

A DISCOURSE OF SELF-EXAMINATION.

Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith ; prove your own selves : know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates ?—2 COR. XIII. 5.

THE apostle having blamed the Corinthians for some enormities among them, and knowing there were some that had not repented of them, comes now to a conclusion of his epistle, and assures them, that if he should come again to them, he would not spare them, but be sharp against them with his ecclesiastical censures. And as for such who had not been guilty of those crimes, yet had mean thoughts of the apostle, and would have some eminent proof of his apostleship, or of Christ speaking in him, ver. 3, he refers himself to them, and makes them the judges of it, whether they had not found the mighty operation of Christ in him. For as though Christ's being crucified evidenced his being subject to the infirmities of man and the penalty of the law, yet his resurrection and his glory is an evidence of the power of God in him and with him ; so though I be weak, yet you yourselves bear arguments in you of the power of God, working in the apostleship, which I have exercised among you, and therefore 'examine your own selves,' and try whether there be not a mighty change wrought in your souls, 'whether you are not in the faith,' and quite other men than you were. If you find not such effects, assure yourselves you are not yet in the state of true Christianity.

Some understand this of Christ being in them in regard of the miraculous gifts, the gifts of miracles, tongues, and healing ; and understand by faith here, a faith of miracles, which was a special gift, and very resplendent in the primitive church. But that doth not seem to be the sense of it, for the possessing such gifts is not a sign of election, nor the want of them a pre-
sage of reprobation, or a testimony of insincerity. Miracles may be wrought by those that have not a justifying and saving faith. Judas had the same commission with the rest of the apostles, at Christ's first sending them out in the time of his life ; and we may well conjecture, that miracles were wrought by him, as well as by his colleagues, in that employment. Besides, it cannot be manifested that those gifts were bestowed upon every member of the primitive church, but only upon some called out by God for that purpose. And if by faith be understood here a faith of miracles, whereby they should try themselves whether Christ was in them, those that had not that gift conferred upon them had no evidence of their being in Christ ; or at

least, had not so illustrious an evidence as the others had, who outstripped the rest of their brethren in those miraculous powers. The gift of miracles was an evidence that Christ was in those instruments, in regard of his power, but true faith only is an evidence that Christ is in a man in regard of his grace.

Examine yourselves, Πειράζετε. Tempt yourselves. The word *tempting* is sometimes taken for trying, as when God is said to *tempt* Abraham in commanding him to sacrifice his son, to know or make known to him that he feared God, Gen. xxii. 1, 12.

Prove yourselves, Δοκιμάζετε. Try yourselves as goldsmiths do metals; prove yourselves, that you may know experimentally what is in you. *Δοκιμή* is used for experience, Rom. v. 5.

The phrase speaks diligence in this work, the repetition intimates both diligence and frequency; what is not known in one act, may be known in repeated acts. Self-examination is a duty in all cases, the repetition speaks necessity; it implies also men's natural backwardness to it.

Know you not your own selves. It implies the folly and unreasonableness of the neglect of it, also the possibility and easiness, upon a due and diligent inquiry, to know whether Christ be in us or no.

How that Christ is in you. Whether the power of Christ hath not wrought in you to the transforming your soul.

Unless you be reprobates, Ἀδόκιμοι. The apostle doth not understand by the word reprobates, such as are eternally rejected by God, as reprobates are opposed to the elect. Those that had not Christ in them at that time might have him afterwards, the work of conversion being daily promoted in the church; but *reprobates*, *i.e.* counterfeit, adulterate, not yet purified and refined from your dross, or, unless you are unapproved or void of judgment, or unexperienced in the ways of Christ. And he puts *μὴ τι*, a diminutive term, *unless* you be somewhat and in part sincere. Or it may go further, and the apostle might mean thus: if after the power of Christ, which hath appeared so gloriously among you, you find no strong operation in your own souls towards him, you have reason to suspect that you are not owned by him, that he may give you over to yourselves.

The protestants confirm the doctrine of the possibility of assurance, and a man's knowledge of himself to be in a state of grace from this text, which doctrine the papists impugn.* It is strange that some of the schoolmen, who assert that a man may by the strength of pure naturals love God above all things, yet deny that a man can know that he loves God above all.

In the verse, observe,

1. The duty expressed: *examine yourselves, prove yourselves.*
2. The matter of it: *whether you be in the faith.*
3. The enforcement and motive: *except you are reprobates.*

Doct. Self-examination is a necessary duty, belonging to every one in the church, and requires much diligence in the performing of it.

Hence some observe, that when it is expressed that God created man in his own image,—Gen. i. 27, 'In the image of God created he him,'—the word is *Elohim*, which is a name of God belonging to his judicial acts, which imply trial and examination; in the image of *Elohim* created he him, *i.e.* with a power of self-trial and self-judging. This self-examination is an exact and thorough search into a man's self, an exquisite consideration in what posture he stands to God. The word is the rule, a glass wherein we see God's will; and conscience is the examiner, that is, the glass wherein we see our lives and the motions of our hearts, and which, by the help of the word, doth dissect and open the soul to itself.

* Catharin. in loc.

I shall not prosecute this doctrine fully, only lay down some conclusions.

1. It is a necessary duty, in regard of our comfort. What good doth it do a man to hear that a Christ is sent to redeem, that a ransom is paid, that sin is pardonable, hell avoidable, heaven attainable, upon the conditions of faith, and not know whether he hath so advantageous a grace in him, which only entitles him to such glorious privileges? What comfort in Christ, in his meritorious passion, in his triumphant resurrection and ascension, in his prevalent intercession, unless we know that by faith we are united to him, and consequently have an interest in all the gracious fruits of his different states of humiliation and exaltation? If we can find this grace in our souls, what a joy unspeakable doth result from thence? Christ as a king will protect my soul, Christ as a priest hath expiated my sins, Christ as a prophet will remove my ignorance; my soul was in his mind upon the cross, my concerns are in his breast in heaven, my name is enrolled in the register of his subjects.

It is necessary,

(1.) Because there are common graces. As there is an outward and inward call, so there is an outward profession and an inward transformation. There are some virtues come from the hand of God as creator, and some immediately from the Spirit as a renewer; some common virtues for the preservation of human society, and some special graces for the fabric of an invisible church. There is an acceptance of the law for an outward practice, without an affection to the lawgiver, or an esteem of the spirituality of the law itself. There is a sanctification in opposition to Judaism, or Paganism, or some erroneous opinion; which is common to those that may apostatise, Heb. x. 29. The apostle calls the church of Corinth saints: 1 Cor. i. 2, 'called to be saints;' saints by vocation outwardly, not all saints by a new vocation inwardly.

(2.) Because there are counterfeit graces. There is much false coin in the world, washed pewter and gilded brass; there are sepulchres garnished outwardly, and full of rottenness and stench within; there are many that want not their artifices in religion as well as in common converse. Good things may be imitated when they are not rooted. We have heard of some limners that have represented Christ so to the life as to deceive artists as skillful as themselves. The apostle speaks of 'a dead faith,' James ii. 26, which is like the carcase of a man without life, a faith that deserves no more the name of faith than the carcase doth the title of a man when the enlivening and principal part is fled. There is a 'repentance unto life,' Acts xi. 18, which supposeth a dead repentance, such as Ahab's humiliation, like marble sweating tears in moist and rainy weather without any mollifying of the natural hardness, or Judas his sorrow, raised by the fire in his conscience, not like Peter's, by the spiritual influence of his Master. There is a 'lively hope,' 1 Peter i. 3, which supposeth a dead hope; there is a 'lively stone,' 1 Peter iii. 5, which implies that there are lifeless stones, that are not inwardly fitted and prepared for the spiritual building. The building upon the rock and the sand might have the same beauty, form, and ornaments, but not the same foundation; one was stable and the other tottering. There is a 'repentance towards God,' Acts xx. 21, when the dishonour of God afflicts us, which implies there is a repentance towards ourselves, when the danger of our own persons starts a pretended sorrow for sin. There is a faith that is sound and lasting, a faith that is temporary and perishing, a faith that starts up like a mushroom in a night, and withers at the next scorching temptation. There is a faith common with devils, and a faith proper to Christians; there is a faith of Christ and a faith *in* Christ.

(3.) Because every man is in a state of grace or nature. There is a state

of grace, Rom. v. 1, a state of wrath, Eph. ii. 3. The world is made up of receivers of Christ or rejecters of him, true subjects to God or rebels against him. There are two families, the family of God and the family of the devil. The visible church was not without its distinction. The ark contains unclean as well as clean beasts. There is a Cain in Adam's family, a Ham in Noah's ark, an Ishmael in Abraham's house, and a Judas in our Saviour's retinue; and at the last day the whole world will be distinguished into two only kinds, of sheep and goats. It is necessary therefore to inquire whose we are, whether we belong to the God of heaven or the god of this world; whether we have the renewed image of God, or still retain the old stamp of the devil.

2. It is a duty that requires diligence and care. That which is of infinite consequence in the state of your souls, ought not to be built upon sandy and slight foundations. It is called communing with a man's own heart, Ps. iv. 4, not a slight glance and away; sweeping and looking with a candle, Luke xv. 8, wherewith every cranny and chink is pried into; trying of the reins, which are parts of the body hidden with fat. There must be a careful removing of several things to come at them; a searching for some precious filings of gold in a heap of dust; an employing all the faculties of the soul in a diligent search: Ps. lxxvii. 6, 'My spirit made diligent search.' It is expressed by counting, Ps. cxix. 59, 'I thought on my ways,' חִשְׁבֹתִי; he looked over the acts of his soul one by one. The heart is called the 'inward parts' or depths 'of the belly,' Prov. xx. 7. As the bowels are folded together in many coats and coverings, that they are not easily come to, so the heart of man is full of devices.

(1.) Diligence is requisite, because the work is difficult. It is no easy matter to be acquainted with ourselves. The soul is not well acquainted with its own features, and preserves not the species of itself. 'We behold our faces in a glass, and soon forget what manner of men we are,' James i. 23, 24. As man is apt to know anything but himself, so it is more easy for him to know anything than himself, as the eye sees everything but itself. There must be diligence to discern the rational workings of our soul, to know whether we truly understand such a thing, or really and firmly will such a good. The judgment of man is corrupted, and misrepresents things like a cracked glass.* We can more easily judge of a bodily than of a spiritual disease, because the understanding which should judge of the state of the soul is sickly and ill-affected itself. Our wills also being so changeable, sometimes set on one thing and sometimes flitting to another, the spiritual workings of them are not so readily discernible. This work is done by a reflex act; and reflex acts, in spirituals as well as naturals, are weakest and more languishing, whereas direct acts are more powerful and vigorous. Where grace is small and corruptions many, it must be hard to discern it, as it is for an eye to discern a small needle, especially if in the dust and rubbish. The roots of sin also lie deep, like Achan's wedge of gold in the earth, not easily to be found without good directions. Lust lies in secret corners; there is a deceitfulness of it, subtle evasions, and specious pretences: consideration is requisite to the discerning of them. External acts discover themselves, but the inward acts of the soul, which are the surest evidences, are not discernible without a diligent inspection. The natural inconstancy and levity of our spirits divert us, and the streams of our corruptions cloud and bemit† us, and control our endeavours in self-examination, that we cannot sometimes any more fixedly behold the motions of grace than we can see the beams of the sun in a black and mourning sky.

(2.) Diligence is requisite, because man is naturally unwilling to this

* Preston.

† Qu. 'bemit'?—Ed.

duty. He would live anywhere but with himself, think of anything but himself, delights most in those things which hinder him from a consideration of his own state. Men are more willing to have their minds rove through all the parts of nature than to busy themselves in self-reflection, would read any book or relation rather than the history of their own heart. We are nearest to ourselves physically, and furthest from our own selves morally. Men whose titles are cracked and unsure are loath to have them tried before the judge, and come under the siftings of conscience. Ever since the fall we run counter to God; it is the property of the divine nature first to know himself, and then to know other things; but we are cross, would know any other thing but not ourselves, would read others, and not so much as spell ourselves. We naturally abhor any actions wherein we may be like God, though they are the most proper operations for our souls, and suitable to the nature of them, as reflex acts are. There being in us a contrariety to God and his law, to God and his gospel, there results from thence an unwillingness in us to bring our hearts under the examination of conscience, that power which acts by authority and deputation from God. And when grace doth egg us at any time to the performance of the duty, do not our hearts hang back, and our corruptions check us in it? Satan is no mean instrument in this: he is said to blind the world, that they might not know their state. He hath lost his likeness to God in his primitive happiness, and ever since envies man the recovery of that likeness which is possible to man and impossible to himself, and therefore diverts him from all glances towards it, and endeavours after it, the first step to which is self-reflection.

This unwillingness ariseth,

[1.] From carnal self-love. It is natural to man to think well of himself, and suffer his affections to bemist or bridle his judgment. A biassed person cannot be a just judge. Every man is his own flatterer, and so conceals himself from himself. Very few that are uncomely in body, or deformed in mind, but think themselves as handsome and honest as others. David so loved himself that he saw nothing of his sin, but was fair in his own eyes till Nathan roused him up by telling him, 'Thou art the man.' Every man would be 'right in his own eyes,' Prov. xvi. 2. Every blackamore fancies himself to have a comely colour. This self-love may so far bemist a good man, that he may not believe such an act to be a crime, such an excuse to be a fig leaf, such a mark to be unsound. And this self-love keeps men off from this work, for fear they should behold their own guilt, and their souls be stung with anguish. Men that are bankrupts are loath to cast up their accounts, lest it should appear to them that they are undone. Some are loath to see their ugly faces in a glass. Conscience, awakened by this duty, bites and stings, and men are loath to impair their own ease because they would escape the din of an accuser in their own bosoms; they turn fugitives from their own hearts, and would rather go to hell in a feather bed than to heaven in a fiery chariot. While man seeks nothing more than himself in a sinful way, he conceals himself and flies furthest from himself in a reflexive way.

[2.] From presumption and security. Some walk as securely as if there were no heaven, and it concerned them not; others walk as presumptuously as though they were heirs-apparent unto it, and yet have no title. Many will have a false persuasion of their faith and interest in Christ at the last day, Mat. vii. 22, and cry, 'Lord, Lord!' and the foolish virgins will knock as confidently and expect entrance to the feast as well as the wise, will not believe but they have a title to heaven till Christ himself clap the door upon them, and manifest the contrary. Had they raked in their own souls and

been plain dealers with themselves, they could not but have found themselves in a lost condition. Those that thus presume cannot endure to hear of the differences between hypocrisy and sincerity, how far a castaway may go in religion. This was the reason the pharisees were such enemies to Christ, because he raked in their consciences; they could never come near him, but he brought some indictment against them of hypocrisy. As Tertullian called heretics *lucifugæ scripturarum*, because they would not be cured of their errors, so are such men also afraid to bring their hearts to the test of the word, because they would not be cured of their false presumptions. As Ahab hated Micaiah, so these their own consciences, because they expect to hear that from them which they think evil, and cannot have such a view of themselves in that glass as they desire to have.

(3.) Diligence is requisite, because man is hardly induced to continue in this work. That self-love which makes them unwilling to enter upon it, renders them unfit to make any progress in it. When we do begin it, how quickly do we faint in it! How soon are our first glances upon ourselves turned to a fixedness upon some slighter object! Every man's heart is like an unruly horse, that will be going out of the way if there be not a resolution to check it in its first starts, and bring things to a judicial trial. The heart itself is so light and fluttering, that it wants the stability of grace to fix it in the trial of grace.

(4.) Diligence is requisite, because we are naturally apt to be deceived and to delude ourselves. Our natural blindness and dimness render us liable to mistake, and our deceitful heart may sing a *requiem* to us while we are fools. We have a subtle enemy that lies in wait for us, who can transform himself into an angel of light, and disguise his serpentine hissings to make them appear like the breathings of the Spirit. If Adam in innocence, who had an ability to discern his methods, was deluded by him, much more may we be deceived by him in a state of corruption, when our hearts naturally have his stamp, and are inclined to take his part and join with him in a self-deceit: 'The heart of man is deceitful,' Jer. xvii. 9. It is the great impostor and cheat of the world, the antichrist within us, the deceiver of our souls, as the great antichrist is called the deceiver of the nations. How apt are we to take upon trust what our heart first speaks! James and John could tell Christ that they were able to drink of his cup, and no question they meant as they spake, Mat. xx. 22; but had it come to a trial, they would not have endured to sip of it; and the issue manifested it: they turned their backs upon him, as well as the other disciples. The Israelites, had they tried themselves by their present resolution, Deut. v. 27, 'All that the Lord our God shall speak unto thee we will hear and do it,' might have subscribed themselves as pious as any in the world; they spake no other than they meant. But God had a further inspection into them than they had into themselves: ver. 9, 'Oh that there were such a heart in them that they would fear me, and keep my commandments always!' Natural conscience is often silenced by a pretence and a show, and a man is naturally apt to make his own corrupt judgment, sometimes also his passion, the standard of good and evil, and not only to frame grace according to his own affections, but a god also: Ps. l. 21, 'Thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself.' The apostle intimates it in that signal mark of caution, when he presseth a truth to which natural conscience will subscribe, that 'neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor covetous, nor drunkards, shall inherit the kingdom of God;' 1 Cor. v. 9, 'Be not deceived,' saith he: even in these things men may deceive themselves with false hopes, much more in moral righteousness. Many

boast themselves rich in spirituals when they are really poor; so did Laodicea think herself rich when God gave her another inventory of her estate, that she was 'poor and miserable, and blind and naked,' Rev. iii. 17. There is too much resting in the world upon outward privileges,* and often beggars conceit themselves princes because they dream of sceptres. How many extend their hopes as far as their wishes, and these as far as a fond fancy and imagination!

(5.) Diligence is necessary, because to be deceived in this is the most stinging consideration. To drop into hell when a man takes it for granted that he is in heaven, to dream of a crown on the head when the fetters are upon the feet, will double the anguish. It is better for a rich man to dream that he is a beggar, for when he awakes his fears vanish, than for a beggar to dream that he is rich, for when his dream ends his sorrow begins. The higher the false conceit, the lower do men sink when they fall; the higher men's expectations of heaven are without ground, the more stinging is their loss of it.† To have vain hopes, till God puts us into the scale and weighs us, will be a miserable disappointment. For a man to deceive himself aggravates this; as self-murder is accounted a greater sin than the murder of another, because it is against that charity to ourselves which is the copy and rule of charity to another.

(6.) Diligence is necessary, because many have miscarried for want of it. Thousands that have thought themselves in the suburbs of heaven, have been cast down to the depths of hell. If all should be saved that think they shall be saved, the strait way would be that which leads to hell; for what man is there almost that doth not confidently believe he shall be happy? How many dream they are going to paradise, and when they awake find themselves in the devil's arms!

II. The use.

1. If this be our duty, to examine ourselves, then the knowledge of our state is possible. If we are to examine ourselves, we may then know ourselves. Reflection and knowledge of self is a prerogative of a rational nature. We know that we have souls by the operations of them.‡ We may know that we have grace by the effects of it, if we be diligent; as we may know by the beams of the sun that the sun is risen, if we shut not our eyes. Grace chiefly lies in the will, and it discovers itself in actions. The more raised any being is, the more active it is. The being of a God is known by the effects of his power in the world, and the being of faith is known by the operations of it in the heart and life. Though gold and that which is gilt be like in appearance, yet the true nature of each of them may be discerned by the touchstone. Hypocritical grace is like true grace, but it is not the same. Sincerity may be known. If we cast but a glance upon our hearts in any word or action, we may know whether we mean as we speak or do, or whether we have any by-ends in it. The discerning of habitual sincerity is not so easy as the knowledge of an integrity in a particular act; yet if we keep a due watch over the motions of our hearts and the actions of our lives as they come upon the stage, and consider what their ends are, it will not be so difficult to know ourselves. It is impossible a man's will should steal by him in all the actions it produceth, and a man be ignorant and insensible of it. The spirit and conscience of a man may know such things as are in it, both the habits it hath and particular motives to this or that act: 2 Cor. ii. 11, 'The spirit of a man that is in him knows the things of a man.' If men would be more inward in conversing with their own hearts, they might

* Vaughan, Serm. p. 6, 7

† Miserum est fuisse felicem.

‡ *Cogito ergo sum* is the first principle in the new philosophy.

have an acquaintance with the concerns of their souls, as their sense hath with outward objects. There can be no sufficient reason given why the understanding should not as well know the acts of the soul and will, as the acts of the sense and the motions of the body. We know our particular passions and the exercises of them. There is no man that fears a danger, or loves an amiable object, but he knows his own acts about them, as well as the object of those acts. If a man have faith and love, why should he not be as able to know the acts of faith and love as to know the acts of his particular affections? This is easy, if we did live more with ourselves, and oftener exercise that prerogative of reflection which we have above beasts. It is difficult indeed in regard of our corruption; as the law is said to be weak, not in itself, it was able to answer the end for which God appointed it, and man by the endowments of his creation was able to observe it; but it became weak to make men happy, and man impotent to conform to it, through the flesh, Rom. viii. 3, by the entrance of corruption. It is the same corruption of man which renders this knowledge of himself difficult. He lives too much abroad out of his own soul, and too little within, otherwise there is no doubt but he may know his own will, and the habitual inclination of it.

2. How foolish is the neglect of this duty! How many ramble about the world without acquainting themselves with their own hearts, or considering whether Christ be in them! What advantage can there be in the knowledge of other things, if we know not whether there be any operations of grace in our own souls! How few give themselves the opportunity of a serious retirement! How unreasonable is it to rest satisfied with underground hopes of heaven, to call ourselves citizens of Jerusalem above, and have no copy of our freedom to shew, nor any living witness in us to bear testimony for us! It is against nature to desire to be in any company rather than our own, to endeavour to know everything in the world rather than ourselves, which is the first object of knowledge. Should that reason which God hath given us, more excellent than the nature of beasts, be employed about examining everything but ourselves?

3. Use of exhortation.

It is our highest advantage to know what should become of our souls in eternity. Is it a small thing to be within the verge of the wrath of God? And is not the knowledge of this necessary, if we be in such a case that we may avoid it? Or is it a small thing to be an heir of heaven? Are justification, adoption, acceptance, small privileges; faith, love, repentance, small graces? Is not the knowledge of them necessary, that we may have the comfort of them? May not some convenient space of time be every day spent in this? May I not say, as Christ to his disciples, 'Can you not watch one hour?' Can you not spare one hour for so great and necessary a work? Let us enter therefore into the bosom of our heart, and see whether we have a true faith, such as Abraham's; whether it be such a lively faith that hath freed our souls in part from the mud of our corruptions; whether it be a faith resting upon Christ for salvation, without giving indulgence to the least offence to him? Such a faith that purifies the heart, reforms the life, inflames the soul with a love to God, causing us to rejoice in him, and in any further degree of conformity to him? Whether it engenders in us a serious desire and a suitable endeavour to obey Christ? Such a faith that relies upon his promises without slighting his precepts?

III. I shall, lastly, give you some directions about this duty of self-examination.

1. Acquaint yourselves with those marks that are proper only to a true

Christian. Overlook all those that are common with the hypocrite, such as outward profession, constant attendances, some affections in duties. Let us not judge ourselves by outward acts; a player is not a prince because he acts the part of a prince. But we must judge ourselves by what we are in our retirements, in our hearts. He only is a good man, and doth good, that doth it from a principle of goodness within, and not from fear of laws, or to gain a good opinion in the world. Grace is of that nature, that it cannot possibly have any by-end. As it is the immediate birth of God, so it doth immediately respect God in its actings. In the very nature of it, it aims at God, as to love him, believe in him. The great accusation the devil brings against Job was, that he served not God for nought, that his service was not sincere, that he acted a righteous part for his own ends, and to preserve his worldly prosperity, Job i. 9, 10. But if our ends be right, and our actions in the course of them according to his rule, if our hearts in them respect God's law and his glory, how will the devil's arrows drop down, as shot against a brazen wall! The inward bent and the habitual delight and affection of our hearts, is chiefly to be eyed, whether they are in God or in other things. This was the apostle's way of trial: Rom. vii. 22, 'I delight in the law of God after the inward man;' and what the incitements are to your profession and service, whether they are not bare affections, moveable passions, carnal interests, a good education, a working fancy, &c. Take those marks, which are inconsistent with hypocrisy, 'such as accompany salvation,' Heb. vi. 9, and necessarily infer a truth of grace. Begin at the lowest step of true and sincere grace, inquire not at first into the marks of an high and towering faith, of the eminent degrees of it. This would be to put a giant's suit upon an infant's back, and judge ourselves not men, because the garments fit us not. A small beam will manifest that the sun doth peep out of a cloud; but larger ones, and more spread, evidence that it hath got a full victory. Have a right notion of true grace, and though grace be little, yet you may know it; as if a man hath a true notion of a diamond, though never so small, he can truly say that is a diamond as well as if it were bigger. Though a gracious spirit may not have grace enough to satisfy its desires, yet it may find grace enough to settle its soul. There may be grace enough to give a man an interest in Christ, though there be not a full strength to answer all the obligations of the gospel. Let us examine, first, the *truth* of grace, and afterwards the *height* of grace. A little of the coarsest gold is more valuable than much of the finest brass. See how the habitual frame and inclination of the heart stands. A heart set upon heaven discovers the treasures of the heart to be there. See whether we have David's temper, to 'hate every false way,' or Paul's, to 'have a conscience void of offence towards God' in regard of his service, as well as towards man in regard of his converse; not to neglect anything towards God that conscience tells us is our duty to him. One sound and undeniable mark is better than a thousand disputable ones.

2. Let us make the word of God only our rule in trials. This is the only impartial friend we can stick to, and therefore it ought to be made our main counsellor. The word is the principle whereby grace is wrought, and it is the medium whereby grace is known.* The word is that whereby we must judge of doctrine, 'to the law and to the testimony.' If an angel from heaven speaks any other thing than what God hath delivered, he is not to be heard. It is also the rule whereby we must judge of graces. If conscience speak anything for a man's comfort, that is not according to the word, it is to be silenced; if conscience presents us with anything as a grace,

* Principium essendi et cognoscendi.

that will not hold water before God, it is to be rejected in that case; bring it to the touch-stone to see if it be current coin. As we are to try other men's spirits, so our own, by this rule; it is a part of man's sinful ambition to be his own judge, and so to make his own fancy his rule. The Scripture beam is like a sunbeam, it will discover the most inward, and the most minute, thing, Heb. iv. 12; it will reveal the deceitful contrivances and sophistry of the heart. This word must try us at last, it is to be the rule of the last judgment, to salvation or condemnation; let it be the rule of our self-judgment. It is safe for us to take that rule which God himself will take, and take in good part whatsoever the word saith; if it shew us our evil, let us change our course; if it speak good, let us be thankful to God, and give him the rent-charge and tribute due to him for it.

3. Take not the first dictates of conscience. 'He that trusts his own heart is a fool,' Prov. xxviii. 26, *i. e.* without a diligent inquisition, it is not wisdom to do so, 'but he that walks wisely shall be delivered;' he that makes a strict inquiry into it, shall be delivered from its snares and his own fears. It is a searching, examining, proving our hearts, that is required, not taking them at the first word. There may be gold at the top, and dross at the bottom. We are naturally quick of belief of those things we would have and desire; we should be jealous of these hearts which have so often deceived us, as we are of those who have often broken their word. Whatsoever it speaks, suspend your belief of its sentence, till you have well examined the ground and reasons why it gives in such a report; if it tells you, you are in a good state, that you are penitents, believers, have a choice love to God, an eye fixing on the glory of God as your end, bring it to the test, examine why it saith so. We have here to do with the greatest impostor, and in other things we will not give credit to a cheater. Therefore our searching often in Scripture is joined with trying. We must not only search out our graces, but try whether they be of the right stamp, and have the mark of God upon them. Examination and proof must go together in this act, as they do in the text.

4. In all, implore the assistance of the Spirit of God. Natural conscience is not enough in this case, there must be the influence of the Spirit; it is God's interpreter that can only 'shew unto a man his righteousness,' Job xxxiii. 23. The sun must give light, before the glass can reflect the beams. Grace cannot be discerned, if the Spirit obscure and hide itself. In the night, the beautiful colours in a room are by the darkness, as it were, buried from the sight; but when the sun discharges its beams into the chamber, they are enlivened, and affect our sense. There may be graces in the soul which appear not, if the Spirit withdraws his light; but when he displays himself, they will appear in their true lustre. In all our trials of ourselves, let us beg of God to try us. When David had been ransacking his heart, he would not rest in his own endeavours, but begs of God to open his heart more fully to his knowledge, and bless him with a perfect discovery of it: Ps. cxxxix. 21-23, 'Do not I hate them which hate thee? I hate them with a perfect hatred.' I think, I conclude I do; but lest my conclusions may be wrong, do thou, O God, 'search me and know my heart, try me and know my thoughts,' *i. e.* make my heart and thoughts, and bent of them, visible and fully discernible to me.

5. Let us take heed that, while we examine our graces and find them, our hearts be not carried out to a resting upon them. We may draw some comfort from them, but must check the least inclination of founding our justification upon them. Graces are signs, not causes, of justification. Christ's righteousness only is our wedding-garment, our graces are but as the fringes

of it. Liberty is a sign the malefactor is pardoned, but it is not the cause of his pardon, but the king's merciful grant. God is a jealous God, and is likely there to withdraw his hand, where the glory of his works shall be attributed to anything below him, and his gifts made equal with his Son; and therefore as one saith,* in our trials of ourselves we should do as men with a pair of compasses, fix one foot in the centre while they move the other about the circumference; so let our souls rest in Christ, and hold him with one hand, while with the other we turn over the leaves of our hearts, and be inquisitive after our evidences. Our justification is not by any inherent grace, but our justification is known to us by the grace we find in ourselves.

6. In case we find ourselves not in such a condition as we desire, let us exercise direct acts of faith. Let us not deject ourselves, and make so bad a conclusion as Peter did, and say to Christ, 'Lord, depart from me, for I am a sinful man;' but let us cast ourselves upon the truth and faithfulness of God in the promise of life in Christ. Lay hold on the promise of life, as if you had not laid hold of it before. When comfort is not fetched in by reflex acts, let faith be exercised in direct acts; when there is darkness and no light, 'trusting in the name of the Lord,' and 'staying upon God,' is the proper business of the soul, Isa. l. 10; we should then drink of the waters of life, groan under our sin, and go to a Saviour; 'forget,' as Paul, 'the things that are behind, and press forward to the things which are before,' Philip. iii. 13, 14. We naturally would believe God upon his deed, and trust in him, because we find something wrought in our own souls; God therefore sometimes hides a man's own graces from him, to draw out the soul in acts of faith, which indeed gives the most glory to God. God will be believed upon his word, and God turns it often to the great advantage of the soul, and puts it upon the exercise of faith, when he denies it the comfortable sight of faith. In this case we should make use of such Scriptures which may foment and nourish faith, and put us upon the casting out that filth and mud in our souls which we discerned. When we can find no grace to present Christ with, we should fetch grace from him. A city of refuge is for a malefactor, a physician for the sick, and a Christ for those that groan under the burden of sin; a Christ lifted up and dying, for those that are stung by the serpent.

To conclude. Let us be frequent in this work. Let us not neglect a privilege God hath invested us with above other creatures below us. There is nothing can reflect upon itself, inquire into the nature of its own being, but man; and shall we only resemble the beasts, to see those things which are without us, and not turn our eyes inward, and see what workmanship of God there is in our souls, and what conformity there is between us and our Creator, between us and our Redeemer? Shall we put such an affront upon ourselves, as to banish the noblest part of our souls from its proper operation? A frequent examination of ourselves would ballast our life, keep faith and repentance fresh and vigorous. Let us take heed of a spiritual laziness, and saying, 'There is a lion in the way;' let us remember it is necessary, and though it be difficult, it is not so in itself, but by reason of our averseness to it. The difficulty may be cured by diligence; the necessity of it, and the advantages of it, should both inflame our desires to it, and increase our pains in it. Certainly there can be no more dreadful sign of no grace at all than a neglect of trial whether we have grace or no. If we examine not ourselves, prove not ourselves whether we be in the faith, we are reprobates, *i. e.* unsound, insincere, not in a state of true Christianity.

* Dr Manton.