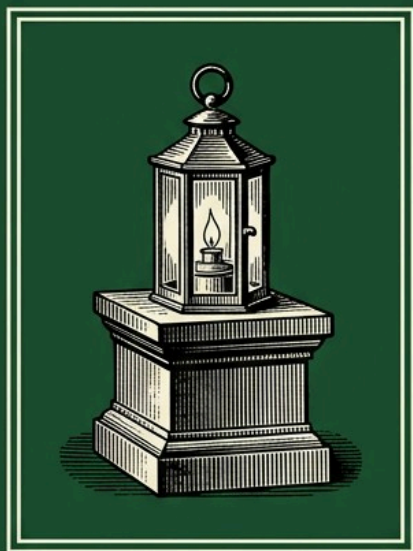


A SAINT INDEED

JOHN FLAVEL



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An extended sermon on Proverbs 4:23, calling believers to **keep the heart with all diligence**. Flavel unfolds what heart-keeping requires, why it is the Christian's supreme daily duty, and offers detailed, compassionate counsel for nine critical seasons of life — including **prosperity, adversity, spiritual desertion, temptation**, and the approach of death. Rich in Scripture and practical wisdom, this work is a landmark of Puritan experiential piety and pastoral care for the inner life.



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TITLE PAGE



A Saint Indeed: or the great work of a Christian, opened and pressed; from Proverbs 4:23. Being a seasonable and proper expedient for the recovery of the much decayed power of godliness, among the professors of these times.

By John Flavel, minister of the Gospel.

Each person is appointed by God to be the guard and defender of his heart as a garrison against his enemies: if, without calling for help or waiting for relief, he surrenders the garrison to the enemy at the first siege, he commits an obvious crime of treason: what then is to be said of surrendering the keys of this garrison before it is even besieged? The key is thought, for thought opens the heart; to turn thought is to turn the key of the heart to open it, so that it may at last be unlocked. _Ames, de Conscien. p. 154._

London, printed by W. R. and are to be sold by Robert Boulter, at the Turk's Head in Bishopsgate Street, near the Great James. 1668.

EPISTLE DEDICATORY



My dear friends.

There are three sad sights with which our eyes should continually affect our hearts. The first is to behold in every place so many profane and dissolute ones who bear the very image of Satan: the face of whose conversation plainly discovers what they are and where they are going (Philippians 3:18-19). These look like themselves, the children of wrath. The second is to see so many cursed hypocrites artificially disguising themselves, and with marvelous dexterity acting the parts of saints, so that even a judicious eye may sometimes mistake the similar workings of the Spirit on them for his saving workings on others: to hear such a person conferring, praying, bewailing his corruptions, and talking of his experiences would easily persuade a man to believe that he has the heart as well as the face of a sincere Christian. These look like saints, but are none. The third is to see so many real saints in whom the Spirit of truth is, who, through the impetuous workings of their corruptions and neglecting the watch over their hearts, do often fall into such scandalous practices that they look like hypocrites though they are not so.

These are three sad sights indeed, and oh that my head were waters and my eyes fountains of tears, that I might weep abundantly over them all!

For the first I would mourn heartily, considering that they (so continuing) must be damned eternally (2 Thessalonians 1:8-9; 1 Corinthians 6:9).

For the second, I would both weep and tremble, considering that they (so abiding) must be damned doubly (Matthew 24:51).

And for the third, no less than any of the rest, because, though they themselves may and shall be saved, yet their examples make fast the bonds of death upon both the former (Matthew 18:7; 2 Samuel 12:13-14).

Alas! that ever they should shed the blood of other souls, for whom Christ shed his own blood! That ever they should be cruel to others, who have found Christ so kind to them! I know they dare not do it directly and intentionally, but so it proves occasionally and eventually. Permit me here to digress a little, and expostulate with these prejudiced and hardened souls — I will presently return to you again. O why do you cause harm to your own souls by other men's examples? Because they stumble and break their shins, will you fall and break your necks? I desire all such as harden themselves by these things, and take up a good opinion of their own deplorable condition, to soberly consider and answer these three queries.

Query 1. Does religion in any way countenance or patronize the sinful practices of its professors, or does it not rather impartially and severely condemn them? It is the glory of the Christian religion that it is pure and undefiled (James 1:27); no doctrine is so

holy (Psalm 19:8), nor does any make more provision for a holy life (Titus 2:11-12). Indeed there is a case in which we may charge the evil practices of men upon their principles, but that is when their practices naturally flow from and necessarily follow their principles: as for example, if I see a Papist sin boldly, I may charge it upon his principles, for they set pardons for sale, and so make way for looseness. If I see an Arminian slight the grace of God, and proudly advance himself, I may cry shame upon his principles, which directly lead to it: but can I do so where such practices are condemned and provided against by their own avowed principles?

Query 2. Is it not a most irrational thing to let fly at religion because of the scandalous ways of some, while in the meantime you wholly slight and overlook the holy and heavenly conversations of many others? Are all that profess godliness loose and careless in their lives? No, some are an ornament to their profession, and the glory of Christ: and why must the innocent be condemned with the guilty? Why condemn the eleven for one Judas?

Query 3. If you condemn religion because of the scandalous lives of some that profess it, must you not then cast off all religion in the world and turn downright atheists? Surely this is the consequence of it: for what religion is there but some that profess it walk contrary to their profession? And then, as Constantine told the Novatian, you must set up your ladder and go to heaven by yourself.

But alas! it is not our printed apologies for religion, but the visible reformations of its professors that must both heal its honor and remove those fatal stumbling blocks at which the blind world strikes and falls into eternal perdition.

Now there are two ways by which this may be effected. First, by convincing the consciences of professors of their miscarriages, and the evil and aggravations of them. Secondly, by medicating the heart, and cleansing the fountain from where they proceed: in the first of these a worthy and eminent servant of Christ has lately labored, holding a clear Gospel glass before the faces of professors which truly represents their spots and blemishes. If he that reads it will consider, apply, and practice, it shall doubtless turn to his salvation, but if it turn to no good account to him that reads it, I know it shall turn to a testimony for him that wrote it. The second is a principal design of this small treatise, the subject of which is exceeding weighty and of daily use to the people of God: though the manner of handling it be attended with many defects and weaknesses — every one cannot be excellent who yet may be useful.

I will exercise your patience no longer than while I tell you.

1. Why I published it to the view of the world.
2. Why I direct it particularly to you.

First, for the publication of it, take this sincere and brief account, that as I was led to this subject by a special providence, so to the publication of it by a kind of necessity. The providence at first leading me to it was this: a dear and choice friend of my intimate acquaintance, being under much inward trouble on account of some special heart disorder, opened the case to me, and earnestly requested some rules and helps in that particular. While I was bending my thoughts to that special case, various other cases of like importance (some of which were dependent upon that under consideration) occurred to my thoughts, and this scripture which I have expounded presented itself as a fit foundation for the

whole discourse. This being lengthened out to what you see, various friends requested me to transcribe for their use various of the cases here handled; and some others begged me to publish the whole, to which I was in a manner necessitated to save the pains of transcribing, which to me is a very tedious and tiresome work. And just as I had almost finished the copy, an opportunity presented (and that somewhat strangely) to make it public. So that from first to last I have been carried beyond my first intentions in this thing.

Objection: If any say the world is even cloyed with books, and therefore though the discourse be necessary, yet the publication is needless.

Solution 1. I answer, there are multitudes of books indeed, and of them many do not concern themselves about root truths and practical godliness, but spend their strength upon impractical notions and frivolous controversies; many also strike at root truths, and endeavor to undermine the power of godliness. And some there are that nourish the root, and tend to clear and confirm, to prepare and apply the great truths of the gospel, that they may be bread for souls to live and feed on. Now, though I could wish that those that have handled the pen of the scribe had better employed their time and pains than to force such useless discourses upon the world, yet for books of the latter rank, I say that when farmers complain of too much corn, let Christians complain of too many such books.

2. And if you be so highly conceited of your own resources and ability that such books are needless to you: if you let them alone they will do you no hurt, and other poor hungry souls will be glad of them, and bless God for what you despise and leave.

Objection: If it be said that several of the cases here handled do not touch your condition, I answer.

Solution 1. That which is not your condition may be another's condition. If you be placed in an easy, full, and prosperous state, and so have no need of the helps here offered to support your heart under pressing wants, others are forced to live by faith for every day's provision. If you be dandled upon the knee of providence, some of your brethren are under its feet. If you have inward peace and tranquility of spirit, and so need not the counsels here given to ward off those desperate conclusions that poor afflicted souls are ready to draw upon themselves at such a time; yet it may be a word in season to them, and they may say as David to Abigail, blessed be you of the Lord, and blessed be your advice.

2. That may be your condition shortly, which is not your condition at present: say not your mountain stands strong, you shall never be moved. There are changes in the right hand of the Most High, and then those truths which are little more esteemed than hedge-fruits will be as apples of gold in pictures of silver. In Jeremiah 10:11, the prophet there teaches the Jews (who then dwelt in their own houses) how to defend their religion in Babylon, and what they should say to the Chaldeans there, and therefore that verse is written in Aramaic. So much for the reasons of its publication. Next, for the dedication of it to you, I was induced to this by the consideration: (1) of the relation I have to you above all the people in the world: I look upon my gifts as yours, my time as yours, and all the talents I am entrusted with as yours. It is not with you as with a woman whose husband is dead, and so is freed from the law of her husband — the relation still continues, and so do all the mutual duties of it. (2) By the consideration of my neces-

sitated absence from you, I would not that personal absence should by imperceptible degrees, untwist (as usually it does) the cord of friendship, and therefore have endeavored (as absent friends use to do) to preserve and strengthen it by this small remembrance. It was Vespasian's answer to Apollonius when he desired access for two philosophers: 'My doors,' said Vespasian, 'are always open to philosophers, but my very breast is open to you.' I cannot say with him, my doors are open for the free access of friends, being by a sad providence shut against myself; but this I can say, my very breast is still open to you; you are as dear to me as ever. (3) Another inducement (and indeed the main) was the perpetual usefulness and necessity of these truths for you, which you will have continual need of: and I know few of you have such happy memories to retain, and I cannot be always with you to inculcate these things, but the written letter remains. I was willing to leave this with you as a legacy, as a testimony of sincere love for and care over you: this may counsel and direct you when I cannot. I may be rendered useless to you by a civil or natural death; but this will outlive me, and oh that it may serve your souls when I am silent in the dust!

To hasten now to a conclusion, I have only these three requests to you, which I earnestly beseech you not to deny me. Indeed, I charge you, as ever you hope to appear with comfort before the great Shepherd, do not dare to slight these requests. (1) Above all other studies in the world, study your own hearts: waste not a minute more of your precious time about frivolous and insipid controversies. It is reported even of Bellarmine (how truly I do not examine) that he turned with loathing from the study of scholastic theology, because it lacked the sweet juice of piety. I had rather it

should be said of you as one said of [a noted scholar], 'He wanted a regular head, but not an honest heart,' than that you should have regular heads and irregular hearts. My dear flock, I have according to the grace given me labored in the course of my ministry among you to feed you with the heart-strengthening bread of practical doctrine, and I do assure you, it is far better that you should have the sweet and saving impressions of Gospel truths feelingly and powerfully conveyed to your hearts, than only to understand them by bare reasoning or a dry logical inference. Leave trifling studies to such as have time lying on their hands, and know not how to employ it. Remember you are at the door of eternity, and have other work to do; those hours you spend upon heart-work in your closets are the golden spots of all your time, and will have the sweetest influence into your last hour. Never forget those sermons I preached to you upon that subject, from 2 Kings 20:2-3. Heart-work is weighty and difficult work; an error there may cost you your souls. I may say of it, as Augustine speaks of the doctrine of the Trinity, 'Nothing is more easily or more dangerously erred in': O then, study your hearts. (2) My next request is that you will carefully look to your conversations, and be accurate in all your ways, hold forth the word of life. Be sure by the strictness and holiness of your lives to settle yourselves in the very consciences of your enemies. Remember that your lives must be produced in the great day, to judge the world (1 Corinthians 6:2). Oh then what manner of persons ought you to be! You have many eyes over you: the omniscient eye of God that searches the heart and minds (Revelation 2:23); the vigilant eye of Satan (Job 1:7-8); the envious eyes of ene-

mies that curiously observe you (Psalm 5:8); the quick and observant eye of conscience, which none of your actions escape (Romans 9:1).

Oh then be precise and accurate in all manner of conversation: keep up the power of godliness in your closets and families, and then you will not let it fall in your more public employments and conversations in the world. I have often told you that it is the honor of the Gospel that it makes the best parents and children, the best masters and servants, the best husbands and wives in the world.

My third and last request is that you pray for me. I hope I can say, and I am sure some of you have acknowledged, that I came at first among you as the return and answer of your prayers: and indeed so it should be (see Luke 10:2). I am persuaded also I have been carried on in my work by your prayers — it is sweet when it is so (see Ephesians 6:18-19). And I hope by your prayers to receive yet a further benefit, even that which is mentioned in Hebrews 13:18-19 and Philemon 22. And truly it is but equal that you should pray for me; I have often prayed for you. Let the pulpit, family, and closet witness for me: and God forbid I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you.

Indeed, friends, your own interest may persuade you to it: what mercies you obtain for me redound to your own advantage. If God preserves me, it is for your use and service: the more gifts and graces a minister has, the better for them that shall wait on his ministry; the more God gives in to me, the more I shall be able to give out to you. I will detain you no longer, but to entreat you to accept this small testimony of my great love, and have recourse to it according as the needs of your condition shall require. Read it

consideringly and obediently; judge it not by the style, but by the weight and savor of what you read. It is a good rule of Bernard: in reading books, regard not so much the knowledge as the savor. That it may prove the savor of life to life to you, and all those into whose hands it shall come, is the hearty desire of

Your loving and faithful pastor, John Flavel. From my study at Ley in Slapton, October 7, 1667.

A SAINT INDEED



Proverbs 4:23._ Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life.

The heart of man is his worst part before it is regenerate, and the best afterwards; it is the seat of principles, and fountain of actions. The eye of God is, and the eye of the Christian ought to be, principally fixed upon it.

The greatest difficulty in conversion is to win the heart to God, and the greatest difficulty after conversion is to keep the heart with God. Here lies the very pinch and stress of religion; here is that which makes the way to life a narrow way, and the gate of heaven a straight gate. Direction and help in this great work is the scope and sum of this text; in which we have:

1. An exhortation: Keep your heart with all diligence.
2. The reason or motive enforcing it: For out of it are the issues of life.

In the exhortation I shall consider:

1. The matter of the duty.
2. The manner of performing it.

1. The matter of the duty: Keep your heart. Heart is not here taken properly for that noble part of the body which philosophers call the first that lives and the last that dies; but by heart, in a metaphor, the Scripture sometimes understands some particular noble faculty of the soul. In Romans 1:21, it is put for the understanding: their foolish heart — that is, their foolish understanding — was darkened. And in Psalm 119:11, it is put for the memory: 'Your word have I hid in my heart.' And in 1 John 3:20, it is put for the conscience, which has in it both the light of the understanding and the recognitions of the memory: 'If our heart condemn us' — that is, if our conscience, whose proper office it is to condemn. But here we are to take it more generally for the whole soul or inner man; for look what the heart is to the body, that the soul is to the man: and what health is to the heart, that holiness is to the soul. The state of the whole body depends upon the soundness and vigor of the heart, and the everlasting state of the whole man upon the good or ill condition of the soul.

And by keeping the heart, understand the diligent and constant use and improvement of all holy means and duties to preserve the soul from sin, and maintain its sweet and free communion with God.

Lavater, commenting on this passage, will have the word taken from a besieged garrison, surrounded by many enemies without, and in danger of being betrayed by treacherous citizens within, in which danger the soldiers upon pain of death are commanded to watch. And whereas the expression, 'Keep your heart,' seems to put it upon us as our work, yet it does not imply a sufficiency or ability in us to do it. We are as able to stop the sun in its course, or make the rivers run backward, as by our own skill and power to

rule and order our hearts. We may as well be our own saviors as our own keepers, and yet Solomon speaks properly enough when he says, 'Keep your heart,' because the duty is ours, though the power is God's. A natural man has no power, a gracious man has some — though not sufficient — and that power he has depends upon the exciting and assisting strength of Christ. Grace within us is indebted to grace without us (John 15:5): 'Without me you can do nothing.' So much of the matter of the duty.

2. The manner of performing it is, with all diligence; the Hebrew is very emphatic — keep with all keeping; as if to say, 'Keep, keep; set double guards, your hearts will be gone else.' And this vehemency of expression with which the duty is urged plainly implies how difficult it is to keep our hearts, and how dangerous to let them go.

2. The reason or motive quickening to this duty is very forcible and weighty: For out of it are the issues of life. That is, it is the source and fountain of all vital actions and operations. It is the spring and origin of both good and evil — as the spring in a watch that sets all the wheels in motion. The heart is the treasury; the hand and tongue are but the shops — what is in these came from there; the hand and tongue always begin where the heart ends. The heart contrives, and the members execute (Luke 6:46): 'A good man out of the good treasury of his heart brings forth good things, and an evil man out of the evil treasury of his heart brings forth evil things; for out of the abundance of his heart his mouth speaks.' So then, if the heart errs in its work, these must needs miscarry in theirs; for heart-errors are like the errors of the first digestion which cannot be rectified afterwards — or like the misplacing and inverting of the stamps and letters in the press, which must needs

cause so many errors in all the copies that are printed. O then! how important a duty is that which is contained in the following proposition?

Doctrine: That the keeping and right managing of the heart in every condition is the great business of a Christian's life.

What the philosopher says of waters is as properly applicable to hearts — they are hard to contain within any bounds. God has set bounds and limits to them, yet how frequently do they transgress — not only the bounds of grace and religion, but even of reason and common honesty. This is the labor and the task: this is that which affords the Christian matter of labor, fear, and trembling to his dying day. It is not the cleansing of the hand that makes a Christian, for many a hypocrite can show as fair a hand as he, but the purifying, watching, and right ordering of the heart. This is the thing that provokes so many sad complaints, and costs so many deep groans and bitter tears. It was the pride of Hezekiah's heart that made him lie in the dust mourning before the Lord (2 Chronicles 32:26). It was the fear of hypocrisy invading the heart that made David cry, 'Let my heart be sound in your statutes that I be not ashamed' (Psalm 119:80). It was the sad experience he had of the divisions and distractions of his own heart in the service of God that made him pour out that prayer, 'Unite my heart to fear your name' (Psalm 86:11).

The method in which I shall develop the point shall be this:

1. First I shall inquire what the keeping of the heart supposes and imports.

2. Secondly, assign various reasons why Christians must make this the great work and business of their lives.

3. Thirdly, point at those special seasons which especially call for this diligence in keeping the heart.

4. Fourthly and lastly, apply the whole in several uses.

1. What the keeping of the heart supposes and imports.

To keep the heart necessarily supposes a previous work of sanctification which has set the heart right by giving it a new spiritual bent and inclination, for as long as the heart is not set right by grace as to its habitual frame, no duties or means can keep it right with God. Self is the weight of the unsanctified heart, which biases and moves it in all its designs and actions; and as long as it is so, it is impossible that any external means should keep it with God.

Man by creation was of one constant, uniform frame and tenor of spirit, held one straight and even course; not one thought or faculty raveled or disordered. His mind had a perfect illumination to understand and know the will of God, his will a perfect compliance with it, his sensitive appetite and other lower powers stood in a most obedient subordination.

Man by degeneration has become a most disordered and rebellious creature, contesting with and opposing his Maker: as the first cause, by self-dependence; as the greatest good, by self-love; as the highest Lord, by self-will; and as the last end, by self-seeking. And so he is quite disordered, and all his acts irregular. His illuminated understanding is clouded with ignorance, his complying will full of rebellion and stubbornness, his subordinate powers casting off the dominion and government of the higher faculties.

But by regeneration, this disordered soul is set right again; sanctification being the rectifying and due framing — or as the Scripture phrases it, the renewal of the soul after the image of God

(Ephesians 4:24) — in which self-dependence is removed by faith, self-love by the love of God, self-will by subjection and obedience to the will of God, and self-seeking by self-denial. The darkened understanding is again illuminated (Ephesians 1:18), the refractory will sweetly subdued (Psalm 110:3), the rebellious appetite or concupiscence gradually conquered (Romans 6:7, throughout). And thus the soul which sin had universally depraved is again by grace restored and rectified.

This being presupposed, it will not be difficult to understand what it is to keep the heart, which is nothing else but the constant care and diligence of such a renewed man to preserve his soul in that holy frame to which grace has reduced it, and daily strives to hold it.

For though grace has in great measure rectified the soul and given it a habitual and heavenly temper, yet sin often actually decomposes it again; so that even a gracious heart is like a musical instrument, which though it be never so exactly tuned, a small matter brings it out of tune again — indeed, hang it aside but a little and it will need tuning again before you can play another lesson on it. Even so stands the case with gracious hearts; if they are in frame in one duty, yet how dull, dead, and disordered when they come to another. And therefore every duty needs a particular preparation of the heart (Job 11:13): 'If you prepare your heart, and stretch out your hands toward him.' Well then, to keep the heart is carefully to preserve it from sin which disorders it, and maintain that spiritual and gracious frame which fits it for a life of communion with God. And this includes these six acts within it.

1. First, frequent observation of the frame of the heart, turning in and examining how the case stands with it — this is one part of the work. Carnal and formal persons take no heed to this; they cannot be brought to confer with their own hearts. There are some men and women that have lived forty or fifty years in the world, and have scarce had one hour's discourse with their own hearts all that while. It is a hard thing to bring a man and himself together upon such an account; but saints know those soliloquies and self-conferences to be of excellent use and advantage. The Heathen could say, the soul is made wise by sitting still in quietness. Though bankrupts care not to look into their books of account, yet upright hearts will know whether they go backward or forward (Psalm 77:6): 'I commune with my own heart.' The heart can never be kept until its case be examined and understood.

2. It includes deep humiliation for heart evils and disorders; thus Hezekiah humbled himself for the pride of his heart (2 Chronicles 32:26). Thus the people were ordered to spread forth their hands to God in prayer in a sense of the plague of their own hearts (1 Kings 8:38). Upon this account many an upright heart has been laid low before God. O, what a heart have I? They have in their confessions pointed at the heart, the painful place: 'Lord, here is the wound, here is the plague-sore.' It is with the heart well kept as it is with the eye, which is a fitting emblem of it: if a small dust gets into the eye, it will never leave blinking and watering till it has wept it out. So the upright heart cannot be at rest till it has wept out its troubles, and poured out its complaints before the Lord.

3. It includes earnest supplications and fervent prayer for heart-purifying and rectifying grace, when sin has defiled and disordered it, so as in Psalm 19:12: 'Cleanse me from secret faults,' and Psalm 86:11: 'Unite my heart to fear your name.' Saints have always many such petitions pending before the throne of grace; this is the thing which is most pleaded by them with God. When they are praying for outward mercies, their spirits may be more relaxed, but when it comes to the heart-case, then they intend their spirits to the utmost, fill their mouths with arguments, weep and make supplication. Oh, for a better heart! Oh, for a heart to love God more! To hate sin more, to walk more evenly with God! Lord, deny not to me such a heart, whatever else you deny me; give me a heart to fear you, love and delight in you, if I beg my bread in desolate places. It is observed of holy Mr. Bradford, that when he was confessing sin, he would never give over confessing until he had felt some brokenness of heart for that sin, and when praying for any spiritual mercy, would never give over that suit until he had gotten some relish of that mercy. That is the third thing included in keeping the heart.

4. It includes the imposing of strong engagements and bonds upon ourselves to walk more carefully with God, and avoid the occasions by which the heart may be induced to sin. Well-composed, advised, and deliberate vows are in some cases of excellent use to guard the heart against some special sin (Job 31:1): 'I made a covenant with my eyes.' By this means, holy ones have over-awed their souls, and preserved themselves from defilement by some special heart-corruptions.

5. It includes a constant holy jealousy over our own hearts. Quick-sighted self-jealousy is an excellent preservative from sin. He that will keep his heart must have the eyes of his soul awake and open upon all the disorderly and tumultuous stirrings of his affections. If the affections break loose and the passions be stirred, the soul must discover and suppress them before they get to a height. O my soul, do you do well in this? My tumultuous thoughts and passions — where is your commission?

Happy is the man that thus fears always (Proverbs 28:14). By this fear of the Lord it is that men depart from evil, shake off security, and preserve themselves from iniquity. He that will keep his heart must eat with fear, rejoice with fear, and pass the whole time of his sojourning here in fear — and all little enough to keep the heart from sin.

6. And lastly, to add no more, it includes the realizing of God's presence with us, and setting the Lord always before us. This the people of God have found a singular means to keep their hearts upright, and to awe them from sin. When the eye of our faith is fixed upon the eye of God's omniscience, we dare not let out our thoughts and affections to vanity. Holy Job dared not suffer his heart to yield to an impure, vain thought, and what was it that moved him to so great a circumspection? Why, he tells you in Job 31:4: 'Does he not see my ways and count all my steps?' 'Walk before me,' said God to Abraham, 'and be perfect' (Genesis 17:1). Even as parents use to set their children in the congregation before them, knowing that otherwise they will be toying and playing, so would the heart of the best man too, were it not for the eye of God.

In these and such like particulars do gracious souls express the care they have of their hearts. They are as careful to prevent the breaking loose of their corruptions in times of temptation as sailors are to bind fast the guns so that they do not break loose in a storm. They are as careful to preserve the sweetness and comfort they have gotten from God in any duty, as one that comes out of a hot bath or a great sweat is of taking cold by going forth into the chill air. This is the work, and of all works in religion it is the most difficult, constant, and important work.

1. It is the hardest work. Heart-work is hard work indeed. To shuffle over religious duties with a loose and heedless spirit will cost no great pains, but to set yourself before the Lord, and tie up your loose and vain thoughts to a constant and serious attendance upon him — this will cost you something. To attain a facility and dexterity of language in prayer, and put your meaning into apt and decent expressions, is easy, but to get your heart broken for sin while you are confessing it; melted with free grace while you are blessing God for it; to be really ashamed and humbled through the awareness of God's infinite holiness, and to keep your heart in this frame, not only in but after duty — will surely cost you some groans and travailing pains of soul. To suppress the outward acts of sin and compose the external part of your life in a laudable and seemly manner is no great matter; even carnal persons by the force of common principles can do this. But to kill the root of corruption within, to set and keep up a holy government over your thoughts, to have all things lie straight and orderly in the heart — this is not easy.

2. It is a constant work. The keeping of the heart is such a work as is never done till life is done; this labor and our life end together. It is with a Christian in this business as it is with sailors who have sprung a leak at sea: if they do not constantly work the pump, the water increases upon them and will quickly sink them. It is in vain for them to say the work is hard and we are weary. There is no time or condition in the life of a Christian which will permit an intermission of this work. It is in the keeping watch over our hearts as it was in the keeping up of Moses's hands while Israel and Amalek were fighting below (Exodus 17:12). No sooner do Moses's hands grow heavy and sink down, but Amalek prevails. You know it cost David and Peter many a sad day and night for intermitting the watch over their own hearts but a few minutes.

3. It is the most important business of a Christian's life; without this we are but formalists in religion. All our professions, gifts and duties, signify nothing. 'My son, give me your heart' (Proverbs 23:26). God is pleased to call that a gift which is indeed a debt; he will put this honor upon the creature to receive it from him in the way of a gift, but if this is not given him he regards not whatever else you bring to him. There is so much only of worth and value in what we do as there is of heart in it. Concerning the heart, God seems to say as Joseph of Benjamin, 'If you bring not Benjamin with you, you shall not see my face.' Among the Heathens, when the beast was cut up for sacrifice, the first thing the priest looked upon was the heart, and if that were unsound and bad, the sacrifice was rejected. God rejects all duties (how glorious soever in other respects) offered him without a heart. He that performs duty without a heart — that is, heedlessly — is no more accepted with

God than he that performs it with a double heart — that is, hypocritically (Isaiah 66:3). And thus I have briefly opened the nature of the duty, what is imported in this phrase, 'Keep your heart.'

2. Next, I shall give you some rational account, why Christians should make this the great business of their lives, to keep their hearts?

The importance and necessity of making this our great and main business will manifestly appear in that: 1. The honor of God. 2. The sincerity of our profession. 3. The beauty of our conversation. 4. The comfort of our souls. 5. The improvement of our graces. And 6. Our stability in the hour of temptation — are all wrapped up in and dependent on our sincerity and care in the management of this work.

1. The glory of God is much concerned in this; heart-evils are very provoking evils to the Lord. The schools do well observe that outward sins are sins of greater infamy, but heart-sins are sins of deeper guilt. How severely has the great God declared his wrath from heaven against heart-wickedness! The great crime for which the old world stands indicted (Genesis 6:5-7) is heart-wickedness: God saw that every imagination of their heart was only evil and that continually, for which he sent the most dreadful judgment that was ever executed since the world began. And the Lord said, 'I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth, both man and beast, and the creeping things, and the fowls of heaven, for it repents me that I have made man.' We find not their murders, adulteries, blasphemies (though they were defiled with these) particularly alleged against them; but the evils of their hearts. Indeed, that which God was so provoked by as to give up his peculiar inheritance into the enemy's hand was the evil of their

hearts (Jeremiah 4:14): 'O Jerusalem, wash your heart from wickedness that you may be saved; how long shall vain thoughts lodge within you?' The wickedness and vanity of their thoughts God took special notice of; and because of this the Chaldean must come upon them as a lion from his thickets, verse 7, and tear them to pieces. For the very sin of thoughts it was that God cast down the fallen angels from heaven, and keeps them still in everlasting chains to the judgment of the great day. By which expression is not obscurely intimated some extraordinary judgment to which they are reserved, as prisoners that have most irons laid upon them may be supposed to be the greatest malefactors. And what was their sin? Why, only spiritual wickedness — for they, having no bodily organs, could act nothing externally against God. Indeed, mere heart-evils are so provoking that for them he rejects with indignation all the duties that some men perform to him (Isaiah 66:3): 'He that kills an ox is as if he killed a man; he that sacrifices a lamb, as if he cut off a dog's neck; he that offers an oblation, as if he offered swine's blood; he that burns incense, as if he blessed an idol.' In what words could the abhorrence of a creature's actions be more fully expressed by the holy God? Murder and idolatry are not more vile in his account than their sacrifices, though materially such as he himself appointed. And what made them so? The following words inform us: 'Their soul delights in their abominations.'

To conclude, such is the vileness of mere heart-sins that the Scriptures sometimes intimate the difficulty of pardon for them. So in the case of Simon Magus (Acts 8:21): his heart was not right; he had vile thoughts of God and the things of God; the apostle bids him repent and pray, if perhaps the thoughts of his heart might be

forgiven him. O then, never slight heart-evils! For by these God is highly wronged and provoked, and for this reason, let every Christian make it his work to keep his heart with all diligence.

2. The sincerity of our profession much depends upon the care and conscience we have in keeping our hearts; for it is most certain that a man is but a hypocrite in his profession, however meticulous he be in the externals of religion, if he is heedless and careless of the frame of his heart. You have a clear instance of this in the case of Jehu (2 Kings 10:31): 'But Jehu took no heed to walk in the ways of the Lord God of Israel with his heart.' That context gives us an account of the great service performed by Jehu against the house of Ahab and Baal, as also of a great temporal reward given him by God for that service — that his children to the fourth generation should sit upon the throne of Israel. And yet in these words Jehu is censured as a hypocrite; though God approved and rewarded the work, yet he abhorred and rejected the person that did it as hypocritical. And in what did his hypocrisy lie? But in this: that he took no heed to walk in the ways of the Lord with his heart — that is, he did all insincerely and for self-ends. And though the work he did was materially good, yet he not purging his heart from those unworthy self-designs in doing it, was a hypocrite. And Simon of whom we spoke before, though he appeared such a person that the apostle could not regularly refuse him, yet his hypocrisy was quickly discovered. And what discovered it? But this: that though he professed and associated himself with the saints, yet he was a stranger to the mortification of heart-sins. 'Your heart is not right with God' (Acts 8:21). It is true, there is a great difference among Christians themselves in their diligence and dexterity about heart-work; some are more conversant and successful in it than others

are. But he that takes no heed to his heart, he that is not careful to order it aright before God, is but a hypocrite (Ezekiel 33:31-32): 'And they come to you as the people come, and sit before you as my people, and they hear your words, but they will not do them; for with their mouth they show much love, but their heart goes after their covetousness.' Here were a company of formal hypocrites, as is evident by that expression, 'as my people' — like them, but not of them. And what made them so? Their outside was fair: here were reverent postures, high professions, much seeming joy and delight in ordinances — 'you are to them as a lovely song' — yea, but for all that, they kept not their hearts with God in those duties; their hearts were commanded by their lusts; they went after their covetousness. Had they kept their hearts with God all had been well, but not regarding which way their heart went in duty — there lay the core of their hypocrisy.

Objection: If any upright soul should hence infer, 'Then I am a hypocrite too, for many times my heart departs from God in duty; do what I can, yet I cannot hold it close with God.'

Solution: To this I answer, the very objection carries in it its own solution. You say, 'Do what I can, yet I cannot keep my heart with God.' Soul, if you do what you can, you have the blessing of an upright heart, though God sees good to exercise you under the affliction of a discomposed heart. There remains still some wildness in the thoughts and fancies of the best to humble them; but if you find a care beforehand to prevent them, and opposition against them when they come, and grief and sorrow afterwards, you will find enough to clear you from reigning hypocrisy. (1) This fore-care is seen partly in laying up the word in your heart to prevent them (Psalm 119:11): 'Your word have I hid in my heart that I

might not sin against you'; partly in our endeavors to engage our hearts to God (Jeremiah 30:21); and partly in begging preventing grace from God in our approaches to duty (Psalm 119:36-37). It is a good sign where this care goes before a duty. And (2) it is a sweet sign of uprightness to oppose them in their first rise (Psalm 119:113): 'I hate vain thoughts'; Galatians 5:17: 'The Spirit lusts against the flesh.' And (3) your after-grief discovers your upright heart; if with Hezekiah you are humbled for the evils of your heart, you have no reason from these disorders to question the integrity of it. But to suffer sin to lodge quietly in the heart, to let your heart habitually and uncontrolledly wander from God — that is a sad and dangerous symptom indeed.

3. The beauty of our conversation arises from the heavenly frames and holy order of our spirits; there is a spiritual luster and beauty in the conversation of saints. The righteous is more excellent than his neighbor; they shine as the lights of the world. But whatever luster and beauty is in their lives comes from the excellence of their spirits, as the candle within puts a luster upon the lantern in which it shines. It is impossible that a disordered and neglected heart should ever produce a well-ordered conversation. And since (as the text observes) the issues or streams of life flow out of the heart as their fountain, it must needs follow that such as the heart is, the life will be. Hence 1 Peter 2:11-12: 'Abstain from fleshly lusts — having your conversation honest,' or beautiful, as the Greek word imports.

Isaiah 55:7: 'Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts.' His way notes the course of his life; his thoughts, the frame of his heart. And therefore since the way and course of his life flows from his thoughts, or the frame of his heart,

both or neither will be forsaken. The heart is the womb of all actions; these actions are virtually and seminally contained in our thoughts. These thoughts being once made up into affections are quickly made out into suitable actions and practices. If the heart be wicked, then as Christ says (Matthew 15:19), 'Out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, etc.' Mark the order: first, wanton or revengeful thoughts; then unclean or murderous practices.

And if the heart be holy and spiritual, then as David speaks from sweet experience in Psalm 45:1: 'My heart is inditing a good matter; I speak of the things which I have made; my tongue is as the pen of a ready writer.' Here is a life richly beautified with good works — some ready made: 'I will speak of the things which I have made'; others still being shaped: 'my heart is inditing' — but both proceeding from the heavenly frame of his heart.

Put but the heart in frame, and the life will quickly discover that it is so. I think it is not very difficult to discern by the duties and conversations of Christians what frames their spirits are under. Take a Christian in a good frame, and how serious, heavenly, and profitable will his conversations and duties be! What a lovely companion he is during the continuance of it! It would do anyone's heart good to be with him at such a time (Psalm 37:30-31): 'The mouth of the righteous speaks wisdom, and his tongue talks of judgment; the law of his God is in his heart.'

When the heart is up with God and full of God, how dexterously and ingeniously will he steer into spiritual discourse, improving every occasion and advantage to some heavenly purpose — few words run then to waste.

And what else can be the reason why the discourses and duties of many Christians have become so frothy and unprofitable, their communion both with God and with one another become as a dry stalk, but because their hearts are neglected? Surely this must be the reason of it, and truly it is an evil greatly to be lamented. For as by this, Christian fellowship has become a flavorless thing, so the attracting beauty that used to shine from the conversations of the saints upon the faces and consciences of the world — which if it did not allure and bring them in love with the ways of God, yet at least left a testimony in their consciences of the excellence of those men and their way — this is in great measure lost, to the unspeakable detriment of religion.

There was a time when Christians carried themselves at such a rate that the world stood gazing at them, as that word in 1 Peter 4:4 implies. Their life and language was of a different character from others; their tongues discovered them to be Galileans wherever they came. But now since vain speculations and fruitless controversies have so much prevailed, and heart-work and practical godliness so much neglected among professors, the case is sadly altered — their discourse has become like other men's. If you come among them now, they may (to allude to Acts 2:6) hear every man speak in his own language. And truly I have little hope to see this evil remedied and the credit of religion again repaired until Christians fall again to their old work and ply heart-work more closely. When the salt of heavenly-mindedness is again cast into the spring, the streams will run clearer and sweeter.

4. The comfort of our souls depends much upon the keeping of our hearts, for he that is negligent in attending to his own heart is (ordinarily) a great stranger to assurance and the sweet comforts

flowing from it.

Indeed, if the Antinomian doctrine were true, which teaches you to reject all marks and signs for the trial of your condition, telling you it is only the Spirit that immediately assures you by witnessing your adoption directly without them, then you might be careless of your hearts — indeed, strangers to them — and yet no strangers to comfort. But since both Scripture and experience confute this error, I hope you will never look for comfort in that unscriptural way. I do not deny but it is the work and office of the Spirit to assure you, and yet do confidently affirm that if ever you attain assurance in the ordinary way in which God dispenses it, you must take pains with your own hearts. You may expect your comforts upon easier terms — but I am mistaken if ever you enjoy them upon any other. Give all diligence; prove yourselves: this is the Scripture way. I remember Mr. Roberts in his *Treatise of the Covenant* tells us that he knew a Christian who in the infancy of his Christianity so vehemently panted after the infallible assurance of God's love that for a long time together he earnestly desired some voice from heaven; indeed, sometimes walking in the solitary fields, earnestly desired some miraculous voice from the trees and stones there. This, after many desires and longings, was denied him; but in time, a better was afforded in the ordinary way of searching the word and his own heart. An instance of the like nature the learned Gerson gives us, of one that was driven by temptation upon the very borders of desperation, who at last being sweetly settled and assured, was asked how he attained it. He answered, 'Not by any extraordinary revelation, but by subjecting my understanding to the Scriptures and comparing my own heart with them.' The Spirit indeed assures by witnessing our adoption, and

he witnesses two ways. (1) Objectively — that is, by working those graces in our souls which are the conditions of the promise, and so the Spirit and his graces in us are all one; the Spirit of God dwelling in us is a mark of our adoption. Now the Spirit cannot be discerned in his essence, but in his operations; and to discern these is to discern the Spirit. And how these should be discerned without serious searching and diligent watching of the heart I cannot imagine. (2) The other way of the Spirit's witnessing is effectively — that is, by irradiating the soul with a grace-discovering light, shining upon his own work. This in order of nature follows the former work: he first infuses the grace, and then opens the eye of the soul to see it. Now since the heart is the subject of that infused grace, even this way of the Spirit's witnessing also includes the necessity of carefully keeping our own hearts. For (1) a neglected heart is so confused and dark that the little grace which is in it is not ordinarily discernible. The most accurate and laborious Christians, that take most pains and spend most time about their hearts, yet find it very difficult to discover the pure and genuine workings of the Spirit there. How then shall the Christian who is comparatively negligent and remiss about heart-work ever be able to discover it? Sincerity — which is the thing sought — lies in the heart like a small piece of gold in the bottom of a river. He that will find it must wait till the water is clear and settled, and then he shall see it sparkling at the bottom. And for the heart to be clear and settled — how much pains and watching, care and diligence will it cost?

2. God does not usually indulge lazy and negligent souls with the comforts of assurance; he will not so much as seem to patronize sloth and carelessness. He will give it, but it shall be in his own

way. His command has united our care and comfort together. They are mistaken that think the beautiful child of assurance may be born without pangs. Ah, how many solitary hours have the people of God spent in heart-examination! How many times have they looked into the word, and then into their hearts! Sometimes they thought they discovered sincerity, and were even ready to draw forth the triumphant conclusion of assurance, then comes a doubt they cannot resolve, and dashes all again. Many hopes and fears, doubtings and reasonings they have had in their own breasts, before they arrived at a comfortable settlement.

To conclude, suppose it possible for a careless Christian to attain assurance — yet it is impossible he should long retain it. For it is with those whose hearts are big with the joys of assurance as with a pregnant woman subject to miscarriages: if extraordinary care is not used, it is a thousand to one if ever she embraces a living child. So it is here — a little pride, vanity, carelessness dashes all that for which you have been laboring a long time in many a weary duty. Since then the joy of our life, the comfort of our souls, rises and falls with our diligence in this work — keep your hearts with all diligence.

5. The improvement of our graces depends on the keeping of our hearts. I never knew grace thrive in a negligent and careless soul. The habits and roots of grace are planted in the heart, and the deeper they are rooted there, the more thriving and flourishing grace is. In Ephesians 3:17, we read of being rooted in grace. Grace in the heart is the root of every gracious word in the mouth, and of every holy work in the hand (Psalm 116:10; 2 Corinthians 4:13). It is true, Christ is the root of a Christian; but Christ is the originating root, and grace, a root originated, planted, and influenced by

Christ. According as this thrives under divine influences, so the acts of grace are more or less fruitful and vigorous. Now in a heart not kept with care and diligence, these fruitifying influences are stopped and cut off; multitudes of vanities break in upon it and devour its strength. The heart is as it were the pasture in which multitudes of thoughts are fed every day. A gracious heart diligently kept feeds many precious thoughts of God in a day (Psalm 139:17): 'How precious are your thoughts to me, O God! how great is the sum of them! if I should count them, they are more in number than the sand; and when I awake, I am still with you.' And as the gracious heart feeds and nourishes them, so they refresh and feast the heart (Psalm 63:5-6): 'My soul is filled as with marrow and fatness while I think upon you.' But in the disregarded heart, swarms of vain and foolish thoughts are perpetually working, and jostle out those spiritual ideas and thoughts of God by which the soul should be refreshed.

Besides, the careless heart makes nothing out of any duty or ordinance it performs or attends, and yet these are the conduits of heaven from which grace is watered and made fruitful. A man may go with a heedless spirit from ordinance to ordinance, abide all his days under the choicest teachings, and yet never be improved by them. For heart neglect is a leak in the bottom — no heavenly influences, however rich, abide in that soul (Matthew 13:3-4). The heart that lies open and common like the highway, free for all passengers — when the seed fell on it, the birds came and devoured it. Alas! it is not enough to hear, unless we take heed how we hear; a man may pray and be never the better, unless he watch unto

prayer. In a word, all ordinances, means, and duties are blessed to the improvement of grace, according to the care and strictness we use in keeping our hearts in them.

6. Lastly, the stability of our souls in the hour of temptation will be much according to the care and conscience we have of keeping our hearts. The careless heart is an easy prey to Satan in the hour of temptation; his main batteries are raised against that royal fort, the heart. If he wins that, he wins all, for it commands the whole man. And alas, how easy a conquest is a neglected heart! It is no more difficult to take it by surprise than for an enemy to enter a city whose gates are open and unguarded. It is the watchful heart that discovers and suppresses the temptation before it comes to its strength. Theologians observe this to be the method in which temptations are ripened and brought to their full strength: there is (1) the irritation of the object, or that power it has to work upon and provoke our corrupt nature, which is either done by the real presence of the object, or else by imagination, when the object (though absent) is held out by the fancy before the soul. (2) Then follows the motion of the sensitive appetite, which is stirred and provoked by the fancy, representing it as a sensual good having profit or pleasure in it. (3) Then there is a consultation in the mind about it, deliberating about the likeliest means of accomplishing it. (4) Next follows the election or choice of the will. (5) And lastly, the desire or full engagement of the will to it. All this may be done in a few moments, for the debates of the soul are quick and soon ended. When it comes thus far, then the heart is won, Satan has entered victoriously, and displayed his colors upon the walls of that royal fort. But had the heart been well guarded at first, it had never come to this height; the temptation had been stopped in the

first or second act. And indeed there it is stopped easily, for it is with the motions of a tempted soul toward sin as with the motion of a stone falling from the brow of a hill: it is easily stopped at first, but when once it is set going, it gathers strength as it goes. And therefore it is the greatest wisdom in the world to observe the first motions of the heart, to check and stop sin there. The motions of sin are weakest at first; a little care and watchfulness may prevent much mischief now, which the careless heart not heeding is brought within the power of temptation — as the Syrians were brought blindfolded into the midst of Samaria before they knew where they were.

By this time, reader, I hope you are fully satisfied how consequential and necessary a work the keeping of your heart is — it being a duty that wraps up so many dear interests of the soul in it.

3. Next, according to the method proposed, I proceed to point out those special seasons in the life of a Christian which require and call for our utmost diligence in keeping the heart. For though (as was observed before) the duty binds always, and there is no time or condition of life in which we may be excused from this work, yet there are some signal seasons, critical hours, requiring more than a common vigilance over the heart.

And the first:

Season 1. Is the time of prosperity, when providence smiles upon us and dandles us upon her knee. Now, Christian, keep your heart with all diligence, for now it will be exceedingly apt to grow secure, proud, and earthly. It is a rare virtue, said Bernard, to see a man humble under prosperity — one of the greatest rarities in the world. Even a good Hezekiah could not hide a vainglorious temper

under this temptation. Hence that caution to Israel (Deuteronomy 6:10-12): 'And it shall be, when the Lord your God shall have brought you into the land which he swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give you great and goodly cities which you did not build, and houses full of all good things which you did not fill, etc. — then beware lest you forget the Lord.' And indeed so it fell out, for Jeshurun waxed fat and kicked (Deuteronomy 32:15). Now then, the first case will be this:

Case 1. How may a Christian keep his heart from pride and carnal security under the smiles of providence and the abundance of earthly comforts?

There are seven choice helps to secure the heart from the dangerous snares of prosperity; the first is this:

1. To consider the dangerous ensnaring temptations attending a pleasant and prosperous condition. Few — indeed very few — of those that live in the pleasures and prosperity of this world escape everlasting perdition (Matthew 19:24). It is easier, said Christ, for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of heaven. And 1 Corinthians 1:26: 'Not many mighty, not many noble are called.' It might justly make us tremble when the Scripture tells us in general that few shall be saved, and much more when it tells us that of that rank and sort of which we are, but few shall be saved. When Joshua called all the tribes of Israel to the lot for the discovery of Achan, doubtless Achan feared; when the tribe of Judah was taken, his fear increased; but when the family of the Zerahites was taken, it was time then to tremble. So when the Scripture comes so near us as to tell us that of such a sort of men very few shall escape, it is time to look about. Chrysostom said, 'I should wonder if any of the rulers

be saved.' Oh how many have been coached to hell in the chariots of earthly pleasures, while others have been whipped to heaven by the rod of affliction! How few like the daughter of Tyre come to Christ with a gift! How few among the rich entreat his favor.

2. It may yet keep us more humble and watchful in prosperity if we consider that among Christians many have been much the worse for it. How good had it been for some of them if they had never known prosperity! When they were in a low condition, how humble, spiritual, and heavenly were they; but when advanced, what an apparent alteration has been upon their spirits. It was so with Israel when they were in a low condition in the wilderness; then Israel was 'holiness to the Lord' (Jeremiah 2:3); but when they came into Canaan and were fed in a fat pasture, then: 'We are lords; we will come no more to you' (verse 31). Outward gains are ordinarily attended with inward losses. As in a low condition their earthly employments were accustomed to have the savor of their duties, so in an exalted condition their duties commonly have the flavor of the world. He indeed is rich in grace whose graces are not hindered by his riches. There are but few Jehoshaphats in the world, of whom it is said (2 Chronicles 17:5-6): 'He had silver and gold in abundance, and his heart was lifted up in the way of God's commands.' Will not this keep your heart humble in prosperity — to think how dearly many godly men have paid for their riches, that through them they have lost what all the world cannot purchase?

3. Keep down your vain heart by this consideration: that God values no man a jot the more for these things. God values no man by outward excellencies but by inward graces; they are the internal ornaments of the spirit which are of great price in God's eyes (1

Peter 3:4). He despises all worldly glory, and accepts no man's person; but in every nation he that fears God and works righteousness is accepted by him (Acts 10:35). Indeed, if the judgment of God went by the same rule as man's does, we might value ourselves by these things and stand upon them. But as one said when dying, 'I shall not appear before God as a Doctor, but as a man.' So much every man is, and no more, as he is in the judgment of God. Does your heart yet swell? and will neither of the former considerations keep it humble?

4. Then fourthly, consider how bitterly many persons have bewailed their folly when they came to die — that ever they set their hearts upon these things — and heartily wished they had never known them. What a sad story was that of Pope Pius V, who dying cried out despairingly: 'When I was in a low condition, I had some hopes of salvation; but when I was advanced to be a Cardinal, I greatly doubted it; but since I came to the papacy, I have no hope at all.' Mr. Spencer also tells us a true but sad story of a rich oppressor who had scraped up a great estate for his only son. When he came to die, he called his son to him and said, 'Son, do you indeed love me?' The son answered that nature, besides his paternal indulgence, obliged him to that. Then said the father, 'Express it by this: hold your finger in the candle as long as I am saying a Paternoster.' The son attempted, but could not endure it. Upon that the father broke out into these expressions: 'You cannot suffer the burning of your finger for me, but to get this wealth I have hazarded my soul for you, and must burn body and soul in hell for your sake. Your pains would have been but for a moment, but mine will be unquenchable fire.'

5. The heart may be kept humble by considering what a clogging nature earthly things are to a soul heartily engaged in the way to heaven — they shut out much of heaven from us at present, though they may not shut us out of heaven at last. If you consider yourself under the notion of a stranger in this world, traveling for heaven and seeking a better country, you have then as much reason to be taken and delighted with these things as a weary horse has with a heavy saddlebag. There was a serious truth in that atheistical scoff of Julian, when he took away the Christians' estates and told them it was to make them fitter for the kingdom of heaven.

6. Is your spirit for all this still puffed up and lofty? Then urge upon it the consideration of that awesome day of reckoning, in which according to our receipts of mercies shall be our accounts for them. And this should awe and humble the vainest heart that ever was in the breast of a saint. Know for certain that the Lord records all the mercies that ever he gave you, from the beginning to the end of your life (Micah 6:5): 'Remember, O my people, from Shittim to Gilgal.' Indeed, they are exactly numbered and recorded, in order to an account; and your account will be corresponding (Luke 12:48): 'To whomever much is given, of him much shall be required.' You are but stewards, and your Lord will come to take an account of you. And what a great account you have to make who have much of this world in your hands! What swift witnesses will your mercies be against you, if this be the best fruit of them?

7. It is a very humbling consideration that the mercies of God should work otherwise upon my spirits than they usually do upon the spirits of others, to whom they come as sanctified mercies from

the love of God. Ah Lord! what a sad consideration is this — enough to lay me in the dust! When I consider (1) that their mercies have greatly humbled them: the higher God has raised them, the lower they have laid themselves before God. Thus did Jacob when God had given him much substance (Genesis 32:10): 'And Jacob said, I am not worthy of the least of all your mercies, and all the faithfulness which you have shown your servant; for with my staff I passed over this Jordan, and now I have become two companies.' And thus it was with holy David (2 Samuel 7:18): when God had confirmed the promise to him, to build him a house and not reject him as he did Saul, he went in before the Lord and said, 'Who am I? and what is my father's house, that you have brought me this far?' And so indeed God required it (Deuteronomy 26:5): when Israel was to bring to God the first fruits of Canaan, they were to say, 'A Syrian ready to perish was my father.' Do others raise God the higher for raising them? And the more God raises me, the more shall I abuse him and exalt myself? Oh what a sad thing is this! (2) Others have freely ascribed the glory of all their enjoyments to God, and magnified not themselves but him for their mercies. So David (2 Samuel 7:26): 'Let your name be magnified, and the house of your servant be established.' He does not fly upon the mercy and suck out the sweetness of it, looking no further than his own comfort — no, he cares for no mercy except God be magnified in it. So in Psalm 18:2, when God had delivered him from all his enemies: 'The Lord,' said he, 'is my strength and my rock; he has become my salvation.' They did not put the crown upon their own heads as I do. (3) The mercies of God have been melting mercies to others, melting their souls in love to the God of their mercies. So Hannah (1 Samuel 2:1): when she received the

mercy of a son, 'My soul,' said she, 'rejoices in the Lord' — not in the mercy, but in the God of the mercy. And so Mary (Luke 1:46): 'My soul does magnify the Lord; my spirit rejoices in God my Savior' — the word signifies 'to make more room for God.' Their hearts were not contracted, but the more enlarged toward God. (4) The mercies of God have been mighty restraints to keep others from sin. So Ezra 9:13: 'Seeing you our God have given us such a deliverance as this, should we again break your commandments?' Sincere souls have felt the force of the obligations of love and mercy upon them. (5) To conclude, the mercies of God to others have been as oil to the wheels of their obedience, and made them fitter for service (2 Chronicles 17:5). Now if mercies work contrarily upon my heart, what cause have I to be afraid that they do not come to me in love? I tell you, this is enough to dampen the spirit of any saint — to see what sweet effects they have had on others, and what sad effects on him.

Season 2. The second special season in the life of a Christian requiring more than a common diligence to keep his heart is the time of adversity, when providence frowns upon you and blasts your outward comforts. Then look to your hearts; keep them with all diligence from repining against God or fainting under his hand. For troubles, though sanctified, are troubles still; even sweet briar and holy thistle have their prickles. Jonah was a good man, and yet how peevish was his heart under affliction! Job was the mirror of patience, yet how was his heart discomposed by trouble! You will find it as hard to get a composed spirit under great afflictions as it is to fix quicksilver. Oh the agitations and tumults which they occasion even in the best hearts! Well then, the second case will be this:

Case 2. How may a Christian under great afflictions keep his heart from repining or desponding under the hand of God? Now there are nine special helps I shall here offer to keep your heart in this condition; and the first shall be this: to work upon your hearts this great truth.

1. That by these contrary providences, God is faithfully pursuing the great design of his electing love upon the souls of his people, and orders all these afflictions as means sanctified to that end.

Afflictions do not fall out by chance, but by counsel (Job 5:6; Ephesians 1:11). By this counsel of God they are ordained as means of much spiritual good to saints (Isaiah 27:9): 'By this shall the iniquity of Jacob be purged.' Hebrews 12:10: 'But he for our profit.' Romans 8:28: 'All things work together for good.' They are God's workmen upon our hearts, to pull down the pride and carnal security of them. And being so, their nature is changed; they are turned into blessings and benefits (Psalm 119:71): 'It is good for me that I have been afflicted.' And surely then, you have no reason to quarrel with, but rather to admire, that God should concern himself so much in your good as to use any means for the accomplishing of it. Paul could bless God if by any means he might attain the resurrection of the dead (Philippians 3:11). 'My brethren,' said James, 'count it all joy when you fall into various trials' (James 1:2-3). My Father is about a design of love upon my soul — and do I do well to be angry with him? All that he does is in pursuit of and reference to some eternal glorious ends upon my soul. O, it is my ignorance of God's design that makes me quarrel with him! He says to you in this case, as to Peter, 'What I do you do not know now, but you shall know it hereafter.'

2. Help. Though God has reserved to himself a liberty of afflicting his people, yet he has bound his own hands by promise never to take away his loving kindness from them. Can I look that Scripture in the face with a repining, discontented spirit (2 Samuel 7:14): 'I will be his father, and he shall be my son; if he commits iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men, and with the stripes of the children of men: nevertheless my mercy shall not depart away from him'? O my heart, my naughty heart — do you do well to be discontented, when God has given you the whole tree with all the clusters of comfort growing on it, because he allows the wind to blow down a few leaves? Christians have two sorts of goods: the goods of the throne, and the goods of the footstool; movables and immovables. If God has secured the former, never let my heart be troubled at the loss of the latter. Indeed, if he had cut off his love or unconvenanted my soul, I had reason to be cast down; but this he has not done — he cannot do it.

3. Help. It is of marvelous efficacy to keep the heart from sinking under affliction, to call to mind that your own Father has the ordering of them. Not a creature moves hand or tongue against you but by his permission. Suppose the cup be a bitter cup — yet it is the cup which your Father has given you to drink. And can you suspect poison to be in that cup which he delivers you? Foolish man, press the case home to your own heart; consult with your own deepest feelings. Can you find it in your heart to give your child that which would hurt and undo him? No — you would as soon hurt yourself as him. 'If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more does God?' (Matthew 7:11). The very consideration of his nature — a God of love, pity, and tender mercies — or of his relation to you, as a fa-

ther, husband, friend — might be security enough, even if he had not spoken a word, to quiet you in this case. And yet you have his word too (Jeremiah 25:6): 'I will do you no hurt.' You lie too near his heart for him to hurt you; nothing grieves him more than your groundless and unworthy suspicions of his designs. Would it not grieve a faithful, tenderhearted physician, when he has studied the case of his patient and prepared the most excellent prescriptions to save his life, to hear him cry out, 'Oh, he has undone me, he has poisoned me!' — because it gripes and pains him in the operation? O, when will you be reasonable!

4. Help. God respects you as much in a low as in a high condition; and therefore it need not trouble you so much to be made low. Indeed, to speak plainly, he manifests more of his love, grace, and tenderness in the time of affliction than in prosperity. As God did not at first choose you because you were high, so he will not forsake you because you are low. Men may look coldly upon you and alter their respects as your condition is altered. When providence has blasted your estates, your fair-weather friends may grow distant, fearing you may be troublesome to them. But will God do so? No, no: 'I will never leave you nor forsake you' (Hebrews 13:5). Indeed, if adversity and poverty could bar you from access to God, it were a sad condition; but you may go to God as freely as ever. 'My God,' said the church, 'will hear me' (Micah 7). Poor David, stripped of all earthly comforts, could yet encourage himself in the Lord his God — and why cannot you? Suppose your husband or child had lost all at sea and should come to you in rags — could you deny the relation? or refuse to entertain him? If you would

not, much less will God. Why then are you so troubled? Though your condition be changed, your Father's love and regard are not changed.

5. Help. And what if by the loss of outward comforts, God will preserve your souls from the ruining power of temptation? Then surely you have little cause to sink your hearts with such sad thoughts about them. Are not these earthly enjoyments the very things that make men waver and yield in times of trial? For the love of these, many have forsaken Christ in such an hour (Matthew 19:22): 'He went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.' And if this be God's design, what have I done in quarreling with him about it? We see mariners in a storm can throw overboard rich bales of silk and precious things to preserve the vessel and their lives with it, and everyone says they act prudently. We know it is usual for soldiers in a besieged city to batter down or burn the fairest buildings outside the walls in which the enemy might shelter during the siege, and no man doubts but that it is wisely done. Those with gangrened legs or arms can willingly stretch them out to be cut off, and not only thank but pay the surgeon for his pains. And must God only be repined at for casting overboard what would sink you in a storm? or for pulling down what would advantage your enemy in the siege of temptation? or for cutting off what would endanger your everlasting life? O inconsiderate, ungrateful man! Are not these things for which you grieve the very things that have ruined thousands of souls? Well, what Christ does in this you do not know now — but hereafter you may.

6. Help. It would much steady the heart under adversity to consider that God by such humbling providences may be accomplishing that for which you have long prayed and waited — and

should you be troubled at that? Say, Christian: have you not many prayers pending before God upon such accounts as these — that he would keep you from sin; discover to you the emptiness and insufficiency of the creature; kill and mortify your lusts; that your heart may never find rest in any enjoyment but Christ? Well, by such humbling and impoverishing strokes, God may be fulfilling your desire. Would you be kept from sin? Lo, he has hedged up your way with thorns. Would you see the creature's vanity? Your affliction is a fair mirror to discover it, for the vanity of the creature is never so effectually and sensibly discovered as in our own experience of it. Would you have your corruptions mortified? This is the way: now God takes away the food and fuel that maintained them, for as prosperity begat and fed them, so adversity when sanctified is a means to kill them. Would you have your heart to rest nowhere but in the bosom of God? What better way can you imagine providence should take to accomplish your desire than by pulling from under your head that soft pillow of creature delights on which you rested before? And yet you fret at this! Peevish child, how you exercise your Father's patience! If he delays to answer your prayers, you are ready to say he does not regard you; if he does what really answers the scope and main end of them, but not in the way you expected, you quarrel with him for that — as if instead of answering he were crossing all your hopes and aims. Is this reasonable? Is it not enough that God is so gracious as to do what you desire, but you must be so presumptuous as to expect he should do it in the way you prescribe?

7. Help. Again, it may steady your heart if you consider that in these troubles God is about that work which, if you did see the design of, your soul would rejoice. We poor creatures are hemmed in

with much ignorance, and are not able to discern how particular providences work toward God's end. And therefore, like Israel in the wilderness, we are often murmuring because providence leads us about in a howling desert where we are exposed to straits — though yet he led them, and is now leading us, by the right way to a city of habitations. If you could but see how God in his secret counsel has exactly laid out the whole plot and design of your salvation — even to the smallest means and circumstances, 'this way, and by these means: such a one shall be saved, and by no other; such a number of afflictions I appoint for this man, at this time, and in this order; they shall befall him thus, and thus they shall work for him' — if you could discern the admirable harmony of divine dispensations, their mutual relations to each other, together with the general respect and influence they all have into the last end — of all the conditions in the world, you would choose that you are now in, had you liberty to make your own choice. Providence is like a curious piece of tapestry, made up of a thousand shreds which single we know not what to make of, but put together and stitched up orderly they represent a beautiful history to the eye. As God works all things according to the counsel of his own will, so that counsel of God has ordained this as the best way to bring about your salvation: such a one has a proud heart, so many humbling providences are appointed for him; such a one an earthly heart, so many impoverishing providences for him. Did you but see this, I need say no more to support the most dejected soul.

8. Help. Further, it would much conduce to the settling of your hearts to consider that by fretting and discontent you do yourselves more injury than all the afflictions you lie under could do. Your own discontent is that which arms your troubles with a sting;

it is you that make your burden heavy by struggling under it. Could you but lie quiet under the hand of God, your condition would be much easier and sweeter than it is. An impatient patient makes a cruel physician. This makes God lay on more strokes, as a father will upon a stubborn child that does not receive correction.

Besides, it unfits the soul to pray over its troubles, or to take in the sense of that good which God intends by them. Affliction is a pill which, being wrapped up in patience and quiet submission, may be easily swallowed; but discontent chews the pill and so embitters the soul. God throws away some comfort which he saw would hurt you, and you will throw away your peace after it. He shoots an arrow which sticks in your clothes and was never intended to hurt, but only to frighten you from sin — and you will thrust it onward to the piercing of your very hearts by despondency and discontent.

9. Help. Lastly, if all this will not do, but your heart (like Rachel) still refuses to be comforted or quieted, then consider one thing more, which if seriously pondered will doubtless do the work. And that is this: compare the condition you are now in (and are so much dissatisfied with) with that condition others are in, and that you yourself deserve to be in. Others are roaring in flames, howling under the scourge of vengeance — and among them I deserve to be. O my soul! Is this hell? Is my condition as bad as the damned? O, what would thousands now in hell give to change conditions with me? It is a famous instance which Doctor Taylor gives us of the Duke of Conde. 'I have read,' said he, 'that when the Duke of Conde had entered voluntarily into the inconveniences of a religious poverty, he was one day espied and pitied by a lord of Italy, who out of tenderness wished him to be more care-

ful and attentive to his person.' The good Duke answered, 'Sir, be not troubled, and think not that I am ill provided of conveniences; for I send a harbinger before me who makes ready my lodgings and takes care that I be royally entertained.' The lord asked him who was his harbinger. He answered, 'The knowledge of myself, and the consideration of what I deserve for my sins, which is eternal torments; and when with this knowledge I arrive at my lodging, however unprovided I find it, it always seems better than I deserve.' Why does the living man complain? And thus the heart may be kept from desponding or repining under adversity.

Season 3. The third season calling for more than ordinary diligence to keep the heart is the time of Zion's trouble: when the church, like the ship in which Christ and his disciples were, is oppressed and ready to perish in the waves of persecution, then good souls are ready to sink and be shipwrecked too upon the billows of their own fear. I confess most men rather need the spur than the reins in this case, and yet some sit down as overwhelmed with the sense of the church's troubles. The loss of the ark cost old Eli his life; the sad posture Jerusalem lay in made good Nehemiah's countenance change in the midst of all the pleasures and accommodations of the court (Nehemiah 2:2). Ah, this goes close to honest hearts! But though God allows — indeed commands — the most awakened apprehensions of these calamities, and in such a day calls to mourning, weeping, and girding with sackcloth (Isaiah 22:12), and severely threatens the insensible (Amos 6:1), yet it will not please him to see you sit like pensive Elijah under the juniper tree (1 Kings 19:4): 'Ah Lord God, it is enough; take away my life also.' No — mourners in Zion you may and ought to be, but self-

tormentors you must not be. You may complain to God, but to complain of God — though but by an unsuitable behavior and the language of your actions — you must not.

Case 3. The third case that comes next to be spoken to is this: how may public-spirited and tender hearts be relieved and supported when they are even overwhelmed with the burdensome sense of Zion's troubles? I grant it is hard for him that prefers Zion to his chief joy to keep his heart from sinking below the due sense of its troubles; and yet this ought and may be done by the use of such heart-establishing directions as these.

Direction 1. Settle this great truth in your hearts, that no trouble befalls Zion but by the permission of Zion's God; and he permits nothing out of which he will not bring much good at last to his people.

There is as truly a principle of quietness in the permitting as in the commanding will of God. See it in David (2 Samuel 16:10): 'Let him alone; it may be God has told him.' And in Christ (John 19:11): 'You could have no power against me, except it were given you from above.' It should much calm our spirits that it is the will of God to permit it; and had not he permitted it, it could never have been as it is.

This very consideration quieted Job, Eli, David, and Hezekiah: that the Lord did it was enough to them. And why should it not be so to us? If the Lord will have Zion plowed as a field, and her goodly stones lie in the dust; if it be his pleasure that antichrist shall rage yet longer and wear out the saints of the Most High; if it be his will that a day of trouble and treading down and perplexity by the Lord God of hosts shall be upon the valley of vision, that the

wicked shall devour the man that is more righteous than he — what are we that we should contend with God? It is fitting that we should be resigned to that will from which we proceeded, and that he who made us should dispose of us as he pleases. He may do what seems good to him without our consent. Does poor man stand on equal ground, that he should negotiate with his Creator, or that God should render him an account of any of his matters? It is every bit as reasonable that we be content however God disposes of us as that we be obedient to whatever he commands us.

But then, if we pursue this argument further by considering that God's permissions all meet at last in the real good of his people, this will much more quiet our spirits. Do the enemies carry away the good figs — even the best among the people — into captivity? This looks like a sad providence; but yet God sends them there for their good (Jeremiah 24:5). Does God take the Assyrian as a staff in his hand to beat his people with? Those blows are smart and make them cry; but the end of his so doing is that he may accomplish his whole work upon Mount Zion (Isaiah 10:12). If God can bring much good out of the worst and greatest evil of sin, much more out of temporal afflictions — and it is as evident that he will as that he can do so. For it is inconsistent with the wisdom of a common agent to permit anything (which he might prevent if he pleased) to cross his great design and end. And can it be imagined that the most wise God should do so?

Well then, as Luther told Melanchthon, 'Let Philip stop trying to rule the world': so say I to you — let infinite wisdom, power, and love alone, for by these all creatures are swayed and actions guided in reference to the church. It is none of our work to rule the world,

but to submit to him that does. The motions of providence are all judicious; the wheels are full of eyes. It is enough that the affairs of Zion are in a good hand.

Direction 2. Ponder this heart-supporting truth in reference to Zion's trouble: that however many troubles are upon her, yet her King is in her.

What? Has the Lord forsaken his churches? Has he sold them into the enemy's hand? Does he not regard what evil befalls them — that our hearts should sink at this rate? Is it not too shameful an undervaluing of the great God, and too much magnifying of poor impotent man, to fear and tremble at creatures while God is in the midst of us? The church's enemies are many and mighty — let that be granted. Yet that argument with which Caleb and Joshua strove to raise their own hearts is of as much force now as it was then: 'The Lord is with us; fear them not' (Numbers 14:9). The historian tells us that when Antigonus overheard his soldiers reckoning how many their enemies were and so discouraging one another, he suddenly stepped in among them with this question: 'And how many do you reckon me for?' Discouraged souls — how many do you reckon the Lord for? Is he not an overmatch for all his enemies? Is not one Almighty more than many mighties? Does his presence stand for nothing with us? 'If God be for us, who can be against us?' (Romans 8:31). What do you think was the reason of that great exploration Gideon made in Judges 6? He questions in verses 12-13; he desires a sign in verse 17; and after that another in verse 36. And what was the end of all this but that he might be sure the Lord was with him, and that he might write this motto upon his banner: 'The sword of the Lord, and of Gideon.' So then, if you can be well assured the Lord is with his people, you will get above

all your discouragements. And that he is so, you need not (as Gideon did) desire a sign from heaven — lo, you have a sign before you in their marvelous preservation amid all their enemies. If God be not with his people, how is it they are not swallowed up at once? Do their enemies lack malice, power, or opportunity? No — but there is an invisible hand upon them. Well then, as it is said (Exodus 33:14): let his presence give us rest. And though the mountains be hurled into the sea, though heaven and earth mingle together — fear not! God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved.

Direction 3. Ponder the great advantages attending the people of God in an afflicted condition. If a low and afflicted state in the world be really best for the church, then your dejections are not only irrational but ungrateful. Indeed, if you estimate the happiness of the church by its worldly ease, splendor, and prosperity, then such times will seem bad for it. But if you reckon its glory to consist in its humility, faith, patience, and heavenly-mindedness, no condition in the world abounds with advantages for these like an afflicted condition. It was not persecutions and prisons, but worldliness and wantonness that was the poison of the church. Neither was it the earthly glory of its professors, but the blood of its martyrs that was the seed of the church. The power of godliness never thrived better than in affliction, and never ran lower than in times of greatest prosperity. When we are left a poor and afflicted people, then we learn to trust in the name of the Lord (Zephaniah 3:12). What say you, sirs? Is it indeed for the saints' advantage to be weaned from the loves and delights of ensnaring worldly vanities? To be quickened and pressed forward with more haste to heaven; to have clearer discoveries of their own hearts; to be

taught to pray more fervently, frequently, spiritually; to look and long more ardently for the rest to come? If this be for their advantage, experience teaches us that no condition is ordinarily blessed with such fruits as these like an afflicted condition.

And is it well done then to repine and droop because your Father consults more the advantage of your souls than the pleasing of your humors? Because he will bring you a nearer way to heaven than you are willing to go? Is this a due requital of his love, who is pleased so much to concern himself in your welfare — which is more than he will do for thousands in the world, upon whom he will not lay a rod or spend an affliction for their good (Hosea 4:17; Matthew 15:14)? But alas! we judge by sense, and reckon things good or evil according to what we can for the present taste and feel in them.

Direction 4. Take heed that you overlook not the many precious mercies which the people of God enjoy amidst all their trouble.

It is a pity that our tears on account of our troubles should so blur and blind our eyes that we should not see our mercies and grounds of comfort. I will not insist upon the mercy of having your lives given you for a prize, nor yet upon the many outward comforts, temporal conveniences, and accommodations which you enjoy — even above what Christ and his precious servants, of whom the world was not worthy, ever had.

But what say you to pardon of sin? Interest in Christ? The covenant of promises? And an eternity of happiness in the presence of God after a few days are over? O that ever a people entitled to such mercies as these should droop under any temporal affliction.

tion, or be so much concerned for the frowns of men and the loss of trifles! You have not the smiles of great men, but you have the favor of the great God. You are perhaps cast back in your estates, but thereby furthered in spiritual things. You cannot live as bravely, plentifully, and easily as before, but still you may live as holy and heavenly as ever. Will you then grieve so much for these circumstantials as to forget your substantials? Shall light troubles make you forget weighty mercies? Remember the church's true riches are laid out of the reach of all its enemies: they may make you poor, but not miserable. What though God does not distinguish in his outward dispensations between his own and others? Indeed, what though his judgments single out the best and spare the worst? What though an Abel be killed in love, and a Cain survive in hatred; a bloody Dionysius die in his bed, and a good Josiah fall in battle? What though the belly of the wicked be filled with hidden treasures, and the teeth of the saints broken with gravestones — yet still here is much matter of praise. For electing love has distinguished, though common providence did not. And while prosperity and impunity slay the wicked, even trial and adversity shall benefit and save the righteous.

Direction 5. Believe that however low the church may be plunged under the waters of adversity, it shall assuredly rise again. Fear not, for as surely as Christ arose on the third day, notwithstanding the seal and watch that was upon him, so surely shall the church arise out of all her troubles and lift up her victorious head above all her enemies. There is no fear of ruining a people that thrive by their losses and multiply by being diminished. O, be not too quick to bury the church before she is dead! Wait till Christ has

tried his skill before you give it up for lost. The bush may be all in a flame, but shall never be consumed — and that because of the good will of him that dwells in the bush.

Direction 6. Record the famous instances of God's care and tenderness over his people in former straits. Christ has not suffered it to be devoured yet — for over 1,600 years the Christian church has lived in affliction, and yet it is not consumed. Many a wave of persecution has gone over it, and yet it is not drowned. Many designs to ruin it, and hitherto none has prospered. This is not the first time that Hamans and Ahithophels have plotted its ruin, that a Herod has stretched out his hand to vex it. Still it has been preserved from, supported under, or delivered out of all its troubles. And is it not as dear to God as ever? Is he not as able to save it now as formerly? Though we know not where deliverance should arise, 'the Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations' (2 Peter 2:9).

Direction 7. If you can fetch no comfort from any of the former arguments, then in the last place try whether you cannot draw some comfort out of your very trouble. Surely this trouble of yours is a good argument of your integrity; union is the ground of sympathy. If you had no rich venture in that ship, you would not tremble as you do when it is in danger. Besides, this frame of spirit may afford you this argument: that if you are so sensible of the church's troubles, Jesus Christ is much more sensible of and solicitous about it than you can be. And he will cast an eye of favor upon those that mourn for it (Isaiah 57:18).

Season 4. The fourth special season for expressing our utmost diligence in keeping our hearts is the time of danger and public distraction. In such times the best hearts are but too apt to be sur-

prised by slavish fear; it is not easy to secure the heart against distraction in times of common destruction. If Syria be confederate with Ephraim, how do the hearts of the house of David shake, even as the trees of the wood that are shaken with the wind (Isaiah 7:2). When there are ominous signs in the heavens, on earth distress of nations with perplexity, the sea and waves roaring — then the hearts of men fail for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming upon the earth (Luke 21:25-26). Even Paul himself may sometimes complain of conflicts within when there are fears without (2 Corinthians 7:5).

But my brethren, these things ought not to be so; saints should be of a more elevated spirit. So was David when his heart was kept in a good frame (Psalm 27:1): 'The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?' Let none but the servants of sin be the slaves of fear; let them that have delighted in evil fear evil. O let not that which God has threatened as a judgment upon the wicked ever seize upon the breasts of the righteous. 'I will send faintness into their hearts in the land of their enemies,' said God, 'and the sound of a shaken leaf shall chase them' (Leviticus 26:36). O what poor-spirited men were these, to flee at a shaking leaf — which makes a pleasant and not a terrible noise, and is in itself a kind of natural music! But to a guilty conscience the rustling leaves are drums and trumpets. God has not given us the spirit of fear, but of love and of a sound mind (2 Timothy 1:7). A sound mind, as it stands there in opposition to the spirit of fear, is a conscience unwounded by guilt. And this should make a man as bold as a lion. I know it cannot be said of a saint, as God spoke of Leviathan, that he is made without fear. There is a natural fear in every man, and

it is as impossible to be wholly put off as the body itself. It is a perturbation of the mind rising from the awareness of approaching danger, and as dangers can approach us we shall find some perturbation within us. It is not my purpose to commend to you a complete apathy, nor yet to take you off from a degree of cautious preventive care as may fit you for troubles and be serviceable to your souls. There is a prudent fear that opens our eyes to danger and quickens to a wise use of means to prevent it — such was Jacob's fear (Genesis 32:7-10). But it is the fear of diffidence from which I would dissuade you — that tyrannical passion which invades the heart in times of danger, distracts, weakens, and unfits the heart for duty, drives men upon unlawful means, and brings a snare with it. Well then, the fourth case will be this:

Case 4. How may a Christian keep his heart from distracting and tormenting fears in times of great and threatening dangers?

Now there are fourteen excellent rules or helps for keeping the heart from sinful fear when imminent dangers threaten us; and the first is this:

Rule 1. Look upon all creatures as in the hand of God, who manages them in all their motions, limiting, restraining, and determining them all at his pleasure.

Get this great truth well settled by faith in your hearts, and it will marvelously guard them against slavish fears. The first chapter of Ezekiel contains an admirable scheme of providence; there you may see the living creatures who move the wheels — that is, the great affairs and turnings of things here below — coming to Christ, who sits upon the throne to receive new orders and instructions from him (verses 24-26). And in Revelation 6 you read of white,

black, and red horses, which are nothing else but the instruments which God employs in executing his judgments in the world — wars, pestilence, and death. But when these horses are prancing and trampling up and down the world, here is that which may quiet our hearts: God has the reins in his hand. Wicked men are sometimes like mad horses — they would stamp the people of God under their feet — but the bridle of providence is in their lips (John 19:11-12). A lion at liberty is terrible to meet, but who is afraid of the lion in the keeper's hand?

Rule 2. Remember that this God in whose hand all creatures are, is your Father, and is much more tender over you than you are or can be over yourselves. 'He that touches you, touches the apple of my eye' (Zechariah 2:8). Let me ask the most timid woman: is there not a vast difference between the sight of a drawn sword in the hand of a cruel enemy, and the same sword in the hand of her own tender husband? As great a difference there is in looking upon creatures through eyes of sense, and looking on them as in the hand of your God through eyes of faith. That is a sweet Scripture to this purpose (Isaiah 54:5): 'Your Maker is your husband; the Lord of hosts is his name.' He is Lord of all the hosts of creatures in the world. Who would be afraid to pass through an army, though all the soldiers should turn their swords and guns toward him, if the general of that army were his friend or father? I have met with an excellent story of a religious young man who, being at sea with many other passengers in a great storm, and they being half dead with fear, he alone was observed to be very cheerful, as if he had little concern in that danger. One of them asking the reason of his cheerfulness, he said, 'Oh, it is because the pilot of the ship is my father.' Consider Christ first as the king and supreme Lord over the

providential kingdom, and then as your head, husband, and friend, and you will quickly say, 'Return to your rest, O my soul.' This truth will make you cease trembling and fall to singing in the midst of dangers (Psalm 47:7): 'The Lord is king of all the earth; sing praises with understanding' — or as the Hebrew word is, 'every one that has understanding' — namely, of this heart-reviving and establishing doctrine of the dominion of our Father over all creatures.

Rule 3. Urge upon your hearts the express prohibitions of Christ in this case, and let your hearts stand in awe of violating them.

He has charged you not to fear (Luke 21:9): 'When you shall hear of wars and commotions, see that you be not terrified.' And Philippians 1:28: 'In nothing be terrified by your adversaries.' Indeed, in Matthew 10:26-31, within the compass of six verses our Savior commands us three times not to fear men. Does every big word of proud dust and ashes make you afraid? Does the voice of a mere man make you tremble, and shall not the voice of God? If you are of such a fearful and timid spirit, how is it that you do not fear to disobey the plain commands of Jesus Christ? The command of Christ should have as much power to calm as the voice of a poor worm to terrify your heart. Isaiah 51:12-13: 'I, even I, am he that comforts you; who are you, that you should be afraid of a man that shall die, and of the son of man that shall be made as grass; and forget the Lord your Maker?' We cannot fear creatures sinfully until we have forgotten God; did we remember what he is and what he has said, we would not be of such feeble spirits. Bring your heart then to this dilemma in times of danger: if I let into my heart the slavish fear of man, I must let out the reverent awe and fear of

God. And dare I cast off the fear of the Almighty for the frowns of a man? Shall I lift up proud dust above the great God? Shall I rush upon a certain sin to shun a probable danger? O keep your heart by that consideration.

Rule 4. Remember how much needless trouble your vain fears have brought upon you formerly, and how you have disquieted yourselves to no purpose.

Isaiah 51:13: 'And you have feared continually because of the oppressor, as if he were ready to devour; and where is the fury of the oppressor?' He seemed ready to devour, but you are not devoured. I have not brought upon you the thing that you feared. You have wasted your spirits, disordered your souls, and weakened your hands — and all to no purpose. You might have all this while enjoyed your peace and possessed your souls in patience. And here I cannot but observe a very deep strategy of Satan in managing a design against the soul by these vain fears. I call them vain in regard to their being frustrated by providence, but certainly they are not in vain as to the end Satan aims at in raising them. For in this he acts as soldiers use to do in the siege of a garrison: who on purpose to wear out the besieged by constant watchings, and thereby unfit them to make resistance when they storm in earnest, give them every night false alarms. Though these alarms come to nothing, yet they notably serve the further design of the enemy. O, when will you beware of Satan's devices?

Rule 5. Consider solemnly that though the things you fear should really come to pass, yet there is more evil in your own fear than in the thing feared.

And that not only as the least evil of sin is worse than the greatest evil of suffering, but as this sinful fear has really more torment and trouble in it than is in that condition you are so much afraid of. Fear is both a multiplying and a tormenting passion; it represents troubles much greater than they are, and so tortures and racks the soul much worse than when the suffering itself comes. So it was with Israel at the Red Sea — they cried out and were sore afraid until they put foot into the water, and then a passage was opened through those waters which they thought would have drowned them. Thus it is with us: looking through the glass of carnal fear upon the waters of trouble, the swellings of Jordan, we cry out, 'O, they are unfordable! we must surely perish in them!' But when we come into the midst of those floods indeed, we find the promise made good: 'God will make a way to escape' (1 Corinthians 10:13). Thus it was with blessed Bilney, when he would make a trial by putting his finger to the candle, and not able to endure it, he cried out: 'What? Cannot I bear the burning of a finger? How then shall I be able to bear the burning of my whole body tomorrow?' And yet when that tomorrow came, he could go cheerfully into the flames with that Scripture on his lips (Isaiah 43:1-3): 'Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by your name; you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; when you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned.'

Rule 6. Consult the many precious promises which are written for your support and comfort in all dangers.

These are your refuges to which you may flee and be safe when the arrows of danger fly by night and destruction wastes at noon-day. There are particular promises suited to particular cases and needs, and there are general promises reaching all cases and con-

ditions. Such are these: Romans 8:28: 'All things shall work together for good.' And Ecclesiastes 8:12: 'Though a sinner does evil a hundred times and his days are prolonged, yet it shall be well with those that fear the Lord.' Could you but believe the promises, your hearts should be established (2 Chronicles 20:29). Could you but plead them with God, as Jacob did (Genesis 32:12): 'You said, I will surely do you good' — they would relieve you in every distress.

Objection: But that promise was made personally and by name to him; so are not these to me.

Answer: If Jacob's God is your God, you have as good an interest in them as he had. The church a thousand years after that transaction between God and Jacob applied what God spoke to him as if it had been spoken to themselves (Hosea 12:1): 'He found him in Bethel, and there he spoke with us.'

Rule 7. Quiet your trembling hearts by recording and consulting your past experiences of the care and faithfulness of God in former distresses.

These experiences are food for your faith in a wilderness condition (Psalm 74:14). By this David kept his heart in times of danger (1 Samuel 17:37), and Paul his (2 Corinthians 1:10). It was sweetly answered by Silenziarius, when one told him that his enemies lay in wait to take away his life: 'If God takes no care of me, how have I escaped hitherto?' You may plead with God old experiences to procure new ones, for it is in pleading with God for new deliverances as it is in pleading for new pardons. Mark how Moses pleads on that account with God (Numbers 14:19): 'Pardon, I beseech you, the iniquity of this people, as you have forgiven them from Egypt until now.' He does not say as men do, 'Lord, this is the first fault;

you have not been troubled before to sign their pardon' — but, 'Lord, because you have pardoned them so often, I beseech you pardon them once again.' So in new straits: 'Lord, you have often heard, helped, and saved in former fears; therefore now help again, for with you there is plentiful redemption, and your arm is not shortened.'

Rule 8. Be well satisfied that you are in the way of your duty, and that will beget holy courage in times of danger.

'Who will harm you, if you be followers of that which is good?' (1 Peter 3:13). Or, if any dare attempt it, you may boldly commit yourselves to God in well-doing (1 Peter 4:19). It was this consideration that raised Luther's spirit above all fear: 'In the cause of God,' said he, 'I ever am and ever shall be stout; in this I take this title: I yield to none.' A good cause will bear up a man's spirit bravely. Hear the saying of a Heathen to the shame of cowardly Christians: when the Emperor Vespasian had commanded Helvidius Priscus not to come to the Senate, or if he did, to speak nothing but what he would have him, the senator returned this noble answer — that as a senator it was fitting he should be at the Senate, and if being there he were required to give his advice, he would speak freely what his conscience commanded him. The Emperor threatening that then he should die, he answered: 'Did I ever tell you that I was immortal? Do you what you will, and I will do what I ought. It is in your power to put me to death unjustly, and in mine to die with constancy.'

Righteousness is a breastplate; the cause of God will pay all your expenses. Let them tremble whom danger finds out of the way of duty.

Rule 9. Get your consciences sprinkled with the blood of Christ from all guilt, and that will set your hearts above all fear.

It is guilt upon the conscience that softens and cowardizes our spirits. 'The righteous is bold as a lion' (Proverbs 28:1). It was guilt in Cain's conscience that made him cry, 'Everyone that meets me will kill me' (Genesis 4:14). A guilty conscience is more terrified with imagined dangers than a pure conscience is with real ones. A guilty sinner carries a witness against himself in his own bosom. It was guilty Herod who cried out, 'John the Baptist is risen from the dead.' Such a conscience is the devil's anvil on which he fabricates all those swords and spears with which the guilty sinner pierces and wounds himself. Guilt is to danger what fire is to gunpowder — a man need not fear to walk among many barrels of powder if he has no fire about him.

Rule 10. Exercise holy trust in times of great distress.

Make it your business to trust God with your lives and comforts, and then your hearts will be at rest about them. So did David (Psalm 56:3): 'At what time I am afraid I will trust in you' — as if to say, 'Lord, if at any time a storm rises, I will make bold to shelter from it under the cover of your wings.' Go to God by acts of faith and trust, and never doubt but he will secure you. Isaiah 26:3: 'You will keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on you, because he trusts in you.' God takes it well when you come to him thus: 'Father, my life, my liberty, or estate are hunted after, and I cannot secure them; O let me leave them in your hand.' 'The poor leaves himself with you' — and does his God fail him? No: 'You are the helper of the fatherless' (Psalm 10:14) — that is, you are the helper of the destitute one who has none to go to but God. And that is a sweet Scripture (Psalm 112:7): 'He shall not be afraid of

evil tidings; his heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord.' He does not say his ears shall be protected from the report of evil tidings — he may hear as sad tidings as other men — but his heart shall be protected from the terror of those tidings. His heart is fixed.

Rule 11. Consult the honor of religion more, and your personal safety less.

Is it for the honor of religion — think you — that Christians should be as timid as hares, to start at every sound? Will not this tempt the world to think that whatever you talk of, your principles are no better than other men's? O what mischief may the discovery of your fears before them do? It was a noble saying of Nehemiah (chapter 6:11): 'Should such a man as I flee? And who being as I am would flee?' Were it not better that you should die than that the world should be prejudiced against Christ by your example? For alas! how apt is the world — who judges more by what they see in your practices than by what they understand of your principles — to conclude from your timidity that however much you commend faith and talk of assurance, yet you dare trust to these things no more than they do when it comes to the trial. O let not your fears lay such a stumbling block before the blind world.

Rule 12. He that will secure his heart from fear must first secure the eternal interest of his soul in the hands of Jesus Christ.

When this is done, then you may say, 'Now, world, do your worst.' You will not be very solicitous about a vile body, when you are once assured it shall be well to all eternity with your precious soul. 'Fear not them,' said Christ, 'that can kill the body, and after that have no power that they can do.' The assured Christian may smile with contempt upon all his enemies and say, 'Is this the

worst that you can do?' What say you, Christians — are you assured that your souls are safe, that within a few moments of your dissolution they shall be received by Christ into everlasting habitations? Well, if you are sure of that, never trouble yourselves about the instruments and means of your dissolution.

Objection: Oh, but a violent death is terrible to nature.

Answer: But what does it matter, when your soul is in heaven, whether it was let out at your mouth or at your throat? Whether familiar friends or barbarous enemies stand about your dead body and close your eyes? Alas, it is not worth making so much ado about. Your soul shall not be sensible in heaven how your body is used on earth — no, it shall be swallowed up in life.

Rule 13. Learn to quench all slavish creature-fears in the reverent fear of God.

This is a cure by diversion. It is a rare piece of Christian wisdom to turn those passions of the soul which most predominate into spiritual channels — to turn natural anger into spiritual zeal, natural mirth into holy cheerfulness, and natural fear into a holy dread and awe of God. This method of cure Christ prescribes in Matthew 10, which is like Isaiah 8:12-13: 'Fear not their fear; but sanctify the Lord of hosts himself, and let him be your fear and your dread.' Natural fear may be allayed for the present by natural reason, or the removal of the occasion, but then it is but like a candle blown out with a puff of breath, which is easily blown in again. But if the fear of God extinguishes it, then it is like a candle quenched in water, which cannot easily be rekindled.

Rule 14. Lastly, pour out those fears to God in prayer which the devil and your own unbelief pour in upon you in times of danger.

Prayer is the best outlet for fear; where is the Christian that cannot add his testimony to this direction? I will give you the greatest example in the world to encourage you in the use of it — the example of Jesus Christ (Mark 14:32). When the hour of his danger and death drew near, he went into the garden, separated from the disciples, and there wrestled mightily with God in prayer, even to an agony. In reference to which the apostle says (Hebrews 5:7): 'Who in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications with strong cries and tears to him that was able to save him from death, was heard in that he feared.' He was heard as to strength and support to carry him through it, though not as to deliverance or exemption from it.

Now, O that these things might abide with you and be reduced to practice in these evil days, that many trembling souls may be established by them.

Season 5. The fifth season to exert this diligence in keeping the heart is the time of straits and pressing outward wants. Although at such times we should complain to God, and not of God (the throne of grace being erected for a time of need — Hebrews 4:16), yet when the waters of relief run low and wants begin to pinch hard, how prone are the best hearts to distrust the fountain! When the meal in the barrel and the oil in the cruse are almost spent, our faith and patience are almost spent too. Now it is difficult to keep down the proud and unbelieving heart in holy quietude and sweet submission at the foot of God. It is an easy thing to talk of trusting God for daily bread while we have a full barn or purse; but to say as the prophet (Habakkuk 3:17): 'Though the fig tree should not blossom, neither fruit be in the vine — yet will I rejoice in the Lord' — surely this is not easy. The fifth case therefore shall be this:

Case 5. How may a Christian keep his heart from distrusting God or repining against him, when outward wants are either felt or feared?

This case deserves to be seriously pondered, and especially to be studied now, since it seems to be the design of providence to empty the people of God of their creature-fullness and acquaint them with those straits which hitherto they have been altogether strangers to.

Now, to secure the heart from the dangers attending this condition, the following considerations may, through the blessing of the Spirit, prove effectual. And the first is this:

Consideration 1. If God reduces you to straits and necessities, yet he deals no otherwise with you in this than he has done with some of the choicest and holiest men that ever lived.

Your condition is not singular; though you have hitherto been strangers to wants, other saints have daily conversed with and been familiarly acquainted with them. Hear what blessed Paul speaks — not of himself only, but in the name of other saints reduced to like extremities (1 Corinthians 4:11): 'Even to this present hour we both hunger and thirst, and are naked and beaten, and have no certain dwelling place.' To see such a man as Paul going up and down the world with a naked back and empty belly, not a house to put his head in — one that was so far above you in grace and holiness, one that did more service for God in a day than perhaps you have done him all your days — and yet to repine as if hardly dealt with! Have you forgotten what necessities and straits even a David suffered? How great were his straits and necessities (1 Samuel 25:8)! 'Give, I pray you,' said he to Nabal, 'whatever

comes to your hand, to your servants and to your son David.' The renowned Musculus was forced to dig in the town ditch for a maintenance. The famous Ainsworth (as I have been credibly informed) was forced to sell the bed he lay on to buy bread. But why speak I of these? Behold one greater than any of them — the Son of God himself, who is the heir of all things and by whom the worlds were made — yet sometimes would have been glad of anything, having nothing to eat (Mark 11:12): 'And on the next day, when they had come from Bethany, he was hungry; and seeing a fig tree afar off having leaves, he came, if perhaps he might find anything on it.'

Well then, God has set no mark of hatred upon you by this, neither can you infer the want of love from the want of bread. When your repining heart puts the question, 'Was there ever any sorrow like mine?' — ask these worthies, and they will tell you: though they did not complain and fret as you do, yet they were driven to as great straits as you are.

Consideration 2. If God does not leave you in this necessitous condition without a promise, you have no reason to repine or despond under it.

That is a sad condition indeed to which no promise belongs. I remember Mr. Calvin, on those words (Isaiah 9:1), 'Nevertheless, the dimness shall not be such as was in her vexation,' solves the question in what sense the darkness of the captivity was not so great as the lesser incursions made by Tiglath-Pileser. In the captivity the city was destroyed and the temple burned with fire — there was no comparison in the affliction. But yet the darkness should not be 'such' — and the reason, said Calvin, is this: there was a certain promise made to this one, but none to the other.

It is better to be as low as hell with a promise than in paradise without one. Even the darkness of hell itself would be comparatively no darkness at all, were there but a promise to enlighten it. Now God has left many sweet promises for the faith of his poor people to feed on in this condition, such as these: Psalm 34:9-10: 'O fear the Lord, you his saints, for there is no want to those that fear him; the lions do lack and suffer hunger, but they that fear the Lord shall want nothing that is good.' Psalm 33:18-19: 'The eye of the Lord is upon the righteous, to keep them alive in famine.' Psalm 84:11: 'No good thing will be withheld from those that walk uprightly.' Romans 8:32: 'He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?' Isaiah 41:17: 'When the poor and needy seek water and there is none, and their tongue fails for thirst, I the Lord will hear them; I the God of Israel will not forsake them.' Here you see, first, their extreme wants — water being put even for the necessities of life; and (2) their certain relief: 'I the Lord will hear them' — in which it is supposed that they cry to him in their straits, and he hears their cry.

Having therefore these promises, why should not your distrustful hearts conclude like David's (Psalm 23:1): 'The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want'?

Objection: But these promises imply conditions; if they were absolute they would afford more satisfaction.

Solution: What are those implied conditions you speak of but these: (1) that either he will supply or sanctify your wants; (2) that you shall have so much as God sees fit for you. And does this trouble you? Would you have the mercy whether sanctified or not?

Whether God sees it fit for you or not? The appetites of saints after earthly things should not be so ravenous as to seize greedily upon any enjoyment, not caring how they have it.

But oh, when wants pinch and we see not from where supplies should come, then our faith in the promise shakes, and we, like murmuring Israel, cry, 'He gave bread — can he give water also?' O unbelieving hearts! When did his promise fail? Who ever trusted them and was ashamed? May not God upbraid you with your unreasonable unbelief, as in Jeremiah 2:31: 'Have I been a wilderness to you?' — or as Christ said to the disciples, 'Since I was with you, lacked you anything?' Indeed, may you not upbraid yourselves? May you not say with good old Polycarp, 'So many years I have served Christ, and found him a good master'? Indeed he may deny what your self-indulgence calls for, but not what your real wants call for. He will not regard the cry of your lusts, nor yet despise the cry of your faith. Though he will not indulge and humor your wanton appetites, yet he will not violate his own faithful promises. These promises are your best security for eternal life, and it is strange if they should not satisfy you for daily bread. Remember the words of the Lord, and comfort your hearts with them amidst all your wants. It is said of Epicurus that in the dreadful fits of colic he often refreshed himself by calling to mind his inventions in philosophy. And of Posidonius the philosopher, that in a great fit of the stone, he solaced himself with discourses of moral virtue, and when the pain twinged him he would say, 'O pain, you do nothing; though you are a little troublesome, I will never confess you to be evil.' If upon such grounds as these they could support themselves under such grinding and racking pains, and even disregard their diseases by them — how much more should the precious promises

of God and the sweet experiences which have gone along step by step with them, make you forget all your wants and comfort you over every strait!

Consideration 3. If it is bad now, it might have been worse. Has God denied you the comforts of this life? He might have denied you Christ, peace, and pardon also, and then your case would have been truly woeful. You know God has done so to millions in the world: how many such wretched objects may your eyes behold every day, that have no comfort in hand nor yet in hope, are miserable here and will be so to eternity, that have a bitter cup and nothing to sweeten it — not so much as any hope that it will be better. But it is not so with you. Though you are poor in this world, yet you are rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which God has promised (James 2:5). O learn to set spiritual riches over against temporal poverty! Balance all your present troubles with your spiritual privileges. Indeed, if God had denied your souls the robes of righteousness to clothe them, the hidden manna to feed them, the heavenly mansions to receive them — if your souls were left destitute as well as your bodies — you might well be pensive. But this consideration has enough to bring the considering soul to rest under any outward strait. It was bravely said by Luther, when want began to pinch him: 'Let us be contented with our hard fare — for do we not feast with angels upon Christ the bread of life?' And 'Blessed be God,' says Paul, 'who has abounded to us in all spiritual blessings' (Ephesians 1:3).

Consideration 4. This affliction, though great, is not such an affliction but that God has far greater ones with which he chastises the dearly beloved of his soul in this world. And should he remove

this and inflict those, you would account your present state a very comfortable state and bless God to be as you now are.

What think you, sirs? Should God remove your present troubles, supply all your outward wants, give you the desire of your hearts in creature-comforts, but hide his face from you, shoot his arrows into your souls and cause the venom of them to drink up your spirits? Should he leave you but a few days to the buffeting of Satan and his blasphemous injections? Should he hold your eyes but a few nights waking with horrors of conscience, tossing to and fro till the dawning of the day? Should he lead you through the chambers of death, show you the visions of darkness, and make his terrors set themselves in array against you? Then tell me if you would not count it a choice mercy to be back again in your former needy condition, with peace of conscience, and count bread and water with God's favor a happy state. O then, take heed of repining! Say not that God deals hardly with you, lest you provoke him to convince you by your own sense and feeling that he has worse rods than these for unsubmissive and froward children.

Consideration 5. If it is bad now, it will be better shortly.

O keep your heart by that consideration! The meal in the barrel is almost spent — well, be it so; why should that trouble me, if I am almost beyond the need and use of all these things? The traveler has spent almost all his money, with but a shilling or two left. Well, said he, though my money is almost spent, yet my journey is almost finished too; I am near home, and then shall be fully supplied. If there are no candles in the house, yet it is a comfort to think that it is almost day, and then there will be no need of candles. I am afraid, Christian, that you miscalculate when you think: 'My provision is almost spent, and I have a great way to travel,

many years to live, and nothing to live upon.' It may be not half so many years as you suppose. In this be confident: if your provision is spent, either fresh supplies are coming (though you see not from where), or you are nearer your journey's end than you reckon yourself to be. Desponding soul, does it become a man or woman traveling upon the road to that heavenly city and almost arrived there — within a few days' journey of the Father's house where all wants shall be supplied — to carry on thus about a little meat, drink, or clothes, which he fears he shall lack by the way? It was a noble saying of the forty martyrs, famous in church history, when turned out naked in a frosty night to be starved to death. With these words they comforted one another: 'The winter is indeed sharp and cold, but heaven is warm and comfortable; here we shiver for cold, but Abraham's bosom will make amends for all.'

Objection 1. But I may die for want?

Solution: (1) Who ever did so? Where were the righteous forsaken? (2) If so, your journey is ended and you are fully supplied.

Objection 2. But I am not sure of that; were I sure of heaven, it were another matter.

Solution: Are you not sure of that? Then you have other matters to trouble yourselves about than these. This should be the least of all your cares. I do not find that souls perplexed and troubled about the want of Christ, pardon of sin, etc., are usually very anxious or solicitous about these things. He that seriously puts such questions as these — 'What shall I do to be saved? how shall I know my sin is pardoned?' — does not usually trouble himself with 'What shall I eat? what shall I drink? or with what shall I be clothed?'

Consideration 6. Does it become the children of such a Father to distrust his all-sufficiency, or repine against any of his dispensations?

Do you do well to question his care and love upon every new necessity? Say — have you not been ashamed of this formerly? Has not your Father's seasonable provision for you in former straits put you to the blush, and made you resolve never to question his love and care again? And yet will you renew your unworthy suspicions of him? Disingenuous child, reason thus with yourself: if I perish for want of what is good and needful for me, it must either be because my Father does not know my wants, or has not the means to supply them, or does not regard what becomes of me. Which of these shall I charge upon him? Not the first: 'My Father knows what I have need of' (Matthew 6:32); my condition is not hidden from him. Not the second: 'The earth is the Lord's and the fullness of it' (Psalm 24:1); his name is God All-sufficient (Genesis 17:1). Not the last: 'As a father pities his children, so the Lord pities those that fear him' (Psalm 103:13); 'The Lord is exceedingly pitiful and of tender mercy' (James 5:11); 'He hears the young ravens when they cry' (Job 38:41) — and will he not hear me? 'Consider,' said Christ, 'the fowls of the air' (Matthew 6:26) — not the fowls at the door that are fed by hand every day, but the fowls of the air that have none to provide for them. Does he feed and clothe his enemies, and will he forget his children? He heard the very cry of Ishmael in distress (Genesis 21:17). O my unbelieving heart! do you yet doubt? Remember Hagar and the child.

Consideration 7. Your poverty is not your sin but your affliction only — if by sinful means you have not brought it upon yourselves. And if it be but an affliction, it may be borne the easier for that.

It is hard indeed to bear an affliction coming upon us as the fruit and punishment of sin. When men are under trouble upon that account, they use to say: 'O if it were but a single affliction coming from the hand of God by way of trial, I could bear it; but I have brought it upon myself by sin, it comes as the punishment of sin, the marks of God's displeasure are upon it' — it is the guilt within that troubles and galls more than the want without.

But it is not so here, and therefore you have no reason to be cast down under it.

Objection: But though there is no sting of guilt, yet this condition has other stings: as first, the discredit of religion. I cannot comply with my obligations in the world, and thereby religion is likely to suffer.

Solution: It is well that you have a heart to discharge every duty. Yet if God disables you by providence, it is no discredit to your profession, because you do not do that which you cannot do. So long as it is your desire and endeavor to do what you can and ought to do, in this case God's will is that leniency and forbearance be exercised toward you (Deuteronomy 24:12-13).

Objection 2. But it grieves me to behold the necessities of others whom I was accustomed to relieve and refresh, but now cannot.

Solution: If you cannot, it ceases to be your duty, and God accepts the drawing out of your soul to the hungry in compassion and desire to help them, though you cannot draw forth a full purse to relieve and supply them.

Objection 3. But I find such a condition full of temptations — a sore clog in the way to heaven.

Solution: Every condition in the world has its clogs and attending temptations; and were you in a prosperous condition, you might there meet with more temptations and fewer advantages than you now have. For though I confess poverty has its temptations as well as prosperity, yet I am confident prosperity does not have those excellent advantages that poverty has. For here you have an opportunity to discover the sincerity of your love to God — when you can live upon him, find enough in him, and constantly follow him, even when all external inducements and motives fail. And thus I have shown you how to keep your hearts from the temptations and dangers attending a poor and low condition in the world. When want pinches and the heart begins to sink, then use and bless God for these helps to keep it.

Season 6. The sixth season of expressing this diligence in keeping the heart is the season of duty, when we draw near to God in public, private, or secret duties. Then it is time to look to the heart, for the vanity of the heart seldom discovers itself more than at such times. How often does the poor soul cry out: 'O Lord, how gladly would I serve you, but vain thoughts will not let me! I came to open my heart to you, to delight my soul in communion with you, but my corruptions have set upon me. Lord, chase off these vain thoughts, and suffer them not to prostitute the soul that is espoused to you, before your face.' The sixth case then is this:

Case 6. How may the heart be kept from distraction by vain thoughts in the time of duty?

There is a twofold distraction or wandering of the heart in duty. (1) Voluntary and habitual (Psalm 78:8): 'They set not their hearts aright, and their spirit was not steadfast with God.' This is the case of formalists, and it proceeds from the lack of a holy bent

and inclination of the heart toward God. Their hearts are under the power of their lusts, and therefore it is no wonder they go after their lusts even when they are about holy things (Ezekiel 33:31). (2) Involuntary and lamented distractions (Romans 7:21-24): 'I find then a law, that when I would do good, evil is present with me. O wretched man that I am!' This proceeds not from the lack of a holy bent and aim, but from the weakness and imperfection of grace. And in this case the soul may make the like complaint against its own corruptions that Abijah made against Jeroboam (2 Chronicles 13:6-7). Grace has a dominion, but lusts are mutinous and rebellious during the infancy thereof. But it is not my business to show you how these distractions come into the heart, but rather how to get and keep them out of the heart. To that end, take these ten following helps.

Help 1. Separate yourselves from all earthly employments, and set apart some time for solemn preparation to meet God in duty. You cannot come seeking hot out of the world into God's presence without finding a flavor of it in your duties. It is with the heart a few minutes since plunged in the world, now at the feet of God, just as with the sea after a storm, which still continues working, muddy and restless, though the wind has laid and the storm is over. Your heart must have some time to settle. There are few musicians that can take up a lute or viol and play immediately on it, without some time to tune it. There are few Christians that can immediately say as in Psalm 57:7: 'O God, my heart is fixed, it is fixed.' O, when you go to God in any duty, take your heart aside and say: 'O my soul, I am now addressing myself to the greatest work that ever a creature was employed about; I am going into the awesome presence of God about business of everlasting moment.'

O my soul, leave trifling now! Be composed, watchful, serious. This is no common work — it is God's work, soul-work, eternity-work. I am now going forth bearing seed which will bring forth fruit to life or death in the world to come. Pause a while upon your sins, wants, troubles; steep your thoughts a while in these before you address yourself to duty. David first mused, and then spoke with his tongue (Psalm 39:3-4). So Psalm 45:1: 'My heart is inditing.'

Help 2. Having composed your heart by previous meditation, immediately set a guard upon your senses. How often are poor Christians in danger of losing the eyes of their mind by those of their body! For this, Job made a covenant with his senses (Job 31:1); for this David prayed (Psalm 119:37): 'Turn away my eyes from beholding vanity, and quicken me in your way.' This may serve to explain that mystical Arabian proverb which advises to shut the windows so that the house may be light. It would be excellent if you could say in your approaches to duty, as a holy person once did when coming away from duty: 'Be shut, O my eyes, be shut! for it is impossible you should ever see such beauty and glory in any creature as I have now seen in God.' You need to avoid all occasions of distraction from without, for be sure you will meet enough from within. Intensity of spirit in the work of God locks the eye and ear against vanity. When Marcellus entered the gates of Syracuse, Archimedes was so intent about his mathematical diagram that he took no notice of the soldiers when they entered his very study with drawn swords. A fervent heart cannot be a wandering heart.

Help 3. Beg of God a mortified imagination. A working imagination — however much it is extolled among men — is a great snare to the soul, except it work in fellowship with right reason and a sanctified heart. The imagination is a power of the soul placed between the senses and the understanding. It is that which first stirs itself in the soul, and by its motion the other powers are stirred. It is the common workshop where thoughts are first forged and formed, and as this is, so are they. If imaginations are not first cast down, it is impossible that every thought of the heart should be brought into obedience to Christ (2 Corinthians 10:5). This imagination is naturally the wildest and most untameable power in the soul. Some Christians — especially those of hot and dry constitutions — have much to contend with in it.

And truly, the more spiritual the heart is, the more it is troubled about the vanity and wildness of it. O what a sad thing it is that your nobler soul must run up and down after a vain roving imagination — that such a beggar should ride on horseback and such a prince run after it on foot! That it should call off the soul from attendance upon God when it is most sweetly engaged in communion with him! Beg earnestly of God that the power of sanctification may once come upon it. Some Christians have attained such a degree of sanctification of their imagination that they have had much sweetness left upon their hearts by its spiritual workings in the night season. When your imagination is more mortified, your thoughts will be more orderly and fixed.

Help 4. If you would keep your heart from those vain excursions, realize to yourself by faith the holy and awesome presence of God in duties.

If the presence of a grave man will compose us to seriousness, how much more the presence of a holy God? Do you think your soul would dare to be so giddy and light if the fence of a divine eye were upon it? Remember the place where you are is the place of his feet (Isaiah 60:13). Act faith upon the omniscience of God: 'All the churches shall know that I am he that searches the heart and tries the minds, and will give to everyone according to their works' (Revelation 2:23). 'All things are naked and open to the eyes of him with whom we have to do' (Hebrews 4:13). Realize his infinite holiness — into what a serious, composed frame did the sight of God in his holiness put the spirit of the prophet (Isaiah 6:5)! Labor also to get up your heart due apprehensions of the greatness of God, such as Abraham had (Genesis 18:27): 'I, who am but dust and ashes, have taken upon me to speak to God.' And lastly, remember the jealousy of God, how tender he is over his worship (Leviticus 10:3): 'And Moses said to Aaron, this is what the Lord spoke, saying: I will be sanctified in those that come near me, and before all the people I will be glorified.'

A man that is praying, said Bernard, should behave himself as if he were entering into the court of heaven, where he sees the Lord upon his throne, surrounded with ten thousand of his angels and saints ministering to him. When you come away from a duty in which your heart has been toying and wandering, you may say, 'Truly God was in this place, and I knew it not.' Suppose all the irrelevancies and vanities that have passed through your heart in a duty were written out and interlined with your petitions — could you have the face to present it to God? Should your tongue but utter all the thoughts of your heart in prayer, would not men abhor you? Why, your thoughts are vocal to God (Psalm 139:2). If you

were petitioning the king for your life, would it not provoke him to see you playing with your gloves, or catching every fly that alights on your clothes while you are speaking to him about such serious matters? O think solemnly upon that Scripture (Psalm 89:7): 'God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints, and to be had in reverence of all that are round about him.' Why did God descend in thunderings and lightnings and dark clouds upon Sinai (Exodus 19:16-18)? Why did the mountains smoke under him? The people quaked and trembled round about him — yes, Moses himself was not exempted. But it was to teach the people that great truth (Hebrews 12:28-29): 'Let us have grace, by which we may serve him acceptably with reverence and godly fear, for our God is a consuming fire.' Present God thus before you, and your vain heart will quickly be reduced to a more serious frame.

Help 5. Maintain a praying frame of heart in the intervals of duty. What is the reason our hearts are so dull, careless, and wandering when we come to hear or pray, but because there have been such long intervals in our communion with God? By reason of this, the heart is out of a praying frame. If that spiritual warmth and those holy impressions we carry from God in one duty were but preserved to kindle another duty, it would be of marvelous advantage to keep the heart intent and serious with God.

To this purpose, those brief prayers in the intervals between stated and solemn duties are of most sweet and excellent use. By these, one duty is as it were linked to another, and so the soul as it were wraps itself up in a chain of duties. That Christian seldom misses his mark in solemn duty who shoots up many of these darts in the intervals of duty. It is an excellent commendation Christ gives to the spouse (Song of Solomon 4:11): 'Your lips, O my

spouse, drop as the honeycomb' — upon which a commentator gives this sweet note: the honeycomb drops actually but sometimes, but it always hangs full of sweet drops ready to fall. If our brief prayers were more, our lamentations upon this account would be fewer.

Help 6. Endeavor to engage and raise your affections to God in duty, if you would have your distractions cured.

A weeping eye and a melting heart are seldom troubled as others upon this account. When the soul is intent about any work, it gathers in its strength and bends all the thoughts about it. And when it is deeply affected, it will be intent. The affections command the thoughts to go after them. Deadness causes distraction, and distraction increases deadness. Could you but look upon duties as the galleries of communion in which you walk with God, where your souls may be filled with those ravishing and matchless delights that are in his presence — your soul would not venture to stir from there.

It is with the heart in duty as it is with those that dig for gold ore: they try here, and finding none, try there; and so go from place to place until at last they hit upon the rich vein, and there they sit down. If your heart could but once hit the rich vein in duty, it would dwell and abide there with delight and constancy. 'O how I love your law! it is my meditation day and night' (Psalm 119:97). The soul could dwell day and night upon its knees when once its delights, loves, and desires are engaged. What is the reason your hearts are so shuffling, especially in secret duties? Why are you ready to be gone almost as soon as you are come into the presence of God? But because your affections are not engaged.

Help 7. Mourn over the matter to God, and call in assistance from heaven when vain thoughts assault your heart in duty.

When the messenger of Satan buffeted Paul by wicked injections, as is supposed, he goes to God and mourns over it before him — 2 Corinthians 12:8. Never slight wandering thoughts in duty as small matters; follow every vain thought with a deep sigh, turn to God with such words as these: 'Lord, I came here to speak with you, and here a busy devil and a vain heart conspiring together have set upon me. O my God, what a heart have I? Shall I never wait upon you without distraction? When shall I enjoy an hour of free communion with you? Help me my God this once — do but display your glory before my eyes, and my heart shall quickly be recovered. You know I came here to enjoy you — shall I go away without you? See how the heart of your poor child works toward you, strives to get near you, but cannot. My heart is a ground; come, O north wind, blow, O south wind — O for a fresh gale from your Spirit to set my affections afloat!' Could you but thus affectionately bewail your distractions to God, you might obtain help and deliverance from them. He would say to Satan and your imperious lusts, as Ahasuerus said of Haman: 'What, will he force the queen before my face?' — 'Who are these that set upon my child in my work and presence?'

Help 8. Look upon the success and sweetness of your duties as very much depending upon the keeping of your heart close with God in them.

These two things — the success and sweetness of duty — are as dear to a Christian as his two eyes, and both of these must necessarily be lost if the heart is lost in duty. Job 35:13: 'Surely God hears not vanity, neither does the Almighty regard it.' The promise

is made to a heart engaged — Jeremiah 29:13: 'Then shall you seek me and find me, when you shall search for me with all your heart.' Well then, when you find your heart under the power of deadness and distraction, say to your soul: 'O what do I lose by a careless heart now! My praying times are the choicest parts, the golden spots of all my time. Could I but get this heart up with God, I might now obtain such mercies as would be matter for a song to all eternity.'

Help 9. Look upon it as a great discovery of the sincerity or hypocrisy of your hearts, according as you find them careful or careless in this matter.

Nothing will startle an upright heart more than this: 'What, shall I give way to a customary wandering of heart from God? Shall the spot of the hypocrite appear upon my soul?' They indeed can drudge on in the round of duty, never regarding the frames of their hearts — Ezekiel 33:31-32. But shall I do so? When men come into the presence chamber and the king is not there, they bow to the empty chair. O, never let me be satisfied with empty duties! Never let me take my leave of a duty until my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts.

Help 10. Lastly, it will be of special use to keep your heart with God in duties to consider what influence all your duties have upon your eternity.

These are your seed time, and what you sow in your duties in this world, you must look to reap the fruit of in another world. Galatians 6:7-8: 'If you sow to the flesh, of that you shall reap corruption; but if to the Spirit, life everlasting.' O my soul, answer seriously: would you be willing to reap the fruit of vanity in the world

to come? Dare you say, when your thoughts are roving to the ends of the earth in duty, when you scarce mind what you say or hear: 'Now Lord, I am sowing to the Spirit; now I am providing and laying up for eternity; now I am seeking for glory, honor, and immortality; now I am striving to enter in at the strait gate; now I am taking the kingdom of heaven by a holy violence'? O, such a consideration as this should make the multitudes of vain thoughts that press in upon your heart in duty to flee seven ways before it. And thus I have shown you how to keep your hearts in the times of duty.

Season 7. The seventh season calling for more than common diligence to keep the heart is when we receive injuries and abuses from men. Such is the depravedness and corruption of man in his fallen state that, as one has said, one man has become a wolf, a tiger to another. They are as the prophet complains — Habakkuk 1:14 — 'as the fishes of the sea, and as the creeping things that have no ruler over them.' And as wicked men are cruel and oppressive one to another, so they conspire together to abuse and wrong the people of God, as the same prophet complains, verse 13: 'The wicked devours the man that is more righteous than he.' Now when we are thus abused and wronged, it is hard to keep the heart from revengeful motions — to make it meekly and quietly commit the cause to him that judges righteously, and to exercise no other affection but pity toward those that abuse us. Surely the spirit that is in us lusts to revenge, but it must not be so. You have choice helps in the gospel to keep down your hearts from such sinful motions against your enemies and to sweeten your embittered spirits. The seventh case therefore shall be this.

Case 7. How a Christian may keep his heart from revengeful motions, under the greatest injuries and abuses from men.

The gospel indeed allows a liberty to vindicate our innocency and assert our rights, but not to vent our corruptions and invade God's right. When therefore you find your heart beginning to be inflamed by revengeful motions, presently apply the following remedies — and the first is this.

Remedy 1. Urge upon your heart the severe prohibitions of revenge by the law of God. Remember that this is forbidden fruit, however pleasing and luscious it may be to our corrupted appetites. O, says nature, revenge is sweet — but O, says God, the effects thereof shall be bitter. How plainly has God forbidden this flesh-pleasing sin: Proverbs 20:22, 'Say not, I will recompense evil'; Proverbs 24:29, 'Say not, I will do so to him as he has done to me'; Romans 12:17, 'Recompense to no man evil for evil'; verse 19, 'Avenge not yourselves, but rather give place to wrath'; nay, that is not all — Proverbs 25:21, 'If your enemy hungers, feed him; if he thirsts, give him drink.' The word 'feed him,' as critics observe, signifies to feed cheerfully and tenderly, as birds do their young ones. The Scripture is a great friend to the peace and tranquility of human societies, which can never be preserved if revenge is not put down. It was once used as an argument by Christians to prove their religion to be supernatural and pure — that it forbids revenge, which is so sweet to nature — and truly it is a great pity such an argument should be lost. Well then, awe your hearts with the authority of God in these scriptures. When carnal reason says, 'My enemy deserves to be hated,' let conscience reply, 'But does God deserve to be disobeyed?' 'Thus and thus he has done, and so he has wronged me — but what has God done that I should wrong

him? If he dares to break the peace, shall I be so wicked as to break the precept? If he fears not to wrong me, shall not I fear to wrong God?' O let the fear of God's threatenings repress such sinful motions.

Remedy 2. Set before your eyes the most eminent patterns of meekness and forgiveness, that your souls may fall in love with it.

This is the way to cut off those common pleas of the flesh for revenge — such as: 'No man would bear such an affront'; 'I shall be reckoned a coward or a fool if I pass by this.' No matter, as long as you follow the examples of the wisest and holiest of men. Never did any suffer more and greater abuses from men than Christ did, and never did any carry it more peaceably and forgivingly. Isaiah 53:7: 'He was oppressed and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter.' This pattern the Apostle sets before you for your imitation — 1 Peter 2:21-23: 'For even hereunto are you called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example that we should follow his steps; who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not, but committed himself to him that judges righteously.' To be of a meek, forgiving spirit is Christlike, Godlike. Then shall you be the children of your Father who is in heaven, 'for he makes his sun to rise upon the evil and upon the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust' — Matthew 5:45. How eminently also did this Spirit of Christ rest upon his apostles: never were there such men upon earth for true excellency of spirit. None were ever abused more, or suffered their abuses better: 'Being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we suffer it; being defamed, we entreat' — 1 Corinthians 4:12-13. Mr. Calvin, though a man of a quick spirit, had attained such a degree of this Christlike forgiveness that when

Luther had used some opprobrious language of him, the good man said no more than this: 'Although he should call me a devil, yet I will acknowledge him to be an eminent servant of Jesus Christ.'

I have often heard it reported of godly Mr. Dod that when one, enraged at his close and convicting doctrine, picked a quarrel with him, struck him on the face, and knocked out two of his teeth — this meek servant of Christ spat out the teeth and blood into his hand and said, 'See here, you have knocked out two of my teeth, and that without any just provocation; but on condition I might do your soul good, I would give you leave to dash out all the rest.' Here is the excellency of a Christian's spirit above all the attainments of moral heathens. Though they were excellent at many other things, they could never attain this forgiving spirit. Cicero said it was the first office of justice to hurt nobody unless first provoked by an injury — whereupon Lactantius noted what a fine sentence the orator spoiled by adding those two last words. Strive then for this excellency of spirit, which is the proper excellency of Christians — do something singular that others cannot do, and then you will have a testimony in their consciences. When Moses outdid the magicians, they were forced to confess the finger of God in that business.

Remedy 3. Consider well the quality of the person who has wronged you — either he is a good man or a wicked man who has done you the injury. If he is a good man, there is light and tenderness in his conscience, and that will bring him at last to a sense of the evil he has done. However that may be, Christ has forgiven him greater injuries than these — and why should not you? Will not

Christ upbraid him with any of those wrongs done to him, but frankly forgives him all? And will you take him by the throat for some petty abuse he has done to you?

Or is he a wicked man? If so, truly you have more need to exercise pity than revenge toward him — and that upon a double account. First, he is beside himself; for so indeed is every unconverted sinner — Luke 15:17. Should you go into Bedlam and there hear one rail at you, another mock you, and a third threaten you, would you say, 'I will be revenged upon them'? No, you would rather go away pitying them: 'Alas, poor creatures, they are out of their wits and know not what they do.' Besides — second — there is a day coming, if they repent not, when they will have more misery than you can find in your hearts to wish them. You need not study revenge; God's vengeance sleeps not and will shortly take place upon them — and is not that enough? Have they not an eternity of misery coming if they repent not? And if ever they do repent, they will be ready to make you reparation.

Remedy 4. Keep down your heart by this consideration: that by revenge you can but satisfy a lust, but by forgiveness you shall conquer a lust.

Suppose by revenge you should destroy one enemy — I will show you how by forgiving you shall conquer three: your own lust, the devil's temptation, and your enemy's heart. And is not this a more glorious conquest? If by revenge you overcome your enemy, yet as Bernard says: unhappy victory, when by overcoming another man you are overcome by your own corruption. But this way you may obtain a truly glorious conquest. What an honorable victory did David this way obtain over Saul — 1 Samuel 24:16-17: 'And it

came to pass, when David had made an end of speaking these words, that Saul lifted up his voice and wept; and he said to David, You are more righteous than I.'

It must be a very disingenuous nature indeed upon which meekness and forgiveness will not work — a stony heart which this fire will not melt. To this sense is Proverbs 25:21-22: 'If your enemy hungers, feed him; if he thirsts, give him drink; for in so doing you shall heap coals of fire upon his head.' Some take this to mean a sin-punishing fire; others, a heart-melting fire — but to be sure, it will either melt his heart or aggravate his misery. Augustine thinks that Stephen's prayer for his enemies was the great means of Paul's conversion.

Remedy 5. Seriously put this question to your own heart: have I gotten any good by the wrong and injuries I have received, or have I not? If they have done you no good, turn the reproach upon yourselves: 'O that I should have such a bad heart, that can get no good out of such troubles! O that my spirit should be so unlike to Christ's!' The patience and meekness of other Christians have turned all the injuries thrown at them into precious stones. The spirits of others have been raised in blessing God when they have been loaded with reproaches by the world; they have bound them as an ornament to their necks. Luther said: 'I could even be proud of it, that I have a bad name among wicked men.' And Jerome sweetly: 'I thank my God that I am worthy to be hated by the world.' Thus their hearts were provoked by injuries to magnify God and bless him for them. If it works contrary with me, I have cause enough to be filled with self-displeasure.

If you have gotten any good by them — if the reproaches and wrongs you have received have made you search your hearts the more, watch your ways the more narrowly; if their wronging you has made you see how you have wronged God — then let me say for them as Paul did for himself: 'Pray, forgive them this wrong.'

Can you not find a heart to forgive one who has been instrumental of so much good to you? That is strange. Though they meant it for evil, yet if God has turned it to good, you have no more reason to rage against the instrument than the man who received a wound from his enemy that only broke open and let out an abscess that would otherwise have been his death.

Remedy 6. It is of excellent use to keep the heart from revenge, to look up and eye the first cause by which all our troubles are ordered.

This will calm and meeken our spirits quickly. Never did a wicked tongue try the patience of a saint more than David's was tried by that railing Shimei — yet the spirit of this good man was not at all poisoned with revenge, though Shimei went along cursing and casting stones at him all the way. Yea, though Abishai offered David, if he pleased, the head of that enemy — yet the king said: 'What have I to do with you, you sons of Zeruiah? So let him curse, because the Lord has said to him, Curse David; who shall then say, Why have you done so?' 'It may be God uses him as his rod to lash me, because I by my sin made his enemies to blaspheme him — and shall I be angry with the rod? How irrational would that be?' This also was what quieted Job: he does not rail and vow revenge upon the Chaldeans and Sabeans, but eyes God as the orderer of those troubles and is quiet — 'The Lord has taken away; blessed be his name' — Job 1:21.

Objection. But you will say: 'To turn aside the right of a man, to subvert a man in his cause — the Lord approves not this' — Lamentations 3:36.

Answer. True, but though it does not fall under his approving will, yet it does fall under his permitting will; and there is a great argument for quiet submission in that. Nay, he has not only the permitting but the ordering of all those troubles. Did we see more of a holy God, we should show less of a corrupt nature in such trials.

Remedy 7. Consider how you daily wrong God, and you will not be so easily inflamed with revenge against others who have wronged you.

You are daily grieving and wronging God, and yet he bears it, forgives, and will not take vengeance upon you — and will you be so quick in avenging yourselves upon others? O what a sharp and terrible rebuke is that — Matthew 18:32-33: 'O you wicked and slothful servant, I forgave you all that debt because you desired me — should not you also have had compassion on your fellow servant, even as I had pity on you?' None should be filled with bowels of pity, forbearance, and mercy toward such as wrong them, as those should be who have experienced the riches of mercy themselves. Methinks the mercy of God to us should melt our very bowels into mercy over others. It is impossible for us to be cruel to others, except we forget how kind Christ has been to us. Those who have found mercy should show mercy. If kindness cannot work, methinks fear should — Matthew 6:15: 'If you forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.'

Remedy 8. Lastly, let the consideration of the day of the Lord, which draws near, withhold your hearts from anticipating it by acts of revenge.

Why are you so quick? Is not the Lord at hand to avenge all his abused servants? 'Be patient therefore, my brethren, unto the coming of the Lord: behold, the husbandman waits... be you also patient, for the coming of the Lord draws near; grudge not one against another, brethren, lest you be condemned; behold, the judge stands at the door' — James 5:7-9. This text affords three arguments against revenge. First, the Lord's near approach. Second, the example of the husbandman's patience. Third, the danger we draw upon ourselves by anticipating God's judgment. 'Vengeance is mine,' says the Lord — he will distribute justice more equally and impartially than you can. Those who believe they have a God to right them will not so much wrong themselves as to avenge their own wrongs.

Objection 1. But flesh and blood is not able to bear such abuses.

Solution. If you resolve to consult flesh and blood in such cases, and do no more than that will enable you to do, never pretend to religion. Christians must do singular and supernatural things.

Objection 2. But if I swallow such abuses, I shall be reckoned a fool, and everyone will trample upon me.

Solution. First, you may be reckoned so among fools, but God and good men will account it your wisdom and the excellency of your spirit. Second, it must be a base spirit indeed that will tram-

ple upon a meek and forgiving Christian. And thus learn to keep your hearts from revenge under all your provocations.

Season 8. The next season in which we are in danger of losing our hearts is when we meet with great crosses and provocations. Then sinful passion is apt to transport the heart. It is the fault of many good men to be of hasty and quick spirits when provoked; though they dare not nurse anger into malice — for that would be a note of wickedness — yet they are very prone to sudden anger, which is a sign of weakness. Beza, in the life of Calvin, observes that Calvin was of a keen and hasty spirit; and the biographer of the great Cameron says that his anger was soon stirred toward his near and familiar friends, but he would easily lay it down and acknowledge his weakness. Alas, when provocations and trials of our patience come, we know not what spirits we are of. The eighth case therefore is this.

Case 8. How the heart may be kept meek and patient under great crosses and provocations.

There are three sorts of anger: natural, holy, and sinful. First, natural anger — which is nothing else but the motion of the irascible appetite toward an offensive object; and this in itself is no sin. These are rather pre-passions than passions, the infirmities rather than the sins of nature, as Jerome calls them. Reason is the driver, the soul is the chariot, and the two horses that draw it in all its motions are the concupiscible and irascible appetites; while these are rightly managed by reason, they are not only lawful but very useful to the soul. God would not have us to be stupid and insensate, though he would have us to be meek and patient. Ephesians 4:26 allows the natural motion but forbids the sinful excess. Second, holy anger — which is a pure flame kindled by a heavenly spark of

love to God, and in Scripture is called zeal, which is (as one says) the dagger that love draws in God's quarrel. Such was Lot's anger against the Sodomites, and Moses's against the idolatrous Israelites. When Servetus condemned Zwingli for his harshness, his answer was: 'In other cases I will be mild, but in the cause of Christ, not so.' What the world calls moderation and mildness here is, in God's account, stupidity and cowardliness. Neither of these two kinds of anger is what I am now persuading you to keep your hearts against. Third, there is sinful passion — and that is the thing which endangers you. Anger becomes sinful when it is either causeless — Matthew 5:22 — or excessive, either in measure or in time, exceeding the value of the provocation, whether more transient or abiding. Yet even then it is sin and is matter of humiliation before God. Now the means to keep the heart from it under provocations are these.

Means 1. Get low and humble thoughts of yourselves, and then you will have meek spirits and peaceable deportments toward others.

The humble man is ever the patient man; pride is the root of passion, and a lofty spirit will be a surly spirit. Bladders blown up with wind will not lie close together, but prick them and you may pack a thousand in a small room. 'Only by pride comes contention' — Proverbs 13:10. When we over-rate ourselves, we think we are unworthily treated by others, and that provokes. And here — by the way — take notice of one great benefit of acquaintance with your own hearts: the meekening and calming of our spirits. Christian, methinks you should know so much about yourself that it is impossible anyone could lay you lower, or have baser thoughts of you, than you have of yourself. Some render the original of

Habakkuk 2:5 thus: the proud man is as one who transgresses by wine — and drunkards, you know, are quarrelsome. O, get more humility, and that will bring you more peace.

Means 2. Be often sweetening your spirits in communion with God, and they will not easily be embittered with wrath toward men.

A quiet conscience never produced an unquiet conversation. The peace of God rules in the heart as an umpire in appeasing strifes — for so much that word in Colossians 3:15 imports. Wrath and strife are hugely opposed to the frame and temper of a spiritual heart, because they are inconsistent with the delight and contentment of that dove-like spirit which loves a serene and quiet breast. O, says a soul that feeds upon the sweet communion of the Spirit: 'Shall the sparks of provocation now catch in my passions and raise such a smoke in my soul as will offend and drive away the Comforter from me?' This is so effectual a remedy against passion that I would almost venture, in a Christian of a hasty nature, to make long-suffering a sign of communion with God. See you such a Christian quiet and calm under provocations — it is very likely his soul feeds upon such sweetness in God that he is loath to leave it. And on the other side, see you a Christian turbulent and clamorous — doubtless all is not well within; his spirit is like a bone out of joint, which cannot move without pain and trouble.

Means 3. Get due apprehensions of the evil nature and effects of sinful anger. Anger is a short madness, says one; anger is the fever of the soul, says another; it is the interregnum and eclipse of reason, says a third.

The effects of it also are very sad.

First, it grieves the Spirit of God — Ephesians 4:30 — and banishes him from the breast in which it rages and tumults. God is the God of peace; the presence and comforts of God are only enjoyed in a calm. It is a golden note one gives upon that text: God does not usually bless with peace of conscience those who make no conscience of peace. Second, it gives advantage to the devil — Ephesians 4:26-27. Satan is an angry and discontented spirit and finds no rest but in restless hearts. He lives like the salamander in fires of contention; he bestirs himself when spirits are in a commotion, sometimes filling the heart with revengeful thoughts, sometimes filling the lips and inflaming the tongue with indecent language — even a meek Moses sometimes spoke unadvisedly with his lips. Third, it detunes the spirit for duty. Upon this account the Apostle dissuades husbands and wives from jarring and contention, that their prayers be not hindered — 1 Peter 3:7. All acts of worship must be suitable to the object of worship, and God is the God of peace, the God of love. Fourth — to mention no more — it disparages the Christian religion. How would Plato and Pythagoras shame us if they were now living! Christ was as a lamb for meekness — does it become his followers to be like lions? O keep your hearts, or you will at once lose not only your own peace but the credit of religion.

Means 4. Consider how sweet a thing it is for a Christian to conquer his corruptions and carry away the spoils of them.

'He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he that rules his spirit, than he that takes a city' — Proverbs 16:32. Is there any contentment in indulging a passion? how much more in mortifying it? When you come in a calm mood, or upon a deathbed, to review your life — how comfortable it will be to reflect upon the

conquests you have gained by the fear of God over the evil propensities of your own heart! It was a memorable saying of the Emperor Valentinian when he came to die: 'Among all my conquests, there is but one that now comforts me.' And being asked what that was, he answered, 'I have overcome my worst enemy — my own wicked heart.'

Means 5. Shame yourselves by setting before you those eminent patterns who have been most excellent for meekness.

Above all, compare your spirits with the spirit of Christ: 'Learn of me,' says he, 'for I am meek and lowly' — Matthew 11:29. Christ was meek and lowly, but I am proud and passionate. It was the high commendation of Moses — Numbers 12:3 — 'Now the man Moses was meek above all the men of the earth'; and this was the man who knew God face to face. It is said of Calvin and Ursinus that they were both of choleric natures, but had so learned the meekness of Christ as not to utter one word under the greatest provocation unbecoming religion. When I read the fine stories of the very heathens — who never had the advantages we have — how the Pythagoreans, whatever feuds had been among them in the day, would hush all by sending to each other this message, 'The sun is almost set'; and that of Plato to his scholar, 'I would beat you if I were not angry' —

when I read what leniency and tenderness Lycurgus showed to the insolent fellow who had struck out one of his eyes — I am ashamed to see how much Christians are outshot by heathens, who by mere moral arguments and precepts had thus meekened their spirits and conquered their passions. The dim light of nature could teach Seneca to say that anger will hurt a man more than the offense; for there is a certain bound in the offense, but he knew not

how far his anger would carry him. It is a shame that these men, who come so far behind us in means and advantages, should so far outstrip us in meekness and patience.

Means 6. Lastly, avoid all irritating occasions.

He that will not hear the clapper must not pull the rope. 'Grievous words stir up anger,' says Solomon — Proverbs 15:1. Do not only pray and resolve against it, but get as far as you can out of the way of it. It is true spiritual valor to run as fast and as far as we can out of sin's way. If you can but resist anger in its first rise, there is no great fear of it afterward. For it is not with this sin as it is with other sins: other sins grow to their full strength by degrees, their first motions being the weakest; but this sin is born in its full strength. It is strongest at first — withstand it then, and it falls before you. Thus learn to keep your hearts when provocations arise.

Season 9. The ninth season of exerting our greatest diligence is the critical hour of temptation, wherein Satan lays close siege to the fort-royal of a Christian's heart and often surprises it for want of watchfulness. To keep your heart now is no less a mercy than a duty. Few Christians are so well skilled in detecting the fallacies and retorting the arguments by which Satan uses to draw them to sin as to come off safe in those encounters. 'Watch and pray,' says our Lord, 'lest you enter into temptation' — Mark 14:38. Even an eminent David and a wise Solomon have smarted for their carelessness at such a time as this. The ninth case therefore shall be this.

Case 9. How a Christian, when strongly solicited by the devil to sin, may keep his heart from yielding to the temptation.

Now there are six special arguments by which Satan subtly insinuates and winds in the temptation; in each of which I shall offer some help for the keeping of your heart. And the first is this.

Argument 1. The first argument is drawn from the pleasure of sin. O, says Satan, here is pleasure to be enjoyed! The temptation comes with a smiling countenance and charming voice: 'What, are you so phlegmatic and dull a soul as not to feel the powerful charms of pleasure? Who can withhold himself from such delights?'

Now your heart may be kept from the danger of this temptation by retorting this argument of pleasure upon the tempter — which is done two ways.

First: you tell me, Satan, that sin is pleasant — be it so. But are the gripes of conscience and the flames of hell so too? Is it pleasant to feel the wounds and throbs of conscience? If so, why did Peter weep so bitterly — Matthew 26:75? Why did David cry out of broken bones — Psalm 51? I hear what you say of the pleasure of sin, and I have read what David said of the terrible effects of sin in his Psalm of remembrance — Psalm 38:2-8: 'Your arrows stick fast in me, and your hand presses me sore; there is no soundness in my flesh because of your anger, neither is there any rest in my bones because of my sin; for my iniquities are gone over my head as a heavy burden, they are too heavy for me; my wounds stink and are corrupt because of my foolishness; I am troubled, I am bowed down greatly, I go mourning all the day long; my loins are filled with a loathsome disease, and there is no soundness in my flesh; I am feeble and sore broken, I have roared by reason of the disquietness of my heart.'

Here I see the true face of sin: if I yield to your temptation, I must either feel these pangs of conscience or the flames of hell.

Second: what do you talk of the pleasure of sin, when by experience I know there is more true pleasure in the mortification than can be in the commission of sin? O how sweet it is to please God, to obey conscience, to preserve inward peace, to be able to say, 'In this trial I have discovered the sincerity of my heart; now I know I fear the Lord; now I see that I truly hate sin.' Has sin any such delight as this? This will choke that temptation.

Argument 2. The second argument is drawn from the secrecy of sin. O, says Satan, this sin will never disgrace you abroad — none shall know it.

This argument may be retorted, and the heart secured thus: 'You say none shall know it — but, Satan, can you find a place void of the divine presence for me to sin in?' Thus Job secured his heart from this temptation — Job 31:4: 'Does he not see my ways, and count all my steps?' — therefore he made a covenant with his eyes in verse 1. After the same manner Solomon teaches us to retort this temptation — Proverbs 5:20-21: 'And why, my son, will you be ravished with a strange woman, and embrace the bosom of a stranger? For the ways of man are before the eyes of the Lord, and he ponders all his goings.' What if I hide it from the eyes of all the world for the present — I cannot hide it from God; and the time is at hand when all the world shall know it too, for the Word assures me — Luke 8:17 — that what is done now in secret shall be proclaimed as upon the housetop. Besides, is not my conscience as a thousand witnesses? Do I owe no reverence to myself? Could the heathen man say, 'When you are tempted to commit sin, fear your-

self without any other witness' — and shall not I be afraid to sin before my own conscience, which always has a reproof in its mouth or a pen in its hand to record my most secret actions?

Argument 3. The third argument by which Satan tempts to sin is taken from the gain and profit arising from it. 'Why so nice and scrupulous? It is but to stretch conscience a little, and you may make your fortune — now is your opportunity.'

The heart may be kept from falling into this dangerous snare by retorting the temptation thus: 'But what profit will it be if a man should gain the whole world and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?' — Matthew 16:26. O my soul, my precious soul — shall I hazard you for all the good that is in this world? There is an immortal spirit dwelling in this fleshly tabernacle, of more value than all earthly things, which must live to all eternity when this world shall lie in white ashes — a soul for which Jesus Christ shed his precious and invaluable blood. I was sent into this world to provide for this soul. Indeed, God has also committed to me the care of my body, but — as one aptly expresses it — as a master commits two things to a servant, the child and the child's clothes: will the master thank the servant if he pleads, 'I have kept the clothes, but I have neglected the life of the child'?

Argument 4. The fourth argument is drawn from the smallness of the sin. 'It is but a little one, a small matter, a trifle — who would stand upon such niceties?'

This argument may be retorted three ways.

First: but is the majesty of heaven a little one too? If I commit this sin, I must offend and wrong a great God — Isaiah 40:15-22.

Second: is there any little hell to torment little sinners in? Are not the least sinners there filled with the fullness of wrath? O there is great wrath treasured up for such as the world counts little sinners.

Third: the less the sin, the less the inducement to commit it. What, shall I break with God for a trifle — destroy my peace, wound my conscience, grieve the Spirit — and all this for nothing? O what madness is this!

Argument 5. A fifth argument is drawn from the grace of God and hopes of pardon. 'Come, God will pass by this as an infirmity — he will not be extreme to mark it.'

But wait, my heart.

First: where do I find a promise of mercy to presumptuous sinners? Indeed for involuntary surprises and unavoidable and lamented infirmities there is a pardon of course, but where is the promise to a daring sinner who sins upon a presumption of pardon? Pause a while, my soul, upon that Scripture — Numbers 15:27,30: 'And if a soul sin through ignorance, then he shall bring a she-goat of the first year for a sin-offering... but the soul that does anything presumptuously, the same reproaches the Lord, and that soul shall be cut off from among his people.'

Second: if God is a God of so much mercy, how can I abuse so good a God? Shall I take so glorious an attribute as the mercy of God and abuse it unto sin? Shall I wrong him because he is good? Or should not rather the goodness of God lead me to repentance — Romans 2:4? 'There is mercy with you, that you may be feared' — Psalm 130:4.

Argument 6. Lastly, sometimes Satan encourages to sin from the examples of good and holy men: 'Thus and thus they have sinned and been restored — therefore this may be consistent with grace, and you may be saved nevertheless.' The danger of this temptation is avoided and the heart secured by retorting the argument three ways.

First: though good men may commit the same sin materially that I am tempted to — did any good man ever venture to sin upon such a ground and encouragement as this?

Second: did God record these examples for my imitation or for my warning? Are they not set up as sea-marks, that I might avoid the rocks upon which they split? 1 Corinthians 10:6: 'Now these were our examples, to the intent we should not lust after evil things, as they also lusted.'

Third: am I willing to feel what they felt for sin? O, I dare not follow them in the ways of sin — lest God plunge me into the depths of horror into which he cast them.

Thus learn to keep your hearts in the hour of temptation to sin.

Season 10. The tenth special season to keep the heart with all diligence is the time of spiritual darkness and doubting — when it is with the soul as it was with Paul in his dangerous voyage, when neither sun, nor moon, nor star appeared for many days. When by reason of the hiding of God's face, the prevalency of corruption, and the lack of clear evidence of grace, the soul is even ready to give up all its hopes and comforts for lost — to draw sad and desperate conclusions upon itself, to call its former comforts vain delusions and its grace hypocrisy. When the serene and clear heavens are overcast with dark clouds, yes, filled with thunders and

horrible tempests; when the poor pensive soul sits down and weeps out this sad lamentation: 'My hope is perished from the Lord!' Now to keep the heart from sinking in such a day as this, to enable it to maintain confidence in its own sincerity, is a matter of great difficulty. The tenth case then will be this.

Case 10. How the people of God in dark and doubting seasons may keep their hearts from entertaining such sad conclusions about their estates as destroy their peace and unfit them for duty.

There are two general heads to which the grounds of doubting our sincerity may be reduced. First, God's dealings toward the soul, either in the time of some extraordinary affliction, or of some long and sad desertion. Or second, the soul's own dealings toward God; and here it usually argues against the truth of its own graces — either from its relapses into the same sins from which it has formerly risen with shame and sorrow; or from the sensible declining of its affections toward God; or from the excess of its affections toward creature-comforts and enjoyments; or from its enlargements in public and frequent straitnesses in private duties; or from some horrid injections of Satan with which the soul is greatly perplexed; or lastly, from God's silence and seeming denial of its long-depending suits and prayers.

These are the common grounds of those sad conclusions. Now in order to the establishment and support of the heart in this condition it will be necessary:

First, that you be acquainted with some general truths which have a tendency to the settlement of a trembling and doubting soul.

Second, that you be rightly instructed about the forenamed particulars which are the grounds of your doubting.

The general truths requisite for poor doubting souls to be acquainted with are these.

Truth 1. Every working and appearance of hypocrisy does not immediately prove the person in whom it is to be a hypocrite. You must carefully distinguish between the presence and the predominancy of hypocrisy. There are remains of deceitfulness in the best hearts. David and Peter had sad experience of it — yet the standing frame and general bent of the heart being upright, it did not denominate them hypocrites.

Truth 2. We ought as well to hear what can be said for us as against us. It is the sin of upright hearts sometimes to use an overly rigid and merciless severity against themselves — they do not impartially consider the case of their own souls. It is in this case as Solomon speaks in another — Proverbs 13:7: 'There is that makes himself rich, and yet has nothing; and there is that makes himself poor, and yet has great riches.' It is the damning sin of the self-flattering hypocrite to make his condition better than it is; and it is the sin and folly of some upright souls to make their condition worse than it really is. Why should you be such enemies to your own peace? Why do you read over the evidences of God's love to your souls as a man reads a book he intends to confute? Why do you study to find evasions to turn off those comforts which are due to you? It is said that Joseph was minded to put away his espoused Mary, not knowing that the holy thing conceived in her was by the Holy Spirit — and this may be your case. A third truth is this.

Truth 3. Many a saint has charged and condemned himself for that which God will never charge him with or condemn him for. 'Why have you hardened our heart from your fear?' says the church — Isaiah 63:17 — and yet the verse before shows that their hearts were not so hardened. Godly Bradford wrote himself down as a hypocrite, a painted sepulcher — yet doubtless God acquitted him of that charge.

Truth 4. Every thing which is a ground of grief to the people of God is not a sufficient ground of questioning their sincerity. There are many more things to trouble you than there are to stumble you. If upon every slip and failing through infirmity you should question all that ever was wrought upon you, your life must be made up of doubtings and fears; you can never attain a settled peace, nor live that life of praise and thankfulness the gospel calls for.

Truth 5. The soul is not at all times fit to pass judgment upon its own condition. To be sure in the dark day of desertion, when the soul is benighted, and in the stormy day of temptation, when the soul is in a hurry — it is utterly unfit to judge its estate. 'Examine your hearts upon your beds, and be still' — Psalm 4. This is rather a season for watching and resisting than for judging and determining.

Truth 6. Every breach of peace with God is not a breach of covenant with God. The wife has many weaknesses and failings, often grieves and displeases her husband — yet in the main is faithful and truly loves him. These failings may cause him to alter his manner, but not to withdraw his love or deny the relationship. 'Return, O backsliding Israel, for I am married unto you.'

Truth 7. Lastly, whatever our sin or trouble may be, it should rather drive us to God than from God. 'Pardon my sin, for it is great' — Psalm 25:11. Suppose it is true that you have so and so sinned, that you have been thus long and sadly deserted — yet it is a false inference that therefore you should be discouraged, as if there were no help for you in your God. When you have well digested these seven establishing truths, if the doubt still remains, then consider what may be replied to the particular grounds of those doubts.

Doubt 1. You doubt and are ready to conclude the Lord has no regard or love for your soul, because of some extraordinary affliction that has come upon you. But I would not have your soul draw such a conclusion until you are able to answer these three questions satisfactorily.

Question 1. If great troubles and afflictions are marks of God's hatred, why should not impunity and constant prosperity be tokens of his love? For of contrary things there is a contrary reason and consequence. But is this so indeed? Does not Scripture say quite otherwise? Proverbs 1:32: 'The prosperity of fools destroys them.' So also Psalm 73.

Question 2. Dare you draw the same conclusion upon all others who have been as much — yes, more — afflicted than yourself? If this argument concludes against you, then so it concludes against every one in your condition. Yea, the greater the affliction of any child of God has been, the more strongly the argument still concludes — and then woe to David, Job, Heman, Paul, and all who have been afflicted as they were.

Question 3. Had God exempted you only from those troubles which all his other people feel, would not that have been a greater ground of doubting to you than this? Especially since Scripture says — Hebrews 12:8 — 'If you are without the chastening whereof all are partakers, then are you bastards and not sons.'

O how is our Father put to it by froward children! If he afflicts, one cries, 'He loves me not'; if he exempts from affliction, others question his love upon that ground. Surely you have other work to do under the rod than this.

Doubt 2. Or do you rashly infer the Lord has no love for you because he hides his face from you — that your condition is miserable because it is dark and uncomfortable? Before you draw such rash conclusions, see what answer you can give to these four queries.

Query 1. If any action of God toward his people will bear a favorable as well as a harsh and severe construction, why should not his people interpret it in the best sense? And is not this such? May he not have a design of love as well as of displeasure in this dispensation? May he not depart for a season — and not forever — yes, that he might not depart forever? You are not the first to have mistaken God's ends in desertion. Isaiah 49:14: 'Zion said, The Lord has forsaken me, my God has forgotten me' — was it so indeed? Nothing less — verse 15: 'Can a mother forget?...'

Query 2. Do you find the marks of an absolute, total, and final desertion upon your own spirit, that you are so apt to conclude yours to be such? Do you find your heart inclined to forsake God? Have you lost your conscientious tenderness in the matter of sin? If so, sad characters appear upon you indeed. But if in this dark

hour you are as tender of sin as ever, as much resolved to cleave to God as ever — 'I cannot, I will not forsake God, let him do what he will with me' — if your heart works thus, it can be but a partial, limited, and temporary desertion. By this he still keeps his interest in your heart — a sure sign he will return and visit you again.

Query 3. Is sense and feeling a competent judge of God's actions and designs? Or may a man safely rely upon its testimony after so many discoveries of its fallibility? Is this a sound argument: 'If God had any love for my soul, I should feel it now as well as in former times — but I cannot feel it, therefore it is quite gone'? Do you not know the sun still keeps on its course in the heavens even in full and close weather, when you cannot see it? And may it not be so with the love of God? Read Isaiah 50:10. May I not as well conclude in winter, when the flowers have hidden their beautiful heads underground, that they are quite dead and gone — because I cannot find them in December where I saw them in May?

Query 4. Do you think the Lord cares nothing for breaking his children's hearts — and his own promise too? Has he no more regard to either? If he returns no more, these must be the consequences — Isaiah 57:16-17; Hebrews 13:5.

Well then, from God's dealings toward you — either in affliction or desertion — no such discouraging, heart-sinking conclusions can be inferred. Next let us see whether they may not be inferred from our own dealings toward God; and here the principal grounds of doubting are such as these.

Doubt 3. 'I have fallen again into the same sin from which I formerly rose with repentance and resolution — therefore my sinning is customary sinning, a spot that is not the spot of God's chil-

dren.' Hence the upright soul trembles, and upon this it is ready to affirm that all its former humiliations for and oppositions to sin were but acts of hypocrisy. But stay, poor trembling heart.

Query 1. If this be so, how is it that Christ put such a favorable construction upon the disciples' sleeping a third time when he had as often reproved them for it — Matthew 26:40-41? And how is it that we find in Scripture so many promises made not only to first sins but also to the backslidings of God's people — Jeremiah 3:22; Hosea 14:4?

Query 2. Is not your repentance and care renewed as often as your guilt is renewed? Yes — the more often you sin, the more you are troubled. It is not so in customary sinning, the rise of which Bernard excellently describes. First, when a man accustomed to good sins grievously, it seems unbearable — he seems to descend alive into hell. Second, in process of time it seems not unbearable, but heavy; and between unbearable and heavy there is no small descent. Third, next it becomes light; his conscience smites but faintly and he scarcely feels the stripes of it. Fourth, then there is not only a total insensibility of it, but that which was bitter and displeasing has now become sweet and pleasing in some degree. Fifth, then it is turned into custom, and not only pleases but daily pleases. Lastly, custom is turned into nature — he cannot be pulled away from it but defends and pleads for it. This is customary sinning; this is the way of the wicked — but the quite contrary is your condition.

Query 3. Are you sure from Scripture grounds that a good man may not relapse again and again into the same sin? It is true that as for gross sins, good men do not ordinarily relapse into them: David committed adultery no more, Paul persecuted the church no

more, Peter denied Christ no more. But I speak of ordinary infirmities. Job's friends were good men, yet he said — Job 19:3 — 'These ten times have you reproached me.' So then, no such conclusions follow from this first ground of doubting.

Doubt 4. The second ground is the declining and withering of our affections to spiritual things. O says the upright soul, 'If I had ever been planted as right seed, I should have been as a green olive tree in the house of my God — but my branches wither, therefore my root is naught.' But stay.

Query 1. May you not be mistaken about the decay of grace and the fading of your affections? What if they are not so quick and ravishing as at first — may not that be recompensed in the spirituality and solidity of them now? Philippians 1:9: 'I pray God your love may abound more and more in all judgment' — it may be more solid, though not so fervent. Or do you not mistake by looking forward to what you would be, rather than backward to what you once were? It is a good note of Ames: we discern the growth of grace as the growth of plants — we perceive it rather to have grown than to be growing.

Query 2. But grant it is so indeed as you affirm — must it necessarily follow that the root of the matter is not in you? David's latter ways are distinguished from his former — 2 Chronicles 17:3 — and yet in both first and last, he was a holy man. The church of Ephesus is charged by Christ for leaving her first love — and yet she was a golden candlestick, with many precious saints — Revelation 2:2-4.

Doubt 5. A third ground of these sad conclusions is the excess of our affections to some creature enjoyments. 'I fear I love the creature more than God — and if so, my love is but hypocritical. I sometimes feel stronger and more sensible motions of my heart toward some earthly comforts than I do toward heavenly objects — therefore my soul is not upright in me.' But stay, soul.

Query 1. May not a man love God more solidly and strongly than the creature, and yet his affections toward the creature be sometimes moved more violently and sensibly than toward God? As rooted malice argues a stronger hatred than a sudden though more violent passion, so we must measure our love not by a violent motion of it now and then, but by the depth of the root and the constancy of its actings. Because David was so passionately moved for Absalom, Joab concluded that if Absalom had lived and all the people died, it would have pleased David well — 2 Samuel 19:7 — but that was argued more like a soldier than a logician.

Query 2. If you indeed love the creature for itself, if you make it your end and religion but a means, then the conclusion is rightly drawn upon you. But if you love the creature in reference to God, and see nothing in it apart from him — though sometimes your affections offend in the excess — this is consistent with sincere love to God. To love the creature inordinately — that is, to put it in God's room and make it your end — is the love of a carnal heart. To love it immoderately — that is, to let out more affection to it than you ought — is sometimes the sin of the best hearts.

Query 3. Have not many souls feared as you do — that when Christ and creatures stood as competitors in some eminent trial they would forsake Christ rather than the creature — and yet when brought to that dilemma been able to cast all the world at their

heels for Christ? Many of the martyrs had such fears, and were satisfied in just this way. The prevalency of love is best seen at parting. There may be more love to Christ in your soul than you are now aware of, and if God brings you to such a pinch you may see it.

Doubt 6. A fourth ground of these sad conclusions is that we find our hearts sometimes more straitened in private than in public duties. 'O if my soul were sincere, its actings in duty would be uniform. I fear I am but a Pharisee upon this ground.' It is sad indeed that we should at any time find our hearts straitened in private. But—

Query 1. Do not all your enlargements in duty — whether public or private — depend upon the Spirit, who is the Lord of influences? And according as he gives out or holds back those influences, so are you enlarged or straitened. What if it sometimes pleases him to give in a public duty what he withholds in a private one? As long as your soul is satisfied in neither without communion with God, and the straitness of your heart is indeed your burden — does that argue you to be a hypocrite?

Query 2. Do you not make conscience of private duties, and set yourself as before the Lord in them? Indeed, if you live in constant neglect or careless performance of them — if you are careful about public and careless about private duties — that would be a sad sign. But when you have conscientiously performed them and often met with God in them, it will not follow that you are insincere because that communion is sometimes interrupted. Besides—

Query 3. May there not be something at times in a public duty which is wanting in a private duty, to raise and advantage your affections? God may sometimes make use of the melting affections

of those with whom you hear or pray as instruments to move your own affections. This advantage is wanting in private duty — therefore, the case so standing, no such inference can be drawn.

Doubt 7. Another ground is from those horrid injections of Satan with which the soul is greatly perplexed. 'By these I may see what a heart I have — can grace be where these are?'

Yes, grace may be where such thoughts are, though not where they are lodged and consented to. Do you cry out under the burden, enter your protest in heaven against them, strive to keep up holy and reverent thoughts of God? Then it is a rape, not a voluntary prostitution.

Doubt 8. The last ground of these sad conclusions is the Lord's long silence and seeming denial of our long-depending suits and prayers. 'O if God had any regard for my soul, he would have heard my cries before now! But I have no answer from him — therefore I have no interest in him.' But stay, doubting soul.

Query 1. Have not many saints stumbled on this stone before you? Psalm 31:22: 'I said in my haste, I am cut off from before your eyes: nevertheless you heard the voice of my supplications.' So the church — Lamentations 3:44: 'You cover yourself with a cloud, that our prayer should not pass through.' Jonah 2:4: 'Then I said, I am cast out of your sight.' And may you not be mistaken in this matter as well as they?

Query 2. Though God's abhorring and final rejecting of prayer is an argument of his abhorring the person who prays, dare we conclude so from a mere suspension of the answer? God may bear long with his own elect who cry to him day and night — Luke 18:7.

Query 3. Can you deny that there are some signs appearing in your soul, even while God suspends his answer, that argue your prayers are not rejected by him? First, though no answer comes, yet you are still resolved to wait — you dare not say as that profane wretch did, 2 Kings 6:33: 'This evil is of the Lord; why should I wait for him any longer?' Second, you can still justify God and lay the reason and cause of his silence upon yourselves, as David did — Psalm 22:2-3: 'O my God, I cry in the daytime and you hear not, and in the night and am not silent — but you are holy.' Third, the suspension of God's answer makes you inquisitive into your own hearts — what evils are there that obstruct your prayers? So the church — Lamentations 3:8: 'He shuts out my prayer' — and how does this work? You may see in verse 40: 'Let us search and try our ways.' Well then, neither from hence may you conclude that God has no love for your soul.

And thus I have shown you how to keep your hearts in a dark and doubting season from those desperate conclusions of unbelief. God forbid any false heart should encourage itself from these things — it is our misfortune that when we give saints and sinners their proper portions, each of them is so prone to take up the other's part.

Season 11. The eleventh special season calling for this diligence to keep our hearts is when sufferings for religion come to a height. Then look to your hearts — Matthew 24:8-10: 'All these are the beginning of sorrows, and they shall deliver you up to be afflicted and shall kill you, and you shall be hated of all nations for my name's sake — and then shall many be offended.' When sufferings for religion grow hot, then blessed is he that is not offended in Christ. Troubles are then at a height: first, when a man's nearest friends

and relations forsake and leave him — Micah 7:5-6; 2 Timothy 4:16; second, when it comes to resisting unto blood — Hebrews 12:4; third, when temptations are presented in the midst of sufferings — Hebrews 11:37; fourth, when eminent persons in profession turn aside and desert the cause of Christ — 2 Timothy 2:19; fifth, when God hides his face in a suffering hour — Jeremiah 17:17; sixth, when Satan falls upon you with strong temptations to question the grounds of your sufferings or your soul's interest in Christ. Now it is hard to keep the heart from turning back and the steps from declining God's ways. The eleventh question then shall be this.

Case 11. How the heart may be kept from relapsing under the greatest sufferings for religion. If the bitterness of sufferings at any time causes your soul to distaste the way of God and take up thoughts of forsaking it, stay your heart under that temptation by propounding these eight questions solemnly to it.

Question 1. What reproach and dishonor shall I pour upon Christ and religion by deserting him at such a time as this? This will proclaim to all the world that, however much I have boasted of the promises, when it comes to the trial I dare hazard nothing upon the credit of them. And how will this open the mouths of Christ's enemies to blaspheme? O, better I had never been born than that worthy name should be blasphemed through me! Shall I furnish the triumphs of the uncircumcised? Shall I make mirth in hell? O if I did but value the name of Christ as much as many a wicked man values his own name, I would never endure to see it exposed to such contempt. Will proud dust and ashes venture death — yes, hell itself — rather than a blot upon their name? And shall I venture nothing to save the honor and reputation of Christ?

Question 2. Dare I violate my conscience to save my flesh? Who shall comfort me when conscience wounds me? What comfort is there in life, liberty, or friends when peace is taken away from the inner man? When Constantius threatened to cut off Basil's right hand if he would not subscribe something against his conscience, he held up both hands to the messenger, saying: 'He shall cut off both rather than I will do it.' Farewell all peace, joy, and comfort from that day forward. Had Zimri peace, who slew his master? Had Jezebel peace? Had Judas peace? Had Spira peace? And shall you have peace if you tread in their steps? O consider what you do!

Question 3. Is not the public interest of Christ and religion infinitely more than any private interest of my own? It is a famous passage: Terentius, captain to the Emperor Adrian, presented a petition that the Christians might have a temple by themselves to worship God apart from the Arians. The emperor tore his petition and threw it away, bidding him to ask something for himself and it should be granted. But he modestly gathered up the pieces of his petition again and told him that if he could not be heard in God's cause, he would never ask anything for himself. Yes, even Cicero, though a heathen, could say: he would not accept even immortality itself against the commonwealth. O if we had more public spirit, we should not have such cowardly spirits.

Question 4. Did Jesus Christ serve me so — when for my sake he exposed himself to far greater sufferings than can ever be before me? His sufferings were great indeed. He suffered from all hands, in all his offices, in every member — not only in his body but in his soul. Yes, the sufferings of his soul were the very soul of his sufferings — witness the bloody sweat in the garden; witness the heart-

melting and heaven-rending cry upon the cross: 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' And yet he flinched not — 'he endured the cross, despising the shame.' Alas, what are my sufferings compared with Christ's? He has drunk up all that vinegar and gall that would make my sufferings bitter. When one of the martyrs was asked why he was so merry at his death, he said: 'It is because the soul of Christ was so heavy at his death.' Did Christ bear such a burden for me with unbroken patience and constancy — and shall I shrink back for momentary and light afflictions for him?

Question 5. Is not eternal life worth the suffering of a moment's pain? 'If we suffer with him, we shall reign with him.' O how will men venture life and limb for a fading crown, swim through seas of blood to a throne — and will I venture nothing, suffer nothing, for the crown of glory that fades not away? My dog will follow my horse's heels from morning to night, take many a weary step through mire and dirt rather than leave me — though at night all he gets by it is but bones and blows. If my soul had any true greatness, any sparks of generosity in it, how would it despise the sufferings of the way for the glory at the end! How would it break down all difficulties before it, while by an eye of faith it sees the forerunner who has already entered, standing as it were upon the walls of heaven with the crown in his hand, saying: 'He that overcomes shall inherit all things.' Come on then, my soul, come on! There is eternal life laid up for those who by patient continuance in well-doing seek for glory, honor, and immortality — Romans 2:7.

Question 6. Can I so easily cast off the society and company of the saints, and give the right hand of fellowship to the wicked? How can I part with such lovely companions as these have been?

How often have I been benefited by their counsels — Ezra 10:3? How often refreshed, warmed, and quickened by their company — Ecclesiastes 4:10-11? How often have I fasted and prayed with them, taken sweet counsel with them, and gone to the house of God in company? And shall I now shake hands with them and say: 'Farewell, all you saints, forever — I shall never be among you more; come, drunkards, swearers, blasphemers, persecutors — you shall be my everlasting companions'? O, rather let my body and soul be rent asunder than that I should ever say so to the excellent of the earth, in whom is all my delight.

Question 7. Have I seriously considered the terrible scriptural threatenings against backsliders? O my heart, dare you turn back upon the very points of such threatenings as these? Jeremiah 17:5-6: 'Cursed be the man that trusts in man and makes flesh his arm, and whose heart departs from the Lord; for he shall be like the heath in the desert, and shall not see when good comes' — that is, the curse of God shall wither him root and branch. And Hebrews 10:26-27: 'If we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remains no more sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment, and fiery indignation which shall devour the adversaries.' And again, verse 38: 'If any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him' — as if he should say: 'Take him, world; take him, devil, for your own; I have no delight in him.' O who dare draw back when God has hedged up the way with such terrible threats as these!

Question 8. Can I look Christ in the face at the day of judgment, if I desert him now?

'He that is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him shall the Son of Man be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels' — Mark 8:38. Yet a little while, and you shall see the sign of the Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. The last trumpet shall sound; the dead, both small and great — even all that sleep in the dust — shall awake and come before that great white throne on which Christ shall sit in that day. Now do but imagine you saw the trembling knees and quivering lips of guilty sinners; imagine you heard the dreadful sentence of the Judge upon them: 'Go, you cursed' — and then a cry, the weeping, wailing, and wringing of hands that there shall be. Would you desert Christ now to prolong a poor, miserable life on earth? If the word of God is true, if the sayings of Christ are faithful, this shall be the portion of the apostate. It is an easy thing to stop the mouth of conscience now — but will it be easy to stop the mouth of the Judge then? Thus keep your heart, that it may not depart from the living God.

Season 12. The twelfth season of looking diligently to our hearts and keeping them with greatest care is the time of sickness — when a child of God draws near to eternity, when there are but a few sands more in the upper part of his glass to run down. Now Satan busily bestirs himself. Of him it may be said as of the natural serpent: he is never seen at his full length till dying. And now his great design — since he cannot win the soul from God — is to discourage it and make it unwilling to go to God. Though the gracious soul should then rouse itself up upon a dying bed and rejoice that the marriage day of the Lamb is now almost come; though it should say with dying Augustine: 'I despise this life to be with

Christ'; or as dying Milius, when asked whether he were willing to die — 'Let him be unwilling to die who is unwilling to go to Christ.' But O, what shrinking from death, what loathness to depart, may sometimes — indeed too frequently — be observed in the people of God! How loath are some of them to take death by the cold hand! If such a liberty were indulged to us, not to be dissolved till we dissolve ourselves, when should we say with the Apostle Paul, 'I desire to be dissolved'? Well then, the last case shall be this.

Case 12. How the people of God in times of sickness may get their hearts loose from all earthly engagements, and persuade them into a willingness to die.

And there are seven arguments which I shall urge upon the people of God at such a time as this, to make them cheerfully entertain the messengers of death and die as well as live like saints. And the first is this.

Argument 1. First, the harmlessness of death to the people of God. Though it keeps its dart, it has lost its sting. A saint — to allude to Isaiah 11:8 — may play upon the hole of the asp and put his hand into the cockatrice's den. Death is the cockatrice or asp; the grave is his hole or den. A saint need not fear to put his hand boldly into it — it has left and lost its sting in the sides of Christ. 1 Corinthians 15:55: 'O death, where is your sting?' Why are you afraid, O saint, that this sickness may be your death — as long as you know that the death of Christ is the death of death? Indeed, if you were to die in your sins — as John 8:21 — if death as a king reigned over you — Romans 5:14 — if it could feed upon you as the lion does upon its prey — Psalm 49:14 — if hell followed the pale horse as Revelation 6:8 describes — then you might well startle and shrink back from it. But when God has put away your sins

from you as far as the east is from the west — Psalm 103:12 — as long as there is no other evil left in death for you to encounter but bodily pain; as long as the Scriptures represent it to you under such harmless and easy notions as the putting off your clothes — 2 Corinthians 5:2 — and lying down to sleep upon your bed — Isaiah 57:2 — why should you be afraid? There is as much difference between death to the people of God and to others as between the unicorn's horn when it is upon the head of that fierce beast, and when it is in the apothecary's shop where it is made healthful and medicinal.

Argument 2. Your heart may be kept from shrinking back at such a time as this by considering the necessity of death in order to the full enjoyment of God.

Whether you are willing to die or not, I assure you there is no other way to obtain the full satisfaction of your soul and complete its happiness. Until the hand of death does you the kind office of drawing aside the curtain of flesh, your soul cannot see God. This animal life stands between him and you — 2 Corinthians 5:6: 'While we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord.' Your body must be refined and cast into a new mold, else that new wine of heavenly glory would break it. Paul in his highest rapture — 2 Corinthians 12:4 — when he heard things unutterable, was then but as a bystander, a looker-on, not admitted into the company as one of them; but as the angels are in our assemblies, so was Paul in that glorious assembly above — and no otherwise. And even for this he had to be as it were taken out of the body and unclothed for a little time, to have a glimpse of that glory, and then put on his clothes again. O then, who would not be willing to die for a full sight and enjoyment of God? Methinks your soul should

look and sigh like a prisoner through the grates of this mortality: 'O that I had wings like a dove, then would I fly away and be at rest!' Most men need patience to die — but a saint who understands what death admits him to should rather need patience to live. Methinks he should often look out and listen on a deathbed for his Lord's coming, and when he receives news of his approaching change should say: 'The voice of my Beloved — behold, he comes, leaping over the mountains, skipping over the hills' — Song of Solomon 2:8.

Argument 3. Another argument persuading to this willingness is the immediate succession of a more excellent and glorious life.

It is but to close your eyes, and you shall see God. Your happiness shall not be deferred till the resurrection, but as soon as the body is dead, the gracious soul is swallowed up in life — Romans 8:10-11. When once you have loosed from this shore, in a few moments your souls will be wafted over on the wings of angels to the other shore of a glorious eternity. Philippians 1:23: 'I desire to be dissolved and to be with Christ.' Did the soul and body die together, as Beryllus taught? Or did they sleep till the resurrection, as others have groundlessly imagined? If so, it would have been madness for Paul to desire a dissolution for the enjoyment of Christ, for he would have enjoyed more of Christ while his soul dwelt in its fleshly tabernacle than out of it.

There are but two ways of the soul's living known in Scripture — the life of faith and the life of vision — 2 Corinthians 5:7. Those two divide all time, both present and future, between them — 1 Corinthians 13:12. If when faith fails, sight should not immediately succeed, what should become of the unembodied soul? But blessed be God, this great heart-establishing truth is evidently revealed in

Scripture. Luke 23:43; you have Christ's promise — John 14:3: 'I will come and receive you to myself.' O what a change will a few moments make upon your condition! Rouse up, dying saint — when your soul has come a little further, when it shall stand like Abraham in his tent door, the angels of God shall soon be with it. The souls of the elect are as it were put out to the angels to nurse, and when they die, these angels carry them home again to their Father's house. If an angel was caused to fly swiftly to bring a saint the answer to his prayer — Daniel 9:21 — how much more will the angels come post from heaven to receive and transfer the praying soul itself?

Argument 4. Further, it may much conduce to your willingness to die to consider that by death God often times hides his people out of the way of all temptations and troubles upon earth. Revelation 14:13: 'Write: from henceforth, blessed are the dead that die in the Lord.' It is God's usual way, when some extraordinary calamity is coming upon the world, to set his people out of harm's way beforehand. Isaiah 57:1: 'Merciful men are taken away from the evil to come.' So Micah 7:1-2 — when such an evil time comes as is there described, that they all lie in wait for blood and every man hunts his brother with a net; before that, God by an act of favor houses his people beforehand. Do you know what evil may be in the earth which you are so loath to leave? Your God removes you for your great advantage. You are disbanded by death and called off the field; other poor saints must stand to it and endure a great fight of afflictions.

It is observed that Methuselah died the very year before the flood; Augustine a little before the sacking of Hippo; Pareus just before the taking of Heidelberg. Luther observes that all the apos-

bles died before the destruction of Jerusalem; and Luther himself before the wars broke out in Germany. It may be the Lord sees your tender heart cannot endure to see the misery or bear the temptations that are coming, and therefore will now gather you to your rest in peace. And yet will you cry, 'O spare me a little longer'?

Argument 5. If yet your heart hangs back, consider the great advantage you will have by death above all that you ever enjoyed on earth — and that, first, as to your communion with God; and second, as to your communion with saints.

First, as to your communion with God — the time of perfecting that is now come. Your soul shall shortly stand before the face of God and have the immediate beamings forth of his glory upon it. Here your soul is remote from God; the beams of his glory strike it but obliquely and feebly. But shortly it will be under the line, and there the sun shall stand still as it did in Gibeon; there shall be no cloudings or declinings of it. O how should this wrap your soul with desires of being unclothed!

Second, as for the enjoyment of saints — here indeed we have fellowship with them of the lower form, but that fellowship is so sweetened by remaining corruptions that there is no full satisfaction in it. As it is the greatest plague that can befall a hypocrite to live in a pure church, so it is the greatest vexation to the spirit of a saint to live in a corrupt and disordered church. But when death has admitted you into that glorious assembly of the spirits of just men made perfect, you shall have the desire of your hearts. Here you cannot fully close with one another — yes, you cannot fully close with your own souls. O what discords, jarrings, and censurings are here! O what perfect, blessed harmony there! In heaven each saint loves another as himself; they are altogether lovely. O

my soul, hasten away from the lions' dens, from the mountains of separation; from divided saints, to those mountains of myrrh and hills of frankincense. You are now going to your own people, as the Apostle's phrase imports — 2 Corinthians 5:8.

Argument 6. If all this will not do, consider what heavy burdens death will ease your shoulders of.

In this tabernacle we groan, being burdened. First, with bodily disorders — how true do we find the saying of Theophrastus: the soul pays a dear rent for the tenement it now lives in. But glorified bodies are clogged with no indispositions; death is the best physician — it will cure you of all diseases at once. Second, with the indwelling of sin — this makes us groan from the very bowels — Romans 7:24. But he that is dead is freed from sin — Romans 6:7. Has justification destroyed sin's damning power, and sanctification its reigning power? So glorification destroys its very being and existence. Third, we groan under temptations here — but as soon as we are out of the body, we are out of the reach of temptation. When once you have gotten into heaven, you may say: 'Now Satan, I am there where you cannot come.' For as the damned in hell are so fixed in sin and misery that their condition cannot be altered, so glorified saints are so fixed in holiness and glory that they cannot fall. Fourth, here we groan under various troubles and afflictions — but then the days of our mourning are ended. God shall wipe away all tears from our eyes. O then, let us hasten away that we may be at rest.

Argument 7. If still you linger like Lot in Sodom, then lastly, examine all the pleas and pretenses for a longer time on earth. Why are you unwilling to die?

Objection 1. 'O, I have many relations in the world — I know not what will become of them when I am gone.'

Solution 1. If you are troubled about their bodies and outward condition, why should not that word satisfy you — Jeremiah 49:11: 'Leave your fatherless children to me; I will keep them alive, and let your widows trust in me.' Luther in his last will and testament has this expression: 'Lord, you have given me wife and children; I have nothing to leave them, but I commit them to you — O Father of the fatherless and judge of widows, nourish, keep, and teach them.' Or are you troubled for their souls? You cannot convert them if you should live, and God can make your prayers and counsels live and take effect upon them when you are dead.

Objection 2. 'I would fain live to do God more service in the world.'

Solution. Well, but if he has no more service for you to do here, why should you not say with David: 'If he has no delight to use me any further, here am I; let him do what seems him good.' In this world you have no more to do, but he is calling you to a higher service and employment in heaven. And what you would do for him here, he can do by other hands.

Objection 3. 'I am not yet fully ready — I am not as a bride completely adorned for the bridegroom.'

Solution. Your justification is complete already, though your sanctification is not so; and the way to make it complete is to die, for until then it will have its defects and wants.

Objection 4. 'O, but I lack assurance — if I had that, I could die presently!'

Solution. Yes, there it sticks indeed. But then consider: a hearty willingness to leave all the world, to be freed from sin and be with God, is the nearest way to that desired assurance. No carnal person was ever willing to die upon this ground.

And thus I have finished those cases which so nearly concern the people of God in the several conditions of their life, and taught them how to keep their hearts in all. I shall next apply the whole.

USE 1. USE OF INFORMATION.

You have heard that the keeping of the heart is the great work of a Christian, in which the very soul and life of religion consists, and without which all other duties are of no value with God. Hence then I shall infer, to the consternation of hypocrites and formal professors.

First, the pains and labors which many persons have taken in religion are but lost labor and pains to no purpose — such as will never turn to account.

Many great services have been performed, many glorious works wrought by men, which yet are utterly rejected by God and shall never stand on record in order to eternal acceptance — because they took no heed to keep their hearts with God in those duties. This is the fatal rock upon which thousands of vain professors split themselves eternally. They are careful about the externals of religion but regardless of their hearts. O how many hours have some professors spent in hearing, praying, reading, conferring — and yet as to the main end of religion, they might as well have sat still and done nothing. For all this signifies nothing if the great work — I mean heart work — is all the while neglected. Tell me,

you vain professor: when did you shed a tear for the deadness, hardness, unbelief, or earthliness of your heart? Do you think such an easy religion can save you? If so, we may invert Christ's words and say, wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to life, and many there be that go in there. Hear me, you self-deluding hypocrite — you that have put off God with heartless duties, you that have acted in religion as if you were blessing an idol that could not search and discover your heart, you that have offered to God but the skin of the sacrifice and not the marrow, fat, and inward parts of it — how will you abide the coming of the Lord? How will you hold up your head before him when he shall say: 'O you dissembling, false-hearted man, how could you profess religion? With what face could you so often tell me you loved me, when you knew all the while in your own conscience that your heart was not with me?' O tremble to think what a fearful judgment it is to be given over to a heedless and careless heart — and then to have religious duties serve instead of a rattle to quiet and still the conscience!

Second, hence I also infer, for the humiliation even of upright hearts, that unless the people of God spend more time and pains about their hearts than generally and ordinarily they do, they are never likely to do God much service or be owners of much comfort in this world.

I may say of that Christian who is remiss and careless in keeping his heart, as Jacob said of Reuben: 'You shall not excel.' It grieves me to see how many Christians there are who go up and down dejected and complaining, living at a poor, low rate both of service and comfort. And how can they expect it should be other-

wise as long as they live at such a careless rate? O how little of their time is spent in the closet, in searching, humbling, and quickening their hearts!

You say your hearts are dead — and do you wonder they are so, as long as you keep them not with the fountain of life? If your bodies had been dieted as your souls have been, they would be dead too. Never expect better hearts till you take more pains with them. He that will not have the sweat must not expect the sweetness of religion.

O Christians, I fear your zeal and strength have run in the wrong channel. I fear most of us may take up the church's complaint — Song of Solomon 1:6: 'They made me the keeper of the vineyards, but my own vineyard have I not kept.' Two things have eaten up the time and strength of the professors of this generation and sadly diverted them from heart work. First, fruitless controversies started by Satan — I doubt not to this very purpose: to take us off from practical godliness, to make us puzzle our heads when we should be searching our hearts. O how little have we minded that of the Apostle — Hebrews 13:9: 'It is a good thing that the heart be established with grace, and not with meats' — that is, with disputes and controversies about meats, which have not profited those who have been occupied with them.

O how much better it is to see men live exactly than to hear them dispute subtly! These unfruitful questions — how have they wearied the churches, wasted time and spirits, and called Christians off from their main business, from looking to their own vineyard? What think you, sirs? Had it not been better if the questions ventilated among the people of God of late days had been such as these: 'How shall a man discern the special from the com-

mon operations of the Spirit? How may a soul discern its first declinings from God? How may a backsliding Christian recover his first love? How may the heart be preserved from unseasonable thoughts in duty? How may a bosom sin be discovered and mortified?' Would not this have tended more to the credit of religion and the comfort of your souls? O it is time to repent and be ashamed of this folly! When I read what Suarez, a papist who wrote many tomes of disputations, said — that he prized the time he set apart for the searching and examining of his heart before God above all the time he ever spent in other studies — I am ashamed to find professors of this age yet insensible of their folly. Shall the conscience of a Suarez feel a relenting pang for strength and time so ill employed, and shall not yours? This is what your ministers long since warned you of. Your spiritual nurses were afraid of spiritual rickets when they saw your heads only growing and your hearts withering. O when will God beat our swords into plowshares — I mean our disputes and contentions into practical godliness! Second, another cause of neglecting our hearts has been earthly encumbrances: the heads and hearts of many have been filled with such a crowd and noise of worldly business that they have sadly and sensibly declined and withered in their zeal, love, and delight in God, and in their heavenly, serious, and profitable way of conversing with men.

O how this wilderness has entangled us! Our discourses and conferences — nay, our very prayers and duties — have a tang of it. We have had so much work without doors that we have been able to do but little within. It was the sad complaint of a holy man: 'O, it is sad to think how many precious opportunities I have lost, how many sweet motions and admonitions of the Spirit I have passed

over unfruitfully, and made the Lord to speak in vain. In the secret influences of his Spirit, the Lord has called upon me, but my worldly thoughts still lodged within me, and there was no place in my heart for such calls of God.' Surely there is a way of enjoying God even in our worldly employments — God would never have put us upon them to our loss. Enoch walked with God and begat sons and daughters — Genesis 5:19. He walked with God but did not retire and separate himself from the things of this life. And the angels that are employed by Christ in the things of this world — for the spirit of the living creatures is in the wheels — are finite creatures and cannot be in two places at once, yet they lose nothing of the beatific vision during all their service, for Matthew 18:10 says their angels, even while employed for those they serve, behold the face of the Father who is in heaven. We need not lose our visions by our employments, if the fault were not our own. Alas, that Christians who stand at the door of eternity and have more work upon their hands than this poor moment of time is sufficient for, should yet be filling both heads and hearts with trifles.

Third, hence also I infer, for the awakening of all, that if the keeping of the heart is the great work of a Christian, then there are but few real Christians in the world.

Indeed, if every one who has learned the dialect of Christianity and can talk like a saint; if every one who has gifts and abilities, and by the common assisting presence of the Spirit can preach, pray, or discourse like a Christian; in a word, if such as associate themselves with the people of God and delight in ordinances might pass for Christians — then the number is great.

But alas, to what a small number they will shrink if you judge them by this rule! How few are there who make conscience of keeping their hearts, watching their thoughts, judging their ends. O there are but few closet-men among professors! It is far easier for men to be reconciled to any other duties in religion than to these. The profane part of the world will not so much as touch with the outside of religious duties, much less this. And as for the hypocrite — though he is polished and careful about those externals — you can never persuade him to this inward work, this difficult work, this work for which there is no inducement in human applause, this work that would quickly discover what the hypocrite cares not to know. So that by a general consent, this heart work is left to the hands of a few secret ones, and I tremble to think in how few hands it is.

USE 2. USE FOR EXHORTATION.

If the keeping of the heart is so important a business, if such choice advantages accrue to you thereby, if so many dear and precious interests are wrapped up in it — then let me call upon the people of God everywhere to fall close to this work.

O study your hearts, watch your hearts, keep your hearts! Away with fruitless controversies and idle questions, away with empty names and vain shows, away with unprofitable discourse and bold censures of others. Turn in upon yourselves, get into your closets, and now resolve to dwell there. You have been strangers to this work too long; you have kept others' vineyards too long; you have trifled about the borders of religion too long; this world has detained you from your great work too long. Will you now resolve to look better to your hearts? Will you hasten and come out of the

crowds of business and clamors of the world and retire yourselves more than you have done? O that this day you would resolve upon it!

Reader, methinks I should prevail with you — all that I beg is this: that you would step aside a little more often to talk with God and your own heart; that you would not suffer every trifle to divert you; that you would keep a more true and faithful account of your thoughts and affections; that you would but seriously demand of your own heart, at least every evening: 'O my heart, where have you been today? Where have you made your forays today?' If all that has been said by way of inducement is not enough, I have yet more motives to offer you — and the first is this.

Motive 1. The studying, observing, and diligent keeping of your own hearts will marvelously help your understanding in the deep mysteries of religion.

An honest, well-experienced heart is a singular help to a weak head. Such a heart will serve you in place of a commentary upon a great part of the Scriptures. By this means you shall far better understand the things of God than learned rabbis and profound doctors — if graceless and inexperienced — ever did. You shall not only have a clearer but a sweeter perception and taste of them. A man may discourse orthodoxly and profoundly of the nature and effects of faith, the troubles and comforts of conscience, the sweetness of communion with God — and yet never have felt the efficacy and sweet impressions of these things upon his own spirit. But O, how dark and dry are these notions compared with his upon whose heart they have been acted! When such a man reads David's Psalms or Paul's Epistles, there he finds his own objections made and answered. O, says he, 'these holy men speak my very heart —

their doubts were mine, their troubles mine, and their experiences mine.' I remember Chrysostom, speaking to his people of Antioch about some choice experiences, used this expression: 'Those who are initiated know what I say' — experience is the best schoolmaster. O then, study your hearts, keep your hearts.

Motive 2. The study and observation of your own hearts will antidote you against the dangerous and infecting errors of the times and places you live in.

For what do you think is the reason that so many professors in England have departed from the faith, giving heed to fables; that so many thousands have been led away by the error of the wicked; that Jesuits and Quakers who have sown corrupt doctrine have had such plentiful harvests among us? But because they met with a company of empty, notional professors who never knew what belongs to practical godliness and the study of their own hearts.

If professors did but give diligence to study, search, and watch their own hearts, they would have that steadfastness of their own that Peter speaks of — 2 Peter 3:17 — and this would ballast and settle them — Hebrews 13:9. Suppose a subtle papist should talk to such a one of the dignity and merit of good works — could he ever work the persuasion of it into that heart which is conscious to itself of so much darkness, deadness, distraction, and unbelief attending its very best duties? It is a good rule: there is no disputing against taste. What a man has felt and tasted, one cannot beat him off from by argument.

Motive 3. Your care and diligence in keeping your hearts will prove one of the best evidences of your sincerity.

I know no external act of religion that distinguishes the sound from the unsound professor. It is wonderful to consider how far hypocrites go in all external duties — how plausibly they can order the outward man, hiding all their indecencies from the observation of the world.

But then they take no heed to their hearts; they are not in secret what they appear to be in public. And before this trial no hypocrite can stand. It is granted they may in a fit, under a pang upon a deathbed, cry out of the wickedness of their hearts — but alas, there is no heed to be taken to these extorted complaints. In our law no credit is given to the testimony of one upon the rack, because the extremity of the torture may make him say anything to be eased. But if self-jealousy, care, and watchfulness are the daily workings and frames of your heart, this strongly argues its sincerity. For what but the sense of a divine eye, what but the real hatred of sin as sin, could put you upon those secret duties which lie out of the observation of all creatures?

If then it is a desirable thing in your eyes to have a fair testimony of your integrity, and to know of a truth that you fear God — then study your heart, watch your heart, keep your heart.

Motive 4. How fruitful, sweet, and comfortable would all ordinances and duties be to us if our hearts were better kept?

O what precious communion you might have with God every time you approach him, if your hearts were but in frame! You might then say with David — Psalm 104:34 — 'My meditation of him shall be sweet.' What loses all our comforts in ordinances and more secret duties is the indisposedness of the heart. A Christian whose heart is in a good frame gets the start of all others who come

with him into duty. They are tugging hard to get their hearts up to God, now trying this argument upon them and then that, to quicken and affect them — and sometimes going away as bad as they came. Sometimes the duty is almost ended before their hearts begin to stir, to feel any warmth, quickening, or power from it. But all this while the prepared heart is at its work. This is the one who ordinarily gets the first sight of Christ in a sermon, the first seal from Christ in a sacrament, the first kiss from Christ in secret prayer. I tell you — and I tell you but what I have felt — that prayers and sermons would appear to you quite different things than they do, did you but bring better ordered hearts to them. You would not go away dejected and drooping, saying, 'O this has been a lost day, a lost duty to me' — if you had not lost your hearts, it might not be so. If then the comfort of ordinances is sweet, look to your hearts, keep your hearts.

Motive 5. Acquaintance with your own hearts would be a fountain of matter to you in prayer.

A man who is diligent in heart work, and knows the state of his own soul, will have a fountain fullness of matter to supply him richly in all his addresses to God. His tongue shall not falter and make pauses for want of matter. Psalm 45:1: 'My heart is overflowing with a good matter' — or as one renders the original: 'my heart is boiling up good matter, like a living spring that is still bubbling up fresh water; and then my tongue is as the pen of a ready writer.' Others must pump their memories, rack their inventions, and are often at a loss when they have done all. But if you have kept and faithfully studied your own heart, it will be with you — as Job speaks in another case — like bottles full of new wine that want vent, which are ready to burst. As holy matter flows plentifully, so

more feelingly and sweetly from such a heart. When a heart-experienced Christian is mourning before God over some special heart corruption, wrestling with God for the supply of some special inward want, he speaks not as other men do who have learned to pray by rote. Their confessions and petitions are squeezed out; his drop freely like pure honey from the comb. It is a happiness then to be with or near such a Christian. I remember Bernard, having given rules to prepare the heart for prayer, concluding them thus: 'And when you are in this frame, remember me.'

Motive 6. By this, the decayed power of religion will be recovered again among professors — which is the most desirable sight in this world.

O that I might live to see that day! When professors shall not walk in a vain show; when they shall please themselves no more with a name to live while being spiritually dead; when they shall be no more — as many of them now are — a company of frothy, vain, and unserious persons; but the majestic beams of holiness shining from their heavenly and serious conversations shall awe the world and command reverence from all who are about them; when they shall warm the hearts of those who come near them, so that men shall say: 'God is in these men of a truth.'

Well, such a time may again be expected according to that promise — Isaiah 60:21: 'The people shall be all righteous.' But until we fall closer to this great work of keeping our hearts, I am out of hope to see those blessed days. I cannot expect better times until God gives better hearts. Does it not grieve you to see what a scorn religion is made in the world, what objects of contempt the professors of it are made?

Professors, would you recover your credit? Would you again obtain an honorable testimony in the consciences of your very enemies? Then keep your hearts, watch your hearts. It is the looseness, frothiness, and earthliness of your hearts that has made your lives so disorderly, and this has brought you under the contempt of the world. You first lost your sight of God and communion with him, then your heavenly and serious deportment among men, and by that your interest in their consciences. O then, for the credit of religion, for the honor of your profession, keep your hearts.

Motive 7. By diligence in keeping our hearts, we should prevent and remove the fatal scandals and stumbling blocks out of the way of the world.

'Woe to the world,' says Christ, 'because of offenses' — Matthew 18:7. Does not shame cover your faces? Do not your hearts bleed within you to hear of the scandalous miscarriages of many loose professors? Could you not, like Shem and Japheth, go backward with a garment to cover the shame of many professors? How is that worthy name blasphemed — James 2:7; 2 Samuel 12:13-14! The hearts of the righteous are saddened — Psalm 25:3; Ezekiel 36:20. By this the world is fearfully prejudiced against Christ and religion, the bonds of death made fast upon their souls, those who had a general love and liking toward the ways of God startled and quite driven back. And thus soul blood is shed — woe to the world.

Yes, how are the consciences of fallen professors plunged and overwhelmed in the depths of trouble! God inwardly excommunicating their souls from all comfortable fellowship with himself and the joys of his salvation. Infinite are the mischiefs that come by the scandalous lives of professors.

And what is the true cause and reason of all this, but the neglecting of their hearts? Were our hearts better kept, all this would be prevented. Had David kept his heart, he had not broken his bones. A neglected, careless heart must of necessity produce a disorderly, scandalous life. I thank God for the faithfulness of a reverend brother in showing professors their manifold miscarriages, and from my heart I wish that when their wounds have been thoroughly searched by that probe, God would be pleased to heal them by this plaster. O professors, if ever you will keep religion sweet, if ever you hope to recover the credit of it in the world — keep your hearts! Either keep your hearts or lose your credit; keep your hearts or lose your comforts; keep your hearts, lest you shed soul blood. What words can express the deep concerns, the wonderful consequences of this work! Everything puts a necessity, a solemnity, a beauty upon it.

Motive 8. A heart well kept will fit you for any condition God casts you into, or any service he has to use you in.

He that has learned how to keep his heart lowly is fit for prosperity, and he that knows how to apply the Scripture promises and supports to his heart is fit to pass through any adversity. He that can deny the pride and selfishness of his heart is fit to be employed in any service for God. Such a man was Paul — he did not only spend his time in preaching to others, in keeping others' vineyards, but he looked to himself and kept his own vineyard. 1 Corinthians 9:27: 'Lest when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway.' And what an eminent instrument he was for God! He could turn his hand to any work; he could dexterously manage both an adverse and a prosperous condition. 'I know both how to abound and how to suffer want.' Let the people deify him — it

moves him not, unless to indignation. Let them stone him — he can bear it. 'If a man purges himself from these,' says he — 2 Timothy 2:21 — 'he shall be a vessel unto honor, sanctified and fit for the master's use, and prepared unto every good work.'

First the heart must be purged, and then it is prepared for any service of God. When the heart of Isaiah was purified — which was the thing signified by the touching of his lips with a coal from the altar — Isaiah 6:7 — then he was fit for God's work: 'Here am I, send me' — verse 8. A man who has not learned to keep his heart — put him upon any service for God, and if it is attended with honor, it shall swell up and overtop his spirit; if with suffering, it will unman and sink him.

Jesus Christ had an instrumental fitness for his Father's work above all the servants God ever employed. He was zealous in public work for God — so zealous that sometimes he forgot to eat bread, yes, so that his friends thought he had been beside himself. But yet he so carried on his public work as not to forget his own private communion with God. Therefore you read in Matthew 14:23 that when he had been laboring all day, yet after that he went up to a mountain alone to pray. O let the keepers of the vineyards look to their own vineyard! We shall never be so instrumental to the good of others as when we are most diligent about our own souls.

Motive 9. If the people of God would more diligently keep their hearts, how exceedingly would the communion of saints thereby be sweetened!

How goodly then would be your tents, O Jacob, and your tabernacles, O Israel! Then, as it is prophesied of the Jews — Zechariah 8:23 — men would say, 'We will go with you, for we have heard that God is among you.' It is the fellowship your souls have with the Father and with the Son that draws out the desires of others after fellowship with you — 1 John 1:3. I tell you: if saints would be persuaded to take more pains and spend more time about their hearts, there would quickly be such a divine luster upon the face of their conversations that men would count it no small privilege to be with or near them.

It is the pride, passion, and earthliness of our hearts that has spoiled Christian fellowship. Why is it that when Christians meet they are often jarring and contending? Only their unmortified passions. Why are there uncharitable censures of their brethren? Only from self-ignorance. Why are they so rigid and unmerciful toward those who are fallen? Because they do not consider themselves — as the Apostle speaks — Galatians 6:1. Why is their discourse so frothy and unprofitable when they meet? Is it not from the earthliness and vanity of their hearts?

My brethren, these are the things that have spoiled Christian fellowship and made it become a dry and sapless thing — so that many Christians are even weary of it and are ready to say with the prophet — Jeremiah 9:2: 'O that I had a cottage in the wilderness, that I might leave my people and go from them!' And with David — Psalm 120:6: 'My soul has long dwelt with those that hate peace.' This has made them long for the grave, that they might go from those who are not their own people to those who are their own people, as the original of that text imports — 2 Corinthians 5:8.

But now, if professors would study their own hearts more, watch and keep them better, all this would be prevented, and the beauty and glory of communion again restored. They would divide no more, contend no more, censure rashly no more. When their hearts are in tune, their tongues will not jar. How charitable, pitiful, and tender will they be toward one another, when every one is daily humbled under the evil of his own heart. Lord, hasten those much-desired days, and bless these counsels in order to them.

Motive 10. Lastly, by this the comforts of the Spirit and precious influences of all ordinances would be fixed, and much longer preserved in your souls than now they are.

Ah, what would I give that my soul might be preserved in that frame I sometimes find it in after an ordinance! One of the fathers sweetly says: 'Sometimes, O Lord, you admit me into the most inward, unusual, and sweet delights — to I know not what sweetness — which, were it perfected in me, I know not what it would be; or rather, what it would not be.' But alas, the heart grows careless again and quickly returns — like water removed from the fire — to its native coldness. Could you but keep those impressions in your hearts forever, what Christians would you be! What lives would you live! And how is it that these things remain no longer with us? Doubtless it is because we suffer our hearts to take cold again. We should be as careful after an ordinance or duty to prevent this as one who comes out of a hot bath is careful not to go out into the chill air. We have our hot and cold fits by turns, and what is the reason but our unskilfulness and carelessness in keeping the heart.

It is a great pity that the ordinances of God, as to their quickening and comforting effects, should be like those human ordinances the Apostle speaks of, that perish in the using. O then, let me say to

you as Job 15:11 says: 'Do the consolations of God seem small to you?' Look over these ten special benefits; weigh them in a just balance. Are they small matters? Is it a small matter to have your weak understanding assisted, your endangered soul antidoted, your sincerity cleared, your communion with God sweetened, your sails filled in prayer? Is it a small thing to have the decayed power of godliness recovered, all fatal scandals removed, an instrumental fitness to serve Christ obtained, the communion of saints restored to its primitive glory, and the influences of ordinances abiding in the souls of saints? If these are no common blessings, no small benefits, then surely it is a great duty to keep the heart with all diligence.

USE 3. USE FOR DIRECTION.

The next use shall be for direction to some special means for the keeping of the heart. And here, besides what has been hinted in the explication of the duty — to which I refer the reader — and all those directions throughout, appropriated to particular cases and seasons, I shall further add several other general means of excellent use to this end. And the first is this.

Means 1. Would you keep your hearts as has been urged? Then furnish your hearts richly with the word of God, which is their best preservative against sin.

Keep the word, and the word will keep you. As the first receiving of the word regenerated your hearts, so the keeping of the word within you will preserve your hearts. Colossians 3:16: 'Let the word of Christ dwell richly in you' — let it dwell, not merely tarry with you for a night; and let it dwell richly, or plentifully, in all that is of

it — its commands, promises, threats — and in all that is of you — your understandings, memories, consciences, affections. And then it will preserve your hearts. Psalm 119:11: 'Your word have I hid in my heart, that I might not sin against you.' It is the slipperiness of our hearts in reference to the word that causes so many slips in our lives. Conscience cannot be urged or awed with forgotten truths. But keep it in the heart and it will keep both heart and life upright. Psalm 37:31: 'The law of his God is in his heart; none of his steps shall slide.' Or if he does slide, the word will recover the straying heart again. Matthew 26:75: 'Then Peter remembered the words of Jesus — and wept bitterly.' We never lose our hearts until they have first lost the efficacious and powerful impressions of the word.

Means 2. Call your hearts frequently to account, if ever you mean to keep them with God.

Those who put a stock into the hands of unfaithful or suspicious servants will be sure to make short reckonings with them. The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked — Jeremiah 17:9. O it is as necessary as it is sweet, that we and our inner thoughts confer together every night — Psalm 16:7. We should call our hearts to account every evening and say: 'O my heart, where have you been today? Where have your thoughts wandered today? What account can you give of them? O naughty heart, vain heart — could you not abide by the fountain of delights? Is there better entertainment with the creature than with God?' The more often the heart meets with rebukes and checks for wandering, the less it will wander. If every vain thought were retracted with a sigh, every excursion of the heart from God met with

a severe check, it would not dare so boldly and frequently to digress and step aside. Those actions which are committed with reluctance are not committed with frequency.

Means 3. He that will keep his heart must take heed of plunging himself into such a multiplicity of earthly business as he cannot manage without neglecting his main business.

It cannot be imagined that he should keep his heart with God who has lost himself in a wood of earthly business. Take heed you do not pinch your souls by gratifying the immoderate desires of your flesh. I wish many Christians could truly say what a heathen once said: 'I do not give, but only lend myself to my business.' It is said that Germanicus reigned in the Romans' hearts; Tiberius only in their provinces. Though the world be in your hands, let it not jostle Christ out of your hearts.

Take heed, Christian, lest your shop steal away your heart from your closet. God never intended earthly employments as a stop, but rather as a step, to heavenly ones. O let not Aristippus the heathen arise in judgment against you, who said he would rather neglect his means than his mind, his farm than his soul. If your ship is overladen, you must cast some overboard. More business than you can well manage is like more meat than you can well digest — it will quickly make a sickly soul.

Means 4. He that means to keep his heart must carefully observe its first declinings from God, and stop it there.

He that will keep his house in good repair must stop every crack as soon as discovered, and he that will keep his heart must not let a vain thought be long neglected. The serpent of heart apostasy is best killed in the egg of a small remission. O if many poor

decayed Christians had looked to their hearts in time, they had never come to that sad pass they now are. We may say of heart neglects as the Apostle does of vain babblings — that they increase to more and more ungodliness. No one becomes most vile all at once. Little sins neglected will quickly become great and masterless. The greatest crocodile once lay in an egg; the greatest oak was once but an acorn. The firing of a small train of powder may blow up all by leading to a greater quantity. Men little think what a proud, vain, wanton, or worldly thought may grow to. Behold how great a matter a little fire kindles!

Means 5. Take heed of losing the liveliness and sweetness of your communion with God, lest thereby your hearts be loosed off from God.

The heart is a hungry and restless thing — it will have something to feed upon. If it enjoys nothing from God, it will hunt for something among the creatures, and there it often loses itself as well as its end. There is nothing that more engages the heart to a constancy and evenness in walking with God than the sweetness it tastes therein. As the Gauls, when they once tasted the sweet wine of Italy, could never be satisfied until they had conquered the country where it grew.

It is true, conscience of duty may keep the heart from neglecting it, but when there is no higher motive, it drives on heavily and is filled with distractions. That which we delight in, we are never weary of — as is evident in the motions of the heart toward earthly things, where the wheels being oiled with delight run nimbly and have often need of braking. The motions of the heart upward would be as free if its delight in heavenly things were as great.

Means 6. Habituate your heart to spiritual meditations, if you would have it freed from those burdensome diversions.

By this means you will gain a facility and dexterity in heart work. It is a pity those smaller portions of our time between solemn duties should lie upon our hands and be rendered useless to us. O learn to save your thoughts and be good stewards of them. To this purpose a fine author speaks: 'These parentheses which happen to come between the more solemn passages — whether business or recreations — of human life, are wont to be lost by most men for want of a due value for them, and even by good men for want of skill to preserve them; for though they do not properly despise them, yet they neglect or lose them for want of knowing how to rescue them or what to do with them. But although grains of sand and ashes are of a despicable smallness and liable to be scattered and blown away, yet the skillful artificer by a vehement fire brings numbers of these to afford him that noble substance, glass — by whose help we may both see ourselves and our blemishes lively represented (as in looking glasses), and discern celestial objects (as with telescopes), and with the sun's beams kindle disposed materials (as with burning glasses). So when these little fragments or parcels of time, which if not carefully looked to would be dissipated and lost, come to be managed by a skillful contemplator and improved by the celestial fire of devotion, they may be so ordered as to afford us both looking glasses to dress our souls by, and perspectives to discover heavenly wonders, and incentives to inflame our hearts with zeal.'

Something of that nature I have in hand for a public benefit, if God give life to finish and opportunity to produce it. Certainly this is a great advantage for the keeping of the heart with God.

USE 4. USE FOR CONSOLATION.

I shall now close the whole with a word or two of consolation to all diligent and serious Christians who faithfully and closely ply heart work — who are groaning and weeping in secret over the hardness, pride, earthliness, and vanity of their hearts; who are fearing and trembling over the experienced deceitfulness and falseness of them — while other vain professors' eyes are abroad, their time and strength eaten up by fruitless disputes and earthly employments, or at best by a cold and formal performance of some heartless and empty duties. Poor Christian, I have three things to offer you in order to your support and comfort, and doubtless either of them alone, mixed with faith, is sufficient to comfort you over all the trouble you have with your own heart.

Comfort 1. This argues your heart to be upright and honest, whatever your other gifts and abilities are.

It is uprightness of heart that will comfort you upon a deathbed. 2 Kings 20:2-3: 'Then he turned his face to the wall and prayed to the Lord, saying: Remember now, O Lord, how I have walked before you in truth and with a perfect heart.'

I am really of his mind who said: 'Might I have my wish, I would prefer the most despicable and sordid work of a rustic Christian before all the victories and triumphs of Alexander or Caesar.' Yes, let me add — before all the elaborated duties and excellent gifts of vain professors; before the tongues of men and angels. It will signify more to my comfort to spend one solitary hour in mourning before the Lord over heart corruption than many

hours in a seemingly zealous but really dead performance of common duties with the greatest enlargements and richest embellishments of parts and gifts.

By this very thing Christ distinguishes the formal from the serious Christian — Matthew 6:5. The one is for the street and synagogue, for the observation and applause of men; but the other is a closet man: he drives on a home trade, a heart trade. Never be troubled then for the want of those things that a man may have and be eternally damned, but rather bless God for that which none but the favorites and darlings of heaven have. Many a one is now in hell who had a better head than yours, and many a one now in heaven who complained of as bad a heart as yours.

Comfort 2. Know further for your comfort that God would never leave you under so many heart troubles and burdens if he did not intend your real benefit thereby.

You are often crying out: 'Lord, why is it thus? Why do I go mourning all the day, having sorrow in my heart? Thus long I have been exercised with hardness of heart, and to this day have not obtained a broken heart. Many years have I been praying and striving against vain thoughts, yet am still infested and perplexed with them. O when shall I get a better heart! I have been in travail and brought forth but wind; I have obtained no deliverance, neither have the corruptions of my heart fallen. I have brought this heart many times to prayers, sermons, sacraments, expecting and hoping for a cure from them — and still my sore runs and ceases not.'

Pensive soul, let this comfort you: your God designs your benefit, even by these occasions of your sad complaints. First, hereby he would let you see what your heart by nature is and was, and

therein take notice how much you are indebted to free grace. He leaves you under these exercises of spirit that you may lie as with your face upon the ground, marveling that ever the Lord of glory should take such a vile creature into his bosom. Your base heart, if it is good for nothing else, yet serves to commend and set off the unsearchable riches of free grace. Second, this serves to beat you off continually from resting — yes, or but glancing — upon your own righteousness or excellency. The corruption of your heart, working in all your duties, makes you sensibly feel that the bed is too short and the covering too narrow. Were it not for those reflections you have after duties upon the dullness and distractions of your heart in them, how apt would you be to fall in love with and admire your own performances and enlargements? For if notwithstanding these you have much to do with the pride of your heart, how much more if such humbling and self-abasing considerations were wanting! And lastly, this tends to make you more compassionate and tender toward others. Perhaps you would have little pity for the distresses and soul troubles of others if you had less experience of your own.

Comfort 3. To conclude: God will shortly put a blessed end to all these troubles, cares, and watchings.

The time is coming when your heart shall be as you would have it; when you shall be discharged of these cares, fears, and sorrows and never cry out 'O my hard, my proud, my vain, my earthly heart!' any more. When all darkness shall be banished from your understanding, and you shall clearly discover all truths in God, that crystal ocean of truth. When all vanity shall be purged perfectly out of your thoughts, and they shall be everlastingly, ravishingly, and delightfully entertained and exercised upon that

supreme goodness and infinite excellency of God, from which they shall never start away any more like a broken bow. And as for your pride, passion, earthliness, and all the other matters of your complaint and trouble — it shall be said of them as it was said of the Egyptians to Israel: 'Stand still, and see the salvation of God.' These corruptions you see today, you shall see them no more forever. When you shall lay down your weapons of prayers, tears, and groans, and put on the armor of light — not to fight, but to triumph in.

Lord, when shall this blessed day come? How long? How long, Holy and True? My soul waits for you. Come, my Beloved, and be like a young deer upon the mountains of separation. Amen.

Finis.

THANKS FOR READING



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