singular in his judgment, but the generality of judicious persons who know you, are of the same mind; in this case you may take much comfort in his judgment of your justification, though it cannot give you any proper certainty, nor is to be absolutely rested in.

Tit. 2. Directions for Self-judging as to our Actions.

Direct. i. 'Let watchfulness over your hearts and lives be your continual work.' Never grow careless or neglectful of yourselves : keep your hearts with all diligence. As an unfaithful servant may deceive you, if you look after him but now and then ; so may a deceitful heart. Let it be continually under your eye.

Object. 'Then I must neglect my calling, and do nothing else.'

Answ. It need not be any hindrance to you at all. As every man that followeth his trade and labour, doth still take heed that he do all things right, and every traveller taketh heed of falling, and he that eateth taketh heed of poisoning or choaking himself, without any hindrance, but to the furtherance of that which he is about : so is it with a Christian about his heart : vigilant heedfulness must never be laid by, whatever you are doing.

Direct. ii. 'Live in the light as much as is possible.' I mean under a judicious, faithful pastor, and amongst understanding, exemplary Christians ; for they will be still acquainting you with what you should be and do ; and your errors will be easily detected, and in the light you are not so like to be deceived.

Direct. iii. 'Discourage not those that would admonish or reprove you, nor neglect their opinion of you.' No, not the railings of an enemy ; for they may tell you that in anger (much more in fidelity) which it may concern you much to hear, and think of, and may give you some light in judging of yourselves.

Direct. iv. 'If you have so happy an opportunity, engage some faithful bosom friend to watch over you, and tell you plainly of all that they see amiss in you.' But deal not so hypocritically as to do this in the general, and then be angry when he performeth his trust, and discourage him by your proud impatience.

Direct. v. 'Put yourselves in another's case, and be impartial.' When you cannot easily see the faults of others, inquire then whether your own be not as visible, if you were as ready to observe and aggravate them. And surely

none more concern you than your own, nor should be so odious and grievous to you; nor are so, if you are truly penitent.

Direct. vi. 'Understand your natural temper and inclination, and suspect those sins which you are naturally most inclined to, and there keep up the strictest watch.'

Direct. vii. 'Understand what temptations your place, and calling, and relations, and company do most subject you to; and there be most suspicious of yourselves.'

Direct. viii. 'Mark yourselves well in the hour of temptation: for then it is that the vices will appear, which before lay covered and unknown.'

Direct. ix. 'Suspect yourselves most heedfully of the most common and most dangerous sins.' Especially unbelief and want of love to God, and a secret preferring of earthly hopes before the hopes of the life to come; and selfishness, and pride, and sensual pleasing of the fleshly appetite and fancy: these are the most common, radical and most mortal, damning sins.

Direct. x. 'Take certain times to call yourselves to a special strict account.' As 1. At your preparation for the Lord's day at the end of every week. 2. In your preparation for the sacrament of Christ's body and blood. 3. And before a day of humiliation. 4. In a time of sickness or other affliction. 5. Yea, every night review the actions of the foregoing day. He that useth to call his conscience seriously to account, is likeliest to keep his accounts in order, and to be ready to give them up to Christ.

Direct. xi. 'Make not light of any sin which you discover in your self-examination.' But humble yourselves for it before the Lord, and be affected according to its importance, both in its guilt and evil signification.

Direct. xii. 'And let the end of all be the renewed exercise of faith and thankfulness, and resolutions for better obedience hereafter.' That you may see more of the need and use of a Saviour, and may thankfully magnify that grace which doth abound where sin abounded; and may walk the more watchfully and holily for the time to come.

Tit. 3. Directions for Self-judging as to our Estates, to know whether we are in a Regenerate and Justified State, or not.

Direct. I. 'If you would so judge of the state of your souls, as not to be deceived, come not to the trial with an over-confident prejudice or conceit of your own condition, either as good or bad.' He that is already so prepossessed as to resolve what to judge before he trieth, doth make his trial but a means to confirm him in his conceit.

Direct. II. 'Let not self-love, partiality, or pride on the one side, or fear on the other side, pervert your judgment in the trial, and hinder you from the discerning of the truth.' Some men cannot see the clearest evidences of their unsanctified hearts, because self-love will give them leave to believe nothing of themselves which is bad or sad. They will believe that which is good and pleasant, be it never so evidently false. As if a thief could be saved from the gallows, by a strong conceit that he is a true man: or the conceit that one is learned, would make him learned. Others through timorousness can believe nothing that is good or comfortable of themselves: like a man on the top of a steeple, who though he know that he standeth fast and safe, yet trembleth when he looketh down and can scarce believe his own understanding. Silence all the objections of an over-timorous mind, and it will doubt and tremble still.

Direct. III. 'Surprise not yourselves on the sudden and unprepared, with the question, whether you are justified or not; but set about it as the most serious business of your life.' A great and difficult question must have a well-studied answer, and not to be answered hastily and rashly. If one should meet you in the street, and demand some great and long account of you, you would desire him to stay, till you review your memorials, or have time to cast it up. Take some appointed time to do this, when you have no intruding thoughts to hinder you, and think not that it must be resolved easily or quickly upon the first inquiry, but by the most sober and judicious consideration, and patient attendance till it be done.

Direct. iv. 'Understand the tenor of the covenant of grace, which is the law that you must judge of your estates by:' for if you mistake that, you will err in the conclusion. He is an unfit judge, who is ignorant of the law.

Direct. v. 'Mistake not the nature of true faith in Christ.' Those that think it is a believing that they are actually pardoned, and shall be saved, do some of them presume or believe it when it is false, and some of them despair, because they cannot believe it. And those that think that faith is such a recumbency on Christ as always quieteth the mind, do think they have no faith, when they have no such quietness: and those that think it is only the resting on the blood of Christ for pardon, do take up with that which is no true faith: but he that knoweth that faith in Christ, is nothing else but Christianity, or consenting to the Christian covenant, may know that he consenteth, even when he findeth much timorousness and trouble, and taketh not up with a deceitful faith.

Direct. vi. 'Remember in your self-judging, that the will is the man, and what you truly would be, that you are, in the sense of the covenant of grace.'

Direct. vii. 'But remember also that your endeavours must prove the truth of your desires, and that idle wishes are not the denominating acts of the will.'

Direct. viii. 'Also your successes must be the proof of the sincerity of your endeavours:' for such striving against sin as endeth in yielding to it, and not in victory, is no proof of the uprightness of your hearts.

Direct. ix. 'Mark what you are in the day of trial:' for at other times it is more easy to be deceived: and record what you then discover in yourself: what a man is in trial, that he is indeed.

Direct. x. 'Especially try yourselves in the great point of forsaking all for Christ, and for the hopes of the fruition of God in glory.' Know once whether God or the creature can do more with you, and whether heaven or earth be dearer to you, and most esteemed, and practically preferred, and then you may judge infallibly of your state.'

Direct. xi. 'Remember that in melancholy and weakness of understanding, you are not fit for the casting up of'

no great accounts ; but must take up with the remembrance of former discoveries, and with the judgment of the judicious, and be patient till a fitter season, before you can expect to see in yourselves the clear evidence of your state.

Direct. xii. 'Neither forget what former discoveries you have made, nor yet wholly rest in them, without renewing your self-examination.' They that have found their sincerity, and think that the next time they are in doubt, they should fetch no comfort from what is past, do deprive themselves of much of the means of their peace. And those that trust all to the former discoveries of their good estate, do proceed upon unsafe and negligent principles ; and will find that such slothful and venturous courses, will not serve turn.

Direct. xiii. 'Judge not of yourselves by that which is unusual and extraordinary with you, but by the tenor and drift of your hearts and lives.' A bad man may seem good in some good mood ; and a good man may seem bad in some extraordinary fall. To judge of a bad man by his best hours, and of a good man by his worst, is the way to be deceived in them both.

Direct. xiv. 'Look not unequally at the good or evil that is in you ; but consider them both impartially as they are.' If you observe all the good only that is in you, and overlook the bad ; or search after nothing but your faults, and overlook your graces ; neither of these ways will bring you to true acquaintance with yourselves.

Direct. xv. 'Look not so much either at what you should be, or at what others are, as to forget what you are yourselves.' Some look so much at the glory of that full perfection which they want, as that their present grace seemeth nothing to them ; like a candle to one that hath been gazing on the sun. And some look so much at the debauchery of the worst, that they think their lesser wickedness to be holiness.

Direct. xvi. 'Suffer not your minds to wander in confusion, when you set yourselves to so great a work : ' but keep it close to the matter in hand, and drive it on till it have come to some satisfaction and conclusion.

Direct. xvii. 'If you are not able by meditation to do

it of yourselves, get the help of some able friend or pastor, and do it in a way of conference with him:’ for conference will hold your own thoughts to their task; and your pastor may guide them, and tell you in what order to proceed, and confute your mistakes, besides confirming you by his judgment of your case.

Direct. xviii. ‘If you cannot have such help at hand, write down the signs by which you judge either well or ill of yourself; and send them to some judicious divine for his judgment and counsel thereupon.’

Direct. xix. ‘Expect not that your assurance should be perfect in this life:’ for till all grace be perfect, that cannot be perfect. Unjust expectations disappointed are the cause of much disquietment.

Direct. xx. ‘Distinguish between the knowledge of your justification, and the comfort of it.’ Many an one may see and be convinced that he is sincere, and yet have little comfort in it, through a sad or distempered state of mind or body, and unpreparedness for joy; or through some expectations of enthusiastic comforts.

Direct. xxi. ‘Exercise grace whenever you would see it:’ idle habits are not perceived. Believe and repent till you feel that you do believe and repent, and love God till you feel that you love him.

Direct. xxii. ‘Labour to increase your grace if you would be sure of it.’ For a little grace is hardly perceived; when strong and great degrees do easily manifest themselves.

Direct. xxiii. ‘Record what sure discoveries you have made of your estate upon the best inquiry, that it may stand you in stead at a time of further need:’ for though it will not warrant you to search no more, it will be very useful to you, in your after-doubtings.

Direct. xxiv. ‘What you cannot do at one time, follow on again and again till you have finished.’ A business of that consequence is not to be laid down through weariness or discouragement. Happy is he that in all his life, hath got assurance of life everlasting.

Direct. xxv. ‘Let all your discoveries lead you up to further duty.’ If you find any cause of doubt, let it quick-

en you to diligence in removing it. If you find sincerity, turn it into joyful thanks to your Regenerator: and stop not in the bare discovery of your present state, as if you had no more to do.

Direct. xxvi. 'Conclude not the worse of the effects of a discovery of your bad condition, than there is cause.' Remember that if you should find that you are unjustified, it followeth not that you must continue so: you search not after your disease or misery as incurable, but as one that hath a sufficient remedy at hand, even brought to your doors, and cometh a begging for your acceptance, and is freely offered and urged on you: and therefore if you find that you are unregenerate, thank God that hath shewed you your case; for if you had not seen it, you had perished in it: and presently give up yourselves to God in Jesus Christ, and then you may boldly judge better of yourselves; it is not for despair, but for recovery that you are called to try and judge. Nay, if you do but find it too hard a question for you, whether you have all this while been sincere or not, turn from it, and resolvedly give up yourselves to God by Christ, and place your hopes in the life to come, and turn from this deceitful world and flesh, and then the case will be plain for the time to come. If you doubt of your former repentance, repent now, and put it out of doubt from this time forward.

Direct. xxvii. 'When you cannot at the present reach assurance, undervalue not a true probability or hope of your sincerity: and still adhere to universal grace, which is the foundation of your special grace and comfort.' I mean, 1. The infinite goodness of God, and his mercifulness to man. 2. The sufficiency of Jesus Christ our Mediator. 3. The universal gift of pardon and salvation, which is conditionally made to all men, in the Gospel. Remember that the Gospel is glad tidings even to those that are unconverted. Rejoice in this universal mercy which is offered you, and that you are not as the devils, shut up in despair: and much more rejoice if you have any probability that you are truly penitent and justified by faith: let this support you till you can see more.

Direct. xxviii. 'Spend much more time in doing your

duty, than in trying your estate.' Be not so much in asking, How shall I know that I shall be saved? as in asking, What shall I do to be saved? Study the duty of this day of your visitation, and set yourselves to it with all your might. Seek first the things that are above, and mortify your fleshly lusts: give up yourselves to a holy, heavenly life, and do all the good that you are able in the world: seek after God as revealed in and by our Redeemer: and in thus doing, 1. Grace will become more notable and discernible. 2. Conscience will be less accusing and condemning, and will more easily believe the reconciledness of God. 3. You may be sure that such labour shall never be lost; and in well-doing you may trust your souls with God. 4. Thus those that are not able in an argumentative way to try their state to any full satisfaction, may get that comfort by feeling and experience, which others get by ratiocination. For the very exercise of love to God and man, and of a heavenly mind and holy life, hath a sensible pleasure in itself, and delighteth the person who is so employed: as if a man were to take the comfort of his learning or wisdom, one way is by the discerning his learning and wisdom, and thence inferring his own felicity: but another way is by exercising that learning and wisdom which he hath, in reading and meditating on some excellent books, and making discoveries of some mysterious excellencies in arts and sciences, which delight him more by the very acting, than a bare conclusion of his own learning in the general, would do. What delight had the inventors of the sea-chart and magnetic attraction, and of printing, and of guns, in their inventions! What pleasure had Galileo in his telescopes, in finding out the inequalities and shady parts of the moon, the Medicean planets, the adjuncts of Saturn, the changes of Venus, the stars of the Milky Way, &c.; even so a serious, holy person, hath more sensible pleasures in the right exercise of faith, and love, and holiness, in prayer and meditation, and converse with God, and with the heavenly hosts, than the bare discerning of sincerity can afford. Therefore though it be a great, important duty to examine ourselves, and judge ourselves before God judge us, and keep close acquaintance with our

own hearts and affairs, yet is it the addition of the daily practice of a heavenly life, which must be our chiefest business and delight. And he that is faithful in them both, shall know by experience the excellencies of Christianity and holiness, and in his way on earth, have both a prospect of heaven, and a foretaste of the everlasting rest and pleasures.

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