


## *The Spouse's Longing for Christ.*

*"I have put off my coat; how shall I put it on? I have washed my feet; how shall I defile them? My beloved put in his hand by the hole of the door, and my bowels were moved for him. I rose up to open to my beloved; and my hands dropped with myrrh, and my fingers with sweet smelling myrrh, upon the handles of the lock. I opened to my beloved; but my beloved had withdrawn himself, and was gone: my soul failed when he spake; I sought him, but I could not find him; I called him, but he gave me no answer."*—SONG OF SOLOMON v. 8-6.<sup>1</sup>

 **HAVE** put off my coat." This is the spouse's answer full of Christ. Like one gone to bed, and having washen his feet, as the custom was in these hot countries, because of sweat after travel. As the friend answereth (Luke xi. 7), "Trouble me not; the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed." This shows while we are asleep, and bedded with our sweet pleasures, Christ's sweet words, "My sister, my love, my dove," His holy and dear head, frozen with cold, cannot move her to open and let Him in. While the temptation is up

<sup>1</sup> Preached at the communion at Anwoth, April 5, 1647. The *first part*, viz., v. 1 and 2, has been published in the "Communion Sermons."

and upon horseback, and takes us on the right nick,<sup>1</sup> and finds us on a ground of sinning with hot blood, we can hardly stand on our feet and resist, or hold out. The prophets rose early in the morning, and sat late up, and spake to Israel to return from their ill ways; yet Israel hearkened not (Jer. xxvi. 5), for idolatry had taken them on the right nick,<sup>1</sup> and jumped with<sup>2</sup> their ease (ver. 18). David was not himself in commanding to number the people, for Joab, otherwise a bad man, had better light nor<sup>3</sup> David, a man after God's own heart, for he was against the numbering of the people. But the devil stood up, and took David at the right side, when his pride was swollen over the banks (1 Chron. xxi. 1). Job's friends, finding him in a fit of distemper, sometimes through vehemency of his pain, caused him to sclent<sup>4</sup> a little off the line. The devil, winnowing Peter, came upon his right side to put him upon the denying of his Lord when he was upon a cold blood in the fear of his life.

There be four reasons of this :

The first is common—a withdrawing of God's working grace; for, if the dam grow dry or ebb, the mill stands. Psa. xxx. 7: "Thou didst hide thy face"—now the horse is saddled—"and I was troubled." So, then, unbelief makes a road.<sup>5</sup> When free-will holds the bridle, up goes the rider's heels, and he feels his own weight; and so it cannot but be, for obedience is not a web of our making.

2. The temptation in this case is many stone weight, heavier than our shoulders dow<sup>6</sup> bear. Pride, lust, laziness,

<sup>1</sup> Point or mark of time.

<sup>2</sup> Fell in with.

<sup>3</sup> Than.

<sup>4</sup> Slant.

<sup>5</sup> A raid or invasion.

<sup>6</sup> Can.

ness, and security are the meikle water, the saints are the short-legged horse, and down they go. God gives the devil liberty to break many a weak back. Be humble and fear. He knew us full well when He bade us pray, "Lord, lead us not into temptation."

3. There be two herbs that grow quickly in our souls in summer weather—security and pride. Humility is a strange flower; it grows best in winter weather, and under storms of affliction. When security and pride and other neighbour-like weeds are rank and up, the temptation has us in the nick.<sup>1</sup> Then if ye would be kept from the temptation's black hour, swell not in pride, turn not lazy in the use of good means. If you do, look for a temptation, as God's lance to make a hole and let out the wind.

4. Light is turned blunt and wants an edge, and then the temptation of a hot bed will prevail to hold Christ at the wrong side of the door. For here I provoke<sup>2</sup> to your experience to discern two nicks<sup>3</sup> you will be on. In the one, the temptation goes home without its errand; in the other, ye are taken, at a preaching, communion, a renewed glance of the face of Christ, at the death of a friend, or under a sharp rod. At such a time the temptation comes, and your light is like a new sharp knife. There is much steel into it, and the light shall cut the temptation in the weft at the first wipe. Let that light be a quarter of a year beside you, and it turns rusty and blunt, and loses the edge; and then let the devil come, my friend, say you, and I will foot his boul.<sup>4</sup> The temptation comes on; and by and by without a host<sup>5</sup> it is

<sup>1</sup> Right point of time.

<sup>2</sup> Appeal.

<sup>3</sup> Turning-points.

<sup>4</sup> Drive back his ball.

<sup>5</sup> Without a cough, *i.e.*, without any hesitation.

made welcome and the light stands by looking on like a dead witness, and says nothing.

It were a good *use* of this doctrine to observe the right stots<sup>1</sup> of your soul, to sharp blunted light, to beware of pride and security, and eye well often the case of your heart. Learn to know the gate<sup>2</sup> to the bottom of it. Plumb often,<sup>3</sup> and see how many fathom deep it is. When the heart is up on the devil's nick,<sup>4</sup> now, now take yourselves quickly, guide well, wale<sup>5</sup> your steps, fear and quake, cry to your rock, put your blunt light to the grinding-stone again.

“*How shall I put it on?*” This she says, as thinking it impossible and unreasonable, as Joseph said to his mistress (Gen. xxxix. 9), “How can I do this.” There is a dispute here with chiding. “Is not this,” would she say, “an unreasonable suit of my well-beloved to bid me fyle<sup>6</sup> my feet, lose my sweet pleasures, go naked in the winter night? Is He not a cumbersome Christ, are not His commandments untimeous, might He not have knocked ere the sun went down, ere I went to bed? It is strange this Christ of mine must have service betwixt midnight and cockerow, when all other folks are at rest.”

We see there be some dainty white and thin-skinned temptations, yea, holy-like, reason-like, and velvet sins, so well favoured to us that they seem to prove Christ to be an unnatural, savage, cumbersome guest, as wild as Turk or Jew. Such reasons will say: “I dow<sup>7</sup> not hold up Christ's cumbersome yeas and nays. He will flay the

<sup>1</sup> Motions.    <sup>2</sup> Way.    <sup>3</sup> Cast the lead.    <sup>4</sup> Point or mark of time.  
<sup>5</sup> Choose.    <sup>6</sup> Soil.    <sup>7</sup> Can.

skin off poor nature." For some temptations are of base metal, made of clay, yea they are wholly gross and round spun and ill-litted<sup>1</sup> (Ezek. xiii. 10). The prophets slew souls that should have lived, for handfuls of barley and pieces of bread. But ordinarily Satan has strong and well-spun reasons on his side; and the chief one that makes great din is the world for the world's pleasure, profit, a hot soft bed, well perfumed, daintily made. The devil has drawn the curtains, ushed<sup>2</sup> the house, and kept the chamber quiet that ye may take your headful of sleep; and all these are set against Christ, to hold Him out. No marvel then the hot bed prevails with the spouse. For a mess of pottage prevailed with Esau as a good one. "What? I am hungry; I may not die; you will tell me of the dignity of my birthright, a type of heaven. But answer me this question, Let the birthright go play itself while hungry and famishing Esau breakfasts." This is strong with the whore against God and the seventh commandment. Prov. vii. 17, 18: "The bed is trim and decked; we will get our fill of love; the good man is from home." The robber has his logic on his finger ends. It is not to seek against God and the eighth commandment. Prov. i. 19: "We shall find all precious substance; we shall fill ourselves with spoil." You know that it is a notable token of sanctified light when men are deaf at all reasons that are against Christ and His word. The flesh cries out, "What fyle<sup>3</sup> my feet, lose my place, leave my hot bed for I wot not what?" If the Lord's spirit is in you, answer, "What, fyle<sup>3</sup> my conscience? Better boolie<sup>4</sup> in my

<sup>1</sup> Badly dyed.    <sup>2</sup> Cleared.    <sup>3</sup> Soil, defile.    <sup>4</sup> Weep in a childish manner.

bed, quit my true peace, and lose my Christ." A reason from gold would not be a golden one to Paul; seeing for Christ, all were loss and dirt and dung to Him. The disciples' nets and their lines and their fish-hooks were not worth a straw when Christ said, "Follow Me." Thou who art tethered to thy delights, when Christ comes by and cries, "Follow Me," if then thou canst break thy tether like a rotten straw rope, and gallop after Him, thou hast clear eyes and seest well.

But here is a question that were worthy the loosing,<sup>1</sup> What makes this so hard to us, to go but the breadth of the house barefooted to let in Christ? Certainly the reasons are these.

1. Our light is corrupt and looks awry, and with a glead<sup>2</sup> eye upon Christ, and it looks with many eyes to the world. Hence when Christ knocketh it says, first, He cannot come here. Second: I doubt if it be Christ that knocketh, because I wish it were not He. Third: I must live. Fourth: I dow<sup>3</sup> not suffer. Fifth: This and this will befall me if I do it. Sixth: If I would let Him in, then my lusts would get no quarters with Him. My will, my affections, and He would never give one jot. They would flee upon each other. Nay, men's lusts are up where eyes should be, and their eyes down at their feet.

2. This is like the first. The devil has litted<sup>4</sup> the world and the pleasures of it. Thirty pieces cast a scad<sup>5</sup> of golden glance upon Judas. His light said, "Sorrow, make care, howbeit the Pharisees had my hungry Master, so be it I had a purse for my part of Him." Colours, and

<sup>1</sup> Solving.    <sup>2</sup> Squinted.    <sup>3</sup> Can.    <sup>4</sup> Dyed.    <sup>5</sup> Gleam.

the purple skin of things, and not the things themselves, cross our eye.

3. Our heart and our affections hold us still in our hot sheets, that we dow<sup>1</sup> not rise to let Christ in. Yea, hardness of heart, the worst believer, and the toughest disputer in the world, carveth all, and when we come to choose what to do, then we speer<sup>2</sup> counsel. Again, what sayest thou, lust? what is your will and vote? honour, ease, &c.?—tell me. Shall I let him in? and then we hear not the other side till amen. O but beloved, there is a thing they call “Try all things,” and look again and fear always, so needful here that they would pull the covering off all things, and let you see all things, whose skin is black, and whose is white.

“How can I? how can I, spouse?” thou askest, “how can I arise? how can I put on my coat?” I will tell thee how thou canst. Stir thy legs and arms, raise thy frozen fingers. It is strange to make a question how a whole strong man not bound can rise out of his bed! Stir ye, and cast the covering and bed-clothes off, and come to the floor. If men would suffer their light to play fair play, and think judiciously and spiritually on the world, and the delights of it, which is their soft bed, they might open to Christ. Men are but sleeping on a bed of ice. It will melt with the heat of God’s anger, and they, and their night sheets, and the bed will swim, nay, men have reason to tire of this bed, both short and narrow. Luke xii. 20: “Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be taken from you;” 1 Cor. vii. 31: “The fashion of this world passeth away.” Is not this a short bed? Fools cannot get down their feet.

<sup>1</sup> Can.

<sup>2</sup> Ask.

2. Is it not often hard, and so hard that Ahitophel, a king's counsellor, who could not but have a well-made bed, could not sleep a wink in it? he leaped over the bedstock,<sup>1</sup> and hanged himself, and slipped down to hell.

3. Yea, cold, cold lie they, the clothes fall all over the bedstock,<sup>1</sup> when (Jer. xiv.) nobles cannot get a drink of water. Nebuchadnezzar, with many kingdoms, is driven from them all, and from among men, to eat grass with the oxen (Dan. iv. 33). Here narrow sheets and a cold bed.

4. These who have been snoring and sleeping here are pulled out of their sheets by the Lord, and they leave foul sheets behind them. Job xx. 6: Though the hypocrite's "excellency mounteth to heaven"—a fair and well-made bed—"yet he shall perish for ever, as his own dung" (ver. 7). Are not these foul foldings? "The memory of the wicked shall rot" (Prov. x. 7). When he is gone his name shall stink. It were good then that all who sleep in this bed would waken and rise, and seek rest to their souls, else God shall send three sharp toothed hands—the devil, death, and judgment—to pull them over the bedstock.<sup>1</sup> And when (2 Pet. iii.) the earth and works therein shall be burned with fire, these who lie hottest, and softest, and sleep sound, shall, even they, their bedclothes, and bed straw, shall all be set on fire, and the bed will be burnt to ashes.

"*My beloved put in his hand.*" That is, with the outward ministry of the word. He put in His hand—it is His Spirit (Acts xi. 21; Ezek. iii. 13; Luke xi. 20)—in the hole of my heart, to make a wider hole. I confess this

<sup>1</sup> The fore part of the bed.



putting of Christ's hand in the key-hole of the heart is better felt nor <sup>1</sup> told. But it is this: when Christ sent His voice and tongue through the door, it did not [do] the turn, and therefore He caused His hand to follow His tongue. He gave with the hand of His Spirit such a dunt,<sup>2</sup> until bed, and house, and all did shake, and the door fell on the floor. Who knows not this who knows Christ's working—that when Christ speaks, His Spirit will make in the heart a stirring and such a glowing, that they will find His soft hand rubbing their cold heart? And when a key and lock are rusted, we rub oil upon the rusty part. When Christ cometh, He finds the wards, sprents<sup>3</sup> go in and out at will, and He takes will and heart and affections in His hand, and scours them with His file. Phil. iii. 12: "I am apprehended of Christ Jesus;" Luke xxiv. 32: "Did not our hearts burn, burn within us, while He spoke;" Cant. ii. 4: "He brought me to His banqueting-house." This was a pull of Christ, taking her by the shoulders, and bringing her into the king's pantry. Hence here be two actions.

One of the word, painting out with alluring and soul delighting words, Christ's fair white and ruddy face; this is a moral yoke.

And withal there is a real action of the hand of the Spirit in all His ten fingers working upon the lock, and setting, engraving, and stamping Christ in deep letters upon the soul. As when a fish is taken there are two actions, the bait alluring and beguiling the fish with hope of meat. This is like the working of the word which is Christ's bait; but when He wins us to dry land,

<sup>1</sup> Than.

<sup>2</sup> Blow.

<sup>3</sup> The work of the lock.

then, when the fish is hooked, there is a real action of the fisher, drawing and hauling the fish to land; it leaping and flighting<sup>1</sup> and wrestling while it bleeds with the hook. And this answereth to the Holy Spirit's powerful hauling and drawing of the soul in all the affections, that the soul feeleth joy, comfort, delight, desire, longing, believing, nibbling, and biting Christ's bait.

The *use* is; Because there are odd times, we should take Christ at the right stot.<sup>2</sup> When His hand is thrusting itself down upon our heart you should thrust your hand on above it, and thrust His stamp and His burning iron even down to the bone, that there may be great letters left behind, and all your life after you may bear Christ's marks. Till such a time, you shall never get such fair quarters or such odd conditions of Christ. Therefore make a double knot, neglect not to work with Christ, and set out all the sails of your soul, and write up the time, and this shall help your doubtings afterwards, and shall be a fair seal of your election. It must be a great guiltiness to smore<sup>3</sup> Christ's fire, and cast water on it, by other bye-thoughts, refusing to take Christ's ball at the stot,<sup>4</sup> and strike the iron while it is hot, in the means of praying, reading, conferring, and telling to the daughters of Jerusalem your love-sickness for Christ. But we silly,<sup>5</sup> narrow, and ebb-hearted creatures have not a hand to receive Christ's sweetmeats. We are like the bairn when his father gives him a hearty handful of sweetmeats, his little hand and short fingers let the half of them slip

<sup>1</sup> Fluttering.

<sup>2</sup> At the right moment in His movements.

<sup>3</sup> Smother.

<sup>4</sup> Right moment.

<sup>5</sup> Foolish, weak.

from him and skail<sup>1</sup> upon the ground. Our little fingers skail<sup>1</sup> the comforts of Christ, and we lose (1) comfort, (2) confirmation of our charters, and (3) we lose the increase of faith.

“*My bowels were moved for him.*” This is the moving and rumbling of a sorrowful and broken heart and true repentance, that Christ stood while His head took cold, as Isa. xvi. 11: “My bowels shall sound like a harp for Moab;” Jer. iv. 19: “My bowels, my bowels! I am pained at the very heart; my heart maketh a rumbling sound.” She would say, “My heart and bowels within me are turned upside down.” My soul said, “Woe is me, that my beloved Christ stood the cold winter night at the doors of my heart with His wet head and His frozen hair. O lazy wretch that I am, who could not arise and let Him in.” We see in true repentance there is meikle<sup>2</sup> sorrow: (Luke vii.) one woman furnished as many tears as washed Christ’s feet. No scant of sorrow there. Ezek. vii. 16: “But they that escape of them shall escape, and they shall be on the mountains like doves in the valley, all of them mourning, every one for their iniquity.” Hos. xi. 11: “They shall tremble as a bird out of Egypt, and as a bird out of the land of Assyria,” while they, repenting, follow after the Lord. Zech. xii. 10: “They shall mourn for him as one mourneth for his only begotten son, and they shall be in bitterness for him as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn.” Jer. xxxi. 19: “After that I was instructed I smote upon my thigh.” Ephraim bemoaning himself, did this as one very sorry for offending the Lord.

<sup>1</sup> Scatter.

<sup>2</sup> Much.

This reproveth those who know as much of what turned bowels for the loss of Christ means as they know a great burgh town up beyond the moon. They had never wet cheeks nor a woe heart for Christ. They say it not in words, but they think it in heart: "If Christ go by me, and be lordly, I will live without Him. If the gospel leave us, we will get the old law again, and the good old sonsie<sup>1</sup> world." To their comfort, then, be it said, who have a woe heart for Christ's wet and frozen head, and would put in His frozen hair in their bosom, and thaw His head, they have an undoubted mark of Christ's love, and sister and undefiled one.

But what is the measure of sorrow required in those who have turned bowels for holding out of Christ? I answer, this is indeed a needful question, because many deceive themselves here, and many have sorrow who cannot climb so high as to turned bowels for holding out of Christ, and for neglecting of Christ's call. Hence—

1. Beware your sorrow be not too little, or ill-bottomed for fear of strokes, not for love toward Him whom you have offended. The devil can come upon an Ahab with a crack of sorrow like the shot of a child's paper gun, yet it was not humbling sorrow. True sorrow so humbleth a man as—

(1) He dare not play the wanton, and ride the carrie,<sup>2</sup> in sinning as before, as Ahab did.

(2) True sorrow that humbles, sets the party in a purpose to creep into Christ, howbeit He should ding out his harns,<sup>3</sup> as the woman with the bloody issue feared<sup>4</sup> and trembling came to Christ.

<sup>1</sup> Well-conditioned.

<sup>2</sup> A two-wheeled barrow.

<sup>3</sup> Knock out his brains.

<sup>4</sup> Frightened.

(8) The hole made in the heart is only for sin, and this breeds a loathing of ourselves (Ezek. xx. 43): "And there shall ye remember your ways, and all your doings, wherein ye have been defiled; and ye shall loath yourselves in your own sight for all your evils that ye have committed."

(4) True sorrow seeks after the Lord, as here the Church rises and cries after her well-beloved; and these whom Peter converted (Acts ii. 37) were pricked in their hearts, and were at "Men and brethren, what shall we do to be saved?"

2. Some think they do right if they sorrow out of measure for sin, and take their pennyworth of themselves. But God seeks no more of you but as much as to toom<sup>1</sup> your souls of pride, that Christ may come in with His full vessel to fill it. Do not think to buy God's kindness with tears, as if sorrow were a fat feast to God; for some here go so far on as they will overscore and give God a lucky<sup>2</sup> measure, and an inch to the ell, one to the hundred, as the hearty merchant who delighteth to be called "a good fellow." Nay—

(1) Look when you come near to the edge of the brae to a gaping hell. Hold your hand—it is now time to rainzie about<sup>3</sup> your heart.

(2) When you find any smell of the Lord's blood and merits, it is time to look up and smile for joy.

(3) When the desire and hunger for Christ are nipping<sup>4</sup> and sad, speer<sup>5</sup> about for a Saviour. The evil of much mourning is that, first, it is rank papistry. God thinks not a penance of your tears good cheer. You

<sup>1</sup> Empty. <sup>2</sup> Overflowing. <sup>3</sup> Bridle in, control. <sup>4</sup> Giving pain. <sup>5</sup> Ask.

see not that you give suck now to merits. Second: it will make way now to pride. When the water goes out of the bag, wind comes in. When many tears go out, a windy conceit comes in: "I am sure God cannot but be pleased now. He is in my debt now."

So in seeking cooling humility, Satan slips in their neve<sup>1</sup> a hot coal of pride. Men see not that God will hold back an ounce or two of sorrow that you may sorrow because you have not sorrowed enough. If wind came in, it would breed a new boil. Third: it is Satan's gate<sup>2</sup> to despair, and he leads us on in Christ's way to his own lodging, for he himself is a despairing and trembling devil.

But a doubt here seemeth to stand in our way. Sorrow for Christ ariseth from our love to Christ; and as much as we love Him, as much should we sorrow for the losing of Him. We owe Him love with all the heart and in the highest degree, and therefore we owe Him sorrow of that same mould.

*Answer.* The argument would conclude strongly if Christ were altogether lost to the saints; but the saints have always a hank in their own hands. Second: howbeit sorrow for Christ's absence spring from a love of Him, yet it follows not that love and sorrow should be in alike length and breadth. Joy and love in extremity are commanded because there is no danger in over-joying. Neither is there danger that love for length and breadth rax<sup>3</sup> itself out of joint, and strain a sinew. But there is danger in over-sorrowing, because despair dwells upon the march<sup>4</sup> with sorrow; and so a friend and a foe are neighbours in town-row<sup>5</sup> together.

Hand.    <sup>2</sup> Way.    <sup>3</sup> Stretch.    <sup>4</sup> Separating wall.    <sup>5</sup> Side by side.

3. I will conclude with this needful watchword, that we take heed to our high-tuned affections. They are often ravelled<sup>1</sup> through other. When we sorrow extremely for Christ's wet head, it is much<sup>2</sup> if faith fall not a sound,<sup>3</sup> and if joy grow not lean and withered, because sorrow is fat and rank. Again, when the promise comes in and shoulders out mourning, and a blink of His new revealed face, then I will readily borrow a dispensation and sorrow no more, and there, I am fanked<sup>4</sup> and ravelled, ere I be aware, upon security. It is here as when a bairn's little hand holds two meikle<sup>5</sup> apples—as the one comes in his loof,<sup>6</sup> the other drops down upon the ground.

*"I rose up to open to my beloved."* Inward grief brings out the spouse's seeking of Christ. Why rose she not to open while He spake, and knocked sweetly, and cried, "Open, my sister, my love, my dove?" Here are words to have moved a heart of stone, and no question they moved her with sense in the meantime; but faith was weak. Hence when Christ was away from the door, and she deserted, she makes her to obedience, for obedience is quicker and more powerful under faith, and hunger, and absence, than under feeling and presence. Feeling, or motions at the word heard, will make us soft, foggie<sup>7</sup> and lazy; sweir<sup>8</sup> faith makes us sharp, laborious, and puts us to a doing. In faith, in a manner, we feed Christ. In feeling and presence we feed ourselves. In feeling we take in; in faith we give out; and sense ofttimes makes us idle. While the bairn eateth an apple the book is laid by. But whether the spouse had feeling while

<sup>1</sup> Twisted confusedly together.

<sup>3</sup> *I.e.*, into a swoon.

<sup>6</sup> Palm of the hand.

<sup>2</sup> It is a great matter,

<sup>4</sup> Entangled.

<sup>5</sup> Great.

<sup>8</sup> *I.e.*, faith in the midst of opposition.

Christ spake and knocked or not, yet the doctrine holdeth when Christ leaveth off to speak in His word, and when to our feeling He is absent, we are often very humble in doing and seeking Him. When Christ is either not answering or giving rough answers, the woman of Canaan is then busiest, crying and again crying to Christ, following on, worshipping on her knees, disputing the matter hotly with Christ by force of reason to carry away her desires. So His Kirk (Cant. iii.), having lost Him, rises, seeks, and, better seeks in the streets, in the open gates, and, about the walls: "Watchman, good watchman, saw ye him whom my soul loveth?" And so was Mary Magdalene when her Lord was lost. What a din she made with watery eyes. She saith, "Angels, saw ye Him?" "Gardener, sir, have ye carried Him away?" "Grave, hast thou Him?" We, like fools, can complain, "He is away." Fye! "Now all is gone." Fye! Now say ye, "He is away. What will I do?" and ye cry black hunger. But if ye be carefully seeking Him, you are fatter now nor<sup>1</sup> when ye were doated and feasted with His presence.

"*I rose up to open.*" After a refusal of Christ the conscience of the child of God begins to overcast. She had given a short and a dry answer. Now she is woe<sup>2</sup> at the answer she gave Him, and her hot bed cannot keep her. After the saints and Christ are aside, and have broken a straw, I defy you to bide<sup>3</sup> ten days from Him. After you have given Christ a rough and cankered refusal, there is a knot in the conscience that you dow<sup>4</sup> not bide all this time under a refusal of Christ. The conscience has

<sup>1</sup> Than.<sup>2</sup> Sorrowful.<sup>3</sup> Stay.<sup>4</sup> Can.



been saying, "Fye upon you, where is love now, where pity, when Christ standeth cold and frozen at the door, and thou wilt not let Him in?" Thus all the time while He knocked was a long thorn or great pricking stob<sup>1</sup> sticking in her conscience. There will, I grant, sometimes be much deadness in the saints after sin, and a purpose to take the play a day or two longer. But ordinarily after sin there is a pulled ear, and God's Spirit crying, "Wrong; come home again." In wicked men after sin there is no scant of false peace, and their heart says heartily, "So be it," and "amen" to all that they have done. After Jezebel had killed innocent Naboth, she said to her husband (1 Kings xxi. 15): "Arise, go take possession of the vineyard which Naboth the Jezreelite refused to give thee for money." This she spoke with an edge, and took a hearty mouthful of it. She would say, "I have taught Naboth good manners, what it is to be a good neighbour to his prince, and to buy and sell with his king. He would not give his vineyard for money, now take it for nothing." Here is Jezebel's "*so be it*," and her seal, "*well done*," put to the murder. When the rulers have crucified Christ, and a stone is above Him in the grave, they say to Pilate, "Sir, we remember this deceiver said while He was alive He would rise again the third day;" calling the slain Man when He is lying under a cold stone "a deceiver." They say they rue<sup>2</sup> not a hair all that is done. I deny not, but sometimes wicked men after sin will halt and clinch<sup>3</sup> like a crazy, tired horse after a long journey. Their conscience, as it were, bearing up a leg, not daring

<sup>1</sup> Small splinter of wood.

<sup>2</sup> Repent

<sup>3</sup> Limp.

to set down both its feet heartily to the ground. But this is not from an ilka<sup>1</sup> day's disposition, but from some holiday notion and a sudden awakening. But a Cain will go asleep again, and leave God and his sick conscience both behind him, and go and build a city. Then try how your conscience dow<sup>2</sup> bear with an outcast with Christ. If you be halting home over to Christ, and looking a greedy and hungry-like look again; if there be a gnawing in the conscience to look home again, because in Satan's bounds, you are out of your own element, you take not with the country nor with the air, home you must be, it is a good token. It is not to be worse thought of that the lazy flesh will say, "Rise not yet to open to Christ. It is too early. It is long to-day. (2) It is a cold night. (3) It is an unreasonable suit. (4) It is an untimeous and hard charge. (5) Give Him not a naysay, but put off awhile, you have no scant of days before you." Howbeit the flesh has all these, yet if ye see through these shifts, and can find nothing but thorns in your way until you return to your first husband again (Hos. ii. 7), you will to the gate again, and Christ and you will, without fail, meet again.

"*My hands dropped with myrrh.*" In the Hebrew, passing myrrh, current myrrh, that is for excellency, passeth well among many merchants.

"*Upon the handles of the lock.*" That is, the Lord left the smell of His words that flowed from His sweet lips (Cant. v. 13). As well smelled as myrrh whereof the holy oil of the sanctuary was made (Exod. xxx. 23). And not only that, but a smell of the effectual working of His

<sup>1</sup> Every day.

<sup>2</sup> Can.

grace was left upon the lock of my heart, my will, and consent, which made my hands, that is, my actions, to smell sweetly. We see when Christ is gone Himself He leaves a sweet disposition of obedience behind Him that will do His turn. His grace rubbed and scoured the lock, and made it gleg<sup>1</sup> and easy to open. Christ's fingers wherever they come leave drops of grace behind them. If He go away Himself He leaves a pawn<sup>2</sup> behind Him. Where Christ walketh ye may discern the print of His feet behind Him. After a full sea, and the tide has gone in again, at the utmost point of the coast, the sea has left a white score of foam to tell the sea came to this point, and no further. Luke xxiv. 32, "Did not our hearts burn within us, while He talked with us by the way?" Christ can come by you suddenly in a blast of a whirlwind, in a preaching, and cast in a coal at the window of your soul, and leave it smoking, and slip His way? And He can shoot an arrow of love even to the feathers, and post away Himself, and say, "Pack you out. Here is a bone for you to gnaw on." And with all this He Himself in the joy of His presence is close away only He has left some token, either the gnawing worm of red-wood<sup>3</sup> hunger that is like to eat in at the one side and out at the other, or some work of believing, or of godly sorrow behind Him. Then ye are far in the wrong to Christ who tie Christ and His graces to the running of a sand-glass, and the time of preaching, and eating, and drinking. He can work by His hand when He is absent Himself, and preaching is sowing time, and sowing and harvest, yea, sowing time and growing

<sup>1</sup> Easy to work.<sup>2</sup> Pledge.<sup>3</sup> Sharp, furious.

time, are not aye<sup>1</sup> together. Offend not, storm not, because aye when He knocketh He makes not open doors. Thank God for the smell of Christ when ye cannot get Himself. O say ye, "I had rather have Himself nor<sup>2</sup> the smell of Him." Who can blame you? I know you had rather have twenty thousand crowns of gold as two crowns only. But you get no more for the time. Be thankful and wait on and steward well what you get.

"I opened to my beloved; but my well beloved had withdrawn himself, and was gone." Upon sorrow for not opening follows a further degree of repentance for not opening. But when it is done to her great sorrow He is away, and has withdrawn Himself. This ordinarily follows our refusing to let Christ in that He go His way, and this is sad news. Now take up your hot bed, your lazy sinews, your tender feet, you dought<sup>3</sup> not, for cold fyle<sup>4</sup> your feet, and now you have lost your Lord. See then how far you wrong your Lord under desertions. We can complain and lay all the blame on Him and say, "O unkind Christ." Nay, but lay all the blame on thyself, and say, "Unkind fool that I am, who held Him at the door while His head was wet and frozen." He knocked, and ye would not let Him in. Well warred<sup>5</sup> you knock and He hold you out.

*Use.* Then take your pennyworths of Christ while you have Him. We sit<sup>6</sup> our market, and lose our Lord in the throng, and we cry wrong on Him instead of ourselves. By refusing to let Christ in we incur three great ills.

<sup>1</sup> Always.

<sup>2</sup> Than.

<sup>3</sup> Could.

<sup>4</sup> Defile.

<sup>5</sup> Well done.

<sup>6</sup> Neglect.

1. We are pyned <sup>1</sup> with hungry desires, and we draw at word and sacraments asa hungry bairn sucking dry breasts, and Christ will not let a mouthful of milk down His breasts. This is because we took not our tide of Christ. As Hos. v. 6, "They shall go with their herds to sacrifice, to seek the Lord, and shall not find Him, for they dealt treacherously against the Lord."

2. We lose increase of faith, joy, peace, and much grace, for we do think that Christ knocketh at our door toom<sup>2</sup> handed, and that when He comes in He brings nothing with Him. Nay, this were to judge Christ scarce worthy of His room.<sup>3</sup>

3. We lose in special manner joy and comfort. Sorrow and challenges fill the heart. When the husband is dead and buried let the wife see his coat, it shall cause her heart to bleed afresh for sorrow. The memory of the Lord's crying at the door, "Open to me, my sister, my love, my dove," and your obstinate refusing to let Him in is the coat of absent and buried Christ. The thought of His loving face you once saw, of His sweet tongue you once heard, is the very bleeding of a holed and wounded soul pierced through with sorrow.

"*My soul went out of me*" [Authorized Version, "My soul failed"]. (As Gen. xxxix. 18.) Or, My soul fainted; I fell in a sound <sup>4</sup> because of His speering.<sup>5</sup> But how did she fall in a swoon when He spake? for when He knocked and spake she gave Him a hagle <sup>6</sup> answer, that she would not go the breadth of the house, bare-footed, to let Him in. This I take to be the sore and

<sup>1</sup> Pained.

<sup>2</sup> Empty.

<sup>3</sup> Place.

<sup>4</sup> A swoon.

<sup>5</sup> Asking.

<sup>6</sup> Rough.

fainting heart she had in hearing Christ's last rap at the door, and His last angry word, like that word of Christ to His sleepy disciples (Matt. xxvi. 45): "Sleep on now, take your rest: sleep your fill, I will go seek My lodging where I best may." And withal remembering His loving words, and remembering her dear Saviour and husband, meaned<sup>1</sup> His dear head in the cold, raw, and stormy air in the night. This brought on a sound,<sup>2</sup> that her soul for sorrow was gone out of her. We see, when the saints remember Christ's sweet promises and fair offers, and, withal, their unbelief and disobedience, it is a sting of conscience and a worm going to the bone, that makes a bleeding heart, and that makes a sound.<sup>2</sup> This, then, is a deep, hot, bleeding wound of conscience, remembering how her Lord spake, and how she refused His offer, for conscience is the two feet of the soul. When the conscience is dashed against a stone and gets a broken leg, the soul halteth, and this is painful and causes a sound.<sup>2</sup> Men know not what danger there is in cutting some master vein that is seated either upon heart or liver, and yet a little chap<sup>3</sup> there may bring on present death. Conscience is the master vein of the soul, and is threaded upon the life of the new birth. Draw blood in this vein by sending Christ away without His errand, and it is a hundred to one that the vein bleed not to death, and the sorrow be excessive even to bring sounding;<sup>4</sup> and in a swooning, man is betwixt life and death. This sickness and swooning are a little matter to beholders. It is easy to stand on the shore

<sup>1</sup> Lamented, moaned.    <sup>2</sup> Swoon.    <sup>3</sup> Blow, knock.

<sup>4</sup> Swooning.

and see the swimmer in danger of drowning, wrestling with the floods. But faith has been now at over giving<sup>1</sup> in the Church. Faith and sense are tough in such cases. For the first word of a troubled conscience is, "He is away;" and faith can say, "Liar! he is not away." Sense says, as Psalm lxxvii., "He has forgotten to be merciful;" and faith saith, "Thou liest! this is my infirmity." This should teach us to dote<sup>2</sup> and handle very kindly a tender conscience, and to be loath either to break a wheel of it by some great guiltiness, or to draw blood of it by security, impenitence, neglect of a fair offer. We may soon, with a reckless or sudden chap, call out a lith<sup>3</sup> in the conscience; but none in heaven or earth can stem the blood but Christ Jesus only. If, unseen Christ had not holden up the Kirk's head in her sound,<sup>4</sup> it had been her death.

"*I sought Him, but I found Him not; I called on Him, but He answered me not*" [Authorized Version, "I sought Him, but I could not find Him; I called Him, but He gave me no answer"]. Then under desertion we should seek. Christ is gone His gates<sup>5</sup> now, yet the Kirk lays Him a speering.<sup>6</sup> Peter, after his denial the third day, came to the grave to spear<sup>7</sup> for his Master Christ. The forlorn son, after a long outcast, yet looks home over again, and he thinks him of his father's house. So in Hos. xiv. 2 the fallen Kirk is bidden go home again, and take words with her and say, "Take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously." So also Jer. xxxi. 18, 19. Ephraim, chastised and put out of his father's house, is

<sup>1</sup> At the point of giving way.    <sup>2</sup> Fondle.    <sup>3</sup> Joint.    <sup>4</sup> Swoon.  
<sup>5</sup> Ways.    <sup>6</sup> Sets about asking for Him.    <sup>7</sup> Ask.

weeping, and with watery eyes looking home over and crying, "Turn me, and I shall be turned." When the saints are put out of God's house they resolve never to take unto another shift, but lie about God's house, and dree<sup>1</sup> about His door, and greet and weep and howl, at door and window, until God rue<sup>2</sup> upon them and call them in. When wicked men are put from God, they are like the servant put from service that seeks a new master; or like the ship-broken man who, seeing the ship going in pieces and ready to sink, resolves to quit it, and take him to swimming, purposing to make arms and legs serve him for a ship. I love it not when men put from God could resolve to seek about for a new master, and when Christ seems a broken ship they take them to swimming to seek another rock.

But here are two doubts: God will not be mine, how can I be His? *Answer*: Faith will bid you halve the covenant here, and say, "Lord, howbeit Thou wilt not be my Father, yet I will evermore be Thy son;" "howbeit Thou wilt not be my God, yet I will evermore be one of Thy covenanted people." We must learn to hang by little under outcasts. He is a blessed man whom God cannot slay, and a happy man whom his Father dow<sup>3</sup> not forsake. (2) I have sinned. Shall I go home again in my guiltiness? *Answer*: There is but one of two ways. Let me reason with such as saith it is a death for a guilty man to go home to God. Now I will give but not grant you it is death, but it is a greater death to bide<sup>4</sup> away. There are fire and water before you. One of them ye are chased to run to—either to the water or to the fire.

<sup>1</sup> Endure.

<sup>2</sup> Repent.

<sup>3</sup> Can.

<sup>4</sup> Stay.



Of two deaths that you cannot choose but one of them must end you. Take the little death, and pass the meikle<sup>1</sup> death. To bide<sup>2</sup> from God after an outcast, is fire and the great death. Eschew that to creep near Christ's bleeding wounds. Howbeit Christ should slay you to speak to your mind—howbeit it be death, it is but water, not fire; the little death, not the great death.

2. When all is done, it is life, and only life, to go to God after an outcast. Fear not, He will not slay you. Fools! that slandered Christ and called Him a man-slayer. The devil lies falsely, for Christ is a sinner saver.

“*I sought Him, but I found Him not.*” A fearful and heavy temptation, as Lam. iii. 8: “When I shout, He shutteth out my prayer.” Where His promise now? Prov. viii. 17: “Those that seek Me early shall find Me.” Isa. lxxv. 24: “And it shall come to pass, before they call I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear.” And now here seeking and not finding, and calling and not answering. We may say here there is meikle betwixt<sup>3</sup> market days. This doctrine is preached daily true<sup>4</sup> to the saints. Let experience be the pulpit. When Christ prayed the same things thrice over (and “O My Father, if it be possible, remove this cup,” it was this unco<sup>5</sup> world with Christ), the first two times to His soul's feeling He got but a dumb answer. In this doctrine there is more need to comfort men than to prove it true. The ground would be redd,<sup>6</sup> and all answered that possibly can be said. And—

First: God will tempt His own promise, as we think.

<sup>1</sup> Great.

<sup>2</sup> Stay away.

<sup>3</sup> All are not alike.

<sup>4</sup> Experience preaches the truth of this.

<sup>5</sup> Strange.

<sup>6</sup> Put in order.

Will not the promise look hungry like then? But there is no hunger at the heart of it. A worm will gnaw and nibble at the root of a plant, and cause it [to] lower to the one side, and droop and change colour; yet it liveth and wants not sap at the root. This same is yet clear, Our Lord will tempt His own word of promise, as we think, and yet the promise bruiks<sup>1</sup> life. "In Isaac shall thy seed be called" (Rom. ix.). A word of promise yet (Gen. xxii. 1, 2): "Abraham," says the Lord, "slay thy son Isaac, whom thou lovest." There is a worm at the root of the promise. The promise lowereth to the one side. This is a sore cross cavil to Abraham's faith. So Luke xxi. 18: "Not a hair of your head shall fall," says our Lord to His disciples. Yet Acts xii. 2: "Herod vexeth the church," and James his hair and head both are stricken off, and fall upon the ground. There was another cross langel<sup>2</sup> to the apostles' faith. Christ says the gates of hell shall not prevail against His Kirk; yet His Kirk is now as it was long since, and saying (as Jer. viii. 20): "The harvest is past, and the summer is ended, and we are not saved." The Lord stands looking on, and beholds fair play, and we are killed all the day long. Is not here in our seeming a withered and dry promise? What is then to be done here? I answer: Let faith lean not only upon a tottering promise (for if God's promise fall, no great matter, howbeit thy bit bridle faith fall also), but also let thy faith lean upon the very temptation as upon an ordinary and special work of God. When God's honour is impawned in saving His Kirk, He will come

<sup>1</sup> Enjoys.

<sup>2</sup> The rope that fastens the fore and hinder feet of a horse or cow together.

and loose His pawn; and when ye have foughten your fill, and your faith is at the latter swaek,<sup>1</sup> He can then come and say, "Poor body! stand thou by, and dry the blood off you, and look on Me, and I will fight My part here." All the several objections are answered.

*Objection 1.* I am like to let my grips<sup>2</sup> go, and my weakness is giving over.<sup>3</sup>

*Answer.* Faith is not faith if it yield to carnal fears. Faith should be like the good wrestler who laid on his back yet keeps his grip. Like a man that is drowned with a bush in his hand, if you die here, die with a promise in your fist, and Christ in your arms; and how weak your flesh is, as spiritually wilful should your faith byde<sup>4</sup> by the mark.

*Objection 2.* Where is Omnipotence so long when I cry with a dry throat and pained breast, and am not heard?

*Answer.* Omnipotence is in God, and no elsewhere. Be sure not aye<sup>5</sup> at a call to claw your scabbed back. Neither is it Omnipotence's part to flatter you, or, as a pick-thank servant ready waiting on, to say "aye" and "nay" to your "yeas" and "nays." In a word, Omnipotence is at hand to save you when God will, not to humour your impatience as you will. We see not our hasty missing of God's power is not so much faith as the yooking<sup>6</sup> scab of our impatience.

*Objection 3.* Nay,—but I believe; I am sure I believe, and my very faith is not answered.

*Answer.* I am far from putting you from assurance of

<sup>1</sup> Last drop in the draught.    <sup>2</sup> Hold.    <sup>3</sup> Yielding.    <sup>4</sup> Remain.

<sup>5</sup> Always.

<sup>6</sup> Itching.

faith, and I am sure it is so. But hasted<sup>1</sup> humours and faith riding both in one race, posting together, our dazzled eyes will take the one for the other. He that believes makes no haste. Faith will knock seven times at God's door, and still wait on. You would have at first in your neve<sup>2</sup> what you seek, else you will not play. That faith of yours has soon done with it. A doubt may be made of a hastered<sup>3</sup> faith that it looks like the prophet's cake unturned, and so raw on the one side. Therefore see that it be not a hot, sudden humour; for God has promised to answer your faith, but not your humour; your patient request, but not your hasty command; your submissive desire, but not your wild, fiery passion.

*Objection 4.* Then you would put me from all assurance that I believe, because I dow<sup>4</sup> not wait?

*Answer.* Far be it from me; but that faith that ye think faith, in as far as it is so hot-spurred that it will either have a present answer or nothing, it is not faith as ye think. Howbeit it be with faith as smoke is beside fire, but it is not fire. Impatience beside faith is smoke, not fire. Discern, therefore, the one from the other.

*Objection 5.* My not seeing or feeling God filling my hand, breaks my faith in pieces. Would He let me see He were coming, I would delay.

*Answer.* Friend, ye may go to your watch, for (Heb. xi. 1) "faith is the substance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not seen," and faith doth cast an anchor in the night where it sees neither brim nor bottom. Faith is content with a fair unseen God's

<sup>1</sup> Early.

<sup>2</sup> Hand, fist.

<sup>3</sup> Hurried.

<sup>4</sup> Can.

venture, and you, a man, may weep and say (Isa. viii. 17): "I will wait upon the Lord that hides His face from the house of Jacob, and I will look for Him."

*Objection 6.* It is hard to see and believe.

*Answer.* Then ye say nothing but it is hard to believe, for faith believeth God's bare word with a pair of covered eyes. Secondly, yet ye have the light of the promises, and that is as good as Christ Himself. When it is told a wife, after seven years' absence of her husband, "I saw him: this and this he was doing: he said he would come home by and by to his wife:" this is a next best thing to the poor woman until he come home himself; and believing her husband will not lie, she sets down her stake there in a piece of patience until he come. Hab. ii. 3: "For the vision is for an appointed time, but in the end it shall speak and shall not lie; though it tarry, yet wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry."

*Objection 7.* It is a wearisome, toilsome, and dreary life that He keeps me in, to hold in His hand and cause me to wait on with little joy, no feeling, and skant<sup>1</sup> and want of old kisses.

*Answer.* Measure the life by the profitableness of it, and by the sweetness of your submission to God's wise dispensation, and not by your wearying. Little matter ye want sweetness if your faith be on its journey to God. If the traveller be going home, the less matter he be wet to the skin.

*Objection 8.* I want comfort in calling and getting no answer.

*Answer.* Faith may be without comfort, and offend ye

<sup>1</sup> Scarcity.

because ye cannot get aye<sup>1</sup> an apple to play the bairn with when ye would. Let it be your comfort that for God's cause, and in a humble submitting of your spirit to an absent Christ, ye can want comfort. He shall get his wombful of comfort that can want comfort, that God may be honoured with his believing and on waiting.

*Objection 9.* I would believe in the dark, and wink and believe, if I had comfort.

*Answer.* And little thanks to you to swim when Christ holds up your chin. The greatest praise to your faith, the greatest honour to Christ that can be, is when faith walketh upon fewest legs, neither feeling nor joy, nor comfort, nor experience, nor sight, but only this one: He is faithful who has promised; so said my beloved Christ, and I will believe.

*Objection 10.* Nay, I see of purpose God holds me off, and shifts me from day to day.

*Answer.* I grant you, and He well avows that He suspends the subscribing of your bill; for His delay is the seeking of your further kindness, faith, patience, &c. He knows that it is true, "soon had, soon gotten, soon forgotten;" soon heard of Christ, and soon unkind to Christ. A dear<sup>2</sup> coft<sup>3</sup> from Christ is well locked up.

*Objection 11.* Nay, but His delays are plain judgments, and bode anger.

*Answer.* Your mind, in my mind, is in a night dream. Expone His delays right, and ye ought to thank God for them. The longer leisure an earthly prince [give] to a poor complaining subject to tell his errand over again and over again, the greater is he obliged to the patience

<sup>1</sup> Always.

<sup>2</sup> That costs much.

<sup>3</sup> Purchase.

of the prince. When God is delaying you that ye may pray again, He is like a father saying to his bairn, "Hold up your head, my bairn; speak loud and tell it over again. I heard not what my bairn said." Cant. ii. 14: "My dove that dwelleth in the clefts of the rock, cause me to hear thy voice."

*Objection 12.* When He delays, I wonder where He is all this time. I fear He come not at all.

*Answer.* Where He is where He is not, even coming to tryst<sup>1</sup> with your faith's last sob, and purposeth ye shall not die through His lingering. But in waiting till He come, beware ye believe He will never come.

*Objection 13.* It were great glory to God, and a great confirmation to my faith, that He is a ready help at hand, and heard my prayers at the first call.

*Answer.* Nay, but His glory is your onwaiting for the trial of your faith and patience and love. When He has gotten this, and is first served, then ye shall be much served in His deliverance of you. But when ye pretend God's glory, and that ye should be served, you are gaping for your own ease, and that ye yourself should be first served in a present deliverance, and no reason but He be first served.

The only principal *use* of all is that we be charitable of our Lord when He answereth not at the first. Love thinks no ill. Far less should it think ill of God. Faith should be long-breathed and not soon tired, and lie believing and praying till the grey hairs. Well betideth all God's on-waiters. They get their errand with meikle joy. The devil takes the word out of Christ's mouth to

<sup>1</sup> Meet.

unbelievers, and saith, "He will not come;" and they take a false answer from Christ. What! shall I wait any longer upon the Lord? And so their faith falls in two in the waft. Wait upon Christ's answer. If it be not an answer of mercy, wait on still, for there is a better one coming from Christ—to Whom, with the Father and Holy Ghost, be glory, praise, and honour, for ever and ever.—Amen.