

SERMON II.

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OF CHRIST CHURCH, OXFORD; AFTERWARDS SENIOR FELLOW OF TRINITY
COLLEGE, DUBLIN.HOW MAY WE EXPERIENCE IN OURSELVES, AND EVIDENCE TO
OTHERS, THAT SERIOUS GODLINESS IS MORE THAN A FANCY?*Be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a
reason of the hope that is in you.*—1 Peter iii. 15.

CHRISTIANITY was no sooner come into the world, than it was assaulted by Satan and his instruments, persecuting believers, and either reproaching their religion as impious, or censuring it as madness, or ridiculing it as folly. The Holy Ghost in the scripture, foreseeing this, not only forewarns them of it, but arms them against it; and, among others of his holy penmen, employs this apostle to fence those saints to whom he wrote against this temptation, and to direct them what to do if it came to be their case.

1. He *encourageth* them under sufferings of all sorts “for righteousness’ sake;” tells them, that so to suffer would be so far from making them miserable, that it would be their happiness: “Happy are ye;” (verse 14;) answerably to what his Master had before told him and the rest of his hearers: “Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you,” &c. (Matt. v. 11.)

2. He *directs* them how to carry themselves,

(1.) When *persecuted*; and that,

(i.) *Negatively*.—Verse 14: “Be not afraid of their terror,” &c. Be not daunted nor affrighted with those fears [which] your enemies would work in you. This passage relates to that of Isaiah viii. 12: “Neither fear ye their fear, nor be afraid;” where the saints are bid not to fear what others were afraid of. But here, with a little variation, they are exhorted not to give way to, or be overcome by, those terrors [which] their adversaries would strike into them.

(ii.) *Positively*.—Verse 15: “Sanctify the Lord God in your hearts.” Fear him more than your persecutors; stand in awe of his power more than their rage; fear him so as not inordinately to fear them; be so afraid of offending him, as not to fear suffering by them. And this advice likewise is agreeable to that [which] our Saviour gives, Matt. x. 28: “Fear not them which kill the body,” &c.: “but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.”

(2.) When *reproached, or scoffed at, or traduced*, by their enemies. If they accuse or mock your religion as impious, or childish, or unreasonable, if they demand a reason of you why you believe or

practise as you do, "be always ready to give" them "an answer;" to give an account of yourselves, and show upon what grounds ye are Christians, and to make it appear that your faith is real, and your obedience reasonable.

Three things only in the words call for a little explication :

1. *What is meant by "hope?"*—Either "hope" here is the same that faith is; (and so it is in divers other places;) and then to give a reason of their hope is to make a confession of their faith; so some take it:* or it may be taken synecdochically, for the whole of their religion; as others.† And indeed, the hope of a Christian being one of the most eminent acts of religion, and seeming withal to the profane and ignorant world one of the most strange things in it, and which was most cavilled against and laughed at, (Acts xvii. 18, 32,) for men to expect a life after death, a glorious resurrection after a dishonourable lying in the grave, and to renounce all worldly enjoyments, and expose themselves to the bitterest sufferings, merely in hope of something they did not see, nor expected to enjoy till after they were dead; it might well be put for the whole of religion, as being so remarkable in it.

2. *What is meant by this ἀπολογία, "answer," they were to give?*—It is elsewhere frequently rendered by "defence;" (Acts xxii. 1; Phil. i. 7, 17;) it is rendered "answer," as here, 1 Cor. ix. 3. You may call it "an apologetical or defensive answer," as relating to their enemies' accusation or charge against them, or examination of them. They might look upon the religion of Christians as an unreasonable thing, and therefore require a reason of their faith and practice; which if they should, the apostle would have them ready to make their defence, and show how good grounds they had for both.

3. *How they were to "be always ready to give an answer."*—It doth not imply that they were bound to do it to every caviller or trifler; but when the glory of God and the honour of the gospel required it, and when their silence might be injurious to the truth, to their own consciences, or their brethren's souls. And so Christian prudence ought to judge of the seasonableness of their making their defence; they were not bound always actually to do it, but to be always actually "ready," whenever God in his providence should call them to it.

Now from what our apostle enjoins these saints to be always ready to do, I infer what all true saints may be able to do, at least what the nature of the thing is capable of; and so the doctrinal inference [which] I deduce from the words, is this :

DOCTRINE.

That true Christians may give a satisfactory account of their Christianity, that it is something both real and reasonable, not folly nor fancy.

In speaking to this truth, two things are to be done:—

I. I shall show, that true believers may give an account of the religion they profess according to the gospel.

* CALVINUS in loc.

† GROTIUS.

II. I shall give directions in answer to the question, *How a believer may be able to experience in himself, and evidence to others, that his religion, that powerful godliness in the practice whereof he lives, is more than a fancy.*

I. *That true believers may give a good account of the religion they profess.*—Most that the carnal world is wont to object against powerful religion in the saints, may be reduced to three heads:—

(I.) Against their *faith*, (in which I include their hope, as of kin to it, and the fruit of it,) it is objected that it is but a *fancy*.

(II.) Against their *obedience*, and close walking with God, and diligence in duty, which is the fruit of their faith, [it is objected] that it is but the *effect of fancy*, and so no better than folly, an unreasonable and groundless niceness and scrupulosity.

(III.) Against their *comforts* and spiritual enjoyments, [it is objected] that they can be no better than their faith and obedience from which they proceed, and are no more than mere *imagination and delusive conceits*. In answer to each of these, I shall, I hope, evidence the contrary to be most true.

(I.) *That the faith of a true believer is something real, and not a fancy.*—By “the faith of a saint,” I understand only that lively and effectual faith which is the instrument or means, (call it as you please,) not only of a saint’s justification, (Rom. v. 1,) but sanctification; (Acts xv. 9;) that which is called “precious faith,” (2 Peter i. 1,) “the faith of God’s elect,” (Titus i. 1,) as being peculiar to them, and the effect of their election; (Acts xiii. 48;) that faith, in a word, which is an apprehending Christ as “the author of eternal salvation,” (Heb. v. 9,) a believing “the record that God hath given of his Son, that eternal life is in him.” (1 John v. 10, 11.) This faith imports in it a respect to Christ as the author of all other spiritual benefits antecedent to eternal life:—*justification*, whereby a believer is entitled to it; *sanctification*, whereby he is prepared for it; *consolation*, by which he is encouraged in seeking it, and supported under the opposition and difficulties he meets with in the way to it. But here I speak of faith especially as respecting eternal salvation, which is one principal act of it, and which includes or supposes the other; and the rather because the belief and expectation of life and immortality after death is that which the unbelieving world looks upon as most strange and unreasonable, and takes all a believer can say of his expecting future things in another world to be but strong fancies of great nothings. There is no act of faith against which the objections of carnal reason are more usually levelled than against this; and if the reality of a Christian’s faith appears in this, it can scarce be denied in others. Now, that this belief of eternal life is something real in a saint’s heart, and not merely a fancy in his brains, might appear more than probable in that it hath been, and still is to be, found in those who are least fanciful, men as serious, as judicious, as rational as any in the world. Though “not many wise men after the flesh are called,” (1 Cor. i. 26,) yet some are; and it cannot reasonably be imagined, that they

who are confessedly grave, and prudent, and discreet, and free from conceits and fancies in all other things, should dote in those only which are of the greatest concernment to them. Especially if we consider that this faith is stirring in them at such times as men use to be least given to fancies; as on the most solemn occasions, under the greatest afflictions, and at the approach of the most terrible of all temporal evils,—death itself. Men are most apt to be taken with fancies and appearances, when they are wholly at ease and flush in the world, and have hope or some prospect of great things in it: then they are apt to fancy things according to their appetites, and fondly to believe that *that* will be, which they desire may be. But when death draws nigh, they have nothing to encourage such imaginations; and then usually their fancies vanish, they come to discover their folly and deceitfulness; they judge quite contrary to what they did before; they then see those things to be real which they counted but fancies, and those things to be but fantastical which they had thought to be real. Now, at such a time as this, the faith of a saint (saving what desertions or temptations may occasion in particular instances) is ordinarily more strong and active. As his judgment of earthly things is more true when he is leaving them, so his apprehension of heavenly is more clear when he draws nigh to them; the approach of death proves an enlivening to his faith; he hath the fairest view of the crown of glory, when his Lord is about to set it on his head. The same thoughts, indeed, he then hath which before he had; only more clear and affecting they are at the last, there being less to interrupt or discompose him. It were hard to say that all the comforts and joys of dying saints and martyrs have been mere delusions and cheats; and yet so they must be, if the apprehensions [which] they have had of heavenly things were but fancies and ravings.

But, to pass this by, it will sufficiently evince the reality of a Christian's faith, if we can make it appear, that *the object* of it is real, *the ground* of it certain, *the actings* of it sensible to himself, and *the effects* of it evident to others. This I shall endeavour to do.

1. As for the *object* of a believer's faith and hope, that good which he believes shall be, and expects after this life, a state of glory for the spirits of just men: *he that shall deny that such a thing is, must not own the name of Christian, when even the light of nature will go so far toward the proving of it.* For,

(1.) That shows us, *that the soul is immortal*, as being of a spiritual nature, and independent on the body in its most proper and noble operations,—the actings of the understanding and will.

(2.) *That there is a reward after this life for them that do well*, no less than, on the contrary, punishment for evil-doers. This the generality of the pagan world, that knew not distinctly wherein that reward did consist, yet have granted the thing; and who is not instructed by his own conscience in the knowledge of it? “The work of the law written in the heart,” (Rom. ii. 15,) and the secret pleasure and satisfaction [which] men take in their own innocence or

good actions, prove a reward on the one hand; as well as the fears and horrors which the consciences of the most sly and secret sinners subject them to, speak the punishment they expect on the other. And if these things were only impressions made upon men's fancies in their tender years, it were strange that all the reason they grow up to exercise, and all the art many obstinate sinners make use of on purpose to obliterate them, and to impress the contrary upon their minds, together with a thousand other species printed on their imaginations by their employments, their pleasures, and all the various occasions and accidents of their lives,—should never be able to rid them of these so unpleasing sentiments.

(3.) Something may be said even from natural reason to prove *this reward to consist in the enjoyment of God*; and so not only to evince the reality of some happiness, but of this in particular, in the other life. For,

(i.) It will scarce be denied but that *the soul of man is capable of enjoying God as its sovereign good*.—That is, of most intensely delighting and entirely acquiescing in him, as a good suitable to the spiritual nature, and sufficient for the vast capacity, of an immortal soul. Some of the Heathen came near this, when they stated man's happiness as consisting in the contemplation of the Highest Being. And indeed the very nature and operations of the soul, and its apprehending spiritual objects, amount to little less than a demonstration of this.

(ii.) *The enjoyment of God is the greatest good any creature can be capable of*.—God is in himself absolutely the greatest good, because an infinite one, and comprehensive of all perfection; and there can be no greater good than to be possessed of him that is the greatest.

(iii.) *The reward and happiness of a holy soul can be nothing less than the greatest good*.—And therefore must needs be the enjoyment of God himself. This appears in that,

First. *Less than the greatest good cannot satisfy man's soul*.—And then, to be sure, cannot make it happy, when its happiness consists in its being fully satisfied. All the riches and pleasures of this world, and delights of sense, can never be to the soul instead of God; because they are unsuitable to its nature, which is spiritual; to its duration, which is immortal; and to those appetites [which] God hath implanted in it. Its very capacity of enjoying God is attended with a secret inclination to it; insomuch that many times, when a man may not have an explicit and distinct knowledge of the good he wants, yet being unsatisfied with what he hath, though never so great, he finds a want of something else; and because he wants it, he desires it, though he know not clearly what it is, to make him happy.

Secondly. *It is most congruous to the wisdom and goodness of God to appoint the greatest good to be the happiness of the noblest of his creatures*.—Not that they deserve it; but because he may be most glorified by it, and because he hath given them a nature capable of it. As he suits the good of other creatures to the capacities he

hath given them, so he doth the good of man. None but angels and men are capable of enjoying or actively glorifying him; and God, having capacitated them for that, suits their good to their capacity. It had not been agreeable to the wisdom of God for man to have had only some inferior good in this life assigned to him as his chief happiness, when he had made him capable of a higher. Thus much hath been said, and more might, even from reason itself, to prove the reality of those things [which] believers look for in the other life. How much might be said from scripture, with respect to which only they are the objects of faith! But this I refer to the next head,—*the ground of a Christian faith.*

2. *That is certain.*—The same things sometimes may both be believed with a divine faith, and known too by natural reason; but then the medium whereby they are known, and the ground whereon they are believed, are very different: the one is some rational argument; the other, the word of God. In the case before us, the being of eternal life (the present object of faith [which] we speak of) may be proved by reason; but then so far it is not the object of faith, but of knowledge. But withal it may be proved by scripture; and so it is the object of faith; and as such I am now to speak of it, and so to show that the ground on which a Christian believes eternal life, is most certain; and that is no other than the word of God, particularly the promise of the gospel. *The scripture, therefore, is the ground of the faith of eternal life,*

(1.) *As it reveals it.*—For that it doth more fully and clearly. Though something a man may know of future happiness by his natural light, as before was said; yet the fairest and most distinct notion [which] he hath of it, is by revelation in the word, that tells us plainly what is that great good in which man's happiness consists, —seeing “God as he is,” and being “like him.” (1 John iii. 2.) “Life and immortality” are “brought to light,” especially by “the gospel;” (2 Tim. i. 10;) not only more distinctly discovered than ever nature could discern them, but than God himself had revealed them in the Old Testament.

(2.) *As it shows the way to it.*—The terms on which it is to be obtained; sets before us eternal life as in Christ. It not only tells us of the thing itself, but shows how man, sinful man, may attain to the enjoyment of it; declares true holiness to be the way in which he is to walk, and Christ the door by which he is to enter.

(3.) *As it secures it upon those terms.*—For so it doth; it is the scope and end of the promise to secure life and glory to those that accept of it upon the terms propounded; the command directs in the way, and the promise makes-over and conveys the blessing: “Believe, and thou shalt be saved.” (Acts xvi. 31; so John iii. 16.) And, Rom. ii. 7: “To them who by patient continuance in well-doing seek for glory and honour and immortality, eternal life” is promised. Now the word and promise of God, not only as revealing life to us and the way to it, but as conveying it, is the ground of our faith and hope. Though without the word we might have some more general knowledge of a

state of happiness in the other world, yet without the word we cannot know the way to it, nor ever attain to an interest in it, nor have so full certainty of the very being of it as by the word we have, the certainty of faith being greater than that of any natural knowledge whatever. We have no ground at all to believe we shall be saved, but what the promise affords us; and that is sufficient ground to build our faith upon; and a better we cannot have than the word of Him that is the Truth itself, and so can neither deceive, nor be deceived: "God, that cannot lie, hath promised eternal life." (Titus i. 2.) Upon the infallibility and veracity of that God in his holy word, the faith of a Christian rests; and a surer foundation for it cannot be imagined, and need not be desired. As the certainty of any assent of the mind to a truth depends upon the strength and firmness of the reason or argument which moves to and procures that assent, and is the cause of it; so likewise the certainty of faith proceeds from the goodness and validity of the authority which is the motive to and reason of our believing, or (which is the same) the ground of it. If we believe a man, that belief is more or less certain according as the person on whose authority our belief is grounded is more or less credible; and so, when we believe God, our faith is such as its foundation is: (the effect imitates the cause:) the foundation of that faith, God's veracity, is the best; and therefore the certainty of our faith is the greatest. If a man be sure that what he believes is the word of God, he may be sure it is most true, and never will fail. And this, no doubt, may be sufficient to satisfy a believer in his own mind, or any one that receives the scripture as the word of God, concerning the reality of the faith he professeth,—that the ground of it is so certain; but if he hath to do with those that believe not the scripture, and so question the foundation of his faith, in that case he may have recourse to all those arguments whereby we are wont to prove the divine authority of the word; and they all confirm the faith of a Christian. And so, the same account a believer may give of the foundation of his faith, as of the divinity of the scripture: if the scripture be the word of God, and that word be true, his faith built upon it is certain.

3. *The actings of a Christian's faith are perceivable by himself.*—Habits which cannot be discerned of themselves when they lie still, yet may be known by their actings: such a habit faith is, which, though it discover not itself or be not perceived when unactive, yet may be discerned in its exercise. When a man actually believes, he may know he believes, reflect upon his own act, as well as, when he hears, or sees, or walks, he may know he doth so, and is not deceived in it. Inward sense hath as much certainty in it as outward, and spiritual sense as natural: if a man, therefore, assent to the truth of God's promise, he may know he assents to it; and if he accept of and close with the good promised, he may know he doth so. Though sometimes temptations may be so strong, and the actings of faith so weak, and the mind so clouded and distracted, that a man may hardly be able to pass a right judgment on those acts, yet it is not always so;

but otherwhiles, when the workings of faith are more strong and vigorous, and a man more clear of temptations, he may do it. In this, therefore, a man may give an account to himself of his faith, that it is real; he may know that he believes the promise of eternal life as really as he believes any ordinary truth proposed to him, and that his believing and resting on God's word is no more a fancy than his believing the word of a man. As for others with whom he hath to do, I know no reason why they should not believe him when he says he believes God's promise, as well as when he says he believes their word; or why one should be a fancy any more than the other.

4. *The effects of a believer's faith are evident to others in a good measure, as well as to himself more fully.*—As he may perceive his faith purifying his heart, taking it off from the world, drawing it nearer to God; so others may see his conversation ordered correspondently to his believing. They may see him shy of sin, diligent in duty, conscientious in his calling, patient in sufferings, charitable to those that need him, meek toward those that offend him, profitable, spiritual, savoury in his converse, just and righteous in his dealings, and, in a word, the main of his course and ways such as is agreeable to the faith he professeth, and the recompence he expects. So that, if the lookers-on cannot be infallibly certain of the reality of his faith, or that such a carriage proceeds from such a faith, yet they may not only have their mouths stopped, that they cannot reasonably object against it; but they may be bound in charity to believe his faith to be true and real, when they see so much in him answerable to it, and what he professeth to be the effect of it. When they see him live like one that expects eternal blessedness, well may they believe that his faith concerning it and hope of it are not feigned. They see him walking strictly, mortifying his flesh, denying himself as to his outward enjoyments and carnal liberties, and generally acting at such a rate as none would do that did not expect eternal life; and what ground can they then have to suspect the faith [which] he pretends to, to be only a conceit or fancy?

(II.) *An account may be given of the practice of a Christian.*—His obedience and holy walking, the strictness and, as the world counts it, singularity of his manners, his universality, diligence, and constancy in the most spiritual and difficult duties, his watchfulness over his words, thoughts, actions, his mortification and self-denial, and whatever it is in a believer's life which the world is most apt to quarrel with, and to look upon as the effect of humour, or fancy, or error. It may be made appear that his practice is reasonable and well-grounded, he hath good cause to do what he doeth. His practice is reasonable,

1. *In respect of God's command.*—For that he hath to allege for the reason of what he doeth in pursuance of the glory he expects in the other world. So long as he doeth nothing in religion but what God commands him, he cannot justly be taxed with folly or unreasonableness; it being the greatest reason to obey God in all things. If, indeed, a man should add to God's word, devise worship out of his

own head, contrive new means for his salvation which God hath not appointed, and so be strict and punctual in things not enjoined; or should he be very exact in ceremonials, insist upon the minutes [minutiæ] of the law, and be more negligent of morals,—the more weighty things of it; he might be well charged with folly for making himself wiser than God, and thinking [that] he better knew how to please him than he doth himself. But let a man walk never so strictly, if it be but according to the strictness of the rule [which] God hath given him, it is no folly in him. If God commands us to “walk circumspectly,” (Eph. v. 15.) to “keep” our hearts, (Prov. iv. 23,) to “deny” ourselves, and “take up our cross,” &c.; (Matt. xvi. 24;) it is reason we should do so, though we had no other reason beside the command. If in civil things the command of superiors in their laws be counted a sufficient warrant for the obedience of subjects, though perhaps it may seem strange to foreigners who have other laws and customs; why should not the law of the Governor of the world be warrant good enough for the greatest holiness and most strict walking, though perhaps carnal men may “think it strange” or unreasonable? (1 Peter iv. 4.)

2. *In respect of their own faith*, which requires such holiness.

(1.) *Serious holiness is most agreeable to the object of their faith, that great good they expect in the future life.*—The holiest practice suits best with the highest hope; it is but reasonable that they that expect to live in heaven, should live answerably while on earth; they that hope to be perfectly holy there, should be as holy as they can here. It ill becomes them to lead sensual lives now, that look for spiritual enjoyments then; to live like beasts, or but like men, that hope hereafter to live with God; and to neglect him at present, whom they hope to enjoy at last.

(2.) *It is serious holiness which must maintain life in a Christian's faith.*—A man can no longer maintain his faith than while his practice is answerable to it: “Faith without works is dead.” (James ii. 26.) Faith hath a respect to commands, as well as promises; or to the condition of the promise, as well as to the mercy promised. Now, the promise being made to holiness as well as faith, (though perhaps in a different respect,) a man cannot have a true faith without holiness; not believe that God will save him, if he walk not in that way in which God hath promised to save him. Though men have not their title to heaven by their holiness, yet they cannot be saved without it. (Heb. xii. 14.) It is the qualification required in all that are saved; and no man can be assured of his salvation, if he be not in some measure qualified and fitted for it. It is certain that holiness is a condition, though not of justification, yet of salvation; and therefore faith, wherever it is in the life and power of it, provokes and stirs a man up to the exercise of holiness, as being the way in which he must, if ever, attain to happiness. Where a promise is conditional, it is presumption to apply it with a neglect of its condition; and in this case the promise doth no further encourage a man's faith, than the command quickens his obedience.

(3.) *Powerful godliness in the practice of it is reasonable in respect of a Christian's peace.*—He can no longer maintain his peace than while he walks in the way of peace, and that is the way of holiness. "There is no peace to the wicked:" (Isai. lvii. 21 :) may we not say, as to the sense of peace, "Nor to saints, neither, so long as they approach to them that are wicked, and live not like saints?" Believers experience in themselves that, when they neglect holiness, they wound their consciences, weaken their faith and hope, lose the sight of their interest in Christ and heaven, expose themselves to God's displeasure and the reproaches of their own hearts, and are many times filled with trouble and bitterness; or, as the prophet, Isai. l. 10, "walk in darkness, and have no light." And is it not then most reasonable for them to take heed of any thing that may break their peace, and to labour so to walk as that they may best secure it? If some single gross sin causes broken bones, and doleful complaints, and lamentable cries in the choicest saints; have they not cause to walk as circumspectly as they can, and keep-up in themselves the exercise of grace, that so they may keep their peace too? And so, upon the whole, the most strict and severe obedience of a Christian is far from unreasonable, when God's command warrants it, his own faith calls for it, and he cannot enjoy his peace without it.

(III.) *That a believer's comforts are real, not fantastical or delusive.*—I deny not but the delusions of Satan, especially transforming himself into an angel of light, or the deceits of men's own hearts, may sometimes impose upon them, and pass with them for divine consolations. Thus carnal men, who mistake their state, and apply those promises to themselves which belong only to God's children, may usurp the saints' privileges, as if they had a right to them; and so speak peace to themselves, when God doth not speak peace, and when they "walk in the imagination of their own hearts." (Deut. xxix. 19.) But it follows not that no comforts are true, because some are false; or that the comforts of the saints are not real, because those of hypocrites are but imaginary. We may say, therefore, that the comforts of religion are then real,

1. *When they are wrought only in souls capable of them.*—Such as have faith and holiness already wrought in them, are real saints, persons justified and sanctified; for others, carnal men, unbelievers, whatever they profess, whatever show they make, are not yet capable of gospel-consolations, as not having a right to any gospel-promise or privilege from whence such comforts are wont to flow.

2. *When they are wrought in a regular way, by the Spirit as the principal efficient, and the word as the instrument.*—When the Holy Spirit applies the promise to those to whom it belongs, and thereby comforts them. They that are qualified according to the scripture, experience the comfort of the scripture; the Spirit speaks in their hearts what he speaks in the word, and conscience says but the same [that] the scripture says. Now the comforts [which] believers pretend to may, for method's sake, be reduced to two sorts; the truth and reality of both which we shall labour to evince.

(1.) *Such as proceed from the direct acts of grace.*—By this sort, I understand nothing else but that inward delight and pleasure which usually accompanies the exercise of any grace, or gracious performance of any duty, and is in a manner intrinsic to it. And the reality of this is confirmed by the experience of all the saints: who of them doth not find a secret sweetness, delight, and satisfaction in the exercise of faith on Christ, love to God, and holiness? Nay, “sorrow for sin,” mortification, self-denial, “have something of pleasure in them.”* There is, I dare say, more pleasure in a kindly melting of the heart for sin, (where the sorrow is not merely legal, but evangelical, and mingled with love,) than there is in the commission of it; more in denying a man’s self as to any unlawful appetite, than in gratifying himself; in resisting a temptation, than in yielding to it; in mortifying a lust, than obeying it: and how much more is there in the exercise of faith and love, &c.? If our natural faculties are delighted with their proper actions about suitable objects, why may not our spiritual too? Are they less capable of pleasure? Or are spiritual operations less congruous to our faculties when renewed and spiritualized, or the objects less suited to them, than natural actions and objects are to our faculties in their mere natural state? If excellent objects and intense operations commonly produce the greatest pleasure in our natural powers when rightly disposed, why may it not be so in spirituals too? What more excellent object than God and Christ? What more noble act is there of a renewed soul, than faith and love? What delight, then, may such a soul take in closing with its chief good in those acts! And so, if a natural man may take pleasure in the contemplation of natural things, why may not a saint in the meditation of heavenly? If one may delight in the exercise of moral virtue, why may not the other in the exercise of grace? If a just, a generous, a valiant act afford some delight to the actor, how much more a holy one? If the excuse or applause of a natural conscience, and its testimony of our well-doing, afford some delight and sweetness; how much more may the approbation of a renewed conscience yield to a renewed soul?

(2.) *Such as proceed from the reflex acts of grace.*—Or men’s reflecting upon and perceiving their own graces; as, suppose, a man’s knowing [that] he believes in Christ, or that he loves God, or hates sin. And this kind of comfort is no other than that which flows from assurance; which, wherever it is in exercise, always brings comfort along with it. Assurance in the act is nothing else but a conclusion drawn by the practical understanding of a renewed soul, through the assistance of the Holy Spirit, from two premisses; whereof *the major* is of faith, the very language of the scripture, usually some gospel-promise: for instance: “Whoever believes in Christ shall have eternal life:” (John iii. 16:) *the minor* is the language of spiritual sense: “I believe in Christ:” *the conclusion* from both is: “Therefore I shall have eternal life;” which, following the major proposition, which is of faith, and therefore invident, and consequently in a

* *Res jucunda est respicientia.*—LUTHERUS.

logical sense the weaker, (though theologically more strong, as being more certain,) is itself of faith too, and therefore most certain. No man that believes the scripture will deny the major: and he that shall deny the minor, must deny all spiritual sense, and the reflection of a gracious soul upon its own actions, and so all possibility of assurance in any such way of ratiocination; and then he may well deny the comfort of assurance, when he takes away assurance itself. And therefore there needs no more to prove the reality of this kind of comfort, (which is so strong and satisfactory to the soul of a believer, that he is never at rest in himself till he have attained to it,) than to prove the being of that assurance from whence it proceeds; and all the arguments which evince the one, will infer the other. He that shall grant [that] a man may be sure of heaven, cannot doubt but he may take abundant comfort and satisfaction in being so assured, and that that comfort is no fancy. And so, if a man may certainly know [that] he believes in Christ, loves God above all, truly fears him, is "pure in heart, poor in spirit, hungers and thirsts after righteousness," (Matt. v. 8, 3, 6,) or hath any grace which accompanies salvation in sincerity in him, which is an evidence of his right to and interest in any gospel-promise or privilege thereby conveyed,—it will amount to the same; and the sight and sense of any such evidence cannot but bring the greatest sweetness and refreshment to a gracious heart, and which is as real as the delight he takes in the exercise of any of his natural faculties.

If a man may take much real delight in knowing his interest in a prince here on earth, is it a delusion when he delights in the knowledge of his interest in a Saviour in heaven? If a man be so much pleased with his being the son of a great man, may not a believer be as much pleased with his being a child of God, his being born of him, and adopted by him? If men do ordinarily comfort themselves with the hope of some worldly inheritance [which] they reckon themselves sure of, why may not a saint much more "rejoice in hope of the glory of God," (Rom. v. 2,) triumph in expectation of an "inheritance among the saints in light," (Col. i. 12,) when no man in the world can ever be so sure of obtaining the things of the world as a saint may be of coming to enjoy the things of eternity? The hope and assurance a Christian hath, is according as the promise which is the foundation of it is; but the promise of future blessedness is a better promise than that of any temporal enjoyment, not only because the good promised is better, but because the promise of the one is more peremptory and absolute, when the other is but conditional and limited.

Thus much may suffice to have been spoken to the first general propounded,—*that a true believer may give an account of his Christianity, and such an one as is satisfactory to himself, and ought to be to others*; he may make it appear that *that serious godliness in the practice of which he lives is more than a fancy.*

II. I come to the second general mentioned,—*to give directions, and show, in answer to the case, how we may experience this in ourselves, and evidence it to others.*

There be two parts of the question which must be distinctly spoken to : *how we may experience this in ourselves ;* and then, *how we may evidence it to others.*

(1.) *How may a believer experience in himself, that that serious godliness [which] he lives in the practice of, is more than a fancy ?*

1. *See that your religiousness came into you the right way.*—Was wrought in you by the word of God, the power of which ye have found changing your hearts, and reforming your lives. When men leap into religion they know not how, can give no account to themselves of their conversion or reformation, that the word which is the ordinary means [that] God useth in converting sinners hath had any influence upon them in working such a change, it is suspicious that what they take to be godliness in themselves is not real ; that which is unaccountable is most like to be a fancy. True, a man may not know the just time when God did work grace in his heart, nor the particular word which was the seed of it, or which did first draw the heart to a closing with the promise, and subjecting itself to the terms of the gospel. He may not know when the new man was first quickened in him, not be able to discern distinctly the first vital motions of grace in his soul. Some may have been wrought-on in their education, by which they have been restrained from more gross sins, and influenced to some diligence in religious duties ; and in them the passing from one extreme to the other, from a state of nature to a state of grace, may not be so remarkable, and therefore not so easily discerned. However, a change they find, and that the word hath wrought it, which they have experienced effectual in many things. It hath been the means at one time or other of enlightening their minds, melting their hearts, exciting their affections, directing their ways, and refreshing their spirits. Though they cannot say what truth wrought the first degree of grace, yet they can say, such and such truths have had an influence upon them, and promoted the work, whenever it was wrought ; such a command quickened them to their duty, another brought them off from some evil way, another helped them when they were tempted ; such a promise supported them when burdened, eased them when troubled, or comforted them when cast down : and so, what good they have done, the word hath put them upon it ; what evil they have escaped, *that* hath kept them from it ; what refreshment they have had, *that* hath brought it in. They know they are in their journey to heaven, and that they do not dream that they are so ; because, if they cannot tell which was absolutely the first step they took in the way, yet they are sensible of many stages they have travelled, many removes they have made ; what accidents have befallen them, what difficulties they have met with, what guide they had, what directions were given them. Their journeying agrees with the map of their way ; the word hath been a light to their feet, and a lamp to their paths ; that hath still gone before them, and conducted them in their march, and their steps have been ordered according to it. (Psalm cxix. 105, 133.) They have not taken up a religion at a day's warning, not passed from being profane and worldly to be even

superstitiously strict all upon a sudden, without being able to give a reason of so great a change. Look, therefore, to the way of God's working upon you, and the means he made use of in it; and though you cannot trace the workings of his grace in all the particular steps he hath taken, yet ye may conclude it to be his work, and not your own fancy, because it was wrought in his way, and by his word, which is his usual instrument in it.

2. See to your faith, as to the foundation of it, and the effects of it.—That it be rightly grounded and rightly qualified; built upon the word, and fruitful in good works.

(1.) See to the foundation of it, that it be the word itself, and not your own mistakes about it.—When men misunderstand the scripture, and so believe it, they build on their own errors, not God's truth; and then what they call "faith" is but a fancy, as not being grounded on the word of God, but their own conceits. See, therefore, that ye rightly understand what ye profess to believe, and know the mind of God in the word; and so, indeed, believe what he speaks, not what you imagine. See that your faith respect commands as well as promises, duties as well as privileges, what you are to do, as well as what you are to expect. God joins both together; and if you separate them, you set up a conceit of your own instead of his truth. Take heed of believing promises as absolute, when they are conditional, or when made with some limitations or restrictions, or when they suppose the use of some means prescribed by the command. In such cases men may think they believe, when they do not: there being no right object for their faith, they believe what God never spoke. This fallacy appears, when men apply promises to themselves, but overlook the condition or the command annexed:—as suppose [they] believe they shall be pardoned, though they never desire to be purged; shall find mercy, though they do not forsake sin, contrary to the tenor of the word; (Prov. xxviii. 14;) or that they shall see God, though they do not follow after holiness, contrary to Heb. xii. 14:—and so when they believe one promise, and not another,—the promise of justification, but not of sanctification; when yet there is a connexion between them, and to whom one belongs, the other belongs too. In a word, let your faith take-in its object in the whole latitude, there being the same reason, God's authority, for your believing one truth, as well as another.

(2.) See to the effects and fruits of it.—The reality of it must be proved by the fruits of it: a barren faith is a dead faith; and indeed, if any faith be a fancy, it is the faith of those that live destitute of holiness, and under the dominion of sin, and yet expect eternal salvation; bring forth no "fruit to holiness," and yet hope "the end" will be "everlasting life." Faith will work as long as it lives; and where there is no fruit, you may be sure there is no root; if it act not, it lives not.

3. Therefore look to your obedience too.—Not only that it be, (as in the former,) but that it be right, and such as it should be; that is, regular, universal, spiritual; for otherwise it is not reasonable.

(1.) *Regular*: such as the word of God calls for, and hath its warrant from thence. Whatsoever we do in the things of God, and what we would have looked on as acts of obedience, should be done with a respect to God's commands, and not of our own heads: obedience it is not, if it be not commanded. Men may do many seemingly good things, and place religion in them, and think they please God by them, which yet may be no true acts of obedience to him, because not according to his word. They do but obtrude a worship upon God, and fancy it will please him, because it pleaseth them: whereas, indeed, nothing is acceptable to him, but what is enjoined by him; nothing is duty, but that which hath a warrant from God for the performance of it. Men may abound in will-worship, and come short in obedience; they may do more than is enjoined them, and yet less too; much which will never be reckoned to them, as it was never required of them. You must judge of yourselves not merely by what you do, but by the ground you have for the doing of it; when God's will is the reason of it, and not the precepts of men, nor your own fancies. So much, and no more, you do for God, as you do in obedience to his command.

(2.) *Universal*: both as to the *extensiveness* and *continuance* of it.

(i.) As to its *extensiveness*.—See that you be not “partial in the law;” (Mal. ii. 9;) that you walk with God “in *all* his ordinances,” (Luke i. 6,) “have respect unto *all* his commandments.” (Psalm cxix. 6.) There is the same reason for obedience to one command as well as another,—God's authority, who is the Lawgiver: (James ii. 11;) and therefore, when men choose one duty and overlook others, they do not so much obey the will of God, as gratify their own humours and fancies, pleasing him only so far as they can please themselves too; and this is not reasonable; we never yield him a “reasonable service,” but when it is universal.

(ii.) As to its *continuance* and duration.—If God's command be still the same, and the obligation of it, it is but reasonable that our obedience likewise should be still the same. Constancy and perseverance in serious godliness will greatly confirm and evidence the reasonableness of our practice and reality of our principles. Fancies are usually transient and variable, and so are their effects in men's actions; few live by fancy all their days, but one time or other they find their error. When a Christian's carriage is uniform in the course of his life, and still continues the same in a congruity and suitableness to his principles, it can hardly be imagined that it should be the effect of mere fancy, but must proceed from something in him more fixed and settled.

(3.) *Spiritual*: if the obedience we yield to God be conformable to his nature, who is a Spirit; so far it is reasonable, and that is such as Christ requires; and this [is] the reason [which] he gives for it: “God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.” (John iv. 24.) See, therefore, that the service you do him, be not merely external and carnal, but inward and spiritual.

(i.) *Spiritual in its principle.*—The goodness of your outward actions proceeds especially from within; and you cannot judge rightly of them, but by the principles from which they proceed. Those principles are faith and love. Your work must be the “work of faith,” (1 Thess. i. 3,) your obedience the obedience of faith. (Rom. i. 5.) Faith both in the command and promise must put you upon it: and if your believing both makes you act conformably to them;—the faith of the command presseth you to obedience, and the faith of the promise encourages you in it;—[if] you therefore serve the Lord, because you believe him and trust in him; that service cannot be unreasonable. And so likewise for love. Love to God must set you at work for God: Exod. xx. 6: “Those that love me, and keep my commandments.” If love within command all without; if that make you labour in his service, fear to offend him, strive to please him; if you can not only see your own obedience, but feel your love to God working your hearts to it; you may be sure *that* obedience is reasonable, because its principle is so real. Love felt in your hearts, and breaking out in your lives, cannot be a fancy; and what more reasonable than for him that loves God to do all he can for God?

(ii.) *Spiritual in the end for which ye act.*—See that, whatever you do, you do it for “the glory of God” as the supreme end. (1 Cor. x. 31.) It is most reasonable, that as you do all *from* God, so you should do all *for* him; that he who is the first cause of all you have, should be the ultimate end of all you do: and if you can be content to be abased, that God may be exalted,—to deny yourselves as to your credit and interest and all worldly concerns, purely that God may be honoured,—it is your desire that in all things Christ Jesus may be “magnified in you, whether by life or by death;” (Phil. i. 20;) and so in doing or suffering, that obedience which is not only qualified as before mentioned, but is directed to such an end, is not folly, nor the effect of fancy.

(iii.) *Spiritual in the acts of it.*—Not that all gospel-obedience or worship consists only in the internal acts and workings of the mind: for *external* worship itself may be spiritual worship; and so it is, when rightly performed; that is, when it is accompanied with and proceeds from *internal*. But by “spiritual in its acts,” I mean that which principally consists in the inward acts of faith and love and fear, &c., which is a serving God in our spirits; (Rom. i. 9;) yet *withal* is productive of and manifests itself in an outward behaviour correspondent to those internal workings. See, therefore, that your religion do not consist merely in externals; that you make as much conscience of inward and heart-worship, as outward and bodily; of the actings of faith and love, as of praying and hearing: look as much, at least, to what is within, as to what comes out. Do not rest in the outside of duty, nor satisfy yourselves with what you do, when yet it is without life and warmth: have as much regard to the manner of performing, as to the performance itself; to the motions of your hearts, as to the labour of your lips or postures of your bodies. To conclude this direction: let your work in the whole of your conver-

sation be as much about your hearts, as your lives : (Prov. iv. 23 :) be the same in secret that you are in public ; the same when under God's eye only, that you are in the face of the world. This, I am sure, cannot be said to be foolish and unreasonable, when it is grounded on the greatest reason. God "sees in secret," (Matt. vi. 6,) "looks on the heart," (1 Sam. xvi. 7,) and calls for the heart ; (Prov. xxiii. 26 ;) and therefore it is but reason we should look to them too. It is the seat of sin, the fountain whence it springs ; and therefore must be looked to, that we may prevent the working of it, and mortify the root of it : and it is the seat of grace ; there is no more good in any man, than what is in his heart ; such as that is, such he is. Now if a man's chief work be about his heart, to watch that, to purify that, to suppress the corruptions of it, to reduce it into order, and keep it in order, to bring it into a holy frame, and maintain it in such a frame, when he hath so much reason for it, it cannot be the effect of fancy or a mere pretence.

4. *Let grace influence you in all you do, even in your ordinary civil actions.*—Do all graciously ; do your common work as your duty ; labour in your callings, enjoy your refreshments, visit your friends, make use of your recreations, with a sense of duty and an eye to God ; do all as commanded by him, and with a respect to his glory and your own salvation. In a word : interest God in all, let all be done by his grace as the ruling and directing principle ; and when ye find it so powerful, ye may well believe it to be real.

5. *Labour to outdo all you ever did while in a state of nature.*—Think what have been the highest actions you have ever been put upon, not only by fancy or humour, but by the best reason you then had, by natural conscience, or good education, or legal convictions, or any present impressions from things without ; and then make it your business to outdo them all. Labour so to act, as nothing less than a settled principle of holiness in your hearts could ever make you act. Living in the love of God ; delighting in his ways ; rejoicing in Christ Jesus ; mortifying your beloved lusts, your most secret, or most pleasant, or most creditable, or most profitable, corruptions ; renouncing all trust in your own righteousness, when yet you do your utmost to work righteousness :—are such acts, as nor mere nature, nor any thing in nature, can reach unto ; and for any to say that fancy can put a man upon so acting, is itself the veriest fancy.

6. *Keep an even course of holy walking, in the most different or contrary conditions.*—If you can hold-on in God's ways when most disheartened in them, serve him never the worse for his afflicting you, walk holily when you have least of the comfort of holiness, not only keep to God when the world is against you, but [when] you fear he is himself against you, trust in him when you think he is slaying you, follow him when he withdraws from you ; and, on the other side, not abuse his goodness, not grow wanton with his smiles, not presume upon his encouragements ; if the taste of God's graciousness whet your desires after him, (1 Peter ii. 3,) his comforts do not cloy you, nor dull you, nor make you grow more loose or slack in his ways ; if, when you

rejoice most in God, ye rejoice most in his work, the comfort of your hearts purifies and spiritualizeth your hearts, so that the more ye enjoy of God, the more ye do for him; and so, in a word, all God's dispensations help you forward in his ways; his rods drive you on, his gifts draw you out, and both further your progress in faith and holiness; neither his consolations puff you up, nor his corrections cast you down, so as to abate your affections to him, and care of pleasing him; you can love the Lord and his holiness, and "fear the Lord and his goodness;" (Hosea iii. 5;) love him when he frowns, and fear him when he smiles;—this will certainly speak the reality of that holy principle which is in you; nothing not real could ever have so real, so great effects upon you.

7. *Be much in the exercise of those graces which have least affinity with your natures, least footing in them, and in mortifying those corruptions which your natures are most inclined to.*—And that will evidence a real change in you and a real principle. Some graces may be further off from your natural tempers than others; be more in the exercise of them: and some corruptions may be more agreeable to them; so, in some, pride is; in others, anger; in others, fear; be sure, exercise yourselves especially to beat them down; go contrary to the stream and current of your own inclinations. It must be something more than a fancy, that can either outdo the best of nature, or mend its worst. Men's fancies usually have some foundation in their tempers and dispositions; and therefore, as their tempers are various, so are their fancies too; some carry them one way, some another; but for the most part it is for the promoting or gratifying [of] some natural inclination: and then that which crosseth such inclinations most, is most like to be something constant and fixed. Fancy will hardly overcome nature in a wrathful man, and make him become meek and gentle; nor make one that is dull and phlegmatic active and zealous; nor a proud person humble, nor a churl liberal: though, where grace meets with a good disposition, it makes the greater show, as, suppose, gracious meekness in one who hath already a natural meekness,—yet the power of grace is especially seen in its influence upon such inclinations in men's natures as are most contrary to it, when it corrects them, regulates them, or makes men act most oppositely to them. And that which thus rectifies the most crooked dispositions, sweetens a harsh nature, moderates a furious one, elevates a dull one, whatever it be, it is more than a fancy.

8. *Labour to act to such a height of holiness, and walk so closely with God, that ye may have some sensible communion with him in duties and ordinances.*—That you may see his power and his glory in his sanctuary, (Psalm lxxiii. 2,) may taste his graciousness. (1 Peter ii. 3.) David did taste sweetness in the word; (Psalm xix. 10;) and why may not you? Why may not the spiritual senses of a believer, an enlightened understanding and renewed conscience, take as real pleasure in spiritual objects, as his natural senses may in natural ones? God may beam in his love into your souls, shed it abroad in your hearts, (Rom. v. 5,) make you taste its sweetness and feel its

power, cheering-up your spirits, and filling them with "joy unspeakable and glorious." (1 Peter i. 8.) The Father may come, and the Son come, and manifest themselves to you, and take up their abode with you; (John xiv. 21, 23;) so that you may say, in the joy of your hearts, "This is the Lord; and we have waited for him: this is our God; and he will save us." (Isai. xxv. 9.) And if you experience this in yourselves; in your conversing with God in his ordinances, find something [that] you never found anywhere else, and can scarce express, or make others understand that have not felt the same, like the white stone with the new name, which none knows but he that hath it; (Rev. ii. 17;) you will find God's consolations carry their own evidence along with them, and speak their own reality; they have something divine in them, such a stamp of God upon them, that they will satisfy your hearts as to their being no delusions. And then let scoffers scoff on; they shall never be able to laugh you out of those comforts whereof you find such real effects, in reviving your hearts, enlivening your graces, breaking the snares of worldly temptations, abating the force of your lusts, and adorning even your outward conversations. I dare say, they may as soon persuade you that honey is not sweet, when yet you taste it; snow not white, when yet you see it is, or not cold, when you feel it so; as persuade you, either that these comforts are not real, or *that* holy principle in you which is attended by them, is but fantastical.

To these directions I shall add two general rules, by which you may best judge, if you would pass a right verdict on yourselves, as to your spiritual state.

1. When you would judge of the reality of grace in your hearts, *judge of yourselves by what you are [when] alone in the most secret duties of religion.*—Closet-prayer, meditation, self-examination, &c. What men are when alone, that usually they are for the main. The heart which may be awed or some way swayed when in company with others, is most apt to discover itself then. If ever grace be working at all, it will be at such a time; and if none appear then, it is odds but there is none in the heart. As some corruptions may be most apt to show themselves (such is the secret atheism of men's hearts, and little sense of God's presence) in secret, when men are free from the restraint of fear and shame, and such-like motives, which many times give check to and keep them under in the company of others; so likewise grace may more readily act in secret, where men may use such means, and take such liberty, for the awakening and exciting it, as might not in the presence of others be so convenient; and be rid withal of some temptations which at least in some tempers may prove a hinderance to the more free actings of it. If you would therefore take the just measure of your spiritual stature, and know what in you is real, do it when alone, when retired, when your hearts are most likely to discover themselves fairly, and have least temptations to deceive you, or impose upon you.

2. *Be curious and diligent in observing, not only the inward workings*

of your souls, but the ordinary, settled inclination and main bent of your hearts.—Observe them, therefore, as to what they are in the main, and not only what they are by fits, at some certain times, or when, it may be, under temptations. The heart of a carnal man may seem to be very good under a pang of conscience or fit of conviction, or in relation to some more gross and scandalous sin, which yet in the general is stark naught. Ahab may humble himself and put on sackcloth, when under the apprehensions of threatened judgments; (1 Kings xxi. 27;) Pharaoh may cry, *God mercy*, when under his hand; (Exod. x. 16, 17;) and Herod may do “many things,” when convinced by John Baptist’s ministry: (Mark vi. 20:) and yet still they may continue the same they were. And, on the other side, the heart of a saint may appear very wicked under a temptation; as David’s did in the business of Uriah, and of numbering the people, in both which grace was for the present run down by a lust. And so, many times, passion or carnal fears or distrust may lie uppermost in the saints, when yet there is grace within, and that which at present appears is not the ordinary, settled frame of their hearts; and though, whatever corruption at any time breaks out, you may be sure it is within, yet that may not make a discovery of the habitual temper and disposition of your spirits, nor argue that there is no grace in you. Judge therefore of yourselves by your course and ordinary carriage, and by that you may see what is most prevalent in you; and if you find your souls mainly looking to God, and respecting his ways, and best-pleased when ye keep closest to him, you may be sure there is something more in you than a fancy or humour: you may in some particular “go astray like lost sheep,” and yet “not forget God’s commandments.” (Psalm cxix. 176.)

(II.) The second part of the case is, *How may we evidence to others, that serious godliness in us is more than a fancy?*

In this there seems to be more difficulty than in the former; we may more easily satisfy ourselves concerning our inward workings, and the temper of our own minds, than we can others. We judge of ourselves by our inward actings and principles, of which, by inspecting our own hearts, we have a more immediate knowledge, and therefore are less liable to be deceived in our judgment; but when others have to do with us, they can judge of what is in our hearts only by our outward carriage which is patent to them, and so are liable to more errors in their thoughts about us. Here, therefore, if we cannot give so clear proofs and evident indications of a real principle in us, as may work a full conviction of it in gainsayers and cavillers, so as to force them to an acknowledgment of it, it may be sufficient if we can go so far as to stop their mouths and put them to silence, (1 Peter ii. 15,) that they may not be able reasonably to oppose what yet they are unwilling to grant; and if it amount not to a demonstration which may overpower their reason, and compel it to yield us to be real in our profession, yet [it] may, as before was intimated, lay an obligation upon their charity to believe us to be so. And in this we must especially have respect to that outward carriage of profes-

sors, which may make the best discovery of their inward frame, and is most obvious to the sense and observation of those that are to be satisfied.

1. In general: *Let men see that you live up to the faith you profess.*—That your practice is agreeable to your principles; and then they cannot deny the reality of your faith, when it is so powerful, nor the reasonableness of your practice, when it is so answerable to it. You profess before men to believe there is a God; let them see that you walk as before him, desire to approve yourselves to him, dare not sin against him. You believe a Christ, let your conversations be an imitation of him: “walk as he walked.” (1 John ii. 6.) You believe a future judgment; live as becomes those that would be able to stand in it, and give an account of yourselves to the Judge. Let your carriage be such as not only your own consciences, but your adversaries when they quarrel with you, tell you it ought to be; that is, such as best suits your faith and hope, even in their judgment, as well as your own. What is it [that] makes the profane world question the reality of godliness in God’s people, but because they think they do not live and act as *they* should do *that* believe such weighty truths, and expect such great things, as they profess they do? If, therefore, your conversation be correspondent to your faith, you take away the great cause of their cavilling with you, and slandering your profession.

2. More particularly: *Be as much in acting for God, as speaking for him.*—Not only commend his ways, but walk in them; not only plead his cause verbally, but really, by being, in your proper sphere, active for it. Not only speak well of them that are good, but do good to them. Many will speak for God and good men; but when it comes to doing, there is an end of their goodness; they will not stir a step, not part with a penny: they can say as [those in] James ii. 16: “Be thou filled, and be thou warmed;” and yet “not give them those things which are needful to the body.” They will be religious as far as good words will go, which cost them nothing, but are loath to be at the charges of doing any real good. How many have their tongues tipped with good discourse, whose lives are unfruitful as to good works! See, therefore, that your actions keep pace with your words; that your religion do not consist merely in talking; *that* will be a sign it is either fantastical or hypocritical. When the fruit of it reacheth no further than the tongue, it is odds if the root reach any deeper than the head; but when your religion appears in action, your enemies themselves will confess the reality of it.

3. *Be as diligent in, and make as much conscience of, the duties of the second table,—righteousness and mercy, in their place and order, as those of the first.*—Without this, your religion cannot be real; and then no wonder if men think it *not* real. “Pure religion and undefiled in the sight of God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction,” &c. (James i. 27.) *In the sight of God*—God himself, that searches the hearts, yet having given men such a law as may govern their outward as well as inward man, and

influence them in those things which relate to their neighbour, as well as [those] which relate to himself, doth accordingly look to their outward carriage toward men, as well as the inward respect they bear to him, and so expects the fruits of righteousness in their lives, as well as the root of piety in their hearts. That holy principle [which] he hath put within them is such as extends to their conversation outwardly, and not to the inward frame of their hearts alone; and so the reality of it in itself must be evidenced by the power of it in its effects. Now if these external actings (where opportunities and means are) are requisite to ascertain the truth of godliness in the heart, as to its very being, we may be sure they are no less necessary as indications of it in the sight of men. The world, which is apt to traduce you as hypocritical or fanatical in religion, will be best confuted by your carriage in those things which relate to themselves, and from which some benefit redounds to them. If men see you just, and righteous, and merciful in your dealings with and behaviour toward others, helpful toward them that want you, pitiful to them in their misery, &c.; what is in your hearts and minds they cannot see, but they will be more ready to judge well of it, because they see so good effects of it; what they see, they will think is real, because it is sensible. True, indeed, the first place is due to the moral duties of God's immediate worship, prescribed in the first table; but yet those of the second must accompany them, or you will never be able to prove the reality of your Christianity, or reasonableness of your practice, to yourselves, and much less to others. They must and will judge of what is within, by that which appears without; of what they do not see, (as your faith and inward holiness they do not,) by that which they do see.

4. *Be most diligent in those duties which all own to be duties, whether of the first or second table.*—Those which are confessedly moral, and which your enemies themselves cannot deny to be duties. Some duties have an intrinsic loveliness in them, and “are of good report” even among those themselves that are but carnal. (Phil. iv. 8.) These carry conviction along with them; and if you be diligent in the practice of them, you will have the consciences of your adversaries take part with you, and their judgments to applaud you, when, perhaps, their malice censures you, and their lusts oppose you. You will have something within them to bear testimony to you; and when they do not love you, yet they cannot condemn you.

5. *Labour to outdo and excel others in the world in all those good things in which they excel most.*—Whatever you see praiseworthy in any, though enemies, do it, and outdo them in it. If they be just, do you be more just, either more exactly, or more universally, or more constantly so. If they be temperate and sober, if it be possible, go beyond them in it. If they be charitable, be you more charitable. If they be humble, meek, gentle, courteous, endeavour to excel them in each. If you think that cannot be in some cases, yet it is but in some; and may you not exceed them as to the general course and whole of a moral conversation? Labour, then, to make it appear

that a nobler principle out of which you act, a higher end at which you aim, and a more perfect copy after which you write, can raise and heighten you to a pitch above any thing, not only that fancy might do in you, but natural conscience or moral virtue in them. And though the best and highest of such moral performances in your external conversation might be in themselves but insufficient arguments, as to your own personal satisfaction, of the truth of grace in your hearts; yet your overtopping others in what they excel most, or in the main of your life and practice, may be an argument *ad hominem*, and be a means to silence enemies, and stop their mouths,—it may be, convince their judgments; or if it do not make them acknowledge what you do to proceed from a supernatural principle, it may, however, force them to own it as coming from something more than a conceit or fancy.

6. *Be diligent in those duties the performance of which hath least connexion with a secular interest.*—So Christ commands, Luke vi. 35: “Love ye your enemies, and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again.” Sow good seed, though upon barren ground, and which is like to yield but a poor harvest. “Buy the truth,” and never “sell it,” though you should for the present be losers by it; nay, follow it at the heels, though it should kick out your teeth. They that do good to others only from whom they expect good,—give to them that are likely to give again,—do plainly turn religion into bartery, and may be said to be good traders, but scarcely good Christians. When men appear for religion only when and where it is countenanced, or while there is something to be got by it,—practice in an employment, custom in a trade, or the favour of men, or applause from them; they may well be suspected, if not of fancy, yet of design and hypocrisy. But when men will do duty and keep God’s way, though they get nothing by it but frowns or blows, detriment or danger, it cannot be reasonably imagined but that they have some better thing in their eye which they look for hereafter, and some very powerful principle at present within them, to support them under difficulties, and prompt them to such duties as are, for aught the spectators can discern, both unprofitable and hazardous.

7. *Labour so to carry yourselves in the sight of men, as to let them see that you are as much set upon gaining heaven, as getting or keeping the world.*—Be as active, as busy, and show as much concern for the things of the other life, as the things of this. Scarce any thing is a greater blemish to religion, or disreputation to them that profess it, than their passionate and over-eager pursuit of temporal things, with a coldness and visible indifferency in seeking eternal; when they can rise up early and sit up late, and eat the bread of carefulness, spend their time and strength in labouring for the world; nay, lose the comfort of their lives by scrambling for the things of this life; and in the mean time put God off with some little superficial service, neglect some duties, and hurry over others, let the crowd of business thrust their spiritual work into a corner of their time, if not quite out of it; the world, indeed, justle God and Christ and heaven out of their

discourse and conversation, which savours of nothing but trades and bargains and adventures and getting estates, and tends to nothing but the promoting a mere worldly interest. "Are these men," think their carnal neighbours, "in good earnest for religion, when they are so mad upon their business? Doth their happiness lie in heaven, when their labour is only for the earth? Can their treasure be above, when their hearts are below, and their actings plainly show that they are so? Can their hope of eternal glory be any better than a fancy, who do so little for that glory, and lay out themselves for this world as if there were no other?" And indeed who can judge otherwise of some men, that hears their pretences, and yet sees their practice? And therefore, Christians, think with yourselves, how doth it become you to act, if you would persuade others that you have real designs for future happiness? What would you do, if you did pretend to the hope of some great estate or enjoyment in the world, to convince them that that hope were reasonable and well-grounded? Would you not act at such a rate, as to make them acknowledge you were serious? Would you not make it your great business, to attain your great ends? Do the same in the present case: let men see that your belief of things to come is as real as of present things, by your pursuing them as earnestly, and acting as vigorously for them. Nay, show a greater concernedness for them; and that will be a means to convince men that you believe a greater excellency in them, and that they cannot be obtained upon easier terms.

8. *The more you pretend to the comforts of Christianity, the more mortified let your conversation be to the things of the world and pleasures of sense, and your carriage more apparently holy.*—Let it never be said, that the comforts of the Spirit make you give liberty to the flesh. When men see that the more you pretend to spiritual enjoyments, the more spiritual you are; and the more pleasure you profess to find in God's ways, the more exactly you walk in them, and the less ye dare sin against him; they will have little to say against you. Those comforts cannot but be real which have so great, so good effects; and when men see the effects so real, they cannot judge the cause to be less so. Whimsies and fancies do not use to make men grow in righteousness and humility and meekness and mortification. Let men see the respect you bear to all God's commands, and they will scarce dare to question the comforts you receive from his promises.

9. *Labour to make such advances in the way to heaven, as may not only be sensible to yourselves, but perceivable by others.*—Let your "profiting appear unto all" men. (1 Tim. iv. 15.) Let your "paths be as the shining light," shining forth "more and more." (Prov. iv. 18.) Not only grow in grace and inward holiness, but abound in the fruits of righteousness. A sensibly-thriving religion cannot be thought to be an imaginary one: they that observe the progress you make, will not be able to question the grounds upon which you go. When they see that, as you grow older and wiser, so you grow better, they cannot reasonably imagine that strength of fancy ever raised you

to that height of goodness, but rather suppose that you do more good than you did, because you see more reason for it, and have more lively hopes of being gainers by it.

10. Lastly. *Be sure to persevere and hold on in the faith you profess, and the practice of godliness.* (Heb. x. 23.)—Your constancy may be a special means to evidence your reality, not only to yourselves but others. When men grow weary of God's ways, their courage fails them, their zeal is out of breath, it is a sign their religion was never real: but when they act uniformly, under the most contrary providences, and among all the vicissitudes and changes of human affairs, in conformity to the principles they have all along professed and owned; the shock of temptations [which] they meet with cannot jostle them out of the way of holiness, nor the enticements and courtship of a (sometimes) fawning world wheedle them into a compliance with it; they "hope to the end," (1 Peter i. 13,) are "not weary in well-doing," (Gal. vi. 9,) labour and faint not, (Rev. ii. 3,) bring forth fruit with patience, and persevere to do so, serve God as long as they have their being, live to him as long as they live at all, (Psalm civ. 33,) act by the same rule, aim at the same end, while they live, and when they come to die;—in a word, when opposition from men, temptations from Satan, nay, frowns from God himself, have not discouraged them, nor lessened their love to him, or activeness for him, or diligence in his service, and at last upon reflection they approve of that good course they have now finished, and have the same thoughts of God and holiness [that] they had before; the worst of enemies cannot (but as impudently as unreasonably) charge them with acting out of fancy or humour, or any thing but a fixed and stable principle.

Beside what hath been spoken by way of direction in answer to the question, some further improvement of this doctrine may be made.

USES.

USE I. *By way of information.*—If true Christians may give an account of their Christianity,

1. *They, then, are no true believers, no true Christians, of whose religion no good account can be given, either how they came by it, or whereon it is grounded.*

(1.) *How they came by it.*—When they pretend to be saints, but cannot in the least tell how they came to be saints; have found no real change in themselves, are the same they have always been; they have, they *think*, loved God, and believed in Christ, and had hopes of heaven, ever since they can remember, but know not how any of these things were wrought in them, or by what means: such a faith, I dare say, is but a fancy, and so is their hope and their love and whatever grace they pretend to.

(2.) *Whereon it is grounded.*

(i.) *When their faith is not rightly grounded, it is no better than a fancy.*—When it is built on the authority of a church or the tradi-

tions of men, and not on the word of God; or on the word misunderstood, or misapplied, or divided, or maimed; when they believe promises without respect to commands; believe Christ is their Saviour, and yet never receive him to be their Lord; believe they shall "see God," though they be not "pure in heart," follow not after holiness. And such indeed is the faith and hope of profane worldlings, and whoever live in contradiction to God's commands, and yet expect the benefit of his promises.

(ii.) *When their practice is not rightly grounded, it is no better than folly, how fair soever and plausible it may seem.*—When men set up a religion merely of man's devising, contrive new ways of worshipping God which he himself never appointed, and so indeed impose upon him, and prescribe to him, what they think must certainly please him. This is unreasonable, for men to think that their inventions or others' traditions can be more acceptable to God than his own institutions, that sacrifice can go further than obedience would have done. They would themselves be served according to their own minds and not their servants' pleasure; and why should not God? They would not have their commands neglected, that their servants' will might be performed; and how foolish is it, then, to adhere to their own inventions, though with the slighting of God's institutions? And yet how few be there that are so addicted to human observances, but they are careless of God's appointments! God's commands being the great and only warrantable reason of all divine worship, whatever worship is uncommanded cannot but be unreasonable.

2. *How great is their sin that question, nay, deride, the grace that is in believers, as not being a real thing!*—Count the most serious powerful godliness to be no better than humour or fancy! All the religion [that] they own consists but in a few outward forms or some moral actions, and whatever is above this they look upon as not real; and so they leave us a lamentably empty religion, when they condemn our faith as fancy, our practice as folly, and cashier all our comforts as mere delusions. This usually proceeds either,

(1.) *From the atheism and infidelity of such men's hearts.*—Some question all religion, and so the true religion among the rest. They are themselves for none, and therefore quarrel with all; they think all religion is but fancy or policy, and so the Christian religion too. They do not really believe the grounds of Christianity, and therefore laugh at them that do.

(2.) Or, *from pride and conceitedness of their own wisdom and reason.*—They magnify their own notions, are in love with their own wisdom, and so condemn all else; like the Athenians, that laughed when they heard of "Jesus and the resurrection." (Acts xvii. 18, 32.) The high opinion they have of their reason makes them deny the reality of faith; what they cannot themselves comprehend, they will not believe, nor allow others to do it. They will scarce allow of any thing between demonstration and fancy; and this makes them innovate so much in religion, and scoff at the faith by which they should be saved.

(3.) Or, *from ignorance of spiritual things, and their not experiencing the power of grace in their own hearts.*—They will believe nothing in religion but what they have themselves felt. They never found the light of divine truths shining into their dark minds, and overcoming their carnal reason; nor the power of grace renewing their wills, and subjecting them to God's will, breaking the force of their sinful inclinations, mortifying their lusts, regulating their affections, changing the habitual temper and disposition of their spirits; nor the efficacy of faith in the purification of their hearts, their resting upon the promises, cleaving to Christ, and fetching-in supplies of the Spirit from him; nor the love of God shed abroad in their hearts, enlarging them in duties, quickening them in his ways, supporting them under burdens, strengthening them against temptations, and comforting them under afflictions: and therefore they question all these things, and take them to be nothing else but canting phrases and unaccountable fancies. A man that never was at Rome or Constantinople, might at the same rate deny there ever were such places; one that never tasted honey might deny it to be sweet, or a blind man laugh at colours because he never saw them,—though contrary to the experience of thousands that had,—with as much reason as they who live merely by sense, and never experienced any better pleasures, deny a higher principle by which believers are acted, and more spiritual comforts which they enjoy.

USE II. *Of exhortation.*

1. *Labour to experience the reality of your religion in yourselves.*—So live as that you may not be deceived, and may know that you are not. So act grace as that you may feel it working, and from thence conclude the principle to be in you, and may taste the sweetness of the comforts it brings with it. Labour to be fully satisfied that you do not live by fancy, and act by fancy, think you believe and hope, when you do not; that grace in you is as real a principle as reason is.

(1.) *This becomes you as reasonable creatures.*—As such, you should know the reason of your own actings, upon what grounds you do what you do, and believe what you believe. You would think a man very weak and foolish in the concernments of this present life, that could give himself no account of his own actions or expectations,—should have high hopes of great things, but not tell why he entertained them. How unreasonable, then, is it for a man to hope for greater things in the other life, to engage in a religious course, be diligent in duties, deny himself as to his worldly interest; and yet not know why he doth so!

(2.) *It is a matter of great consequence to you.*—For,

(i.) *If you cannot give yourselves an account of your religion, you will never enjoy the comforts of it, never take comfort in its comforts.*—The comforts of true religion are too great, too sweet, too precious, to be vainly lost, or but coldly sought after. “Joy unspeakable and full of glory” is well worth having: but, alas! how shall you come by this joy, these strong consolations, if you are not satisfied in the

reality of that principle in your hearts upon which they depend? You have no joy or peace but in believing, and hoping, and walking holly; (Rom. xv. 13; xii. 12; Psalm cxix. 56;) and if you know not but your faith and hope may be a mere fancy, and so your diligence in holiness, which is the effect of faith, but the effect of fancy, what comfort can you have in one or other? What pleasure can you have in reflecting upon your sincerity, when you question your sincerity? or upon your interest in Christ, and the benefits of his blood, and privileges of the gospel, when, for aught you know, the faith upon which that interest immediately stands, is not a grace of God's Spirit, but a fancy of your own heads?

(ii.) *You will never be able to give an account of it to others.*—What you understand not yourselves, you will not be able to make out to others that ask you a reason of it. If you cannot tell why you believe, how can you evidence to others that you do believe? And if you cannot tell why you practise thus or thus, how can you satisfy others that your practice is reasonable? If you would be able to answer them, first see [that] you be able to answer yourselves: when you can satisfy your own conscience, you may the better answer their cavils, or check their revilings, or bear their censures.

(iii.) *You will never be able to suffer for your religion, if you cannot give, at least, yourselves an account of it; nor suffer for that, the reality of which is doubtful to you.*—You will soon make shipwreck of a good conscience, if you be at uncertainties about that faith which should help you to keep it. Get well settled, or you will be easily shaken: you will very scarcely venture your all in the world in expectation of eternal life, when you are not sure [that] there is such a thing, or that you have a title to it; but rather fear that the hopes you had of it were no better than waking men's dreams, or pleasing visions of an imaginary happiness which had no subsistence but in your own fancies. You are likely enough to come into sufferings; you had need see upon what ground you stand, that you may be able to hold out. If you once come to question the reality of your faith, you will soon come to forsake it; and if you know not but your practice hitherto hath been unreasonable, you will think, when troubles come upon you, you have reason to alter it. If your former strictness and zeal in religion seem folly to you, you will count it your wisdom to grow loose and cold and careless in it, especially rather than hazard estate or liberty or life for it. What man of sense would hang or burn, rather than forego that which he himself took to be but a fancy,—at least, had no assurance that it was not?

(iv.) *You shall not need to fear the scorns or censures of enemies, if you be fully satisfied in yourselves that your faith is really a grace of God's Spirit in you, and not a deceit of your own heart.*—And the holiness of your conversation, a well-grounded, scriptural practice; not an unwarrantable, irrational niceness. Let the profane world scoff its fill, and call you "deceivers," or count you fools; it is no shame to be called "fools" for believing Christ's truth, or doing Christ's will; it hath been the lot of others before you. And so long as you

feel the power of faith in your own souls, you are sure it purifies your hearts, makes you fearful of sin, conscientious and painful in duty, strong against temptations, patient in afflictions; and so long too as you find holiness growing and thriving in you, your spiritual strength increasing, your fruit abounding;—so long you may be sure you are not fools, and the world's flouts or scorns cannot make you so. You would not be much concerned, if those that bore you an ill will should make themselves sport with you, and attempt to persuade you that you were blind, or lame, or sick, or asleep, when in the mean while your eyes were open, and you saw all things about you as at other times;—you could walk and exercise your limbs, discourse and exercise your reason, perform all the actions of men that are awake or in health. If you experience the workings of a holy principle in your hearts, and the effects of it in your lives, neither the sophistry nor censures nor jeers of those that are otherwise minded, will be able to beat you out of the conviction of your spiritual senses, any more than of your reason and understanding or bodily motions.

2. *Labour to evidence the same to others.*—And to be able to give a reason of your faith and hope and holy obedience, to them that demand it of you; and, if possible, to satisfy them as well as yourselves.

(1.) *This may be much for the glory of God and credit of the gospel.*—When it is seen that you are men as well as Christians, and act reasonably as well as religiously, and never more reasonably than when most religiously; that that “Divine nature” [which] you are made “partakers of,” (2 Peter i. 4,) is a perfection and elevation, not the destruction, of your human; that you have great reason for that good way, that holy course, in which you have been walking; and that the greatest strictness in religion is really your greatest wisdom. How may your confession, when joined with a godly conversation, which is a speaking practice and the most forcible conviction, stop the mouths of cavillers, falsify their slanders, make them know themselves to be liars, and own themselves to have had too hard thoughts of you, and that they, and not you, have been in the wrong! And if you come into sufferings, it will be for the honour of the gospel so to demean yourselves as to make it appear that you suffer, not only not as evil-doers, (1 Peter iv. 15,) but not as fools; that there is enough in your religion to justify you before men, not only in your greatest preciseness, but in your deepest sufferings; and though you pass for fools with the unbelieving world for exposing yourselves to a thousand miseries and apparent present ruin in expectation of an invisible and only future happiness, yet your faith is so well grounded, your hope so sure, that you need not be ashamed of undergoing evil, any more than of doing good.

(2.) *It may be a means to encourage the hearts, and strengthen the hands, and confirm the faith, of your fellow-saints.*—When they see that you believe as they believe, and hope as they hope, and practise as they practise; that they are not alone nor singular in what they do. Though a true believer ought to hold on constantly in the way

of faith and holiness, notwithstanding the opposition of all the world against him; yet it may be no small encouragement to him to find others of the same mind, acting at the same rate and upon the same grounds.

SERMON III.

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HOW GOD IS HIS PEOPLE'S GREAT REWARD.

I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward.—Genesis xv. 1.

ABRAHAM is called “the friend of God;” (James ii. 23;) the Lord spake with him familiarly; (Gen. xvii. 22;) he was made of God’s privy council. (Gen. xviii. 17.) And in the text: “The word of the Lord came unto” him “in a vision.” Representations of things in a vision differ from revelations by dreams. (Gen. xxxi. 11.) And what was the word that came to this holy patriarch in a vision? “I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward:” words too great for any man or angel fully to expound. Both the Hebrew and Greek carry the phrase very high: שְׂכָרְךָ הַרְבֵּה מְאֹד “I am thy super-abundant, very exceeding much reward,” ὁ μισθός σου πολλὸς σφοδρὰ. In the text is a climax; it riseth, as the waters of the sanctuary, higher: “I am thy reward, thy great reward, thy exceeding great reward.”* There are four things here to be spoken to:—

- I. *That nothing beside God can be the saints’ reward.*
- II. *How God is their reward.*
- III. *How God comes to be their reward.*
- IV. *Wherein the exceeding greatness of this reward consists.*

I. *That nothing beside God can be the saints’ reward.*

1. Nothing on earth can be their reward. The glistening of the world dazzles men’s eyes; but, like the apples of Sodom, it doth not so much delight as delude. The world is *res nihili*, [“a thing of nought,”] gilded emptiness. (Prov. xxiii. 5.) The world is made circular, the heart in the figure of a triangle; a circle cannot fill a triangle: the world is enough to busy us, not to fill us.† “In the fulness of his sufficiency he shall be in straits.” (Job xx. 22.) It seems a riddle, to have sufficiency, yet not have enough. The meaning is,—When he enjoys most of the creature, yet *aliquid deest*, “there is something wanting.” When king Solomon had put all the creatures into a limbeck, [alembic,] and went to extract and still out the spirits, they turned to froth: הַכֹּל הִנָּהוּ קִפְזִי “All is vanity.” (Eccles. i. 2.) God never intended [that] we should dig happiness out of the earth which he hath cursed.

* *Mercēs tua magna nimis.*—GROTIUS. † *Fumus et ventus sunt omnia mundana.*
—AUGUSTINUS, tom. ix. “All things terrestrial are but smoke and wind.”—EDIT.