

## FOURTH TREATISE

### Containing A RESOLUTION OF MANY DOUBTS, AND CASES OF CONSCIENCE

It is a rule frequently found true by experience, *Nihil magis certum, quam quod ex dubio certus est*. Nothing is more certain to the soul, than what is confirmed to it after much doubting. Yet, there is a generation of men who live in a fool's paradise of a false persuasion all their lifetime, and never doubt of their good estate. Their faith is false, their joy a delusion, their truce no peace, and their boldness no holy confidence. A confidence never shaken with doubts and jealousies is greatly to be feared. The blindest are ever the boldest. You never heard dead men complain of sickness. Doubts are the qualms of a Christian's spirit, and show a man to be alive. Assurance is the lifeblood of a believer's joy. Oh, but some are presumptuous and have a carnal confidence. They sleep with ease and walk without care. Those sermons which one would think would search the quick and cut them to the heart are dull and powerless (Prov. 16:2).

On the other hand, many whose souls are dear to God are full of doubts concerning their own condition. They are lacking the sense and assurance of their justification and reconciliation to God, through Jesus Christ. Though their condition be good, yet are they exceedingly troubled,

filled with perplexities and fears, affrighted with doubts and discouragements, all because they cannot see that they have an interest in Christ and are in covenant with God. The doubts and scruples of their hearts are numerous and various, according to the various manners of Satan's working to entangle poor Souls. It is impossible for me to speak to them all particularly. I have only spoken to such as seem to me to be the most common and ordinary objections of sad and discouraged souls.

I am greatly afraid, lest what I take to be sincerity be nothing but self-flattery. Many carnal men lie under a strange persuasion and presumption that their state is good; and what if my seeming assurance should prove carnal confidence? Oh this carnal confidence hath murdered thousands, yea, millions of souls! Answer: (1) Art thou an enemy, an irreconcilable enemy to sin? Then doubt not of thy sincerity. Presumption is a friend and favorer of sin, but assurance is its deadly enemy (1 John 3:3). As assurance is a preserver of holiness, so holiness is a producer of assurance (2 Pet. 1:10). Heavenly-mindedness, a religious use of ordinances, sacraments, and fervent prayer are the breeders of this blessed assurance, but a neglect yea, a contempt of those, will quietly stand with presumption (Deut. 29:19). A still conscience and a slothful profession can agree with presumption. He that presumes he hath oil in his lamp, but none in his vessel, he hath the name of a lover of Christ, but the heart of a

crucifier of Christ. He is neglecter of family duty, a despiser of the godly, nay, now and then a drunkard. And yet he is as bold and confident of his salvation as the precisest saint. He is persuaded that godliness is his race, Christ his Saviour, and glory his reward. This indeed is a devilish deceit.

Oh but thou art no pleader for Baal or for any known sin. I appeal to thy conscience, whether, when thou hast been guilty of any particular known sin, that thy confidence in prayer, but also thy assurance of grace is lessened, clouded, and benighted until thou hast particularly repented of the same.

(2) Thy very doubts and scruples may resolve the case. Presumption is seldom or never mingled with doubtings and distrust, but assurance is assaulted with scrupulous thoughts, and temptations, and holy tremblings (Ps. 2:12). Dost thou never feel any attempts, buffetings, and surmisings of Satan? Doth thy conscience never question thy condition? Doth thy own heart hold its peace and keep quietness and silence in thy breast? Art thou never driven to search for evidences and experiences to maintain thy right to Christ? Findest thou no contradiction, disturbance, and interruption of thy peace? Then know that all thy faith and hope of heaven is but a dream, fancy, and shallow. Thy confidence is but accursed calmness of soul. From now on let this make thee doubt because thou never doubted before.

But poor believer, it is otherwise with thee; thou art often haunted with fears, suspicions and jealousies. Thy own dark and unbelieving heart is often belching out mists that darken thy assurance. Yea, all the ordinances and engines of hell are planted against assurance to beat down and batter that curious work of the Spirit. The devil spies thee and overlooks thee with an envious and evil eye. That foul fiend would put out faith, which is the very heart, and assurance, which is the eye of the new man. His opposition argues, that thy faith is not presumption.

(3) Hath God given thee a thankful heart? Presumption is unthankful. I read indeed, the Pharisees praised God: "God, I thank thee" (Luke 18:11). Oh, but these were thankless thanks. His thanks did no more flow from a praiseful heart, than his prayer issued from an humble heart. The praiseless soul is a graceless presumptuous soul, but the gracious heart is a thankful heart. Oh, what inflamed love! What raised thoughts! What a dilated heart hath an assured believer. If God speaks peace, he will offer unto God the calves of the lips (Hosea 14:2). When Hannah's heart rejoiced and her horn was exalted, then was her mouth enlarged (1 Sam. 2:1). Hast thou ever felt an enlarged, rejoicing heart, blessing and delighting in God? Then thy state is good.

(4) Did God humble thy soul before He advanced it to assurance and comfort? Presumption is natural and born in our bones, but assurance is the blessed fruit of the

Spirit, and of faith (Heb. 10:22). Hadst thou this peremptory conceit of thy good estate ever since a child? If thy assurance be a native, it is not heaven-born. Such a beautiful child as assurance was not born of such a mother as is thy natural corruption, and of such a father as Satan. But if it followed Conversion and sound humiliation, it is a true heavenly persuasion.

(5) Art thou little in thine own eyes? Presumption is accompanied with pride, with scorn and contempt of others, but assurance is accompanied with self-debasement. The one is accompanied with loftiness (Luke 18:11), and the other with lowliness (Luke 1:48). If thou be not puffed up with pride, but are humble and lowly in spirit, and if the greater the mercy and higher the favor of God become, the lesser and lower thy heart is, then rest assured that thy heart is upright before God.

My soul is exceedingly oppressed with terrors and affrighting fears. Great is their received mercy, who have a sound and quiet spirit, whatever their other troubles and pressures be. But as for me, terrors have taken hold of me, and those corruptions that still hang upon me make me fear I have no grace. I find pride, passion, etc. still stirring and strong. It is not my afflictions, but corruptions that disquiet my conscience. Answer: Firstly, it is infinitely better to have a complaining conscience than a quiet one. Better hear the doom, and feel the lash of thy conscience, than to bear it like a dead child in thy bosom.

A smarting conscience is better than a snoring conscience. A reprobate conscience, a conscience past feeling, was both the sin and judgment of the heathens (Rom. 1:28). "Who being past feeling, have given themselves over unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness" (Eph. 4:19). Who would not pray to God to send him a terrified conscience in mercy, rather than a stupified conscience in wrath? Look upon the carnal soul. The devil flatters him with joys and hopes, so that he hath not one unquiet thought for sin, from one sabbath to another, whereas sin is a sword in thy bones all the day long! Now, wouldst thou change conditions with the carnal man and give thy grief and pain for his ease and peace? Surely thou wouldst not exchange souls with such a man on any terms for one moment.

Secondly, Christ in His set time will pacify and appease thy conscience (Prov. 29:6). What if the soul of a Christian be all in an uproar? Yet the blood of Christ will make peace, and the Spirit of Christ will create abundance of joy. What if the winds stir and are tempestuous on the face of thy soul? Yet when the winds see Christ walking towards them, they will abate, and there will be a very great calm

Thirdly, do not conclude thou hast no grace, because some peculiar sins still haunt thee and hang upon thee. These only speak thy weakness, but do not evidence thy

being graceless. Many of God's servants have had corruptions hung long upon them, yet they are true converts. How long did passion hang upon the prophet Jonah? He was so selfish, that he rebelled and fled to Tarshish. And yet after God had broken him in hell, how did his selfish passion hang on him again (Jonah 4:1-3,9)?

Fourthly, corruption shall either rage for thy good, or it shall be slain. "A damsel, possessed with the devil, brought much gain" (Acts 16:6). Such a devil is a saint's lust; it makes him rich in faith, rich in humility, rich in self-denial, in faithful prayer, and in good works. Oh, woe is me, saith a fallen saint; wretch that I am, what shall I do? Here is an old corruption that hath again polluted my soul when it was just lately washed. Here is a corruption that will kill all my joy before it leaves me. Yea, it is well if it depart without the blood of my soul. But stay thy complaint, poor Christian. Believe, and thou shalt be strengthened. "The God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly" (Rom. 16:20).

I am so near ruin's brink that I fear I shall unavoidably perish. I am so low that I fear there will never be a lifting up. I am sunk into the mire, fallen into an horrible pit, where I must needs perish, if not soon delivered. Answer: (1) When thou wast once further off from the kingdom of grace, thou perished not. Some years ago thy danger was really greater than now, though now it is more in

thy thoughts than it was then. Surely the further the traveller walks from the seaside, the more hopeful is his escape. Was Christ thy Pilot in former straits, when amidst dangerous rocks and tempests, and shalt thou now shipwreck and perish in the very mouth of haven? No, verily not.

(2) God foresees that this will occasion thy great praises. “The blessing of him that was ready to perish came upon me: and I caused the widow’s heart to sing for joy” (Job 29:13). When a widow or orphan is delivered from the hand of the oppressor, the greater the danger was, the more thankful they are to the deliverer. They bless him both behind his back and to his face, as one, without whose help they had been beggared and undone. So when a troubled soul is saved out of its sinking despondencies and fears, it says, I for my part had been completely beaten and overthrown by the devil, my strong adversary. I would have been undone and damned forever, except that God helped me. Blessed, forever blessed, be His Name. I will bless Him while I live, who saved my imperilled soul from destruction. “He cares not for the flesh of bulls, nor ten thousand rivers of oil”; praise He desires, and praise I will give Him. My redeemed soul shall sing the praises of the Lord forever.

(3) Remember, God has been no small friend to thy outward man, when in a perishing condition. How then can He neglect the noble soul? Shall dross be gathered, and

gold lost? Will He take up the shell of the body, and gild it with wealth, health, strength, beauty, and lay it in His bosom, and then let the immortal pearl of the soul be spurned at by justice, and trampled under the devil's feet? No, verily not. He that hath been so full of pity to the body, will be much more pitiful to the soul. The nobler the person plunged in misery is, the more he moves compassion.

(4) God is gracious to all mankind promiscuously. Properly, and formally, He hates none. The evil and unthankful receive many mercies from Him, such as the support of their beings, some restraint of : sin, reservation out of hell, prevention of judgments, bestowal of outward command favours, spiritual ordinances, inward motions, glorious gifts, etc If His hardened enemies receive these, what may His troubled elect expect from Him?

There is a kind of tenderness and pity in unreasonable creatures towards their young ones The pelican will spill her blood, and burn her wings and body to save her tender young. The hen will, by her good will, lose her life, before her brood become a prey to the ravenous kite. Birds will chirp, mourn, and flutter over the head of him that demolishes and destroys their nests, and leads their young ones captive. Oh, but God's compassions to His children are infinite : in nature and duration. "The Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy" (James 5:11), or of

many bowels, as in the original. He who mercifully delivered Israel out of Egyptian bondage will work signs and wonders for thy deliverance, rather than suffer thy soul to perish. He who showed Hagar a well nigh at hand when her son was ready to expire, will show a fair well of salvation to thee, whose heart is ready to sink, and faint, and die within thee. He that kept David safe, when persecuted and pursued as a partridge, will keep thy soul safe, though hunted by that mighty hunter the devil.

The Lord abhors and punishes the unmerciful usage of afflicted and perishing persons (Deut. 25:17-19). Thy soul is marching away out of spiritual Egypt, where the devil made thee serve with rigor and sore bondage. Thy soul is weary, faint, and feeble, but will God fall on the weak and weary, and slay them? Oh no, God will never play cursed Amalek. He will not for a world stain his hands in the blood of an humbled, broken, and bleeding soul.

I am unable to believe in Jesus Christ. I find it as impossible to believe, as to fulfill the law. I have often striven against, but cannot vanquish unbelief. Answer: (1) This complaint may perhaps be causeless and therefore sinful. It may be that thou callest nothing faith unless it be assurance, a sense that thy faith is sound, whereas assurance is not the nature, but the effect of faith, and is usually given after some glorious conquest over corruption. This strength or assurance of faith thou may expect, and

pray for. Yet thou must not doubt of the truth of thy faith because this assurance is wanting.

(2) Faith is a receiving of Christ as offered in the gospel. Art thou willing to consent and accept of Christ on gospel terms? If so, there is a sure foundation of faith laid. The seed of faith is sown in thy heart. "But as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His Name" (John 1:12). Here, to receive Christ and to believe in His Name are equivalent. He who receives Christ believes on His Name. But to silence all such complaints, let me ask, how came thou to the sight of thine own infirmity? How came thou to distrust thy own power? Was it not by the illumination and conviction of God's Spirit? Once thou prided thyself presumptuously in thy faith, and felt that thou hadst believed in Christ. And yet then there was no sense of thine own vileness, no deep humiliation under the sense of it. Now thou art both sensible and humbled, and yet thou dost labour under too much diffidence and dejection. Oh, the policy of the devil in tempting thee to presume when far off from Christ, and now to despond when near to Him.

I am ignorant of the time of my new birth and cannot tell when, nor by what sermon I received the image of the heavenly. Therefore I question whether I be at all renewed. Answer: (1) Sometimes God's elect children are religiously educated, prayed for, and instructed by their

religious parents, and so are insensibly leavened and seasoned with grace. They are not vassalized to Satan by inward corruption, nor barely moralized by outward conformity to God, but really, changed and rooted in grace. And yet they know not when - The kingdom of God cometh not with observation” (Luke 17:20). The kingdom of grace may be set up in thy heart, and yet thou didst not observe the time of its coming. “So is the kingdom of God, as if a man should cast seed into the ground, and should sleep, and rise night and day, and the seed should spring and grow up, he knoweth not how” (Mark 4:26-27). (2) Care not so much for the knowledge of the time of conversion as for an evidence of the work of conversion. Is the work really done? Art thou passed from death to life? Hath the Lord drawn a lively resemblance of Himself upon thy soul? Canst thou be abased and ashamed under the sight of thy original depravation? Dost thou despair of help in or from thyself? Dost thou embrace the righteousness of Christ? Then fear not, but proceed to grow, for the seed of true grace is sown in thy heart.

I suspect, and have long suspected, whether my name be written in the book of life, among the living in the new Jerusalem. I fear I am a reprobate, and belong not to the election of grace. Answer: (1) Who told thee that thou dost not belong to the election of grace? Did God ever say so in His Word? Or did the Spirit of God ever witness such a thing to thee? Why dost thou suspect thyself to be

a reprobate? Is it because duties are burdensome to thee, or is it because thy hope is deadened? These are no signs of reprobation. Blasphemy against the Holy Ghost is the only sign of reprobation. Some signs may indeed evidence a man not to be regenerate, but what signs can evidence a man not to be elected? Poor soul, I thought the love of God to thee had deserved more charitable thoughts at thy bands if in nothing else but in making thee a reasonable creature, in preserving thee since thou wast conceived in the womb, in casting thy lot within the sound of the glorious gospel, and in sending His ministers to endeavour to heal thee of thy soul wounds.

(2) The list of the names of the elect is only under God's lock and key. He only that counts the stars can tell their names. Many are elected whose election is to man invisible. "And He causeth all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and bond, to receive a mark in their right hand, or in their foreheads" (Rev. 13:16). As antichrist's regiment is divided into two ranks, so in Christ's company of saints divided. Some have their Father's Name on their foreheads, open to the observation of all that are willing to see it. Others have it in the hollow of their hands, scarce known to themselves, as in Revelation 14:9-10: "If any man worship the beast and his image, and receive his mark in his forehead, or in his hand, the same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of His indig-

nation: and, he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb.” So if any man worship God, having a name secret or open, he shall drink of the waters of life of those rivers of pleasure which are at God’s right hand forevermore.

(3) It is both a foolish and wicked thing for a blind creature to take it upon himself to read God’s book of life and death. The book is clasped, the angels are unlearned in it, and hast thou skill to read it? “The secret things belong unto the Lord our God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us and our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law” (Deut. 29:29). Leave off poring over God’s eternal counsel and decree concerning thee, lest thou be smitten blind for thy curiosity in trying to read what God hath not revealed. This is a temptation aimed at smiting the shield of faith out of thine hand. It is a fiery dart too hot for thee to hold. Therefore cast it out of thy mind and meditation, and instead of poring upon what God hath secretly decreed, consult daily with what God hath revealed. I find that we are directed to the “law and to the testimony of God” (Isa. 18:20). But where are we ever directed to the counsel and decree of God?

“Faith purifies the heart” (Acts 15:9). But alas, the imaginations of my heart are very impure! The frame of my heart is evil “and doth oftentimes send forth at the same

place, sweet water and bitter” (James 3:11). I lack a sanctified frame of heart. My thoughts are so vile, that I cannot think I have any true faith. Answer: (1) There is iniquity enough in thy heart, but dost thou regard iniquity in thy heart? Impure and impertinent thoughts come into thy mind, but dost thou voluntarily open the passage to them? Dost thou ferment and cherish such thoughts? Dost thou delight in sin? Art thou captivated by it against thy will? Art thou not a servant to sin, but constantly wishing and praying for inward and outward cleanness? Then thy state is good.

(2) St. James saith, “Doth a fountain send forth at the same place sweet water and bitter?” His meaning is not that corrupt communication never flows from the mouth, nor vain thoughts rise out of the mind of a godly man, but that such discourse, and such thoughts proceed not from them with that unbridled liberty they do from others. These are not common and ordinary with them. Even a good man’s tongue may talk too freely, and his mind be too unhappily fruitful in vile, impertinent, and unworthy thoughts.

(3) When St Paul says “that faith purifies the heart,” his meaning is not that he who finds impurity in his heart is altogether destitute of faith. He means that faith besprinkles the soul with Christ’s pure and precious blood, and quickens the heart to study and pursue purity and holiness. It draws grace and virtue from Christ to weaken sin,

and raiseth endeavours in a Christian to cleanse himself from all filthiness, both of the flesh and of the spirit.

Oh, the heart of man is a great depth, who can fathom it? Oh, that guile, and deceit, and delusion that is to be found in the heart! It is deceitful above all things. Many have been beguiled by it. Judas was, yes, so was Peter. I fear my heart is not upright. Answer: (1) Examine what footsteps and prints of God there are in thy heart. Do not condemn thyself rashly, for it is great injustice so to do. Did the law ever discover to thee thy sins in their own colours: in their number to be numberless, in their nature to be deadly and damnable, in their weight to be heavier than mountains, in their dishonouring and provoking quality to God, and in their defiling and damning power as to thyself? Did ever the law, subserviently to the new covenant, drive thy self-condemned soul to Christ? And did Christ set thee upon obedience, on obeying God from a principle of love and thankfulness? These things argue a blessed change of heart.

(2) Dost thou run to Christ daily for uprightness of heart, for the spirit of truth, to lead and guide thee to all righteousness? Doth thy soul breathe as David in Psalm 51:10, "Create in me a clean heart, O Lord, and renew a right spirit within me"? (3) If thou still say thy heart is deceitful, then know that hypocrites do not confess, but cover their deceit and hypocrisy. They love not to hear

of the deceitfulness of their heart. They are afraid to conclude themselves to be deceived, or “to have their good evil spoken of” (Rom. 14:16). Oh, but thou art glad when thou canst discover any unknown or deceitful hole in thy heart where Satan lurks. This is a great argument of heart - sincerity.

I am a covenant breaker; I have broken the covenant of grace and mercy. What mercy then can I expect? Surely God will avenge the quarrel of His covenant, and utterly reject me, who have so often broken with Him. Answer: (1) Hast thou so often broken covenant with God, and wilt thou break it again? yes, worse than ever by thy unbelief? Is not unbelief a grievous violation of it? Indeed thy breach of covenant is a proper cause of trouble, and thy soul should be greatly humbled for it, but it is no proper cause of unbelief. Alas, unbelief puts the soul far off from God, “and they that are far from God shall perish” (Ps. 73:27)! Whatever thy condition is, beware of shouldering and excluding thyself out of the covenant. Never did anyone gain by rejecting God’s covenant. Is not the remission of thy breaches and backslidings one article printed and promised in the covenant? “Go, and proclaim these words towards the north, and say, return thou backsliding Israel, saith the Lord; and I will not cause My anger to fall upon you” (Jer. 3:12-14).

Secondly, there is a wide difference between the omis-

sion of covenant duties and the dissolution of the covenant. Every breach does not dissolve the marriage covenant between man and wife, any more than every breach dissolves the covenant between Christ and the soul. Those He loves once, He always loves “Having loved His own which were in the world, He loved them unto the end” (John 13:1). “The foundation of the Lord standeth sure, having this seal, the Lord knoweth those that are His” (2 Tim. 2:9). He so knoweth them that He will not finally dissolve His covenant made with them Though they through weakness break covenant with God, “yet God abideth faithful, He cannot deny Himself” (2 Tim. 2:13).

If I were regenerate and born again, I could never love God so coldly, nor forget the mercies of God so suddenly as I do. I should have a better disposition of soul. I should understand spiritual mysteries more clearly, and walk before God more mournfully, more diligently, more humbly and holily, than I do Answer This thy reasoning is sinful. Is this thy thankfulness to God for what thou hast received, to question thy grace because it is not so large as thou wouldest have it? Do you question the truth of thy love, because it is not stronger? Do you question the opening of thy eyes, because thy sight is dim, or question the breaking of thy heart because the measure of thy godly sorrow for sin is so small? Are not thy complaints causeless? Is not thy thankfulness to God for His grace, and thy joy in the Holy Ghost, ceased by this? And is not

thy unthankfulness displeasing unto God, and thy diffidence displeasing to Christ? Yea, by thy madness, thou condemnest many a righteous soul that have a great ground to complain of the weakness of their love to God, and their forgetfulness of the mercy of God, as thou. Yet, they would not for a world say, I have no grace. May not thy causeless condemning of thyself, if overheard, weaken the hands and hearts of others?

My peace I fear is carnal security, because I cannot pray so feelingly, mourn so kindly, hear so attentively as before. Answer: It is weakness to require the same condition and disposition before peace and reconciliation and after it (James 5:13). Before peace there is disquietment, sorrow, and fear. The poor soul is tortured, food neglected, the body disregarded, health, credit, etc. not esteemed, in comparison of God's favour. Yes, sometimes hideous outcries by reason of hot hellish burnings within. Oh, but after peace comes there is a great alteration: tears are dried up, sorrows swallowed up, the terrible storm turned into a sweet calm, and hideous outcries into sweet songs of praise. Christian, observe how thy peace came. Did prayer fetch it in (Matt. 7:9-10)? Did faith forerun it? Did it follow upon legal terrors and spiritual conflicts? And hast thou an heart willing to obey God universally? Then know assuredly, thy peace is a true and solid peace.

I have some joy, but I fear it is but the joy of hypocrites,

a mere delusion. Answer: When was thy joy given? Was it when all within thy heart was anguish and dolor? Did it come when thou wast fled for refuge to the mercy and free grace of God in Jesus Christ? Did it come when thou was begging pardon and forgiveness at God's hand? Did it come when studying renovation and new obedience? And did it leave the heart in a thankful frame? Fear not, it is the joy of the Lord, a sound joy indeed.

Oh, but my joy was so short, so soon gone, that I greatly suspect it. Answer: It came to remove the causes of thy fear, and to prevent despair. It came to show thee that God is pacified, and at peace with thee. It came to give thee the seal and mark of God's Spirit. This work it did, and so it abode with thee, and left a delightful remembrance behind it. Though for a time it may vanish, or rather lie hid as seed under the clod, yet it will spring up again, "for light is sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart" (Ps. 97:11). Perhaps it will not spring up in this world so as never to vanish more, for alas, a believer, while on earth must wear changeable suits of apparel, and sometimes be clad with the garments of joy and praise, and by and by girded with sackcloth and sorrow. There is no perpetual holy day till the poor Christian comes home to heaven; there shall he have a constant joyfulness of heart.

My sorrow is turned into joy. My joys and comforts are restored, and yet I am at a great loss, not knowing what

my duty is. Answer: (1) Are thy comforts restored? Go to the priest, show thyself to the Lord, and bring thy thank offerings, and pay thy vows. Let thy acknowledgments be greater than ordinary. The favor thou hast received is extraordinary, and God will not be pleased with a slight acknowledgment. What greater privilege than to be moistened with these honeydews of joy? Therefore live thankfully in the midst of all.

Secondly, safely lay up and keep those cordials in a humble head. Oh, a humble heart is the fittest vessel to keep them, that they be not lost. Oh, how humbly should thou walk, who art cheered and carried in the arms of the Almighty, as on the wings of a great eagle! Let God's loving looks and smiles make thee reflect on thy own vileness. To be humble under God's mercies is the way to live long in the enjoyment of it. Spiritual comforts are not so easily obtained as to be idly wasted. Satan will watch to rob thee of thy evidences, and to deprive thee of thy comforts. If therefore, thou wouldest not have them soon removed, watch and be sober. Trust not thyself, but God with the preservation of them. Record in thy memory, all those comfortable words God spake to thy aching heart, "I remembered thy judgments of old, oh Lord, and have comforted myself."

Thirdly, increase and promote thy joys and comforts. Hear, read, and meditate on the Word. Study, apply, and enquire after the promises. Pray to God to keep thy peace

against all molestations, and frequent the table of the Lord. The Lord's Supper is an excellent and approved means to continue and confirm joy and comfort to make the waters of spiritual joy to grow and swell.

Fourthly, let thy comforts fence thee against sin. The time was, when thou felt nothing but disconsolate deadness, when thou wanted that comfort thou now hast apprehended. Do not abase God's love, and rob thyself of those tastes and tokens of God's mercies by thy willful sinning against Him

My obedience and righteousness is so weak and imperfect, that I know not what to call it, obedience or disobedience, righteousness or unrighteousness. Is it possible for such a lame and imperfect obedience to find acceptance with God? Answer: (1) Is it not thy intention in what thou doest to please and glorify God? Is it not the consideration of God's will, and the desire of God's glory, that primarily sway thee? If so, obey God in truth and sincerity, if not in perfection. Now sincerity is the seat of duty; it is a support to the soul in the greatest trials and a succor against the day of death. He that is sincere has a right to all the creatures, the comfort of all the Scriptures, the sanctification of all afflictions, the benefit of all mercies, the power of all ordinances, and the help of all the promises.

(2) Christ's perfect and complete righteousness is thine by imputation. He is thy surety (Rev. 19:18). He fulfilled

His duty, and underwent the penalty of the law. And as thy sin was made Christ's to expose Him to wrath, so is His righteousness made thine, to make thee a child of favour. Though thine inherent righteousness, the righteousness by which thou art sanctified be imperfect, yet thy imputed righteousness, that righteousness by which thou art justified, is perfect. Let all thy imperfections drive thee to Christ, for in His perfect robes thou shalt find acceptance.

I obey God with fear and trembling. Therefore, I fear my obedience proceeds not from love to God, but only from the fact that conscience compels and threatens me if I obey not. Answer: (1) The godly, especially after the first obtaining of grace, are not totally freed from the spirit of bondage. There still remains some fear of God's heavy wrath and displeasure. "My flesh trembleth for fear of Thee; I am afraid of Thy judgments" (Ps. 119:120). Fear of God's wrath, as well as love for His majesty, puts a godly soul to work.

(2) Dost thou not feel love to God sometimes puts life and heat into thy obedience? Art thou not sometimes resolved to obey, when thou hast no actual apprehensions of God's wrath? Yea, dost thou not for the transgressions of others sometimes find a pained heart and wet eyes? If so, surely thy obedience is not only out of convictions of conscience, but the propension of the new nature.

I am lovingly invited by the Lord of Hosts to a feast of

fat things, the most heavenly food ever, to feed upon Christ the true paschal Lamb in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. But alas, wretched creature that I am, I dare not appear at so holy a feast. Shall I be so bold with Obed Edom, as to approach to this sacred ark, and receive the same into my house? If the Bethshemites, in 1 Samuel 6, were so sharply punished for looking into the ark, how may I presume to receive the Lord of the ark Himself? I greatly suspect my propriety and right to that solemn ordinance. What claim can I lay to it? Answer: Every sanctified soul hath a double right, or ground, namely (1) Christ's death, and (2) the covenant of grace.

Therefore, for clearing thy title, I ask (1) Is the covenant law written in thy heart? "This shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the Lord, I will put My law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be My people" (Jer 31:33).

Question: How can I discover that God's law is written in my heart? Answer: If the law of God be written in thy heart, then there is an inward conformity to the whole law. Thy heart will comply with the law; it will forbid what the law forbids and command what the law commands. If the law of God be written in thy heart, then there is a newness introduced. "Are old things done away and are all things become new?" Is thy mind enlightened? Is thy conscience purged and quickened? Do thy

affections run in a new channel? Which way does delight sway thee? Does it sway thee to obey the will of the flesh, or the will of God? Is softness wrought in thy heart, so that sin is soon felt and easily sorrowed for? This argues that the covenant law is written in thy heart.

Secondly, does the bitterness of sin, and the sweetness of Christ's love affect thy soul? Is this the language of thy heart? Oh, how foul, how cursed, how hateful is sin, that neither the cries of angels, nor the blood of beasts, nor the damnation of all created souls could wash away one sin! Nothing less than the blood of Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of the eternal Father can. Christ on the cross represents sin's horrid nature more lively than hell with all her torments. How dead were we in guilt? We were condemned by the law and devoid of hope when Christ undertook for us. Surely we were dead, stark dead, helplessly and hopelessly dead. Oh, sweet Redeemer, what love is like this of Thine? How enflaming, enlarging, and affecting is Thy love (2 Cor. 5:14)! Now does the bitterness of sin, and the sweetness of Christ's love affect thy soul? Then thou hast a propriety in Christ's death, and a clear right to His table.

(3) Art thou dead to sin, and the world, and alive to Christ? Many say they have an interest in Christ's death, in whose heart sin is still alive, but they are self-deceivers. For this end Christ died on the cross, that sin might die in our hearts. "Who His own self bare our sins in His

own body on the tree, that we being dead to sin, should live unto righteousness” (1 Pet. 2:24). Christ died to destroy our enemies, of which sin is the principal one. Now is thy sin dead in thy heart? Though thy corrupt nature sticks close to thee still, though thou hast thy daily failings and infirmities, yet canst thou say that thy inclinations to sin are dead, and thy delight in sin dead? Art thou daily conflicting against sin, so that the evil thou dost, is what thou wouldest not do? And hast thou resigned thyself freely and wholly to Christ including thy soul, thy body, thy estate, thy friends, and thy health to Christ? Are thy love, thy anger, thy joy, thy sorrow all devoted to Christ’s honour and service? Then thou hast a sufficient right to that solemn ordinance of the Lord’s Supper.

My profit and benefit by coming to the Lord’s table is small. It is scarcely, if at all discernible, and therefore I think it is as good to abstain and remain absent from the table for the future also. Answer: (1) They who are spiritual may use God’s ordinances carnally, and consequently unprofitably. Every gracious person is not always a worthy communicant. Sin is incident to the saints. Christian, didst thou examine thy heart impartially? Didst thou descend into the very bottom of it, to discover what is hid there? Didst thou in order to receive worthily, judge thyself before the Lord? Didst thou pass sentence against and condemn thyself as deserving rather to be tormented with scalding wrath, than relieved with refreshing mercy? Didst thou survey Christ’s sufferings,

and reflect on thy sins that procured them? Didst thou come to the Lord's table with an unfeigned resolution to forsake every known sin, especially those thou art most prone and inclined to, and to prefer God's will before thine own? Didst thou at the Lord's table employ thy thoughts in holy exclamations? Didst thou at that time resist all worldly thoughts, and say to them, Arise and depart, for here shall not be your rest? And after thou wast at the Lord's table, didst thou bless God for the opportunity thou enjoyed? Wast thou thankful for the honour thou receivedst at that time? And didst thou stand upon thy watch, shunning those occasions which formerly had led thee into sin? If these things were neglected, charge thy unprofitableness not upon the ordinance but thyself.

(2) The ordinance may not perhaps profit, till it be revived and quickened afterwards. Perhaps in the hours of temptations, the Spirit of God will revive a sense of what was done and felt upon the heart, or maybe in hearing, as in John 12:16, "These things understood not His disciples at the first: but when Jesus was glorified, then remembered they that these things were written of Him, and that they had done these things unto Him." So when a poor saint is ready to be routed by a temptation, some truth he formerly heard presently starts forth for his rescue. He remembers such a passage fell in such a sermon. Now, says he, I remember it, though then I saw not its usefulness, and therefore I will not do this wickedness

and sin against God. So in a necessitous time, I remember, saith the gracious soul, I took the Lord's Supper at such a time, and so was bound out from sin, and shall I now yield unto it? Thus thou shalt reap the profit of this precious ordinance later, in an hour of temptation, though thy profit for the present seem but small.

(3) Profit may be gathered, though not presently discerned. "And there was also a strife among them which of them should be accounted the greatest" (Luke 22:24). What! Were not these Christ's apostles? And yet you see what bitter fruit suddenly sprouts out. They fall to contention, which is a shameful work of the flesh. Was it not sad, to see the whole society and college of the apostles fall out at such a time? Christian, if thou communicate worthily, expect to feel corruption stir. This stirring argues thy profiting, for it stirs because it feels itself wounded. This stirring and activity of corruption (where it is bewailed and opposed) is a sure sign of its approaching death.

(4) Canst thou grieve that thou hast got no profit by the sacrament? If thou canst but grieve, that grief is profit. As in praying for strength against sin, the soul thinks no strength comes, whereas this is strength that it continues praying, and that sin does not cause it to give up praying. So waiting for profit is profit.

Ah, but I am un unworthy wretch. Alas! What an impure sty, what a cabin of filth I am! How unworthy my home

is for such a guest to come into! Is there any beauty in me to attract His love, any comeliness to ravish Him unto me? None at all: Miriam was not more leprous, nor a leopard more spotty than I am. What am I, that such a visit should be given me? If John the Baptist sanctified men from his mother's womb, but reputed himself unworthy to loose the latchet of Christ's shoes, how shall I, a miserable sinner, dare to receive so high a mystery? Oh, my unworthiness raises fears and doubts, so that I cannot come with confidence, nor pray with assurance! Answer: (1) The covenant of grace and promises of mercy are the proper right of such only as are unworthy. "Then shall ye remember your own evil ways, and your doings that were not good, and shall loathe yourselves in your own sight for your iniquities and for your abominations" (Matt. 9:13; Ezek. 36:3 1). Unworthiness in respect of merit is no hindrance, but on the other hand, the sense of this unworthiness is a duty. We come to receive mercy, and he that comes to receive mercy must not be a retainer of merit. Why else is there a fulness in Christ, to correct all defects in us? I never heard of anyone admitted for his worthiness, or rejected for want of it.

(2) Though thou be unworthy yet Christ is worthy, all worthy; He hath worth enough. And the worthiness of Christ is reckoned thine, for all purposes. "Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for Thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by Thy blood" (Rev. 5:9). Jesus Christ is worthy to open the

book, to appear in court for thee, so that thy deliverance should be wrought: from the curse and rigor of the law, from the sting and power of death, from the strength and poison of sin, and from the cruelty, chains, and pains of hell.

With this worthiness of Christ, thou mayest stop all mouths. I am guilty, but the Lamb is worthy. I have deserved misery, but He hath deserved glory. And He is mine. His wisdom is mine, His righteousness mine, His redemption mine, His worthiness mine. He was clothed with a curse, that all that believe in Him might be covered with His worthiness. Therefore I will say with the centurion, "I am not worthy, that Thou shouldst enter under my roof, neither think I myself worthy to come unto Thee, only say the word, and my soul shall be healed."

If heaven should open itself to receive thee, wouldest thou stay below with sin and misery, and say thou art unworthy to strive to enter in? Behold here in the sacrament, Paradise is as it were laid open again to thee, and no cherubim stands against thee! Shall this pretence of unworthiness keep thee from the tree of life?

Had I nothing but this common unworthiness I were happy, but my soul is bound and burdened with a multitude, with heaps of sin. "Innumerable evils have compassed me about, mine iniquities have taken hold upon me, so that I am not able to look up; they are more than the hairs of my head: therefore my heart faileth me" (Ps.

40:12). If the Apostle Peter said to Christ, “Depart from me, O Lord, for I am a sinful man,” how may I, who am so great a sinner, presume to join myself unto Him? How dare I receive Him, nay, touch Him? Answer: (1) If all who sin were excluded, the feast were at an end, “for there is not a just man upon earth, that doth good and sinneth not.”

(2) The greatness of sin is a motive with God to pardon it. “And the Lord said, I will not again curse the ground anymore for man’s sake; for the imagination of man’s heart is evil from his youth; neither will I again smite anymore everything living, as I have done” (Gen. 8:21). Now reason would rather argue thus: the imagination of man’s heart is evil from his youth, therefore God will curse the ground and destroy the world. Oh, but the greatness of sin is a motive with God to pardon it. “For Thy Name’s sake, O Lord, pardon mine iniquity: for it is great” (Ps. 25:11).

(3) Is thy sin greater than the almighty mercy of God? Is thy sin greater than the all-sufficient satisfaction and all-satisfying death of Christ? Is Christ a Mediator for smaller sins only, and not for the greatest? Is He a Physician to cure those only that are head-sick, and not those also that are heart-sick? Surely thy sins are neither more nor greater than God is able to pardon.

Are thy sins against the law and light of nature? Oh, such are monstrous and grievous sins, and therefore thou art

deservedly whipped with Satan's scourgings. Yet remember, thy sin is not unto death. It is not unpardonable; it is no obstinate rejection of Christ after conviction, nor voluntary apostasy. Jonah's case is thine. "Then I said, I am cast out of Thy sight; yet I will look again toward Thy holy temple" (Jon. 2:4).

Are thy sins against the law of liberty and against the Word and doctrine of God, which freely reproveth sin in all, without respect of persons? This is indeed very grievous. I would not extenuate or diminish the same. Yet, is not Christ's satisfaction superabundant, full and all-sufficient? Is not God well pleased with His Son, and with such as believe in Him as Mediator? Are not gospel promises large? Are they not free as well as large? Is not the mercy of God unlimited? Have we not examples of those finding mercy, who sinned against the counsels and reproofs of God's Word?

Are thy sins against Christ? Hast thou undervalued Christ, and neglected the means of salvation? Oh, this sin is greater than the sins of the Sodomites! But yet, art thou humbled and disquieted for this? Is it the grief and burden of thy soul? Art thou almost swallowed up of sorrow? Then know that there is comfort in the very bosom of thy sorrow. "Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted" (Matt. 5:4). If thou be self-condemned, the gospel will acquit thee. If a gospel mourner,

the Spirit of God will comfort thee, for He is the comforter of Zion's mourners, and the exalter of humble souls. If thou still live in those sins for the washing away of which Christ shed His blood, thou sinnest if thou come to the table of the Lord. But if thou art troubled that thou art so vile a sinner, and art ashamed of thy sins, and can take no pleasure in them, but art willing to mingle the tears of godly sorrow with thy Saviour's blood, then thou wilt be a welcome guest at the Lord's table. Every willing penitent is a fit communicant

Ah (saith the doubting Christian), I fear I was never yet humbled enough for sin. Were my heart broken enough, had I felt such heart-breaking and rock-renting tempests in my bosom as some have done, then I might hope to be bound up. Had I been laid low enough, then I might hope to be exalted. But would you have such a hard, flinty-hearted wretch as I, think to find mercy? Alas, I find not a broken heart, but a barren hard heart, a proud stiff neck. Oh, that I were but once weary, and heavy laden enough! Answer: What I speak shall be in no wise to diminish grief and humbleness of heart to sin, but to quiet the troubled soul that thinks it lacks a broken and humbled heart, that groans under the hardness of its heart. Though it be really humbled, yet it cannot have a good thought of itself.

The measure of humiliation is not essential to bringing a

man into the state of grace. Though God calleth everywhere for humiliation and brokenness of heart for sin, yet He hath no where set a measure for it, saying, whosoever is not humbled to this or that degree shall not be saved.

(2) Dost thou not feel the same effects wrought by thee, as are wrought by the most broken-hearted and mourning saints? Some mourn and sorrow much, but hast thou not a resolvedness to please God as well as they? Hast thou not a fearfulness to sin? Hast thou not a sense of thy misery, and a desire of grace? Hast thou not a purpose to change thy course and conversation, and to walk in newness of life as well as they?

Judge of thy brokenness of heart not so much from thy sensitive sorrow and grief for sin, as from thy detestation and hatred of sin, and a well-advised condemning of it, and resolving against it. Sensitive sorrow may be abated many ways. Sometimes God's Spirit withdraws to show us that He is the Giver of it, and to keep us depending upon Him, and asking it from Him. Sometimes it is abated by the encroachment of worldly delights; both hinder this sensitive sorrow, though the latter more than the former. Sometimes it proceeds from want of meditating on Christ and sin, and sometimes from the wasting of the spirits. Yes, God sees not so much sorrow needful to some as to others, nor at one time as another. It is not likely that Mary Magdalene always wept so much, as at

her first conversion. Therefore, judge not of thy contritions and godly sorrow for sin by the degrees of sensible trouble and affliction, much less by thy tears and great lamentations, for some command tears almost for everything.

Judge of thy contrition and godly sorrow by the real effects of it, which are hatred of sin, and a fixed purpose and resolution against sin for the future. Perhaps thou dost not feel in thy heart that stirring grief and violent renting for that horrible filth of thy sinful heart, and those many rebellions of thy former wicked life, which thou heartily desirest. Yet, if thou lookest upon what thou hast done amiss with abhorrence and detestation of the thing, and heartily wishest thou had not done it, if thou censure thyself severely for it, and thereupon resolve not to do the like again, thou art by no means to cast away thy confidence, or to be discomforted, as though thou were not truly converted. Thou mayest rest assured hereupon, that thou hast an heart rightly broken for sin.

(3) Thou mayest have godly sorrow for sin, and not know it. If thou canst say thou lovest God, and wouldest obey Him universally, and that thou dost value and prize Christ and His salvation above all the world, question not thy conversion, question not thy contrition and sorrow for sin, for that is the use of godly sorrow. If thy sorrow flow from hatred of sin, and be followed with such a high-prizing of Christ, with a true love to God, and fear

to offend Him, it is sound and thou art humbled enough.

I am sore troubled about shedding of tears. I seldom can pour forth tears for my sins, and when I do I fear they are unsound. Answer: (1) Seriously consider what abundant cause thou hast to weep, with David to water thy couch with thy tears (Ps. 6:6), and with Peter to weep bitterly (Matt. 26). What, oh man! Canst thou not wring a few drops from thy eyes for thy sins, when a stream of blood issued from the side and heart of Christ and not for any sin of His own, but for thine? Rivers of tears flowed from David's eyes, for the transgressions of others (Ps. 119:136). Wilt thou weep for a broken arm, and not for sin, that gave a deadly stab and wound to thy soul?

(2) It is a comfort and a matter of joy to have the heart so broken or sin as to weep (Ps. 126:5; Rev. 21:4). Only observe two things. (a) Look to the motive of thy tears. What cares God for a little salt water, a few tears? We are to weep not merely because of judgments felt or feared, but because we have wronged God's patience, and been so evil to Him who hath been so good to us. We have been so unkind to a faithful friend, so ungrateful to a constant benefactor. "Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in Thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called Thy son" (Luke 15:21). Not father, I have spent my portion, and am reduced to great straits, but "I have sinned against Thee." (b) Observe the end and effect of thy tears. Do they leave thee more watchful against sin? Do

they make thy life more fruitful in good works? Do they make thy conscience more tender? If not, what are they but Esau's tears (Gen. 27:34)), Saul's tears (1 Sam. 24:16), or the hypocrite's tears (Mal. 2:13)? Such tears are only the handsel to perpetual weeping.

(3) As sometimes there is great joy in the heart, when scarcely a smile on the countenance, so there may be excessive sorrow in the heart, when scarcely a tear in the eye. This is indeed rare and not ordinary, yet I dare not exclude from heaven some natural, dry, hard tempers. Repenting work is mostly inlaid. It is compunction of heart that best discovers repentance. You never read that the repenting thief wept, no more than the reviling thief, yet, there was compunction of heart.

(4) Though sometimes thou hast not tears to pour forth for thy sins, yet thou hast always the fountain of godly sorrow in thy heart. A rooted desire to mourn for sin, and the Spirit of God helps thee in prayer to intercede with groans that cannot be expressed (Rom. 8:26). Well, at such a time, the Lord hears the voice of those sighs and groans, as well as the voice of weeping at other times.

I have some desires of grace, but alas, I fear they are not sparks fallen from heaven, but some false and strange fire! I have often read and heard that a true desire of grace is grace, at least in God's acceptance. It argues a saving and comfortable estate because the promise of blessedness is annexed by Christ to the desire of grace

(Matt. 5:6). Yet I fear my desires of grace are not real, but feigned desires; what comfort then can I take in them? Answer: (1) God fully perceives sincerity in thy desires and a direct tendency towards spirituality, though thou perceivedst it not. Thy happiness consists not in thy knowledge, but in God's knowledge of thy sincerity. As a child may know its dependence on its father, yet it is happy because the father knows his relation unto it.

Art thou not afraid, lest thy desires are carnal and selfish? Is not this the language of thy heart? Alas, I fear it is rather glory than grace, I fear it is rather happiness than holiness I desire. Were there no hell to be dreaded, I fear I should have little stomach to desire holiness for its native beauty and excellency. And dost thou not humble thyself for the selfishness and carnality of thy desires? This is a hopeful sign (Prov. 28:13). This self-suspecting is a great preservative from perdition, whereas self-confidence is a sad prognostic of apostasy.

(3) Dost thou not desire Christ with grace, above all riches and worldly conveniences? The prophet, speaking of earthly souls, says, "They sold the righteous for silver, and the poor for a pair of shoes" (Amos 2:6). They sold the favours of God, the joys of heaven, peace of conscience, and communion with the spirit, for worldly trifles. Yea, they sell their Saviour for nought, and so that the devil may be no loser, they throw in their own souls at the bargain. They would rather have a little gold and

silver than Christ and all His unsearchable riches. But to thee, Christ is the only pearl of great price, the principal object of thy desires. Wouldst thou not rather be holy than honourable, a member of Christ than the emperor of the world, or a companion of the saints than a companion of kings? This argues thy desires to be right.

(4) Are thy desires industrious? “The desire of the slothful killeth him, for his hands refuse to labour.” His desires are nourished in sloth; they live not in endeavours. Now, dost thou content thyself with a heartless, cold wish, or dost thou labour painfully, pray fervently, receive the Lord’s Supper frequently and work out thy salvation diligently? This justifies thy desires to be heaven-born. There is no rock (saith one) more sure than this truth of God that the heart that complaineth of the lack of grace desireth above all things the supply of that want, and useth all holy means for the procurement of that supply, and therefore cannot be destitute of saving grace.

(5) Are thy desires of a constant and fixed nature? Does one good wish overtake another (Job 6:6,8; Ps. 27:4)? Are thy desires of grace like waters that never fail, living not dying desires? Then know they spring from an everlasting root and are fed by the overflowing fountain of God’s Spirit.

I fear I have none of the Spirit of God. I have no sensible feeling of His testimony and operations. Answer: Dost thou not cover injustice with a show of humility? Hast

thou not yearnings after Christ and after communion with Christ? Are not these yearnings the workings of God's Spirit? Thou lovest comfort and confirmations for lack of observing what thou hast. Thou observest the sproutings and motions of corruption in thy heart, and art cast down. Observe also the motions of the Spirit, and give God thanks and praise. The smallest discernible workings of the Spirit are not to be prized slightly.

I cannot attain to that measure of grace and holiness I see in other men. I think some carnal men do more resemble me than I do the saints, either those saints now living, or those recorded in Scripture. Oh, what glowing affections, what burning love, what patience, what diligence, and what hope we read of David, Paul, etc! Answer: (1) Compare not thyself with saints, unless it be to quicken thy endeavours. Foment hopes of attaining to what they received. Alas! There was in them, even the best of them, enough to humble them. Oh how defective were their attainments, if compared with the rule? How far were their graces from perfection? Let the consideration of their high attainments draw thee out to embrace Christ's righteousness, but let it not discourage or draw thee to despondency.

(2) Thou hast the same foundation of comfort with the most eminent saints. If thou enjoy not that sensible support and that mighty measure of the Spirit they enjoyed, yet thou hast the same Christ that David, Paul, etc. had:

a full Christ to satisfy all thy indigency and necessity. Christ is as careful of His weakest members as He is of the strong. Tell my disciples and Peter (Peter, who through weakness had denied Christ) that I go before them into Galilee, there shall they see Me (Mark 16:7). There is a promise of strength made to the feeble, “In that day shall the Lord defend the inhabitants of Jerusalem; and he that is feeble among them at that day shall be as David; and the house of David shall be as God, as the angel of the Lord before them” (Zech. 12:8).

Some have the happiness of a strong memory. Oh those precious divine truths which are stored up in their memory. But alas, I am attended with a miserable frailty in my memory! How little do I remember of the truths I read and hear! How few do I remember of the answers of prayer I have received! Answer: (1) Dost thou remember what thou art able? It is one thing to have the memory healed by ability, another thing to have the memory sanctified by grace. It may be thy memory is not healed by ability, but is it sanctified by grace? Dost thou remember what thou canst, so as to practice it? Indeed, if sloth and sleeping, if careless and inattentive hearing, if worldly thoughts be the cause of thy forgetfulness, thou art justly to be reprov'd. Sleepy heads need not marvel they remember so little.

Secondly, thou that hast a shallow memory, hast thou an affected heart? “And they said one to another, did not our

hearts burn within us, while He talked with us by the way, and while He opened to us the Scriptures?” (Luke 24:32). Was it thus with you, while God was speaking to you in the ministry of the Word? Then know that God esteems a Christian more by his heart than by his head. A tender heart is better than a strong memory. What avails a barren, brain knowledge of God? What avails a dry remembrance of heavenly things? A good Christian is made up more of affections than of notion.

Thirdly, go daily to God with thy memory, and say, “Lord, here is my memory, let it be no longer a receptacle of vain and idle things, much less of hellish anger and revenge. Let it recall those divine truths I meet with in Thy Word. Write on it, O Lord, by the finger of Thy blessed Spirit, the great things of Thy law and the great mystery of man’s redemption.”

Though I am not an utter stranger to the duties of religion and righteousness, yet I am afraid lest custom and ordinariness be the spring-head of all my duties. Answer: Art thou not as much, or more disquieted and troubled for thy heedless and careless performance of duty, as for thy omitting the set season of duty? Yea, when thou hast performed duty, with as much care and circumspection as possible, yet, art thou sorry when thou casts an eye of reflection back upon it, and discovers the lameness and imperfection of it? Then it is not wholly and only custom and ordinariness that is the spring-head of thy duties.

Custom and commonness is not discerned, nor daily mourned for, when the duty is already past. Instead thou art often putting the question to thy own heart, oh my soul, why dost thou observe this or that duty? Is it only custom, because others do so, or is it thou thyself that hast wanted to do so? Is it conscience, because God has commanded it? Art thou afraid, oh Christian, lest custom devour all? Art thou afraid, lest custom be the principle and spring-head of thy duties? Surely, it is not custom but conscience that stirs up fears and complaints about custom.

I have always suspected my state, but now some that are truly godly, that are persons of discretion and understanding in spiritual things, suspect it also. Answer: (1) Perhaps it is but the rash and unadvised judgment of one or two private Christians, and not the judgment of the godly. It is sad to be reputed an hypocrite by the whole neighbourhood. Yet they are not infallible judges. God alone, who keeps the keys and shuts and opens the windows of the heart, can tell infallibly what is in the heart. Some are too censorious, and from this or that particular infirmity presently conclude that the heart is rotten. "But who art thou that judgest another man's servant? to his own master he standeth or falleth. Yea, he shall be holden up, for God is able to make him stand" (Rom. 14:4). Is not thy condemnation by others a just and fitting repayment of thy condemning others?

Secondly, as hypocrites have passed for real saints among men, (witness Judas, Demas, Simon Magus, etc.), so have honest and upright souls been counted dissemblers by those that feared God (witness Job in Job 4:6-7; and Paul, in Acts 9:26).

Thirdly, God acquits those that are upright and sincere; and if God acquit thee, what does man's condemnation mean? "With me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man's judgment" (1 Cor. 4:3). "Behold my witness is in heaven, and my record is on high" (Job 16:19). Not only Job's foes, but his friends, yes, his godly friends witnessed against him, and condemned him. But he accounted it enough that he had God's testimony and approbation. Amidst all their misconstructions he gloried in this, that God owned him and bear witness to his integrity.

Alas, I cannot pray; I am in such an ill temper. I would pray, but I lack expressions, and have no such abilities as others have. Answer: (1) God eyes more the spirit of prayer than the gift of prayer. If thou hast not the gift of prayer, hast thou the spirit of prayer? The spirit of prayer and the spirit of adoption go together. Canst thou sigh and groan before God? A hearty and heavy sigh from a child will move the Father's heart more than all the canting language of a vagrant beggar (Ps. 38:9; Rom. 8:26; Ps. 10:17). Dost thou find an elevation of heart to God? Doth thy soul ascend and approach to God? This is heart-

prayer, and heart-prayer is prevailing prayer. Heart-prayer is heard further than mouth-prayer (Ex. 14:15). Hannah prayed in heart. Only her lips moved, yet, it is called petition (1 Sam. 1:13). Canst thou desire to pray? That very desire is a prayer.

(2) The best saints have sometimes been in such a condition, that they could not pray. Was it not thus with Hezekiah (Is. 38:14), and Asaph (Ps. 77:4; 42:4)? There was no expressing, but a pouring out of the soul. It is not gifts but grace that commends prayer. Having affectionate expressions is more taking with man. Oh, but God is not as man is. It is the inward invisible power of prayer that prevails with God (Hos. 12:3-4). Plain-hearted Jacob had power with God; if thou canst not pray, yet weep as Jacob did. Thou canst say as Jacob did in Genesis 32:26, "Lord, bless me. I will not let Thee go except Thou bless me." Thou canst say as the publican, "God be merciful to me a Sinner" (Luke 18:13).

My prayers are full of defects. Surely God will never accept such weak, wandering, dead, spiritless, imperfect services as my prayers are. Answer: (1) It does not follow that thy prayers are dead and spiritless because they are weak. God will not despise thy prayers even if they be sinful, as long as they are not formal, even though they be short, as long as they are not customary; even though they are not elaborate, as long as they are not perfunctory; even if they lack commendable utterance, as

long as they are in sincerity of heart; even though thy gift be low, as long as the spirit is present.

Secondly, we ought to give all attention to the work of prayer, to the matter of our prayer, to our expressions in prayer, and to our' dispositions and affections in prayer as much as possible. Yet notwithstanding our greatest attention, distractions will arise. Oh, but these distractions that come from objects, and are unwillingly entertained, do not nullify or evacuate our prayers. Indeed such as come from negligence, and are permitted with allowance, threaten to turn prayer into sin. "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me" (Ps. 66:18). Wandering in prayer is an iniquity, and if we regard it not, it will spoil our prayers Therefore, we must say as Amnon, "Put now this woman out from me, and bolt the door after her" (2 Sam. 13:17). So, Lord, have these distractions and temptations taken away from me, and bolt the door after them Thirdly, Christ perfumes the prayers of His servants with the incense of His merits. Whatever defect is in thy prayers, yet no defect is in Christ's merits. The angel of the covenant stands with the golden censer at the altar, ready to perfume thy sacrifices. Though thy prayers, as they come from thee, are an unsavory breath in the nostrils of God, yet there is a Mediator to perfume them. They do not go immediately to God, but pass through a Mediator's hand into God's hands (Rev. 8:3-4). While the saints are praying on earth, Christ is interceding in heaven. His intercession puts a value upon their

prayers, clothing them with acceptance, when their prayers are for things agreeable to His will, and accompanied with faith and endeavours to pray better.

What sorrow is like my sorrow! I indeed pray, but have no more liveliness and enlargement in prayer than a dead soul! Never was any heart harder than mine. Oh how shut up, how narrow, how straightened is my soul! My dullness and dead-heartedness is such that I am afraid to pray. Answer: (1) Suppose thou find no comfort at all in prayer, nor in thyself, when thy heart is so locked up. Yet there is still comfort in Christ. Oh Christian! Never ground thy comfort on thy duties, but lay up all thy comfort in Christ, for there it will be safe. Study Christ's office and work, and this will be a rejoicing to thee.

(2) Art thou at rest while thus straightened? Dost thou not desire to give God quickened devotion, warm prayer, and working affections? If so, then know that thy heart is an enlarged heart, enlarged in desires after enlargedness.

(3) Do not cease to pray because thou dost apprehend thyself to be dull. The best way to fit ourselves for prayer is to fall presently to prayer. By setting ourselves upon the work, we shall gather fitness, though we were unfit at the first. We have never more need to pray than when we are most indisposed, for then we are often exposed to temptation, apt to be overcome and fit for nothing. Yea, dullness is driven away by prayer and earnest contention.

God's people have often experienced that they entered upon their work with much indisposition and listlessness to prayer. Yet being resolved to perform the duty, despite the present dullness of their spirits, they have, in the progress of the work, been more enlarged and raised in their spirits than at other times. They have been taken up seven degrees nearer unto the third heaven, than at such times, when at the beginning of the exercise they found a fresh and lively edge upon their hearts to pray. And let me add, frequency and preparation for duty will bring enlarged affections.

(4) All dullness doth not hinder the success of prayer, but only that which is allowed, delighted in, or not striven against. Christian, if thou spare no labor to get thy heart upon the wing, and pray as well as thou canst, thy prayer shall be accepted.

I have prayed against corruption, and I have prayed against temptation, and yet I think it is increased since I fell to praying against it. Alas! I see no advantage made by my prayers. With what comfort then can I proceed in the duty? Answer: Thy corruption is not increased in power, but only in activeness. It is not stronger, but only more stirring. And why? Only because Satan hath edged it. He sees that sin will wither away, that prayer will bring a consumption and languishing death upon sin, and therefore he stirs himself. When a Christian sets himself

in good earnest to pray down Satan's dominion and kingdom, then he leaps out. He comes with enraged might, ready to tear the soul out of its faith, and to scare it from prayer. But see that thou pray on, be of good courage, hath not God commanded thee, "Be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed, for the Lord thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest" (Josh. 1:9)? It is better to anger Satan than to grieve the Spirit of God. If thou continue praying, sin will die by degrees. St. Paul prayed three times before he could get any answer.

I am perplexed, and know not how often to pray. Daniel prayed thrice, and David seven times a day, but this is too often for my calling. Yet praying less will not serve my heart. Answer: Pray every day at least twice, and as often beside as conveniency gives room and liberty "Pray without ceasing" (1 Thess 5 17), doth not mean to pray only and to do nothing else all day long, or all night long Such sense of the phrase is very preposterous But the command is to continually keep up a preparedness and disposition of heart for prayer, and to be frequent in this duty. The daily sacrifice under the law was to be offered twice, morning and evening every day (Ex. 29:39-40) Nehemiah prayed daily before God day and night, i e morning and evening (Neh 1 6) So did Paul (1 Thess 3 10), and David (PS 92 1-2) Surely this is the least thou can do In the morning beg the blessings of the day, and in the evening return thanks for them.

God accepts prayers more for their being sprinkled with faith and repentance than because of their number. It is all one with the Lord, to save by many or by few. Gideon's diminished army tells us that "all" is not in the multitude. And the Pharisees' many prayers, and alms and fasts show that all is not in number. I would not ensnare any man's conscience. To resolve to keep thyself to such an exact number of prayers will make thy way grievous. Only see that daily, and as often as thou can, thou be taken up in the exercise of this excellent duty.

I have fallen from my former steadfastness and lost what I formerly gained in spirituals. Once I stood firm in my own thoughts, but now I see that my righteousness is much like Ephraim's righteousness: "for your goodness is as a morning cloud, and as the early dew it passeth away" (Hos. 6:4). Once I could have mourned, and sighed, and wept for sin. Once I could have tasted the power of ordinances, and conversed with God in ordinances, but now I may cry out that my heart is wretchedly removed from that sanctified frame. Answer: (1) It is no new thing for saints to falsely accuse, and uncharitably to censure themselves.

(2) In this thy unsettledness, I see that thy heart is fixed. Answer me only this one question, How dost thou come to sorrow for thy fickleness and inconstancy? Does not this sorrow evidence that it is the full and fixed resolution of thy soul, to lament every discerned sin? If a mournful

frame were not fixed in thy heart, wouldst thou thus mourn for thy unfixedness?

(3) Every kind of wavering is not inconsistent with the truth of grace. Wavering is two-fold: (1) Some are wavering in the choice of the object of their affections. This inconstancy is peculiar to the wicked. They have a divided heart: a heart for God, and a heart for sin. They hang between God and Baal, between God and the world, as Solomon is painted hanging between heaven and hell. (2) Some are wavering in the pursuance of the object of happiness, and so the godly themselves may be leavened with instability. Hence, the apostle writes in 2 Peter 3:17-18, "Beloved, seeing ye know these things before, beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness. But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

(4) The most stable spirit is sometimes unfixed. Cedars and oaks are sometimes shaken with violent blasts of wind. No man is so spiritual as never to be indisposed for the service of God. Was not the Spouse indisposed (Cant. 5:2)? Does not David cry to God for enlargement? "I will run the way of Thy commandments, when Thou shalt enlarge my heart" (Ps. 119:32). This shows at least that he was sensible of inward straightness. Yea, this is a common lot. A Christian may be alive, though not lively. A Christian may be indisposed, yet not stark dead.

(5) Thou dost complain (dejected soul) it was once better with thee than now; if so, be of good comfort, those golden glorious days may return. In the meanwhile, there is a particular promise for thee. “Oh Israel, return unto the Lord thy God, for thou hast fallen by thine iniquity” (Hos. 14:1). Notice: the Lord thy God even after all this. And “I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely, for Mine anger is turned away from him” (Hos. 14:4). Thy putrid sores and pestilent ulcers shall not fester. God will heal thy backsliding. “Return, ye backsliding children, and I will heal your backslidings” (Jer. 3:22). Although backsliders, yet thou art children still. Therefore arise, embrace the Lord’s counsel and return.

Alas! My sin abounds beyond mercy. I have sinned against the Holy Ghost and the Scriptures say expressly that this sin shall never be forgiven (Matt. 12:31-32). Answer: (1) Is it so, poor soul? Hast thou indeed sinned this unpardonable sin? Why fearest thou that this is thy wickedness? Does the nature of this sin show thee any such thing? Is not the sin against the Holy Ghost a voluntary, willful, resolved, and malicious hating of God after conviction? “But he that shall blaspheme against the Holy Ghost hath never forgiveness, but is in danger of eternal damnation. Because they said, he hath an unclean spirit” (Mark 3:29-30). Is it thus with thee? Why then art thou afraid? Fearlessness and hardness of heart are ordinary signs of this sin. He who is guilty of it hath no trouble, no reflection, no trembling. There is a seal set upon the

mouth of the grave.

Secondly, art thou not so far from despising and blaspheming God that thou dost dearly love Him, and earnestly long after Him? Art thou not so far from hating and persecuting Him in His saints, that thou dost love them, and couldst wish to follow their example? Surely these are not marks of this sin

Could I but be assured of God's love to me, or of my love to Him, my troubled heart would take courage. But alas! I not only lack assurance, but I fear I can never attain assurance. My heart is so filled with guile, and falsehood, and hypocrisy that I cannot be assured there is any grace there. And if I should attain this assurance, I am greatly afraid lest I should abuse it to wantonness. Answer: Be not discouraged, gracious soul, we know (and so doth every holy, humble Christian) that there is an unknown world of wickedness, unbelief, earthly-mindedness, etc., in our base hearts. Yet, first, *A posse ad esse non valet consequentia*. A possibility of being deceived, infers not that thou shall actually be deceived.

Secondly, the heart is naturally false, but by grace it is made sincere. It is made like a dove without gall, and without guile (Ps. 32:2). Though the relics of hypocrisy be in thee, yet it reigns not.

Thirdly, that assurance is attainable, thou wilt find proved in my second treatise.

Fourthly, some abuse their confidence to wantonness. Oh, but that confidence of theirs is not an holy persuasion of God's Spirit, but a false, groundless, and devilish delusion. Thy fear of abusing it shows that thou wilt not abuse it. Shall not the godly strive for assurance, because the ungodly make their presumption the nursing mother to looseness? No truths are so sweet and spiritual that they cannot be turned into wantonness, even that of free and full justification by grace. Manna itself may be abused, and so corrupted with worms. (5) Assurance is maintained by holy fear, how then can it be the parent of pride, security, or looseness (Ps. 25:14)? Oh, it is carefulness that begets assurance, how then can assurance beget carelessness?

I am an ancient professor, an old Mnason; yet I lack assurance. I have some glimmerings of a dark hope, but alas, I am always doubting and questioning God's love, and suspecting my former profession! Answer: Thy condition is to be pitied, for thou dost lack the assurance of thy sanctification, the assurance of thine election, and the assurance of God's love. To lack the assurance of God's love is asad and uncomfortable case to the godly soul, for God's smiles are precious, His frowns are deadly, and His displeasure very heavy. This being thy case, thou hast cause to be afflicted, yet not to be utterly discouraged. It is the usual lot of the godly. David, a man according to God's own heart, complains of his broken bones.

Consider, first, God intends to teach thee how to comfort others in the same distress, by thy experience. This is the end of the cross. This is the end of thy affliction. “And whether we be afflicted, it is for your consolation and salvation, which is effectual in the enduring of the same sufferings which we also suffer: or whether we be comforted, it is for your consolation and salvation” (2 Cor. 1:6). Alas! We are unsympathetic and want a fellow-feeling of the desertions and miseries of others. But God afflicts His children that they may know how to succour others under affliction. God afflicts thee that thou mayest know how to revive and raise others that hang down the head and are heavy-hearted. By discovering to them thy doubts and fears and those sovereign helps in the ministry of the Word, thou canst help others. How the Lord turned thy troubles to the welfare and peace of thy soul and turned thy dark and sorrowful midnight into a bright and joyful morning! It requires great art and skill in a man to remedy the sore of another if he himself has not experienced the same pain. So now God makes thee sore, that hereafter He may make thee serviceable to others. Therefore sit down satisfied.

Secondly, if thou lack assurance, resolve to esteem it and to cherish it, if God shall give it count it merchandise better than the merchandise of silver and its price far above rubies. Let God’s denial irritate, provoke and increase thy desires after it. Pray and pray again. Be restless and more desirous than ever. Yet avoid murmuring

and impatience. Rest contented with thy present state, yet pray mightily for a more comfortable state. “God loves to hear thy voice” (Cant. 2:14). The harder thou dost pray for this jewel, the tighter wilt thou hold it when once thou hast gotten it (Cant. 3:4).

Thirdly, search thy heart, and see whether some known sin lies there unlamented and unreformed, and so robs thee of the comfortable knowledge of God’s love and favor to thee. “And grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption” (Eph. 4:30). Sin grieves God’s Spirit, and what grieves the Spirit of God will be grief of heart to thee. Sin will raise a very hell of horror in thy conscience. As a worm it will gnaw thy inward comforts, as an east wind it will blast thy tender buds, as vapors it will make an earthquake, a heart-quake within thee. If thy persuasions of thy gracious estate stand with any known sin, they are presumption, for a tender conscience feels a burden sometimes of an idle action. An idle word will break the power of confidence in prayer, much more a gross and scandalous sin. Did not David’s adultery take away the joy of God’s salvation?

Fourthly, the lukewarm performance of public or secret duties will waste and kill assurance. “Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure” (2 Pet. 1:10). Nothing less than diligence, all diligence, will preserve assurance. Nothing hurts a

Christian so much as a careless and lukewarm performance of duties. "Take heed therefore how ye hear: for whosoever hath, to him shall be given; and whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken, even that which he seemeth to have" (Luke 8:18). It is as if he had said, as you deal with God so will God deal with you. If you use the means of grace carefully, diligently, and conscientiously, you shall increase your stock, you shall be having, and having, and having, till you come to a glorious estate in all spiritual riches in knowledge, love, humility, heavenly-mindedness, and all manner of graces. But if you do the work of the Lord negligently, you shall wither, and your grace shall suffer loss. Your stock shall be diminished, your hearts little affected and enflamed with the love of God. Stand little in awe of God, and you will have little hope and confidence in God. Yea, this spiritual sloth will strike conscience with quaking and remorse, when awakened (Isaiah 64:6).

Warm and fervent desires are as oil to the lamp of assurance, as fuel to the fire, and when this fuel is withdrawn, no wonder the fire be ready to go out. Oh, how frozen and earthly are thy prayers! How heartless are thy meditations! How cursory and customary is thy reading! How ordinary thy hearing of the Word, and thy singing seldom with understanding. And is not this that wastes and kills thy assurance?

Fifthly, hate the sin that plots thee so much mischief. Detest thy iniquity that interrupts thy comfort, and as a black, thick, dark cloud, hinders God from looking with such comfort upon thy soul. Satan hindered Paul from going to Thessalonica. “Wherefore we would have come unto you, even I Paul, once and again; but Satan hindered us” (1 Thess. 2:18). So God would come to you, but that sin hinders Him. Sin is the adulteress that lies between thee and thy husband. Oh, the bitterness of sin, that keeps thee from the sweet feast of assurance. Oh, lie low and humble before God, because of sin. Lie like Lazarus at God’s gates with sores, and sighs, and sorrows.

Sixthly, if thou lackest assurance, make much of affiance, and trust God still. It is a piece of purest obedience to trust God when thou dost feel no comfort. It is an ascribing all to God. It puts the greatest abasement on man, and the greatest advancement on God (Rom. 4:20). It is thy duty to pray to God. It is thy duty to obey God, though God should never give thee one moment’s comfort in this world. God is not obliged nor indebted to His creatures. “Who is among you that feareth the Lord, that obeyeth the voice of His servant, that walketh in darkness, and hath no light? Let him trust in the Name of the Lord, and stay upon his God” (Isa. 50:10). This is faith indeed. Assurance is the life of sense and feeling; but it is affiance, or staying upon God even in the dark, that is truly the life of faith. If therefore thou canst not fly towards heaven with the wings of assurance, walk thither

on the legs of faith.

I find a woeful abatement in my affections. My sorrow for sin is decayed, and my fervour in prayer decayed. Answer: Every abatement in affections is not a declining in grace. Once thou prayed more but now thou watchest more. Once thy grief for sin was affectionately more, but now thy hatred of sin is more inveterate, thy judgment more settled, and thy will more resolved against it.

I fear I am under Satan's tyrannical power and dominion still. I fear he is my prince and ruler still, and that I am a friend to him, though he is neither a friend to God nor man. Answer: (1) Dost thou yet lie in a condition of sin, fast clasped in and pinioned with thy sins? If thou art a willing sinner, thou art indeed a child of the devil. "In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother" (1 John 3:10). Oh, but if thou hast taken an everlasting farewell and eternally shaken hands goodbye with every sin, if there be no composition or compromising betwixt thee and Satan, then it is different with you. If thou dost heartily renounce the devil's dominion, and art willing, Out of consideration of Christ's excellency and sweetness of His government, to deliver up all soul and body to Him, then the power of sin is broken. Canst thou groan, and complain, and grieve, and sorrow for the loathsomeness of thy dungeon? Art thou weary of thy natural condition?

Oh, then no tongue can express, no heart can conceive thy happiness.

(2) Seeing we are born vassals to hell, if thou wouldst know under whose empire and dominion thou art, answer me a few questions. Dost thou find thy blind eyes cured and enlightened? Is Satan unkinged and dethroned and Christ received and crowned? Once thou hadst a good opinion, a strong conceit of thyself, but now it is otherwise; now Jesus Christ the conqueror brings new laws, and is both a Prince and a Saviour unto thee.

(3) Dost thou rejoice when Christ is a conqueror in thy soul, or in the world? Wouldst thou rather fall into an affliction, than into a sin and temptation? Doth thy heart leap within thee when thou hearest that Satan is ejected out of such a man's heart, that strangers are become Israelites, and persecutors are now proselytes? On the other hand, art thou grieved with sinners who are captivated and drawn into the snare of the devil? Then, fear not, Satan is not thy ruler, neither art thou Satan's friend.

I have fallen again and again into sins seemingly repented of, sins which formerly I have pursued with particular grief and sorrow, and prayed, and resolved against. Therefore, I greatly question the truth of my estate. Answer: To relapse into old sins is very sad and sinful. Better to fall into new enticing sins, than into old repented of sins, for in so doing, thou seemest, not only to falsify, but also to recall thy promise made against it. To

repent of thy repentance, and to grieve for thy former sorrow will haunt thee.

But yet, (1) this doth not prove thy state nought, for better and stronger saints than thou have done so. Witness the disciples in Matthew 26:43. Christ commanded them to watch and pray in verse 38. Oh, but they slept when they should have prayed, “And He cometh unto the disciples, and findeth them asleep” (verse 40). He exhorts them again to watch and pray, “Watch and pray that ye enter not into temptation” (verse 41), but when He cometh to them the second, yea, the third time, “He findeth them asleep.” Abraham, the father of the faithful, had his own relapse into dissimulation about Sarah (Gen. 12:13; 20:2). And yet before that time, Abraham was in a state of grace and still remained in favor with God. Witness also Job’s friends. “These ten times have ye reproached me” (Job 19:3). Was it not a grievous sin to reproach a godly man, and that under affliction? And yet they reproached him ten times.

The power of grace appears more in maintaining a spiritual warfare against sin, than in preserving from relapsing into sin. Countest thou sin thy worst and most fatal enemy? Wilt thou not enter into a league or combination with it? Wouldst thou rather fight against it, than fall into it? This argues power of grace.

Grace gathers strength even by falling into sin because corruptions are discovered by relapses that lay hid before

in the godly (Luke 22:32). Satan intends to burn up the good metal, but instead he purifies it. He aims to cast away the corn by winnowing, but it so happens that the chaff is winnowed out. "But Hezekiah rendered not again according to the benefit done unto him, but his heart was lifted up" (2 Chron 32:25). Hezekiah knew not before the pride that was in his heart.

If this relapsing into sin come not from lack of will to resist sin, but from lack of strength, be of good comfort, God will pardon and pass it by. It is an honour to a man and much more of an honour for Christ to pass by infirmities. "The strong must bear the infirmities of the weak" (Rom. 15:11) - so will Christ. He will not turn His children or spouse out of doors for frailties or infirmities. He will not cut off a member of His, because of some imperfection. Sins of frailty lie not long unpardoned. They do not break thy acceptance with God. Only see that thy sins be infirmities, and not wilful sins.

Observe these few words of advice: (1) Watch and pray against relapses. As a broken leg that is bound up is shattered and shaken with a second fall, so relapses often shatter all our former assurances. A prayerful watch and watchful prayer is a singular means against relapses. (2) Call to mind former iniquities. A fresh remembrance of them will keep thee humble and weary, and will keep thee from the commission of new sins. (3) Believe the pardoning of new sins. Upon every act of sin, exercise

an act of faith for pardon. (4) Discover not so much infirmity of grace, as to sin because it is a sin of infirmity. Shouldest thou easily commit it, because God freely pardons it? (5) Believe not the devil again. He tells thee that Christ is not so ready as thou thinkest to pardon thy infirmities. He says that Christ is a hard master, but do not believe him. (6) Sigh, groan, and pray for heaven; the enjoyment of God's company there will swallow up all sins of infirmity. (7) Scruple not the truth of grace for every sin's sake. Mourn for sins of infirmity, for they are sins, and consequently to be mourned for. Yet rejoice in this, that they are only sins of infirmity.

Were I sure that my sin were but a sin of infirmity, I could better believe its pardon, but how shall I know this? Answer: In a large sense, all the sins of the godly (though none of the wicked) are sins of infirmity. "For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin" (Heb. 4:15). If Christ's blessedness hinders not His feeling of all our miseries, then neither doth His holiness hinder His feeling of our sins. But yet, some sins are infirmities, rather than others (Rom. 6:19).

I shall omit many marks and only lay down four or five, for the comfort and satisfaction of the doubting Christian. (1) He that sins out of infirmity, is usually diligent in gathering and treasuring up strength against sin. The

sense of his own weakness provokes him to more earnest working. He bewails the weakness of his memory, the hardness of his heart, and his slowness to believe. Hence comes unwearied waiting on God for more strength.

(2) Thou doth sin out of infirmity art surprised and seized on against thy will and consent. “The good that I would, I do not, but the evil which I would not, that I do” (Rom. 7:19). Thou art travelling to heaven. Oh, but unexpectedly this sin treads on thy heel, and casts thee down. This is not thy way; this is not thy element. It is thy joy to be kept from sin, and thy trouble to fall into it.

(3) He that sins out of infirmity is so low in his own eyes and apprehension that he will take a reproof for sin in good part. He that hath an infirmity in his feet will not boast of his swiftness. He that hath an infirmity in his tongue will not be forward to speak; he will be swift to hear, but slow to speak. So he that sins out of infirmity will receive a right reproof with thankfulness. “Let the righteous smite me; it shall be a kindness; and let him reprove me; it shall be an excellent oil” (Psalm 141:5).

(4) Is thy sin and temptation such as is common to man? (I allude to 1 Corinthians 10:13.) Are others of God’s people usually ensnared by it? Doth experience show that it is incident, and ordinary, and familiar to the saints?

(5) If thou canst acknowledge that thy sin is thy own conception and birth and art timorous lest it be worse than a

mere infirmity, this shows it is but an infirmity. Wicked men attribute their sins to Satan (Gen. 3:13), and these seeming good works to themselves, as Jehu. "And he said, Come with me, and see my zeal for the Lord" (2 Kings 10:16). Observe, my zeal. On the other hand, the godly attribute their good works to God (1 Cor. 15:10). And they attribute their sins to themselves, though they are from Satan (cf. 1 Chron. 21:1,8). Thou thinkest it is more than of infirmity, this shows it to be but a sin of infirmity. Wicked men take gross sins for infirmities, and the godly take infirmities for gross sins.

I cannot perceive those marks and signs of grace in me I look for, and therefore fear my state is not good. All I do is only done in hypocrisy and falsehood. Answer: (1) It may be at present a time of sore temptation with thee, and therefore thou art not fit to judge of thy estate. Times of temptation are not fit times for a Christian to give a right judgment of his estate. His soul is in the dark then, and a dark soul distrusts all. I advise thee, poor Christian, not to look at thy face in muddied or troubled waters.

(2) Judge not thy state by perfect signs. True grace must not be judged by the marks of strong grace. Some marks discover grace in promotion, others in sincerity. Some marks discover the essence of grace, others the degree of grace. Thou mayest have the essence of grace, while lacking the feeling of grace in a strong, powerful, and sovereign degree.

(3) If thou canst perceive a single sign of grace, conclude the rest are present in thy soul, though they be dormant and latent, and thou perceiveth them not. Sometimes a child of God discovers in his heart a holy fear and awe of offending God, sometimes spiritual poverty, sometimes repentance, sometimes love, sometimes nothing but holy desires and sighings after Christ. If thou canst perceive this, fear not, for it is the mark of a holy soul, a badge of eternity.

I am grievously tempted of the devil from day to day. Were I a child of God, surely He would not suffer Satan thus to vex, trouble, and tempt me continually. Answer: (1) Temptations are the lot of all God's children. Wicked men are tightly linked to Satan, and lulled asleep by him. They go on pleasantly with full sail to destruction, and therefore Satan disquiets them not. But those that seriously purpose to serve God are encountered and molested by Satan. As a lion runs and roars after that prey which is out of his clutches, so doth that roaring lion, the devil, molest those, who by the power of God's grace and Spirit, are passed out of His kingdom. He spites them, because they are not of his family. Therefore it is not a good inference which thou dost make, that God is not thy Father nor thou His child, simply because He suffers thee to be tempted. None have more cause to doubt of God's fatherly love than they who are wholly freed from Satan's temptations.

(2) Thou shalt be strengthened until thou prevail (1 John 2:12-14). 1 Christ bruised the serpent's head for thee. He out-plotted his policy crushed and dashed his power for thy sake. The devil's kingdom has never had such a stroke since the world stood, as it had by the death of Christ upon the cross. Fear not, faint not, poor soul; God, even thy God, is a mighty Man of war. Christ is the Captain of thy salvation.

(3) The more the devil tempts thee, the more doth God pity thee. "For in that He Himself hath suffered being tempted, He is able to succour them that are tempted" (Heb. 2:18). Suppose a mother hath two children, the one in the cradle, the other abroad in winds and storms, frost and hail, and snow. Is she not most concerned about the child that is abroad? How often doth she go to the door, and look out at the window for her child? Her heart turns, her soul yearns, and she is often heard to say, "Alas, alas, for my poor child." Thy brother, poor doubting Christian, lies safe and warm in Abraham's bosom in heaven. Thou art the child exposed to the storm. Oh, but the heart of thy Saviour calls for thee, and He even wisheth thee by His side in His heavenly kingdom. "Father, I will that they also, whom Thou hast given Me, be with Me where I am" (John 17:24).

(4) Temptations shall enlarge thy comfort at last. "Ye are they which have continued with Me in My temptations. And I appoint unto you a kingdom, as My Father hath

appointed unto me” (Luke 22:28-29). Temptation teacheth spiritual wisdom and dependence upon God. It makes a Christian an expert in the spiritual warfare. It increaseth, and trieth, and exerciseth faith. It humbles and abases the soul, so that many a saint can bless God for some temptations, as singular mercies. Time shall be when thou shalt say, “Thanks be to God that I was tempted.”

The more grievously and incessantly thou art tempted, the more earnestly thou must pray. Oh, pray for patient continuance in well-doing, that Satan’s importunity foil thee not. Pray for a spirit of discerning, that thou may not be ignorant of the depths and fetches of Satan. Thy simplicity and ignorance of Satan’s wiles will arm his assaults with more power. Pray that he may not circumvent, nor beguile thee with deceits and falsehoods. Pray for might to resist his temptations; he cannot make thee sin without thy consent. Indeed he can wind himself in, and by degrees draw thee to consent. Therefore call in God to thy assistance; bespeak Him in prayer, that thou may be able to stand, through His strengthening thee.

(6) Manfully resist Satan. Doth he come and say, Thou a Christian! Who believes it? When wast thou converted? Answer him, I was asleep this morning when the sun rose, yet now I know it is up, for I see the light. So when the day-star dawned in my heart, I was not aware, but now I feel the light of conversion in my mind, and the

heat of it in my life. Doth Satan say, Who told thee thou wast elected? Answer, I read my election in my faith and effectual calling. I went not to heaven for it, but heaven is come down into my soul. Election is no ground of my faith, but my faith is the effect and evidence of my election.

Doth Satan say, How knowest thou that thy evidences for heaven are not counterfeit? That thy repentance is real? And thy faith unfeigned? Answer, Suppose I have been hitherto hypocritical, yet I am resolved sincerely to repent and believe, as if I never had repented and believed. Though those acts of faith and repentance I exerted many years since are worn out and do not give the same comfort as before, yet I hope God will bring them to my remembrance when the temptation is cooler. Job was called an hypocrite by thee. Doth Job serve God for nought? Thou cursed spirit! I will turn from thy temptations; I will obtain another new copy of my old evidences. This I am sure of, if thou didst know me to be a saint, thou wouldst never tell me. Or if I were an hypocrite, thou wouldst not tell me, lest I should escape thy snare. Thou never tellest saints that they are saints. Thou never tellest hypocrites that they are hypocrites. Thou falsely persuadest hypocrites that they are saints, and thou wouldst try to persuade me that I am a hypocrite. Suppose me not for the present a saint, yet God is omnipotently able, and mercifully willing, and graciously covenanting and promising to work grace in my heart.

(7) Study to know the advantages the devil hath over you. An unknown enemy is not easily vanquished. Question: How shall I get this knowledge, since Satan is a subtle enemy and will be sure to hide his designs from me? Answer: Blessed be God, the tempter is not altogether undiscoverable. "We are not ignorant of his devices," saith the apostle (2 Cor. 2:11). Therefore, (1) Learn the compliances, leanings, and tendencies of thine own deceitful heart. "Walk about Zion, and go round about her. Mark ye well her bulwarks, consider her palaces" (Ps. 48:12-13). So Satan walks and considers round about the heart to know where the attack may be made most successfully. Therefore it is good Christian policy to consider where thou art weakest, that there fortifications may be made. Study and search out thy beloved sin, and treasure up the most sovereign helps and considerations against it (Luke 3:12-14).

(2) Take counsel at God's oracle; diligently search and read the Holy Scriptures. This holy book I would commend, as a perfect magazine and armoury (Rev. 2:24). The doctrine in the Holy Scriptures will be an ark to keep thee from being swallowed up in these soul-devouring depths of Satan. The history of the Scripture will show how it hath fared with Christ's champions in their combats with Satan. No temptation, but there is a remedy against it. No lust, but in some part or other it is noted and deciphered.

(3) If thou would defeat the counsel of this hellish Ahithophel, procure an Hushai for thy friend, i.e. entreat God to detect, and to confound Satan's designs at the best time. God knows all the windings of Satan, though he is like a serpent on a rock. God's eye overlooks hell, and the damned, and sees them sweltering in the scorching flames. He watches all the devil's motions, therefore intreat him to discover and confound him.

Satan's power and host render him very formidable. I fear I shall one day fall by the hand of this hellish Saul. Alas! I am but one, whereas Satan is a legion. Therefore he may oppress me with a number. I am weak as water; Satan is as strong as a lion, and therefore he may crush me with his power. Answer: (1) Satan is in God's hand, and therefore cannot shake or toss the saints with temptations, except as God gives him leave. He can do nothing, but as thy heavenly Father permits him. If he might do what he would, oh what cruel usage might thou expect from him! This cursed fiend would destroy thy soul; he would damn the blessed angels, yea, pull the Almighty God out of heaven. But let this relieve thy troubled soul, that all that befalls thee is of God's allowance. He will not suffer thee to be tempted above what thou art able, but will with the temptation make a way to escape.

(2) Though Satan be a legion, yet they that be with thee are more than they that be against thee. The holy angels are with thee. "The angels of the Lord encampeth round

about those that fear Him” (Ps. 34:7). And are not the blessed angels strong enough for all the powers of darkness? With thee is the blessed God, whose strength is infinite, and whose Name is Almighty. Therefore fear not. Think not thou, believing soul, though thou saw devils about thee, as many as the prophet’s servant saw Syrians about Dothan (2 Ki. 6:15), think not that therefore thou shalt be swallowed up. If the Lord opens thine eyes, thou mayest likewise see “the mountains full of horses, and chariots of fire round about the Lord’s Elishas” (verses 16-17). Therefore be not dismayed, thou saint and servant of the living God. Thou that dost fear God, be not afraid of the evil.

(3) Though Satan be strong, yet is he a conquered enemy. Christ hath overcome him and spoiled him of his strength and power to hurt (Col. 2:15; Eph. 4:8). And therefore, though he tempt thee, yet he cannot overcome thee. He may, by his temptations, hold thy soul in exercise, but be of good cheer, he cannot hinder thy salvation. He may bruise thy heel, but cannot break thy head. The wounds he gives thee may be painful, but not mortal. Though sometimes he foils thee, yet thou art, and shalt be kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation.

(4) Thy Lord and Head Jesus Christ is able to strengthen thee against, and save thee from thine enemy Satan. He is able to furnish thee Out of His infinite strength, in a

time of trial, with proportionable strength against the assaults of the devil. As thy adversary renews his force against thee, so thy Lord can and will renew thy strength against thy adversary. See what Joab said to his brother Abishai as recorded in 2 Samuel 10:11. "If the children of Ammon be too strong for thee, then I will come and help thee." How much more mayest thou be confident that thy Elder Brother, the Captain of thy salvation, will help thee against thy spiritual enemies that are too strong for thee. Therefore do not think so disgracefully and contemptuously of thy Lord's power, as to be afraid of the devil.

(5) God hath promised help and strength to enable the tempted soul to stand against the powers of darkness. "My grace is sufficient for thee: for My strength is made perfect in weakness" (2 Cor. 12:9). "He giveth power to the faint: and to them that have no might he increaseth strength. They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength" (Isaiah 40:29,31). In the original it is, They shall change their strength, as soldiers put upon hard service are by their general's order relieved by others. So in a time of sore temptation, Christ Jesus thy Captain will send forth His Spirit with a fresh supply of strength and comfort to thy heart. "Fear thou not, for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness" (Isa. 41:10).

(6) Thou art sure of victory, whilst thou doth resist and keep up the fight. “Resist the devil, and he will flee from you” (James 4:7). Though he comes ramping and roaring and seeking to devour thee, yet if thou seriously and constantly resist, Satan shall not prevail. Thy victory over him is not only possible, but certain. Look into heaven, and behold the glorified saints there. Were they not once weak and foolish men and women as we now are, tossed and tempted by the devil? Oh, but they grappled, wrestled, and skirmished with Satan till death came and put an end to their warfare. And now behold, they are rejoicing and shouting for the victory they have obtained over Satan. If thou wilt but resist Satan a while longer, God’s promise assures thee that thou shalt prevail also.

(7) Satan’s power is serviceable and subservient to God’s glory and thy good. No matter how his temptations may disquiet thee for a time, yet God can and will order them to thy good; they shall but drive thee nearer to God for the present, and at last end in thy everlasting salvation.

Now I feel myself freed from the temptation; the temptation is hushed and gone. Yet still I am at a loss, not knowing what to do. Answer: Hast thou fallen by the temptation, or hast thou not? If thou hast not fallen by the temptation, then (1) search whether the temptation be conquered or only removed. Sometimes Satan draws back, not because he is overcome, but only to give a fuller blow. Didst thou use God’s weapons, the Word,

prayer, and faith to resist him, and is he fled? Hath thy affliction, under Satan's molestations, produced the peaceable fruits of righteousness? Hath it wrought in thee more humility of heart, more self-denial, more hatred of sin? Canst thou out of dislike of sin, avoid temptations to sin? Are evil thoughts burdens to thee, heavy to be borne? Then the temptation is dashed and broken.

(2) Bless God that hath given thee so great a deliverance. Had not His grace stepped in between thee and Satan's blows, he would have cut asunder the sinews of thy hope, maimed thy comforts, and made pitiful work with thy soul. Oh, though there be more of the love and mercy of God tasted after a recovery from sin, yet there is more peace and comfort in the soul when kept from sin. God's pardoning our sin commends His love to us. Oh, but God's preserving us from sin, saves us much repenting pain and sorrow. Therefore bless God for thy deliverance.

(3) Beware of growing secure. Live in the daily expectation of after-assaults. Preach not to thy soul freedom from temptation, for when the poor Christian falls asleep, Satan comes, lets fly his temptations, fires his passions, and sets all on wheels. As David smote the Amalekites, when they were secure (1 Sam. 30:6-7), Satan smites thy soul when asleep in security. Mariners will not set to sea (were there never such a calm) without anchor and tack-

lings. Usually a saint's fall is after some great calm following temptation. As sure as the devil is a tempter, he will come again. Neither shame nor cowardice hinders his return; he will come in, either at a new breach with new temptations, or else with the same temptations he did before. He is not sure but hopes thou might lose grace, zeal, watchfulness, etc. or that God will permit him now to cast thee down. Therefore he will renew the onset, and if he cannot conquer thee, yet he will disturb thy comfort. Beware of growing secure.

But if the temptation hath prevailed, and thou hast fallen by it, and sin hath wounded thy soul, then seek out and apply the remedy. I mean, repent and do thy first works. Art thou fallen? Rise, by all means rise again. Despair not of pardon. Though the whole weight and shower of despair falls on the damned, yet some degrees and drops of it may fall on those that are truly godly. Say as the apostle, "We are troubled on every side, but yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed" (2 Cor. 4:8-9). Though thou be perplexed with doubts, yet yield not to despair. To sin is not death, but not to repent of sin is. A great sin repented of will not trouble thee so much as a smaller sin unrepented of. Oh, let repentance follow thy sin, and pardon will follow thy repentance.

I cannot hear of wars and rumors of wars without my spirit being troubled. I am afraid lest enemies come in

like a flood. What is an object of fear, if war be not? Fear is to hear the thunder of cannons from the mountains, and the neighing of the strong ones, to see the banners displaying, the pikes pushing, the swords glittering, the bullets flying, and the houses all on a flame about the ears of the inhabitants, to see in the streets and highways, wives and virgins ravished on the one hand, and friends and children wallowing in their blood, on the other. To look upwards and behold nothing but fire, and smoke, and confusion, to look downwards and behold hundreds of skulls, legs, and arms. When I think of these things, fear taketh hold of me, and I am so troubled that I cannot speak. Answer: First, war and bloodshed may be feared with a natural fear. Natural fear is a harmless passion. Why should not natural fear be as lawful as natural sorrow, which even lodged for a little while in our Saviour's pure and sinless soul? "He began to be sorrowful and very heavy; then saith He unto them, My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death" (Matt. 26:37-38). "He groaned in the Spirit, and was troubled" (John 11:33). Grace does not abolish the affections, but only rectifies them.

Secondly, a natural stupidity or fool-hardiness is corruption, rather than gracious affection. Some can be troubled or afraid at nothing; this comes from carelessness, and sluggish temper and constitution. Such senseless souls are like benumbed consciences, quiet, not good (Isa. 47:8).

Thirdly, there is a carnal or degenerate fear which is to be condemned, and that is when worldly fear is obstructive and prejudicial to the actings of divine and holy fear. Our affections are always wrong when they hinder grace. Therefore beware of and rebuke the usual effects of carnal fear. Be not discomposed and distracted in mind. Let not fear knock the mind off its hinges. Be not tossed, and removed this or that way; beware of violent concussions by the winds of evil tidings (2 Thess. 2:2). Maintain an holy quietness and sweet calmness, without turbulency. Tremble more at God's silence, or at the loss of God's kindness than at the darts and direful thunder of war. Fear more the displeasure of God against thy soul than the rage of men against thy body. Tremble not so much for famine upon man and beast, lest the word of God, the food of the soul, be removed. Tremble not so much at the drawn sword, as at God's withdrawing His presence from thee. God's smiles are sweeter than peace; and God's frowns and rebukes, yea, His very silence and absence, are worse than the fury of war. "My flesh trembleth for fear of Thee, and I am afraid of Thy judgments" (Ps. 119:120). "Fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul; but rather fear Him, which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell" (Mt. 10:28). Fear more for the cause of Christ than your own wealth or life. It were better we all sank in the sea than that the blessed interest of Christ should suffer. Oh, fear lest Christ should be defamed or reproached. Fear the sins of

war more than the miseries of war. Oh the rapines of soldiers! The hellish cursing and swearing! The beastly uncleanness, and notorious luxury! The oppression and stealth that usually abound at such a time! Oh the woeful fruits of war! Do not fear the dangers, so much as the debaucheries and outrageous wickedness of war.

Fourthly, though the people of God may hear of wars and commotions, yet there is no cause for them to be terrified and troubled. When greater alterations than war come, they must not be terrified. If the heavenly spheres clashed, if the earth groaned and staggered, if an universal deluge should flood the world, if all were turned into an hurry and confusion, into an heap and dung-hill, yet they should not. fear (Ps. 3:6). Nay, at the day of judgment, when the earth shall quake, and the sea be turned into blood, when they shall hear the devils roaring, and see the heavens on fire, the sun and moon clad in sack-cloth, and the stars hung in black, men and women amazed, and all the tribes of the earth wailing and wringing their hands, yet then must they be so far from terror, that they must rejoice. “When these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh” (Luke 21:28). When, therefore, the sword of the Lord is unsheathing, be not troubled but consider, first, that if wars be actually begun, God can soon still and hush them again. Or if wars be not actually begun, God can prevent them (Amos 7:4-6).

Secondly, God will be a safety and a refuge to you in time of trouble. “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble; therefore will we not fear, though the earth be removed” etc. (Psalm 46:1-2).

Thirdly, to be slavishly afraid of hell, is unbecoming a Christian, and a great sin. How much more is it a sin to be slavishly afraid of frail man? “Who art thou, that thou shouldest be afraid of a man that shall die, and forgettest the Lord thy Maker” (Isa. 5 1:12-13).

Fourthly, God much prizes a quiet, meek, and unterrified spirit (I Pet. 3:4). A sedate temper God loves, for such a temper resembles heaven, where there are no clouds, no winds or tempests, no fear of enemies, persecution, sword, famine, pestilence, disease, pains, death. No fogs of ignorance, nor error of judgment, no imperfection, impurity, inability, or averseness in the will, nor affections perverted with disorder, and no fear treads in the courts of God above.

Fifthly, the promise encourageth to believe, not to fear. “Whoso hearkeneth unto Me shall dwell safely, and shall be quiet from fear of evil” (Prov. 1:33). Indeed, it is said of the wicked that “their houses are safe from fear” (Job 21:9). Yet what they have is not an internal, divine peace, but stupidity and a seared conscience. It is a dream, afancy, and lasts but for a moment. “There were they in great fear, where no fear was” (Psalm 53:5).

Sixthly, God's power is on the side of His people. He is their Captain and Champion; why then should they dread the proudest man or potentest army upon earth? "If God be for us, who can be against us?" (Rom. 8:31). Poor Christian, hast thou not read on the one side how the Lord hath armed locusts, lice, and worms against the bloodiest potentates? Hast thou not read on the other side how chariots of fire, and thousands of angels are ready for the defense of the saints? Hast thou not read how the sea recoiled, that the Lord's Israel might pass through or how hungry, savage lions were muzzled when Daniel was cast in among them? Is it not recorded how devouring flames were tied up when the three children were thrown into them and that the stars fought from heaven against Sisera? How the crows fed the prophet of the Lord, when in danger of his life? Hast thou not read how the belly of a dreadful, devouring fish was sanctuary to Jonah, when cast into the sea? Now remember, this God is thy God for ever and ever; therefore fear not. But get a real, free, cordial submission of thy will to the will of God.

Draw nigh to the Lord of hosts in prayer, that He would so fortify thee with His favour, as to out-face all adversaries whatsoever. And above all things, get assurance of God's love. Let it be thy great work to confirm thy peace with God, for till this be done, it is impossible that thy soul should not be afraid at every alarm. "If thy peace be made with God, the Lord will enlighten thy darkness,

strengthen thy weakness, and save thee in all thy straits” (Job 22:2 1). Therefore say as David, “The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid? Though an host should encamp against me, my heart shall not fear: though wars should rise against me, in this will I be confident. For in the time of trouble He shall hide me in His pavilion” etc. (Ps. 27:1-5).

God hath left me and cast me off in anger, and will not show me mercy any more. There was a time when I knew Christ sweet and comfortable. These were happy days, but alas, now Christ is gone, and I fear He will never come again! Answer: (1) This desertion or withdrawal is a testimony of divine love, just as afflictions are (Heb. 12:6). Thou doth count it cruelty, but it is love. God fore-saw what havoc spiritual pride might make in thy soul, or what sloth and security might creep into thy heart. Thy soul would suffer, should He always feed thee with honey out of the rock. Such strong comforts, high raptures, and heavenly joys would overset thee, and therefore, in love to thy soul, the Lord hath withdrawn for a season. Thou doth still lie under the banner of Christ’s love, and art still grasped fast in the arms of His mercy, though thou feel Him not.

Secondly, though thy soul hath lost comfort, yet thy grace has gained, for now thou art much in exercising grace, repentance, humility, love, patience, etc. Though

thy soul be disquieted, thy graces are quickened. Now thou doth follow God with humiliations, lamentations, and supplications. Though thou canst not sing a song of deliverance, yet thou canst mourn and pour out a prayerful complaint before God.

Thirdly, remember that before this joy was present, and may instantly and unexpectedly return. Thou sayest, oh the day of my espousals! Then my crown did flourish, but now, alas, now it is fallen from my head. But let thy soul solace itself by remembering ancient love and thy former savour of His sweet ointments. Thou that bewails thyself, shake off these irksome cries. “It was but a little that I passed from them, but I found Him whom my soul loveth, I held Him and would not let Him go” (Cant. 3:4). See here the spouse in as woeful a case as ever befell a saint and yet some glimpses of joy satisfy her heart.

Fourthly, though thou be cast down, yet thou shalt never be cast off, nor prove to be a cast-away. Thou mayest fear hell but thou never shalt feel hell. The sun may be overcast with clouds and mist, but not blotted out of the firmament (2 Cor. 4:8-9). Though thou wade through a sea of sorrows, yet, in despite of all the powers of earth and hell, thou shalt happily escape at last. Though thou be struck into the place of dragons, yet shalt thou be brought out of that horrible pit, and set upon a rock. “In a little wrath I hid My face from thee for a moment; but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee, saith the

Lord thy Redeemer” (Isa. 54:8).

I am greatly afraid of death. I can never think of death without being afraid of dying comfortlessly. Answer: (1) Even a righteous soul may remove out of the body with very little comfort. “There is one event to the righteous, and to the wicked” (Eccles. 9:2). Some of God’s people have a sweet and comfortable passage into glory, through the broad gate of assurance. Others are so weak in faith that they find a very strait and difficult entrance into heaven. They die poor, doubting, and cloudy, though truly gracious souls.

Secondly, ordinarily a holy life is concluded with a comfortable death. What else extracted that prayer from Balaam? “Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my latter end be like his” (Num. 23:10). Did not the martyrs walk barefoot on hot burning coals? Did they not clap their hands in the fire for joy? What creature is so tormenting and afflictive to sense, as fire? Oh but by the power of grace, they were enabled to do that, which by the power of nature they could never have done. The delight of their souls found in Christ assuaged their bodily, sensitive pains. As their sufferings were very great, so God gave them stronger comforts in the apprehensions of His favour and presence, which topped them all.

Thirdly, however, if thou be afraid of dying uncomfortably, yet die in faith. “All these died in faith” (Heb. 11:13). It were to be wished that all God’s children could depart,

as old Simeon wished to depart, with Jesus in their arms (Luke 2:29-30). As a drowning man catcheth hold on something and is found dead with it in his hands, so throw out the arms of thy faith, and when about to shut thine eyes, cling to the Lord Jesus at thy last breath. Labour to die in faith of thy own reconciliation to God through Jesus Christ. Leave the world with these words of Job: "I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that He shall stand at the latter day upon the earth; and though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see for myself and not another" (Job 19:25-27).

Forthly The godly will judge of thee according to the tenor of thy life, rather than according to the circumstance of thy death. If thy light hath shined before men in the constant practice of a godly life, they will not conclude thy salvation impossible, simply because thy death hath been without comfort.

Fifthly, the uncomfortable death of a child of God may glorify God and edify the saints as much as some parts of his religious life. Oh, think they, if such an admirable pattern of holiness and humility had his heart heavy, and his head wrapped in discomfort when he died, oh what manner of conversation is then required to die in peace! As Samson slew more at his death than in his life (Judg. 16:30) so thy death may edify more than thy life hath done.

Sixthly, God will pass his sentence, rather after the good works of thy life, than thy corruptions and frailties at thy death. As the ungodly shall not be acquitted for a death-bed charity, so the godly shall not be condemned for a death-bed infirmity. Sin and sickness shall bear the whole blame. Angels stand round about the godly man's sick-bed, to carry his soul into glory.

Seventhly, a probable way may be taken to die in comfort: (1) by making constant and diligent preparation in life for dying, and (2) by maintaining a gracious disposition at death. Observe these two rules, and they will put a blessed and desired end to thy days. Die armed against the terrors of death, for death cannot hurt thee. As a drone bee, it hath lost its sting. Christ encountered and conquered death. Thy death is not total, but only external. It is the death of the body. Thy death is not penal, but profitable. It is a putting off of all thy defects, deformities, and infirmities. Thy death is not perpetual, but only a sleeping in the grave till the resurrection. Here thy victory over death is inchoate, and then it shall be consummate. Therefore fear it not. What is it to thee, but the conclusion of thy sorrows, the death of thy sins, and thy entrance into heaven? Die willing to see this world no more. Is thy portion, thy heart, here or in heaven? Even if thou leave riches and relations, thy gain will be an hundredfold. Hang not on this world's breasts, but remember what is laid up in heaven for thee. Die patiently under thy sufferings and pains. Did not sin deserve

plagues and pains? Did not Christ endure death patiently? Wilt not thou sign thy name beneath His and follow His example? Die with gracious exhortations and speeches on thy lips. Leave savoury instructions to thy children and savoury advice to thy friends and neighbours behind thee. Tell them how gracious the Lord hath been to thee. Finally, die commending that jewel, thy soul, into Christ's hand. Lay thy head on Jesus' breast and say, "A bundle of myrrh is my well-beloved unto me, I shall lie to all eternity betwixt His breasts" (Cant. 1:13).