

their salvation, bless the Lord that hath made it a key by regeneration to open the door of salvation to your souls. And as you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him.

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AN  
APPENDIX  
TO THE FOREGOING  
TREATISE.

ROM. i. 18.

*For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness.*

**I**N all the foregoing sermons I have been pleading and wooing for Christ. And as Abraham's servant, to win the *damself's* consent, told her what treasures his master's son had, so I have laboured to shew you some part of the unsearchable riches of Christ, if by any means I might allure your hearts, and be instrumental to close the happy match betwixt him and you; and (as the *apostle* speaks) espouse you to one husband, even to Christ.

But alas! How few stir towards him? The most seem to be immoveably fixed in their natural state, and sinful courses. All our arguments and entreaties return to us again, and effect nothing. It is amazing to think what is the matter, that souls which have in them the inbred hopes and fears of the world to come, and self-reflecting powers cannot, for all this, be prevailed with to quit the way of sin, and to embrace the way of holiness, though their consciences meanwhile stand convinced, that eternal damnation is the issue and result of the one; life, peace, and eternal joys of the other.

This hath put me upon a serious search what may be the cause and reason of this fixed and unreasonable obstinacy; and in this it seems evidently to lie with most that live in an unregenerate state under the gospel, that they put a force upon their own consciences, and do imprison and hold the truth in unrighteousness, though the wrath of God be revealed from heaven against all that do so.

If by this discourse I can but set truth at liberty, and loose the

Lord's prisoners which lie bound in your souls, I shall not doubt the value of Christ will quickly rise among you, and free convictions will make the work of your ministers much more easy and successful than they now find it. It is hardly imaginable but the things you have heard must leave your souls under convictions: but if you suppress and stifle them, they produce nothing but aggravations of sin and misery. Now, in order to the free and effectual working of all your convictions, and begetting that reverence which is due to them from every soul, as to the voice of God, I have chosen this scripture, the scope and sense whereof I shall next give you.

The true scope and aim of this context is to prove the justification of sinners to be only by the imputed righteousness of Christ in the way of faith. To make this evident, he distributes the whole world into Gentiles and Jews; the one seeking righteousness by the dim light of nature, or the law written in their hearts; the other, viz. the Jews, by the works of the law, or external conformity to the law of Moses: But that neither can find what they seek, he distinctly and fully proves. He proves it first upon the Gentiles from this verse to the 17th verse of the second chapter; and then he proves it upon the Jews also from thence to the end of the third chapter. As for the Gentiles, he acknowledges that they had inbred notions of God imprinted in their nature; they had also the book of the creatures before them, enough to leave them without excuse, ver. 20. they have no pretence of ignorance: But these common notices of God, and of good and evil, they did not obey and put in practice, but acted against the very light and dictates of their natural consciences. For which cause the wrath of God was revealed from heaven against them, as the text speaks. Wherein note,

1. A clear and dreadful revelation of Divine wrath.

2. The object or impulsive cause thereof, *ungodliness* and *unrighteousness*.

3. The special aggravation of this ungodliness and unrighteousness, *that they held the truth in unrighteousness*.

1. Here is a clear and dreadful revelation of Divine wrath, the "wrath of God (saith the apostle) is revealed from heaven;" *ὀργή Θεοῦ*, the indignation or vengeance of God. It is a word of deep and dreadful signification; the damned that feel the weight of it, have the fullest sense of it. It is said, Psalm xc. 11. "Who knows the power of thine anger? According to thy fear, so is thy wrath." That is, the fears of an incensed Deity are no vain bugbears, nor the effects of ignorance and superstition as *atheists* fancy; but let men's fears of it be what they will, they shall

find, except they repent, the wrath of God to be according to, yea, and far above their fears of it. If the wrath of a king be as the messengers of death, what then is the wrath of the great and terrible God? This wrath is here said to be *revealed*, *Αποκαλυπτεται*, discovered, or made manifest; and so it is divers ways: It was revealed to them by the light of nature, their own consciences gave them notice and warning of it. Thus it was revealed to them by an internal testimony, a witness within them; and it was also revealed to them by the instances and examples of strokes and punishments of sin in all ages by the immediate hand of a justly incensed God. They came not by chance, but Divine direction: therefore it is added, *απ' ορανω*, *from heaven*, or from God in heaven.

2. Here is the *object*, or impulsive cause of this revealed and inflicted wrath, it is revealed from heaven *against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men*. *Επι πασαν ασεειαν και αδικιαν*. The former *ασεια*, *ungodliness*, compriseth all sins against the first table; the irreligious lives and practices of men, living in the neglect of the duties of religion: the other word *αδικια*, *unrighteousness*, compriseth all sins against the second table, acts of fraud, uncleanness, &c. against men. And because these two general comprehensive words are branched out into many particulars, therefore he saith, "the wrath of God is revealed against *all* ungodliness and unrighteousness." There is not one of the many sins into which ungodliness and unrighteousness are branched out, but incenseth the Lord's wrath: and though he only mentions the sins in the *abstract*, we are to understand the *abstract* put here for the *concrete*; the sins for the sinners that commit them, or God's punishing these sins upon the persons of the sinners.

3. Lastly, We have here before us the special aggravation of these sins, or that which made them much more provoking to God than otherwise they had been. And it was this, that whilst they committed these sins, or omitted those duties, *they held the truth in unrighteousness*: *κατεργων*, the word signifies to *detain*, *stop*, *hinder*, or put a *Remora* in that way of the truth of God, or those common notions they had of his being, power, goodness, truth, &c. as also of his worship, and the difference between good and evil. These truths struggled in their consciences; conscience instigated them to duty, and laboured to restrain them from sin; but all in vain, they overbear their own consciences, and keep those sentiments and convictions prisoners, though they struggled for liberty to break forth into practice and obedience. Their convictions were kept down under the dominion and power of corruptions, as a prisoner is shut up by his keeper. Their lusts were too hard for their light. Thus you have both the scope and sense of the text. The point from it is this.

Doct. *That the wrath of God is dreadfully incensed against all those that live in any course of sin, against the light and dictates of their own consciences.*

Sins of ignorance provoke the wrath of God, yet are they not of so heinous a nature as sins against light and conviction are, nor shall they be punished so severely, Luke xii. 47. "That servant which knew his Lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes."

It excuses, a *tanto*, in some measure, when a man can say, Lord, had I known this to be a sin, I would not have done it: but when the conscience is convinced, and strives to keep us from such an act or course of sinful actions, and we stop our ears against its voice and warnings; here is a high and horrid contempt of God and his law, and gives the sin a scarlet dye or tincture. Sins of ignorance cannot compare with such sins as these, John iii. 19. John xvi. 22. To open this point, let me.

1. Shew you what conscience is.
2. What the light of conscience is, and what its kinds are.
3. How this light binds the conscience, and makes it strive in us.
4. Then instance in some cases wherein it doth so.
5. And, Lastly, how and why the imprisoning of these convictions so dreadfully incenseth the wrath of God.

*First*, It will be needful to speak a little to the nature of conscience in general. Conscience (as our *Divines* well express it) is the judgment of man upon himself, as he is subject to the judgment of God. A judgment it is, and a practical judgment too; it belongs to the understanding faculty, 1 Cor. xi. 13. *If we would judge ourselves, &c.* This self-judgment is the proper office, of the conscience, and, to enable it for this its work and office, there are (as is generally observed) three things belonging to every man's conscience.

1. A knowledge of the rule or law, according to which it is to judge, called the *Synteresis*, which is a treasury of rules and principles, without which conscience can no more do its work, than an artificer that wants his square or level can do his.

2. Knowledge of the facts, or matters to be judged, called the *Syneidesis*. The conscience of every man keeps a register of his actions, thoughts, and the very secrets of the heart.

3. An ability or delegated authority to pass judgment on ourselves and actions, according to the rule and law of God, called *Crisis*, judgment. Here it sits upon the bench as God's vicegerent, absolving or condemning, as it finds the sincerity or hypocrisy of the heart upon trial, 1 John iii. 20, 21.

Conscience, therefore, is a high and awful power, it is *solo Deo minor*; next, and immediately under God, our Judge; riding, as Joseph did in the second chariot. And concerning conscience, he saith to every man, as he once did to Moses, with respect to Pharaoh, *Sec, I have made thee a God to Pharaoh*, Exod. vii. 1. The voice of conscience is the voice of God. What it bindeth or looseth on earth, *Clave non errante*, is accordingly bound or loosed in heaven, 1 John iii. 21. the greatest difference and precise obedience is due to its command. Its consolations are, of all, the most sweet, and its condemnations (only excepting those by the mouth of Christ in the last judgment) most terrible. Zuinglius spake not without ground, when he said, "What death would I not rather chuse? What punishment would I not rather bear? Yea, into what a profound abyss of hell would I not rather enter, than to witness against my conscience?" It is like he had felt the terrors of it to be more bitter than death. How many have chosen strangling, rather than life, under the terrors of conscience? Wherever you go, conscience accompanies you; whatever you say, do, or but think, it registers and records, in order to the day of account. When all friends forsake thee, yea, when thy soul forsakes thy body, conscience will not, cannot forsake thee. When thy body is weakest and dullest, thy conscience is most vigorous and active? Never more life in the conscience than when death makes its nearest approach to the body. When it smiles, cheers, acquits and comforts, oh, what a heaven doth it create within a man! And when it frowns, condemns, and terrifies, how doth it becloud, yea, benight all the pleasures, joy, and delights of this world? O conscience! how glad would the damned be to have taken their last farewell of thee, when they bid this world and all its inhabitants farewell, at death! And what had become of all the sufferers and martyrs, when shut up from friends in dungeons, had it not been for the cheering cordials and comforts thou there administered to support them! It is certainly the best of friends, or the worst of enemies in the whole creation. This is conscience, these are its powers and offices; which was the first thing.

*Secondly*, Our next enquiry must be into the light of conscience, and the various kinds of that light.

The Lord did not frame such an excellent structure as the soul of man, without windows to let in light, nor doth he deny the benefit of light to any soul; but there is a twofold light which men have to inform and guide their consciences.

1. The light of natural reason, which is common.

2. The light of scripture revelation, which is special.

1. There is a common light of natural reason, which is connate, called by Solomon, Prov. xx. 27 "The candle of the Lord.

“The spirit of man is the candle of the Lord.” This is affirmed by him that had an extraordinary portion of intellectuals, a brighter lamp of reason, and wisdom, than other men; and this is not only true of the soul in general, but of that special power of it, which is called *conscience*, which is God’s spy, and man’s overseer. The *Heathens* had this light shining to their minds, and consciences; some of them, by the alone help of this natural light, made wonderful discoveries of the mysteries of nature; yea, they found its efficacy and power, great in their consciences, to raise their hopes or fears, according to the good or evil they had done.

\* *Conscia mens ut cuique sua est, ita concipit intra Pectora pro facto, spemque metumque suo.* Ovid.

And to the shame of many that are called Christians, some among them paid great reverence to their own consciences.

† ——— *Imprimis reverere teipsum, Turpe quid ausurus, te sine teste time.*

But however, the generality of them did not so, and are taxed for it in the text; and besides, this light can make no discoveries of Christ, and of the way of salvation by him. The most eagle-eyed philosophers among them were in the dark here. And therefore,

2. God hath afforded men a more clear, and excellent light to shine into their minds, and consciences, even the light of the gospel, which, compared with the light of natural reason, is as the light of the sun to the dim moon-light. Psal. cxlvii. 19, 20. “He sheweth his word unto Jacob, his statutes and his judgments unto Israel: he hath not dealt so with any nation; and as for his judgments they have not known them. Praise ye the Lord.” Every creature hath the name of God engraven on it, but he hath magnified his word above all his name, Psal. cxxxviii. 2. God, who best knows the rate and value of his own mercies, accounts this a singular favour and privilege to any nation. Without revelation we could never have known the cause of our misery, the fall of Adam, or the only way and means of our recovery by Christ: by this a people are lifted up to heaven, Matth. xi. 21. in respect of means and advantages of salvation; and consequently the contempt or neglect of such light and love, will certainly plunge the guilty into proportionable misery. John iii. 19. “This is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men love darkness rather than light.”

Moreover, God doth not only afford the light of natural rea-

\* As is every man’s conscience, so are his hopes and fears.

† Principally reverere thyself; tempted to any base action, dread thyself, even when there is no other witness.

son and external gospel-revelation to some men in an eminent degree; but to both these he super-adds the internal illumination of his Spirit, which is the clearest and most glorious light in the whole world. "He shineth into their hearts to give the light of the "knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." 2 Cor. iv. 6. These are the three sorts of light that God makes to shine into the souls and consciences of men to direct and guide them; the first a common and general light, the two last the most clear and transcendent in excellency, especially that of the Spirit with the gospel: For though the sun be risen, yet men may draw the curtains about them, and lie in darkness; but the Spirit opens them, and makes it shine in.

*Thirdly,* How this light shining into the consciences of men obligeth them to obedience, and how men's lusts struggle against the obligations of an enlightened conscience, is the next thing to be spoken to.

It is manifest and beyond all controversy, that an enlightened conscience lays strong and indispensable obligations and engagements on the soul to obedience; for the will of God is the supreme law, 1 Tim. vi. 15. it is the will of "the only potentate, the King "of kings, and Lords of lords:" And the promulgation and manifestation of it, so binds the conscience of the creature to obedience, as no authority or power on earth can loose those bands; no man can grant a *Supersedeas* in this case, or relieve the soul so bound by a *noli prosequi*: For conscience, as God's *vicegerent*, in his name requireth obedience, and the man that heareth the voice of God from the mouth of his own conscience presently thereupon becomes a *debtor*, Rom. i. 14. put under a necessity, 1 Cor. ix. 16.

Now conscience, by reason of the light that shineth into it, feeling itself under such strong bands and necessities, stimulates and urgeth the soul to obedience, warns, commands, and presses the soul to its duty against the contrary interest, and inclinations of the flesh: and hence arise those combats and conflicts in the bosoms of men. Sometimes conscience prevails, and sometimes lusts and corruptions prevail, and that with great difficulty; for it is not alike easy to all men to shake off, or burst the bands of their own consciences, though others can do it easily. What a hard task had Saul to conquer his own conscience? *I forced myself*, saith he, 1 Sam. xiii. 12. he knew it belonged not to him to offer sacrifice, his conscience plainly told him it would be his sin; but yet the fear of the Philistines being stronger than the fear of God, he adventured upon it, *renitente conscientia*, against the plain dictates of his own conscience. Thus Herod gives sentence to put John to death, Mat. xiv. 9. "The king was sorry, nevertheless, for his oath's sake, and "them which sat with him at meat, he commanded it to be given

“her.” His honour weighed up all his fear of sin, his own word weighed more with him than God’s word; *Nemo ita perplexus teneatur inter duo vitia, quin exitus patent absque tertio*: ‘No man is held so perplexed between two vices, but he may find an issue without falling into a third.’

Pilate’s conscience was convinced of Christ’s innocency, Matth. xxvii. 18, 19. yet the fear of Cæsar hurries him on to the greatest of wickedness, even to give sentence against innocent blood, yea, the blood of the Son of God. Darius, in like manner, Dan. vi. 14. knew that Daniel was not only an excellent person, but that he was entrapt by the *nobles*, merely for his conscience, and that to put him to death was to sacrifice him to their malice: This he and his conscience debated all the day, many encounters he had with it; for the text saith, He “was sore displeas’d with himself, and he set his heart on Daniel to deliver him, and laboured until the going down of the sun to deliver him;” but after a day’s sharp fight betwixt him and his conscience, lust prevails at last against light, and returns victor out of the field in the evening. So it was with poor Spira; he seem’d to hear, as it were, an inward voice, *Do not write, Spira, do not write*: but the love of his estate, wife, and children, drew his hand to the paper, though conscience struggled hard to hold it back.

Thus, as the restless sea strives to beat down, or break over its bounds, so do impetuous lusts strive to over-bear light and conviction; *video meliora proboque, deteriora sequor*: They know this or that to be a sin, and that they hazard their souls by it; but yet they will adventure on it, and rush into sin as the horse into the battle.

*Fourthly*, I promised to give you some instances of the conflicts betwixt men’s consciences and their corruptions, wherein conscience is vanquished and over-borne, and by what weapons the victory over conscience is obtained. Now the convictions of men are two-fold, viz.

1. General, respecting their state.

2. Particular, respecting this or that action.

1. There are general convictions and notices given to some men and women by their consciences, that their condition, or state of soul is neither right nor safe; that they want the main things which constitutes a Christian, viz. regeneration, or a gracious change of heart and life: They hear and read the signs and effects of these things; but their consciences plainly tell them it cannot find them in them; that they enjoy the external privileges of the saints, but they belong not to them; that something is still wanting, and that the main thing too. O my soul, thou art not right; thou hast gifts, thou hast a name to live, but for all that thou art dead;



some further work must be done upon thee, or thou art undone to eternity: thou passest for a good Christian among men, but woe to thee if thou die in the state thou art. These, and such as these are the whispers of some men's consciences in their ears; and yet they cannot so yield themselves up into the hands of their convictions, as to confess and bewail their hypocrisy and gross mistake, and seek for a better foundation to build their hope on. Felix's conscience gave him such a terrible rouse and monition as this, and made him to tremble whilst Paul reasoned with him about righteousness, and temperance, and judgment to come, Acts xxiv. 25. it whispered in his ear such language as this, O poor soul, how shall such an oppressor, such an intemperate wretch as thou art, stand before God in this day of judgment, which Paul proves in thy face is certainly future? For, as Tacitus saith of him, He was *inexplebilis gurgis*, an insatiable gulph of covetousness: So it was with Agrippa, Acts xxvi. 28. he stood at half-bent, dubious, and unresolved what to do: he saw the heavenly doctrine of Christianity evidently confirmed by doctrines and miracles, his conscience pleaded hard with him to embrace it, and had almost prevailed; almost, or within a little, as the word is, thou persuadest me to be a Christian: but Agrippa had too much wealth and honours to deny and forsake for Christ; the love of the present world overbore both the hopes and fears of the world to come. And thus that excellent fisher for souls, who had thoroughly converted so many to Christ, caught but a piece of Agrippa; *almost* is a great deal for so great a person. The gospel is a drag-net, and brings up all sorts, whole Christians, and half Christians. The conscience is caught, and the will begins to incline; but O the power and prevalence of sin! which, like the rudder, commands all to a contrary course.

If we come a little nearer, and enquire what are those *Remora's* that stop conscience in its course, bind and imprison, stifle and suppress its convictions; that although a man strongly suspect his foundation to be but sand, his hopes for heaven a strong delusion, yet will he not throw up his vain hopes, confess his self-deceits, and begin all anew. What is it which over-bears conscience in this case? Let men impartially examine their hearts, and it will be found that these three things bind and imprison these convictions of conscience, and hold the truth in unrighteousness, viz. Shame, fear, and pride of heart.

(1.) *Shame*. Men that have been professors, and of good esteem in the world, are ashamed the world should know the mistakes and errors of all their life past, and what deluded fools and self-deceivers they have been: this is a powerful restraint upon conviction; how shall they look their acquaintance in the face? what

will men think and say of them? "How can ye believe which receive honour one of another?" saith Christ, John v. 44. q. d. What! you be Christians, and yet not able to endure a censure, or a scoff upon your names; that stand more upon your reputation than your salvation: how can you believe?

O what madness and exalted folly appears in this case! men will choose rather to go on, though conscience tells them the end of that way will be death, than suffer the shame of a just and necessary retraction, which yet indeed is not their shame, but their duty and glory. You that are so tender of the shame of men, how will you be able to endure the contempt and shame that shall be cast on you from God, angels and men, in the great day? Luke ix. 26. It is no shame to acknowledge your mistake, but to persist in it, after conviction, is shameful madness.

I knew an excellent minister, who proved an eminent instrument in the church of God, who in the beginning of his ministerial course was not upon the right foundation of regeneration. This man had rare abilities, excellent natural and acquired gifts, and could preach of regeneration, faith, and heavenly-mindedness, though he felt nothing of these things in his own experience. His life was very unblameable, and he had no mean interest and esteem among good men. It pleased the Lord, whilst this man was studying an excellent spiritual point to preach to others, his conscience first preached it in his study to himself, and that with such a close and rousing application, as made him to tremble, telling him, that though he had gifts above many, and sobriety in his conversation, yet one thing, and that the main thing, sanctifying grace, was wanting. Hereupon the pangs of the new birth seized his soul, and the Lord made him a most inward, searching, experimental minister, and crowned his labours with unusual success. This minister, to his dying day, was not ashamed in all companies to acknowledge his mistake, and bless God for his recovery out of it; and in most of his sermons, he would endeavour to convince professors of the necessity of a second conversion.

(2.) *Fear* is another pull-back, which with-holds men from executing the convictions of their own consciences, and obeying its calls in this grand case and concern of the soul. They are pretty easy and safe under the external profession, and duties of religion, and are afraid of throwing up their vain hopes, and engaging themselves heartily and thoroughly in religion; and there be two things that scare them.

1st. The inward pains and troubles of Spirit attending the new birth; which they have read and heard of, and seen the effects of in others. O it is a dreadful thing to lie under the terrors that

many have felt ! and so it is with them as with one that hath a bone ill-set, who, if he have any ease, will rather endure a little daily pain, and be content to halt all his life, than undergo the pain of another fraction or dislocation in order to a perfect cure.

2dly, They are afraid of external sufferings. The form of godliness leaves men a latitude to take or leave, according as the times favour or frown upon the ways of religion ; but the power of godliness will engage and put them beyond retreat : They must then stand to it come what will. But, soul, let me tell thee, if the just fears and apprehensions of hell, and the eternal wrath of God were upon thee, to which thy hypocrisy and formality will expose thee ; all these fears of inward or outward troubles would vanish the same hour.

(3.) *Pride of heart* suffers not this conviction of conscience to work out its effects, but holds this truth in unrighteousness, to the hazard and ruin of many souls. Men that live upon their own duties and self-righteousness, are not easily brought to renounce all this, and live upon the righteousness of Christ alone for justification. Proud nature will rather venture the hazard of damnation than such self-denial, Rom. x. 3. As you see it common among poor people to live meanly on coarse fare of their own, than upon the alms and bounty of another.

O but if once the day of God's power be come, and a man begins to feel the commandment come home to his conscience, as Paul did, Rom. vii. 9. when he comes to realize the world to come, the value of his soul, and the danger it is in ; then all these remora's are as easily swept away, as so many straws by the rapid course of a mighty torrent. Then let men say or think what they please, I must not throw away my own soul to maintain a vain estimation among men. Let inward or outward sufferings be ever so great, it is better for me to feel them, than to suffer the everlasting wrath of the great and terrible God. Let my own righteousness be what it will, all is but dung and dross to the pure and perfect righteousness of Christ.

2. As this general conviction, with respect to men's state and condition, is held in unrighteousness, and men and women go with grumbling consciences, and frequent inward fears by reason of it ; so there are many particular convictions bound and imprisoned in men's souls. Particular convictions, I say, both as to sins committed, and known duties omitted, against both tables of the law of God ; called in the text, *ungodliness* and *unrighteousness*. Conscience labours and strives to bring men to confess, bewail, and reform them, but cannot prevail ; contrary lusts and interests overpower them, and detain them in unrighteousness. What these

are, and how they are with-held by those lusts, I shall give in some instances.

*Instance 1.* And first, for convictions of *ungodliness*. There are many that call themselves Christians, whose consciences tell them God is to be daily and duly worshipped by them, both in family and closet-prayer. It sets before them Joshua's pious practice, Joshua xxiv. 15. "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." They know God is the *founder*, the *owner*, the *master* of their families; that all family-blessings are from him, and therefore he is to be owned, acknowledged, and sought, in daily family prayers and praises. It tells them the curse of God hangs over prayerless families, Jer. x. 25. and that they live in the inexcusable neglects of these duties, seldom worshipping God with their families, or in their closets; and that therefore they live without God in the world. And dreadful will the account and reckoning be at the great day, for their own souls, which they have starved for want of closet-prayer, and for the souls committed to their charge, which perish for want of family-duties. This is the case of many, who yet will needs pass for professors of Christianity.

Lord, how sad a case is here? How can men possibly live in the daily neglect of so great, so necessary a duty? Certainly it is not for want of light and conviction; the very light of nature, if we had no Bibles, discovers these duties. But three things hold this truth of God dictated by men's consciences in unrighteousness, viz.

1. The love of the world.
2. Consciousness of inability.
3. A disinclined heart.

1. *The love of the world* chokes this conviction in the souls of some: and they think it enough to plead for their excuse, the want of opportunities, and many encumbrances they have, which will not allow them time for these duties. The world is a severe task-master, and fills their heads and hands all the day with cares and toils.

And must the mouth of conscience then be stopped with such a plea as this? No; God and conscience will not be answered and put off so. The greatest number of persons in the world, from whom God hath the most spiritual and excellent worship, are of the lower and poorer rank, Psal. lxxiv. 20. James ii. 5. And it is highly probable your necessities had been less, if your prayers had been more. And what sweeter outlet and vent to all these troubles can you find than prayer? This would sweeten all your labours and sorrows in the world.

2. *Consciousness and sense of inability and want of gifts*, restrain this conviction in others. Should they attempt such duties before

others they shall but expose their own ignorance and shame.

But this is a vain pretence to shake off duty. The neglect of prayer is a principal cause of that inability you complain of; gifts, as well as grace, grow by exercise. To him that hath shall be given, and he shall have more abundantly. And besides, it is the fruit of pride, and argues your eye to be more upon your own honour than God's. The Lord regards not oratory in prayer; your broken expressions, yea, your groans and sighs please him more than all the eloquence in the world.

3. But the principal thing that restrains men from obeying their convictions as to family and closet prayer, is a *disinclined heart*; that is the root and true cause of these sinful neglects and omissions. You savour not the sweetness of these things, and what a man relishes no sweetness in, or finds no necessity of, is easily omitted and let pass.

But woe to you that go from day to day self-condemned for the neglect of so known, so sweet, and so necessary a duty; if our hearts condemn us, God is greater than our hearts, 1 John iii. 20. He that lives without prayer is dead whilst he lives; and let men talk what they please of secret communion with God, I am sure, if religion did thrive in the closet, it would never be banished out of the family. The time is coming also when death will disband and break up your families, separate the wife from the husband, the child from the parent, the servant from the master; and then where shall you find relief and comfort, who have spent your time together so sinfully and vainly, I cannot tell, nor what account you can give to God in the great day. Think sadly on these things, they are worth thinking on.

*Instance 2.* A second instance of *ungodliness* continued in under the convictions of conscience, is *formality* in all the external duties of religion and ordinances of God. Have not the consciences of some of you often, and plainly told you, that though you be often engaged in the public duties of hearing, prayer, &c. yet your hearts are not with God in those duties? They do not work after communion and fellowship with him therein. It is nothing but the force of education, custom, and care of reputation brings you there.

Such a conviction as this could it work home, and do its work thoroughly, would be the salvation of thy soul; were power added to the form, as conscience would have it, thou wert then a real Christian, and out of the danger of hell. The want of this thy conscience sees will be thy ruin, and accordingly gives thee plain warning of it. O what pity is it such a conviction as this should be held in unrighteousness! But so it is in very many souls, and that on several accounts.

1. Because hypocrisy is so odious and abominable a sin, that men are loth to own and acknowledge it, how guilty soever they be of it. What, dissemble with God, and play the hypocrite with him ! it is so black and foul a crime, that men cannot easily be brought to charge themselves with it. They may have the infirmities which are common to the best of men, but yet they are not hypocrites. Thus pride of heart casts a chain upon conviction, and binds it, that it cannot do its work.

2. It is a cheap and easy way to give God the external service and worship of the body, but heart-work is hard work. To sit or kneel an hour or two is no great matter : but to search, humble, and break the heart for sin ; to work up the dead and earthly affections into a spiritual heavenly frame, this will cost many a hard tug. It is no severe task to sit before God as his people, whilst the fancy and thoughts are left at liberty to wander which way they please, as the thoughts of formal hypocrites use to do, Ezek. xxxiii. 31. but to set a watch upon the heart, to summon in the thoughts of God, to retract every wandering thought with a sigh ; this is difficult, and the difficulty over-powers conviction of duty.

3. The *atheism* of the heart quenches this conviction in men's souls. Formality is a secret invisible sin, not discernible by man ; the outside of religion looks fair to a man's eye, and so long it is well enough, as if there was not a God that trieth the hearts and the reins. Thus, when a beam of light and conviction shines into the soul, a cloud of natural *atheism* over-shadows and darkens it.

But, poor self-cozening hypocrite, these things must not pass so ; thy conscience, as well as the word, tells thee that it is not the place of worship, but the spirituality of it that God regards, John iv. 23, 21. That they are hypocrites in scripture-account who have God in their mouths, but he is far from their reins, Jer. xii. 2. and that hypocrites will have the hottest place in hell, Matth. xxiv. 51.

*Instance 3.* A third instance of convictions of ungodliness held in unrighteousness, is in declining or denying to confess the known truths of God, which we ourselves have professed, when the confession of them infers danger.

In times of danger, conscience struggles hard with men to appear for the truths of God, and upon no account whatsoever to dissemble or deny them ; and enforceth its counsels and warnings upon us with such awful scriptures as these, Luke ix. 62. " No man " having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for " the kingdom of God." And Matth. x. 33. " But whosoever " shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Fa- " ther which is in heaven." In this case conscience useth to

struggle hard with men, yet is many times overborne by the prevalent temptations of the flesh: As,

1. By carnal fears. The fear of suffering gets the ascendant of the fear of God; men choose rather to adventure their souls upon wrath to come, than the present wrath of incensed enemies. They vainly hope to find mercy with God, but expect none from men. Thus the fear of man brings a snare, Prov. xxix. 25. and so the voice of conscience is drowned by the louder clamours and threats of adversaries.

2. As the fear of man's threatenings, so the distrust of God's promises, defeats the design of conscience. If men believed the promises, they would never be afraid of their duties; faith in a promise would make men as bold as lions, if such a word as that was minded, Isa. lvii. 11. "Of whom hast thou been afraid, or feared, that thou hast lied, and hast not remembered me?" Men would say, as Zuinglius in the like case, What death would I not rather choose to die? What punishment would I not rather undergo? Yea, into what vault of hell would I not rather choose to be cast, than to witness against my own conscience?

3. The immoderate and inordinate love of the world, overpowers conscience, and drowns its voice in such an hour of temptation. So Demas found it, 2 Tim. iv. 10. O what a dangerous conflict is there in an hour of temptation, betwixt an enlightened head and a worldly heart?

*Lastly*, The example of others who comply and embrace the sinful terms of liberty to escape the danger, embolden men to follow their examples, and Satan will not be wanting to improve their examples. Do not you see such and such men, beating the road before you? Learned men, and prudent men, who, it may be, have less heart, but more wisdom than you. Why will you be singular, why will you hazard all for that, for which others will hazard nothing?

But certainly such sins as these will cost you dear, it is a dreadful thing to betray the truths and honour of God for base, secular ends; and you will find it so when you and your consciences shall debate it together in a calm hour.

*Secondly*, There are also sins of *unrighteousness* against the *second table*, in which many live against the plain dictates and warnings of their own consciences, though they know the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all unrighteousness of men who hold the truth in unrighteousness. To give some instances of this,

*Instance 1.* And first, let me instance in that sin of *defrauding* and going beyond others in our civil commerce and dealings with them: over-reaching, cozening, and cheating the ignorant or unwary, who, it may be, would not be so unwary as they are, did

they not repose trust and confidence in your deceitful words and promises. Conscience cannot but startle at such sins, the very light of nature discovers the evil of it, and the sober *Heathens* abhor it: but we that live under the gospel cannot but feel some terror and trembling in our consciences when we read such a severe and awful prohibition, backed with such a dreadful threatening as that is in 1 Thess. iv. 6. "That no man defraud, or go beyond his brother in any matter, because that the Lord is the avenger of all such." The word is, *το μη υπερβαινειν*, that no man overtop, viz. by power, or by craft and policy. To this sin a dreadful threatening is annexed, the Lord is the *avenger* of all such. The word is, *ειδικος*, but once more, that I remember, used in the New Testament, Rom. xiii. 4. and is there applied to the civil magistrate, who must see execution done upon malefactors; but here the Lord himself will do it, he will be this man's avenger. This rod, or rather this ax, conscience shews men, and gives warning of the danger, and yet its convictions are over-powered and bound as prisoners, by

1. The excessive love of gain; 1 Tim. vi. 9. "But they that will be rich fall into temptation, and a snare; and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition." When a resolution is made for the world, men will be rich by right or wrong; this powerfully arms the temptation. Set gain before such a man, and he will break through the law of God and convictions of conscience, but he will have it; this drowns them in perdition and destruction, that is, it surely, thoroughly, and fully ruins them: As he is a dead man that is only drowned; but to be drowned in destruction, yea, in destruction and perdition too, this must needs make his ruin sure, as sure as words can make it, and so all such persons shall surely find it, who persist in such a course.

2. Pinching necessities and straits over-bear conscience in others; necessity hath no ears to attend the voice of the word and conscience. Here conscience and poverty struggle together, and if the fear of God be not exalted in the soul, it now falls a prey to temptation. This danger wise Agur foresaw, and earnestly entreated the Lord for a competency to avoid the snare of poverty, Prov. xxx. 8, 9. Poor wretch! how much better were it for thee to endure the pains of a griping stomach than these of a griping conscience? Such gains may be sweet in thy mouth, but bitter in thy bowels.

3. The examples of others who daily venture on such sins without scruple, and laugh at such squeamish consciences as keek at such things; this emboldens others to follow them, Psal. l. 18. and thus the voice of conscience is drowned, and convictions buried



for a time ; but it will thunder at last, and thy buried convictions will have a resurrection, and it shall be out of thy power to silence them again.

*Instance 2.* The truth of God is held in unrighteousness, when men's lusts will not suffer them to restore what they have sinfully, and unjustly gotten into their hands. This sin lies boking in the consciences of some men, makes them very uneasy, and yet they make a hard shift to rub along under these regrets of conscience. Now those things which make a forcible entry into the conscience, take the truths of God prisoners, and bind them, that they cannot break forth into the duty of restitution, are,

1. The shame which attends and follows the duty to which God and conscience, call the soul. O it is a shame and reproach, they think, to get the name of a *cheat* ; loth, loth they are, that these works of darkness should come into the open light ; men will point, and hiss at them ; and say, There goes a thief, a cheat, an oppressor : This keeps many from restitution.

But dost thou not here commit a greater cheat than the former ? Which is the greater shame, thinkest thou, to commit sin, or to confess and reform it ? To tie the snare upon thy soul by commission, or loose it off from thy conscience by repentance and restitution ? to be the derision of wicked men, (for none else will deride thee for thy duty), or be the contempt and derision of God, angels, and all good men for ever ? To attain inward peace at this hazard, or to lie under the continual lashes and wounds of thy own conscience ?

2. Poverty, and inability, is sometimes pleaded, to quiet the troubled conscience ; and indeed this is a just, and very frequent blast of God upon ill-gotten goods : The curse of God is upon them ; they melt away. O what a miserable snare have you now entangled your souls in ! Once you could, but would not restore, a worldly heart would not part with unjust gains ; now you would, but cannot. Thus a worldly heart, and an empty purse, hold you first and last, under the guilt of a known sin. A lamentable case !

3. Vain purposes do often suppress and silence convictions : My condition may alter, I may be in a capacity hereafter, when I can better spare it, than at present ; or I will do it in my last will, when I die, and charge my executors with it. Thus do men bribe their consciences, to get a little quiet, whilst they continue under known guilt, and cannot tell how soon death shall summon them to the awful bar of a just and terrible God.

Sirs, as you value your peace, and, which is more, your souls ; release the Lord's *prisoner* which lies bound within you with cords and chains of Satan's making ; do it, I say, as you hope to see the face of God in peace : You know, without repentance there can be

no salvation; and without restitution no repentance: For how can you repent of a sin you still knowingly continue in? Repentance is the soul's turning from sin, as well as its sorrow for sin. You cannot therefore repent of sin, and still continue in it; "How shall we that are dead to sin, continue any longer therein?" Rom. vi. 2. Trust providence for the supply of your wants, and the wants of yours, in the ways of duty, and righteousness. A little that a righteous man hath is better than the riches of many wicked. You will have more comfort in bread and water, with peace of conscience, than in full tables with God's curse. You will lie more at ease on a burden of straw, than on a bed of down with a grumbling conscience.

*Instance 3.* How many lie under the condemnations of their own consciences, for the lusts of uncleanness in which they live: And though they read, and their consciences apply to them such scriptures as that, 1 Cor. vi. 9. "Be not deceived, neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, &c. shall inherit the kingdom of God;" a dreadful sentence! And that, Heb. xiii. 4. "Whoremongers and adulterers God will judge;" Yet convictions are overborne, and stifled by,

1. The impetuous violence of carnal lusts, which permit not of calm debates, but hurry them on to the sin, and leave them to consider the evil and dangerous consequences afterward. Thus they go, "As an ox to the slaughter, or as a fool to the correction of the stocks," Prov. vii. 22. Lust besots them. To give counsel now is but to give physic in a *paroxysm*, or counsel to him that is running a race. Lust answers conscience as Antipater did one that presented him a book treating of happiness, *ε σχολαζω, I have no leisure to read such discourses.*

2. Others would fain solve their scruples with the sinful failings of good men, as David, Solomon, &c. not considering what brokenness of heart it cost David, Psal. li. and the other, *Sorrow more bitter than death, Eccl. vii. 26. Lata venire Venus, tristis abire solet.* This is a presumptuous way of sinning, and how dreadful that is, see Numb. xv. 30.

*Instance 4.* Truth is often held in unrighteousness by sinful silence, in not reprovng other men's sins, and thereby making them their own. We are sometimes cast into the company of ungodly men, where we hear the name of our God blasphemed, the truth, worship, or servants of God reproached; and have not so much courage to appear for God, as others have to appear against him: in such cases conscience useth to instigate men to their duty, and charge it home upon them in the authority of such a scripture as

that, Lev. xix. 17. "Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thy heart, "thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy neighbour, and not suffer sin "upon him." O, saith conscience, thy silence now will be thy sin, This poor wretch may perish for want of a seasonable, plain, and faithful rebuke. Thy silence will harden him in his wickedness. No sooner doth such a conviction stir in the conscience, but many things are ready to lay hold on it. As,

1. A spirit of cowardice, which makes us afraid to displease men, and chuses rather the wrath of God should fall on them, than that their wrath should fall on us. We dare not take as much liberty to reprove sin as others do to commit it. They glory in their shame, and we are ashamed of what is both our glory and our duty.

2. Dependence on, or near relation to the person sinning. It is a father, an husband, a superior, on whose favour I depend; and should I displease him, I may ruin myself; this is the voice of the flesh. Hence duty is neglected, and the soul of a friend basely betrayed; our interest preferred to God's, and thereby frequently lost: for there is no better way to secure our own interest in any man's heart, than to settle it by our faithfulness in his conscience, and by being willing to hazard it for God's interest and glory. The Lord blesseth men's faithfulness above all their sinful carnal policies, Prov. xxviii. 23. "He that rebuketh a man, afterwards shall find "more favour than he that flattereth with his lips."

3. Men's own guilt stops their mouths and silences them. They are ashamed and afraid to reprove other men's sins, lest they should hear of their own. Fear of retortion keeps them from the duty of reprehension. Thus we fall into a new sin for fear of reviving an old one. "He that reproveth a scorner getteth himself shame; "and he that rebuketh a wicked man getteth himself a blot," Prov. ix. 7.

But this is the fruit of our pride and ignorance. What we fear might turn to our benefit. The reproof given is duty discharged; and the retortion in return, a fresh call to repentance for sin past, and a caution against sin to come.

*Instance 5.* Another instance of convictions of unrighteousness imprisoned in men's souls, is not distributing to the necessities of others, especially such as fear God when it is in the power of our hands to do it, and conscience as well as scripture calls us to our duty.

Men cannot be ignorant of that text, Matth. xxv. 40, 41. where, by a *Synecdoche*, charity to the saints is by Christ put for the whole of obedience; and men's eternal states are cast according to their observance of this command; though I fear few, very few study and believe it as they ought. Thou canst, saith conscience, if thou

wilt relieve such or such a poor Christian, and therein express thy love to Christ, yea, refresh the bowels of Christ; do it, God will repay it: if thou refusest, "how dwelleth the love of God in thee?" 1 John iii. 17. This is the voice of God and conscience, but divers lusts are ready to lay hold on, and bind this conviction also as soon as it stirs, viz.

1. The excessive love of earthly things. The world is got so deep in men's hearts, that they will rather part with their peace, yea, and with their souls too, than part with it. Hence come those churlish answers, like that of Nabal, 1 Sam. xxv. 11. "Shall I take my bread, and my water, and my flesh, and give it to men whom I know not whence they be?"

2. Unbelief, which denies to give honour and due credit to Christ's bills of exchange drawn upon them in scripture, and presented to them by the hands of poor saints. They refuse, I say, to credit them, though conscience protest against them for their non-compliance. Christ saith, Mark ix. 41. "Whosoever shall give you a cup of cold water to drink in my name, because ye belong to Christ, verily I say unto you, he shall not lose his reward." He shall gain that which he cannot lose, by parting with that which he cannot keep.

3. The want of love to Jesus Christ. Did we love Christ in sincerity, and were that love so fervent as it ought to be, it would make thee more ready to lay down thy neck for Christ, than thou now art to lay down a shilling for him, 1 John iii. 16. It is our duty, in some cases, to spend our blood for the saints. So it was in the primitive times: behold (said the Christians enemies) how they love one another, and are willing to die one for another. But that spirit is almost extinguished in these degenerate days.

*Instance 6.* How many stand convinced, by their own consciences, what a sin it is to spend their precious time so idly and vainly as they do? When a day is lost in vanity, duties neglected, no good done or received; at night conscience reckons with them for it, and asks them what account they can give of that day to God, how they are able to satisfy themselves to lie down and sleep under so much guilt? And yet when the morrow comes, the vanity of their hearts carries them on in the same course again the next day; and whilst they keep themselves in vain company, they are quiet, till conscience finds them at leisure to debate it again with them. Now the things which master these convictions are,

1. In some men their ignorance and insensibility of the preciousness of time. They know it is their sin to spend their time so vainly, but little consider that eternity itself hangs upon this little moment of time: and that the great work of their salvation will require all the time they have; and if it be not finished in

this small allotment of time it can never be finished, John ix. 4.

2. The examples of other vain persons that are as prodigal of their precious time as themselves, and entice them to spend it as they do.

3. The charming power of sensual lusts and pleasures. O how pleasantly doth time slide away in plays, ale-houses, in relating or hearing taking stories, news, &c.

4. Inconsiderateness of the sharp and terrible rebukes of conscience for this on a death-bed, or the terrors of the Lord in the day of judgment.

In all these instances you see how common this dreadful evil of holding the truth in unrighteousness is; yet these are but a few selected from among many.

*Fifthly*, In the next place I am obliged to shew, how and why the imprisoning of convictions, or holding the truths of God in unrighteousness so dreadfully incenseth his wrath. And this it doth upon several accounts.

1. Knowledge and conviction of sin is an excellent mean, or choice help to preserve men from falling into sin: There be thousands of sins committed in the world, which had never been committed if men had known them to be sins before they committed them. Every sinner durst not make so bold with his conscience as you have done. The *apostle* tells us the reason why the princes of this world crucified the Lord of glory, was, because they knew him not, 1 Cor. ii. 8. had they known him they would not have dared to do as they did. And so it is in multitudes of lower and lesser sins than that, Satan blinds their eyes with ignorance, then uses their hands and tongues in wickedness; he is the ruler of the darkness of this world, Eph. vi. 12. But when men do know this or that to be sin, and yet venture on it, then an excellent antidote against sin is turned into a dreadful aggravation of sin, which highly incenses the wrath of God.

2. Knowledge and conviction going before add presumption to the sin that follows after it; and presumptuous sin is the most provoking and daring sin; from this way of sinning David earnestly beseeches God to keep him, "Keep back thy servant (saith he) from presumptuous sins." When a man sees sin, and yet adventures on it, in such sinning there is a despising of the law of God: a man may break the law whilst he approves, reverences, and honours it in his heart, Rom. vii. 12, 13. but here the commandment is despised, as God told David, 2 Sam. xii. 9. It is as if a man shall say, I see the command of God armed with threatenings in my way, but yet I will go on for all that.

3. Knowledge and conviction leave the conscience of a sinner

naked and wholly without excuse or apology for his sin: in this case there is no plea left to extenuate the offence, Job xv. 22. "Now they have no cloak for their sin." If a man sins ignorantly, his ignorance is some excuse for his sin, it excuses it at least *a tanto*, as Paul tells us, thus and thus I did, *but I did it ignorantly*: here is a cloak or covering, an excuse or extenuation of the sin: but knowledge takes away this cloak, and makes the sin appear naked in all the odious deformity of it, nothing left to hide it.

4. Light or knowledge of the law and will of God, is a very choice and excellent mercy; it is a choice and singular favour, for God to make the light of knowledge to shine into a man's mind or understanding; it is a mercy withheld from multitudes, Psal. cxlvii. 19. and those that enjoy it are under special engagements to bless God for it, and to improve it diligently and thankfully to his service and glory; but for a man to arm such a mercy as this against God, to fight against him with one of his choicest mercies, this must be highly provoking to the Lord; it is therefore mentioned as a high aggravation of Solomon's sin, in 1 Kings xi. 9. that he sinned against the Lord, "after the Lord had appeared unto him twice."

5. This way of sinning argues an extraordinary degree of hardness of heart: it is a sign of little tenderness, or sense of the evil of sin. Some men, when God shews them the evil of sin in the glass of the law, they tremble at the sight of it: so did Paul, Rom. vii. 13. "When the commandment came, sin revived, and I died;" he sunk down at the sight of it. But God shews thee the evil of sin in the glass of his law, and thou makest nothing of it: O obdurate heart! When the rod was turned into a serpent Moses fled from it, was afraid to touch it; but though God turn the rod into a serpent, and discovers the venomous nature of sin in his word, thou canst handle and play with that serpent, and put it into thy bosom: this shews thy heart to be of a strange complexion.

6. To go against the convincing, warning voice of conscience, violates and wounds a man's conscience more than any other way of sinning doth; and when conscience is so wounded, who, or what shall then comfort thee? it is a true rule, *maxima violatio conscientiae, est maximum peccatum*: the more any sin violates a man's conscience, the greater that sin is: the sin of devils is the most dreadful sin, and what makes it so, but the horrid violation of their consciences, and malicious rebellion against their own light and clear knowledge; Jam. ii. 19. They know and sin, they believe and tremble;  $\Phi\epsilon\iota\sigma\sigma\sigma\iota$ , they roar under the tortures of conscience like the roar of the sea, or the noise of the rocks before a storm.

O then, if there be any degree of sense and tenderness left in you, if any fear of God or regard of salvation; let go all God's prisoners which lie bound and are imprisoned in the souls of any of you this day. Bless'd be God some have done so, and are at ease and rest in their spirits by so doing: they could have no ease till they unbound them, and yielded obedience to them. It is said, Acts xvi. 38. That when the magistrates at Philippi understood that those men whom they had bound and imprisoned were Romans, they *feared*; and well they might, for the punishment was great for any man that injured a citizen or freeman of Rome: but every conviction you imprison is a messenger of heaven, a commissioned-officer of God, and woe to him that binds or abuseth it. Do you know what you do? Are you aware of the danger? Wast thou not afraid (saith David to the Amalekite) to stretch forth thine hand to destroy the Lord's anointed? So say I, Art thou not afraid to destroy the immediate messenger of God, sent to thy soul for good? Conviction is a kind of embryo of conversion; the conversion and salvation of thy soul would be the fruit of it, were it obeyed: thy striving with it causes it to miscarry, renders it abortive, and thy life must go for it, except God revive and recover it again; as you know the law is for striking a pregnant woman, Exod. xxi. 22, 23. Loose then every man the Lord's prisoners, I mean your restrained, stifled convictions, stifle them no longer; you see what a dreadful aggravation of sin it is, and that the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, that hold the truth in unrighteousness.

### I. Use, for Information.

*Infer.* 1. This will prove a fruitful doctrine to inform us, First, *That knowledge in itself is not enough to secure the soul of any man from hell.*

No gifts, no knowledge, but that only which is operative and influential upon the heart and life, and to which we pay obedience, can secure any man from wrath, John xiii. 17. "If you know these things, happy are ye if you do them." The greatest sins may be found in conjunction with the greatest knowledge, as you see in the fallen angels: light is then only a blessing, when it guides the soul into the way of duty and obedience: there is many a knowing head in hell. Yet from hence let no man indulge himself in ignorance, or shun the means of knowledge, that he may sin more freely and less dangerously; for you must account with God for all that knowledge you might have had, as well as for that you had; for the means of knowledge he gave you, as well as for that knowledge you did actually attain by them.

*Infer. 2.* What a singular and choice mercy is a tender conscience! A conscience yielding obedience to conviction! A drop of such tenderness in the conscience is better than a sea of speculative knowledge in the head, 1 Cor. xii. 31. Many poor Christians are ashamed to see themselves so out-stripped and excelled by others in gifts, and apt to be discouraged; but if God has blessed thee with a tender and obedient heart to the will of God, so far as he is pleased to manifest it to thee, thou hast no reason to be discouraged for want of those excellent gifts and parts others do enjoy. You cannot discourse *floridly*, or dispute *subtily*; but can you obey conscientiously, and comply with the manifested will of God tenderly? Then happy art thou. Oh! it is far better to feel a truth, than merely to know it. It was the high commendation of the Romans, that they obeyed from the heart that form of gospel-doctrine which was delivered them, Rom. vi. 17\*. or rather into which they were delivered, as melted metals into the moulds. Two learned divines travelling to the Council of Constance, were affected, even to tears, at the sight of a shepherd in the fields, mourning and melting at the sight of a toad, and blessing God that he had not made him such a loathsome creature; whereupon they applied Austin's words to themselves, *surgunt indocti, &c.* The unlearned will rise and take heaven from the learned. Thy little knowledge made effectual by obedience, is more *sanctified*, more *sweet*, and more *saving* than other men's; and therefore of much greater value. It is more *sanctified*; for the blessing of God is upon it, Gal. iv. 16. It is more *sweet*; for you relish the *goodness*, as well as discern the *truth* of gospel-doctrines, Psal. cxix. 103. It is not an insipid, dry speculation. And then it is more *saving*, being one of those better things that accompany salvation, as it is, Heb. vi. 9.

*Infer. 3.* Learn hence, in the third place, *What an uncomfortable life, knowing, but unregenerate men and women do live: They are frequently in wars and combats with their own consciences.* Isa. xlvi. 22. "There is no peace to the wicked, saith my God." They and their consciences are ever and anon at daggers drawing, they have little pleasure in sin, and none at all in religion; they have none in religion, because they obey not its rules; and little in sin, because their consciences are still galling and terrifying them for imprisoning their convictions.

It is true, some men's consciences are seared as with an hot iron, 1 Tim. iv. 2. but most have grumbling, and some have raging, and roaring consciences; they seldom come under the word, or rod; but their consciences lash them: And when death approaches, the

\* ΕΣ ΟΥ ΠΑΡΕΘΩΗΤΕ.



terrors of the Almighty do shake and terrify them. Altogether to neglect duty, they dare not, and how to escape a lash from their consciences, they know not: Fain they would have the pleasures of sin, but then, like Balaam, they meet a sword in the way; they plunge themselves into earthly diversions, like Cain, to be rid of a fury within them, but all will not do. Is this a life for thee, reader, to live? No peace with God, nor any with thyself? No; expect no peace whilst thy convictions lie bound, and imprisoned in thy conscience. Sin for a moment is sweet in thy mouth, but it is presently turned into the gall of asps within thee, Job xx. 14. O that you did but know the pleasures of a pure, peaceable conscience, and how much it excels all the delights of sense and sin!

*Infer. 4. Ministers had need often to repeat, and inculcate the same truths to their hearers; for the work is not half done, when truth is got into the minds and consciences of men.*

Our work sticks at the *heart*, more than at the *head*; the understanding is many times opened, when the heart and will are locked, and fast barred against it: To open the passages betwixt the head and heart is the greatest difficulty; this is the work of Almighty power. There is knowledge enough in some men's heads to save them, but it hath not its liberty; restrained truth cannot do its office. It is much easier to convince the mind than to change the heart, or bow the will. The hardest part of the ministerial work is to preach truths into the hearts and lives of men. This makes the frequent inculcations of the same truths necessary and safe to the people's souls. Phil. iii. 1. "To write the same things unto you, to me indeed is not grievous, but for you it is safe.

*Infer. 5. How astonishing and wonderful is the power and strength of sin, which can hold men fast after their eyes are opened to see the misery and danger it hath involved them in.*

One would think, if a man's eyes were but once opened to see the *moral* evil that is in sin, and the everlasting train of *penal* evils that follow sin, together with a way of escape from both; it should be impossible to hold that sinner a day longer in such a state of bondage: the work were then as good as done: But, alas! we are mistaken; sin can hold those men and women fast that see all this. They know it is an horrid violation of God's just and holy laws; they know it brings them under his wrath and curse, and will damn them to all eternity if they continue in it; they know Christ is able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, and that he is as willing as he is able; and yet no arguments can prevail with them to part with sin. Shew but a beast a flame of fire, and you cannot drive him into it, if he see any way to escape it. Tell a man this is rank poison, and will kill him; and you cannot make him swallow it, though wrapt up in sugar, or put into

the most pleasant *vehicle*. But let a sinner see death and destruction before him, and sin can make him rush on, “as a horse into “the battle,” Jer. viii. 9. He goes as an ox to the slaughter; his heart is fully set in him to do evil, Eccl. viii. 11. as one said, when his *physician* told him, ‘If he followed such a course of sin ‘he would in a little time lose his eyes; then, saith he, *Vale lumen ‘amicum*, Farewell, sweet light; I cannot part with this practice.’ So it is with others, rather than forego their pleasures, and break their customs in sin, farewell heaven, Christ, and all. O the enchanting efficacy of sin! Jer. xviii. 11, 12. “And they said, there is no “hope, but we will walk after our own devices.” When a man considers what visions of misery and wrath convictions give men, he may wonder that all convinced men are not converted; and, on the other side, when he considers the strong holds sin hath gotten upon the hearts of sinners, it may justly seem as great a wonder that any are converted.

Infer. 6. *How dreadful is the state and case of apostates, who have their eyes opened, their consciences awakened, their resolutions for Christ seemingly fixed; and yet, after all this, return again to their former course of sin!*

You see, brethren, sin hath not only power to hold men in bondage to its lusts after their eyes have been opened, but it hath power to recover and fetch back those that seemed to have clean escaped out of its hands, 2 Pet. ii. 18, 19. The unclean spirit may depart for a time, and make his re-entry into the same soul with seven spirits worse than himself, Matth. xii. 43. Restraints by conviction and formality do not wholly dispossess Satan, he still keeps his propriety in the soul, for he calls it *my house*; and that propriety he keeps under all those convictions, and partial reformations, opens to him and all his hellish retinue a door for his return. But oh how doleful will the end of such men be! and how just is that *martial law of heaven* that dooms the apostate to eternal wrath! Heb. x. 28. Such are twice dead, and will be plucked up y the root, Jude, ver. 12.

Infer. 7. To conclude this use, *How sure and dreadful will be the condemnation of all those, in the day of the Lord, who obstinately persist and continue in sin, under the convictions and condemnations of their own consciences!*

Poor wretches, you are condemned already, John iii. 18. condemned by the law of God, and by the sentence of your own consciences. What thy own conscience saith according to God's law, God will confirm and make it good, 1 John iii. 20. “If our hearts “condemn us, God is greater than our hearts, and knoweth all “things.” His sentence will be as clear as it will be terrible; for

in the last day the books will be opened, the book of God's *omniscience*, and the book of thine own *conscience*. Now the book of conscience is as it were a *transcript* or counterpart of God's book for thee to keep in thine own bosom. Now when God's book and thy own book shall be compared, and found exactly to agree, there can be no farther dispute of the equity of the account. O when God shall charge thee, saying, Thou knewest this and that to be sin, and yet thy lusts hurried thee on to commit it; Is it not so? Look sinner into thine own book, and see if thy conscience has not so charged it to thy account. Thou knewest prayer was thy duty when thou neglectedst it; and over-reaching the ignorant, credulous, and unwary, was thy sin, when the love of gain tempted thee to it. You knew I had plainly told you, theft, uncleanness, drunkenness, and extortion, would bar you out of the kingdom of Christ, and of God, 1 Cor. vi. 9, 10. and yet putting that to the venture, you have lived in those sins; is it not so? Examine the book in your own bosom, and see. The Lord make men sensible of coming wrath for those sins they live in under light; for the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against them.

## II. *Use.*

Is the wrath of God revealed from heaven against all that hold the truth in unrighteousness? Then let me exhort and persuade you by all the regard and love you have for your souls, by all the fears you have of the incensed wrath of the great and terrible God; that you forthwith set your convictions at liberty, and loose all the Lord's prisoners that lie bound within you: Because there is wrath, beware, Job xxxvi. 18. O stifle the voices of your consciences no more, slight not the softest whisper, or least intimation of conscience; reverence and obey its voice. Motives pressing and persuading this are many, yet estimate them by weight rather than by number.

*Motive 1.* The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against them that hold the truth in unrighteousness; and because there is wrath, beware. Are you truly informed what the wrath of God is! "Who knoweth the power of thine anger? According to thy fear, so is thy wrath," Psal. xc. 11. O, if the wrath of a king, (who in all his glory is but a mortal worm) be as the roaring of a lion, and as the messengers of death, Prov. xx. 2. Prov. xvi. 14. What then is the power of his wrath, at whose frowns the kings of the earth tremble, the captains and the mighty men shrink like worms into their holes? If the lesser executions of it by providence in this world be so dreadful, that men, yea, good men have desired an hiding-place in the grave till it be past, Job xiv. 13. then what is the full execution thereof upon the ungodly in the place of tor-

ments? If the threats and denunciations of it against others have made an Habakkuk, though assured of personal safety, to quiver with his lips, and tremble in his bowels, as you see it did, Hab. iii. 16. how much more should those tremble and quiver who are to be the subjects of it, and not the mere heralds of it as he was? And, (which is more than all) if Jesus Christ, who was to feel it but a few hours, and had the power of the Godhead to support him under it, did, notwithstanding, sweat as it had been great drops of blood, and was sore amazed; think with thyself, poor wretch how shall thy heart endure, or thy hands be strong, when thou hast to do with an incensed Deity?

*Motive 2.* Till you let your convictions go, Satan will not let you go; he binds you whilst you bind them: Here is the command of God, and the command of Satan, in competition. Let go my truths, saith God, which thou holdest in unrighteousness; bind, and suppress them, saith Satan, or they will deprive thee of the liberty and pleasure of thy life. Now, whilst thou slightest the voice of God and conscience, (for the voice of conscience is the voice of God) dost thou not avowedly declare thyself the bond-slave of Satan? "His servants ye are to whom you obey," Rom. vi. 16. Dare not to make one step further in the way of known sin, saith conscience; continue not, at thy peril, in such a dangerous state, after I have so clearly convinced and warned thee of it: Fear not, saith Satan, if it be bad with thee, it will be as bad with millions: God will wound the heads of such as go on in their trespasses, saith the scripture, Psal. lxxviii. 21. Tush, others do so, and escape as well as the most nice, and tender, saith Satan. Now, I say, thy obedience to Satan's commands plainly declares thee, all this while, to be a poor enslaved captive to him, acted and carried according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience.

*Motive 3.* Nay, further, until you obey your convictions, you are *confederates* with the devil in a desperate plot against your own souls; you join with Christ's great and avowed enemy to dishonour him, and damn yourselves.

Two things make you *confederates* with the devil against your own souls: (1.) Your *consent* to this project for your damnation; for so your own consciences out of the scriptures inform you it is: consent makes you a party. (2.) Your *concealment* of this plot brings you in as a party with him. Confess thy sin, and bewail it, saith conscience; not so, saith pride and shame, how shall I look men in the face if I do so? Do not you, in all this, believe Satan, and make God a liar? Do not you act as men that hate your own souls, and love death? Prov. viii. 36. O it is a dreadful thing for men to be accessory to their own eternal ruin, and that after fair

warning and notice given them by their own consciences. Satan (be his power what it will) cannot destroy you without your own consent.

*Motive 4.* Whilst you go on stifling your own convictions, and turning away your ears from its calls to repentance and reformation, you cannot be pardoned; you are in your sins, and the guilt of them all lies at your door. You may see what the terms of remission are, Isa. lv. 7. "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him turn unto the Lord, and he will have mercy on him; and to our God, and he will abundantly pardon." So again, Prov. xxviii. 13. "He that hardeneth his neck shall not prosper, but he that confesseth and forsaketh shall find mercy." You see by these, and may see by many more plain scripture-testimonies, there can be no hope of remission whilst you go on in this path of rebellion; concealing, yea, and persisting in your known wickedness. There is a necessary and inseparable connection betwixt repentance and remission, Acts v. 31. and Luke xxiv. 47. and can you endure guilt to be your bed-fellow during life, and your grave-fellow after death?

*Motive 5.* You can never have peace with your own consciences whilst you keep convictions prisoners. Now a man's conscience is his best friend, or his worst enemy: thence are the sweetest comforts, and thence are the bitterest sorrows. It is a dreadful thing for a man to lie with a cold sweating horror upon his panting bosom. *Tum pallida mens est criminibus, tacita sudant præcordia culpa.* And this (or which is worse) obduration and stupidity must be the case of them that hold the truth in unrighteousness. There can be no sounding a retreat to these terrors till Sheba's head be thrown over the walls; I mean, till that sin your conscience convinceth you of, be delivered up. As Israel could have no peace till Achan was destroyed; so thou shalt have no peace whilst thy sin is covered and hid. Men may cry peace, peace, to themselves whilst they continue in sin, Deut. xxix. 18, 19. but the sharpest troubles of conscience are better than such peace. Deliver up thyself, man, if thou love peace, into the hands of thy own convictions, and thou art in the true way to peace. Thy rejoicing must be in the testimony of thine own conscience, as the *apostle* speaks, 2 Cor. i. 12. or thou rejoicest in a dream, in a delusion, in a thing of nought.

*Motive 6.* What dreadful charges are you like to meet with upon your death-beds, on the account of those sins you have lived in, against knowledge and conviction! conscience is never more active and vigorous than in the last hours and moments of life. Now it will be stifled and over-ruled no longer. It whispered before, but now it thunders. If a man have a clear and quiet conscience, his evening is clear, and his sun sets without clouds. See

*Psal. xxxvii. 37. The end of that man is peace.* In contemplation of this felicity it was that Balaam uttered that wish, *Let my last end be like his.* This peace is the result of a man's integrity and obedience to the voice of conscience, this being the evidence we can most safely rely upon of our uprightness and interest in Christ; but the result of such violations and abuses to thy conscience, cannot be peace to thy soul. It is true, some wicked men die in seeming peace, and some good men in trouble, but both the one and the other are mistaken: the first, as to the good estate he fancies himself in, and the other as to his bad estate; and a few moments will clear up the mistake of both.

*Motive 7.* Obedience to conviction will not only produce peace at death, but it will give you present ease, present relief and refreshment in hand. No sooner did David resolve to obey the voice of conscience, in confessing his sin, but he had sensible ease in his own spirit, *Psal. xxxii. 5.* So *Isa. xxxii. 17.* "The fruit of righteousness is peace, quietness, and assurance for ever." On the contrary, you find in *Job xx. 20.* wicked men have no rest in their bellies, that is, in their consciences: for guilt lies boking there as a thorn in the flesh. And what is life worth without ease? To live ever in pain, to live upon the rack, is not worth while to live. If then you love ease and quietness, obey your consciences; pull out that thorn, I mean that sin that sticks fast in thy soul, and aches in thy conscience. Who would endure so much anguish for all the flattering pleasures of sin?

*Motive 8.* Convictions followed home and obeyed, are the inlets to Christ, and eternal salvation by him; they are the first leading work of the Spirit, in order to union with Christ, *John xvi. 8.* Till you obey and yield up yourselves to them, Christ is shut out of your souls; he knocks, but finds no entrance. At your peril therefore be obedient to their calls: all the while you parley with your convictions, and demur to their demands, Christ stands without, offering himself graciously to you, but not admitted; so that no less than your eternal happiness or misery depends on your obedience or disobedience to the voices and calls of your convictions.

*Motive 9.* Obey your convictions, honour their voices, and restrain them not; then shall your consciences give a fair testimony for you at the judgment-seat of Christ. You read, *1 Pet. iii. 21.* "Of the answer of a good conscience towards God;" than which nothing can be more comfortable: this gives a man boldness in the day of judgment, *1 John iv. 17.* Believe it, sirs, it is not your baptism, your church privileges, the opinion men have of you; but the testimony of your consciences that must be your comfort. I know men are not justified at God's bar by their own

obedience, nor any exactness of life, it is only Christ's righteousness that is the sinner's plea; but yet your obedience to the calls and voices of God and conscience, are your evidence that you are in Christ.

*Motive 10.* Lastly, consider what a choice mercy it is to be under such calls and convictions of conscience as are yet capable of being obeyed; it is not so with men's convictions after this life. Conscience convinceth in hell as well as here, but all its convictions there are for torment, not recovery. O it is a choice mercy your convictions are yet *medicinal*, not purely *penal*; that you are not *malo obfirmati*, so fixed in the state of sin and misery as the damned are, but yet enjoy the saving benefit of your convictions; but this you will not enjoy long, therefore I beseech you, by all that is dear and valuable in your eyes, reverence your consciences, and let go the Lord's prisoners that lie bound within you.

### III. Use.

I next come to expostulate the matter with your consciences, and propound a few convictive queries to your souls this day: I cannot but look upon this assembly with fear, jealousy, and compassion. I am afraid there be many of you in this wretched case, men and women, that hold the truths of God in unrighteousness, though the wrath of God be revealed from heaven against all them that do so. Let me demand,

*Demand 1.* Do not some of you stand convinced by your own consciences this day, that your hearts and lives, your principles and practices, are vastly different from the people of God among whom you live, and whose characters you read in Scripture? Do not your own consciences tell you, that you never took that pains for your salvation you see them daily take; that there be some it may be in your families, nay, possibly in your bosoms, that are serious and heavenly, whilst you are vain and earthly; that are in their chambers upon their knees, wrestling with God, whilst you are in your beds, or about the things of the world? And doth not conscience sometimes whisper thus into thine ear, Soul, thou art not right; something is wanting to make thee a Christian; thou wantest that which others have; and except something further be done upon thee, thou wilt be undone for ever? If it be so, let me advise thee to hearken diligently to this voice of conscience: do not dare to venture to the judgment-seat of God in such a case: ponder that text, Mat. xxi. 32. and let the disparity your conscience shews you betwixt your own course and that of others, awaken you to more diligence and seriousness about your own salvation: how canst thou come from the *alehouse*, or thy vain recreations, and find a wife or child in prayer, and thy conscience not smite thee? It may

be they have been mourning for thy sins, whilst thou hast been committing them. It may be there lives not far from thee a godly, poor man, who out of his hard and pressing labours redeems more time for his soul in a week, than ever thou didst in thy life. O hearken to the voice of thy conscience! else thou art he that holdest truth in unrighteousness.

*Demand 2.* Did thy conscience never meet thee in the way of sin, as the angel of the Lord met Balaam, with a drawn sword, brandishing the threatenings of God against thee? Did it not say to thee, as a captain once said to his soldiers about to retreat, he cast himself down in their way, saying, If you go this way, you shall go over your captain, you shall trample him first under your feet? Stop, soul, stop, said thy conscience; this and that word of God is against thee: if thou proceed, thou must trample upon the sovereign authority of God, in this or that command; yet thy impetuous lusts have hurried thee forward: thou wouldst not fairly debate the case with thy conscience; and then did not thy conscience say to thee, as Reuben spake to his brethren, Gen. xlii. 22. "Spake I not unto you saying, Do not sin against the child, but you would not hear; therefore also his blood is required of you?" If this has been your course of sinning, verily you are the persons that have held the truths of God in unrighteousness, and against you the wrath of God is revealed from heaven.

*Demand 3.* Have you not seen the wrath of God revealed from heaven against other sinners that have gone before you in the very same track and course of sin in which you now go, and yet you persist in it, notwithstanding such dreadful warnings? Thus did Belteshazzar, though he saw all that the God of heaven had done to his father, Dan. v. 20, 21, 22. You have seen great estates scattered, and their owners that got them by fraud and oppression reduced to beggary; and yet when a temptation is before you, you cannot forbear to take the advantage (as you call it) to get the gain of oppression. You have seen drunkards clothed with rags, and brought to miserable ends: adulterers severely punished, their names and estates, souls and bodies blasted, and wasted by a secret, but just stroke of God. Have you taken warning by these strokes of God, and hearkened to the monitions and cautions your consciences have thereupon given you? If not, thou art the man that holdest the truth of God in unrighteousness.

*Demand 4.* Do not you inwardly hate, and do not your hearts rise against necessary and due reproofs given you by those that love your souls better than yourselves? If you hate a faithful re-prover, though you know you justly deserve the reproof, and are guilty of the sin he reproveth; if you recriminate, or deny in such



cases, you are certainly so far confederates with Satan against your own souls, and imprison your own convictions.

*Demand 5.* Have not some of you apostatized from your first profession, and are not those hopeful blossoms that once appeared upon your souls blasted and gone? You had quick convictions, and melting affections, tenderness in your consciences, and zeal for duties: but all is now vanished; your affections are grown cold, your duties omitted, though conscience often bids you remember from whence you are fallen, and do your first works. You are the persons guilty of this sin.

*Demand 6.* Do none of you presume upon future repentance, and so make bold with your consciences for present, thinking to compound that way with it? This argues thee to be a self-condemned man, and one that holdest truth in unrighteousness: thy sin is present and certain, thy repentance but a peradventure, 2 Tim. ii. 25. This is an high and a daring way of presumptuous sinning.

*Demand 7.* Lastly, Have none of you taken the vows of God upon you, to reform your course, and break off your iniquities by repentance, when you have been under dangerous sickness on shore, or dreadful tempests at sea? Have you not said, Lord, if thou wilt but spare and save me this once, I will never live at the rate I have lived any more: try me, O Lord, this once; and yet when that affliction hath vanished, your purposes and promises to God have vanished with it: you are the persons that hold the known truths of God prisoners in your souls; and to all these seven sorts of sinners, this text may justly be as the hand-writing upon the wall once was, even a *Mene Tekel*, that may make thy very loins to shake.

#### IV. Use.

This doctrine winds up and finishes in *directions* for the prevention of such presumptuous sins in men for time to come, that truth may have its free course through your souls.

*Direction 1.* And to this end my first counsel and direction is, that you fail not to put every conviction into speedy execution. Do not delay, it is a very critical hour, and delays are exceeding hazardous: convictions are fixed and secured in men's souls four ways. 1. By deep and serious consideration, Psal. cxix. 59. "I thought upon my ways, and turned my feet to thy testimonies." 2. By earnest prayer; thus Saul, under his first convictions, fell presently on his knees, Acts ix. 11. *Behold, he prayeth*: The warm breath of prayer foment and nourishes the sparks of conviction, that they be not extinct. 3. By diligent attendance on the word. The word begets it, and the word can, through God's blessing preserve it,

James i. 23, 24. 4. Present execution, falling, without delay, on the duty thou art convinced of. James i. 24. "Be not forgetful hearers, but doers of the word; otherwise a man is as one that looks into a glass, and straightway forgets what manner of man he was." Take the sense thus, a man looks into the glass in the morning, and there perhaps he sees a spot on his face, a disorder in his hair or clothes; and thinks with himself, well, I will rectify it anon; but being gone from the place, one thing or other diverts his mind, he forgets what he saw, and goes all the day with the spot on his face, never minding it any more. O brethren, delays are dangerous, sin is deceitful, Heb. iii. 13. Satan is subtle, 2 Cor. xi. 3. and this way gains his point. This *motto* may be written on the tomb of most that perish, *Here lies one that was destroyed by delays*. Your life is immediately uncertain, so are the strivings of the Spirit also. Besides, there is a mighty advantage in the *primus impetus*, the first heat of the soul. When thy heart is once up in warm affections and resolutions, the work may be easily done; as a *bell*, if once up, goes easily, but is hard to raise when down. See 2 Chron. xxix. 36. what advantage there is in a present warm frame! Beside, the nature of these things is too serious and weighty to be postponed and delayed. You cannot get out of the danger of hell, or into Christ too soon. Moreover, every repetition of sin after conviction greatly aggravates it. For it is in sinning as it is in numbering, if the first be one, the second is ten, the third a hundred, and the fourth a thousand. And to conclude, think what you will, you can never have a fitter season than the present: the same difficulties you have to-day, you will have to-morrow, and it may be greater. Fall on presently, therefore, to execute your convictions.

*Direct.* 2. If you would be clear from this great wickedness of holding the truth in unrighteousness, then see that you reverence the voice, and stand in awe of the authority of your own consciences; and resolve with Job, "My heart shall not reproach me as long as I live," Job xxvii. 6. There are two considerations apt to beget reverence in men to the voice of their own consciences.

1. It is our best friend when pure and unviolated.

2. It is our worst enemy, when wounded and affronted.

1. Conscience obeyed, and kept pure and inviolate, is thy best friend on earth. 2 Cor. 1. 12. "This is our rejoicing, the testimony of our consciences." The very *Heathens* could say,

\* *Nil conscire tibi, nulla pallescere culpa,  
Hic murus aheneus esto.*

What comforted Hezekiah on his supposed death-bed but the fair testimonial his conscience gave in of his integrity? 2 Kings ii. 3. "A good man (saith Solomon) shall be satisfied from himself; but the backslider in heart shall be filled with his own ways." Mark the opposition, conscience gives the backslider his belly full of sorrow, and the upright man his heart full of peace. He is satisfied from himself, that is, from his own conscience, which though it be not the original spring, yet it is the conduit at which he drinks peace, joy, and encouragement.

2. Conscience wounded and abused, will be our worst enemy; no poniards so mortal as the wounds of conscience. "A wounded spirit who can bear?" Prov. xviii. 14. Could Judas bear it, or could Spira bear it? What is the torment of hell, but the worm that dies not? and what is that worm but the remorse of conscience? Mark ix. 44. Oh, what is that fearful expectation mentioned, Heb. x. 27. See how you like that life described, Deut. xxviii. 65, 66. The primitive Christians chose rather to be cast to the lions than into the paws of an enraged conscience; *ad leones, potius quam ad lenones*. Every little trouble will be insupportable to a sick and wounded conscience, as a quart of water would be to your shoulder in a great leaden vessel.

O, if men did but fear their own consciences, if they did reverence themselves, as the *moralist* speaks, if they did herein exercise themselves to have always a conscience void of offence, as Paul did, Acts xxiv. 16. then would you be clear of this great sin of holding the truth in unrighteousness.

*Direct.* 3. If you would escape the guilt, and danger of holding God's truths in unrighteousness, then keep your hearts under the awful sense of the day of judgment, when every secret thing must come into judgment, and conscience like a register-book, is to be opened and examined. The consideration of that day gives your consciences a seven-fold defensative against sin. 1. It provokes every man to get real, solid grace, and not rest in an empty profession, Matth. xxv. and this secures us from formal hypocrisy, that we be not found foolish virgins. 2. It excites us to the diligent improvement of our talents, that we be not found slothful servants, neglecting any duty God and conscience calls us to, Matth. xxv. 21. 3. It confirms, and establishes us in the ways of God, that we wound not conscience by apostasy, 1 John ii. 28. 4. It is a loud call to every man to repentance, and not to lie

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\* A good conscience is a wall of brass.

stupid, and senseless, under guilt, Acts xvii. 30, 31. 5. It is a powerful antidote against formality in religion, the general, and dangerous disease of professors, Mat. vii. 22, 23. 6. It excites holy fear and watchfulness, in the whole course of life, 1 Pet. i. 17. 7. It puts us not only to our watch, but to our knees in fervent prayer, 1 Pet. iv. 7.

And he that feels such effects as these, from the consideration of that day, is fortified against that sin my text warns of, and dares never hold the truths of God in unrighteousness. It is our regardlessness of judgment to come, and ignorance of the nature of it which so emboldens us to neglect known duties, and commit known sins, Amos vi. 3. 2 Pet. iii. 3, 4. If our thoughts and meditations were engaged more frequently, and seriously, on such an awful subject, you would rather choose to die than to do violence to your consciences.

*Direct.* 4. Get right and true apprehensions of the *moral* evil that is in sin, and of the *penal* evil that follows sin; then no temptation shall prevail with you to commit a sin, to escape a present trouble, or neglect a known duty, to accommodate any earthly interest, and consequently to hold no truth of God in unrighteousness. It is fear of loss and sufferings that so often overbears conscience; but if men were once made thoroughly sensible that the least sin is worse for them than the greatest affliction or suffering, the peace of conscience would be well secured. And that this is really so, appears thus: 1. Afflictions do not make a man vile in the eyes of God. A man may be under manifold afflictions, and yet very dear, and precious, in God's account, Heb. xi. 36, 37, 38. but sin makes man vile in the eyes of God, Dan. xi. 2. 2. Afflictions do not put men under the curse of God, blessings and afflictions may go together, Psal. xciv. 12. but sin brings the soul under the curse, Gal. iii. 10. 3. Afflictions make men more like unto God, Heb. xii. 10. but sin makes us more like the devil, 1 John iii. 8. John viii. 34. 4. Afflictions for conscience sake are but the creature's wrath inflamed against us; but sin is the inflamer of God's wrath against us, as in the text. 5. Afflictions are but outward evils upon the body, but sin is an internal evil upon the soul, Prov. viii. 36. 6. Afflictions for duties sake have many sweet promises annexed to them, Mat. v. 10. but sin hath none. 7. The effects of sufferings for Christ are sweet to the soul, 2 Cor. vii. 4. but the fruits of sin are bitter; it yields nothing but shame and fear. 8. Afflictions for Christ are the way to heaven, but sin is the *broadway* to hell, Rom. vi. *ult.* 9. Sufferings for duty are but for a moment, 2 Cor. iv. 17. but sufferings for sin will be eternal, Mark ix. 44.

If such thoughts might be suffered to dwell with us, now would

they guard the conscience against temptations, and secure their peace and purity?

*Direct. 5.* Be thoroughly persuaded of this great truth, that God takes great pleasure in uprightness, and will own and honour integrity amidst all the dangers that befall it, Psal. xi. 7. Prov. xi. 20. When he would encourage Abraham to a life of integrity, he engages his almighty power for the protection of him in that way. Gen. xvii. 1. "I am God Almighty, walk thou before me, and be perfect." So Psal. lxxxiv. 11. "The Lord God is a sun and a shield; he will give grace and glory, and no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly."

An upright man is the boast of heaven, Job i. 8. he is God's darling; and the reason is, because he bears the image of God. Psal. xi. 7. "The upright Lord loveth uprightness;" yea, and if integrity brings them into trouble, they may be sure the Lord will bring them out. Psal. xxxiv. 19. "Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivereth them out of them all." How safely then may they leave themselves in the hands of his infinite wisdom, power, and fatherly care? Nay, God is not only the *protector*, but he is also the *rewarder* of conscientious integrity, Psal. xviii. 20. and that four ways. 1. In the inward peace it yields them; Isa. xxxii. 17. "The work of righteousness shall be peace, and the effect of righteousness, quietness and assurance for ever." But the effect of sinful shifts and carnal policies are shame and sorrow. 2. In the success and issue of it; it not only turns to God's glory, but it answers and accommodates our own designs and ends far better than our sinful projects can do, Prov. xxviii. 23. 3. Great is the joy and encouragement resulting from it in the day of death, 2 Kings xx. 3. Psal. xxxvii. 37. 4. In the world to come, Psal. xlix. 14. Were this duly considered and thoroughly believed, men would choose rather to part with life than the purity and peace of their own consciences. They would suffer all wrongs and injuries rather than do conscience the least injury.

*Direct. 6.* Do not idolize the world, nor over-value the trifles of this life; it is the love of the world that makes men warp from the rules of their own consciences, 2 Tim. iv. 10. it is this that makes men strain hard to get loose from the ties and bonds of their own consciences. The young man was convinced, but the world was too hard for his convictions, Luke xviii. 23. the degree of his sorrow was according to the degree of his love to the creature. It is not the having, but the over-loving of the world that ruins us; it is a worldly heart which makes men twist and turn, shuffle and dissemble at that rate they do, in time of temptation. Could you once dethrone this idol, how secure and safe would your consciences be! The church is described, Rev.

xii. 1. as clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet; the most zealous age of the church was the age of poverty. Try these few considerations upon your hearts to loose them from the inordinate love of the world. 1. What good will the world do when you have lost your integrity for its sake, and peace is taken away from the inner man? What joy of the world had Judas, and what comfort had Spira? If you part with your integrity for it, God will blast it, and it shall yield you no joy. 2. Except you renounce the world, you are renounced by Christ: disclaim it, or he will disclaim you, Luke xiv. 33. No man can be admitted into Christ's service, but by sealing those indentures with him. 3. Whatever loss or damage you shall sustain for Christ and conscience sake, he stands obliged to repair it to you, and that with an infinite overplus, Mark x. 29, 30. 4. In a word, all the riches, pleasures, honours, and liberties in the world are not able to give you that joy and heart-refreshing comfort that the acquitting and cheering voice of your own consciences can do. Settle these things in your hearts as defensatives against this danger.

*Direct.* 7. Lastly, Beg of God, and labour to get more Christian courage and magnanimity; for want of this, conscience is oft overborne against its own light and conviction; Christian magnanimity is conscience's security. It is excellent and becoming a Christian to be able to face any thing but the frowns of God and his own conscience. All the famous champions of truth and witnesses for God, that came victorious out of the field with temptation, with safe and unwounded consciences, were men of courage and resolution: See Dan. iii. 16. Heb. xi. 27. Acts xxi. 13. And what is this Christian courage but the fixed resolution of the soul to encounter all dangers, all sufferings, all reproaches, pains and losses in the strength of assisting grace, that shall assault us in the ways of our duty; and so it stands opposed in scripture to the *spirit of fear*, Heb. xi. 27. to *shame*, Mark viii. 38. to *apostasy*, Heb. x. 39. He must neither be afraid nor ashamed, nor lose one inch of ground for the sake of whatsoever dangers he meets with, and that because he hath embraced Christianity upon those terms, and was told of all this before, John xvi. 1. because there is no retreating, but to our own ruin, Heb. x. 38. because he owes all this, and much more than this, to Christ, Phil. i. 29. because he understands the value of his soul above his body, and of eternals above and beyond all temporals, Matth. x. 28. and, in a word, because he believes the promises of God's assistance and rewards, Heb. xi. 25, 26, 27.

O my friends, were our fears thus subdued, and our faith thus exalted, how free, and safe, would truth be in our consciences! he that owns any truth to live upon it, or accommodate a carnal interest by it, will disown that truth when it comes to live upon him,

let conscience plead and say what it will: but he that hath agreed with Christ upon these terms, to be content to be miserable for ever if there be not enough in Christ to make him happy, this man will be a steady Christian, and will rather lie in the worst of prisons, than imprison God's known truths in unrighteousness.

#### THE CONCLUSION.

I have now done my message. I have set before you the Lord Jesus in the glory of his free grace and condescending love to sinners, O that I had skill and ability to have done it better! I have wooed and expostulated with you on Christ's behalf: I have laboured according to my little measure of strength, to cast up and prepare the way by removing the stumbling blocks and discouragements out of it. This hath been a time of conviction to many of you, some have not been able to hold their convictions any longer under restraints, but many, I fear, do so; and therefore I have in the close of all handled this startling and awakening scripture among you, to shew you what an horrid evil it is to detain God's truths in unrighteousness. I have also, in the name and authority of God, demanded all the Lord's prisoners, his suppressed and restrained truths at your hands: if you will unbind your convictions this day, cut asunder the bonds of carnal fear, shame, &c. with which you restrain them; those truths you shall so make free, will make you free: if not, but you will still go on stifling and suppressing them in your own bosoms, remember that there are so many witnesses prepared to give evidence against you in the great day. And O that whilst you delay this duty, the sound of this *text* may never be out of your ears, nor suffer you to rest: "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness."