

# The Godly Man's Picture

Thomas Watson



THE GODLY MANS PICTURE

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*Thomas Watson*



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## ABOUT THIS BOOK



A masterwork of Puritan practical theology, this treatise paints a vivid portrait of **authentic Christian character** through twenty-four defining marks of godliness — from knowledge, faith, and love to humility, prayer, and spiritual warfare. With penetrating insight and rich Scripture exposition, Watson distinguishes **true piety from mere outward profession**, offering both a mirror for self-examination and a compelling vision of the transformed life. The work concludes with **powerful consolations** for the believer, making it an enduring guide for anyone seeking genuine spiritual growth.



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# CONTENTS



Title Page .....	6
To the Reader .....	7
The Character of a Godly Man, Drawn with a Scriptur... ..	9
Chapter 1 .....	10
Chapter 2 .....	13
Chapter 3 .....	16
Chapter 4 .....	21
Section 1 .....	22
Section 2 .....	32
Section 3 .....	35
Section 4 .....	38
Section 5 .....	42
Section 6 .....	45
Section 7 .....	53
Section 8 .....	65
Section 9 .....	71
Section 10 .....	80
Section 11 .....	91
Section 12 .....	102
Section 13 .....	112
Section 14 .....	119

Section 15 .....	129
Section 16 .....	136
Section 17 .....	147
Section 18 .....	159
Section 19 .....	167
Section 20 .....	176
Section 21 .....	185
Section 22 .....	192
Section 23 .....	201
Section 24 .....	211
Chapter 5 .....	216
Chapter 6 .....	218
Chapter 7 .....	233
Chapter 8 .....	236
Chapter 9 .....	243
Chapter 10 .....	248
Chapter 11 .....	250
Chapter 12 .....	268

## TITLE PAGE



**T**he Godly Man's Picture, Drawn with a Scripture-Pencil.  
Some Characteristic Notes of a Man that shall go to

Heaven.

By Thomas Watson, Minister of the Gospel.

But know that the Lord has set apart him that is godly for  
Himself, Psalm 4:3.

London, Printed for Thomas Parkhurst at the Three Crowns,  
over against the Great Conduit, at the lower end of Cheapside,  
1666.

## TO THE READER



**C**hristian Reader,

The soul is precious, and salvation is glorious — making preparations for the next life is the highest act of wisdom. That there is an inheritance in light is beyond all dispute, and Scripture most forcefully insists that we must be suited and fitted for it. If anyone asks, who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord? The answer is, he who has clean hands and a pure heart. Describing such a person is the purpose of this work. Here you will find the godly man's portrait, drawn out in full. What a rare thing godliness is! It is not hollow or empty, but solid — the kind of thing that fills the heart and spirit completely. Godliness consists in an exact harmony between holy beliefs and holy living. May all who come across this book fall so in love with piety that they embrace it wholeheartedly. Godliness is so sublime that even an angel taking up a pen could not fully capture its perfect radiance and splendor. Godliness is our wisdom. Job 28:28: The fear of the Lord, that is wisdom. Cleverness without piety is profound madness. Godliness is like a spiritual queen — whoever marries her is sure to receive a great inheritance with her. 1 Timothy 4:8: Godliness has the promise of the life that now is, and that which is to come. Godliness gives assurance — even holy triumph in God — and how sweet that

is! Latimer once said: Sometimes when I sit alone and have a settled assurance about the state of my soul, and know that God is my God, I can laugh at all troubles, and nothing can discourage me. Godliness places a man in heaven before his time. Christian, reach for piety — it is a worthy ambition. Study the saints' characteristics described here, and do not stop until you have them stamped upon your own soul. This is the great business that should consume your time and thoughts. Other theories and clever ideas count for nothing with the soul. They are like wafers with fine designs pressed on them — beautiful to the eye, but thin and offering little nourishment. But I will not keep you any longer at the door; had I expanded on any single characteristic of the godly man, it would have required a full volume, but since I intend to cover many, I have pulled in my sails and given you only a brief summary. If this work — however rough — proves useful to souls, I have my desire; and that God of Grace would bring this about effectively shall be the prayer of him who is

Yours in all Christian affection, Thomas Watson. February 26, 1666.

THE CHARACTER OF A GODLY MAN,  
DRAWN WITH A SCRIPTURE-PENCIL



**P** salm 32:6. For this shall everyone that is godly pray unto  
You.

## CHAPTER 1



**A**t the opening of this psalm, David shows us where true happiness is found — not in beauty, honor, or riches (the world's trinity), but in the forgiveness of sin. Verse 1: Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven. The Hebrew word for forgive means to carry out of sight, which fits perfectly with Jeremiah 50:20: In those days (says the Lord) the sins of Judah shall be sought for, and they shall not be found. This is an incomprehensible blessing, and one that lays the foundation for all other mercies. I will touch on it briefly and set down five key assertions about it.

1. Forgiveness of sin is an act of God's free grace. The Greek word for forgive points to the source of pardon — it does not arise from anything within us, but is the pure result of free grace. Isaiah 43:25: I, even I am He, that blots out your transgressions for My own sake. When a creditor forgives a debtor, he does it freely. Pardon of sin is a fine thread spun out of the depths of free grace. Paul cries out, I obtained mercy, 1 Timothy 1:13. He was showered with mercy — whoever is pardoned is covered all over with it. When the Lord pardons a sinner, He does not pay a debt but gives a gift.

2. God, in forgiving sin, removes both the guilt and the penalty. Guilt cries out for justice — no sooner had Adam eaten the apple than he saw the flaming sword and heard the curse. But in forgiveness, God shows the sinner grace. He says, in effect: Though you have fallen into the hands of my justice and deserve to die, I will acquit you, and whatever has been charged against you will be discharged.

3. Forgiveness of sin comes through the blood of Christ. Free grace is the driving cause; Christ's blood is the meritorious cause. Hebrews 9:22: Without shedding of blood there is no remission. Justice must be satisfied — either in the sinner or in the substitute. Every pardon is bought at the price of blood.

4. Before sin is forgiven, it must be repented of. This is why repentance and forgiveness are always linked together. Luke 24:47: That repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name. Not that repentance earns forgiveness in a Roman Catholic sense — Christ's blood must wash even our tears — but repentance is a qualification, not a cause. The person who is genuinely sorry for sin will value pardoning mercy all the more. When the soul is filled with nothing but dark clouds of sorrow, and then God brings a pardon — setting up a rainbow in the cloud to tell the sinner that the flood of wrath will not overwhelm him — what joy fills the heart at the sight of that rainbow! The soul that was soaked in tears now melts in love toward God. Luke 7:38, 47.

5. Once God has forgiven sin, He will never bring it up again, Jeremiah 31:34. The Lord issues a full pardon and will not throw our past offenses back in our faces or use a cancelled debt against us. Micah 7:19: He will cast our sins into the depths of the sea. Sin

will not be thrown in like a cork that bobs back to the surface, but like lead that sinks to the bottom. How eagerly we should all seek this covenant blessing!

1. How tragic it is to lack forgiveness! It must go badly for the criminal who has not received his pardon — all of God's curses stand in full force against the unforgiven sinner, and even his blessings are cursed. Malachi 2:2. Caesar once marveled at one of his soldiers who was cheerful while deeply in debt. Can a sinner be cheerful when he is heir to all of God's curses, and does not know how soon he may find himself among the damned?

2. How sweet it is to have forgiveness! First, the pardoned soul is out of reach of hell. Romans 8:33. Satan may accuse, but Christ will produce the discharge. Second, the pardoned soul can approach God in prayer with confidence. Guilt clips the wings of prayer so it cannot fly to the throne of grace — but forgiveness breeds confidence. The one who has his pardon can look his King in the face with joy.

David himself had received this great mercy of pardon, as is clear from verse 5: You forgave me. Because he had found God to be a God of pardons, he encourages others to seek God, in the words of this text: For this shall everyone that is godly pray unto You.

## CHAPTER 2



**T**he first question to address is: what is godliness?

In general terms, godliness is the sacred work of God in a person, by which someone who was once worldly is made spiritual. When godliness is worked in a person, he does not receive an entirely new soul — but he receives another spirit, as Numbers 14:24 says. The faculties are not new, but their qualities are; the strings are the same, but the tune has been improved. Concerning godliness, I will lay down seven key principles.

1. Godliness is a real thing — it is not mere appearance, but substance. Godliness is not the feverish fantasy of a sick mind; a Christian is not an enthusiast whose religion is built entirely on feelings and imagination. Godliness has truth as its foundation; it is called the way of truth in Psalm 119:30. Godliness is a ray of light that shines from God — if God is true, then godliness is true.

2. Godliness is an inward thing — it lives chiefly in the heart. Romans 2:29: Circumcision is that of the heart. The dew lies on the leaf, but the sap is hidden in the root. The moralist's religion is all in the leaves — it consists only in outward actions — but godli-

ness is a holy sap rooted in the soul. Psalm 51:6: In the hidden part, You shall make me know wisdom. The Chaldean translation renders it: In the secret place of the heart.

3. Godliness is a supernatural thing — by nature we inherit nothing but evil. Romans 7:5: When we were in the flesh, the sinful passions worked in our bodies. We took in sin as naturally as a mother's milk, but godliness is the wisdom from above, as James 3:17 says. It is breathed into us from heaven. God must light the lamp of grace in the heart — weeds grow on their own, but flowers must be planted. Godliness is a heavenly plant that comes from the new Jerusalem, which is why it is called a fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22. A person has no more power to change himself than to create himself.

4. Godliness is an extensive thing — it is a sacred leaven that spreads through the entire soul. 1 Thessalonians 5:23: The God of peace sanctify you wholly. There is light in the understanding, order in the affections, pliability in the will, and uprightness in daily life. We would never call someone who has white teeth a white person if their skin is dark — and a person is not godly if he is only good in some one area. Grace is called the new man in Colossians 3:10 — not a new eye or tongue, but a new man. The godly person is good all over; though he is regenerated only in part, that work touches every part of him.

5. Godliness is an intense thing — it does not consist in dead formality or half-hearted indifference, but is vigorous and fiery. Romans 12:11: Fervent in spirit. We call water hot when it has reached a high temperature. The person who is godly has an inflamed devotion, and his heart overflows with holy passion.

6. Godliness is a glorious thing — just as a jewel adorns a ring, piety adorns the soul and makes it shine in God's eyes. Reason makes us human, but godliness makes us earthly angels; through it we partake of the divine nature, as 2 Peter 1:4 says. Godliness is closely related to glory — 2 Peter 1:3 puts them together: glory and virtue. Godliness is glory in seed form, and glory is godliness in full bloom.

7. Godliness is a permanent thing. Aristotle said that names are given based on a person's settled character. We do not call someone red-faced because he blushes once, but because he has a naturally ruddy complexion. A brief flush of godliness is not enough to make someone a Christian — godliness must be the settled character and disposition of the soul. Godliness is a stable thing: there is a great difference between a stake in a fence and a tree in the garden — the stake rots and crumbles, but the tree, having life in it, endures and flourishes. When godliness has taken root in the soul, it abides to eternity. 1 John 3:9: His seed remains in him. Godliness, having been engraved in the heart by the Holy Spirit as with the point of a diamond, can never be erased.

## CHAPTER 3



**T**his is a sharp rebuke for those who are counterfeit Christians — people who merely put on a show of godliness. They are like Michal, who placed an image in the bed to deceive Saul's messengers, as we read in 1 Samuel 19:16. Jesus calls such people whitewashed tombs. They do not pursue virtue — they only paint it on. In ancient times, a third of the inhabitants of this island were called Picts, meaning painted people; it seems many still deserve that name. How many people are painted with the red glow of a religious profession, whose outward appearance dazzles onlookers, but inside there is nothing but rot? Hypocrites are like the swan, which has white feathers but black skin — or like the lily, which has a beautiful color but a foul smell. Revelation 3:1: You have a name that you are alive, but you are dead. The apostle Jude compares such people to clouds without water, in verse 12. They claim to be full of the Spirit, but they are empty clouds — their goodness is nothing more than a religious fraud.

Question: But why do people settle for a mere show of godliness?

Answer: It helps protect their reputation. 1 Samuel 15:30: Honor me before the people. People crave respect and want a good name in the world, so they dress themselves in the outward style of religion so that others will regard them as saints. But what good does it do to have others praise you while your own conscience condemns you? What will it matter, when a man is in hell, that others thought he had gone to heaven? Beware of this — counterfeit piety is double wickedness.

1. To have only a show of godliness is a sin that provokes God's anger. The person who claims to be a saint, but whose heart tells him it is only a name — who carries Christ in his Bible but not in his heart, and who uses religion as a servant to his own selfish purposes — what is that but abusing God to His face and serving the devil in Christ's clothing? Hypocrisy stirs up God's fury; He calls such people the brood of His wrath in Isaiah 10:6. God will send them to hell to face the consequences of their hypocrisy.

2. To make only a show of godliness is to deceive yourself. Ajax in his madness mistook sheep for men — but it is a far worse error to mistake a show of grace for actual grace. This is to pull off a con on yourself. James 1:22: Deceiving your own souls. The person who holds counterfeit gold in place of true gold cheats himself most of all. The hypocrite deceives others while he lives, but deceives himself when he dies.

3. To have only the name and outward show of godliness is hateful to both God and other people. The hypocrite is born under an unfortunate star — everyone despises him. Wicked men hate him because he puts on a show, and God hates him because he does nothing more than put on a show. The wicked hate him for wearing the mask of godliness, and God hates him because it is

only a mask. Acts 26:28: You have almost persuaded me to be a Christian. The wicked hate the hypocrite because he is almost a Christian, and God hates him because he is only almost.

4. To be nothing more than a flash of light — like a comet — and to make only a show of piety, is a futile thing. Hypocrites lose everything they have done. Their fake tears fall outside of God's bottle; their prayers and fasts prove worthless. Zechariah 7:5: When you fasted and mourned, was it really for Me, even for Me? Just as God will not reward a lazy servant, neither will He reward a deceitful one. All the hypocrite's reward comes in this life, as Matthew 6:5 says: They have their reward. A poor reward it is — just the empty praise of men. The hypocrite can write out his receipt and mark it, Received in full payment. Augustus Caesar was granted great military triumphs, but the Senate would not allow him to serve as consul or sit in the Senate house. Hypocrites may receive the praise of men, but even if those triumphs are granted, they will never have the right to sit in the Senate house of heaven. What acceptance can a man expect from God when his own heart tells him he is nothing but a con artist in the things of God?

5. Having only a pretense of godliness will give no comfort at death. Will painted gold make a man rich? Will painted wine satisfy someone who is thirsty? Will the paint of godliness do you any good in the end? What good were the bright lamps of the foolish virgins when they had no oil? What is a lamp of outward profession without the oil of grace? The person who has only a painted holiness will have only a painted happiness.

6. You who have nothing but a fine-looking mask of piety are exposing yourself to Satan's ridicule. At the last day you will be brought out like Samson — to give the devil sport. He will say:

What has become of all your vows, tears, and confessions? Is this where all your religion has led? You so often defied the devil — and now you have come to live with me? Could you find no weapon to destroy yourself but one made of gospel material? Could you draw poison from nowhere but the means of grace? Could you find no road to hell but by seeming to be godly? What a bitter thing it will be to have the devil reproach a man like this! It is terrible to be mocked in this life — Cleopatra, Queen of Egypt, when she saw that the enemy had reserved her for a public triumph, chose to press asps to her chest and die rather than endure the shame. What then will it be to have the devil triumph over a man on the last day?

Let us therefore beware of this kind of pageantry and devout play-acting. What should make us all the more watchful over our own hearts is the sight of towering men in the church rotted through with hypocrisy. Balaam a prophet, Jehu a king, Judas an apostle — all of them stand on record to this day as hypocrites.

It is true that the seeds of this sin exist even in the best of God's people — but just as under the Old Testament law, not everyone with raised skin or spots was declared unclean and put out of the camp, so not everyone who has traces of hypocrisy in them should be judged as a hypocrite, for these may simply be the blemishes of God's children. What makes a true hypocrite is when hypocrisy is the dominant force in a person — like an infection spreading through the body.

Question: When is a person under the control and power of hypocrisy?

Answer: There are two signs of its dominance. 1. A crooked eye — when someone serves God for self-serving motives. 2. A prized sin — when there is some sin a person holds dear and cannot give up. These two are as reliable signs of a hypocrite as any I know.

Let us take David's candle and lantern, search for this leaven, and burn it before the Lord.

Christian, if you grieve over hypocrisy yet find this sin so powerful that you cannot overcome it, go to Christ and ask Him to exercise His kingly authority in your soul — to subdue this sin and bring it under control. Ask Christ to perform His spiritual surgery on you; ask Him to open up your heart, cut out what is rotten, and apply the medicine of His blood to heal you of your hypocrisy. Often pray David's prayer from Psalm 119:80: Let my heart be sound in Your statutes. Lord, let me be anything rather than a hypocrite. A divided heart has no place in heaven.

## CHAPTER 4



- 2.** The next question to address is: who is the godly man?  
To answer this fully, I will lay down several specific signs and characteristics of a godly man.

## SECTION 1



**1.** The first foundational sign is that a godly man is a man of knowledge. Proverbs 14:18: The prudent are crowned with knowledge. The saints are called wise virgins in Matthew 25:4. A natural man may have some general knowledge about God, but he knows nothing as he ought to know it, as 1 Corinthians 8:2 says. He does not know God in a saving way — his eye of reason may be open, but he does not perceive the things of God spiritually. Water cannot rise above its source; vapor cannot rise higher than the sun draws it. A natural man cannot act above his nature — he is no more able to judge rightly about spiritual things than a blind man can judge colors. First, he does not see the evil of his own heart; no matter how dark and distorted a face may be, it cannot be seen under a veil — the sinner's heart is so dark that only hell could match it, yet the veil of ignorance hides it from his view. Second, he does not see the beauty of a Savior. Christ is a pearl — but a hidden pearl.

But a godly man is taught by God. 1 John 2:27: The anointing teaches you all things — that is, all things essential to salvation. A godly man has the good knowledge of the Lord, as 2 Chronicles 30:22 says. He has sound wisdom, as Proverbs 3:21 says. He knows God in Christ — to know God apart from Christ is to know

Him as an enemy, but to know Him in Christ is sweet and satisfying. A grace-filled soul has the fragrance of knowledge, as 2 Corinthians 2:14 says. There is a great difference between someone who has read about a country or viewed it on a map, and someone who has actually lived there and tasted its fruits and spices. The knowledge that adorns a godly man has eight distinctive qualities.

1. It is a grounded knowledge. Colossians 1:23: If you continue in the faith, grounded. It is not merely believing what the church believes — true knowledge rests on a double foundation: the Word and the Spirit, one serving as the rule and the other as the witness. Saving knowledge is not uncertain or wavering; it carries a certainty within it. John 6:69: We believe, and are sure that You are the Christ. 2 Corinthians 5:6: Being always confident. A godly man holds nothing that he would not die for — the martyrs were so firmly grounded in their knowledge of the truth that they sealed it with their blood.

2. It is an appreciative knowledge. A gemologist is said to truly know a jewel when he can properly value it. The person who truly knows God values Him above the glory of heaven and the comforts of earth. To compare other things with God is to dishonor Him — like comparing the glow of a firefly to the sun.

3. The knowledge of a godly man is life-giving. Psalm 119:93: I will never forget Your precepts, for by them You have given me life. Knowledge in the head of a natural man is like a torch in the hand of a dead man — it gives no life. True knowledge gives life. A godly man is like John the Baptist — a burning and shining lamp — not only shining with understanding but burning with love. The bride in Song of Solomon 2:5 said her knowledge of Christ made

her lovesick. I am wounded with love. I am like a deer struck by an arrow — my soul is bleeding, and nothing can heal me but the sight of the One my soul loves.

4. True knowledge is personal and applying. Job 19:25: I know that my Redeemer lives. A medicine is most effective when it is applied — and this kind of personal, applied knowledge brings joy. Christ is called a guarantee in Hebrews 7:22. What joy it is, when I am drowning in debt, to know that Christ is my guarantee! Christ is called an advocate in 1 John 2:1. The Greek word for advocate also means comforter — what comfort it is, when my case is desperate, to know that Christ is my advocate, who has never lost a case He has argued.

Question: But how can I know that I am rightly applying Christ to myself? A hypocrite may think he is applying Christ when he is not. Balaam, though a sorcerer, still said my God in Numbers 22:18.

Answer: 1. The person who rightly applies Christ holds two things together — Jesus and Lord. Philippians 3:8: Christ Jesus my Lord. Many take Christ as a Jesus but refuse Him as a Lord. Do you hold together both Prince and Savior, as Acts 5:31 describes? Are you as willing to be ruled by Christ's law as to be saved by His blood? Christ is a priest upon His throne, as Zechariah 6:13 says. He will never be a priest to intercede for you unless your heart is the throne where He rules. A true application of Christ means that just as we take Him as a husband, we also surrender ourselves to Him as Lord.

2. The person who rightly applies Christ draws power from Him. The woman in the Gospel touched Christ and felt power come out from Him, and her bleeding stopped, as Mark 5:29 tells us. To apply Christ is to feel sin-killing power flowing from Him. Natural scientists tell us there is an opposition between the diamond and the magnet — if a piece of iron is placed next to a diamond, the diamond will not allow the magnet to draw it away. In the same way, the knowledge that truly applies Christ has an opposition to sin, and will not allow the heart to be drawn away by it.

5. The knowledge of a godly man is transforming. 2 Corinthians 3:18: We all, with unveiled faces, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image. Just as a painter looking at a face paints a likeness of it — so, beholding Christ in the mirror of the Gospel, we are changed into His likeness. We may look at other glorious things without being made glorious by them — a person with a distorted face can look at beauty and still not become beautiful, and a wounded man can look at a surgeon and still not be healed. But this is what makes divine knowledge so remarkable: it gives us such a sight of Christ that we actually come to share His nature. When Moses had seen God's back as He passed by, Moses' face shone — some of the rays and beams of God's glory had fallen on him.

6. The knowledge of a godly man is self-emptying. Worldly knowledge makes the head dizzy with pride, as 1 Corinthians 8:2 says. True knowledge brings a person to the end of himself — the more he knows, the more he is humbled by his own ignorance. David was a bright star in God's church, yet he thought of himself as more of a dark cloud than a star, as Psalm 73:22 shows.

7. The knowledge of a godly man is growing. Colossians 1:10: Increasing in the knowledge of God. True knowledge is like the light of morning, growing brighter on the horizon until it reaches full noon. Spiritual knowledge is so satisfying that the more a saint knows, the more his thirst for it increases. It is called the riches of knowledge in 1 Corinthians 1:5 — the more riches a man has, the more he desires. Even the apostle Paul, who knew Christ deeply, still pressed on to know Him more: Philippians 3:10: That I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection.

8. The knowledge of a godly man is practical. John 10:4: The sheep follow Him, for they know His voice. Although God desires knowledge more than burnt offerings, as Hosea 6:6 says, He desires a knowledge that leads to obedience. True knowledge does not only improve a Christian's sight — it improves his walk. It is a shame for a Christian to live in contradiction to what he knows — to know he should be holy and disciplined, yet live loosely. Not to obey is the same as not knowing. 1 Samuel 2:12 says that Eli's sons did not know the Lord — yet they could not have been unaware, since they taught others the knowledge of the Lord. They are said not to know because they did not obey. When knowledge and practice appear together, like the twin stars Castor and Pollux, they promise great blessings.

Application 1. Let us test ourselves by this characteristic.

1. Are those people godly who still live in the region of darkness? Proverbs 19:2: That the soul be without knowledge is not good. Ignorant people cannot offer God a reasonable service, as Romans 12:1 says. It is a sad thing that after the Sun of Righteousness has shone so long in our sky, people should still be under the power of ignorance. Perhaps in worldly matters they are

sharp enough — no one can outsmart them — but in the things of God they have no knowledge. Nahash was willing to make a covenant with Israel only on the condition that he might put out their right eyes, as 1 Samuel 11:1 records. The devil has left men their left eye — practical knowledge in worldly matters — but he has put out their right eye; they do not understand the mystery of godliness. What can be said of them is what was said of the Jews: To this day the veil is on their heart, 2 Corinthians 3:15. Many Christians are no better than baptized pagans. What a shame it is to be without knowledge! 1 Corinthians 15:34: Some do not know God — I say this to your shame. People think it shameful to be ignorant of their own trade, but feel no shame about being ignorant of God. There is no going to heaven blindfolded. Isaiah 27:11: It is a people of no understanding, therefore He who made them will not have mercy on them.

In our day, ignorance is often chosen rather than unavoidable — there is a difference between not knowing and not wanting to know. John 3:19: They loved darkness rather than light. It is the owl that loves the dark. Sinners are like the Atlantes, a people in Ethiopia who cursed the sun. Wicked men willfully shut their eyes, as Matthew 13:15 describes, and God shuts them judicially, as Isaiah 6:10 says.

2. Are those people godly who, though they have knowledge, still do not know God as they ought to — who have never known Him through personal experience? How many knowledgeable people remain spiritually ignorant? They have intellectual understanding but not sanctification; their knowledge has no real power to make them better. If you set up a hundred torches in a garden, they will not make the flowers grow — only the sun can do that.

Many people are so far from being improved by their knowledge that they are actually made worse by it. Isaiah 47:10: Your knowledge has corrupted you. Most people's knowledge only makes them more skilled at sin — they have little reason to boast about such knowledge. Absalom could boast of his magnificent hair, but that very hair became the means of his death; in the same way, these people may boast of their head knowledge, but it will destroy them.

3. Are those people godly who, though they have some dim understanding, never personally apply Christ to themselves? Many people in Noah's day knew there was an ark, but drowned because they never got into it. Knowledge that is never applied will only light a person's way to hell. It would be better to live as someone who has never heard the Gospel than to die as an unbeliever after hearing it. Christ not trusted is a terrible thing. When Moses held his staff, it did great good — it worked miracles — but when it left his hand it became a serpent. In the same way, Christ, when grasped by the hand of faith, is full of comfort — but when not grasped by faith, He will prove to be a serpent that stings.

Application 2. If we want to show ourselves godly, we must pursue this good knowledge of the Lord. How much effort do people put into gaining natural knowledge! I have read of one Benchorat who spent forty years working out the motion of the eighth sphere. How much more effort should we put into finding the knowledge of God in Christ? It must be dug for and searched out like a vein of silver. Proverbs 2:3: If you seek her as silver.

This knowledge surpasses all other knowledge as far as the diamond surpasses crystal. No jewel we wear adorns us as this does. Proverbs 3:15: She is more precious than rubies. Job 28:12-13:

Man does not know her value; the deep says, it is not in me; she cannot be bought with the gold of Ophir, or with precious onyx, or with sapphire. The dark chaos of Genesis 1:2 was a fitting picture of an ignorant soul — but when God lights the lamp of knowledge in the mind, what a new creation takes place! How the soul shines like the sun in its glory!

This knowledge brings real comfort. Of natural knowledge we can say what Solomon said in Ecclesiastes 1:18: He who increases knowledge increases sorrow. Gaining knowledge in arts and sciences is like gathering straw, but gaining the knowledge of God in Christ is like gathering pearls. This knowledge leads the way to salvation, as 1 Timothy 2:4 says.

Question: But how do we gain this saving knowledge?

Answer: Not through the power of reason alone. Some speak of how far reason, well developed, can reach — but the measuring line of reason is too short to plumb the depths of God. A person can no more reach saving knowledge of God through reason than a pygmy can climb the pyramids. The light of nature will no more help us see Christ than a candle helps us understand, as 1 Corinthians 2:14 says: The natural man does not receive the things of God, neither can he know them. What then must we do to know God in a soul-saving way? We must call on the help of God's Spirit. Paul never saw his own blindness until a light shone from heaven in Acts 9:3. God must anoint our eyes before we can see — why else would Christ have told Laodicea to come to Him for eye salve, as Revelation 3:18 says, if she could already see on her own? Let us beg for the Spirit, who is a Spirit of revelation, as Ephesians 1:17

says. Saving knowledge does not come by study alone but by divine inspiration. Job 32:8: The inspiration of the Almighty gives understanding.

Cassian writes of a man named Theodore who shone with remarkable knowledge of the Scriptures — knowledge that came not so much from diligent study as from the grace of the Holy Spirit, since he could barely understand or speak even a few words of the Greek language. This account, as Acosta notes, is not meant to make us despise human effort in study, but to make clear that by the gift of the divine Spirit, a person can sometimes understand the Scriptures in a saving way through simple reading more than another might achieve with a great library of commentaries.

We may form excellent ideas about God and theology, but the Holy Spirit must enable us to know them in a spiritual way. A person may see the markings on a sundial, but cannot tell the time of day unless the sun is shining. We may read many truths in the Bible, but we cannot know them in a saving way until God's Spirit shines on us. 1 Corinthians 2:10: The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. Scripture shows us Christ, but the Spirit reveals Christ within us, as Galatians 1:16 says. The Spirit makes known what the whole world cannot reveal — the personal sense of God's love.

Application 3. You who have this saving, sanctifying knowledge growing in you — give God thanks for it. This is the heavenly anointing. The most beautiful objects cannot be seen in the dark, but when light appears, every flower shines in its natural beauty. So while people remain in the midnight of their natural state, the beauty of holiness is hidden from them — but when the light of the

Spirit comes in a saving way, those truths they once ignored now appear in such glorious brightness that they are carried away with wonder and love.

Thank God, you saints, that He has removed your spiritual blindness and allowed you to see what natural eyesight could never reveal. How thankful Christ was to His Father for this very thing! Matthew 11:25: I thank You, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children. How much should you marvel at free grace — that God has not only brought the light to you, but given you eyes to see it! That He has enabled you to know the truth as it is in Jesus, as Ephesians 4:21 says. That He has opened not only the eye of your understanding, but the eye of your conscience. This is a mercy you can never be sufficiently thankful for — that God has so enlightened you that you will not sleep the sleep of death.

## SECTION 2



**2.** The godly man is driven by faith. As gold is the most precious of metals, so faith is the most precious of the graces. Faith cuts us off from the wild olive tree of our natural state and grafts us into Christ. Faith is the vital pulse of the soul. Habakkuk 2:4: The just shall live by his faith. Those who have no faith may breathe, but they have no spiritual life. Faith is the energizer of all the other graces — no grace stirs until faith sets it in motion. Faith is to the soul what the body's vital spirits are to the body — it drives living activity throughout. Faith energizes repentance — it is like the heat that makes the still work and causes it to produce. When I believe in God's love for me, it causes me to weep that I have sinned against so good a God. Faith is the mother of hope — first we believe the promise, then we hope for it. Faith is the oil that feeds the lamp of hope; faith and hope are two inseparable graces — remove one and the other fades. If the tendons are cut, the body is crippled; if the tendon of faith is cut, hope goes lame. Faith is the foundation of patience — the person who believes that God is his God, and that all circumstances work for his good, patiently surrenders himself to the will of God. This is how faith is a living principle.

The life of a saint is nothing other than a life of faith. His prayer is faith breathing, as James 5:15 shows. His obedience is the fruit of faith, as Romans 16:26 says. By faith, a godly man lives in Christ as the sunbeam lives in the sun. Galatians 2:20: I live, yet not I, but Christ lives in me. Through the power of faith, a Christian sees beyond reason and trades in a realm above the moon. By faith his heart is kept at peace — he entrusts himself and all his affairs to God. Just as in time of war, people take shelter in a fortress and entrust themselves and their valuables there, so the name of the Lord is a strong tower, as Proverbs 18:10 says, and a believer deposits everything he is worth in that fortress. 2 Timothy 1:12: I know whom I have believed, and I am persuaded that He is able to guard what I have entrusted to Him until that day. God trusted Paul with His Gospel, and Paul trusted God with his soul.

Faith is a remedy for every trouble — a universal cure. It is the godly man's anchor, cast into the sea of God's mercy, keeping him from sinking into despair. As the saying goes: if faith holds firm, no ruin can do lasting harm.

Application: Let us test ourselves by this characteristic. How far from being godly are those who have no faith! There are those who are completely absorbed in what they can see and touch. Most people are spiritually nearsighted — they can only see what is directly in front of them, as 2 Peter 1:9 says. I have read of a people in India said to be born with only one eye. Such are those who are born with the eye of reason but lack the eye of faith — who, because they cannot see God with bodily eyes, deny that He exists. By the same logic they might deny they have souls, since souls are spirits and cannot be seen.

Where is the person who lives in the heights — who has climbed into the upper region and sees things not seen, as Hebrews 11:27 says? If men truly lived by faith, would they use dishonest schemes to make a living? If faith were present, would there be so much fraud? If faith were alive, would men drift along like dead fish carried by the current? In this age, there is scarcely as much faith to be found among people as there is among the devils, for they at least believe and tremble. It was a solemn and serious remark by Mr. Greenham that he feared not Roman Catholicism but atheism would prove to be England's ruin. But I will not press further here, having dealt more fully with this topic in another work.

## SECTION 3



**3.** A godly man is set on fire with love for God. Psalm 116:1. Faith and love are the two poles on which all of religion turns. A true saint rides in that chariot whose interior is paved with love, as Song of Solomon 3:10 describes. Just as faith gives life to every duty, love sweetens every duty. The sun ripens fruit, and love in the same way ripens the acts of worship, giving them a richer and better quality. A godly man is lovesick for God. John 21:16: Lord, You know that I love You. Though I denied You, dear Savior, it was from weakness, not from lack of love. God is the fountain and essence of all goodness, and His beauty and sweetness draw out love from every gracious heart. God is the saint's portion, as Psalm 119:57 says. And what is more cherished than one's inheritance? I would hate my own soul, said Augustine, if I found that it did not love. A godly man loves God, and therefore delights to be in His presence; he loves God, and therefore finds comfort in nothing apart from Him. Song of Solomon 3:3: Have you seen him whom my soul loves? Without God, even lilies appear black, roses grow pale, the hyacinth loses its sweetness, and neither myrtle nor laurel breathes any fragrance.

The devoted soul loves God and therefore thirsts for Him — the more of God he has, the more he desires. One sip of the wine of the Spirit stirs the appetite for more. The soul loves God, and therefore rejoices at the thought of His appearing, as 2 Timothy 4:8 says. He loves God and longs to be with Him — Christ was in Paul's heart, and Paul longed to be in Christ's presence, as Philippians 1:23 shows. When the soul becomes like God, it longs to be with God. A grace-filled heart cries out: Oh, that I had wings, that I might fly away and be with my beloved Christ! The bird longs to leave the cage, even if it is hung with pearls.

Such is the love a grace-filled soul bears for God that many waters cannot put it out — he loves God even when God seems to frown. Though I am out of sight, and quite forgotten, let me not love You if I love You not.

A godly man loves God even when pressed by hardship. A mother and her nine-year-old child were near starvation when the child looked up at her and said: Mother, do you think God will starve us? No child, said the mother, He will not. The child replied: But if He does, we must love Him and serve Him.

Application: Let us test our godliness by this touchstone — do we love God? Is He our treasure and center? Can we, with David, call God our joy — yes, our exceeding joy, as Psalm 43:4 says? Do we delight in drawing near to Him and coming before Him with singing, as Psalm 100:2 says? Do we love Him for His beauty more than for His gifts? Do we love Him even when He seems not to love us?

If love for God is a mark of the godly man, how few will qualify! Where is the man whose heart overflows with love for God? Many seek His benefits, but few love Him. Most people are consumed with self-love — they love their comfort, their earthly profit, their desires, but they have not a drop of love for God. If they loved God, would they be so eager to be rid of Him? Job 21:14: They say to the Almighty, depart from us. If they loved God, would they tear His name apart with their oaths? Does someone love his father when he shoots him through the heart? Though such people worship God, they do not love Him — they are like the soldiers who knelt before Christ and mocked Him, as Matthew 27:29 says. The person whose heart is a grave in which love for God is buried deserves to have written on his tombstone what 1 Corinthians 16:22 declares: Let him be accursed. A soul empty of divine love is in a condition that suits the damned. But I will leave this and move to the next point.

## SECTION 4



**4.** A godly man resembles God — he sees things the way God does, he has a God-like character, and he partakes of the divine nature, as 2 Peter 1:4 says. A godly man bears God's name and image — godliness is God-likeness. There is a great difference between professing God and resembling Him.

A godly man resembles God in holiness. Holiness is the most radiant jewel in the crown of the King of Heaven. Exodus 15:11: Glorious in holiness. God's power makes Him mighty, His mercy makes Him lovable, but His holiness makes Him glorious. The holiness of God is the essential purity of His nature and His deep hatred of sin. A godly man reflects something of this in his own life — the holy oil of consecration is upon him. Psalm 106:16: Aaron, the holy one of the Lord. Holiness is the mark and garment of Christ's people. Isaiah 63:18: The people of Your holiness. The godly are a holy priesthood as well as a royal one, as 1 Peter 2:9 says. And they do not merely have a holy exterior, like the Egyptian temples that were impressive on the outside — they are like Solomon's temple, which was overlaid with gold within. Written on their hearts is: Holiness to the Lord. The holiness of the saints consists in their conformity to God's will, which is the standard and pattern of all holiness.

Holiness is a person's glory. Aaron put on garments for glory and beauty, as Exodus 28:2 says. In the same way, when a person is clothed with the embroidered garment of holiness, it is for glory and beauty.

The goodness of a Christian lies in his holiness, just as the goodness of the air lies in its purity and the worth of gold lies in its fineness.

Question: How do the godly show their holiness in practice?

Answer: 1. By hating the garment stained by sin, as Jude 3 says. The godly set themselves against evil, both in their intentions and their actions. They are careful to avoid even the appearance of evil, as 1 Thessalonians 5:22 says. Even the appearance of evil can harm a weaker Christian — and if it does not corrupt one's own conscience, it may offend a brother's conscience, and to sin against him is to sin against Christ, as 1 Corinthians 8:12 says. A godly man will not push as far as he is permitted to go, lest he end up going further than he should. He will not swallow everything that others — bribed by ambition or advantage — may argue for. It is easy to put a golden color on rotten material.

2. The godly show their holiness by defending holiness publicly. Psalm 119:46: I will speak of Your testimonies before kings, and will not be ashamed. When godliness is attacked and slandered in the world, the saints stand up in its defense and wipe off the reproach that has been cast on religion. Holiness defends the godly, and they in turn defend holiness — it protects them from danger, and they protect it from disgrace.

Application 1: How can people be called godly who are nothing like God? They have nothing of God in them — not a trace of holiness. They call themselves Christians, but they have erased the word holiness from the title. You might as well call midnight the middle of the day.

Some are so brazen that they boast they are not among the holy ones. But is it not the Spirit of holiness that distinguishes Christ's sheep from the goats? Ephesians 1:13: You were sealed — or marked — with the Holy Spirit. Is that something for a person to boast about — that none of the Spirit's marks are on them? Does the apostle not say that without holiness no one will see the Lord, as Hebrews 12:14 declares? Those who congratulate themselves on their unholiness had better ring the bells for joy, since they will never see God.

There are others who actively hate holiness. Sin and holiness never meet without fighting — holiness fires its zeal against sin, and sin spits its venom of malice against holiness. Many claim to love Christ as a Savior, but hate Him as the Holy One, as Acts 3:14 describes.

Application 2: Let us press on to be like God in holiness.

1. This is God's great purpose in the world. It is what the preaching of the Word is designed to accomplish — the silver drops of the sanctuary are meant to water the seed of grace and produce a harvest of holiness. What purpose do the promises serve, if not to win us over to holiness? What are all of God's providential dealings but instruments to stir up holiness? Just as God uses all the seasons of the year — frost and heat alike — to bring on the harvest, so both prosperity and hardship are meant to advance

the work of holiness in the soul. What is the purpose of the Spirit's coming, if not to make the heart holy? When air becomes unhealthy because of thick vapors, the wind acts as a fan to clear and purify it — in the same way, the breath of God's Spirit upon the heart is meant to purify it and make it holy.

2. Holiness alone is what God delights in. Tamerlane, when presented with a pot of gold coins, asked whether the gold bore his father's stamp. When he saw it bore the Roman stamp, he rejected it. Holiness is God's stamp and mark — if He does not see this stamp on us, He will not recognize us as His own.

3. Holiness fits us for communion with God. Communion with God is a mystery to worldly people. Not everyone who hangs around the royal court actually gets to speak with the king — we may approach God in religious duties and hover around the court of heaven, yet not truly enjoy communion with Him. What keeps the connection with God alive is holiness. The holy heart enjoys much of God's presence and feels heart-warming, heart-comforting power in the means of grace. Where God sees His own likeness, there He gives His love.

## SECTION 5



**5.** A godly man is very careful and precise about how he worships God. The Greek word for godly literally means a right worshiper of God. A godly man honors God's ordained ways of worship, and values purity of worship over pomp. Adding human inventions to sacred worship is like diluting wine — it may give it a color, but it only corrupts it. God commanded Moses to build the tabernacle according to the pattern shown on the mountain, as Exodus 25:40 says. If Moses had left anything out or added anything to that pattern, it would have been a grave offense. The Lord has always shown His displeasure against those who corrupt His worship. Nadab and Abihu offered strange fire — fire other than what God had consecrated on the altar — and fire came out from the Lord and consumed them, as Leviticus 10:1 records. Whatever is not appointed by God in His worship, He regards as strange fire. No wonder He is so deeply offended — as though He were not wise enough to determine how He will be served. Yet people presume to prescribe to Him, and as though the rules for His worship were lacking, they attempt to improve on God's design and add their own inventions.

A godly man dares not depart from the pattern God has shown him in Scripture. This may well have been one reason why David was called a man after God's own heart — because he kept the springs of God's worship pure and did not introduce anything of his own invention into sacred matters.

**Application:** This characteristic can help us test ourselves as to whether we are truly godly. Are we careful about the things of God? Do we practice that form of worship which carries God's own authority? It is a dangerous thing to mix and blend in matters of religion.

1. Those who will add to one part of God's worship will be just as ready to remove from another. Mark 7:8: Setting aside the commandment of God, you hold to the traditions of men. Those who bring in a human tradition will in time set aside a divine command. This is exactly what the Roman Catholics are deeply guilty of — they bring in altars and crucifixes and set aside the second commandment. They introduce oil and cream into baptism, then leave out the cup in the Lord's Supper. They bring in prayers for the dead and remove the intelligible reading of Scripture to the living. Those who will insert into God's worship what He has not commanded will be just as ready to erase what He has commanded.

2. Those who favor adding outward human inventions to God's worship are usually indifferent to the heart of religion. Living by faith, living a disciplined and self-denying life — these things receive little attention from them. Wasps build their combs but have no honey in them. The religion of many people is like grain that runs all to stalk with no fruit.

3. Superstition and ungodliness tend to go hand in hand. It has been observed that those who have been most devout at religious pillars have often been found reeling against the wall in drunkenness.

4. Those devoted to superstition are seldom if ever truly converted. Matthew 21:31: Tax collectors and prostitutes enter the kingdom of God before you. This was spoken to the chief priests, who were the most rigid practitioners of formal religion. The reason such people are rarely brought to saving grace is that they harbor a secret hatred toward the power of true godliness. A snake may be beautifully colored, but it carries a sting — in the same way, people may appear outwardly zealous and devout while harboring a sting of hatred in their hearts against genuine goodness. This is why those who have been most passionate for superstition have also been most eager for persecution. The Church of Rome wears white linen — a symbol of innocence — but the Spirit of God paints her in scarlet, as Revelation 17:4 says. Why? Not only because she dresses in scarlet, but because her very nature is scarlet-dyed, having stained her hands with the blood of the saints, as Revelation 17:6 shows.

Let us then, if we would show ourselves godly, keep close to the rule of worship, and in the things of God, go no further than we can say, it is written.

## SECTION 6



**6.** A godly man is a servant of God, not a servant of men. This characteristic has two distinct aspects, and I will address each in turn.

1. A godly man is a servant of God. Ezra 5:11: We are the servants of the God of heaven. Colossians 4:12: Epaphras, a servant of Christ.

Question: In what sense is a godly man a servant of God?

Answer: In seven respects.

1. A servant leaves everyone else and commits himself to one master. In the same way, a godly man leaves the service of sin and devotes himself to the service of God, as Romans 6:22 says. Sin is a tyrannical master — the sinner is most enslaved when he feels most free. The wages sin pays should be enough to drive us from its service. Romans 6:23: The wages of sin is death. What a terrible payment! A godly man enlists in God's household and becomes one of His personal servants. Psalm 116:16: O Lord, truly I am Your servant, I am Your servant. David repeats it twice — as if to say: Lord, I have signed my contract; no one else has a claim on me; my ear is bored to Your service.

2. A servant does not belong to himself — he belongs to his master. He cannot do as he pleases but must follow the will of his lord. In this way a godly man is God's servant — he belongs entirely to God and has no will of his own. Your will be done on earth. Some will ask the godly: Why can't you do what everyone else does? Why won't you drink and swear and disregard the Sabbath as others do? Because the godly are God's servants — they may not do as they please but must live by the rules of His household. They will do nothing for which they cannot point to their Master's authorization.

3. A servant is bound by covenant — there are contracts and formal agreements made between him and his master. In the same way, the covenant drawn up in baptism creates such a bond, and in conversion that covenant is renewed and sealed. There we bind ourselves to God as His sworn servants. Psalm 119:106: I have sworn, and I will perform it, that I will keep Your righteous judgments. A godly man has bound himself to the Lord by vow, and he takes that vow seriously — he would sooner die under persecution than live by breaking his oath.

4. A servant does not only wear his master's uniform — he does his master's work. In this way, a godly man works for God. Paul spent himself and was spent for Christ, as 2 Corinthians 12:15 says. He outworked all the other apostles, as 1 Corinthians 15:10 says. A godly man works actively for God to his last breath, as Psalm 119:112 shows. Only the dead rest from their labors.

5. A servant follows his master. In this way, a godly man is God's servant — while others run after the beast, he follows the Lamb. He walks in the steps of Christ. If a master leaps over hedge and ditch, the servant follows him. A godly man will follow Christ

through afflictions, as Luke 9:23 says: If anyone will come after Me, let him take up his cross daily and follow Me. Peter was willing to follow Christ even on the water. A godly man will follow Christ even when every step costs him — he holds on to his goodness even when all around him are bad. Just as all the salt water of the sea cannot make the fish salty — they retain their freshness — so all the wickedness in the world cannot make a godly man wicked. He retains his piety and follows Christ even in the worst of times.

6. A servant is satisfied with what his master provides. He does not demand particular meals — if the portions are small, he does not complain, knowing he is a servant and eats at his master's discretion. In this way a godly man is God's servant — he is willing to live on what God provides. If he receives only leftovers, he does not grumble. Paul knew he was a servant, and so whether he had more or less, he was content, as Philippians 4 shows. When Christians complain about their circumstances, they forget that they are servants and must live on what their heavenly Master provides. Even those who receive the smallest portion from God will die still in His debt.

7. A servant will defend the honor of his master — he cannot bear to hear his master insulted and will stand up for his reputation. In the same way, every godly man will stand up for the honor of his Master, Christ. Psalm 119:139: My zeal has consumed me. God's servant speaks up for His truth. Those who can hear God's name slandered and His ways spoken against yet remain silent — God will be ashamed of such servants and disown them before men and angels.

Application: Let us prove ourselves godly by being servants of the Most High God.

Consider 1: God is the best master — He keeps every promise without fail. 1 Kings 8:23: There is no God like You in heaven above or on earth below, who keeps covenant with Your servants. Verse 56: There has not failed one word of all His good promise. God has the sweetest and most gracious character — He is slow to anger and ready to forgive. In our need He provides for us; in our weakness He has compassion on us. He shares His secrets with His servants, as Psalm 25:14 says. He actually waits on His servants — was there ever such a master? Luke 12:37: Blessed are those servants whom the Lord finds watching when He comes; truly I say to you, He will dress Himself and have them recline to eat, and He will come and serve them. When we are sick He makes our bed for us, as Psalm 41:3 says: You will sustain him on his sickbed. He holds our head when we are faint. Other masters may forget their servants and dismiss them when they grow old, but God will not. Isaiah 44:21: You are My servant, O Israel; you will not be forgotten by Me. It is a slander to call God a hard master.

2. God's service is the best service — there are six privileges in serving Him.

1. Freedom. Although the saints are bound to God's service, they serve Him freely. God's Spirit, called a free spirit, makes them free and joyful in obedience. The Spirit carries them on wings of delight, turning duty into privilege. It does not force but draws — it opens the heart in love and fills it with joy. God's service is perfect freedom.

2. Honor. King David was glad to call himself one of God's dependents: Psalm 143:12: I am Your servant. When Paul wanted to display his highest credential and most distinguished title, he did not call himself Paul, a Hebrew of the Hebrews, or Paul of the tribe

of Benjamin — he called himself Paul, a servant of Christ, in Romans 1:1. Theodosius considered it a greater honor to be God's servant than to be an emperor. Christ Himself, who is equal with the Father, is not ashamed of the title Servant, as Isaiah 53:11 shows. Every servant of God is a son; every subject is a prince. It is a greater honor to serve God than to have kings serve us. The angels in heaven are servants to the saints on earth.

3. Safety. God takes care of His servants and gives them His protection. Isaiah 41:9-10: You are My servant; fear not, for I am with you. God hides His servants. Psalm 27:5: In the shelter of His tabernacle He will hide me — that is, He will keep me as safe as in the most holy place of the sanctuary, where only priests could enter. Christ's wings both heal and shelter — they cure and protect us. The devil and his instruments would quickly devour God's servants if He did not place an invisible guard around them and cover them with the golden feathers of His protection. Acts 18:10: I am with you, and no one will attack you to harm you. God's watchful eye is always on His people, and the enemies will not accomplish the harm they plan — they will be instruments of discipline rather than destruction.

4. Gain. Skeptics say: It is worthless to serve God — what profit is there in keeping His ordinances? Malachi 3:14. But beyond the benefits God gives in this life — including the sweet peace of conscience — He reserves His best wine for last, giving His servants a glorious kingdom, as Hebrews 12:28 says. God's servants may be kept down and mistreated for a time, but they will be promoted in the end. John 12:26: Where I am, there My servants will also be.

5. Assistance. Other masters assign work to their servants but do not help them do it — but our heavenly Master not only gives us work, He gives us strength to do it. Psalm 138:3: You strengthened me with strength in my soul. God commands us to serve Him, and He enables us to serve Him. Ezekiel 36:27: I will cause you to walk in My statutes. The Lord does not only fit the work to us — He fits us for the work, and along with His command He gives power.

6. Provision. A master will not let his servants go without — and God's servants will be provided for. Psalm 37:3: Truly you shall be fed. If God has given us Christ, will He withhold a crust of bread? Genesis 48:15: The God who has fed me all my life. If God does not give us what we crave, He will give us what we need. Even the wicked are fed, and they are compared to dogs in Philippians 3:2. If a man feeds his dog, he will surely feed his servant. Who then would not fall in love with God's service?

3. We are bound to serve God — we have been bought at a price, as 1 Corinthians 6:20 says. This is a metaphor drawn from the practice of ransoming captives from prison by paying money for their release — once ransomed, they owe their service to the one who freed them. In the same way, when the devil had taken us prisoner, Christ ransomed us — not with money, but with His own blood. Therefore we owe our service to Him alone. If anyone can show a better claim to us than Christ, we may serve them — but since Christ has the greatest right to us, we are to cling to Him and enroll ourselves in His service forever.

2. I move now to the second part of this characteristic: a godly man is not a servant of men. 1 Corinthians 7:23: Do not become slaves of men.

Question: But is there no service we owe to other people?

Answer: There are three kinds of service to people.

1. There is a civil service owed to others — that of those in a lower position to those above them. A servant, as Aristotle says, is a living tool. Ephesians 6:5: Servants, obey your masters.

2. There is a spiritual service owed to others — when we are useful to their souls. 2 Corinthians 4:5: Your servants for Jesus' sake.

3. There is a sinful serving of men — and this comes in three forms.

1. When we place human commands above God's commands. God says one thing; a person says another. God says: Honor the Sabbath; a person says: break it. When human orders carry more weight with us than God's own commands, we have become servants of men.

2. When we willingly surrender ourselves to the corrupt desires of others and let them rule our consciences. This happens when we are endlessly pliable — ready to adopt Arminianism or atheism, the Gospel or the Quran — simply because others want us to. We become whatever others wish us to be, exactly like Issachar's character in Genesis 49:14: Issachar is a strong donkey, lying down between the saddlebags. This is not humility but cowardice, and it is servitude to men.

3. When we become advocates for a corrupt cause — defending wicked and unjustifiable actions — or when we give sin a religious name and use our eloquence to put a respectable face on the devil's work. This is being a servant of men. In such cases, a godly person refuses to demean himself by serving men in this way. He says

with Paul in Galatians 1:10: If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a servant of Christ. And with Peter in Acts 5:29: We must obey God rather than men.

Application: How far removed from godliness are those who live to please people — who comply with sinful human demands out of fear of punishment or hope of reward, who will bend their conscience to any shape and sail whatever way profit blows! These are servants of men — they have renounced their baptismal vow and rejected the Lord who bought them.

To the person who is like Proteus — able to take any shape and bow as low as hell to please others — I would say two things.

1. You who have mastered every posture of compromise — how will you face Christ on that day? When you say on your deathbed, Lord, look on Your servant, Christ will disown you and say: My servant? No — you renounced My service; you were a servant of men. Depart from Me; I never knew you. What a devastating blow that will be on that day!

2. What does a person gain by sinfully enslaving himself to others? He gets a stained reputation, a cursed estate, and a hell in his own conscience. And even those he so shamefully stoops to please will end up despising him. How the chief priests kicked Judas away in Matthew 27:4: That is your problem.

To keep from becoming servants of men, let us abandon fear and strengthen faith. Faith is a world-conquering grace, as 1 John 5:4 says. It overcomes the world's alluring music and its threatening furnace alike. It steels a Christian with divine courage and makes him stand immovable, like a rock in the middle of the sea.

## SECTION 7



**7.** A godly man deeply prizes Christ. To illustrate this, I will show two things.

1. That Jesus Christ is in Himself precious.

2. That a godly man recognizes and honors that preciousness.

1. That Jesus Christ is in Himself precious. 1 Peter 2:6: Behold, I lay in Zion a chief cornerstone, chosen and precious. Christ is compared to the most precious things.

1. To a bundle of myrrh, as Song of Solomon 1:13 says. Myrrh is highly precious — it was one of the chief spices used in the holy anointing oil, as Exodus 30:25 describes.

1. Myrrh has a perfuming quality — and so Christ perfumes our persons and our acts of worship, making them a sweet fragrance before God. Why is the church, that heavenly bride, so fragrant with grace? Because Christ, that myrrh-tree, has dropped His fragrance upon her.

2. Myrrh is also invigorating — its scent comforts and refreshes the spirit. In the same way, Christ comforts the souls of His people when they are overwhelmed by sin and suffering.

2. Christ is compared to a pearl. Matthew 13:46: When he found one pearl of great value. Christ, this pearl, was small in His humility but infinite in His value. Jesus Christ is a pearl that God wears at His heart — a pearl whose brilliance outshines all the world's glory, a pearl that enriches the soul, the highest part of a person, a pearl that illuminates heaven, a pearl so precious it makes us precious in God's sight, a pearl that restores and heals, a pearl worth more than all of heaven. The preciousness of Christ can be seen in three ways.

1. He is precious in His person — He is the radiance of His Father's glory, as Hebrews 1:3 says.

2. Christ is precious in His offices, which are like several rays of the Sun of Righteousness.

1. Christ's prophetic office is precious, as Deuteronomy 18:15 says. He is the great oracle of heaven. He surpasses all the prophets who came before Him in preciousness, for He teaches not only the ear but the heart. He who holds the key of David opened the heart of Lydia in Acts 16:14.

2. Christ's priestly office is precious — this is the solid foundation of our comfort. Hebrews 9:26: Now once at the end of the ages He has appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. By virtue of this sacrifice, the soul can go to God with boldness and say: Lord, give me heaven — Christ has purchased it for me. He hung on the cross so that I might sit on the throne. Christ's blood and intercession are the two hinges on which our salvation turns.

3. Christ's kingly office is precious. Revelation 19:16: On His robe and on His thigh He has a name written: King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Christ surpasses all other kings in majesty — He has

the highest throne, the richest crown, the widest dominion, and the longest reign. Hebrews 1:8: Your throne, O God, is forever and ever. Though Christ has many who share in His glory, as Ephesians 2:6 says, He has no successors. Christ extends His scepter where no other king can reach — He rules the will and the affections, and His authority binds the conscience. Even the angels swear allegiance to Him, as Hebrews 1:6 shows. Christ's kingship is seen in two royal acts.

1. In ruling His people.

2. In overruling His enemies.

1. In ruling His people, He rules with kindness — His royal rod has honey at the end. Christ raises the banner of mercy, which causes so many willing volunteers to run to His standard, as Psalm 110:3 says. Holiness without mercy and justice without mercy would be dreadful — but mercy invites poor sinners to trust in Him.

2. In overruling His enemies, He brings down their pride, outwits their scheming, and restrains their malice. Psalm 76:10: The wrath of man shall praise You; the remainder of wrath You will restrain — or as the Hebrew puts it: You will gird up. The stone cut out of the mountain without hands, which struck the great image in Daniel 2:34, was a symbol, as Augustine says, of Christ's royal power conquering and triumphing over His enemies.

3. Christ is precious in His benefits. Through Christ all dangers are removed, and through Christ all mercies are delivered. In His blood flow justification (Acts 3:19), cleansing (Hebrews 9:14), fullness of grace (John 1:16), peace with God (Romans 5:1), adoption (Galatians 4:5), perseverance (Hebrews 12:2), and glorification

(Hebrews 9:12). This will be the subject of the highest joy throughout eternity. We read that those who had passed over the sea of glass stood with their harps and sang the song of Moses and the Lamb, as Revelation 15:2 says. In the same way, when God's saints have crossed the glassy sea of this present world, they will sing hallelujahs to the Lamb who redeemed them from sin and hell and brought them into that glorious paradise where they will see God forever and ever.

2. The second point to establish is that every godly man places a high value on Christ. 1 Peter 2:7: To you who believe, He is precious — or in the Greek: an honor. Believers hold Christ in the highest esteem. The psalmist speaks like someone captivated by Christ's breathtaking beauty: Psalm 73:25: Whom have I in heaven but You? And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides You. He did not say he had nothing — he had many comforts on earth — but he desired nothing above God. It is like a wife who says there is no one whose company she prizes like her husband's. How David prized Christ: Psalm 45:2: You are fairer than the sons of men. The bride in Song of Solomon saw Christ as the chief, the most incomparable of all: Song of Solomon 5:10: He is outstanding among ten thousand. Christ surpasses all others: Song of Solomon 2:3: Like an apple tree among the trees of the forest, so is my beloved among the young men. Christ infinitely surpasses all the beauty and glory of this visible world more than the apple tree surpasses the trees of the wild forest. Paul prized Christ so highly that he made Him his supreme pursuit: 1 Corinthians 2:2: I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ — I counted nothing else of value. Paul knew Christ best of all — 1 Corinthians 9:1: Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? He saw Him with his bodily eyes in a vi-

sion when he was caught up to the third heaven in 2 Corinthians 12:2, and he saw Him with the eye of faith in the Lord's Supper — and so he knew Him best of all. See then how he dismissed and counted worthless everything else compared to Christ: Philippians 3:8: I count all things as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. He counted worldly gain as loss and gold as garbage for the sake of Christ. Indeed, a godly person cannot help but place supreme value on Christ — he sees in Him a fullness of worth beyond all comparison.

1. A fullness in terms of variety. Colossians 2:3: In whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. No single country produces everything — but Christ has every kind of fullness: fullness of merit, of Spirit, of love. He has a treasure equal to every one of our needs.

2. A fullness in terms of degree. Christ does not have mere drops or rays — He is more filled with goodness than the sun is filled with light. He has the fullness of the Godhead dwelling in Him, as Colossians 2:9 says.

3. A fullness in terms of duration. The fullness found in created things is like the streams of Arabia — they dry up quickly. But Christ's fullness is inexhaustible — it overflows and flows on forever.

And this fullness is for believers. As Luther says, Christ is a common treasury or storehouse for the saints. John 1:16: Of His fullness we have all received. Set a glass under a still and it receives water drop by drop. In the same way, those who are united to Christ receive the dew and drops of His grace distilling upon them. How worthy Christ is to be admired by all who believe!

Application 1: Since a godly man highly prizes Christ, what should we think of those who place no value on Him? Are they godly or not? There are four kinds of people who do not prize Christ.

1. The Jews. They do not believe in Christ. 2 Corinthians 3:15: To this day the veil is on their heart. They await their future Messiah, as their own Talmud reports. They blaspheme Christ, reject imputed righteousness, and despise the virgin Mary — calling her in mockery *Marah*, meaning bitterness. They treat the Gospel with contempt, deny the Christian Sabbath, regard Christians with disgust, and consider it unlawful for a Jew to receive medical care from a Christian. Schecardus records the story of one Bendema, a Jew who was bitten by a serpent and when a Christian came to heal him, he refused the help and chose to die rather than be healed by a Christian. Such is the hatred the Jews bear toward Christ and all who bear His name.

2. The Socinians, who acknowledge only Christ's humanity. To do this is to place Him below the angels, since human nature by itself is inferior to angelic nature, as Psalm 8:5 says.

3. Proud professors who do not place the full weight of their salvation on Christ alone, but want to mix their own dross with His gold — their own works with His merits. This is to steal a jewel from Christ's crown and to implicitly deny that He is a complete and sufficient Savior.

4. Vain intellectuals who value the study of arts and sciences above Christ. Not that knowledge of these things is wrong — Moses was educated in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, as Acts 7:22 says, and human learning is useful for preparing one to study deeper

things, just as a coarser dye prepares cloth to receive a richer and deeper color. The problem is when the study of Christ is neglected. The knowledge of Christ must hold first place. It was surely not without meaning that God allowed all of Solomon's writings about birds and plants to be lost, while what he wrote about spiritual wisdom has been miraculously preserved — as if God wanted to teach us that knowing Christ, the true Wisdom, is the crowning knowledge of all. One leaf from this Tree of Life will give more comfort on a deathbed than the entire body of human learning. What does it profit to know the movements of the planets and the influences of the stars, while remaining ignorant of Christ, the bright Morning Star, as Revelation 22:16 says? What does it profit to understand the nature of minerals and precious stones while not knowing Christ, the true cornerstone, as Isaiah 28:16 says? It is an undervaluing — even a despising — of Christ when, like a magnet drawing iron and straw, we pursue lesser things and neglect the One who has refined gold to give us, as Revelation 3:18 says.

Application 2: Since it is a mark of a godly person to prize Christ, let us test our godliness by this — do we hold Christ in high esteem?

Question: How can we know whether we do?

Answer: 1. If we truly prize Christ, we prefer Him in our minds above all other things. We value Christ above honor and wealth — the pearl of great price lies closest to our heart. The person who prizes Christ considers even the leftovers from Christ better than the world's finest harvest. He counts the worst things of Christ better than the best things of the world. Hebrews 11:26: He considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of

Egypt. But is this true of us? Has the value of worldly things gone down in our eyes? Gregory of Nazianzus solemnly thanked God that he had anything at all to lose for Christ's sake. But how few people like him can be found today. You will hear some say they have a high regard for Christ — yet they value their land and estate above Him. The rich young man in the Gospel preferred his bags of gold to Christ. Judas valued thirty pieces of silver above Him. Is it not to be feared that if a moment of real testing came, many would rather renounce their baptism and throw off Christ's colors than risk losing their earthly possessions for Him?

2. If we truly prize Christ, we cannot live without Him — for we cannot do without the things we truly value. A person can live without music, but not without food. A child of God can go without health and friends, but he cannot go without Christ. In Christ's absence he says with Job: I go about in mourning without the sun, as Job 30:28 says. I have the starlight of earthly comforts, but I lack the Sun of Righteousness. Rachel cried in Genesis 30:1: Give me children, or I will die! So the soul cries: Lord, give me Christ, or I die — give me one drop of the water of life to quench my thirst. Test yourselves by this: Do those prize Christ who can manage perfectly well without Him? Give a child a rattle, and he will not care about gold. If men have enough worldly provision — grain and wine — they are content to do without Christ. Christ is the spiritual Rock, as 1 Corinthians 10:4 says. As long as men have oil in the jar, they have no desire for honey from this Rock. If their business fails, they complain — but if God removes the Gospel, which is the ark containing Christ the manna, they remain calm and untroubled. Do those truly prize Christ who can sit down content without Him?

3. If we truly prize Christ, we will not begrudge any effort to obtain Him. The person who prizes gold will dig for it in the mine. Psalm 63:8: My soul clings hard after God. Plutarch records that the Gauls, an ancient people of France, after tasting the fine wine of the Italian grape, asked about the country where it came from and never rested until they had reached it. The person in whose eyes Christ is precious never rests until he has found Christ. Song of Solomon 3:1-2, 4: I sought him whom my soul loves; I held him, and would not let him go.

Test yourselves by this. Many say they hold Christ in high regard, but they put no real effort into using the means to find Him. If Christ would drop like a ripe fig into their mouths, they might be willing to have Him — but they will not put themselves to any real trouble to seek Him. Does someone truly prize his health if he refuses to take medicine or exercise?

4. If we truly prize Christ, we take great delight in Him. What joy does a person take in what he counts his greatest treasure? The person who prizes Christ makes Him the chief source of his joy. He can delight in Christ even when all other delights are gone. Habakkuk 3:17: Though the fig tree should not blossom, yet I will rejoice in the Lord. Though a flower in a man's garden withers, he can still delight in his money and jewels. The person who esteems Christ can find his comfort in Christ even when autumn has stripped every other comfort away.

5. If we truly prize Christ, we will give up our most cherished sins for Him. Paul said of the Galatians that they esteemed him so highly they would have pulled out their own eyes and given them to him, as Galatians 4:15 says. The person who esteems Christ will pull out the sinful desire that is his right eye. A wise man will

throw away a poison to take a remedy. The person who places high value on Christ will part with his pride, his dishonest gain, his sinful habits. He will put his foot on the neck of his sins.

Test yourselves by this! How can those be said to prize Christ who will not give up a single vanity for Him? Not a proud habit, not a curse, not a single drunken cup. What contempt and scorn do they show for the Lord Jesus who prefer a sin that will damn them over a Savior who will save them.

6. If we truly prize Christ, we will feel that no price is too high for Him. We can pay too much for gold, but we cannot pay too much for Christ. Even if we give our blood for Him, it is no bad bargain. The apostles rejoiced to be honored so highly as to be dishonored for Christ's sake, as Acts 5:41 says. They counted their chains more precious than bracelets of gold. Let no one say he prizes Christ who refuses to carry his cross. Matthew 13:21: When tribulation or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he falls away.

7. If we truly prize Christ, we will want others to share in Him. Whatever we consider excellent, we naturally want our friends to have a share in it. If a man discovers a spring of fresh water, he calls others to come and drink and satisfy their thirst. Do we commend Christ to others? Do we take them by the hand and lead them to Him? The fact that so few do this reveals how few truly prize Christ — they do not strive for their loved ones to have a part in Him. They work to leave land and wealth to their children, but show no concern about leaving them the pearl of great price as their true inheritance.

8. If we truly prize Christ, we prize Him in times of health as well as sickness — when we are prosperous as well as when we are pressed. A true friend is valued at all times — the rose of Sharon is always sweet. The person who rightly values his Savior thinks just as highly of Him on a good day as on a hard day. The wicked reach for Christ only when they are desperate — as the elders of Gilead went to Jephthah only when they were in trouble, as Judges 11:7 records. Themistocles complained that the Athenians came to him only as men run to a tree for shelter from a storm. Sinners want Christ only as a shelter. The Hebrews never chose their judges except when they were in imminent danger. Godless people never look for Christ except at death, when they face the threat of hell.

Application 3: If we want to show the world that we bear the mark of godliness, let us prize Jesus Christ. He is chosen and precious. Christ is the wonder of beauty. Pliny said of the mulberry tree that there is nothing in it that is not useful and medicinal — the fruit, the leaves, the bark. In the same way, there is nothing in Christ that is not precious: His name is precious, His virtues are precious, His blood is precious. The blood of the Lord was the price of the world.

Let us have tender, adoring thoughts of Christ and count Him our greatest treasure and delight. This is why millions perish — they do not prize Christ. Christ is the door through which people enter heaven, as John 10:9 says. If they do not know this door, or are too proud to stoop and enter through it, how can they be saved? To cultivate Christ-admiring thoughts, let us consider the following.

1. We cannot place too high a value on Christ. We may prize other things above their worth — that is one of our great sins; we commonly overrate created things, imagining they contain more than they do, which is why God withers our gourd when we overvalue it. But we can never raise our esteem of Christ high enough — He is beyond all value. Every ruby and diamond can be assigned an exact price by the jeweler, who can say: this is worth so much and no more. But Christ's worth can never be fully known. No seraph can adequately value Him. Ephesians 3:8 calls His riches unsearchable. Christ is more precious than the soul, than the angels, than heaven itself.

2. Jesus Christ has placed the highest value on us. He took our flesh upon Himself, as Hebrews 2:16 says. He made His soul an offering for us, as Isaiah 53:10 says. How precious was our salvation to Christ! Should we not prize and adore the One who has placed such value on us?

3. Failing to prize Christ is the height of foolishness. Christ is our guide to glory — it is madness for a person to despise his guide. He is our physician, as Malachi 4:2 says. It is madness to despise one's own physician.

What does it mean to treat Christ as worthless in exchange for things of no real value? Matthew 23:17: You fools and blind men. How is a fool identified? By offering him an apple and a piece of gold — if he chooses the apple over the gold, he is judged a fool. How many such fools there are — people who prefer husks over manna, the gaudy empty things of this life over the Prince of Glory. Will Satan not claim them as fools in the end?

4. Those who dismiss Christ now and say there is no beauty in Him worth desiring — a day is coming very soon when Christ will dismiss them just as completely. He will treat them with the same indifference they showed Him. He will say: I do not know you, as Luke 13:27 says. What a devastating word that will be — when people cry, Lord Jesus, save us! and He answers: I was offered to you, but you would have none of Me. You scorned Me, and now I will have nothing to do with you or your salvation. Depart from Me; I do not know you. This is all that sinners gain by rejecting the Lord of Life. Christ will dismiss at the day of judgment those who dismissed Him in the day of grace.

## SECTION 8



**8.** A godly man is one who weeps with gospel sorrow. David sometimes played his harp with joy, and at other times the instrument of his eyes wept. Psalm 6:6: I water my couch with tears. Christ calls His bride a dove in Song of Solomon 2:14. The dove is a mourning creature. Grace softens and melts the soul, causing a spiritual thaw — the sorrow of the heart runs out through the eye, as Psalm 31:9 says.

The rabbis report that on the very night Israel departed from Egypt toward Canaan, all the idols of Egypt were struck down by lightning and earthquake. In the same way, at the very moment people move from their natural condition toward heaven, all the idols of sin in the heart must be broken down by repentance. A softened and melting heart is a key promise of the covenant of grace, as Ezekiel 36:26 says, and is the fruit of the Spirit. Zechariah 12:10: I will pour out on the house of David the Spirit of grace, and they shall look on Me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for Him.

Question: But why does a godly man weep? Has not his sin been pardoned, which is reason for joy? Has he not had a transforming work done in his heart? Why then does he weep?

Answer: A godly man finds plenty of reason to weep.

1. He weeps because sin still lives within him — the law of sin in his members, as Romans 7:23 says. He grieves over the stirrings and first risings of sin. His nature is a poisoned fountain. A regenerate person grieves that he carries within him what is at enmity with God — his heart is like the wide sea, full of crawling things without number, namely vain and sinful thoughts. A child of God mourns over his hidden wickedness. He has more evil in him than he is even aware of. There are winding passages in his heart he cannot trace — an unknown world of sin within. Psalm 19:12: Who can discern his own errors?

2. A godly man weeps because corruption clings to him. If he could be rid of sin there would be some comfort, but he cannot shake off this viper. Sin clings to him like leprosy to the wall, as Leviticus 14:39 says. Although a child of God forsakes his sin, sin does not forsake him. Daniel 7:12: As for the rest of the beasts, their dominion was taken away, but their lives were prolonged for a season. In the same way, though sin's dominion is removed, its life lingers for a season — and while sin lives, it troubles. The Persians were constant enemies to the Romans and continually raiding their borders. So sin wages war against the soul, as 1 Peter 2:11 says. There is no ceasefire until death — how can this fail to produce tears?

3. A child of God weeps because he is sometimes overcome by the power of his corruption. Romans 7:19: The evil I do not want, that is what I do. Paul was like a man being swept downstream. How often is a saint overpowered by pride and anger! When David

had sinned, he soaked his soul in the bitter tears of repentance. It cannot help but grieve a regenerate person to think that having once felt the sting of sin, he would yet again press it to his chest.

4. A godly heart grieves that he cannot be more holy. It troubles him that he falls so far short of the standard God has set. He says: I should love the Lord with all my heart — but how weak is my love! How far short I fall of what I should be — even of what I might have been. When I look at my life, what do I see but blanks and blots?

5. A godly man sometimes weeps out of a sense of God's love. Gold is the finest and most solid of all metals, yet it is also the most readily melted by fire. Gracious hearts — which are golden hearts — are the most readily melted into tears by the fire of God's love. I once knew a holy man who was walking in his garden shedding many tears. A friend happened upon him and asked why he was weeping. He burst out: O the love of Christ, the love of Christ! So we see the cloud melted into water by the rays of the sun.

6. A godly person weeps because the sins he commits are in a certain sense more serious than the sins of others — the sin of a justified person is especially offensive.

1. Because he acts against his own principles. He sins not only against the rule but against his own knowledge, vows, prayers, hopes, and past experiences with God. He knows how dearly sin will cost him, yet he still reaches for the forbidden fruit.

2. The sin of a justified person is offensive because it is a sin of ingratitude. 2 Kings 11:9. Peter's denial of Christ was a sin against love — Christ had included him among the apostles, had taken him up onto the Mount of Transfiguration, and had shown him a vision

of heavenly glory. Yet after all that grace and favor, Peter denied Christ — it was the worst of ingratitude. This drove him out to weep bitterly, as Matthew 26:75 says. He baptized himself, as it were, in his own tears. The sins of the godly go closest to God's heart — the sins of others anger God, but these grieve Him. The sins of the wicked pierce Christ's side, but the sins of the godly wound His heart. The unkindness of a wife cuts deepest into the heart of her husband.

3. The sin of a justified person is offensive because it brings more dishonor upon God. 2 Samuel 12:14: By this deed you have given great occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme. The sins of God's people put dark stains on the face of religion. We can see from all this how much reason a child of God has to weep even after conversion. Who could hear these things and hold back tears?

Now this sorrow of a godly man for sin is not a despairing sorrow — he does not mourn without hope. Psalm 65:3: Iniquities prevail against me — there is the holy soul weeping. As for our transgressions, You will purge them away — there is faith triumphing.

This kind of holy sorrow is excellent. There is as much difference between the sorrow of a godly person and that of a wicked person as there is between spring water — clear and sweet — and seawater, which is salt and bitter. A godly man's sorrow has three characteristics.

1. It is inward — it is a sorrow of the soul. Hypocrites make their faces look sorrowful on the outside, as Matthew 6:16 describes. But godly sorrow goes deep — it is a piercing of the heart,

as Acts 2:37 says. True sorrow is a kind of spiritual martyrdom, which is why it is called soul-affliction in Leviticus 23:29.

2. Godly sorrow is genuine — it grieves more over the evil that is in sin than the evil that follows from it. It grieves more over the stain than the sting. Hypocrites weep for sin only when it brings punishment. I have read of a spring that never sends out streams except the evening before a famine — and hypocrites never shed their tears except when God's judgments are approaching.

3. Godly sorrow is transforming — it makes the heart better. Ecclesiastes 7:3: By the sadness of the face the heart is made better. Holy tears do not merely wet the face — they wash it. They purge out the love of sin.

Application 1: How far from godliness are those who scarcely ever shed a tear for sin. They weep when they lose a loved one, but though they are in danger of losing God and their own souls, they do not weep. How few know what it is to be in agony over sin, or what a broken heart means. Their eyes are not like the fishpools of Heshbon, full of water, as Song of Solomon 7:4 says, but more like the mountains of Gilboa which had no dew upon them, as 2 Samuel 1:21 says. It was a greater plague for Pharaoh to have his heart turned to stone than to have his rivers turned to blood.

Others shed a tear from time to time, yet are no better for it — they go right on in wickedness and do not drown their sins in their tears.

Application 2: Let us pursue this divine characteristic and become weepers. This is a repentance never to be regretted, as 2 Corinthians 7:10 says. It is reported of the martyr Mr. Bradford that he was of a tender spirit — he rarely sat down to eat without

tears trickling down his cheeks. There are two cleansing basins for sin: blood and tears. The blood of Christ washes away the guilt of sin; tears wash away the filth. Tears of repentance are precious — God collects them in His bottle, as Psalm 56:8 says. They are beautiful — a tear in the eye adorns more than a ring on the finger. Oil makes the face shine, as Psalm 104:15 says, but tears make the heart shine. Tears bring comfort — the sinner's laughter turns to grief, but the saint's mourning turns to music. Repentance may be compared to myrrh — bitter to the taste, but strengthening to the spirit. Repentance may be bitter to the flesh, but it is deeply refreshing to the spirit. Wax that melts is fit to receive a seal — a melting soul is fit to receive the stamp of every heavenly blessing. Let us give Christ the water of our tears, and He will give us the wine of His blood.

## SECTION 9



9. A godly man loves the Word of God. Psalm 119:97: Oh, how I love Your law.

1. A godly man loves the written Word. Chrysostom compared Scripture to a garden arranged in beautiful patterns and filled with flowers. A godly man delights to walk in this garden and refreshes his soul there. He loves every part and portion of the Word.

1. He loves the guiding part of the Word — as a guide and rule for life. The Word is like a signpost pointing us to our duty. It contains both what we are to believe and what we are to do. A godly man loves the practical wisdom of the Word.

2. A godly man loves the warning part of the Word. Scripture, like the Garden of Eden, has a tree of life within it, but also a flaming sword at its gates — this is the threatening portion of the Word. It flashes fire in the face of everyone who goes on stubbornly in wickedness. Psalm 68:21: God shall strike through the head of His enemies, of those who go on still in their trespasses. The Word gives no permission for evil. It will not let a person limp between God and sin. The true mother would not allow the child to be di-

vided, and God will not allow the heart to be divided. The Word thunders warnings even against the mere appearance of evil. It is like that flying scroll full of curses in Zechariah 5:1.

A godly man loves the warnings of the Word because he recognizes that love lies within every warning. God does not want us to perish, and so He mercifully warns us — to frighten us away from sin. God's warnings are like marker buoys on the water, showing where the rocks lie and warning of death to those who sail too close. The warning is a bit in the mouth to keep us from galloping straight to hell. There is mercy in every warning.

3. A godly man loves the comforting part of the Word — the promises. He feeds on these as Samson walked along eating honeycomb from the lion, as Judges 14:8 says. The promises are full of sweetness and nourishment. They are our healing remedy when we are faint. They are the channels through which the water of life flows. Psalm 94:19: When my anxious thoughts multiply within me, Your comfort delights my soul. The promises were David's harp that drove away dark thoughts — they were the breast that fed him with divine comfort.

A godly man shows his love for the written Word in the following ways.

1. By diligently reading it. The noble Bereans searched the Scriptures daily, as Acts 17:11 says. Apollos was mighty in the Scriptures, as Acts 18:24 says. The Word is our great charter for heaven — we should be reading it over every day. The Word is its own interpreter, showing what is true and what is error. It is the field where the pearl of great price is buried — how we should dig for it! A godly man's heart is the library that holds the Word of God

— it dwells richly in him, as Colossians 3:16 says. It is reported of Melanchthon that when he was young, he always carried his Bible with him and read it eagerly. The Word has a double function: to teach us and to judge us. Those who will not be taught by the Word will be judged by the Word. Let us make the Scriptures our close companion! What if times came, as in the days of Diocletian — who commanded by public decree that Bibles be burned — or as in Queen Mary's days, when it was a capital offense to possess an English Bible? By spending time regularly in Scripture, we can carry a Bible in our minds.

2. A godly man shows his love for the Word by frequently meditating on it. Psalm 119:97: It is my meditation all the day. A devout soul meditates on the truth and holiness of the Word. He does not merely pass over it with a few quick thoughts, but soaks his mind in Scripture. Through meditation he draws out the sweetness from this flower and digests holy truths deep in his mind.

3. He shows his love to the Word by taking delight in it — it is his joy. Jeremiah 15:16: Your words were found, and I ate them, and Your word was to me the joy and the rejoicing of my heart. No one ever took such delight in his favorite meal as the prophet took in the Word. How can a saint help but take great pleasure in the Word, when everything he could ever hope to inherit is written there? Does not a son delight in reading his father's will, where the father has conveyed his estate to him?

4. He shows his love for the Word by storing it in his heart. Psalm 119:11: Your word I have hidden in my heart. Just as one hides a treasure so it will not be stolen away. The Word is the jewel; the heart is the case in which it must be kept. Many hide the Word in their memory, but not in their heart. And why did David

store the Word in his heart? That I might not sin against You. Just as a person would carry an antidote when entering an infected area, a godly man carries the Word in his heart as a spiritual antidote to protect him from the infection of sin. Why have so many been poisoned by false teaching, or others by moral vice? Because they have not stored the Word as a holy antidote deep in their hearts.

5. He shows his love for the Word by defending it. A wise man will not let his land be seized — he will defend his title to it. David regarded the Word as his inheritance: Psalm 119:111: Your testimonies have I taken as a heritage forever. Did David allow his inheritance to be wrested from his hands? A godly man will not only argue for the Word but die for it. Revelation 6:9: I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God.

6. He shows his love for the Word by placing it above the most prized things. 1. Above food. Job 23:12: I have treasured the words of His mouth more than my necessary food. 2. Above riches. Psalm 119:72: The law of Your mouth is better to me than thousands of gold and silver pieces. 3. Above worldly honor. There is a memorable story about King Edward VI: on his coronation day, three swords were presented to him, signifying that he was monarch of three kingdoms. The king said there was still one sword missing. When asked what that was, he answered: the Holy Bible — the sword of the Spirit — which is to be valued above all these emblems of royalty.

7. He shows his love for the Word by talking about it. Psalm 119:172: My tongue shall speak of Your word. Just as a greedy man talks about his profitable acquisitions, so a godly man speaks of the Word — what a treasure it is, how full of beauty and sweetness

it is. Those whose mouths the devil has gagged — who never speak of God's Word — it is a sign they have never received any real benefit from it.

8. He shows his love for the Word by conforming to it. The Word is his sundial by which he sets his life, and the scale by which he weighs his actions. He patterns his daily walk on the Word. 2 Timothy 4:7: I have kept the faith. Paul kept the doctrine of faith and lived the life of faith.

Question: Why does a godly man love the Word?

Answer: 1. Because of the excellence of the Word.

1. The written Word is our pillar of fire to guide us. It shows us what dangers to avoid and is the chart by which we sail to the new Jerusalem.

2. The Word is a spiritual lens through which we can see our own hearts. The light of nature that the ancient pagans had revealed spots in their outward conduct, but this lens reveals spots in the imagination itself. That natural light revealed spots of unrighteousness, but the Word reveals spots even in our righteousness. Romans 7:9: When the commandment came, sin came alive and I died. When the Word came as a mirror, all my confidence in my own righteousness died.

3. The Word of God is a sovereign comfort in distress. While we follow this cloud, the rock follows us. Psalm 119:50: This is my comfort in my affliction, that Your word has given me life. Christ is the fountain of living water, and the Word is the golden pipe through which it flows. What else can revive us at the hour of death but the word of life?

2. A godly man loves the Word because of the power it has had in his own life — this morning star has risen in his heart and brought in the Sun of Righteousness.

2. A godly man loves the preached Word, which is a living commentary on the written Word. The Scriptures are the precious oils and healing balms; the preaching of the Word is the pouring of them out. The Scriptures are the spices; the preaching of the Word is the grinding of those spices, which releases a wonderful fragrance and delight. The preached Word is the rod of God's strength, as Psalm 110:2 says, and the breath of His lips, as Isaiah 11:4 says. What was once said of the city of Thebes — that it was built by the sound of Amphion's harp — is far more truly said of the conversion of souls: it is built by the sound of the gospel harp. This is why preaching is called the power of God to salvation in 1 Corinthians 1:24. Through preaching, Christ is said to speak to us now from heaven, as Hebrews 12:25 says. This ministry of the Word is to be valued even above the ministry of angels.

A godly man loves the preached Word — partly because of the good he has received through it, having felt the dew fall along with this manna — and partly because of God's own appointment. The Lord has ordained this as the means by which He saves His people. The king's image makes a coin acceptable currency; the stamp of divine authority on the preached Word makes it the instrument of people's salvation.

Application: Let us test ourselves by this characteristic — are we lovers of the Word?

1. Do we love the written Word? What sums of money did the martyrs pay for just a few pages of the Bible? Do we treat the Word as a close companion? Just as Moses often held the rod of God in his hand, we should often hold the book of God in ours. When we need direction, do we consult this sacred source? When we find sin strong within us, do we reach for the sword of the Spirit to cut it down? When we are discouraged, do we go to this bottle of life for comfort? If so, we are lovers of the Word. But how can those say they love the Scriptures who rarely open them? Their eyes begin to ache when they look at a Bible. The two testaments hang on the wall like rusty armor that is seldom if ever used. The Lord wrote the law with His own finger — but though God took the trouble to write, people will not take the trouble to read. They would sooner look at a deck of cards than at a Bible.

2. Do we love the preached Word? Do we value it in our minds? Do we receive it into our hearts? Do we dread the loss of gospel preaching more than the loss of peace and prosperity? Is it the removal of the ark that troubles us most?

Again, do we give the Word our reverent attention? When a judge delivers his charge from the bench, all listen carefully. When the Word is preached, the great God is delivering His charge — do we listen as if our lives depend on it? This is a good sign that we love the Word.

Again, do we love the holiness of the Word? Psalm 119:140. The preached Word is meant to bring down sin and build up holiness. Do we love it for its spiritual purity? Many love the preached Word only for its eloquence and clever ideas. They come to a sermon as to a music lecture, as Ezekiel 33:31 says, or as to a garden

to pick flowers — but not to have their lusts subdued or their hearts changed. These are like a foolish woman who paints her face but neglects her health.

Again, do we love the rebukes of the Word? Do we love the Word when it comes home to our conscience and shoots its arrows of reproof at our sins? It is the minister's duty at times to rebuke. A preacher who can give only smooth words from the pulpit but does not know how to reprove is like a sword with a fine hilt but no edge. Titus 2:15: Rebuke them sharply. Dip the nail in oil — reprove in love — but drive the nail all the way in. Now, Christian, when the Word puts its finger on your sin and says, you are the man, do you welcome the reproof? Can you thank God that the sword of the Spirit has cut between you and your sinful desires? This is truly a sign of grace and shows that you are a lover of the Word.

A corrupt heart loves the comforts of the Word but not its rebukes. Amos 5:10: They hate the one who reproves at the gate. Like venomous creatures that spit poison at the slightest touch. Acts 7:54: When they heard these things they were cut to the heart and gnashed their teeth at him. When Stephen touched them to the quick, they were enraged and could not bear it.

Question: How do we know that we love the rebukes of the Word?

Answer: 1. When we seek out a ministry that searches the heart. Who wants medicine that has no effect? A godly man chooses not to sit under a ministry that makes no impression on his conscience.

2. When we pray that the Word will target our specific sins. If there is some treacherous desire that has crept into our heart, we want it exposed and dealt with. We do not want sin covered up — we want it cured. We can open our chest to the arrow of the Word and say: Lord, strike this sin.

3. When we are grateful for a reproof. Psalm 141:5: Let the righteous strike me — it is a kindness! And let him rebuke me — it is oil on my head; let my head not refuse it.

David was glad to receive a reproof. Suppose a man were in the jaws of a lion, and someone shot the lion and saved him — would he not be grateful? So, when we are in the grip of some sin like a lion, and the minister by his reproof shoots that sin dead, should we not be grateful? A gracious soul rejoices when the sharp lance of the Word has lanced his infected wound. He wears a reproof like a jewel in his ear. Proverbs 25:12: Like a gold ring, so is a wise re-prover to a listening ear. In short, it is piercing, convicting preaching that does the soul good. A sharp reproof prepares for comfort, just as a biting frost prepares the ground for the sweet flowers of spring.

## SECTION 10



**1**o. A godly man has the Spirit of God dwelling in him. 2 Timothy 1:14: The Holy Spirit who dwells in us. The scholastic theologians debate whether a person actually receives the Holy Spirit Himself. Montanus held that the godly have God's Spirit in them in such a way that they share in His very essence and have become one person with Him — but this is nothing less than blasphemy, since it would follow that every saint should be worshiped.

I believe the Spirit is present in the godly through His influence — they have His presence and receive His sacred workings. When the sun enters a room, the sun itself is not there, but the beams that radiate from it are. Indeed, some theologians have thought that the godly receive more than merely the Spirit's influence — though to say exactly what that more is goes beyond words, and would require a far more elevated pen than mine to describe. The Spirit of God shows itself in a gracious soul in two ways.

1. Through His movements. These are something like the sweet fragrance the Spirit breathes upon the heart, by which it is lifted into an almost angelic condition.

Question 1: But how can we tell the movements of the Spirit from a delusion?

Answer: The movements of the Spirit are always in line with the Word. The Word is the chariot in which the Spirit of God rides — whichever way the current of the Word flows, that is the direction in which the wind of the Spirit blows.

Question 2: How can the movements of the Spirit in the godly be distinguished from the promptings of a natural conscience?

Answer: 1. A natural conscience may push a person toward the same actions the Spirit does, but not from the same source. A natural conscience spurs a person to duty, but drives him to do it out of fear of hell — like a galley slave pulling at the oar for fear of being beaten. The Spirit, by contrast, moves a child of God from a far nobler source — it causes him to serve God freely and gladly, and to regard duty as a privilege.

2. The promptings of a natural conscience lead people only to the easier religious duties, where the heart is not deeply engaged — such as going through the motions in reading or prayer. But the movements of the Spirit in the godly go further, driving them to the most demanding duties — like self-examination and self-humbling — and even to dangerous duties, such as confessing Christ's name in times of persecution. Divine movements in the heart are like new wine that must find an outlet. When God's Spirit takes hold of a person, it carries him at full sail through every difficulty.

2. The Spirit shows itself in the godly through its powerful effects. These are varied.

1. God's Spirit has a teaching power — the Spirit teaches convincingly. John 16:8. He teaches in such a way that He also persuades.

2. God's Spirit has a sanctifying power. The heart by nature is polluted, but when the Spirit enters it, He works sin out and grace in. The Spirit of God was represented by the dove — a symbol of purity. The Spirit makes the heart a temple in its purity and a paradise in its pleasantness. The holy oil of consecration was nothing other than a picture pointing forward to the Spirit. The Spirit sanctifies the imagination, causing it to produce holy thoughts. He sanctifies the will, bending it toward what is good, so that serving God becomes as delightful as sinning against Him once was. Sweet-scented powders perfume linen — in the same way, God's Spirit in a person fills him with the fragrance of holiness and makes his heart a reflection of heaven.

3. God's Spirit has a life-giving power. 2 Corinthians 3:6: The Spirit gives life. Just as air blown into an organ pipe makes it sound, so the breath of the Spirit brings life and movement. When the prophet Elijah stretched himself over the dead child, the child was revived, as 1 Kings 17:22 says. In the same way, God's Spirit stretching itself over the soul breathes life into it.

Our spiritual energy, as well as our spiritual life, comes from the Spirit's work. Ezekiel 3:14: The Spirit lifted me up. When the heart is weighed down and reluctant to pursue duty, the Spirit of God lifts it up and puts a sharp edge on the affections — making love intense and hope alive. The Spirit removes the weights from the soul and gives it wings. Song of Solomon 6:12: Before I was aware, my soul had set me over the chariots of my noble people. The soul's wheels had once been pulled off and it moved along

heavily — but when the Spirit of the Almighty takes hold of a person, he now runs swiftly in the ways of God, and his soul is like swift chariots.

4. God's Spirit has a governing power — He rules and directs. God's Spirit holds the highest place in the soul, holding the violence of corruption in check and not allowing the person to be as loose and careless as others. The Spirit of God does not vacate His office but exercises authority over the heart, bringing every thought captive to the obedience of Christ, as 2 Corinthians 10:5 says.

5. The Spirit has a softening power — which is why He is compared to fire, which melts wax. The Spirit turns flint into flesh. Ezekiel 36:26: I will give you a heart of flesh. How will this happen? Verse 27: I will put My Spirit within you. While the heart is hard it lies like a log, unmoved by either judgments or mercies. But when God's Spirit enters, He makes a person's heart as tender as his own eye, and it becomes responsive and yielding to divine impressions.

6. The Spirit of God has a strengthening power — He pours in strength and help for the work. He is a spirit of power, as 2 Timothy 1:7 says. God's Spirit carries a person beyond his natural limits. Ephesians 3:16: Strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man. The Spirit strengthens faith, stirs up courage, and lifts one end of the cross — making it lighter to carry. The Spirit gives not merely enough strength, but strength to spare.

Question: How do we know whether we are acting in the strength of God's Spirit, or in our own natural abilities?

Answer: 1. When we humbly cast ourselves on God for help — as David did when going out against Goliath, casting himself on God for strength: 1 Samuel 17:45: I come to you in the name of the Lord. 2. When our actions are rightly motivated — we do them with pure aims. 3. When we have found God working alongside us and give Him all the credit: 1 Corinthians 15:10. This clearly shows that the work was carried out by the strength of God's Spirit rather than by any natural ability of our own.

7. God's Spirit has a comforting power. Discouragement can arise even in a gracious heart — just as the sky, though it is a bright and luminous expanse, still has clouds passing through it. This sadness is usually caused by Satan's malice — if he cannot destroy us, he will disturb us. But God's Spirit within us sweetly cheers and revives — He is called the Comforter in John 14:16. These comforts are genuine and certain. This is why the Spirit is called the seal, as Ephesians 1:13 says. When a legal document is sealed, it is firm and unquestionable. So when a Christian has the seal of the Spirit, his comforts are confirmed. Every godly person has these revivals of the Spirit to some degree — he has the seeds and beginnings of joy, even if the flower has not yet fully opened.

Question: How does the Spirit give comfort?

Answer: 1. By showing us that we are in a state of grace. A Christian cannot always see his own spiritual riches — the work of grace may be written in the heart like shorthand that he cannot read. The Spirit gives him the key to unlock these unclear marks, so he can spell out his adoption. From this comes joy and peace. 1 Corinthians 2:12: We have received the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things freely given us by God.

2. The Spirit comforts by giving us overwhelming awareness of God's love. Romans 5:5: The love of God has been poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit. God's love is a box of precious perfume, and only the Spirit can break open this box and fill us with its sweet fragrance.

3. The Spirit comforts by bringing us to the blood of Christ. Just as a man who is weary and about to faint needs only to be brought to water to be refreshed, so when we are sinking under the weight of sin, the Spirit brings us to the fountain of Christ's blood. Zechariah 13:1: In that day a fountain shall be opened. The Spirit enables us to drink the waters of justification that flow from Christ's side. He applies everything Christ has purchased — He shows us that our sins are removed in Christ, and that though we are stained in ourselves, we are spotless in our Head.

4. The Spirit comforts by enabling our conscience to speak comfort to us. A child must be taught before it can speak. The Spirit opens the mouth of conscience and helps it speak — to declare to a person that his spiritual condition is good, and from this he begins to receive comfort. Romans 9:1: My conscience bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit. Conscience draws up a certificate for a person, and then the Holy Spirit comes and signs His name to it.

5. The Spirit delivers the oil of joy through two golden channels.

1. The ordinances.

2. The promises.

1. The ordinances: Just as Christ in prayer had His face transformed with a glorious radiance, as Luke 9:29 says, so often in the use of the holy ordinances, the godly experience such transports of

joy and transformation of soul that they are lifted above the world and look down on everything in it with indifference.

2. The promises bring comfort in two ways. First, for their certainty — Romans 4:16. God has staked His truth on His promises. Second, for their suitability — they are fitted to every Christian's condition. The promises are like a medicinal garden: there is no ailment for which some remedy cannot be found there. But the promises cannot comfort on their own — only the Spirit enables us to draw the sweetness from them. The promises are like an alembic full of herbs, but the alembic will not produce a drop unless heat is applied. So when the Spirit of God — who is compared to fire — is applied to the alembic of the promises, they begin to distill comfort into the soul. This is how the Spirit dwells in the godly through His powerful effects.

Objection: But is being filled with the Spirit really a sign of a godly person? Are not the wicked also said to partake of the Holy Spirit, as Hebrews 6:4 says?

Answer: Wicked people may experience the Spirit's work, but not the Spirit's indwelling. They may have God's Spirit move upon them; the godly have it enter into them, as Ezekiel 3:24 says.

Objection: But the unregenerate do taste of the heavenly gift, as Hebrews 6 says.

Answer: It is with them as with cooks — they may taste and sample the food they prepare, but they are not nourished by it. There, tasting is contrasted with eating. The godly do not merely have a drop or a taste of the Spirit — He is in them like a river of living water, as John 7:38 says.

Application 1: This marks as ungodly those who have none of God's Spirit. Romans 8:9: If anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him. And if he does not belong to Christ, then to whom does he belong? What army does he march with? It is the misery of a sinner that he has none of God's Spirit. It is deeply troubling to hear people pray, Take not Your Holy Spirit from us, who have never possessed God's Spirit. Will drunkards and those who take the Lord's name in vain claim to have God's Spirit in them? Do the malicious and impure have God's Spirit? It would be blasphemy to say so. Would the blessed Spirit leave His heavenly home to take up residence in a dungeon? A sinner's heart is like a jail — dark and foul — and would God's free Spirit be confined there? A sinner's heart is a picture of hell — what would God's Spirit be doing in such a place? Wicked hearts are not a temple but a pigsty, where the unclean spirit makes his home. Ephesians 2:2: The prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience. We would be horrified to live in a house haunted by evil spirits. A sinner's heart is haunted. John 13:27: After the bread, Satan entered into him. Satan only makes attempts on the godly, but he enters into the wicked. When the demons entered the herd of pigs, they ran violently down the steep bank into the sea, as Matthew 8:32 says. Why do people run so eagerly toward sin? Because the devil has entered into these swine.

2. This also removes from godliness those who not only lack the Spirit but mock Him. Like those in Jerusalem who said in Acts 2:13: These men are full of new wine. And indeed the apostles were — full of the wine of the Spirit. How God's Spirit is ridiculed by the wicked! These, they say, are the spiritual people. What wretches —

to use the very tongues that should be instruments of God's praise as tools for blasphemy! Is there no one else at whom you can throw your scorn but the Spirit? Mocking the Spirit comes very close to insulting Him deliberately. How can people be sanctified except by the Spirit? To ridicule the Spirit is to make sport of their own damnation.

Application 2: If you want to be counted among the godly, pursue the blessed indwelling of the Spirit. Pray as Melancthon prayed: Lord, set my soul ablaze with Your Holy Spirit. And as the bride prayed: Awake, O north wind, and come, O south wind! Blow upon my garden, as Song of Solomon 4:16 says. Just as a sailor longs for a wind to carry his ship out to sea, so beg for the favorable breezes of the Spirit. God's promise can give wings to your prayer. Luke 11:13: If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him? God's Spirit is a precious jewel — go to Him for it. Lord, give me Your Spirit — where is the jewel You promised me? When will my soul be like Gideon's fleece, soaked with the dew of heaven?

Consider how necessary the Spirit is — without Him, nothing we do is acceptable to God.

1. We cannot pray without the Spirit — He is a spirit of prayer, as Zechariah 12:10 says. He helps both what we say and how we feel. Romans 8:26: The Spirit helps us with sighs and groans.

2. We cannot resist temptation without the Spirit. Acts 1:8: You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you. The person who faces both the current of a corrupt nature and the

wind of temptation will inevitably be swept away into sin, unless the opposing wind of the Spirit blows against them.

3. We cannot be fruitful without the Spirit. A golden rain refreshing hearts parched by heaven's drought.

Why is the Spirit compared to dew and rain, if not to show us how utterly unable we are to produce a harvest of grace unless God's dew falls on us?

4. Without the Spirit, no means of grace is effective for us. The ordinances are the pipes that carry grace, but the Spirit is the spring. Some people are content simply to have a minister to preach to them, and never look further — like a merchant who is satisfied that his ship has good rigging and a full crew, yet never concerns himself about whether there is any wind. The ship of the ordinances will not carry us to heaven — even if an angel were the pilot — unless the wind of God's Spirit blows. The Spirit is the soul of the Word — without Him the Word is nothing but a dead letter. Ministers can prescribe the medicine, but it is God's Spirit who makes it work. Our hearts are like the aging David's body — they covered him with warm clothes, but he could not get warm, as 1 Kings 1:1 says. In the same way, though God's minister may wrap us in prayers and counsel like warm blankets, we remain cold and unmoved until God's Spirit comes. Then we say as the disciples did in Luke 24:32: Did not our hearts burn within us? How greatly we need the Spirit!

3. To those who have the blessed Spirit, shown by His active power and vital work in your lives: 1. Acknowledge God's distinguishing love — the Spirit is a mark of election. 1 John 3:24. Christ gave Judas the money bag, but not His Spirit. The Spirit is a love-

token: where God gives His Spirit as a pledge, He gives Himself as the portion. The Spirit is a concentrated blessing — He stands for all good things, as Matthew 7:11 says. What would you be without the Spirit — nothing but a corpse? Without the Spirit, even Christ's blood would not benefit you — the blood of God is not enough without the breath of God. Be thankful for the Spirit then — this magnet will never stop drawing you until it has drawn you all the way to heaven.

2. If you have this Spirit, do not grieve Him. Ephesians 4:30. Shall we grieve our Comforter?

Question: How do we grieve the Spirit?

Answer: 1. When we coldly push away His movements. The Spirit sometimes whispers in our ear and calls to us, as God called to Jacob in Genesis 35:1: Arise, go up to Bethel. So the Spirit says: Arise, go to prayer; draw aside and meet with your God. When we smother these promptings and give way to temptations toward emptiness and distraction, this grieves the Spirit. If we suppress the Spirit's promptings, we will lose the Spirit's comfort.

2. We grieve the Spirit when we deny His work in our hearts. If someone gives you a gift and you deny ever having received it, you have insulted the love of your friend. In the same way, Christian, when God has given you His Spirit — shown by the meltings of heart and passionate longing for heaven you have known — yet you deny that any renewing work of the Spirit has ever happened in you, this is the worst kind of ingratitude and grieves the good Spirit. Renounce the sinful works of the flesh, but do not deny the gracious work of the Spirit.

## SECTION 11



**1** 1. The godly man is a humble man. He is like the sun at its highest point — which when it is at its greatest height appears to be at its lowest. Augustine calls humility the mother of the graces. Before I describe who the humble man is, I will draw three distinctions.

1. I distinguish between being humbled and being humble. A person can be humbled without being humble. A sinner can be humbled by affliction — his circumstances are low, but not his spirit. A godly man is not only humbled in his circumstances but humble in his heart — his heart is as low as his condition.

2. I distinguish between outward humility and inward humility. There is a great difference between a humble manner and a humble spirit. A person may conduct himself humbly:

1. Toward others, and yet be proud. Who was more outwardly humble in his manner than Absalom? 2 Samuel 15:5: When anyone came near to bow down before him, Absalom would reach out his hand and take hold of him and kiss him. But though he had a humble manner, he was plotting for the throne, as verse 10 shows: As soon as you hear the sound of the trumpet, say, Absalom reigns in Hebron! Here was pride dressed in the cloak of humility.

2. A person may conduct himself humbly toward God and yet be proud. 1 Kings 21:27: Ahab put on sackcloth, and fasted, and walked gently. But his heart was not humble. A person can bow his head like a reed, while lifting the banners of pride in his heart.

3. I distinguish between humility and cunning strategy. Many put on a show of humility to advance their own ends. Roman Catholics appear to be the most humble and self-denying of saints — but it is more a calculated strategy than genuine humility, since by this means they have accumulated the wealth of the earth into their hands. All of this can be present without any true godliness.

Question: How can a Christian know that he is truly humble, and therefore godly?

Answer: 1. A humble soul is empty of all inflated thoughts about himself. Bernard calls humility self-annihilation. Job 22:29: You will save the humble person — in Hebrew, literally, him who has lowered eyes. A humble man thinks more poorly of himself than others think of him. David, though a king, thought of himself as a worm. Psalm 22:6: I am a worm, and not a man. Bradford the martyr signed his own letters as a sinner. Job 10:15: If I am righteous, I will not lift up my head. Like the violet — a sweet flower that hangs its head.

2. A humble soul thinks better of others than of himself. Philippians 2:3: Count others more significant than yourselves. A humble man values others more highly than himself. The reason is that he can see his own heart far more clearly than he can see another's. He sees his own corruption and assumes things are better with others — their graces are not as weak as his, their corruptions not as strong. Surely, he thinks, they have better hearts than

I do. A humble Christian studies his own weaknesses and other people's strengths, which leads him to place a higher value on others than on himself. Proverbs 30:2: Surely I am more stupid than any man. And Paul, though he was the foremost of the apostles, called himself the least of all the saints in Ephesians 3:8.

3. A humble soul has a low opinion of his own spiritual duties. Pride tends to breed in our most sacred activities, just as a worm breeds in the sweetest fruit and mold forms from the finest wine. A humble person disowns not only his sins but his duties. After praying and weeping, he says: How little I have done — God could justly condemn me for all of this. He prays as good Nehemiah did in Nehemiah 13:22: Remember me, O my God, concerning this, and spare me. Lord, remember how I have poured out my soul — but spare me and forgive me. He sees that his best efforts fall many measures short of what they should be, and so he wants Christ's merits placed on the scales alongside his own. The humble saint blushes when he looks at his own record — he sees that he cannot write a clean line and keeps making blots. It humbles him to think that even his best acts are contaminated. He drops poison on his own sacrifice. O Lord, he says, I dare not claim to have prayed or wept — what I record as acts of worship, God might well record as sins.

4. A humble man is always filing charges against himself. He does not complain about his circumstances but about his heart. O this evil heart of unbelief! Lord, said Hooper, I am hell, but You are heaven. A hypocrite is always talking about how good he is. A humble soul is always confessing how bad he is. Paul, that exalted saint who was caught up to the third heaven, how this bird of paradise mourned over his own corruption: Romans 7:24: O wretched

man that I am! Holy Bradford signed his letters: the hard-hearted sinner. The more knowledge a humble Christian gains, the more he laments his ignorance. The more faith he has, the more he grieves his unbelief.

5. A humble man will declare God to be right even in a time of affliction. Nehemiah 9:33: Yet You have been just in all that has come upon us. When people oppress and slander him, the humble soul acknowledges God's righteousness even in the midst of hard treatment. 2 Samuel 24:17: I have sinned. Lord, my pride, my spiritual barrenness, my treating of sermons as a luxury — these have brought all these judgments upon me. Even when clouds surround God, righteousness is the foundation of His throne, as Psalm 97:2 says.

6. A humble soul magnifies Christ. Philippians 1:20. He gives the glory for everything he does to Christ and to free grace. King Canute took the crown off his own head and placed it on a crucifix. In the same way, a humble saint takes the crown of honor from his own head and places it on Christ's. The reason is the love he bears for Christ — and love can give up anything for the one it loves. Isaac loved Rebekah and gave her his jewels. The humble saint loves Christ completely, and so can give everything to Him. He gives away the honor and praise of all he does to Christ — let Christ wear those jewels.

7. A humble soul is willing to receive a reproof for sin. A wicked man is too proud to accept a rebuke. The prophet Micaiah regularly confronted King Ahab about his sin, and Ahab said of him: I hate him, as 1 Kings 22:8 says. A reproof to a proud man is like pouring water on quicklime — it only makes things hotter. But a gracious soul loves the person who corrects him. Proverbs 9:8:

Rebuke a wise man, and he will love you. The humble-spirited Christian can endure the insults of an enemy and the correction of a friend.

8. A humble man is willing to have his own name and abilities overshadowed, as long as God's glory is increased. He is content to be outshone by others in gifts and reputation, as long as the crown of Christ shines all the brighter for it. This is the humble man's motto: Let me decrease; let Christ increase. His desire is that Christ be exalted — and if that is accomplished, he rejoices regardless of who the instrument is. Philippians 1:15: Some preach Christ out of envy. They preached in order to draw away some of Paul's listeners. But Paul says, Verse 18: Christ is preached, and in that I rejoice. A humble Christian is content to be set aside if God has other instruments He can use to bring Himself greater glory.

9. A humble saint is content with whatever condition God considers best for him. A proud man complains he does not have more; a humble man marvels that he has as much as he does. Genesis 32:10: I am not worthy of the least of all Your mercies. When the heart is low, it can be content in a low condition. A Christian looking at his sins marvels that things are not worse — he does not say his blessings are small, but that his sins are great. He knows that even the smallest portion God serves him is better than he deserves, and so he receives it gratefully, on his knees.

10. A humble Christian will stoop to the lowest person and the humblest task. He will visit the poorest member of Christ's body. Lazarus's sores are more precious to him than the rich man's purple robes. He does not say: Stand back, do not come near me, for I am holier than you. Instead, he condescends to those of low position, as Romans 12:16 says.

Application 1: Since humility is an inseparable mark of a godly man, let us test our hearts by this touchstone. Are we humble? How can godliness be seen in those who are bloated with pride and ready to burst? Yet though people are proud, they will not admit it. This bastard child of pride is born, but no one wants to claim it. Let me therefore ask a few questions and let conscience answer.

1. Are not those proud who are given to boasting? 1 Corinthians 5:6: Your boasting is not good. 1. Those who boast in their wealth — their hearts swell with their bank accounts. Bernard called pride the rich man's cousin. Ezekiel 28:5: Your heart has become proud because of your riches. 2. Those who boast in their clothing. Many dress in such fashions that they make the devil fall in love with them. Beauty marks, gaudy attire, immodest dress — what are these but the flags and banners of pride? 3. Those who boast in their physical appearance. The body is nothing but dust and blood kneaded together. Solomon says in Proverbs 31:30: Beauty is vain. Yet some are so vain as to be proud of what is itself only vanity. 4. Those who boast in their abilities. These decorations do not make them impressive in God's eyes. An angel is a highly intelligent creature — but take away humility from an angel, and he becomes a devil.

2. Are not those proud who have an inflated opinion of their own excellence? They look at themselves through the magnifying glass of self-love and appear to their own eyes to be greater than they really are. Simon Magus claimed in Acts 8:9 that he was someone great. Alexander insisted he was the son of Jupiter and of divine descent. Sapor, King of Persia, styled himself brother of the Sun and Moon. They toss about grand talk and words a foot and a half long.

I have read of a pope who placed his foot on the neck of the Emperor Frederick, and quoted Psalm 91:13 as his justification: You will tread on the lion and the dragon you will trample under-foot. There is no idol like the self. The proud man bows down to this idol.

3. Are not those proud who despise others? Luke 18:9: The Pharisees trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and treated others with contempt. The Chinese people used to say that Europe has one eye, they themselves have two, and all the rest of the world is blind. A proud man looks at others with the same contempt that Goliath had for David. 1 Samuel 17:42: When the Philistine looked and saw David, he disdained him. Those who stand on the pinnacle of pride look down on other men as no bigger than crows.

4. Are not those proud who blow their own trumpet? Acts 5:36: Before these days Theudas rose up, claiming to be somebody. A proud man is his own herald — he broadcasts his own fame, and in doing so reveals his vice: he paints his own virtue.

5. Are not those proud who claim the glory that belongs to God? Daniel 4:30: Is not this great Babylon, which I myself have built? So says the proud man: Are these not the prayers I have made? Are these not the charitable works I have done? When Herod gave a speech and the crowd hailed him as a god in Acts 12:22, he was perfectly happy to accept the honor. Pride is the greatest sacrilege — it robs God of His glory.

6. Are not those proud who are never satisfied with their circumstances? They speak harshly about God, accusing His care and wisdom as though He had not dealt well with them. A proud man

is someone God Himself cannot satisfy — like Momus, he is always finding fault and throwing it in heaven's face.

Let us search ourselves to see whether there is any of this leaven of pride in us. People are naturally proud creatures — this sin runs in the blood. Our first parents fell through pride — they reached for deity. The seeds of this sin exist even in the best of people, but the godly do not permit it to rule them — they labor to kill this weed through mortification. But where this sin is dominant and controlling, it cannot stand with grace. You might as well call a man wise who has no discernment, as call a man godly who has no humility.

Application 2: Work toward this characteristic — be humble. It is an apostolic command. 1 Peter 5:5: Be clothed with humility. Put it on like a fine garment. Better to lack any other thing than to lack humility — better to lack gifts than humility, better even to lack the comforts of the Spirit than to lack humility. Micah 6:8: What does the Lord require of you but to walk humbly with your God?

1. The greater a person's worth, the more humble he is. Feathers fly upward, but gold sinks down. The golden saint descends in humility. Some of the ancient writers compared humility to the celidonian stone — small in size, but remarkable in virtue.

2. God loves a humble soul. It is not our high birth but our low hearts that God delights in. A humble spirit is what God looks toward. Isaiah 66:2: To this one I will look — to him who is poor and contrite in spirit. A humble heart is God's palace. Isaiah 57:15: I dwell in the high and holy place, and also with him who is of a contrite and humble spirit. Great people, besides their state houses, have smaller retreats to which they withdraw on occasion. Besides

His dwelling place in heaven, God has the humble soul as His retreat, where He takes up His rest and finds His delight. Let Italy boast that it is the garden of the world for pleasure — a humble heart glories in this: it is the presence chamber of the great King.

3. The times we live in call for humility. The Lord seems to say to us now what He said to Israel in Exodus 33:5: Take off your ornaments from you, that I may know what to do to you. My displeasure is breaking forth — I have darkened the light of the sanctuary, I have turned waters to blood, I have sent the arrow of plague — so put down your pride and take off your ornaments. Woe to those who lift themselves up when God is pressing them down. When should people be humble if not under His hand? 1 Peter 5:6: Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God. When God afflicts His people and cuts short their privileges, it is time to put on sackcloth and lay their honor in the dust, as Job 16:15 says.

4. What a terrible sin pride is! Chrysostom calls it the mother of hell. Pride is a compound evil: just as Aristotle said that justice contains all virtues, so pride contains all vices. It is a spiritual drunkenness — it rises like wine into the head and intoxicates it. It is idolatry — a proud man is a worshiper of himself. It is revenge — Haman plotted Mordecai's death simply because Mordecai would not bow to him.

How hateful this sin is to God! Proverbs 16:5: Everyone who is proud in heart is an abomination to the Lord.

5. The destructive power of pride. It is the ruin of souls. Zephaniah 2:9-10: Surely Moab shall become like Sodom — this shall be theirs for their pride. Pliny says that doves take pride in

their feathers and in flying high — and at last they fly so high that they become prey for the hawk. People fly so high in pride that they become prey for the devil, the prince of the air.

6. Humility raises one's esteem in the eyes of others — everyone respects the humble. Proverbs 15:33: Before honor comes humility.

Question: What means can we use to become humble?

Answer: 1. Let us fix our eyes on the golden pattern of Christ. He holds the highest degree in humility. Philippians 2:7: He emptied Himself, and was made in the likeness of men. What a lowering of Himself for the Son of God to take on our flesh! And that Christ should take our nature when it was disgraced and stained by sin — this was the wonder of humility. Look at the humble Savior, and let the feathers of pride fall.

2. Study God's immensity and purity — a sight of His glory humbles. Elijah wrapped his face in his cloak when God's glory passed before him, as 1 Kings 19:13 says. The stars disappear when the sun appears.

3. Study ourselves. First, our dark side — by looking at our faces in the mirror of the Word we see our blemishes. What a world of sin swarms within us! We can say with Bernard: Lord, I am nothing but sinfulness or barrenness.

Second, our bright side. Is there any good in us? 1. How out of proportion it is to the means of grace we have been given! There is still something lacking in our faith, as 1 Thessalonians 3:10 says. Christian, do not be proud of what you have — be humble for what you still lack.

2. The grace we have is not homegrown — we owe it entirely to Christ and free grace. As the man said of the axe that had fallen into the water: 2 Kings 6:5: Alas, master, for it was borrowed! So I can say of all the goodness and excellence in us: it is borrowed. Would it not be foolish to be proud of a ring that belongs to someone else? 1 Corinthians 4:7: Who makes you different from anyone else? What do you have that you did not receive? The moon has no reason to be proud of her light, since she borrows it from the sun.

3. How far short we fall of others. Perhaps other Christians are giants in grace — they are in Christ not only before us, but far above us. We are like the foot in Christ's body; they are like the eye.

4. Our spiritual beauty is spotted. The church is said to be fair as the moon in Song of Solomon 6:10 — and the moon at its brightest still has a dark spot on it. Faith is mixed with unbelief. A Christian can find in the very best of his grace something that should humble him.

5. If we would be humble, let us think about our mortality. Should dust exalt itself? Thoughts of the grave should bury our pride. It is said that when there is a dangerous swelling in the body, stroking it with the hand of a dead man cures it. Serious meditation on death is enough to cure the swelling of pride.

## SECTION 12



2. A godly man is a praying man. This is stated in the text:

**1** Everyone that is godly shall pray to You. As soon as grace is poured in, prayer is poured out. Psalm 109:4: But I am prayer — in the Hebrew, I am prayer itself; prayer and I are one. Prayer is the soul's commerce with heaven — God comes down to us by His Spirit, and we go up to Him by prayer. Caligula placed his statue in the Capitol, whispering in Jupiter's ear — prayer whispers in God's ear. A godly man cannot live without prayer, just as a person cannot live without breathing. The soul cannot live unless it breathes out its desires to God. As soon as the newborn child of grace arrives, it cries — no sooner was Paul converted than Scripture says: Behold, he is praying, as Acts 9:11 shows. No doubt he prayed before, as a Pharisee, but it was either superficial or superstitious. When the work of grace had passed through his soul, now — truly — he prayed. A godly man spends time every day on the mountain of prayer. He begins the day with prayer — before he opens his shop, he opens his heart to God. We burn sweet fragrances in our homes; a godly man's home is a house of incense — he fills it with the fragrance of prayer. He engages in no business without first seeking God. Scipio never entered the Senate house without first going up to the Capitol to offer his devotion. A godly man consults

God in everything — he asks His permission and His blessing. The Greeks sought counsel from their oracles; in the same way, a godly man inquires of the divine Oracle, as Genesis 24:12 and 1 Samuel 23:3-4 show. A true saint constantly sends up his heart to heaven through brief, spontaneous prayers.

Question: Is prayer a sign of a godly man? Can a hypocrite not pray eloquently and with apparent devotion?

Answer: He can. Isaiah 58:2: They seek Me daily. But a hypocrite does not pray in the Spirit, as Ephesians 6:18 says. A person can have the gift of prayer without having the spirit of prayer.

Question: How do we know that we have the spirit of prayer?

Answer: When the prayer we make is spiritual.

Question: What does it mean to pray a spiritual prayer?

Answer: 1. When we pray with understanding. Under the Old Testament law, Aaron was to light the lamps when he burned incense on the altar, as Exodus 30:7 says. The incense pictured prayer, and the lighting of the lamps pictured knowledge — when the incense of prayer burns, the lamp of knowledge must be lit. 1 Corinthians 14:15: I will pray with the understanding. We must know the majesty and holiness of God so that we are moved with genuine reverence when we come before Him. We must bring petitions that align exactly with God's will. Ecclesiastes 5:2: Do not be hasty with your mouth or impulsive in thought to bring up a matter before God. God refused to accept what was blind and defective, as Malachi 1:8 says. How can we pray with real feeling when we do not pray with understanding? Roman Catholics pray in an unknown language. Christ could reply to them as He did to the

mother of Zebedee's sons: Matthew 20:22: You do not know what you are asking. The person who prays without knowing what he asks will be heard he knows not when.

2. A spiritual prayer is one in which the heart and spirit pray — not only words, but genuine desire. It is wonderful when a person can say: Lord, my heart prays. 1 Samuel 1:13: Hannah prayed in her heart. The sound of a trumpet comes from within; and the finest music of prayer comes from within the heart. If the heart does not go along with the act, it is speaking, not praying.

3. A spiritual prayer is a fervent prayer. James 5:16: The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous person accomplishes much. The heart, like the first mover in the old astronomical model, should carry the affections along in the most zealous and vigorous way. Fervency is the wing of prayer — it is what carries prayer upward to heaven. Prayer is expressed through sighs and groans, as Romans 8:26 says. It is not so much the eloquence of the spirit as the groans of the spirit that God values. Prayer is called a wrestling in Genesis 32:24, and a pouring out of the soul in 1 Samuel 1:15. Prayer is compared to incense in Psalm 141:2. Incense without fire produces no sweet smell — prayer without fervency is like incense without fire. Christ prayed with strong crying and tears, as Hebrews 5:7 says — crying prayer prevails. When the heart is on fire in prayer, a Christian is carried as if in a fiery chariot straight up to heaven.

4. A spiritual prayer is one that rises from a broken heart. Psalm 51:17: The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit. The incense in the tabernacle was to be ground fine, picturing the breaking of the heart in prayer. It is not the fluent tongue but the melting heart that God accepts. A Christian may say: I cannot pray as others can

— as Moses said to God: I am not eloquent. But can you weep and sigh? Does your soul pour out through your eyes? God accepts broken expressions when they come from broken hearts. I have read of a plant that bears no fruit, but it weeps out a kind of gum that is very precious. In the same way, though you do not flourish with the gifts and expressions of others, if you can weep tears from a contrite heart, these are exceedingly precious to God, and He will put them in His bottle. Jacob wept in prayer and prevailed with the angel, as Hosea 12:4 says.

5. A spiritual prayer is a believing prayer. Matthew 21:22: Whatever you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive. The reason so many prayers sink and are lost is that they crash against the rock of unbelief. Praying without faith is shooting without a bullet. When faith takes prayer by the hand, we draw near to God. We should come to God in prayer as the leper did: Matthew 8:2: Lord, if You are willing, You can make me clean. It dishonors God to have even a whisper in the heart suggesting that His ear is heavy and He cannot hear. What was said of Israel in the wilderness can be applied to prayerless prayer — it could not enter in, because of unbelief.

6. A spiritual prayer is a holy prayer. 1 Timothy 2:8: Lift up holy hands. Prayer must be offered on the altar of a pure heart. Sin that is lived in makes the heart hard and God's ear deaf. Sin stops the mouth of prayer the way a robber gags a traveler — it keeps him from speaking. Sin poisons and contaminates prayer. A wicked man's prayer is infected with plague — and will God come near it? A magnet loses its power when coated with garlic, and

prayer loses its power when polluted with sin. Psalm 66:18: If I had cherished iniquity in my heart, the Lord would not have listened.

It is senseless to pray against sin, and then to sin against prayer. A spiritual prayer, like distilled spirits, must be refined and separated from the dregs of sin. Malachi 3:3: That they may offer to the Lord an offering in righteousness. If the heart is holy, this altar will sanctify the offering.

7. A spiritual prayer is a humble prayer. Psalm 10:17: Lord, You have heard the desire of the humble. Prayer is the asking of a gift, which calls for humility. Luke 18:13: The tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his chest, saying, God, be merciful to me, a sinner! God's incomprehensible glory can strike us with holy awe when we draw near to Him. Ezra 9:6: O my God, I am ashamed and blush to lift my face to You. There is something right and beautiful about a creature lying prostrate at the feet of its Maker. Genesis 18:27: Behold, I have undertaken to speak to the Lord, I who am but dust and ashes. The lower the heart descends, the higher the prayer ascends.

8. A spiritual prayer is praying in the name of Christ. To pray in Christ's name is not merely to mention His name in prayer, but to pray in reliance on His intercession. Just as a child claims his inheritance in the right of his father who secured it, we come for mercy in Christ's name — He has purchased it for us with His blood. Unless we pray in this way, we are not truly praying at all — in fact, we provoke God. It was the same with Uzziah, who tried to offer incense without a priest and God struck him with leprosy, as

2 Chronicles 26:16 says. When we do not come in Christ's name in prayer, we are offering incense without a priest — and what can we expect but to encounter wrath?

9. A spiritual prayer is one offered out of love for prayer. A wicked man may pray, but he does not love to pray. Job 27:10: Will he delight himself in the Almighty? A godly man is carried on wings of delight — he is never better than when he is praying. He is not driven by fear but fired by love. Isaiah 56:7: I will make them joyful in My house of prayer.

10. A spiritual prayer is one offered with spiritual aims. There is a vast difference between a spiritual prayer and a self-centered request. The hypocrite's aims are worldly and fleshly — he looks sideways in prayer. It is not a sense of his spiritual needs that drives him, but desire. James 4:3: You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions. The sinner prays more for food than for grace. God does not regard this as praying but as howling. Hosea 7:14: They cry to Me, but do not cry out to Me from the heart, but wail upon their beds for grain and wine. Just give me the profit.

Prayers with no good aim receive no good answer. A godly man has spiritual aims in prayer. He sends out his prayer as a merchant sends out his ship — expecting great returns of spiritual blessing. His purpose in prayer is that his heart may be made holier and that he may have deeper communion with God. A godly man keeps the trade of prayer going in order to grow the stock of grace.

11. A spiritual prayer is accompanied by the use of means. We need both prayer and practical action working together. When Hezekiah was sick, he not only prayed for recovery but also applied

a poultice of figs to the boil, as Isaiah 38:21 says. It is the same with the soul — when we pray against sin and also avoid temptation, when we pray for grace and also make use of every opportunity, this is the applying of the fig poultice, which will bring healing. To pray for holiness while neglecting the means is like winding up a clock and then pulling off the weights.

12. A spiritual prayer is one that leaves the heart in a spiritual condition afterward. A Christian is better after prayer — he has gained more strength over sin, just as a person gains physical strength through exercise. After prayer the heart retains a tint of holiness, as a vessel keeps the scent of the wine that has been in it. When Moses had been with God on the mountain, his face shone. In the same way, having been on the mountain of prayer, our graces shine and our lives shine. This is the mark of a godly man — he prays in the Spirit. This is the right kind of prayer. The gift of prayer is common, like ordinary fire used in a kitchen. But spiritual prayer is rarer and more excellent, like lightning that comes down from heaven.

Application 1: Since the godly man is a man of prayer, this excludes from godliness those who:

1. Who do not pray at all. Their homes are unhallowed houses. It is listed as a mark of the reprobate: He does not call upon God, as Psalm 14:4 says. Does the person in need expect to receive help who never asks for it? Do they expect mercy from God who never seek it? If so, God would be treating them better than He treated His own Son — who offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying, as Hebrews 5:7 says. None of God's children are speechless. Galatians 4:6: Because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father! Even crea-

tures by natural instinct cry to God. Psalm 147:9: The young ravens cry. Psalm 104:21: The young lions seek their food from God. To not cry to God is worse than animal behavior.

2. Others pray, but only rarely. Like that godless man Heylin describes, who told God he was no common beggar, had never troubled Him before, and if God would hear him now, he would never trouble Him again.

3. Others pray, but not in the Holy Spirit, as Jude 20 says. They are more like parrots than weeping doves — their hearts do not melt in prayer. They exercise their minds more than their feelings.

Application 2: If you want to give evidence of the new birth, cry out Abba, Father! Be men and women of prayer. Pray at least twice a day — in the temple there was a morning and an evening sacrifice. Daniel prayed three times a day. In fact, he loved prayer so much that he would not give it up even to save his life, as Daniel 6:10 shows. Luther spent three hours every day in prayer.

Objection: But why do we need to pray, when God has already made so many promises of blessing?

Answer: Prayer is the condition attached to the promise — promises turn on the hinge of prayer. Ezekiel 36:37: I will also let the house of Israel ask Me to do this for them. A king promises a pardon, but it must be formally requested. David had a promise that God would build him a house, but he claimed that promise through prayer, as 2 Samuel 7:25 shows. Christ Himself had all the promises secured to Him, yet He prayed — and spent entire nights in prayer.

So if you would be counted godly, devote yourself to prayer. Prayer sanctifies your blessings, as 1 Timothy 4:5 says. Prayer weeds out sin and waters grace.

To encourage Christians and strengthen their resolve in prayer — as Aaron and Hur held up Moses' arms — let me offer these few considerations.

1. Prayer is seed sown in God's ears. Other seed sown in the ground can be picked up by birds — but this seed, especially when watered with tears, is too precious to be lost.

2. Consider the power of prayer. After laying out the full armor of a Christian, the apostle crowns everything with prayer as its chief component, as Ephesians 6:18 says. Without prayer, says Zanchius, all the rest is worth little. Through prayer, Moses divided the Red Sea. Joshua stopped the movement of the sun and made it stand still, as Joshua 10:13 records. Indeed, prayer made the Sun of Righteousness stand still — Luke 18:40: And Jesus stood still. Prayer is the doorway to every blessing, spiritual and physical. When the emperor Aurelius Antoninus marched against the Germans, he had in his army a regiment of Christians whose fervent prayers brought rain to refresh the whole army — and because of the power of their prayers, he named them the Thundering Regiment. Prayer has power to bring down the proud enemies of the church. We read that the two witnesses have fire at their lips — fire that comes from their mouths and devours their enemies, as Revelation 11:5 says. This fire is surely to be understood as their prayers. David prayed: Lord, turn Ahithophel's counsel into foolishness, as 2 Samuel 15:31 says — and that prayer caused Ahithophel to hang himself. Moses' prayer against Amalek accomplished more than Joshua's sword. Prayer has a kind of di-

vine power — it has raised the dead, prevailed with angels, cast out demons, and even moved God Himself. Jacob's prayer held God fast. Genesis 32:26: I will not let You go unless You bless me. Prayer finds God free and leaves Him bound.

3. Jesus Christ prays over our prayers again — He removes the dross and presents nothing but pure gold to His Father. Christ mingles His sweet incense with the prayers of the saints, as Revelation 5:8 says. Think about the dignity of His person — He is God. Think about the tenderness of His relationship — He is a Son. What encouragement this gives us to pray! Our prayers are placed in the hands of a mediator. Though as they leave us they are weak and imperfect, as they reach the Father through Christ they are mighty and powerful.

4. The sweet promises God has made to prayer. Isaiah 30:19: He will be very gracious to you at the sound of your cry. Jeremiah 29:13-14: You will seek Me and find Me, when you seek Me with all your heart. Isaiah 65:24: Before they call I will answer, while they are yet speaking I will hear. These promises keep the head of prayer above water. God is bound by His own promises, as Samson was bound by his own hair.

Let us then redouble our efforts and, like our Savior, pray even more earnestly, as Luke 22:44 says. Let us be persistent in our pleading, and resolve with Bernard that we will not leave God's presence until we have God Himself. Prayer is a battering ram that will make the gates of heaven fly open.

Question: How should we go about praying rightly?

Answer: Call on the Spirit of God. Jude 20: Praying in the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit both composes prayer and sets it on fire. God recognizes no other language but that of His own Spirit. Pray for the Holy Spirit, so that you may pray in the Holy Spirit.

## SECTION 13



**1** 3. A godly man is a sincere man. John 1:47: Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit! The word for sincere means without folds or hidden layers. A godly man is straightforward, with no hidden agendas or subtle evasions. Religion is the uniform a godly man wears, and that uniform is lined with sincerity.

Question: How does the godly man's sincerity show itself?

Answer: 1. The godly man is what he appears to be — he is a Jew inwardly, as Romans 2:29 says. Grace runs through his heart like silver through veins of ore. The hypocrite is not what he appears — he keeps a cunning fox hidden within a pleasant face.

A portrait resembles a person but has no breath. The hypocrite is a portrait — a likeness — he does not breathe out genuine holiness. He is like an angel painted on a sign. A godly man matches his profession the way a transcript matches the original document.

2. The godly man works to make himself acceptable to God in everything. 2 Corinthians 5:9: We make it our aim, whether present or absent, to be pleasing to Him. It is better to have God's approval than the world's applause. Those who competed in the Olympic races labored to receive the approval of the judge and un-

pire of the race. A day is coming very soon when one smile from God's face will be worth more than all the praises of men. How sweet that word will be: Well done, good and faithful servant, as Matthew 25:21 says. A godly man is ambitious for God's endorsement. The hypocrite wants to make a good impression on people — Saul was always after the people's approval, as 1 Samuel 15:30 shows. A godly man presents his heart to God, who is both the spectator and the judge.

3. The godly man is honest in confessing his sins. Psalm 32:5: I acknowledged my sin to You, and I did not cover my iniquity. The hypocrite veils and covers his sin — he does not cut sin off but hides it. He is like a patient with some ugly disease who would rather die than admit what ails him. But a godly man's sincerity shows in this: he confesses his sin and shames himself for it. 2 Samuel 24:17: I have sinned, and I have done wickedly. And a child of God will confess sin in specific terms. An insincere Christian confesses sin only in bulk — acknowledging in general that he is a sinner. But David points as if with his finger directly at the wound: Psalm 51:4: I have done this evil. He does not say, I have done evil, but this evil — he points straight at his bloodguilt.

4. The godly man has pure motives in everything he does. In every act of worship, his goal is to know God better and to bring more glory to God. Just as the plant heliotrope turns itself to follow the movement of the sun, so a godly man's actions all move toward the glory of God. It is a principle in philosophy that means exist for the sake of ends. A godly man prays and worships in order to honor God. Even if he falls short, he is aiming in the right direction. The hypocrite cares about nothing but self-interest — his

mill's sails turn only when the wind of advantage is blowing. He never dives into the waters of the sanctuary except to fish for a piece of gold at the bottom.

5. The godly man hates pretense toward other people. His heart goes along with his tongue. He cannot flatter and hate at the same time, or praise a person and then tear him down. Romans 12:9: Let love be without hypocrisy. Pretended love is worse than hatred — faking friendship is no better than lying, because it claims to offer what is not there. Many people are like Joab: 2 Samuel 20:9-10: He took Amasa by the beard to kiss him, and struck him in the stomach with his sword, and he died. Wicked poison lies hidden beneath sweet honey.

There is a river in Spain whose fish appear to be golden in the water, but when taken out, they look like ordinary fish. Not all that glitters is gold. Some people profess great kindness, but they are like large veins with little blood — lean on them and they give way like a dislocated leg. I deeply question the honesty toward God of a person who will flatter and lie to his friend. Proverbs 10:18: He who conceals hatred with lying lips is a fool. By everything said so far, we can test whether we have this mark of a godly man — sincerity.

Sincerity, as I understand it, is not exactly a grace in its own right, but rather the essential ingredient in every grace. Sincerity is what gives grace its quality — without it, grace is not genuine. Ephesians 6:24: Grace be with all those who love our Lord Jesus Christ with undying love. Sincerity qualifies our love. Sincerity is to grace what blood and vital energy are to the body — there is no life without blood, and there is no genuine grace without sincerity.

Application: If we want to be regarded as godly, let us press toward this characteristic of sincerity.

1. Sincerity makes us lovely in God's eyes. God says of the sincere soul what He said of Zion: Psalm 132:14: This is My resting place forever; here I will dwell, for I have desired it. A sincere heart is God's paradise of delight. Noah found grace in God's eyes. But what did God see in Noah? He was girt with the belt of sincerity: Genesis 6:9: Noah was blameless in his generation. Sincerity resembles God, and when God sees a sincere heart He sees His own image, and He cannot help but love it. Proverbs 11:20: He who is blameless in his way is God's delight.

2. Sincerity causes our service to be accepted by God. The church at Philadelphia had but little strength — her grace was weak, her service modest. Yet of all the churches Christ wrote to, He found the least fault with her. Why? Because she was the most sincere. Revelation 3:8: You have kept My word and have not denied My name. Though we cannot pay God all we owe, a little in good coin is accepted. God accepts sincerity as full payment. A little real gold, however tarnished, is better than the shiniest imitation. A little sincerity, even with many weaknesses clinging to it, is worth more to God than all the spectacular performances of hypocrites.

3. Sincerity is our safety. People with false hearts who step out of God's way and rely on worldly scheming think they are most safe when they are least secure. The person who walks uprightly walks safely. Proverbs 10:9. A sincere Christian will do nothing that the Word does not sanction — and that is safe for the conscience. More than that, God often takes care of the outward safety of those who are upright in their ways. Psalm 4:8: I lay down and

slept. David was surrounded by enemies at the time, yet God so encamped around him by His providence that David could sleep as securely as if he were in a fortress. Verse 5: The Lord sustained me. The only true way to be safe is to be sincere.

4. Sincerity is the gospel's idea of perfection. Job 1:8: Have you considered My servant Job, that there is no one like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man? Though a Christian may be full of weaknesses and be like a newborn infant put out to nurse — fragile and helpless — God looks at him as if he were completely righteous. Every true saint wears the Thummim of perfection on his breastplate.

5. Sincerity is what the devil attacks most fiercely. Satan's spite was not primarily against Job's wealth, but against his integrity. He wanted to wrench the shield of sincerity from Job's hand — but Job held it fast: Job 27:6. A thief does not fight over an empty purse but over money. The devil wanted to rob Job of the jewel of a good conscience — and then Job would truly have been poor. Satan does not oppose outward profession but sincerity. He lets people go to church and make grand displays of holiness without any opposition — that does him no harm and them no good. But when people are genuinely and sincerely godly, Satan musters all his forces against them. What the devil attacks most, we must labor hardest to defend. Sincerity is our royal fortress, where our chief treasure is kept. This fortress draws the most fire, so let us be most careful to protect it. While a man holds his castle, his castle holds him. While we hold our sincerity, sincerity will hold us.

6. Sincerity is the beauty of a Christian. Where does the beauty of a diamond lie, if not in this — that it is a real diamond? If it is a fake, it is worthless. In the same way, where does the beauty of a

Christian lie, but in this — that he has truth in his inward parts? Sincerity is a Christian's banner of glory — it is both the breast-plate that defends him and the crown that adorns him.

7. Consider the vileness of hypocrisy. The Lord commanded that no leaven be offered in sacrifice — and leaven was a picture of hypocrisy, as Luke 12:1 shows. The hypocrite does double service for the devil: behind the mask of piety, he can sin more and be suspected less. Matthew 23:14: Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you devour widows' houses, and for pretense you make long prayers. Who would think men guilty of extortion who prayed for hours at a time? Who would suspect a man of using false weights who always had his Bible in hand? Who would think him a slanderer who seemed to be afraid of an oath? Hypocrites are the worst kind of sinners — they cast the deepest reproach on religion. Hypocrisy usually ends in scandal, and scandal brings evil reputation on the ways of God. One man's bankruptcy makes even honest men suspected. One scandalous hypocrite makes the world suspect that all professing Christians are the same. The hypocrite seems almost designed to do religion harm and to make it despised.

The hypocrite is a liar — he worships God with his knees while his heart worships his own desires. As 2 Kings 17:33 says: They feared the Lord, and served their own gods.

The hypocrite is a shameless sinner — he knows his heart is false, yet he presses on. Judas knew himself to be a hypocrite. He asked, Master, is it I? Christ replied, You have said it. Yet so shameless was he that he continued in his falseness and betrayed Christ. All the plagues and curses written in God's Word are the hypocrite's inheritance — hell is his appointed meeting place.

Matthew 24:51. Hypocrites are the very guests the devil is most expecting, and he will make them as welcome as fire and brimstone can.

8. When the heart is sincere, God will overlook many weaknesses. Numbers 23:21: He has not observed iniquity in Jacob. God's love does not make Him blind — He can see our weaknesses, but how? Not with an eye of vengeance but with an eye of compassion, the way a physician examines a disease in his patient in order to heal it. God does not see iniquity in Jacob so as to destroy him, but to heal him. Isaiah 57:18: He went on in his own way, but I have seen his ways, and I will heal him. How much pride, vanity, and anger does the Lord pass over in His sincere ones! He sees the integrity and pardons the weakness. How much did God overlook in Asa? The high places were not removed. Yet 2 Chronicles 15:17 says: The heart of Asa was wholly true to the Lord all his days. We value a portrait even if it is not drawn full-length. In the same way, though the graces of God's people are not developed to their full measure — and even have many scars and spots — yet having something of God in them in sincerity, they will find mercy. God loves the sincere, and it is the nature of love to cover weakness.

9. Nothing but sincerity will give us comfort in an hour of trouble. King Hezekiah thought he was dying, but what revived him was that his conscience drew up a certificate on his behalf: Isaiah 38:2-3: Remember, O Lord, how I have walked before You in faithfulness and with a whole heart. Sincerity was the finest jewel in his crown. What a golden shield this will be against Satan when he roars at us with his temptations and sets our sins before us on our deathbed. Then we will answer: It is true, Satan — these were our failures, but we have mourned over them. If we sinned, it was

against the grain of our heart's deepest desire. This will stop the devil's mouth and send him into retreat. Therefore pursue the jewel of sincerity. 1 John 3:21: If our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God. If we are cleared in our own conscience, we can be confident that we will be acquitted at the great judgment on the last day.

## SECTION 14



**1** 4. A godly man is a heavenly man. Heaven is in him before he is in heaven. The Greek word for saint means a person taken off from the earth. A person may live in one place and yet belong to another — he may live in Spain and yet be a citizen of England. Pomponius dwelt in Athens, yet was a citizen of Rome. In the same way, a godly man lives for a time in the world, but he belongs to the Jerusalem above. That is where he aspires to be. Every day is Ascension Day for a believer. The saints are called stars for their loftiness — they have risen into the upper regions. Proverbs 15:24: The way of life leads upward for the wise. A godly man is heavenly in six ways.

1. In his election. 2. In his disposition. 3. In his communication. 4. In his operation. 5. In his expectation. 6. In his conversation.

1. A godly man is heavenly in his election — he chooses heavenly things. David chose to dwell in God's house as his permanent home, as Psalm 84:10 shows. A godly person chooses Christ and grace above the most glorious things the world offers. A person is defined by his choices. This choice for God is most clearly seen in a

decisive moment: when Christ and the world compete for our loyalty, and we let the world go to keep Christ and a clear conscience — that is a sure sign we have chosen the better part.

2. A godly man is heavenly in his disposition — he sets his affections on things above, as Colossians 3:2 says. He sends his heart to heaven before he arrives there. He looks on the world as a beautiful prison, and he cannot love his chains even when they are made of gold. A holy person contemplates glory and eternity. His desires have grown wings and flown to heaven. Grace in the heart is like fire — it causes the soul to sparkle upward in holy longings and prayers lifted to God.

3. A godly man is heavenly in his communication — his words are seasoned with salt to benefit others, as Colossians 4:6 says. As soon as Christ rose from the grave, He was speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God, as Acts 1:3 records. In the same way, no sooner is a person risen from the grave of their unregenerate life than they begin speaking of heaven. Ecclesiastes 10:12: The words of a wise man's mouth are gracious. A godly man speaks so heavenly that it is as if he has already been there. The love he bears for God will not let him be silent. When the bride in the Song of Songs was overcome with love, her tongue became like the pen of a ready writer: Song of Songs 5:10: My beloved is radiant and ruddy, outstanding among ten thousand. Where wine is in the house, the sign is hung out — and where there is a genuine principle of godliness in the heart, it will express itself through the lips.

How can they be called godly who seem possessed with a spirit of silence? They never have any good spiritual conversation. They speak freely enough about worldly things — they can talk about their goods and trade, and report on what a fine harvest they had

— but in matters of religion they are as if their tongue were stuck to the roof of their mouth. If you spend time with many such people, you would have no way of knowing whether they were Christians at all, for they never speak a word about Christ.

Others have tongues that pour out poison rather than honey, defiling those around them. Plutarch says that speech ought to be like gold — most valuable when it has the least impurity. What unclean and spiteful words some people utter! What a foul stench comes from these dungheaps. Those lips that gallop so fast into sin have great need of David's bridle. Can the body be healthy when the tongue is diseased? Can the heart be holy when the devil is at the lips? A godly man speaks the language of heaven. Malachi 3:16: Those who feared the Lord spoke often with one another.

4. A godly man is heavenly in his operation. The motions of the planets are heavenly — and a godly man's motions are elevated and sacred. He works out his salvation with all his strength, as the athletes in the Olympics strained every muscle to win the crown. He prays, fasts, and keeps watch. He presses urgently toward heaven. He is moved by God, carries forward God's interests in the world, and does the work of angels. His actions are worthy of heaven.

5. A godly man is heavenly in his expectation — his hopes reach beyond the world. Titus 1:2: In hope of eternal life. A godly man casts anchor within the veil. He hopes to have the chains of sin broken off. He hopes for things eye has not seen. He hopes for a kingdom when he dies — a kingdom promised by the Father, purchased by the Son, and assured by the Holy Spirit. Just as an heir lives in anticipation of a great inheritance that will one day be his,

so a child of God, who is a co-heir with Christ, lives in hope of glory. This hope comforts him in every situation. Romans 5:2: We rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.

First, hope comforts a godly man in affliction. Hope lightens and sweetens even the most severe trials. A child of God can laugh with tears in his eyes. The time is coming soon when the cross will be taken from his shoulders and a crown placed on his head. A saint who is surrounded by a thousand troubles will be, in an instant, clothed with robes of immortality and raised above the angels.

Second, hope comforts a godly man in death. Proverbs 14:32: The righteous has hope in his death. If someone were to ask a dying saint — when all his earthly comforts were gone — what he still had, he would say: the helmet of hope. There is an account of a Christian woman who, when a persecutor commanded that her breasts be cut off, replied: Tyrant, do your worst — I have two breasts you cannot touch: faith and hope. A soul with this blessed hope rises above the desire for life and the fear of death. Who would be troubled to exchange a short-term lease for an inheritance that will never end? Who would regret leaving behind this brief life — soon expired — to possess a glorious inheritance in eternal light?

6. A godly man is heavenly in his conversation — he radiates such holiness that it honors his profession. He lives as if he had seen the Lord with his own eyes. What zeal, holiness, and humility shine forth in his life. A godly person seeks not only to imitate the angels but to follow Christ Himself. 1 John 2:6: Whoever says he abides in Him ought to walk in the same way in which He walked. The Macedonians celebrated Alexander's birthday by wearing his

portrait around their necks, set with pearls and jewels. In the same way, a godly man carries the living image of Christ with him in the heavenliness of his conduct. Philippians 3:20: Our citizenship is in heaven.

Application 1: Those who are consumed by the world must be judged ungodly, for godliness and earthly-mindedness are a contradiction. Philippians 3:18-19: For many walk, of whom I now tell you even weeping, that they are enemies of the cross of Christ, whose god is their belly, who set their minds on earthly things. We read that the earth swallowed Korah alive, as Numbers 16:32 records. This judgment has fallen on many in a spiritual sense — the earth has swallowed up their time, their thoughts, and their conversation. They are buried twice: their hearts are buried in the earth before their bodies are. How sad it is that the soul — that noble thing, made for communion with God and angels — should be put to grinding work and made a slave to the earth. How has the soul become like the prodigal son, choosing to spend time with pigs and feed on husks rather than seeking communion with the blessed God? This is how Satan fools people and keeps them from heaven — by making them seek a heaven here.

Application 2: If we want to show that we are born of God, we must have a heavenly spirit and disposition. We will never go to heaven when we die unless we are living in a heavenly way while we live. To lift our affections higher, let us carefully weigh four considerations.

1. God Himself calls us to turn away from the world. 1 John 2:15: Do not love the world. We may enjoy its pleasures the way we enjoy the fragrance of flowers, but the world must not lie close to our hearts like a treasure we cling to. Romans 12:2: Do not be con-

formed to this world. Do not chase after its honors and profits. God's commands call us away from the world — and so do His providences. Why does He send war and plague? What is the meaning of such great suffering? Surely, times of dying are meant to help us die to the world.

2. Consider how far below a Christian it is to be earthly-minded. We sometimes laugh at children who busily chase after toys — blowing bubbles, kissing their dolls — while we ourselves do the same thing. At death, all the world we have clutched and treasured will be like a rag doll — it will give us no comfort then. To be consumed with such things is far below the dignity of a soul born from heaven. More than that, those who claim to be lifted by godliness and whose hopes reach above — for them to have their hearts fixed below is to dishonor their heavenly calling and to soil the silver wings of grace by dragging them through the dirt.

3. Consider what a poor and contemptible thing the world is — it is not worth setting our affections on. The world cannot fill the heart. If Satan were to take a Christian up to a high mountain and show him all the kingdoms and glory of the world, what would he actually be showing him? A fantasy — an apparition. Nothing here can satisfy the vast capacity of the human soul. Job 20:22: In the fullness of his sufficiency he is in distress. There is want in the midst of plenty. The world will no more fill the soul than a single drop will fill a bucket. And even the little sweetness we draw from created things is mixed with bitterness — like the drink they gave Christ. Mark 15:23: They offered Him wine mixed with myrrh. And this imperfect sweetness will not last. 1 John 2:17: The world is passing away. Created things do little more than greet us and then vanish. The world constantly changes — it is reliable only in its dis-

appointments. How quickly we may move from our comfortable lodging to make our bed in the dust. The world is a great inn where we stop for a night or two and then move on. What madness it is to set our hearts so firmly on the inn that we forget our true home.

4. Consider what a glorious place heaven is. We read of an angel coming down from heaven who placed his right foot on the sea and his left foot on the land, as Revelation 10:2 says. If we had but once been in heaven and seen its surpassing glory, we could in holy contempt trample with one foot on the earth and with the other on the sea. Heaven is called a better country in Hebrews 11:16: They desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Heaven is called a better country in contrast to the land where we now live as strangers. What should we care about, if not that better country?

Question: In what sense is heaven a better country?

Answer: 1. In that country above there are better delights. There is the tree of life and the rivers of pleasure. There is breathtaking beauty and inexhaustible riches. There are the joys of angels. There is the flower of joy in full bloom. There is more than we can ask or imagine. There is glory in its fullest measure, beyond all description.

2. In that country there is a better dwelling. First, it is a house not made with hands, as 2 Corinthians 5:1 says — which signals its excellence. Every house here has been built by human hands, but the house above surpasses the craft of any man or angel. Only God could lay a single stone in that building. Second, it is eternal in the heavens. It is not a temporary shelter but a permanent mansion — a house that will never fall into disrepair. Wisdom has built this house and hewn out its seven pillars, which will never crumble.

3. In that country there are better provisions. In our Father's house there is bread enough. Heaven was pictured by Canaan, which flowed with milk and honey. There is the royal feast, the finest wine, the food of angels — delicacies so extraordinary they surpass not only our ability to describe them but even our capacity to believe them.

4. In that country there is better society. God Himself is there — blessed forever. How infinitely sweet and satisfying will one smile from His face be? A king's presence makes the court. There are the glorious cherubim. In this earthly country where we now live, we are among wolves and serpents. In the country above, we will be among angels. There are the spirits of righteous people made perfect, as Hebrews 12:23 says. Here, God's people are obscured by their weaknesses — we see them spotted with pride, anger, and fault-finding. But in the Jerusalem above, we will see them in their royal attire, adorned with unimaginable beauty, without the slightest shadow of sin upon them.

5. In that country there is better air to breathe. We sometimes travel to the countryside for fresh air — but the best air is found only in that better country. First, it is more temperate — the climate is calm and mild. We will neither freeze with cold nor faint with heat. Second, it is brighter air — a better light shines there. The Sun of Righteousness illuminates that horizon with His glorious beams. Revelation 21:23: The Lamb is its light. Third, it is purer air. Wetlands filled with dark vapors are considered unhealthy to live in. This world is a place of bogs and swamps, where the toxic vapors of sin rise up and make the atmosphere harmful. But in the country above, there are none of those vapors — only a

sweet fragrance of holiness. There is the scent of the orange tree and the pomegranate, and myrrh and cassia flowing from Christ, sending out the most beautiful fragrance.

6. In that country there is better soil.

First, for its altitude: the earth lies low and is therefore of a lesser kind. The element nearest to heaven is purer and more excellent, like fire. That country above is the high country, as Psalm 24:3 says — it is set far above all the visible heavens.

Second, it is better land for its fertility — it bears a richer harvest. The richest harvest on earth is a golden grain harvest, but the country above yields nobler things. There are celestial pearls, the spiritual vine, the honeycomb of God's love dripping with sweetness, the water of life, the hidden manna. There is fruit that does not rot and flowers that never fade. There is a harvest that can never be fully gathered — it will always be harvest time in heaven. And all of this the land yields without any labor of plowing or sowing.

Third, it is better land for its freedom from harm. There are no thorns or briars there. This world is a wilderness filled with wicked people, and Micah 7:4 says the best of them is a briar — tearing at God's people and wounding their spiritual freedoms. But in the country above, not one briar can be found — all the briars have been burned away.

Fourth, it is better land for the excellence of its prospects — everything a person sees there is his own. The best view is the one where a person can see the furthest on his own ground.

7. In that country there is better unity — all the inhabitants are bound together in love. The poisonous weed of hatred does not grow there. There is harmony without division and charity without envy. In that country above, as in Solomon's temple, no sound of hammer is heard.

8. In that country there is better employment. Here we complain of our needs and weep over our sins. But there we will praise God. How joyfully will the birds of paradise sing when they arrive in that heavenly country? There the morning stars will sing together and all God's saints will shout for joy.

What should we desire more than that country above? Those whose eyes are open will see that it surpasses everything beyond measure. An uneducated person looks at a star and it appears to him as a tiny silver speck. But an astronomer, using his instruments to measure the star's true size, knows it to be many times larger than the earth. In the same way, a person without spiritual perception hears that the heavenly country is very glorious, but it seems far away and remote — and because he has no spiritual discernment, the world looks bigger in his eyes. But those who are spiritually skilled, using the instrument of faith to see heaven clearly, will say: this is by far the better country. And toward it they will hasten, with the sails of desire fully set.

## SECTION 15



**1** 5. A godly man is a zealous man. Grace turns a saint into a seraph — it makes him burn with holy zeal. Zeal is a mixed passion, a compound of love and anger. It carries our love toward God and our anger against sin in the most intense way. Zeal is the flame of the affections. A godly man has a double baptism — of water and of fire. He is baptized with a spirit of zeal. He burns with zeal for God's honor, truth, and worship. Psalm 119:139: My zeal has consumed me. Zeal was a crown placed on Phinehas's head — he was zealous for his God, as Numbers 25:13 says. Moses, touched with a coal from God's altar, smashed the tablets in his zeal, as Exodus 32:19 records. Our Lord, in His zeal, drove the buyers and sellers out of the temple. John 2:17: Zeal for Your house has consumed Me.

But there is an unnatural heat — something that looks like zeal but is not. A comet looks like a star. Let me therefore show the differences between true zeal and false zeal.

1. False zeal is blind zeal. Romans 10:2: They have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. This is not the fire of the Spirit but wildfire. The Athenians were very devout and zealous, but they did not know what they were worshiping. Acts 17:23: I

found an altar with this inscription: To an Unknown God. In the same way, Roman Catholics are zealous in their religion, but they have taken away the key of knowledge.

2. False zeal is self-seeking zeal. Jehu cries, Come and see my zeal for the Lord, as 2 Kings 10:16 says. But it was not zeal — it was ambition. He was fishing for a crown. Demetrius championed the goddess Diana, but it was not her temple he cared about — it was the silver shrines that enriched him. Ignatius complained of people like this in his day, who made a profitable trade out of Christ and religion. Many in King Henry the Eighth's time were eager to tear down the abbeys — not out of any zeal against the Roman church, but so they could build their own estates on the ruins. They were like eagles that soar high but keep their eyes fixed on their prey below. If blind zeal will be punished severely, hypocritical zeal will be punished far more severely.

3. False zeal is misguided zeal — it runs hottest in things that are not commanded. It is the mark of a hypocrite to be zealous for human traditions while ignoring God's actual commands. The Pharisees were more concerned with washing their cups than with purifying their hearts.

4. False zeal is driven by anger rather than love. When James and John wanted to call fire down from heaven, the Savior rebuked them. Luke 9:54: You do not know what spirit you are of. It was not zeal but rage. Many people have taken up the cause of religion out of faction and personal feeling rather than genuine zeal for the truth.

But the zeal of a godly man is true and holy zeal, which shows itself in its effects.

1. True zeal cannot bear an injury done to God. Zeal makes the blood rise when God's honor is attacked. Revelation 2:2: I know your works and your toil and your patient endurance, and how you cannot bear with those who are evil. A person who truly loves a friend cannot hear that friend spoken against and stay silent.

2. True zeal faces the greatest difficulties without flinching. When the world holds up the threat of danger to discourage us, zeal drives out fear. Zeal does not say, there is a lion in the way. Zeal charges through an army of dangers and marches in the face of death. When Paul was told he was in danger everywhere — that bonds and imprisonment awaited him in every city — this only sharpened his zeal. Acts 21:13: I am ready not only to be bound but also to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus. Just as a hard frost makes a fire burn hotter through the surrounding cold, fierce opposition only inflames true zeal further.

3. True zeal has knowledge leading it and holiness following it. Wisdom leads the way and holiness brings up the rear. A hypocrite may appear zealous but is corrupt in his life. A godly man is both pure and passionate — white in holiness and red with zeal. Christ's zeal burned hotter than fire, and His holiness was purer than the sun.

4. Genuine zeal loves truth even when it is despised and opposed. Psalm 119:126: They have made void Your law, therefore I love Your commandments above gold. The more others ridicule holiness, the more we love it. What has religion lost because others look down on it? Does a diamond sparkle any less because a blind man dismisses it? The more fiercely the wicked attack the truth, the more boldly the godly defend it. When Michal scoffed at

David's religious dancing before the ark, he said: If this is being undignified, I will be even more undignified than this. 2 Samuel 6:22.

5. True zeal produces fervency in duty. Romans 12:11: Fervent in spirit. Zeal makes us hear God's Word with reverence, pray with genuine feeling, and love with passion. God kindled Moses's sacrifice with fire from heaven. Leviticus 9:24: Fire came out from before the Lord and consumed the burnt offering on the altar. When we are zealous in devotion and our heart burns within us, it is fire from heaven kindling our sacrifice. How repulsive it is for a man to be all fire when he is sinning and all ice when he is praying. A heart that is truly devoted, like water at a boil, overflows with holy affections.

6. True zeal never runs out of energy. Though it is intense, it is constant. No waters can quench the flame of zeal — it burns hot even in cold conditions. Zeal's heat is like the natural warmth of the body that comes from the heart and lasts as long as life itself. Zeal that is not constant was never genuine.

Application 1: How far from godliness are those who dismiss zeal and call it religious fanaticism. They want the light of knowledge but not the heat of zeal. When Basil preached urgently against the Arian heresy, it was called foolishness. Religion is something that demands zeal. The kingdom of heaven is not taken by the passive — Matthew 11:12 says it has suffered violence and the violent have taken it by force.

Objection: But why so much passion in religion? What becomes of wisdom then?

Answer: Wisdom should direct zeal, but not destroy it. If the eye is needed, must the body therefore have no warmth? If wisdom is the eye of religion, zeal is its heart.

Question: But what about moderation?

Answer: Moderation in non-essential matters is commendable and would certainly help bring peace to the church. But in the core articles of faith, where God's glory and our salvation are at stake, moderation is nothing but sinful neutrality. Calvin advised Melanchthon not to be so fond of the name 'moderate' that he ended up losing all his zeal.

Objection: But the apostle urges moderation in Philippians 4:5: Let your reasonableness be known to everyone.

Answer: The apostle there is speaking about controlling our anger. The Greek word for moderation means candor and meekness — the opposite of rash anger. The same word is translated 'gentle' in 1 Timothy 3:3. Moderation here means gentleness of spirit, which the next words make clear — 'The Lord is at hand.' The apostle is saying: do not take personal revenge, because the Lord is near and will right your wrongs. This has nothing to do with zeal in matters of religion — a Christian should be zealous there without reservation.

2. How foreign to godliness are those who have no zeal for the glory of God. They can watch God's ordinances despised and His worship corrupted without the slightest stirring in their spirit. How many people are dull and lukewarm — passionate about their own worldly interests but cold toward the things of heaven. Hot for their own cause, cool for God's. God most strongly rejects lukewarm professors. Revelation 3:15-16: I wish that you were cold or

hot — but because you are neither, I will spit you out of My mouth. A lukewarm Christian is only half-baked — like Ephraim in Hosea 7:8: Ephraim is a cake not turned. To maintain the outward form of religion without any zeal is to be like bodies that move but have no life in them. I would put this question to these tepid, neutral people: If religion is not a worthy cause, why did you take it up in the first place? If it is, why do you pursue it so half-heartedly? Why do you have no holy passion? These people would love to get to heaven on a soft bed but are unwilling to be carried there in the fiery chariot of zeal. Remember: God will be zealous against those who are not zealous for Him. He reserves the fire of hell for those who lack the fire of zeal.

Application 2: If you want to be counted among the godly, labor for zeal. It is as bad to have no religion as to be without zeal in religion. Beware of worldly shrewdness — this was one of the three things Luther feared would be the death of true religion. Some people have been too calculating to be saved. Their caution has smothered their zeal. Beware also of laziness, which is an enemy of zeal. Revelation 3:19: Be zealous and repent. Christians — what are you saving your zeal for? Is it for your gold that will rot away? Or for your lusts that will drag you down? Can you spend your zeal on anything better than God? Think of how zealous people have been in false religion. Isaiah 46:6: They pour gold out of the bag and weigh silver on the scales. The Jews spared no expense in their idolatrous worship. More than that, Jeremiah 32:35: They caused their sons and daughters to pass through the fire to Molech. They were so zealous in their idol worship that they sacrificed their own children to their false gods. How far did the pagans go in their misguided zeal? The Roman tribunes complained of a shortage of gold

to offer Apollo. Roman matrons pulled off their gold chains, rings, and bracelets and gave them to the priests for sacrifice. If these people were so zealous in their sinful worship, will you not be zealous in worshipping the true God? Can you lose anything by your zeal? Will it not be repaid a hundredfold? What is heaven worth? What is a sight of God worth? Was not Jesus Christ zealous for you? He sweat drops of blood and endured the full weight of His Father's wrath. How zealous He was for your redemption — and do you have no zeal for Him? Is there anything you hate more than laziness and sluggishness in your servants? You grow weary of such servants. Do you dislike a dull temper in others but tolerate it in yourself? What are all your religious duties without zeal but empty forms — hollow and lifeless?

Do you understand how glorious a thing zeal is? It is the brilliance that shines from grace — the flame of love. It resembles the Holy Spirit Himself. Acts 2:2-3: There appeared to them tongues as of fire, distributing themselves, and they rested on each one of them, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit. Those tongues of fire were a picture of the zeal that the Spirit poured out upon them.

Zeal makes all our worship effective before God. When iron is red hot, it cuts best. When our service is red hot with zeal, it most readily pierces through to heaven.

## SECTION 16



**1** 6. A godly man is a patient man. James 5:11: You have heard of the patience of Job. Patience is a star that shines in a dark night. There are two kinds of patience.

1. Patience in waiting. 2. Patience in bearing.

1. Patience in waiting: A godly man, if he does not receive what he desires immediately, will wait until the mercy is ripe. Psalm 130:6: My soul waits for the Lord. It is right that God should determine the timing of our mercies. Isaiah 60:22: I the Lord will hasten it in its time. Deliverance may be delayed beyond our timetable, but it will not be delayed beyond God's.

Why should we not wait patiently on God? First, we are servants — and it is fitting for servants to wait. Second, we wait for everything else. We wait by the fire until it burns. We wait for the seed until it grows, as James 5:7 says. Why can we not wait on God? Third, God has waited on us. Did He not wait patiently for our repentance? How many times did He come, year after year, before finding fruit? If God waited on us, can we not wait on Him? A godly man is content to wait for God's timing. Even if the vision is delayed, he will wait for it.

2. Patience in bearing, which has two aspects. First, toward other people — enduring wrongs without seeking revenge. Second, toward God — enduring His hand without complaining. A godly man not only does God's will but bears God's will. Micah 7:9: I will bear the indignation of the Lord. This patient acceptance of God's will is not —

1. Stoic indifference: Patience is not numbness under God's hand. We are meant to feel our pain.

2. Nor is it patience under compulsion — bearing something simply because we have no choice. As Erasmus says, that is necessity, not patience. True patience is a willing submission of our desires to God. Acts 21:14: The will of the Lord be done. A godly man rests in what God does, accepting it not merely as good but as the best thing for him. The core conflict between God and us is whose will prevails. In the regenerate person, the human will yields to the will of God. Four things are opposed to this patient disposition.

1. Restlessness of spirit: when the soul is thrown into disorder and shaken off its foundation, so that it becomes unfit for holy duties. When the strings of a lute are tangled, the lute cannot make music. In the same way, when a Christian's spirit is troubled and disturbed, he cannot make melody in his heart to the Lord.

2. Discontent — a sullen, resentful spirit. When a person is not angry at his sins but at his circumstances, that is the opposite of patience. Discontent is the daughter of pride.

3. Bitterness toward God — a rejection of God and His ways, leading to turning away from religion altogether. Sinners harbor hard thoughts of God, and if He touches them in a sensitive place

they will quickly withdraw from Him and throw off any pretense of belonging to Him.

4. Self-justification — when instead of humbling himself under God's hand, a man defends himself as though he does not deserve what he is suffering. A proud person stands on his own defense and is ready to accuse God of being unjust — which is like accusing the sun of being dark. This is the opposite of patience. A godly man bows to God's wisdom and submits to His will. He says not only 'Good is the word of the Lord,' as Isaiah 39:8 says, but also: good is the rod of the Lord.

Application: If we want to show ourselves godly, let us excel in the grace of patience. Ecclesiastes 7:8: Better is the patient in spirit than the proud in spirit. There are some graces we will not need in heaven — we will not need faith when we have full sight, nor patience when we have perfect joy. But in a dark and sorrowful night, we need these stars to shine. Let us show our patience in bearing God's will. Patience in bearing God's will has two aspects.

1. When God removes a comfort from us.
2. When God brings suffering upon us.

1. We must be patient when God removes a comfort from us. Does God take away someone we love? Ezekiel 24:16: I will take away the desire of your eyes with a stroke. Even so, it is our duty to quietly accept the will of God. The loss of a beloved person is like having a limb torn from the body. As one ancient writer put it: a man dies as many times as he loses those he loves.

But grace will calm and settle our hearts and work in us a holy patience under even such a severe trial. Here are eight considerations that may serve as medicine to kill the root of impatience

when we lose loved ones.

1. The Lord never takes a comfort from His people without giving something better in its place. The disciples lost Christ's physical presence — and He sent them the Holy Spirit. God dims one joy and brightens another. He does not simply take — He makes an exchange. He takes away a flower and gives a diamond.

2. Godly friends who have died are in a better condition. They have been taken away from the evil to come, as Isaiah 57:1 says. They are out of the storm and have reached the harbor. Revelation 14:13: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord. God's people have a promised inheritance through their union with Christ, but it is not paid out until the day of death. At death, the saints enter into direct communion with God and receive what they hoped and prayed for so long. Why should we resent a friend's promotion?

3. If you are a saint, you have a friend in heaven that you cannot lose. The Jews say at funerals: Let your consolation be in heaven. If you are deep in grief, look up to heaven and draw comfort from there. Your closest family is above. Psalm 27:10: When my father and my mother forsake me, the Lord will take me in. God will be with you in the hour of death. Psalm 23:4: Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, You are with me. Other friends cannot be held forever — but God is a friend you cannot lose. He will be your guide in life, your hope in death, and your reward after death.

4. Perhaps God is correcting you for a fault. If so, you should be patient. It may be that your friend had more of your love than God did, so God took that person away so that the stream of your love might flow back to Him. A devout woman who lost first her chil-

dren and then her husband said: Lord, You have a plan for me. You intend to have all my love. God does not approve when any created thing is placed on the throne of our affections. He will remove that comfort so that He alone is nearest our heart. If a husband gives his wife a jewel, and she becomes so enchanted with the jewel that she forgets her husband, he will take the jewel back so that her love returns to him. A dear loved one is like that jewel. If we begin to idolize them, God will take the jewel away so that our love returns to Him.

5. A godly loved one is parted from us, but not lost. What is truly lost is what we have no hope of ever seeing again. Believing friends have simply gone a little ahead of us. A time will come soon when there will be a reunion with no more parting (1 Thessalonians 5:10). How glad one friend is to see another after a long absence! What glorious celebrations there will be when old companions meet again in heaven and embrace one another! When a great prince lands at the shore, cannons fire in celebration. When godly friends all arrive at the heavenly shore and congratulate each other on their happiness, what astonishing joy will fill the air! What music in the choir of angels! How heaven will ring with their praise! And the crowning glory of it all: those who were joined in the flesh on earth will be joined even more closely in the mystical body of Christ, resting together in His embrace — that bed of perfume.

6. We have deserved far worse from God's hand. Has He taken away a child, a wife, a parent? He might have taken away His Spirit. Has He deprived us of a loved one? He might have deprived

us of salvation. Does He put bitterness in the cup? We have deserved poison. Ezra 9:13: You have punished us less than our sins deserve. We have a sea of sin, but only a drop of suffering.

7. The patient soul enjoys the sweetest peace. An impatient person is like a troubled sea that cannot rest — he tortures himself on the rack of his own grief and passions. But patience calms the heart the way Christ calmed the sea when it was rough. Then there is a sabbath in the heart — even a taste of heaven. Luke 21:19: By your patience you will gain your souls. By faith a person possesses God, and by patience he possesses himself.

8. Consider how patiently many of the saints have endured when the Lord broke the very staff of their comfort by taking their loved ones. The Lord took away Job's children, and he was so far from complaining that he broke into praise. Job 1:21: The Lord has taken away — blessed be the name of the Lord. God told Eli that his sons would both die in one day (1 Samuel 2:34). Yet how patiently Eli received this devastating news! 1 Samuel 3:18: It is the Lord. Let Him do what seems good to Him. Notice the difference between Eli and Pharaoh. Pharaoh said, Who is the Lord? Eli said, It is the Lord. When God struck two of Aaron's sons dead, Aaron held his peace (Leviticus 10:3). Patience opens the ear but shuts the mouth — it opens the ear to hear the rod, but shuts the mouth so that not a word is spoken against God. Here are the models of patience. Should we not follow their example? These are truths that quiet restless hearts when God sets a death's mark on our comforts and removes the people we love.

2. We must be patient when God brings affliction upon us. Romans 12:12: Patient in tribulation.

First, the Lord sometimes lays heavy affliction on His people. Psalm 38:2: Your hand has come down hard on me. The Hebrew word for afflicted means to be melted. God sometimes seems to melt His people in a furnace.

Second, God sometimes lays many different afflictions on the saints. Job 19:17: He multiplies my wounds. Just as we have many ways of sinning, the Lord has many ways of afflicting. He melts away some people's wealth. He chains others to a sickbed. He confines still others to a prison. God has many arrows in His quiver, and He shoots them.

Third, sometimes God lets the affliction last a long time. Psalm 74:9: There is no longer any prophet, nor is there any among us who knows how long. Just as some diseases are chronic, lingering in the body for years, so it is with afflictions. The Lord allows many of His precious ones to endure chronic afflictions that weigh on them for a long time. In all these situations, it is right for the saints to rest patiently in the will of God. The Greek word for patient is a metaphor drawn from someone who stands unshaken under a heavy load. This is what true patience looks like: bearing affliction without giving way to despair or complaint.

The skill of a pilot is proven in a storm, and the quality of a Christian is proven in affliction. The person with true skill in navigation is the one who steers the ship of his soul wisely when fierce winds blow from heaven and does not crash on the rock of impatience. A Christian should always maintain his composure — not behaving in an unworthy way or losing himself to uncontrolled emotion when the hand of God is on him. Patience adorns suffering. In Scripture, affliction is compared to a net. Psalm 66:11: You brought us into the net. Those who have escaped the devil's net

may still be caught in the net of affliction. But they must not be like a wild bull in a net (Isaiah 51:20), kicking and fighting against their Maker. Instead, they should lie patiently until God breaks the net and makes a way for their escape. I will now present four compelling arguments to encourage patience under the afflictions God brings on us.

1. Afflictions work for our benefit. Hebrews 12:9: He disciplines us for our good. We pray that God would take whatever course is best for our souls. When God is afflicting us, He is answering that very prayer — He does it for our profit. Not that afflictions benefit us on their own, but God's Spirit works through them. Just as the waters of Bethesda could not heal by themselves until the angel came down and stirred the water (John 5:4), so the waters of affliction have no healing power until God's Spirit works with them and makes them beneficial to us. Afflictions are profitable in many ways.

First, they make people sober and wise. Doctors sometimes restrain disturbed patients with chains and a strict diet to bring them back to reason. Many people go completely out of control in prosperity — they know neither God nor themselves. So the Lord binds them with the cords of affliction to bring them to their senses. Job 36:8-9: If they are bound in chains and caught in the cords of affliction, then He shows them their transgression. He also opens their ear to correction.

2. Afflictions are a friend to grace.

First, they produce grace. Beza acknowledged that God laid the foundation of his conversion through a severe illness in Paris.

Second, they increase grace. God's people owe much to their troubles. They would never have had so much grace if they had not faced such severe trials. Now the waters flow and the fragrance of grace pours out. The saints thrive through affliction the way the Lacedemonians grew rich through war. God makes grace flourish most in the fall of the leaf.

Third, afflictions quicken our pace on the way to heaven. It is like children sent on an errand: if they find apples or flowers along the way, they dawdle and are in no hurry to get home. But if something frightens them, they run as fast as they can to their father's house. In prosperity, we are gathering the apples and flowers and not thinking much about heaven. But when troubles arise and times grow frightening, we make greater haste toward heaven and, like David, run the way of God's commands (Psalm 119:32).

2. God mixes mercy with affliction. He steeps the sword of justice in the oil of mercy. There was no night so dark that Israel did not have a pillar of fire in it. There is no condition so dismal that we cannot see a pillar of fire giving light. If the body is in pain but the conscience is at peace, there is mercy. If affliction is preventing sin, there is mercy. In the ark there was both a rod and a pot of manna — a picture of the Christian's condition: mercy woven together with judgment, the rod and the manna side by side.

3. Patience reveals much of God in the heart. Patience is one of God's own titles. Romans 15:5: The God of patience. If your heart has been shaped by this blessed quality, it is a sign that God has given you much of His own nature. You shine with some of His light.

Impatience reveals deep weakness in the heart. Think of it this way: if a person's body is so unhealthy that every small scratch festers, you would say his flesh is in very poor condition. In the same way, when every small trouble provokes impatience and complaints against God's providence, it is a sign of a disordered heart. If there is any grace in such a heart, it takes sharp eyes to see it. But the person with a patient spirit is an advanced student in the school of faith and shares deeply in the divine nature.

4. The end of affliction is glorious. The Jews were captive in Babylon — but what was the outcome? They left Babylon with silver vessels, gold, and precious things (Ezra 1:6). In the same way, affliction ends in endless glory (Acts 14:22; 2 Corinthians 4:17). This truth can quiet our restless hearts. Who would refuse to travel through a short stretch of muddy, plowed-up road if at the end lies a beautiful meadow — and in that meadow, a mine of gold?

Question: How can I bring my heart into a patient frame?

Answer: 1. Cultivate faith. All our impatience comes from unbelief. Faith is the source of patience. When a storm of emotion begins to rise, faith speaks to the heart as Christ spoke to the sea — Peace, be still — and immediately there is calm.

Question: How does faith produce patience?

Answer: Faith reasons the soul into patience. Faith is like that town clerk in Ephesus who calmed a rioting crowd and argued them soberly back to peace (Acts 19:35-36). When impatience begins to make an uproar in the soul, faith settles the disturbance and reasons the soul into holy patience. Faith says: Why are you troubled, O my soul? Are you afflicted? Is it not your Father who has done this? He is shaping and polishing you, making you fit for

glory. He strikes so that He may save. What is your trial — is it sickness? God is shaking the tree of your body so that fruit may fall, even the peaceable fruit of righteousness (Hebrews 12:11). Have you been driven from your home? God has prepared a city for you (Hebrews 11:16). Do you suffer insult for Christ's sake? A spirit of God and glory rests on you (1 Peter 4:14). This is how faith argues and reasons the soul into patience.

2. Pray to God for patience. Patience is a flower of God's planting. Pray that it may grow in your heart and release its sweet fragrance. Prayer is a holy power that can quiet a troubled spirit. Prayer composes the heart and brings it back into tune when impatience has broken the strings and thrown everything into confusion. Go to God in prayer. Prayer delights God's ear, melts His heart, and opens His hand. God cannot deny a praying soul. Seek Him urgently, and He will either remove the affliction — or, which is better, He will remove your impatience.

## SECTION 17



**1** 7. A godly man is a thankful man. Praise and thanksgiving are the work of heaven, and he begins here on earth the very work he will be doing forever in heaven. The Jews say the world is sustained by three things: the law, the worship of God, and thankfulness. As if to say, where thankfulness is missing, one of the pillars of the world has been removed and it is ready to fall. The Hebrew word for praise comes from a root meaning to shoot upward. The godly man fires his praises like a volley of shots toward heaven. David, who was shaped after God's own heart, sang God's praises with great sweetness — which is why he was called the sweet singer of Israel, as 1 Samuel 23:1 says. Even at his worst, a Christian is thankful. The prophet Jonah had a sharp and irritable spirit. The sea did not churn as wildly in the storm as Jonah's heart churned with passion. Yet through that dark cloud, grace appeared — he had a thankful heart. Jonah 2:9: I will sacrifice to You with the voice of thanksgiving; I will pay what I have vowed. For a clearer understanding, let me lay out four particulars.

1. Praise and thanksgiving is the work of a saint. Scripture continually calls the godly to praise God. Psalm 135:20: You who fear the Lord, bless the Lord. Psalm 149:5: Let the saints be joyful in

glory; let the high praises of God be in their mouths. Praise is work that belongs to the saint.

First, only the godly can praise God rightly. Not everyone has skill to play the lute, and not everyone can sound forth the harmonious praises of God. Wicked people are obligated to praise God, but they are not fit to do so. Only a living Christian can tune praise rightly. Wicked people are dead in sin — how can those who are dead lift up God's praises? Isaiah 38:19: The grave cannot praise You. A wicked person stains and obscures God's praise. If a filthy hand works with beautiful silk, it ruins the fabric. God will say to the sinner: What right do you have to take My name on your lips? Psalm 50:16.

Second, praise is fitting only for the godly. Psalm 33:1: Praise is becoming for the upright. A corrupt person decorated with God's praises is like a dunghill stuck with flowers. Praise in the mouth of a sinner is like a solemn oracle spoken by a fool. How out of place it is for someone to praise God whose entire life dishonors God. It is as indecent for a wicked man to praise God as it would be for a loan shark to talk about living by faith, or for the devil to quote Scripture. Only the godly are suited to be singers in God's choir. Praise is called the garment of praise in Isaiah 61:3. This garment fits well only on a saint's shoulders.

2. Thanksgiving is the highest form of worship. Our needs may drive us to prayer, but blessing God shows a heart of rare generosity. The raven cries, but the lark sings. In petition we act like men; in thanksgiving we act like angels.

3. Thanksgiving exalts God. Psalm 50:23: Whoever offers praise glorifies Me. Though nothing can add the smallest measure to God's essential glory, praise lifts Him up in the eyes of others. Praise is a display of God's honor, a lifting up of His name, a showing forth of the trophy of His goodness, a proclaiming of His excellence, a spreading of His fame — like breaking open a jar of ointment so that the sweet fragrance of God's name is carried throughout the world.

4. Praise is a uniquely distinguishing work — by it, a Christian surpasses even the evil spirits. You talk about God? So can the devil — he quoted Scripture to Christ. You profess religion? So can the devil — he disguises himself as an angel of light. You fast? He never eats. You believe? The devils have a faith of intellectual assent — they believe and tremble, as James 2:19 says. But just as Moses performed miracles the magicians could not match, there is a work Christians can do that no devil can do — and that is thanksgiving. They blaspheme but do not bless. Satan has his fiery darts but no harp or instrument of praise.

Application 1: Here we see the true nature and character of a godly man — he is much given to praise and doxology. Lactantius said: A man cannot be good who is unthankful to his God. A godly man is a God-exalter. The saints are temples of the Holy Spirit, as 1 Corinthians 3:16 says. Where should God's praises be sounded, if not in His temples? A good heart never grows tired of praising God. Psalm 34:1: His praise shall continually be in my mouth. Some people are thankful while the memory of a mercy is fresh but then let it drop. The Carthaginians at first sent a tenth of their annual income to Hercules as an offering — but gradually they grew weary and stopped. David, as long as he drew breath, kept singing

God's praises. Psalm 146:2: I will sing praises to my God while I have my being. David would not give God a brief burst of music and then hang up the instrument — he continually celebrated God's praise.

A godly man expresses his thankfulness in every act of worship — he mingles thanksgiving with prayer. Philippians 4:6: In everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. Thanksgiving is the more divine element of prayer. In our petitions we express our own needs; in our thanksgivings we declare God's excellencies. Prayer rises like incense when it is perfumed with thanksgiving.

And just as a godly man is thankful in every act of worship, so he is thankful in every situation — thankful in adversity as well as prosperity. 1 Thessalonians 5:18: In everything give thanks. A gracious soul is thankful to be drawn closer to God, even when the cord drawing him is affliction. When things go well, he praises God's mercy. When things go badly, he honors God's justice. When God has a rod in His hand, a godly man has a psalm in his mouth. The devil's striking of Job was like striking a musical instrument — it produced praise. Job 1:21: The Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord. God's spiritual plants, when they are cut and bleed, drip with thankfulness. The tears of the saints cannot drown their praise.

2. If this is the mark of a godly man, then the number of truly godly people appears to be very small. Few are engaged in the work of praise. Sinners shortchange God of what is owed Him in thanksgiving. Luke 17:17: Where are the nine? Of ten lepers healed, only one returned to give thanks. Most of the world serves as a tomb for God's praise — burying it rather than raising it up.

You will hear people swearing and cursing, but few blessing God. Praise is the annual rent all people owe, but most are far behind in paying it. God gave King Hezekiah a remarkable deliverance — but Hezekiah did not give back according to the benefit he had received, as 2 Chronicles 32:25 says. That 'but' was a blemish on his record. Some, instead of being thankful, actually return evil for good — they are made worse by mercy. Deuteronomy 32:6: Do you thus repay the Lord, O foolish and unwise people? This is like a toad that converts wholesome plants into poison. Where do we find a genuinely grateful Christian? We read in Revelation 5:8 that the saints had harps in their hands — a picture of praise. Many have tears in their eyes and complaints on their lips, but few have harps in their hands, blessing and praising the name of God.

Application 2: Let us examine ourselves by this mark — are we thankful for mercy? It is a harder thing than it appears to be genuinely thankful.

Question: How can we know whether we are rightly thankful?

Answer: 1. When we are careful to record God's mercies. 1 Chronicles 16:4: David appointed certain of the Levites to remember, to thank, and to praise the Lord God of Israel. Physicians say memory is the first faculty to decay — and this is true spiritually as well. Psalm 106:13: They quickly forgot His works. A godly man records his mercies the way a doctor records prescriptions in a book, so they are not lost. Mercies are jewels that should be kept safe. A child of God keeps two books always at hand: one to record his sins, so that he stays humble; the other to record his mercies, so that he stays thankful.

2. We are rightly thankful when the heart is the main instrument in our music of praise. Psalm 111:1: I will praise the Lord with my whole heart. David did not only tune his instrument — he tuned his heart. If the heart does not join the tongue, there is no true harmony. Where the heart is absent, a parrot is as good a singer as a Christian.

3. We are rightly thankful when the mercies we receive make us love God more. David's miraculous preservation from death drew out his love to God. Psalm 116:1: I love the Lord. It is one thing to love our mercies and another thing to love the Lord. Many love their deliverance but not their deliverer. God is to be loved more than His gifts.

4. We are rightly thankful when we give all credit to God and take no worthiness to ourselves. Genesis 32:10: I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies and all the faithfulness that You have shown to Your servant. It was as if Jacob were saying: Lord, even the smallest portion You carve out for me is more than I deserve. 2 Samuel 9:7: Mephibosheth bowed himself and said, What is your servant, that you should show regard for a dead dog such as I am? In the same way, a thankful Christian, when he surveys his blessings and sees how much he enjoys that others — better than he — do not have, says: Lord, what am I — a dead dog — that free grace should look on me and crown me with such loving kindness?

5. We are rightly thankful when we put God's mercies to use. We turn our enjoyments into opportunities for service. The Lord gives us health, and we spend ourselves for Christ, as 2 Corinthians 12:15 says. He gives us an estate, and we honor the Lord with our wealth, as Proverbs 3:9 says. He gives us children, and we dedicate them to God and raise them for God. We do not

bury our talents but trade them. This is to put God's mercies to work. A gracious heart is like good soil that, having received the seed of mercy, brings forth a crop of obedience.

6. We are rightly thankful when our hearts can be more enlarged for spiritual mercies than for earthly ones. Ephesians 1:3: Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing. A godly man blesses God more for a fruitful heart than for a full harvest. He is more thankful for Christ than for a kingdom. Socrates was known to say he valued the king's smile more than his gold. A devout heart is more thankful for a smile from God's face than for all the gold of the Indies.

7. We are rightly thankful when mercy acts as a spur to duty — when it creates energy for God. Mercy is not like the sun to a fire, dimming it, but like oil on a wheel, making it turn faster. David wisely moves from mercy to duty. Psalm 116:8-9: You have delivered my soul from death; I will walk before the Lord in the land of the living. Bernard said: Lord, I have two coins — a soul and a body — and I give them both to You.

8. We are rightly thankful when we draw others into this heavenly work of praise. David did not only praise God himself — he called others to do so. Psalm 111:1: Praise the Lord. The sweetest music is played together. When many saints join in together, they make heaven ring with their praise. Just as one drinker calls out to another, so in a holy sense one Christian must stir up another to the work of thankfulness.

9. We are rightly thankful when we not only speak God's praise but live it. The Latin phrase *gratiarum actio* means that we give thanks by living thankfully. Those who have received great mercy should be examples of great godliness. Obadiah 17: On Mount Zion there shall be those who escape, and it shall be holy. To offer God praise with the mouth while dishonoring Him in our lives is to commit a gross inconsistency in religion — like those Jews who bowed the knee to Christ and then spat on Him, as Mark 15:19 records.

10. We are rightly thankful when we pass God's praises on to the next generation — telling our children what God has done for us. In one time of need He provided for us; in one illness He restored us; in one temptation He helped us through. Psalm 44:1: O God, our fathers have told us what deeds You performed in their days, in the days of old. By passing on our experiences to our children, God's name is preserved, and the mercies He showed us will produce a fresh crop of praise long after we are gone. Heman asks in Psalm 88:10: Will the dead praise You? Yes — in this sense: when we are dead we still praise God, because we have left the record of His mercies with our children, inspiring them to thankfulness, so that praise continues to live when we no longer do. As one ancient poet put it: as long as the golden stars wheel across the sky, they will celebrate God's name with grateful song.

Application 3: Let us demonstrate our godliness through gratitude. Psalm 29:2: Give to the Lord the glory due His name.

1. It is a good thing to be thankful. Psalm 147:1: It is good to sing praises to our God. It is harmful when the tongue — that organ of praise — falls out of tune through complaining and discontent. But it is good to be thankful. It is good because this is all a

creature can do to lift up God's name. And it is good because it tends to make us good. The more thankful we are, the more holy we become. While we pay this tribute of praise, our store of grace increases. In other debts, the more you pay, the less you have — but the more you pay this debt of thankfulness, the more grace you receive.

2. Thankfulness is the rent we owe to God. Psalm 148:11-13: Kings of the earth and all peoples — let them praise the name of the Lord. Praise is the tribute to be paid into the treasury of the King of heaven. As long as God renews our lease on life, we must renew our payment of praise.

3. Consider the great cause we have for thankfulness. Gratitude for benefits received is a principle written into human nature itself. Even pagans praised Jupiter for their victories.

What full clusters of mercy hang upon us? When we try to number God's mercies, we must confess with David that the task is impossible. Psalm 40:5: Many, O Lord my God, are the wonders You have done, and Your thoughts toward us; none can compare with You. They cannot be counted. And as God's mercies are beyond numbering, so they are beyond measuring. David took the longest measuring line he could find, stretching from earth to the clouds — and beyond the clouds — and still could not reach the height of God's mercies. Psalm 108:4: Your mercy is great above the heavens. How richly God has showered us with blessing. A whole constellation of mercies has shone in our sky.

First, consider the earthly blessings we have received. Every day a new tide of mercy comes in. The wings of mercy have covered us; the breast of mercy has fed us. Genesis 48:15: The God

who has been my shepherd all my life long to this day. How many snares laid for us have been broken? How many fears have blown away? The Lord has made our bed when He has made others' graves. He has cared for us as if we were the only ones He needed to care for. No cloud of providence has been so dark that we could not see a rainbow of love within it. We have been made to swim in a sea of mercy — does not all of this call for thankfulness?

Second, what should add more strings to our instrument of praise and make it ring louder is considering the spiritual blessings God has given us. He has given us from the springs above. He has opened the wardrobe of heaven and clothed us in a richer garment than any angel wears. He has given us the best robe and placed on our finger the ring of faith, by which we are united to Him. These are mercies of the highest order — they deserve to be marked with a star. God saves the best wine for last. Here He gives us mercies only a portion at a time, and the greatest things are yet to come. Here we have some drops of honey and foretastes of God's love. The rivers of pleasure are reserved for paradise. Well may we take up the harp and celebrate God's praise. Who can stand on these glowing coals of God's love and not have his heart burning with thankfulness?

4. Thankfulness is the wisest strategy — nothing is lost by it. To be thankful for one mercy is the way to receive more. It is like pouring water into a pump, which draws out more. Musicians love to play where the echo is best — and God loves to pour out His mercies where the echo of thankfulness is fullest.

5. Thankfulness is a disposition God delights in. If repentance is the joy of heaven, praise is the music. Bernard calls thankfulness the sweet balm that drops from a Christian.

There are four sacrifices God takes great pleasure in: the sacrifice of Christ's blood, the sacrifice of a broken heart, the sacrifice of generosity to others, and the sacrifice of thanksgiving. As Richard Greenham said: praise and thanksgiving is the most excellent part of God's worship, for it will continue in the heavenly choir when all other religious exercises have ceased.

6. Consider how terrible a thing ingratitude is. It colors and intensifies every other sin, turning it a deeper shade of crimson. Ingratitude is the very essence of baseness. Obadiah 7: Those who ate your bread have set a trap beneath you. Ingratitude is worse than animal behavior. Isaiah 1:3. It is said of Julius Caesar that he would never forgive an ungrateful person. And though God is a sin-pardoning God, ingratitude seems to stretch even His mercy. Jeremiah 5:7: How can I pardon you? Your children have forsaken Me; when I had fed them to the full, they committed adultery. Draco, whose laws were written in blood, decreed that if anyone received a benefit from another and could be proved ungrateful for it, he should be put to death. An unthankful person is a monster in nature and a paradox in Christianity. He is the scorn of heaven and the plague of earth. An ungrateful person does one good thing only — when he dies.

7. Our failure to be thankful is the cause of the judgments that have fallen on us. Our ingratitude for health has brought so much sickness and death. Our ingratitude for the Gospel — our surfeit of sermons taken for granted — is the reason God has put so many lights under a bushel. As John Bradford said: my unthankfulness was the death of King Edward the Sixth. Who will invest in a field that produces nothing but briars? Unthankfulness stops the golden flow of God's bounty so that it will not pour out.

Question: How can we become truly thankful?

Answer: 1. If you want to be thankful, get a heart deeply humbled by a sense of your own unworthiness. A broken heart is the best instrument for sounding forth God's praise. The person who truly understands his sins marvels that he has anything at all — that God would shine on such a dunghill. 1 Timothy 1:13: I was formerly a blasphemer and a persecutor — but I received mercy. How thankful Paul was! How loudly he proclaimed free grace! A proud man will never be truly thankful. He looks at all his blessings as either self-earned or deserved. If he has wealth, he credits his own cleverness and hard work — not considering Deuteronomy 8:18: You shall remember the Lord your God, for it is He who gives you power to get wealth. Pride chokes the flow of gratitude. Christian — think of your unworthiness. See yourself as the least of saints and the greatest of sinners, and you will be thankful.

2. Work to gain solid assurance of God's love for you. Read God's love in the stamp of holiness He has pressed on your heart. God's love poured in will make these vessels of mercy overflow with thankfulness. Revelation 1:5-6: To Him who loved us — to Him be glory and dominion forever. The deepest springs yield the sweetest water. Hearts that are deeply moved by God's love yield the sweetest praise.

## SECTION 18



**1** 8. A godly man is a lover of the saints. The best way to discern grace in yourself is to love grace in others. 1 John 3:14: We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers. What is religion but a binding together? A knitting of hearts. Faith knits us to God, and love knits us to one another. There are two kinds of love toward others.

1. Civil love: A godly man has a love of basic goodwill toward all people. Genesis 23:7: Abraham rose and bowed to the Hittites. Though they were outsiders, not within the covenant community, Abraham was warm and courteous toward them. Grace sweetens and refines human nature. 1 Peter 3:8: Be courteous. We are to have this love of basic goodwill toward all.

First, because all people are made from the same material as we are, shaped from the same dust, and are a part of God's intricate craftsmanship.

Second, because our kind behavior toward them may be a means of drawing them to love the ways of God. A harsh and harsh manner often alienates people's hearts and hardens them further against holiness. But a loving approach is compelling and may act like a magnet drawing them toward faith.

2. There is also a holy and spiritual love, which a godly man bears especially to those of the household of faith. The first was a love of courtesy; this is a love of deep delight. Augustine says our love for the saints should exceed our love for natural family, because the bond of the Spirit is closer than the bond of blood. This love toward the saints, which marks a person as godly, must have seven qualities.

1. Love to the saints must be sincere. 1 John 3:18: Let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth. Honey that drops from the comb is pure — love must be equally pure, without deceit. Many are like Naphtali in Genesis 49:21: they give goodly words. Pretended love is like a painted fire — it has no heat. Some hide malice behind a false show of love. History records that the Emperor Antoninus would display the most friendship in the very moments he intended the most harm.

2. Love to the saints must be spiritual — we must love them because they are saints. Not for personal reasons — because they are pleasant company or have been kind to us — but for spiritual reasons: because of the grace that is in them. We are to honor their holiness. Anything less is merely natural affection.

3. Love to the saints must be broad — we must love all who bear God's image.

First, even those with many weaknesses. A Christian in this life is like a good face covered with freckles. If you cannot love another because of his imperfections, you have never honestly looked at your own face in the mirror. Your brother's weaknesses should move you to pity him; his graces should move you to love him.

Second, we must love the saints even when they do not agree with us on every point. Another Christian may differ from me either because he has more understanding than I do or because he has less. If he differs from me because he has more understanding, I have no reason to criticize him. If it is because he has less understanding, I should bear with him as a weaker vessel. In matters that are not essential, there should be Christian patience and forbearance.

Third, we must love the saints even when their grace surpasses ours. We should thank God for the outstanding grace of others, since it honors religion. Pride is not fully defeated in any believer. Even saints are prone to resent one another's excellencies. Is it not strange that the same person could hate one man for his sin and envy another for his virtue? Christians need to watch their hearts carefully. Love is genuine when we can rejoice in another's grace even when it seems to outshine our own.

4. Love to the saints must include high regard — we should value their persons above others. Psalm 15:4: He honors those who fear the Lord. We may look upon wicked people as those who have squandered their purpose, but we should look upon the saints as jewels — and hold them in great esteem.

5. Love to the saints must be social — we should delight in their company. Psalm 119:63: I am a companion of all who fear You. It is a kind of torment to spend time with the wicked, where we cannot help but hear God's name dishonored. In ancient Rome it was a capital crime to carry a coin or ring with the image of Tiberius into any shameful place. Those who bear God's image should not go into sinful or degrading company. Only two people in Scripture ever sought the company of the dead — and both were possessed

by demons. What comfort can a living Christian find in spending time with the spiritually dead? But the fellowship of saints is something to be chosen eagerly. It is not walking among tombs but walking among beds of spices. Believers are Christ's garden; their graces are the flowers; their wholesome conversation is the fragrance of those flowers.

6. Love to the saints must be active — we should be ready to serve them in every way. We should defend their reputations, meet their needs, and — like the good Samaritan — pour oil and wine into their wounds, as Luke 10:34-35 says. Love cannot be hidden — it is active in its realm and expends itself for the good of others.

7. Love to the saints must be constant. 1 John 4:16: He who abides in love. Our love must not merely lodge for a night — we must dwell in love. Hebrews 13:1: Let brotherly love continue. Just as love must be sincere without hypocrisy, so it must be constant without failure. Love must be like a pulse — always beating. Not like the Galatians, who at one point would have torn out their own eyes for Paul (Galatians 4:15), and later were ready to tear out his eyes. Love should not end before life ends. If our love to the saints has all these qualities, we can have strong reason to believe we are counted among the godly. John 13:35: By this all people will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.

What moves a godly man to love the saints is the awareness that he is closely related to them. Love belongs between relations — and believers have a deep spiritual kinship. They all share one head, and so they should all share one heart. They are stones of the same building, as 1 Peter 2:5 says. Should not these stones be cemented together with love?

Application 1: If loving the saints is a mark of godliness, how sad it is to see this grace in eclipse. This mark of godliness has almost been erased among Christians. England was once a fair garden where the flower of love grew — but now that flower has been plucked or has withered. Where is the friendship and unity that should exist among Christians? I ask you: would there be this criticizing and despising, this tearing down and undermining of one another, if love were present? Instead of tears of contrition, there are bitter spirits. It is a sign that wickedness abounds when the love of many grows cold. There is such distance between some professing Christians that you would think they had not received the same Spirit or were not hoping for the same heaven. In the early church, there was such love among the godly that it astonished the pagans. Now there is so little that it should make Christians blush.

Application 2: If we want to be counted among God's saints, let us love the brotherhood. Those who will one day live together should love together now. What makes a disciple but love? John 13:35. The devil has knowledge — but what makes him the devil is that he lacks love. To encourage Christians toward love, consider the following.

1. The saints carry within them something that deserves our love. They are the exquisite craftsmanship of the Holy Spirit. Ephesians 2:10: We are God's workmanship. They bear the marks of grace that only a brush dipped in heaven could draw. Their eyes shine with beauty, as Song of Songs 4:9 says. Their lives are fruitful, as Song of Songs 7:7 says. This is what makes Christ Himself delight in His bride. The church is the daughter of a king, as Song

of Songs 7:1 says. She is attended by angels, as Hebrews 1:14 says. A palace of glory is reserved for her, as John 14:2 says. Should not all of this draw out our love?

2. Consider how wrong it is for the saints not to love one another.

First, it is unnatural. The saints are Christ's lambs, as John 21:15 says. A dog attacking a lamb is ordinary, but one lamb attacking another is unnatural. The saints are brothers and sisters. How barbaric it is for brothers and sisters not to love one another?

Second, it is foolish. Do God's people not have enough enemies outside, that they should turn on one another? The wicked conspire against the godly. Psalm 83:3: They lay crafty plans against Your people. Even when wicked people have private quarrels among themselves, they will set aside their differences and unite against the saints. It is like two greyhounds fighting over a bone — put a hare between them and they will instantly drop the bone and chase the hare together. When God's people have so many enemies watching for any misstep and glad to cause them harm, should the saints fall out and divide among themselves?

Third, it is especially wrong given the times. God's people are suffering a common hardship — they endure affliction for the same cause. For them to be at odds with each other during such a time is completely out of place. Why does the Lord bring His people together in affliction, if not to draw them together in affection? Metals fuse together in a furnace — if Christians are ever going to unite, it should be in the furnace of suffering. Chrysostom compared affliction to a shepherd's dog that makes all the sheep run

together. God's rod carries this clear message: love one another. How unworthy it is, when Christians are suffering together, to be fighting with each other at the same time.

Fourth, it is deeply sinful.

First, for saints not to love is to live in contradiction to Scripture. The apostle returns again and again to the theme of love, as though it produces the sweetest music in all of religion. Romans 13:8; Colossians 3:14; 1 Peter 1:22; 1 John 3:11; 1 John 4:21: This commandment we have from Him — whoever loves God must also love his brother. To refuse to love is to walk in the opposite direction from God's Word. Can a doctor be a good doctor who goes against the principles of medicine? Can a person be a good Christian who goes against the principles of religion?

Second, the lack of love among Christians greatly silences the spirit of prayer. Hot passions make cold prayers. Where hostility and conflict rule, instead of praying for one another Christians will be ready to pray against one another — like the disciples who asked for fire from heaven on the Samaritans, as Luke 9:54 records. Do you think God will hear prayers that rise from a bitter heart? Will He accept offerings that are soured with a bitter spirit? Will prayer rise like incense when it is offered with the strange fire of sinful passions?

Third, these burning resentments hinder the growth of godliness in our own souls. The flower of grace will not grow in an angry heart. A body cannot thrive while infected with plague — and a soul infected with malice cannot thrive either. While Christians are quarreling, grace is diminishing. As the spleen grows, health decays — and as hatred increases, holiness declines.

Fifth, it is dangerous. Divisions among God's people signal ruin. Every kind of harm enters through the gap of division. Matthew 12:25. Hostility among the saints may cause God to withdraw His presence from His temple. Ezekiel 10:4: The glory of the Lord went up from the cherub and stood over the threshold of the house. Does not God seem to be standing at the threshold, as if about to take flight? Woe to us if God departs from us. If the captain leaves the ship, it is truly close to sinking. If God leaves a nation, that nation must fall into ruin.

Question: How can we attain this excellent grace of love?

Answer: 1. Beware of the devil's messengers — those who run his errand and make it their work to fan the flames of conflict among Christians and make one group look evil to another.

2. Keep up friendly fellowship with other believers. Christians should not treat one another with suspicion and distance, as if afraid of catching a disease.

3. Claim the promise of Jeremiah 32:39: I will give them one heart and one way. Let us pray that there will be no strife among Christians except to see who can love the most. Let us pray that God will divide Babylon and unite Zion.

Application 3: If loving the saints is a mark of godliness, then those who hate the saints must be charged with ungodliness. The wicked harbor an unrelenting hatred against God's people — and how can such an opposition be reconciled? To hate the saints is the brand of a reprobate. Those who persecute the godly are a curse to creation. If all the scorching drops of God's judgment can make them miserable, they will be made so. No one who has ever made a trade of hating and persecuting the saints has prospered by it.

What became of Julian, Diocletian, Maximinus, Valerian, Cardinal Crescentius, and others? Some died with their bodies giving way in horrific ways; others choked in their own blood — set up as permanent monuments of God's vengeance. Psalm 34:21: Those who hate the righteous will be condemned.

## SECTION 19



**1** 9. A godly man does not indulge himself in any sin. Though sin lives in him, he does not live in sin. Not every man who has wine in him is drunk. A godly man may stumble into sin through weakness, but he does not make sin his road. Psalm 139:24: See if there is any wicked way in me.

Question: What does it mean to indulge sin?

Answer: 1. To feed sin and keep it alive — the way an overindulgent parent gives a child whatever it wants, so to indulge sin is to humor it.

2. To indulge sin is to commit it with pleasure. 2 Thessalonians 2:12: They had pleasure in unrighteousness.

In this sense, a godly man does not indulge sin. Though sin is in him, he is troubled by it and would gladly be free of it. There is the same difference between sin in the wicked and sin in the godly as between poison in a snake and poison in a man. Poison in a snake is in its natural environment and causes no discomfort. Poison in a man's body is dangerous, and he uses every remedy to expel it. In the same way, sin in a wicked person is comfortable — it is in its natural place. But sin in a child of God is a burden, and he uses every means to rid himself of it. This is what separates him

from sin: his will is against it. A godly man protests against sin. Romans 7:15: I do not understand my own actions — I do not do what I want. A child of God, even while committing sin, hates the sin he commits. There are four kinds of sin in particular that a godly man will not allow himself to indulge.

1. Secret sins: Some people are too cautious to commit obvious sins that would damage their reputation, but they will nurse sin in private. 1 Samuel 23:9: Saul was secretly working against David. Not everyone will sin openly, but many sin behind the curtain. Rachel did not display her father's household idols for all to see — she put them beneath her and sat on them, as Genesis 31:34 says. Many carry their sins secretly, like a candle hidden inside a dark lantern.

But a godly man dares not sin in secret. First, he knows that God sees what is done in secret. Psalm 44:21. God cannot be fooled by our cleverness, and He cannot be excluded by our secrecy.

Second, a godly man knows that secret sins are in some ways worse than others. They reveal more deceit and practical atheism. The person who sins behind closed doors convinces himself that God does not see. Ezekiel 8:12: Son of man, have you seen what the elders of the house of Israel are doing in the dark? For they say, the Lord does not see us. Those with bad eyes think the sun is dim. How greatly this provokes God — that people's practical disbelief should call His all-seeing knowledge a lie. Psalm 94:9: He who planted the ear, does He not hear?

Third, a godly man knows that secret sins will not escape God's justice. A judge on the bench can only punish offenses that are proved by evidence — he cannot punish the secret thoughts of the

heart. But the sins of the heart are as visible to God as if they were written in large letters on a person's forehead. Just as God will reward secret acts of devotion, He will repay secret sins.

2. A godly man will not allow himself in profitable sins. Profit is the golden bait with which Satan fishes for souls. The sweetness of gain is a powerful lure.

Profit was the final temptation Satan used against Christ. Matthew 4:9: All these I will give You. But Christ saw the hook beneath the bait. Many who have escaped gross sins are still caught in a golden net. To gain wealth they will take crooked paths. A godly man will not travel to riches by the devil's highway. Gains that cost a man his peace of conscience and his heaven in the end are not gains at all. The person who builds his estate on injustice stuffs his pillow with thorns — and his head will rest very uneasily when death approaches.

3. A godly man will not allow himself in a favorite sin. There is usually one sin that holds a special place in the heart — the sin the heart is most attached to. A cherished sin rests in a man's heart the way the beloved disciple leaned on Jesus at the table. John 13:23. A godly man will not indulge a darling sin. Psalm 18:23: I have kept myself from my guilt. This means the sin that fits a person's natural temperament — the one his heart most naturally drifts toward. 1 Kings 22:31: Do not fight with small or great, but only with the king of Israel. A godly man fights with his king-sin. The oracle of Apollo told the people of Cyrrha that if they wanted to live at peace among themselves, they must keep constant war with the enemies on their borders. If we want peace in our souls, we must wage war against our besetting sin and never stop until it is subdued.

Question: How can we identify our favorite sin?

Answer: 1. The sin a person does not want to be confronted about is the darling sin. Herod could not tolerate having his immorality spoken against. If the prophet touched that sin, it would cost him his head. People can endure having other sins called out, but when the preacher puts his finger on that one wound and names that particular sin, their hearts fill with resentment. That reaction is a clear sign — that is the Herodias.

2. The sin the thoughts return to most often is the darling sin. Where the thoughts go, the heart goes. A person in love cannot keep their thoughts off the one they love. Examine which sin occupies your mind most. Which sin greets you first thing in the morning? That is the dominant sin.

3. The sin that has the greatest power over us — the one that leads us captive most easily — is the beloved sin. There are some sins a person can resist more effectively. When those sins come seeking entry, he can turn them away. But there is one sin that, when it comes calling, he cannot refuse — it overcomes him. This is the sin in his heart. The rich young man in the Gospels had turned away many sins, but one sin defeated him — that was greed. Christians, notice which sin carries you captive most easily. That is the seductive sin in your heart. It is a terrible thing when a person is so enslaved by lust that if it demands the loss of not only half the kingdom but the entire kingdom of heaven, he surrenders it to gratify that lust.

4. The sin a person constructs arguments to defend is the beloved sin. A person who carries a jewel will defend it as if his life depended on it. In the same way, when sin is lodged in the heart,

people will defend it. The sin we become advocates and debaters for is the besetting sin. If the sin is anger and we argue for it — as Jonah did in Jonah 4:9: I have good reason to be angry — that is it. If the sin is greed and we justify it, perhaps even twisting Scripture to support it, that is the sin closest to the heart.

5. The sin that disturbs us most and confronts us most forcefully in times of sickness or crisis — that is the Delilah sin. When Joseph's brothers were in distress, their sin of selling him came flooding back to memory. Genesis 42:21: We are truly guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the distress of his soul when he begged us and we did not listen. In the same way, when a person lies on a sickbed and conscience says: you committed this sin, you persisted in it and rolled it like honey under your tongue — when conscience reads that heavy account, you can be sure that was the beloved sin.

6. The sin a person finds hardest to let go of is the dearest sin. Jacob could part with any of his sons more easily than with Benjamin. Genesis 42:36: Joseph is no more, and Simeon is no more, and now you would take Benjamin. In the same way, the sinner says: this sin and that sin I have given up — but must Benjamin go? Must I part with this delightful sin that has such a hold on my heart? A castle may have several outer forts — and the first and second may be taken. But when the attackers reach the main castle, the commander will fight to the death rather than surrender it. In the same way, a person may allow some sins to be dismantled, but when it comes to one particular sin — that is the taking of the castle — and he will never yield to part with it. That is the master-sin.

The besetting sin is a God-provoking sin. The wise men of Troy advised Priam to send Helen back to the Greeks and not let himself be any longer captivated by her beauty, because keeping her in the city would lay the foundation of a devastating war. In the same way, we should put away our Delilah sin, lest it provoke the God of heaven and cause Him to make war against us.

The besetting sin is the most dangerous of all. As Samson's strength lay in his hair, so the strength of sin lies in this beloved sin. It is like a disease that strikes the heart and brings death. A godly man will lay the axe of repentance to this sin and cut it down. He places this sin, like Uriah, in the front line of battle so that it may be destroyed. He will sacrifice this Isaac. He will tear out this right eye so that he can see more clearly the way to heaven.

4. A godly man will not allow himself in sins the world considers minor. There is no such thing as a truly small sin, though some may be less serious by comparison. But a godly man will not indulge even these.

For example, first: sins of neglect. Some think it is no great matter to skip family prayer or personal prayer. They can go months without God hearing from them. A godly man would as soon live without food as without prayer. He knows that every blessing is sanctified through prayer, as 1 Timothy 4:5 says. A bird should put many Christians to shame — it never takes a drink without lifting its eye toward heaven.

Second, a godly man dares not allow himself in empty, trivial talk — much less in anything that sounds like a careless oath. If God will hold us accountable for idle words, how much more will He hold us accountable for idle oaths?

Third, a godly man dares not allow himself in harsh, unfair judgment of others. Some think this a small matter — they would not swear, but they will slander. This is deeply wrong. You wound a person in what is most precious to him. A godly man turns all his criticism against himself — he judges his own sins. But he is very careful and tender with the good name of another.

Application: If you want to be counted among the saints, do not indulge any sin. Consider the damage a single sin, harbored and lived in, will do.

1. One sin gives Satan as much advantage over you as many sins. A bird-catcher can hold a bird by one wing. Satan held Judas firmly by just one sin.

2. One sin that is lived in shows that the heart is unsound. A person who hides a rebel in his house is guilty of treason against the crown. The person who indulges one sin is a treacherous hypocrite.

3. One sin opens the door to more. A small thief can unlock the door for others to enter. Sin is linked in chains — one sin pulls in more. David's adultery opened the way to murder. One sin never travels alone. If only one seed of sin is left, the devil will brood on it until it multiplies.

4. One sin is as much a breach of God's law as many. James 2:10: Whoever fails in one point of the law has become guilty of all of it. If the king makes laws against robbery, treason, and murder, a person who is guilty of only one of these is just as much a law-breaker as if he were guilty of all three.

5. One sin that is lived in keeps Christ from entering. One stone in a pipe blocks the water. One sin that is indulged clogs the soul and keeps the streams of Christ's blood from flowing into it.

6. One sin that is lived in will ruin all your good acts of worship. A drop of poison spoils a glass of wine. Abimelech, a son born outside marriage, killed seventy of his brothers, as Judges 9:5 records. One corrupt sin will destroy seventy prayers. One dead fly will corrupt the whole jar of ointment.

7. One sin harbored in the soul gnaws like a worm at the peace of conscience. It takes the manna out of the ark and leaves only the rod. As one ancient writer lamented: Ah, what is that scorpion within?

One sin is a pirate that robs a Christian of his comfort. One string out of tune ruins all the music. One sin that is tolerated will destroy the music of a clear conscience.

8. One tolerated sin will damn a person just as surely as many. One disease is enough to kill. No matter how strong a fence is, if one gap is left open the wild animal will find it and trample the crop. If even one sin is allowed in the soul, you leave an opening for the devil to enter. Chrysostom compared this to a soldier in full armor — if even one part of his body is left unguarded, the bullet can enter there and he may be shot just as surely as if he wore no armor at all. In the same way, if you favor even one sin, you leave part of your soul unprotected, and the bullet of God's wrath may enter there and strike you down. One sin can shut you out of heaven. As Jerome asks: What difference is there between being

shut out for many sins or for one? Therefore be careful not to cherish even one sin. One millstone will sink a man to the bottom of the sea just as effectively as a hundred.

9. One sin harbored in the soul will make a person unfit to endure suffering. A time of trial may come at any moment. The person with an injured shoulder cannot carry a heavy load. In the same way, the person with guilt in his conscience cannot carry the cross of Christ. Will someone deny his very life for Christ when he cannot deny his lust for Christ? One unmortified sin in the soul will eventually produce the bitter fruit of apostasy.

If you truly want to show yourself godly, give every sin a bill of divorce and cut it off. Kill your Goliath sin. Romans 6:12: Do not let sin reign in your mortal body. In the original, this means: do not let sin play king over you. Grace and sin may coexist, but grace and love for sin cannot. Therefore stop negotiating with sin. Take the spear of mortification and drive it into the heart of every sin.

## SECTION 20



**2**0. A godly man is godly in his relationships. It is not enough to be good in a general way — we must show our godliness in the roles and relationships we occupy.

1. A person is godly who is good as a magistrate or civil official. The magistrate is God's representative. A godly magistrate holds the balance of justice and gives every person what is rightly theirs. Deuteronomy 16:19: You shall not pervert justice. You shall not show partiality, and you shall not accept a bribe, for a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise. A magistrate must judge the case, not the person. A judge who allows himself to be corrupted by bribes is no longer a judge but a party to the crime. A magistrate must act according to the law, as Acts 23:3 says. And to do justice, he must first examine the case carefully. An archer who wants to shoot straight must first see the target clearly.

2. A person is godly who is good as a minister. A minister must be —

First, diligent. 2 Timothy 4:1-2: Preach the word; be ready in season and out of season. A minister must not be idle. Laziness in a minister is as inexcusable as sleeping at one's post. John the Baptist was a voice crying out, as Matthew 3:3 says. A silent minis-

ter is no more useful than a dead physician. A man of God must labor in the Lord's vineyard. It was Augustine's prayer that Christ might find him either praying or preaching when He came.

Second, a minister must be knowledgeable. Malachi 2:7: For the lips of a priest should guard knowledge, and people should seek instruction from his mouth. It was said of Gregory Nazianzene that he was an ocean of theology. The prophets of old were called seers, as 1 Samuel 9:9 notes. It is absurd to have our seers be blind. Christ said to Peter: Feed My sheep, as John 21:16 records. How sad it is when the shepherds themselves need to be fed. Ignorance in a minister is like blindness in an eye doctor. Under the law, a person with a diseased head was declared unclean, as Leviticus 13:44 states.

Third, a minister must preach plainly, adapting his content and style to the understanding of his congregation. 1 Corinthians 14:19. Some ministers, like eagles, love to soar into abstract theological speculations, thinking they are most admired when they are least understood. Those who preach in the clouds, rather than reaching their people's conscience, simply shoot over their heads.

Fourth, a minister must be zealous in rebuking sin. Titus 1:13: Rebuke them sharply. Epiphanius said of Elijah that he had sucked fire from his mother's breast. A man of God must draw the fire of zeal from the breast of Scripture. Zeal in a minister is as appropriate as fire on the altar. Some are afraid to rebuke — like the swordfish, which carries a sword on its head but has no heart to use it. They carry the sword of the Spirit but have no will to draw it in reproof against sin. Many have spread comfort over their people like a soft pillow, letting them sleep so soundly that they never woke until they were in hell.

Fifth, a minister must be holy in heart and life.

First, in heart. How tragic it is for a minister to preach to others what he has never experienced in his own soul — to urge others toward holiness while being a stranger to it himself. Would that this were not so common. How many blow the Lord's trumpet with an unclean breath.

Second, in life. Under the law, the priests washed themselves in the basin before serving at the altar. Those who serve in the Lord's house must first be washed from gross sin in the basin of repentance. The life of a minister should be a walking Bible. Basil said of Gregory Nazianzene that he thundered in his preaching and shone in his conduct. A minister must imitate John the Baptist, who was not only a voice crying out, as Isaiah 40:3 says, but also a light shining, as John 5:35 says. Those who live in contradiction to what they preach bring disgrace on a noble calling. They turn their books into cups and their study into a tavern. Though they are angels in office, they are devils in their lives. Jeremiah 23:15.

3. A person is godly who is good as a husband — who fills that role with love. Ephesians 5:25: Husbands, love your wives. The vine twining its branches around the elm and embracing it is a picture of the deep love that should characterize marriage. Marriage would be a sorrowful condition if it had only cares to make it bitter without love to make it sweet. Love is the finest diamond in the wedding ring. Isaac loved Rebekah, as Genesis 24:67 says. Unkindness in this close relationship causes great harm. Pagan writers record that Clytemnestra, the wife of Agamemnon, in revenge for wrongs she suffered from her husband, first broke the bonds of fidelity and then agreed to his murder. A husband should show his love for his wife by covering her weaknesses, by avoiding

occasions of conflict, by tender and affirming words, by godly counsel, by gifts and expressions of love, by encouraging what he sees that is admirable and virtuous in her, by praying together, and by spending time with her — unless prevented by urgent business. A pilot who abandons his ship and leaves it to the mercy of the waves shows that he does not value it or think there is anything worth protecting in it.

The apostle gives a strong reason why husband and wife should love each other. 1 Peter 3:7: So that your prayers may not be hindered. Where strong passions dominate, prayer is either neglected or disrupted.

4. A person is godly who is good as a father.

First, a father must pour godly instruction into his children. Ephesians 6:4: Bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord. This is what Abraham did. Genesis 18:19: I have chosen him, that he may command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord. Children are young plants that must be watered with good education so that they may, like Obadiah, fear the Lord from their youth, as 1 Kings 18:12 says. Plato observed that the person who neglects to sow cannot expect to harvest. In the same way, a parent who neglects to sow the seed of sound instruction cannot expect good fruit from a child. And even if the child dies in sin despite all counsel, it is still a comfort to a godly parent to know that before the child died, he gave him the medicine of spiritual truth.

Second, a parent must pray for his children. Monica, the mother of Augustine, prayed earnestly for his conversion. Someone said of Augustine: It was impossible that a son of so

many prayers and tears should be lost. Your child's soul is in a trap — will you not pray that it may be delivered from the snare of the devil? 2 Timothy 2:26. Many parents are careful to set aside an inheritance for their children but never set aside prayers for them.

Third, a parent must discipline his children. Proverbs 23:13: Do not withhold discipline from a child; if you strike him with a rod, he will not die. Discipline beats out the dust and moth of sin. A child indulged and allowed to pursue wickedness will become a burden rather than a blessing. David coddled Adonijah. 1 Kings 1:6: His father had never at any time displeased him by asking, Why have you done thus? Adonijah later became a grief to his father and tried to seize his throne. Correction is a hedge of thorns that stops children before they sprint all the way to hell.

5. A person is godly who is good as a head of household. A godly man promotes religion in his family — he establishes worship in his home, not only in his heart. Psalm 101:2: I will walk within my house with a blameless heart. Joshua 24:15: As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord. It is recorded in honor of Archbishop Cranmer that his household was a nursery of godliness. A godly man's home is a small church. Colossians 4:15: The church in his house.

First, a godly head of household makes God's word known to those under his roof. He reads Scripture, and fills his house with the fragrance of prayer. The Jews had acts of worship in their households as well as in the tabernacle, as Exodus 12:3 records.

Second, a godly master provides for his servants' needs. He cares for them in health and in sickness. He is not like the Amalekite in 1 Samuel 30:13, who abandoned his servant when he

fell ill. He is rather like the good centurion, who came to Christ on behalf of his sick servant, as Matthew 8:5 records.

Third, a godly master sets his servants a good example. He is sober and heavenly in his manner. His virtuous life is a clear mirror in which everyone in his household can see how to conduct themselves.

6. A person is godly who is good in the role of a child — who honors his parents. Philo the Jew placed the fifth commandment in the first table of the law, as if children had not completed their duty to God until they had also given honor to their parents. Honoring parents involves two things.

First, showing respect for their persons — respect that is shown both in humble speech and in humble manner. The opposite is a child who behaves toward a parent with arrogance and contempt. Among the Lacedemonians, if a child behaved disrespectfully toward a parent, it was publicly declared that the father was lawfully permitted to disinherit that child and choose another heir.

Second, honoring parents means obeying their instructions. Ephesians 6:1: Children, obey your parents in the Lord. Obedience is the interest children pay their parents on the investment their parents have made in them. Christ set every child an example of obedience to parents. Luke 2:51: He was submissive to them. The Rechabites were outstanding in this. Jeremiah 35:5-6: I set before the Rechabites pitchers of wine and said, Drink wine — but they said, We will drink no wine, for Jonadab the son of Rechab, our father, commanded us saying: You shall not drink wine, you or your sons, forever. When Solon was asked why he had not made a law against disobedient children, he answered that he thought no one

could be so wicked. God has punished children who refused to pay the tribute of obedience. Absalom, a disobedient son, was hanged in an oak tree between heaven and earth, as being worthy of neither. Manlius, an old man reduced to poverty, had a wealthy son. He asked his son only for a small gift, but could not receive it. The son disowned him and spoke to him with contempt. The old man walked away with tears falling as witnesses to his grief. God, to avenge this disobedience, soon struck the son with madness. The person in whom godliness truly lives makes as much conscience of the fifth commandment as the first.

7. A person is godly who is good in the role of a servant. Colossians 3:22; Ephesians 6:5: Servants, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling. The faithfulness of a servant shows in —

First, diligence. Abraham's servant made haste to complete the task his master had given him, as Genesis 24:33 shows.

Second, cheerfulness. Servants must serve willingly. As the centurion described his servants in Luke 7:8: I say to one, Go, and he goes.

Third, faithfulness, which has two parts. First, not taking what does not belong to you. Titus 2:10: Not pilfering. Second, keeping confidences. A stomach that cannot hold what is put into it is a poor stomach — and a servant who cannot keep the secrets his master has entrusted to him is a poor servant.

Fourth, not talking back. Titus 2:9: Not argumentative. It is better to correct a mistake than to make excuses for it. And what should motivate a servant in his work is this encouraging promise. Colossians 3:24: Knowing that from the Lord you will receive the

inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ. If Christ Himself were asking you to do a piece of work, would you not do it gladly? While you serve your master, you are serving the Lord Christ. And if you ask what your pay will be — you will receive the inheritance.

Application 1: If relational holiness is the great mark of a godly man, then — God have mercy on us — how few genuinely godly people can be found. Many wear the coat of religious profession. They will pray and talk about points of doctrine. But what does their life at home reveal? They are not good in their relationships. How badly it reflects when Christians are deficient in the godliness that should show up in their roles. Can we call him godly who is a corrupt magistrate? He twists justice. Psalm 58:1: Do you indeed decree what is right, O rulers? Do you judge the children of man uprightly? No, in your hearts you devise wrongs. Can we call him godly who is a negligent parent? He never teaches his child the way to heaven. He is like the ostrich, which is cruel to its young, as Job 39:16 says. Can we call him godly who is a poor head of household? Many masters leave their religion at church — the way a clerk leaves his book — and bring nothing of God home. Their houses are not houses of God but houses of wickedness — not little temples but little hells. How many masters will stand at the judgment bar, having fed their servants' stomachs but starved their souls. Can we call him godly who is a bad child? He stops his ear to his parents' counsel. You might as well call someone a loyal subject who rebels against his ruler. Can we call him godly who is a lazy and willful servant? He is quicker to find fault in others than to

correct it in himself. To call someone godly who is poor in his relationships is a contradiction — it is calling evil good, as Isaiah 5:20 warns.

Application 2: If we want God's approval, let us show our godliness in our relationships. Failing to be good in our relationships cancels the good of everything else. Naaman was a great and honorable man — but he was a leper, as 2 Kings 5:1 says. That one word 'but' spoiled everything. In the same way, a person may be a great listener to sermons — but he neglects his relational duties. That failure stains the beauty of all his other actions. As in printing, even if the type is perfectly cut, if it is set in the wrong place the whole page is ruined. In the same way, no matter how many admirable qualities a person has, if he is not faithful in his particular role and makes no conscience of how he walks in his relationships, he does harm to religion. There are many to whom Christ will say at the last day, as He said to the rich young man in Luke 18:22: You still lack one thing — you failed in your relational calling. Therefore, as we value our salvation and the honor of religion, let us shine in the sphere of relationship where God has placed us.

## SECTION 21



**2** 1. A godly man does spiritual things in a spiritual manner. Philippians 3:3: We are the circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God. Spirit-worship is worship in its purest form. 1 Peter 2:5: You are being built up as a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices. These sacrifices are not only spiritual in their subject matter but in their quality. A wicked man either neglects duty entirely or performs it in a dull and careless way. Instead of using the world without being enslaved by it, he serves God as if he were not serving God at all. A godly man brings spiritual quality to his duties — he is not only concerned with doing holy things but with doing them in a holy way.

Question: What does it mean to perform spiritual duties spiritually?

Answer: It involves three things.

1. To perform duties spiritually is to do them from a spiritual principle — namely a renewed principle of grace. A man may have remarkable gifts, the most moving and beautiful expressions, speaking like an angel — and yet his duties may not be spiritual, because he lacks the grace of the Spirit. Whatever a moral, unregenerate person does is only refined nature. Such a person may

perform duties that appear better than a godly man's — more refined in style and appearance — but they are not as good, because they lack a renewed principle. A crab apple tree may produce fruit that is bigger and fairer to the eye than a pippin, but it is not as good fruit because it does not come from as good a root. In the same way, an unregenerate person may perform as many duties as a child of God, and these may appear more impressive to an outside observer, but they are harsh and bitter because they do not flow from the sweet root of grace. A true saint gives God wine pressed from the pure grape of the Spirit.

2. To perform duties spiritually is to do them with full concentration. A Christian is deeply serious and works to keep his thoughts focused on what he is doing. 1 Corinthians 7:35: That you may give undivided devotion to the Lord.

Question: But can a godly man not have wandering thoughts during worship?

Answer: Yes — sad experience confirms it. Thoughts will dance about in prayer. The saints are called stars — and in worship they are often wandering stars. The heart is like mercury, which will not stay still. It is hard to hold two good thoughts together. We cannot lock our hearts so tightly that distracting thoughts, like wind, cannot find a way in. Jerome confessed: Sometimes when I am engaged in God's service, I find myself walking in the galleries or adding up accounts.

But for the godly, these wandering thoughts are not welcomed. Psalm 119:113: I hate double-minded thoughts. They arrive like unwelcome guests — and are shown the door as soon as they are noticed.

Question: What causes these distracting thoughts in the godly?

Answer: 1. From the corruption of our nature — they are the mud the heart throws up.

2. From Satan. If the devil cannot keep us from duty, he will try to disrupt us in duty. When we come before the Lord, Satan is at our right hand to oppose us, as Zechariah 3:1 says. Just as someone standing at your elbow jogs your arm while you try to write — making it impossible to write clearly — so Satan places distracting images before the imagination to draw us away. The devil does not oppose outward formality — he opposes genuine fervency. When he sees us setting ourselves sincerely to seek God, he whispers things in our ears so that we can barely focus on what we are doing.

3. These distracting thoughts arise from the world. They breed from earthly concerns. Worldly business frequently crowds into our acts of worship, and while we are speaking to God our hearts are talking about something else. Ezekiel 33:31: They sit before Me as My people, but their heart is set on their gain. While we are hearing the Word or meditating, some worldly concern commonly knocks at the door and pulls our attention away from the duty we are in the middle of. It is as it was with Abraham when he prepared to worship — the birds came down upon the sacrifice and he had to drive them away. Genesis 15:11.

Question: How can we get rid of these wandering thoughts and be more spiritual in worship?

Answer: 1. Keep in mind God's holiness. He is a holy God, and He cannot endure for us to entertain vain thoughts while we are worshipping Him. Would a king be pleased if, while a subject was

speaking to him, the subject began playing with a feather? Will God accept flighty, distracted hearts? How reverently the angels approach — they cover their faces and cry: Holy, holy.

2. Think about the immense importance of the duties you are engaged in. As David said about building the house of God: The work is great. 2 Chronicles 29:1. When we are hearing the Word, the work is great — this is the Word by which we will be judged. When we are in prayer, the work is great — we are pleading for the life of our souls. Is this a time to be careless?

3. Come to duty with love. The nature of love is to fix the mind on its object. A person in love keeps thinking about the one he loves — nothing can pull those thoughts away. The person who loves the world has his thoughts constantly running toward it. If our hearts were more on fire with love, they would be more fixed in worship. And what cause do we have to love worship? Is this not the direct road to heaven? Do we not meet with God here? Can a wife be in a better place than in her husband's company? Where can the soul be better than when drawing near to God?

4. Consider the harm these wandering thoughts do. They contaminate our duties, hinder fervency, show deep irreverence, and tempt God to turn His ear away. How do we expect God to attend to our prayers when we ourselves barely attend to them?

3. To perform duties spiritually is to do them in faith. Hebrews 11:4: By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain. The holy oil made for the tabernacle had several spices blended into it, as Exodus 30:34 records. Faith is the sweet spice

that must be mixed into duty. To doubt either God's mercy or His truth is an offense against Him. A Christian may safely stake his very soul on the public faithfulness of heaven.

Application 1: How far from godliness are those who are unspiritual in their worship. They do not perform duties from a renewed principle or with genuine focus — they simply go through the motions to quiet their conscience. Many people look no further than the bare doing of duties and never think about how they are done. God does not judge our duties by their length but by their love. When people offer God only the lifeless shell of duty, may He not say as in Isaiah 58:5: Is this the fast I have chosen? Are these the duties I required? I called for the heart and spirit — and you bring nothing but the empty form. Should I take comfort in this?

Application 2: Let us demonstrate our godliness by being more spiritual in our duties. It is not how much we do but how well. A musician is praised not for playing long but for playing well. We must not only do what God commands but do it as God requires. How many people are unspiritual in spiritual things? They bring their performances but not their hearts. They give God the skin, not the richest part of the offering. God is Spirit, as John 4:24 says. And it is the spiritual quality of duty He is most pleased with. 1 Peter 2:5: Spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God. The spirit drawn from wine is the strongest part — and the spiritual element of duty is the best part of it. Ephesians 5:19: Making melody to the Lord with your heart. It is the heart that makes the music. Bringing a spiritual quality to duty gives it life. Without this, it is dead praying, dead hearing — and dead things are not pleasing. A dead flower has no beauty; a flower without fragrance has no sweetness.

Question: How can we perform our duties in a spiritual manner?

Answer: 1. Keep the soul pure and undefiled. Lust dulls and deadens a person. Beware of any stain of impurity. James 1:21. Wood soaked with sap does not burn easily — and a heart steeped in sin is not fit to burn in holy devotion. Can a person be spiritual in worship while feeding on carnal lust? Hosea 4:11: Whoredom, wine, and new wine take away the heart. Any sin that is lived in takes the heart away from God. Such a person has no heart to pray or meditate. The more alive the heart is toward sin, the more it dies toward duty.

2. If we want to be spiritual in duty, let us keep two things in mind.

First, the benefit of a duty performed spiritually. It weakens corruption, increases grace, defeats Satan, strengthens our communion with God, produces peace of conscience, brings answers of mercy, and always leaves the heart in a better condition.

Second, the danger of performing duties in an unspiritual manner. Such duties are as if they had not been done at all — because what the heart does not do is not truly done. Duties sloppily performed turn ordinances into judgments. This is why many who are frequently at worship come away worse for it. If medicine is not properly prepared and the ingredients not rightly balanced, it is as harmful as poison. In the same way, if duties are not performed rightly, they leave the heart harder and more sinful than before.

Unspiritual duties often bring earthly judgment. 1 Chronicles 15:13: The Lord our God broke out against us, because we did not seek Him according to the rule. This is why God makes breaches in families and relationships — because people do not worship Him in the manner and order He requires.

3. If we want our duties to be spiritual, we must get our hearts into a spiritual condition. An earthly heart cannot be spiritual in worship. Let us ask God for a spiritual taste — the ability to find sweetness in holy things. Without spiritual hearts we come to duty without delight and leave without benefit. If a man wants the wheels of his watch to move rightly, he must repair the spring. Christian, if you want to move more spiritually in duty, get the spring of your heart repaired.

## SECTION 22



**2** 2. A godly man is thorough and complete in his religion — he obeys every command of God. Acts 13:22: I have found in David a man after My heart, who will do all My will. In the Greek the phrase means all My wills — plural. A godly man labors to walk according to the full width of God's law. Every command carries the same stamp of divine authority, and one who is godly will obey one command as willingly as another. Psalm 119:6: Then I shall not be put to shame, having my eyes fixed on all Your commandments. A godly man works through the whole body of religion the way the sun moves through all the signs of the zodiac. A musician who plays on a ten-stringed instrument must strike every string, or he ruins all the music. The Ten Commandments are like a ten-stringed instrument — we must obey every one and strike every string, or there is no sweet music in our religion. True obedience is the obedience of a child — a child should obey a parent in all reasonable commands. God's laws are like the curtains of the tabernacle, which were looped together, or like a chain of gold where every link is connected. A person of conscience will not willingly break a single link of that chain. If one command is violated, the whole chain is broken. James 2:10: Whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become guilty of all of it. A deliberate

breach of one of God's laws brings a person under the guilt and curse of the whole law. True obedience is whole and consistent. A godly heart, like a compass needle, always points in the direction the lodestone draws it.

This is a fundamental difference between a child of God and a hypocrite. The hypocrite picks and chooses in religion. He will perform duties that are easy and that serve his pride or self-interest, but he disregards others. Matthew 23:23: You tithe mint and dill and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness. To be fervent in some duties and cold in others is a symptom of a disordered heart. Jehu was zealous in destroying the worship of Baal but let Jeroboam's golden calves stand, as 2 Kings 10:29-31 records. This shows that men are not truly good when they are only good in part. If your servant did some of the work you assigned and left the rest undone, how would you regard that? The Lord says: Walk before Me, and be blameless, as Genesis 17:1 says. How can our hearts be right with God when we deal with Him selectively — doing some things and leaving others undone? The person who is godly is godly completely.

There are ten duties God calls for, which a godly man will conscientiously perform. These duties can also serve as marks and tests of genuine godliness.

1. A godly man frequently examines his own heart. He takes the lamp of God's Word and searches his inner life. Psalm 77:6: I communed with my heart; and my spirit searched carefully. A gracious soul searches for any duty neglected, any sin harbored. He examines his evidence of title to heaven. Just as he would not take gold on trust without verifying it, he does not take his own grace

for granted. He is a spiritual merchant who regularly audits the state of his soul to see what he is worth before God. He sets his house in order. Regular accounting keeps God and conscience in good standing. A worldly person cannot tolerate this kind of self-examination — he is ignorant of what is happening in his own soul. He is like someone well-traveled abroad but a complete stranger in his own home country.

2. A godly man is much devoted to private prayer — he keeps his hours for personal worship. When Jacob was left alone, he wrestled with God, as Genesis 32:24 records. In the same way, when a gracious heart is alone, it wrestles in prayer and will not leave God without a blessing. A devout Christian exercises eyes of faith and knees of prayer.

Hypocrites, who have nothing of religion beyond the outward appearance, love to be seen. Christ described them clearly. Matthew 6:5: They love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, so that they may be seen by others. The hypocrite is devout in the temple, where everyone can watch him. But he is a stranger to private communion with God. In church he is a saint; in his private room he is an atheist. A good Christian keeps a quiet, secret communication with heaven. As one has said: only the person who weeps without a witness truly weeps.

Private prayer sustains the life of godliness. When personal holiness is abandoned, religion receives a wound to the heart.

3. A godly man is diligent in his work and calling. He takes responsibility for providing for his family. Church must not crowd out work. Mr. Perkins said: Though a man be gifted in excellent ways, and hear the Word with reverence, and receive the sacra-

ments — yet if he does not practice the duties of his calling, all of it is hypocrisy. Religion never issued a license for idleness. 2 Thessalonians 3:11-12: We hear that some among you walk in idleness — we command and encourage such people to do their work quietly and to earn their own living. Bread tastes sweetest when earned by real effort. A godly man would rather fast than eat the bread of idleness. Empty professors talk about living by faith but do not live by working. They are like the lilies of the field — they neither toil nor spin. An idle person is the devil's tennis ball, batted about by one temptation after another, until at last the ball falls into the hazard.

4. A godly man sets boundaries for himself even in lawful things. He is moderate in recreation and in eating, taking only what is necessary to restore his strength — so that he is better fitted for God's service. Jerome lived very simply — his food was a few dried figs and cold water. Augustine wrote in his Confessions: Lord, You have taught me to go to my food as to a medicine. If the gentle rein of reason should curb the appetite, how much more should the stronger bit of grace restrain it. The life of a sinner is animal-like. The glutton feeds without reverence, as Jude 12 says, and the drunkard drinks without reason. Too much oil chokes the lamp, while a smaller amount makes it burn more brightly. A godly man holds the golden bridle of self-control and refuses to let his table become a snare.

5. A godly man is careful to be morally upright. He makes conscience of justice in dealings with others as well as of his personal piety. Scripture links these two together. Luke 1:75: In righteousness and holiness before Him all our days. In that verse, holiness refers to our duty to God, and righteousness refers to our duty to

our neighbor. A person may be morally upright without being godly, but no one can be truly godly without also being morally upright. This moral uprightness shows up in how we deal with other people. A godly man lives by the golden rule. Matthew 7:12: Whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them. There are three forms of dishonesty in business dealings.

First, using false weights. Hosea 12:7: The merchant uses dishonest scales. When men make their weights lighter, they make their sin heavier. Amos 8:5: Making the ephah small. The ephah was the measure used in selling grain — they reduced it so buyers received less than they paid for. A godly man who holds the Bible in one hand will not use dishonest weights in the other.

Second, passing off inferior goods. Amos 8:6: They sell the chaff of the wheat. They would sort out the best grain and sell the poorest at the same price as the best. Isaiah 1:22: Your wine is mixed with water. They adulterated their wine but led customers to believe it came from the pure grape.

Third, charging far more than something is worth. Leviticus 25:14: When you sell to your neighbor or buy from your neighbor, you shall not wrong one another. A godly man deals fairly without being demanding. He will sell at a price that helps himself without damaging others. His motto is: a conscience void of offense toward God and toward men, as Acts 24:16 says.

The hypocrite separates what God has joined together — righteousness and holiness. He pretends to be devout but is not honest in his dealings. This brings religion into contempt — when men

display the colors of Christ but practice fraud, using a mask of piety to hide a disregard for basic decency. A godly man makes conscience of the second table of the law as well as the first.

6. A godly man will forgive those who have wronged him. Revenge is naturally sweet to the heart.

A gracious spirit overlooks insults, forgets injuries, and counts it a greater victory to conquer an enemy by patience than by power. This is truly noble — to overcome evil with good. Though I would not entrust myself to an enemy, I would strive to love him. Though I might not count him among my trusted circle, I would not exclude him from my prayers. Matthew 5:44.

Question: But does every godly man actually reach this point — to forgive and even love his enemies?

Answer: He does so in a gospel sense. First, in his understanding he fully agrees with it — he affirms in his judgment that this is right. Romans 7:18: With my mind I serve the law of God. Second, in his grief — a godly man mourns that he cannot love his enemies more. Romans 7:24: Wretched man that I am! He thinks: My heart is so corrupt — I have received such great mercy, and can show so little. I have had enormous debts forgiven, and yet I struggle to forgive small ones. Third, in his desire — a godly man prays that God will give him the heart to love his enemies. He prays: Lord, pull this root of bitterness out of me; fill my soul with love; make me a dove without gall. Fourth, in his effort — a godly man, in the strength of Christ, resolves and strives against all bitterness and ill will. This is what it means in a gospel sense to love our enemies. A wicked man cannot do this — his malice burns until it boils over into revenge.

7. A godly man feels the suffering of the church deeply. Psalm 137:1: By the waters of Babylon, there we sat down and wept, when we remembered Zion. I have read of certain trees whose leaves, if one is cut or touched, cause the other leaves to shrink and droop — as if they feel the wound. There is a spiritual sympathy among Christians like this. When one part of God's church suffers, they feel it as though they themselves have been touched. Ambrose records that when the Emperor Theodosius lay near death, he was more troubled about the condition of the church of God than about his own illness. When Aeneas was offered escape while Troy burned, he cried: Far be it from me to desire to live when Troy lies in ruins. In music there are two strings tuned in unison — strike one, and the other vibrates in response. When the Lord strikes others, a godly heart is moved in sympathy. Isaiah 16:11: My heart cries out for Moab like a lyre. Even though a child of God is doing well personally — living in comfort — he grieves when things go badly for the body of believers. Queen Esther enjoyed the king's favor and all the pleasures of the court, but when a death warrant was signed against the Jewish people, she mourned and fasted and risked her own life to save theirs.

8. A godly man is content with his present circumstances. If provisions run low, his heart adjusts to match his situation. As Cato said: Many blame me for my want, and I blame them because they cannot endure want. A godly man puts a charitable interpretation on God's providence. When God brews a bitter cup for him, he says: This is my medicine — it is meant to purge me and do my soul good. And so he is content.

9. A godly man is fruitful in good works. Titus 2:7. The Hebrew word for godly — *hasid* — means merciful, implying that to be godly and to be charitable are the same thing. A godly man feeds the hungry, clothes the naked. Psalm 37:26: He is always lending generously. Among devout Jews even today, many give a tenth of their income to the poor, and they have a proverb: Give the tenth and you will grow rich. The hypocrite is all for faith and nothing for works — like the laurel tree that makes a fine show but bears no fruit.

10. A godly man will endure persecution. He will be wed to Christ even if the only dowry Christ settles on him is the cross. He suffers by choice and with a spirit of courage. Argerius wrote a letter to a friend dated: From the pleasant garden of the Leonine prison. The blessed martyrs, clothed in the full armor of God, by their courage blunted the edge of persecution. The juniper tree makes the coolest shade and yet also the hottest coals. In the same way, persecution makes the coal of love burn hotter, and the shadow of death feel cooler.

So a godly man walks the full circle of religious duties and obeys God in all that He commands.

Objection: But is it not impossible for anyone to walk according to the full width of God's law and follow Him completely?

Answer: There are two ways of obeying God's law. The first is perfect obedience — doing everything the law requires without falling short. This we cannot reach in this life. The second is incomplete obedience, which God accepts for Christ's sake. This consists of four things.

1. An approving of all God's commandments. Romans 7:12: The commandment is holy and righteous and good. Verse 16: I agree with the law, that it is good. There is both intellectual assent and genuine agreement.

2. A genuine delight in God's commands. Psalm 119:47: I will delight in Your commandments, which I love.

3. A heartfelt desire to walk in all God's commands. Psalm 119:5: Oh that my ways may be steadfast in keeping Your statutes.

4. A genuine effort to walk in every path of the commandment. Psalm 119:59: I turned my feet to Your testimonies. This God counts as perfect obedience, and He is pleased to accept it. Zechariah had real weaknesses — he hesitated in unbelief and was struck dumb for it. Yet it is said of him that he walked in all the commandments of the Lord blamelessly, as Luke 1:6 says. This is because he sincerely strove to obey God in all things. Gospel obedience is true in its nature, even if not complete in its degree. And where it falls short, Christ places His merits on the scale — and then there is full weight.

## SECTION 23



**2** 3. A godly man walks with God. Genesis 6:9: Noah walked with God. The age in which Noah lived was deeply corrupt. Verse 5: The wickedness of man was great in the earth. But the wickedness of the times could not knock Noah off his path. Noah walked with God. Noah is called a preacher of righteousness in 2 Peter 2:5.

Noah preached first by his teaching. According to some of the rabbis, his message ran something like this: Turn from your evil ways, or the waters of the flood will come and wipe out the entire human race.

Second, Noah preached by his life. He preached through his humility, patience, and holiness. Noah walked with God.

Question: What does it mean to walk with God?

Answer: Walking with God involves five things.

1. Walking as under God's eye. Noah lived with a deep sense of God's presence. A godly man keeps himself aware that he is before God, knowing his Judge is watching. Psalm 16:8: I have set the Lord always before me. This was how David saw his life.

2. Walking with God means enjoying a close friendship and intimacy with Him. Friends walk together and find comfort in each other's company. The godly make their needs known to God, and He makes His love known to them. There is a sweet exchange between God and His people. 1 John 1:3: Our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ.

3. Walking with God is walking above earthly things. A godly person is lifted above all things that belong only to this world. A person must rise very high to walk with God. A dwarf cannot walk among the stars — and a small, earthbound soul cannot walk with God.

4. Walking with God implies visible godliness. Walking is a visible posture — grace must be observable to those who watch. The person who walks with God shows something of God in his manner of life. His conduct speaks like an open Bible.

5. Walking with God implies ongoing progress in grace. It is not merely a step but a walk — there is a continuing movement toward maturity. A godly man does not stop in the middle of the road but presses on until he reaches the end of his faith, as 1 Peter 1:9 says. Though a godly man may at times step off the path, he does not leave the road. He may stumble through weakness — as Peter did — but he recovers himself through repentance and continues in a life of growing holiness. Job 17:9: The righteous holds to his way.

Application 1: It is plain how wrong it is to call those godly who do not walk with God. They would like Noah's reward but do not love Noah's walk. Most people are found on the devil's dark road.

Philippians 3:18: Many walk, of whom I tell you even weeping, that they are enemies of the cross of Christ.

1. Some will praise walking with God and say it is the finest life in the world — but will not take a single step in that direction. Not everyone who praises fine wine is willing to pay the price. Many a father commends virtue to his child but sets no example of it himself.

2. Others take a few steps along the good old way, but then turn back. If the ways of God were not good, why did they enter them? If they were good, why did they forsake them? 2 Peter 2:21: For it would have been better for them never to have known the way of righteousness than after knowing it to turn back from the holy commandment.

3. Others slander walking with God, saying it is a gloomy and joyless life, and that those who are less devoted seem to prosper more. God counts this blasphemy. 2 Peter 2:2: The way of truth will be spoken evil of. The Greek word means it will be blasphemed.

4. Others mock walking with God as if it were ridiculous scrupulousness. What — you're going to join the holy crowd? You think you're wiser than everyone else? Some people, if they had the power, would laugh holiness out of existence. The seat of the scornful stands at the mouth of hell.

5. Others, instead of walking with God, walk after the flesh.

1. They walk by fleshly opinions. 2. They walk after fleshly lusts.

1. They walk by fleshly opinions. There are six of these.

1. That it is best to do what most people do — to follow the course of the world; to stay fashionable rather than to get a new heart.

2. That human reason is the highest judge in matters of religion. We should believe only as far as we can see. To become a fool in order to be wise — to be saved entirely by another's righteousness — to gain everything by giving everything up: none of this will the natural man put in his creed.

3. That a little religion is enough. The lifeless form may be maintained for appearance's sake, but zeal is madness. The world thinks the best religion is like gold leaf — spread very thin.

4. That any path that leads to suffering cannot be the right path. A stick that is straight will appear bent when you look at it underwater. In the same way, religion that is under affliction looks crooked to a worldly eye.

5. That all a person's concern should be for the present life. As one godless cardinal said, he would gladly give up his share in paradise to keep his position in Paris.

6. That sinning is better than suffering. It shows more wisdom, they say, to keep your skin intact than your conscience pure. These are the rules laid down by the crooked serpent — and whoever walks by them will never know peace.

2. Others walk after fleshly lusts — they make themselves caterers for the body, as Romans 13:14 says. Such was the Emperor Heliogabalus, who indulged his body so extravagantly that he would sit only among sweet flowers mixed with amber and musk. He clothed himself in purple studded with precious stones. He burned in his lamps, instead of oil, a costly aromatic balsam im-

ported from Arabia. He bathed in perfumed water. He put his body to no other use than as a vessel through which food and drink could pass.

This is how sinners walk after the flesh — if a drunken or immoral desire calls, they satisfy it. They call everyone cowards who will not sin as boldly as they do. Instead of walking with God, they walk contrary to Him. Lust is the compass they sail by, Satan is their pilot, and hell is the port they are bound for.

Application 2: Let us examine whether we have this mark of the godly — do we walk with God? This can be known —

First, by the road you travel. The path of godliness is a quiet, less-traveled road on which only a few holy people walk. This is why it is called a path rather than a highway. Proverbs 12:28: In the path of righteousness is life, and in its pathway there is no death.

Second, if we walk with God, we walk in the fear of God. Genesis 5:22: Enoch walked with God. The Chaldean translation renders this: he walked in the fear of the Lord. The godly are careful about anything that might displease God. Genesis 39:9: How then can I do this great wickedness and sin against God? This is not a cowering, servile fear, but —

First, a fear that springs from love. Hosea 3:5. A child fears to offend his father out of the tender love he bears for him. This was what made holy Anselm say: If sin were on one side and hell on the other, I would rather leap into hell than willingly offend my God.

Second, it is a fear joined with trust. Hebrews 11:7: By faith, Noah, moved with godly fear, prepared an ark. Faith and fear go hand in hand. When the soul looks at God's holiness, it fears.

When it looks at God's promises, it trusts. A godly man trembles, yet trusts. Fear preserves reverence; faith preserves joy. Fear keeps the soul from being careless; faith keeps it from being crushed. By this we can know whether we walk with God: if we walk in the fear of God, we are careful not to break His laws or forfeit His love. Scripture brands sinners with this mark. Romans 3:18: There is no fear of God before their eyes. The godly fear God and do not sin, as Psalm 4:4 says. The wicked sin and do not fear, as Jeremiah 5:23-24 says. Loose and careless living will soon drive God away from us and make Him weary of our company. 2 Corinthians 6:14: What fellowship has light with darkness?

Application 3: Let me urge all who want to be counted godly to take up Noah's walk. Though the reality of grace lives in the heart, its beauty is seen in the walk.

1. Walking with God is deeply pleasing to God. The person who walks with God declares to the world who he most loves to be with. His fellowship is with the Father. He counts those the sweetest hours that are spent with God. This is precious and acceptable to God. Genesis 5:24: Enoch walked with God. And see how warmly God responded to Enoch's walk. Hebrews 11:5: He had this testimony — that he pleased God.

2. A close walk with God is a powerful means of drawing others to walk with Him. The apostle urges wives to walk in such a way that their husbands might be won by watching their conduct. 1 Peter 3:1. Justin Martyr confessed that he became a Christian by observing the holy and blameless lives of the early saints.

3. A close walk with God would silence the opponents of the truth. 1 Peter 2:15. A careless way of living puts a sword in the hands of wicked people to wound religion. How damaging it is when it can be said of professing Christians: they are as proud, as greedy, as dishonest as anyone else. Will that not bring the ways of God into contempt? But a holy and close walk with God would stop the mouths of sinners so completely that they could not speak against God's people without contradicting themselves. Satan came to Christ and found nothing in Him to accuse, as John 14:30 records. What a defeat it will be for the wicked when they can find nothing to charge against the godly except their very holiness. Daniel 6:5: We shall find no ground for complaint against this Daniel unless we find it in connection with the law of his God.

4. Walking with God is a pleasant walk. The ways of wisdom are called pleasantness in Proverbs 3:17. Is not light pleasant? Psalm 89:15: They walk, O Lord, in the light of Your face. Walking with God is like walking through beds of fragrant spices. This is what brings peace. Acts 9:31: Walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit. While we walk with God, what sweet music the bird of conscience makes within us. Psalm 138:5: They will sing of the ways of the Lord.

5. Walking with God is an honor. It is a distinction for someone of low rank to walk alongside a king. What greater dignity could be given to a mortal person than to converse with his Maker and take a daily walk with God?

6. Walking with God leads to rest. Hebrews 4:9: There remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God. As the philosopher said: motion tends toward rest. There is a kind of motion, however, that never arrives at rest. Those who walk with their sins will never

have rest. Revelation 14:11: They have no rest, day or night. But those who walk with God will sit down in the kingdom of God. Luke 13:29. Like a weary traveler who comes home and finally sits down. Revelation 3:21: To the one who conquers I will grant to sit with Me on My throne. A throne speaks of honor, and sitting speaks of rest.

7. Walking with God is the safest walk. Walking in the ways of sin is like walking on the bank of a river. The sinner treads on the edge of the bottomless pit, and if death gives him a nudge, he falls in. But walking in God's way is safe. Proverbs 3:23: Then you will walk on your way securely. The person who walks with a guard walks safely. The person who walks with God will have God's Spirit to guard him from sin and God's angels to guard him from danger. Psalm 91:11.

8. Walking with God will make death peaceful. Augustus wished for a quiet and easy death, free from much pain. If anything can make our pillow easy at death, it will be this — that we walked with God throughout our lives. Has anyone ever cried out on their deathbed that they were too holy, that they prayed too much, or walked too closely with God? No. What has cut people to the heart is that they did not walk more closely with God. They have wrung their hands in anguish to think how they were enchanted by the pleasures of this world. A close walk with God will make even death our friend. King Ahasuerus, when he could not sleep, called for the book of records and had it read to him, as Esther 6:1 says. In the same way, when sickness drives sleep from our eyes and we call for conscience — that book of records — and find written in it: on this day I humbled my soul before God in fasting; on this day my heart melted in prayer; on this day I had

sweet communion with God — what a comfort that will be. We will be able to face death with peace and say: Lord, take me now to heaven — the place I have so often visited in longing. Let me now go not in desire but in possession.

9. Walking with God is the surest way to know the mind of God. Friends who walk together share their secrets with one another. Psalm 25:14: The friendship of the Lord is for those who fear Him. Noah walked with God — and the Lord revealed to him the great secret of destroying the old world and saving him in the ark. Abraham walked with God, as Genesis 24:40 says, and God admitted him into His inner counsel. Genesis 18:17: Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do? God sometimes opens His heart sweetly to the soul in prayer and at the Lord's Supper — just as Christ made Himself known to the disciples in the breaking of bread, as Luke 24:35 records.

10. Those who walk with God will never be completely abandoned by Him. The Lord may withdraw for a time to make His people cry after Him more urgently, but He will not utterly leave them. Isaiah 54:8: In a moment of anger I hid My face from you, but with everlasting love I will have compassion on you. God will not turn away any of His old companions. He will not abandon someone who has kept Him company. Enoch walked with God, and then he was no more, for God took him, as Genesis 5:24 says. He took him up to heaven — as the Arabic rendering expresses it. Enoch was gathered into the arms of divine love.

Question: How can we walk with God?

Answer: 1. Leave the old road of sin. A person who wants to walk in a pleasant meadow must turn off the main road. The road of sin is crowded with travelers. So many are going that way that hell, vast as it is, has had to enlarge itself to make room for them. Isaiah 5:14. This road of sin looks attractive. The woman says: I have perfumed my bed with myrrh, aloes, and cinnamon, as Proverbs 7:17 says. Notice: for every one sweet thing — the cinnamon — there are two bitter things — myrrh and aloes. For the small sweetness sin offers now, there will be a far greater measure of bitterness afterward. Therefore get out of these thorns. You cannot walk with God and with sin. 2 Corinthians 6:14: What fellowship has righteousness with wickedness?

2. If you want to walk with God, get to know Him. Job 22:21: Agree with God and be at peace. Learn God through His attributes and His promises. Strangers do not walk together.

3. Have all differences between you and God resolved. Amos 3:3: Do two walk together unless they have agreed to meet? This agreement and reconciliation comes through faith. Romans 3:25: Whom God put forward as a propitiation by His blood, to be received by faith. Once we are made friends with God through Christ, we will be called up to the mountain as Moses was — honored as favorites of heaven and invited to walk with God.

4. If you want to walk with God, develop a love for God's ways. They are adorned with beauty, as Proverbs 4:18 says. They are sweetened with pleasure, as Proverbs 3:17 says. They are secured by truth, as Revelation 15:3 says. They come with life, as Acts 2:28 says. They stretch into eternity, as Habakkuk 3:6 says. Fall in love with the way of religion and you will soon be walking in it.

5. If you want to walk with God, take hold of His arm. Those who walk in their own strength will quickly grow tired and give out. Psalm 71:16: I will go in the strength of the Lord God. We cannot walk with God without God. Let us press Him on His promise. Isaiah 36:27: I will cause you to walk in My statutes. If God takes us by the hand, we will walk and not grow faint. Isaiah 40:31.

## SECTION 24



**2** 4. A godly man works to make others godly. He is not content to go to heaven alone but wants to bring others with him. Spiders work only for themselves, but bees work for others. A godly man is both a diamond and a magnet — a diamond for the sparkling brilliance of grace, and a magnet for his drawing power. He is always working to draw others toward embracing true godliness. Living things have the power to reproduce. Where religion truly lives in the heart, there will be an effort to pass that life of grace on to others. Philemon 10: My son Onesimus, whom I have fathered while here in prison. Though God is the fountain of grace, the saints are the channels that carry living water to others. This passionate desire for the conversion of souls comes from —

1. The nature of godliness itself. Godliness is like fire, which transforms everything it touches into its own nature. Where the fire of grace burns in the heart, it will seek to kindle others. Grace is a holy leaven that works to season and transform those nearby with divine truth. Paul longed to convert King Agrippa. How earnestly he pressed him! Acts 26:27: King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know that you believe. His zeal and eloquence nearly won the king. Acts 26:28: And Agrippa said to Paul, In a short time would you persuade me to be a Christian?

2. A godly man labors for the conversion of others out of compassion. Grace makes the heart tender. A godly man cannot help but pity those who are trapped in the bitterness of sin. He sees what a deadly cup is being prepared for the wicked. Without repentance, they will be delivered over to God's wrath. The fire that rained on Sodom was only a picture of hell — what seemed terrible then was nothing compared to what awaits. This is a fire of true and final punishment. Jude 7: Suffering the punishment of eternal fire. Seeing sinners bound for destruction, a godly man works to turn them from the error of their ways. 2 Corinthians 5:11: Knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade others.

3. A godly man works for the good of others out of holy zeal for Christ's glory. The glory of Christ is as dear to him as his own salvation. For that reason, he labors with all his strength to bring souls to Christ.

It is a glory to Christ when multitudes are born to Him. Every star adds brightness to the sky. Every new convert is a member added to Christ's body — a jewel adorning His crown. Though Christ's glory cannot be added to as God, as mediator it can be expressed and displayed more fully. The more who are saved, the more Christ is honored. Why else would the angels rejoice at the conversion of a sinner? Because Christ's glory shines all the more.

Application 1: This mark excludes from the number of the godly those who never work to promote the salvation of others. As one has said: a person who does not bring others to spiritual birth is poorly born indeed.

If people truly loved Christ, they would work to draw as many as possible to Him. A person who loves his captain will persuade others to serve under his banner. This exposes the hypocrite. Though a hypocrite may put on a display of grace himself, he never thinks about bringing grace to others. He is without compassion. I may apply to him the words of Zechariah 11:9: Let what is dying die, and what is cut off be cut off. Let souls go to the devil — he does not care.

2. How far from godliness are those who, instead of working to stir up grace in others, actively destroy every hopeful beginning of grace. Instead of drawing people toward Christ, they draw them away. Their work is to poison and damage souls. This damage is done in three ways.

First, by unjust commands. Jeroboam made Israel sin, as 1 Kings 17:26 says. He compelled them to idolatry.

Second, by corrupt examples. Examples speak louder than words. The example of those in high positions is especially powerful. People in elevated places are like a pillar of cloud — when it moved, Israel followed. When those in authority live carelessly, others will follow their lead.

Third, by wicked company. The breath of sinners is contagious. They are like the dragon who poured a flood from his mouth, as Revelation 12:15 says. They pour a flood of profanity from their mouths. Evil tongues are set on fire by hell, as James 3:6 says. The sinner provides the fuel and powder, and the devil supplies the flame. The wicked are constantly setting traps and temptations before others. As the prophet says in a different context, Jeremiah 35:5: I set bowls of wine and cups before them and said, Drink. In

the same way, the wicked set cups of wine before others and make them drink until reason is clouded and lust is inflamed. These people are profoundly wicked — they make converts to the devil. How terrible will their judgment be — for they must answer not only for their own sins but for the souls of all they destroyed.

3. If working for grace in others is a mark of a godly man, then how much more must he work for it in those closest to him. A godly man will care deeply that his children come to know God. He would be grieved to think that any of his own flesh might burn in hell. He labors to see Christ formed in those who are, in a sense, another edition of himself. Augustine wrote that his mother Monica labored in greater pain and care for his spiritual birth than for his natural birth.

Childhood is the most fitting time to sow seeds of religion in our children. Isaiah 28:9: To whom will He teach knowledge, and to whom will He explain the message? Those who are weaned from the milk, those just taken from the breast. Wax, while it is soft and warm, will take any impression. Children will fear a rebuke when they are young; when they are old they will resent it.

First, it pleases God greatly when our children come to know Him early. When you walk into a garden, you love to pick a fresh bud and smell its fragrance. God loves a saint in the bud. Of all the trees mentioned in prophetic vision, the Lord chose the almond tree — which blossoms among the very first. Such an almond tree is the person who comes to faith early in life.

Second, by working to raise our children in the fear of the Lord, we will provide for God's glory long after we are dead. A godly man should not only honor God while he lives but leave

something that will promote God's glory after he is gone. Children who have been shaped by godly principles will stand in our place when we leave, and will glorify God in their own generation. Good ground does not only produce a first harvest but an after-harvest. A godly man does not only bring God a crop of obedience during his own life — by grounding his child in faith, he brings God a second harvest after he has gone.

Application 2: Let all who bear God's name do everything in their power to promote godliness in others. A knife touched to a magnet will itself be able to attract a needle. A person whose heart has been touched by the Spirit of God will naturally work to draw those near him toward Christ. Even the pagans could say: We are not born for ourselves alone. The more excellent something is, the more freely it shares itself. In the body, every member gives to others — the eye provides light, the head sends out vital spirits, the liver supplies blood. A Christian must not live entirely within his own circle but must work for the good of those around him. To share grace generously makes us like God, whose influence extends to all.

And surely it will bring no grief to the heart when conscience can bear witness that we brought glory to God in this way — by laboring to fill heaven.

Not that this is in any way meritorious or contributes to our salvation as a cause. Christ's blood is the cause. But our working for God's glory in the conversion of others is a clear evidence of our salvation. The rainbow is not the reason God will not flood the world — it is the sign that He will not. Rahab's scarlet thread hung from her window was not the reason she was spared from destruc-

tion — it was the sign that she would be spared. In the same way, our building others up in the faith is not the cause of our salvation — it is a symbol of our godliness and a sign of our coming joy.

And so I have now set out the marks and characteristics of a godly man. If someone described in this way is called a fanatic, then Abraham, Moses, David, and Paul were fanatics — which, I believe, no one but an atheist would dare to say.

## CHAPTER 5



**C**oncerning these characteristic marks described above, let me lay down two conclusions.

1. These marks are a Christian's box of evidence. Just as an unrepentant sinner carries the signs of his lost condition — marks and symptoms by which he can know he is spiritually dying — so the person who can point to these marks of godliness can see the signs of salvation in his soul and know that he has passed from death to life. He is as certain to arrive in heaven as if he were already there. Such a person is without question a member of Christ — and if he were to perish, something of Christ Himself would perish with him.

These wonderful marks can comfort a Christian under every kind of worldly discouragement and every accusation from the devil. Satan tempts a child of God with the suggestion that he is a hypocrite with no real claim to the promised inheritance. A Christian can pull out these evidences and dare the devil to prove that any wicked person or hypocrite has ever been able to show such a clear certificate of title to heaven. Satan will find it easier to prove himself a liar than to prove a genuine saint a hypocrite.

2. The person who truly has even one of these marks carries the seed of all of them within him. Whoever holds one link of a chain holds the whole chain.

Objection: But what if a child of God says: Either I do not have all these marks, or they are so faintly present in me that I cannot see them clearly?

Answer: To resolve this concern, pay careful attention to the distinctions Scripture makes among believers. Scripture places Christians in different ranks and stages. Some are little children — just newly brought to the breast of the gospel. Others are young men, who have grown into greater maturity of grace. Others are fathers, nearly ready to receive their degree of glory. 1 John 2:12-14. You who are only in the first stage may still have the vital core of godliness just as truly as those who have reached a higher stature in Christ. Scripture speaks of both the cedar and the bruised reed — and the last is as true a plant of the heavenly paradise as the first. Therefore the weakest should not be discouraged. Not everyone has these marks of godliness written in bold capital letters on their souls. Even if they are faintly stamped, God can read the work of His Spirit there. A seal only lightly pressed into wax still ratifies a will and gives legal title to an estate. If there is found only some good thing toward the Lord — as was said of Abijah — God will accept it.

## CHAPTER 6



**F**rom everything said so far, I want to draw three great applications.

First, I appeal to those who are still in their natural condition — those who have never tasted any sweetness in the things of God. I urge them with all the compassion I have to labor to get these marks of godliness engraved on their hearts. Even though godliness is scorned by the world — just as in Tertullian's day the very name of Christian was treated as a crime — do not be ashamed to embrace it. Know that persecuted godliness is better than prosperous wickedness. What good is the whole world to a person without godliness? To be learned and ungodly is like a devil transformed into an angel of light. To be beautiful and ungodly is like a fine painting hung in a diseased room. To be honored in the world and ungodly is like an ape dressed in royal robes, or like that image with a head of gold on feet of clay. It is godliness that truly ennobles the heart — making both God and angels fall in love with it.

Labor for genuine godliness. Do not rest satisfied with the common workings of God's Spirit. Do not think it is enough to be intelligent and articulate. A person can talk about religion in ways

that amaze others yet never feel the sweetness of those things in his own soul. A lute produces beautiful music for listeners but feels none of the sound itself. Judas could give an impressive speech about Christ but felt no power from Him.

Do not rest in having your emotions stirred a little. A hypocrite may have feelings of sorrow, like Ahab, or feelings of desire, like Balaam — but these are passing and superficial and do not amount to real godliness. Strive instead to be like the king's daughter — glorious within, as Psalm 45:13 says.

To persuade people to become godly, let me lay out some powerful motives and arguments. May the Lord drive them home like nails fastened by His Spirit.

1. Let people seriously consider how miserable they are while they remain in a state of ungodliness. This should motivate them to flee as from Sodom. The misery of ungodly people appears in nine particulars.

1. They are in a state of death. Ephesians 2:1: dead in trespasses. They must be dead, because they are cut off from Christ, who is the source of life. Just as the body without the soul is dead, so the soul without Christ is dead. This spiritual death shows itself in its effects — it robs people of all their spiritual senses. Sinners have no awareness of God within them. Ephesians 4:19: having no sensitivity. All their moral qualities are like flowers strewn on a corpse. And what is hell but a tomb to bury the dead in?

2. Their worship is polluted. Not only the plowing but also the praying of the wicked is sin. Proverbs 15:8: The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord. If the water in a well is foul, it cannot be clean in the bucket. If the heart is full of sin, the reli-

gious duties cannot be pure. This puts every ungodly person in a dilemma: if he does not attend the means of grace, he is a despiser of them; if he does attend, he defiles them.

3. Those who live and die in ungodliness have no right to the covenant of grace. Ephesians 2:12: At that time you were without Christ, strangers from the covenants of promise. To be without the covenant is like being in the days of Noah without an ark. The covenant is the gospel charter, full of glorious privileges — but who can claim those privileges? Only those whose hearts have been filled with grace. Read the charter: Ezekiel 36:26: A new heart I will give you, and I will put My Spirit within you. And what follows in verse 28: I will be your God. A person who dies in his ungodliness has no more claim to the new covenant than a common farmer has to the privileges of a chartered city.

God's writing always comes before His seal. 2 Corinthians 3:3: You are declared to be the epistle of Christ, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts. Here is a golden letter: the writing is the work of faith, the surface it is written on is the heart, and the finger that writes it is the Spirit. After the Spirit writes, the Spirit seals — Ephesians 1:13: After you believed, you were sealed with the Spirit. That is, you were sealed up to the assurance of glory. What claim do ungodly people have to the seal of the covenant when they do not even have the writing?

4. The ungodly are spiritual fools. Psalm 75:4: I said to the fools, deal not foolishly, and to the wicked, lift not up the horn. If a parent had a very beautiful child who was a fool, the parent would take little joy in him. Scripture dresses the sinner in a fool's coat. And let me tell you: it is better to be without reason than to be

without grace. The sinner without grace is the devil's fool, as Proverbs 14:9 implies. Is it not foolish to refuse a rich gift? God offers Christ and salvation, but the sinner refuses the offer. Psalm 81:11: Israel would have none of Me. Is it not foolish to prefer a temporary income over a permanent inheritance? Is it not foolish to care for your mortal body while neglecting your immortal soul — like painting the walls of a house while the timber rots? Is it not foolish to feed your soul to the devil — like that emperor who fed his lion with pheasants? Is it not foolish to lay a snare for yourself, as Proverbs 1:18 says — to pursue your own shame, as Habakkuk 2:10 says — and to love death, as Proverbs 8:36 says?

5. The ungodly are vile people. Nahum 1:14: I will make your grave, for you are vile. Ungodliness makes people base. It stains their name and corrupts their character. Psalm 14:3: They have all become filthy. In the Hebrew the word means they have become rotten and stinking. Call wicked people whatever bad names you like — you cannot call them worse than they are. They are swine, as Matthew 7:6 says. Vipers, as Matthew 3:7 says. Devils, as John 6:70 says. The wicked are the dross and refuse, as Psalm 119:119 says. And heaven is too pure to allow any dross inside it.

6. The temporal blessings that ungodly people enjoy come to them as judgment, not as favor. The wicked may have health and wealth — more than heart could wish, as Psalm 73:7 says — but their table becomes a snare, as Psalm 69:22 says. Sinners receive their blessings with God's permission, but not with His love. The people of Israel would have been better off without the quail than to have received it with such bitter consequences. The ungodly are

intruders. They have no spiritual title to what they possess. What they enjoy is like goods taken from a shop that have not been paid for. Death will bring a terrible reckoning at last.

7. The temporal judgments that come upon ungodly people are never lifted as an act of mercy. Pharaoh had ten arrows shot at him — the ten plagues — and all those plagues were eventually removed. But because his heart remained hard, those plagues were not removed in mercy. It was not preservation but reservation: God was reserving him as a striking monument of His justice, until he was drowned in the depths of the sea. God may spare a person's life without forgiving his sins. The wicked may receive sparing mercy, but not saving mercy.

8. While the ungodly are alive, they live under the wrath of God. John 3:36: He who does not believe — the wrath of God abides on him. The person without grace is like someone without a pardon, living every hour in fear of execution. How can a wicked man truly rejoice? Above his head hangs the sword of God's justice, and beneath him burns the fire of hell.

9. At death, the ungodly must face God's fury and indignation. Psalm 9:17: The wicked shall be turned into hell. I have read of a certain stone in Ethiopia with two poles: with one it draws iron toward it, with the other it repels iron. In the same way, God has two hands — one of mercy and one of justice. With the one He draws the godly to heaven; with the other He thrusts the sinner into hell. And what a dreadful place that is! It is called a fiery lake in Revelation 20:15. The word lake suggests the overwhelming abundance of torments in hell. The phrase fiery lake points to their intensity. Fire is the most agonizing of all elements. The geographer Strabo mentions a lake in Galilee so caustic in nature that it

scaldeth off the skin of whatever is cast into it. But that lake is cool by comparison with the fiery lake into which the damned are thrown. This fire has two especially terrible qualities. 1. It is sulphurous — mixed with brimstone, as Revelation 21:8 says. Brimstone is both suffocating and foul. 2. It is inextinguishable. Though the wicked will be engulfed in the flames, they will not be consumed. Revelation 20:10: And the devil was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night forever and ever. This is the desperate condition of all who die ungodly. In the next world they will have a life that is always dying and a death that never dies. Should not this drive people away from their sins and move them to become godly — unless they have resolved to find out for themselves how hot hell's fire is?

2. Consider what remarkable people the godly are. Proverbs 12:26: The righteous is more excellent than his neighbor. Like the sunflower, like the wine of Lebanon, like the gleaming stones on Aaron's breastplate — such is the radiant splendor of a person adorned with godliness. The excellence of the godly appears in seven particulars.

1. They are precious. They are therefore set apart for God. Psalm 4:3: Know that the Lord has set apart him who is godly for Himself. We set apart the things we value most. The godly are set apart as God's own special treasure, as Psalm 135:4 says. As His garden of delight, as Song of Songs 4:12 says. As His royal crown, as Isaiah 62:3 says. The godly are the excellent of the earth, as Psalm 16:2 says — comparable to fine gold, as Lamentations 4:2 says. Double refined, as Zechariah 13:9 says. They are the glory of

the creation. Isaiah 46:13. Origen compared the saints to sapphires and crystal. God calls them jewels in Malachi 3:17. And they are jewels in two ways:

1. For their value. Pliny says diamonds were for a long time known only among princes and were mounted on their crowns. God values His people so highly that He will give kingdoms as their ransom, as Isaiah 43:5 says. He pledged His greatest treasure for them, as John 3:16 says.

2. They are jewels for their brilliance. If one single pearl of grace shines so brightly that it ravishes Christ's heart — Song of Songs 4:9: You have ravished my heart with one of your eyes, that is, with one of your graces — then how glorious are all the graces gathered together in a constellation?

2. The godly are honorable. Isaiah 43:4: You have been honorable. The godly are a crown of glory in the hand of God, as Isaiah 62:3 says. They are plants of renown, as Ezekiel 16:14 says. They are not only vessels of mercy but vessels of honor, as 2 Timothy 2:21 says. Aristotle called honor the highest good. The godly are near relations to the blessed Trinity. They have the guardianship of angels. They have God's name written on them, as Revelation 3:12 says, and the Holy Spirit dwelling within them, as 2 Timothy 1:14 says.

The godly are a sacred priesthood. The priesthood under the law was an honor — even the king's daughter married Jehoiada the priest, as 2 Chronicles 22:11 records. It was a custom among the Egyptians to choose their kings from among their priests. The saints are a divine priesthood, offering up spiritual sacrifices, as 1 Peter 2:9 says. They are co-heirs with Christ, as Romans 8:17 says.

They are kings, as Revelation 1:6 says. Novarinus tells of an ancient king who invited a group of poor Christians to a great feast. When asked why he showed such honor to people of such humble origin, he replied: These I must honor as the children of the most high God — they will be kings and princes with me in another world. The godly are in some sense exalted above the angels. The angels are Christ's friends; the saints are His bride. The angels are called morning stars in Job 38:7, but the saints are clothed with the Sun of righteousness in Revelation 12:1. Chrysostom says all people are ambitious for honor — then behold the honor of the godly! Proverbs 4:8: Exalt wisdom, and she will promote you; she will bring you to honor when you embrace her. The trophies of the saints' honor will be set up in the world to come — fame greater after death.

3. The godly are beloved of God. Psalm 47:4: The excellency of Jacob whom He loved. A holy heart is the garden where God plants the flower of His love. God's love for His people is an ancient love — it goes back to eternity, as Ephesians 1:4 says. He loves them with a special, distinguishing love. They are the dearly beloved of His soul, as Jeremiah 12:7 says. Worldly people receive bounty dropping from God's fingers, but the godly receive love dropping from God's heart. He gives the one a golden cup, but the other a golden kiss. He loves the godly as He loves Christ, as John 17:26 says. The love is the same in kind, though not in degree. Here on earth the saints only sip of God's love; in heaven they will drink from rivers of pleasure, as Psalm 36:8 says. And this love is permanent. Death may take their life from them, but it cannot take God's love from them. Jeremiah 31:3: I have loved you with an everlasting love.

4. The godly are prudent people. They have both good insight and good foresight.

1. They have good insight. 1 Corinthians 2:15: He who is spiritual judges all things. The godly have insight into persons and things.

1. They have insight into people. They have the anointing of God, and through a spirit of discernment they can see the difference between the precious and the vile, as Jeremiah 15:19 says. God's people are not quick to judge, but they are discerning. They can see a proud and self-indulgent heart beneath an outward appearance. They can detect a vengeful spirit behind a sharp tongue. They can read the tree by its fruit, as Matthew 12:33 says. They can see the warning signs of sin on the wicked, which moves them to distance themselves from those sinners, as Numbers 16:26 records.

2. The godly have insight into things that are mysterious.

1. They can see much of the mystery of their own hearts. Take the most sophisticated political thinker — someone who understands the complexities of statecraft — and yet he does not understand the mystery of his own heart. You will sometimes hear him swear that his heart is good. But a child of God sees the deep corruption within, as 1 Kings 8:38 suggests. Though some flowers of grace grow there, he also sees how quickly the weeds of sin grow — and so he is constantly weeding his heart through repentance and mortification.

2. The godly can read the signs of the times. 1 Chronicles 12:32: The men of Issachar had understanding of the times. The godly can see when an age is degenerating — when God's name is dis-

honored, His messengers despised, and His gospel pushed aside. God's people work to keep their garments clean, as Revelation 16:15 says. Their concern is that the times will not be worse because of them, and that they will not be made worse by the times.

3. The godly understand the mystery of living by faith. Hebrews 10:38: The just shall live by faith. They can trust God where they cannot trace Him. They can draw comfort out of a promise, as Moses drew water out of the rock. Habakkuk 3:17: Though the fig tree does not blossom, yet I will rejoice in the Lord.

2. The godly have good foresight.

1. They foresee the danger of a temptation before it strikes. 2 Corinthians 2:11: We are not ignorant of his schemes. The wicked swallow temptations like pills and later feel those pills tearing at their conscience. But the godly see a temptation coming and refuse to go near it. They see the snake hidden under the green grass. They know that Satan's kindness is craftiness. He does as Jephthah's daughter did — he brings out the tambourine and dances before people with a temptation, and then brings them very low, as Judges 11:35 says.

2. The godly foresee temporal dangers. Proverbs 22:3: A prudent man foresees evil and hides himself. God's people see when a storm of divine judgment is about to break over a nation, and they take shelter — into their inner rooms, as Isaiah 26:20 says. They shelter in the attributes and promises of God, and in the clefts of the rock — the wounds of Christ — and hide themselves. No wonder they are called wise virgins.

5. The godly are a bulwark to a nation. 2 Kings 2:12: O my father, the chariots of Israel and its horsemen! The godly are the pillars that keep a city and nation from collapse. They hold back judgment from a land. It was said of old that as long as Hector lived, Troy could not be destroyed. God could do nothing to Sodom until Lot had gone out of it, as Genesis 19:22 says. Truly godly people are a bronze wall around their communities. The Lord would soon be done with this world were it not for the sake of a few faithful ones. Would God preserve the world for drunkards and blasphemers alone? He would soon sink the ship of church and state, but some of His elect are on board. Yet how foolish people are to mistreat the saints and count them a burden — when they are in fact the greatest blessing.

6. The godly are people of a bold and noble spirit. Numbers 14:24: My servant Caleb, because he had a different spirit. An excellent spirit was found in Daniel, as chapter 5:12 says. The godly refuse what is base and corrupt. They will not fill their pockets by selling out their conscience. They are courageous in God's cause. Proverbs 28:1: The righteous are as bold as a lion. The saints live in keeping with their high calling. They long for God's love. They reach upward toward glory. They set their feet where worldly people set their hearts. They display the banner of the gospel, lifting up Christ's name and cause in the world.

7. The godly are truly happy people. King Balak sent Balaam to curse the people of God, but the Lord would not allow it. Numbers 22:12: God said to Balaam, You shall not curse the people, for they are blessed. And Moses later recorded it as something worth remembering — that what the king intended as a curse, God turned into a blessing. Deuteronomy 23:5: The Lord your God turned the

curse into a blessing for you. They must be happy who are always on the strongest side. Psalm 118:6: The Lord is on my side. They are happy who have all their circumstances working for their good, as Romans 8:28 says. They are crowned with peace while they live, as Psalm 119:165 says, and with glory when they die, as Psalm 73:24 says. Should not all this draw people to pursue godliness? Deuteronomy 33:29: Happy are you, O Israel — a people saved by the Lord.

3. Pursuing godliness is the most rational thing a person can do.

1. It is the highest act of reason for a person to be fundamentally changed. While a person remains in his natural condition, he is poisoned with sin — no more actually fit for communion with God than a toad is fit to be made an angel. Given that, it is entirely reasonable that he should seek a change.

2. It is rational because this change is a change for the better. Ephesians 5:8: Now you are light in the Lord. Would any man refuse to trade a dark prison for a king's palace? Would he refuse to exchange brass for gold? When you become godly, you are trading up: pride for humility, impurity for holiness — a lust that will damn you for a Christ who will save you. If people were not so spiritually dazed, if the fall had not knocked off their good judgment, they would see that becoming godly is the most rational thing in the world.

4. Consider the excellence of godliness itself. What is better than gold? A precious stone. What is better than a precious stone? Virtue.

The excellence of godliness appears in several ways.

1. Godliness is our spiritual beauty. Psalm 110:3: The beauties of holiness. Godliness is to the soul what light is to the world — it illuminates and adorns it. It is not greatness that makes us beautiful in God's eyes, but goodness. What is the beauty of angels but their holiness? Godliness is the fine and detailed workmanship of the Holy Spirit. A soul filled with godliness is embroidered with beauty and polished with purity. This is the clothing of worked gold that makes the King of heaven fall in love with us. If there were no true excellence in holiness, the hypocrite would never bother to imitate it. Godliness sheds glory and brilliance on the saints. What are the graces but the golden feathers in which Christ's dove shines?

2. Godliness is our defense. Grace is called the armor of light in Romans 13:12. It is light for beauty and armor for defense. A Christian wears armor made by God — armor that cannot be pierced. He carries the shield of faith, the helmet of hope, and the breastplate of righteousness. This is proven armor that holds against every assault of temptation and every terror of hell.

3. Godliness produces solid peace. Psalm 119:165: Great peace have they who love Your law. Godliness settles the heart, making it calm and still — like the upper atmosphere where no storms or winds reach. How could that heart ever be troubled where the Prince of Peace dwells? Colossians 1:27: Christ in you. A holy heart may be compared to the doors of Solomon's temple in 1 Kings 6:32 — made of olive wood and carved with open flowers. There is the olive of peace and the open flowers of joy in that heart. Godliness does not destroy a Christian's happiness — it refines it. His rose has no thorns; his wine has no froth. The person who is a favorite of heaven must be full of joy and peace. He can sing a song of rest

to his soul and say: Soul, take your ease. King Ptolemy once asked a philosopher how he might sleep peacefully at night. The philosopher answered: Let piety be the goal of all your actions. If someone asked me how to have peace while awake, I would give the same answer: Let your soul be filled with godliness.

4. Godliness is the best trade we can pursue — it brings real profit. Wicked people say: It is pointless to serve God; what do we gain from it? Malachi 3:14. To be sure, there is no profit in sin. Proverbs 10:2: Treasures of wickedness profit nothing. But godliness is profitable, as 1 Timothy 4:8 says. It is like mining for gold — there is gain alongside the labor. Godliness makes God Himself our portion. Psalm 16:5: The Lord is the portion of my inheritance. If God is our portion, our entire estate consists of jewels. When God gives Himself, He gives everything else with Him. The one who owns the estate has all the rights that belong to it. And God is a portion that can never be used up or lost, as Psalm 73:26 says. This is why godliness is a thriving investment.

And as godliness brings profit, so it is profitable for all things, as 1 Timothy 4:8 says. What else can claim that? Food cannot give a person wisdom. Gold cannot give him health. Honor cannot give him beauty. But godliness serves every need — it fends off every trouble, supplies every want, and makes soul and body completely happy.

5. Godliness is an enduring possession — it never loses its value.

All worldly pleasures have death written on them. They are shadows, and they are fleeting. Earthly comforts are like Paul's friends who walked with him to the ship and then said their

farewells, as Acts 20:38 records. In the same way, worldly comforts will accompany a man to his grave and then leave him. But godliness is a possession that cannot be taken from us — it runs alongside eternity. Force cannot weaken it; age cannot wear it out. It outlasts suffering and outlives death, as Proverbs 10 says. Death may cut the stalk of the body, but the flower of grace is untouched. As the saying goes: noble virtue is never carried down to the shadows of death.

6. Godliness is so excellent that even the worst of people want it when the end is near. Though godliness is now despised and treated with contempt, at death everyone wants it. A philosopher once asked a young man whether he would rather be the wealthy Croesus or the virtuous Socrates. The young man replied: I would live like Croesus but die like Socrates. So people want to live with the wicked in pleasure but die with the godly in peace. Numbers 23:10: Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my end be like his. If godliness is so desirable at death, why not pursue it now? Godliness is just as necessary today — and far more attainable now than at the last moment.

5. There are very few godly people. They are like gleanings left after the harvest. Most people bear the mark of the beast, as Revelation 13:17 says. The devil keeps open house for all who will come, and he is never short of guests. This should motivate us: if the number of the saints is so small, how earnestly should we labor to be found among them? Romans 9:27: But a remnant shall be saved. It is better to go to heaven with a few than to go to hell in a crowd.

6. Consider how empty and worthless the things are that people without godliness spend their lives chasing. People consume themselves with the outward and temporary things of this life. And what does a person gain who has labored for the wind? Ecclesiastes 5:16. Can wind satisfy hunger? What is gold but dust? Amos 2:8. It will sooner choke a person than satisfy him. Pull back the mask from the most attractive thing under the sun and see what is underneath — worry and frustration. And the greatest concern of all still waits ahead: giving an account. The things of this world are no more than a bubble on water or a flash of light in the sky.

But godliness has real worth. If you speak of true honor, it is to be born of God. If of true courage, it is to fight the good fight of faith. If of true delight, it is to have joy in the Holy Spirit. Embrace godliness, then! Here is something real. Of all other things, we might say what Zechariah 10:2 says: They comfort in vain.

## CHAPTER 7



**Q**uestion: What must we do in order to become godly?

**A**nsWER: Let me briefly lay out some rules and helps toward godliness.

1. Be diligent in using every means that promotes godliness. Luke 13:24: Strive to enter through the narrow gate. What is intention without action? Once you have assessed the value of godliness, pursue the steps most likely to help you obtain it.

2. If you want to be godly, beware of the world. It is hard for a clod of earth to become a star. 1 John 2:15: Do not love the world. Many people want to be godly, but worldly honors and profits pull them away. Where the world fills both head and heart, there is no room for Christ. The person whose mind is rooted in the earth is likely to mock godliness. When Jesus was preaching against sin, the Pharisees, who were lovers of money, laughed at Him, as Luke 16:14 records. The world eats out the heart of godliness as ivy eats out the heart of an oak. The world kills with silver weapons.

3. Train yourself in holy thinking. Serious meditation shows everything in its true color. It reveals the ugliness of sin and the beauty of grace. Through holy thinking, the mind grows clearer and the heart grows better. Psalm 119:59: I considered my ways

and turned my feet to Your testimonies. If people would step away from the noise and rush of daily life and spend even half an hour each day thinking about their souls and eternity, it would produce a remarkable change in them and move them toward genuine and lasting conversion.

4. Watch your heart. This was Christ's charge to His disciples. Matthew 24:42: Watch therefore. The heart will rush us into sin before we realize what is happening. A deceitful heart needs a watchful eye. Watch your thoughts. Watch your desires. The heart has a thousand ways to escape. Keep close watch over your soul! Stand continually at your watchtower, as Habakkuk 2:1 says. After you have prayed against sin, stay alert against temptation. Most of the wickedness in the world happens because people fail to keep watch. Watchfulness sustains godliness. It is the edge that keeps religion from unraveling.

5. Be careful about how you spend your time. Ephesians 5:16: Making the most of every opportunity. Many people waste their time — some in pointless socializing, others in entertainment and pleasures that quietly steal the heart away from better things. What are our best hours for, if not the care of our souls? Time wasted is not time lived, but time lost. Time is a precious thing. A piece of wax in itself is worth very little, but when it seals a will and conveys an estate, it becomes enormously valuable. In the same way, time by itself may not seem significant, but because salvation must be worked out within it, and the inheritance of heaven depends on using it well, time is of the highest importance.

6. Remember how brief your stay in this world is. 1 Chronicles 29:15: Our days on earth are like a shadow, and there is no abiding. There is only a span between the cradle and the grave.

Solomon says there is a time to be born and a time to die, as Ecclesiastes 3:2 says — but he mentions no time of living, as though life were so brief it was not worth naming. And once time is gone, it cannot be called back. Scripture compares time to a flying eagle in Job 9:26. But time differs from the eagle in one way: the eagle flies forward and then returns, but time only flies forward and never comes back. Time, once gone, is gone forever.

Thinking seriously about the shortness of our time here would do much to promote godliness. What if death came before we were ready? What if our last breath left us before God's Spirit had breathed life into us? The person who truly grasps how fleeting life is will hurry to repent. When God is about to do a brief work, He will not give us unlimited time to prepare.

7. Embrace this truth: godliness is the very purpose for which you were created. God did not send people into the world merely to eat, drink, and wear fine clothes, but to serve Him in righteousness and holiness, as Luke 1:75 says. God made the world as a dressing room — a place to prepare our souls. He sent us here on the great mission of godliness. If we care for nothing but the body — the animal part of us — we have shamefully degraded ourselves and betrayed the very reason for our existence.

8. Spend time among godly people. They are the salt of the earth and will help to season you. Their counsel can guide you; their prayers can stir you up. Holy sparks from them may land in your heart and kindle devotion in you. It is good to be among the saints and learn the practice of godliness. Proverbs 13:20: He who walks with wise men will be wise.

## CHAPTER 8



**A**pplication 2. My second application is an exhortation to those who wear the cloak of godliness and are regarded by others as believers: hold fast. Hebrews 10:23: Let us hold firmly to the confession of our hope. This word is especially timely now, when the devil's agents are everywhere working to unsettle people and draw them away from the strict religious commitment they once professed. It is deeply grieving to see Christians —

1. Wavering in religion. How many are we seeing who are unsettled and unsteady — like Reuben, unstable as water, as Genesis 49:4 says. The apostle rightly compares such people to waves of the sea and wandering stars in Jude 13. They have no firm footing in the principles of godliness. Beza wrote of one Bolsecus whose religion changed like the moon. The Ebionites were like this — they kept both the Jewish Sabbath and the Christian. Many professing Christians are like the river Euripus, which flows and ebbs back and forth in religion. They are like reeds that bend any direction — toward the Mass or toward other false religions. They are like the planet Mercury, always varying and rarely constant in its path. When people think of heaven and the reward waiting for them, they want to be godly. But when they think of persecution, they become like those Jews who abandoned Christ and walked

with Him no more, as John 6:66 records. If people's faces changed as fast as their opinions, we would not recognize them. This kind of wavering in religion reveals shallowness. Feathers float wherever the wind blows — and so do lightweight Christians.

2. It is also grieving to see people fall away from the godliness they once seemed to have. They have turned back to worldliness and self-indulgence, and the very cloak of their profession has slipped off. If they were never fixed stars, it is no surprise to see them become falling stars. This spiritual falling-sickness was never more widespread. It is a dreadful thing for people to abandon the godliness they once appeared to have. Chrysostom says apostates are worse than those who are openly wicked, because they bring a bad reputation on godliness. Tertullian says the apostate seems to place God and Satan on a scale, and having weighed both, chooses the devil's service and declares him the better master. For this reason the apostate is said to put Christ to open shame, as Hebrews 6:6 says.

This will be bitter in the end, as Hebrews 10:38 warns. What anguish did Spira feel in his conscience? How Stephen Gardiner cried out in horror on his deathbed — he had denied his Master like Peter, but he had never repented like Peter.

To remain steadfast in godliness and persevere, we must do two things.

1. Guard against the things that will cause us to drift gradually from our profession.

1. Beware of greed. 2 Timothy 3:2: Men will be lovers of money — and verse 5: having a form of godliness but denying its power. Even one of Christ's own apostles was caught by the lure of silver.

Greed will cause a person to betray a good cause and shipwreck a good conscience. I have read of some in the time of Emperor Valens who renounced the Christian faith to prevent their property from being seized.

2. Beware of unbelief. Hebrews 3:12: Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. There is no evil like an evil heart, and no evil heart like an unbelieving one. Why? Because it leads people to abandon the living God. The person who does not trust God's mercy will not fear His justice. Unbelief is the mother of apostasy. That is why unbelieving and unstable go together. Psalm 78:22: They did not believe in God — verse 41: They turned back and tested God.

3. Guard against cowardice. Anyone who is afraid to be good must have a bad heart already. Proverbs 29:25: The fear of man brings a snare. Those who fear danger more than sin will commit sin to avoid danger. Origen, out of fear, offered incense to an idol. Aristotle says the chameleon changes colors so often because of excessive fear. Fear can make people change their religion as often as the chameleon changes color. Christian, you who have professed godliness so long, and others have counted you among the saints — why do you now fear and begin to pull back? The cause you have enlisted in is good. You are fighting against sin. You have a good commander marching before you: Christ, the captain of our salvation, as Hebrews 2:10 says. What is it you are afraid of? Is it losing your freedom? What is freedom worth when your conscience is in chains? Better to lose your freedom and keep your peace than to keep your freedom and lose your peace. Is it the loss of your property? Are you asking like Amaziah in 2 Chronicles 25:9: What shall

we do about the hundred talents we have spent? I would answer with the prophet: The Lord can give you far more than this. He has promised a hundredfold in this life, and if that is not enough, He will give you eternal life, as Matthew 19:29 says.

2. If you want to hold on to your profession of godliness, use every means available for perseverance. First, labor for a genuine work of grace in your soul. Grace is the strongest fortress. Hebrews 13:9: It is good for the heart to be strengthened by grace.

Question: What is this genuine work of grace?

Answer: It consists of two things.

1. It involves a humbling work in the heart. The thorn of sin pierced Paul's conscience. Romans 7:9: Sin revived and I died. Some people are humbled less than others — just as some mothers have easier labor than others — but all go through the labor.

2. Grace involves a transforming work in the heart. 1 Corinthians 6:11: But you were washed, but you were sanctified. A person is so changed that it is as if a different soul were living in the same body. If you want to persevere in the ways of God, you need this living principle of grace. Why do people change their religion? Because their hearts were never changed. They do not fall away from grace — they fall away for want of grace.

2. If you want to continue in godliness, be deliberate and thoughtful — weigh things carefully in the balance. Luke 14:28: Which of you, intending to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost? Ask yourself honestly what it will cost you to be godly. You must expect the world's hatred. John 15:19. The wicked hate the godly for their piety. Strange as this seems, it is true. Do we hate a flower for its fragrance? The godly are hated

precisely for the sweet scent of their graces. Is a woman hated for her beauty? The wicked hate the godly for the beauty of holiness that shines through them. And hidden hatred will eventually break out into open violence, as 2 Timothy 3:12 says. Christians must count the cost before they begin building. Why do people give up their religion so quickly? Because they took it up so quickly.

3. If you want to hold your profession firm, get a clear and solid knowledge of God. Know the love of the Father, the merit of the Son, and the power of the Holy Spirit. Those who do not truly know God will gradually walk away from their profession. The Samaritans sided with the Jews when the Jews were in favor, then denied all connection with the Jews when the Jews were being persecuted by Antiochus. No wonder they were so inconsistent in their religion — as Christ Himself said of the Samaritans in John 4:22: You worship what you do not know. They were wrapped in ignorance. Blind people are prone to falling, and so are those who are spiritually blind in their minds.

4. If you want to persist in godliness, embrace it freely, out of genuine choice. Psalm 119:30: I have chosen the way of truth. Embrace godliness for its own worth. The person who wants to persevere must be willing to choose godliness with reproach rather than sin with all its worldly glory. The person who takes up religion out of fear will lay it down again out of fear. The person who embraces godliness for personal gain will abandon it when the rewards are taken away. Do not be godly as a worldly strategy — be godly as a genuine and heartfelt choice.

5. If you want to persevere in godliness, pursue integrity. Integrity is a golden pillar that will hold you up. A hollow tree must eventually fall in the storm. The hypocrite sets up shop in religion,

but he will soon go bankrupt. Psalm 78:37: Their heart was not right with Him, neither were they steadfast. Judas was first a silent hypocrite and then a traitor. If copper is gilded, the gold will wash away in time. Only sincerity holds. Psalm 25:21: Let integrity preserve me. Consider how many storms Job weathered. Not only Satan but God Himself seemed to be against him, as Job 7:20 says — enough to make anyone quit godliness. Yet Job stood firm because he stood upright. Job 27:6: My righteousness I hold fast, and will not let it go; my heart shall not reproach me as long as I live. Colors hold best when laid in oil. If we want our profession to hold its color, it must be grounded in the oil of sincerity.

6. If you want to hold out in godliness, keep the life and energy of your duties burning. Romans 12:11: Fervent in spirit, serving the Lord. We add coals to a fire to keep it from dying out. When Christians sink into dull formality, they begin to lose heart, and their godliness gradually fades. No one is more likely to become an apostate than the lukewarm professor.

7. If you want to persevere in godliness, practice self-denial. Matthew 16:24: Let him deny himself — his personal comfort, his personal agenda. Anything that competes with or stands against Christ's glory and interests must be denied. Self is the great snare. Self-love quietly undermines the power of godliness. The rich young man in the gospel could have followed Christ, but something of self stood in the way, as Matthew 19:20-22 records. Self-love is really self-destruction. The person who cannot get beyond himself will never get to heaven.

8. If you want to hold on in godliness, maintain a holy wariness about your own heart. Romans 11:20: Do not be conceited, but fear. A person who keeps gunpowder in his house lives carefully,

knowing it could catch fire. Sin in the heart is like gunpowder — it makes us fear that a spark of temptation might blow us up. Two things should keep us always watchful: the deceitfulness of our hearts and the desires of our hearts. When Peter was afraid of sinking and cried out, Lord, save me, Christ took him by the hand and held him up, as Matthew 14:31 records. But when Peter grew confident and thought he could stand on his own, Christ allowed him to fall. Let us distrust ourselves, and in a holy sense clothe ourselves with trembling, as Ezekiel 26:16 says.

9. If you want to continue making progress in godliness, labor for assurance. 2 Peter 1:10: Be diligent to make your calling and election sure. The person who is certain that God is his God is like a castle built on a rock — all the powers of hell cannot shake him. How can someone be consistent in religion when he is uncertain about his spiritual condition and does not know whether he has grace or not? It will be hard to die for Christ if you do not know that Christ has died for you. Assurance steadies a Christian when times are turbulent. The person most likely to bear witness to the truth is the one who has the Spirit of God bearing witness to his heart, as Romans 8:16 says. Be diligent! Be much in prayer, reading, and godly conversation. These are the oil without which the lamp of assurance will not burn.

10. If you want to hold on in godliness, take hold of God's strength. God is called the strength of Israel in 1 Samuel 15:29. It is in His strength, not our own, that we stand. A child is safest in the nurse's arms. It is not our holding God but His holding us that keeps us safe. A small boat tied fast to a rock is secure — and so are we when we are anchored to the Rock of Ages.

## CHAPTER 9



**T**o stir Christians to persevere in the practice of godliness, I will offer four considerations.

1. It is the glory and crown of a Christian to grow gray-headed in godliness. Acts 21:16 mentions Mnason of Cyprus, an old disciple. What an honor it is to see a Christian whose life has been marked by hardship, yet whose conscience remains pure white and whose graces stay green and flourishing!

2. Consider how sinners persevere in their sins. They are settled on their dregs (Zephaniah 1:12). God's judgments will not deter or remove them. They say to their sin what Ruth said to Naomi: Where you go, I will go. The Lord do so to me, and more, if anything but death parts you and me (Ruth 1:16). Nothing will separate them from their sins. What a shame it is that the wicked should be more fixed in evil than we are in good — more constant in the devil's service than we are in Christ's!

3. Our perseverance in godliness can be a means of confirming others. Cyprian's congregation followed him to the place of his execution, and seeing his steadfastness in the faith, they cried out: Let us also die with our holy pastor! Philippians 1:14: Most of the brothers, having become confident by my chains, are much more

bold to speak the word. Paul's zeal and constancy fired up those who watched. His prison chain produced converts in Nero's own court. Two of those converts later became martyrs, as history records.

4. We will lose nothing by persevering in godliness. God has attached eight glorious promises to the saints who persevere.

The first promise is Revelation 2:10. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life. Christian, you may lose the breath of life, but not the crown of life.

The second promise is Revelation 2:7. To the one who overcomes I will grant to eat of the tree of life. This tree of life is the Lord Jesus. This tree pours life into us and conquers death. On the day we eat of this tree, our eyes will truly be opened to see God.

The third promise is Revelation 2:17. To the one who overcomes I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, with a new name written on the stone that no one knows except the one who receives it. This promise has three branches.

First: I will give him some of the hidden manna. This is a rich image. It signifies the love of God — called manna for its sweetness, and hidden because it is rare and precious.

Second: I will give him a white stone. This means acquittal. Jerome calls it a precious stone.

Third: And on the stone a new name. This means adoption — he will be recognized as an heir of heaven. No one can know it except the one who has the inner seal of the Spirit assuring him of it.

The fourth promise is Revelation 3:5. The one who overcomes will be clothed in white garments, and I will never blot his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels. The persevering saint will be clothed in white — an image of joy, as Ecclesiastes 9:8 says. He will put off his mourning and be dressed in the white robe of glory. And I will not blot his name out of the book of life. God will blot out a believer's sins, but He will not blot out his name. The book of God's decree has no errors in it. But I will confess his name. The one who has owned Christ on earth and worn His colors when it was death to wear them — Christ will not be ashamed of him. He will acknowledge his name before His Father and the holy angels. What a comfort and honor it will be to receive a favorable look from Christ on the last day! Even more, to have Christ call us by name and say: These are the ones who stood up for My truth and kept their garments clean in a defiling age. These shall walk with Me in white, for they are worthy.

The fifth promise is Revelation 3:12. The one who overcomes I will make a pillar in the temple of My God, and he will never go out of it. I will write on him the name of My God and the name of the city of My God. Many excellent things are packed into this promise. I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God. The hypocrite is a reed shaken by the wind, but the conquering saint will be a glorious pillar — a pillar for strength, and a pillar in the temple for holiness. And he will go out no more. I understand this as describing the glorified state. He will go out no more — meaning he will never go back to war. He will never face sin or temptation again. No more drums or cannons will be heard. Having won the field, the believer will stay home and divide the reward. And I will write

on him the name of My God. That is, he will be openly acknowledged as God's child, just as a son bears his father's name. How honored that saint must be who has God's own name written on him! And I will write on him the name of the city of My God. That is, he will be enrolled as a citizen of the heavenly Jerusalem, made a full member of the angelic fellowship.

The sixth promise is Revelation 2:26. The one who overcomes and keeps My works until the end — to him I will give authority over the nations. This may have a double meaning. First, it may refer to the saints living on earth: their zeal and patience will overpower the enemies of truth (Acts 6:10). Or more importantly, it may describe the saints triumphing in heaven. They will share in some of Christ's authority and will join Him in judging the world on the last day. 1 Corinthians 6:2: Do you not know that the saints will judge the world?

The seventh promise is Revelation 3:21. To the one who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne.

First, here is the saints' dignity: they will sit on the throne.

Second, their safety: they will sit with Christ. Christ holds them fast, and no one can pull them from His throne. The saints may be turned out of their homes, but they cannot be turned out of Christ's throne. You might as well try to pluck a star from the sky as pull a saint from that throne.

The eighth promise is Revelation 2:28. I will give him the morning star. Though the saints may be stained with reproach in this life — labeled troublemakers and traitors — Paul himself was treated as a criminal in the eyes of some (2 Timothy 2:9). Yet God will bring forth the saints' righteousness as the light, and they will

shine like the morning star, which is brighter than all the rest. I will give him the morning star. This morning star means Christ Himself. It is as if Christ said: I will give the persevering saint some of My own beauty. I will place some of My radiant beams on him. He will have the nearest degree of glory to Mine, just as the morning star stands closest to the sun.

What soul-captivating promises these are! Who would not persevere in godliness? Anyone not moved by these promises is either stone or beast.

## CHAPTER 10



**A**pplication 3. I now turn to those in whom a genuine work of godliness has taken place. I want to speak to them in three ways: 1. A caution. 2. Counsel. 3. Comfort.

1. By way of caution: do not blur the marks of grace in your souls. Though God's children cannot completely erase their grace, they can disfigure it. Too much carnal freedom can weaken the evidence of grace and dim its brightness until it can no longer be clearly read. These marks of godliness are precious beyond comparison — gold and crystal are nothing to them. Keep them clearly written in your hearts! They will be living comforts at the hour of death. It will not frighten a Christian to have every sign of death in his body, when he can see every sign of grace in his soul. He will say with Simeon: Lord, now let Your servant depart in peace.

2. By way of counsel: you who are rich in the treasures of godliness, give God the glory for it. This flower does not grow in nature's garden. When you had enlisted under the devil and taken his pay, fighting against your own happiness — that then God would come with converting grace and draw you by a loving, gentle power to take His side against Satan. When you had spent long years soaking in wickedness, marinating for hell — that then God

should steep you in Christ's blood and breathe holiness into your heart. What cause you have to count yourself an eternal debtor to free grace. The person who does not give God the praise for his grace is denying that God is its author. Acknowledge God's love. Stand in wonder at His distinguishing mercy. Place the crown of your praise on the head of free grace. If we ought to be thankful for the fruits of the earth, how much more for the fruits of the Spirit. It is good that eternity is coming, when the saints will triumph in God and make His praise glorious.

3. Let me speak to the godly by way of comfort. To you who have even the smallest measure of genuine godliness, I offer two rich encouragements.

1. Jesus Christ will not discourage the weakest grace, but will cherish and preserve it to eternity. Grace that has only just begun to bud will, under the beams of the Sun of Righteousness, be ripened and brought to full glory. I will speak to this more fully in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER 11



**M**atthew 12:20. A bruised reed He will not break, and a smoldering wick He will not snuff out, until He leads justice to victory.

This text speaks prophetically of Christ. He will not exploit the weaknesses of His people or crush grace in its early growth. A bruised reed He will not break, and a smoldering wick He will not snuff out. I begin with the first — the bruised reed.

Question: What is meant here by a reed?

Answer: It is not to be taken literally, but symbolically. It is a spiritual reed — the rational, spiritual part of a person, the soul. The soul may well be compared to a reed because it is fragile and easily shaken in this life, until it grows up into a firm cedar in heaven.

Question: What is meant by a bruised reed?

Answer: It is a soul humbled and wounded by a sense of sin. It weeps, but it does not despair. It is tossed on the waves of fear, yet it holds the anchor of hope.

Question: What does it mean that Christ will not break this reed?

Answer: The meaning is that Christ will not discourage any sorrowful spirit who is in the pangs of new birth. If the wound of sin is felt, it will not be fatal. A bruised reed He will not break. The wording contains an understatement: He will not break it — meaning, He will bind it up. He will bring comfort to it.

The whole point is to show Christ's compassion toward the poor, downcast sinner who beats his chest and can barely lift his eyes for mercy. The heart of the Lord Jesus goes out to such a one. This bruised reed He will not break.

The text has two parts: 1. A condition: a soul broken and bruised through repentance. 2. A promise: it will not be broken.

Doctrine: The bruised soul will not be destroyed. Psalm 147:3: He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds. For this very purpose Christ received both His calling and His anointing — to bind up the broken soul. Isaiah 61:1: The Lord has anointed Me to bind up the brokenhearted. But why will Christ not break a bruised reed?

1. Because of the tenderness of His nature. James 5:11: The Lord is full of compassion and mercy. He places compassion in other creatures, which is why He is called the Father of mercies in 2 Corinthians 1:3. Surely He Himself is not without compassion. When a soul is in spiritual distress, God will not deal harshly with it — to do so would be to deny His own tender character.

This is why the Lord has always been most attentive to His bruised ones — as a mother is most careful with her weakest and sickest children. Isaiah 40:11: He will gather the lambs with His

arm and carry them in His bosom. Those who have been spiritually broken, who are tender and weak like lambs, Christ will carry in the arms of free grace.

2. Jesus Christ will not break the bruised reed because a contrite heart is His sacrifice. Psalm 51:17. A bruised spirit pours forth tears that are like precious wine. Psalm 56:8. A bruised soul overflows with holy desires and is lovesick for God. Since a bruised reed holds such value, Christ will not break it. No crushed spice is as fragrant to us as a contrite spirit is to God.

3. The bruised reed will not be broken because it so closely resembles Christ Jesus. Christ Himself was once bruised on the cross. Isaiah 53:10: It pleased the Lord to bruise Him. His hands and feet were bruised by the nails; His side was bruised by the spear. A bruised reed resembles a bruised Savior. More than that, a bruised soul is a member of Christ — and though it is weak, Christ will not cut it off. He will cherish it all the more.

1. Will Christ not break the bruised reed? This implies He will break unbruised reeds — those who were never touched by spiritual conviction but who live and die without repentance. These are hard reeds, or rather hard rocks. Christ will not break a bruised reed, but He will break a hard one. Many people do not know what it is to be a bruised reed. They may be bruised outwardly by affliction, but they are never broken inwardly by sin. They never understood the pangs of new birth. You sometimes hear people thank God they have always had peace of mind, never troubled in spirit. They are blessing God for what is actually their greatest curse. Those who are never broken by repentance will be shattered by judgment. The hearts that would not break for sin will break in de-

spair. In hell there is nothing to be seen but a heap of stones and a hammer — the heap of stones being hard hearts, and the hammer being God's power and justice, breaking them apart.

2. Will Christ not break a bruised reed? See then the gracious heart of Jesus Christ — full of gentleness and sympathy. Though He may bruise the soul on account of sin, He will not destroy it. The surgeon may cut the body and draw blood, but he will bandage the wound afterward. As Christ has beams of majesty, so He has depths of mercy. Christ's emblem carries both a lion and a lamb — the lion for His fierce dealings with the wicked, as Psalm 50:22 shows, and the lamb for His gentleness toward His people. His name is Jesus — Savior — and His office is that of a healer, as Malachi 4:2 says. Christ made a plaster from His own blood to heal the broken heart. Christ is the purest essence of love. Someone once said: if the sweetness of all flowers were gathered into one flower, how sweet would that flower be? How full of mercy is Christ, in whom all mercy is gathered? Christ has a skillful hand and a tender heart. He will not break a bruised reed.

Some people are so harsh and cruel that they heap affliction on top of affliction — putting more weight on a dying man. But our Lord Jesus is a compassionate High Priest, as Hebrews 2:17 says. He is touched with the feeling of our weakness. Every bruise of the soul reaches His heart. No one refuses Christ except those who do not know Him. He is nothing less than love in human form. He Himself was bruised, in order to heal those who are bruised.

3. What encouragement this offers to faith! If Christ had said He would break the bruised reed, there would be grounds for despair. But because He says He will not break it, a door of hope swings open for humbled and broken souls. Can we say we have

been broken over our sin — then why do we not believe? Why do we go on drooping under our fears and discouragements, as though there were no mercy available for us? Christ says He will heal the brokenhearted, as Psalm 147:3 says. But unbelief says: He will not heal me. Christ says He will cure the bruised soul. Unbelief says: He will destroy it. Unbelief empties our comforts and goes on to empty the Word of God — as if all God's promises were forgeries, or blank lottery tickets. Has the Lord said He will not break a bruised reed? Can truth lie? What a sin unbelief is! Some think it terrible to be numbered among drunkards, blasphemers, and the sexually immoral. But let me tell you — it is no less terrible to be numbered among unbelievers. Unbelief is worse than any other sin, because it brings God under suspicion and robs Him of the choicest jewel of His crown — His truthfulness. 1 John 5:10: He who does not believe has made God a liar.

Let all humbled sinners go to Jesus Christ. Christ was bruised by abandonment in order to heal those who are bruised by sin. If you can show Christ your wounds and reach Him by faith, you will be healed of every soul-bruise. Since Christ will not break you, do not destroy yourself by despair.

Application 2. Since Jesus Christ will not break a bruised reed, this rebukes those who do everything in their power to break it. These are the people who try to hinder the work of conversion in others. When they see someone wounded and troubled over sin, they discourage them by saying that religion is a sour, gloomy thing and that they would be better off going back to their old pleasures. When an arrow of conviction has been shot into someone's conscience, these people pull it out again and refuse to let the work of conviction continue. In this way, when a soul is nearly broken

open, they prevent it from being thoroughly broken. This is to be a devil to others. If shedding another person's blood makes a man guilty, what is it to destroy another person's soul?

Application 3. This text is a spiritual honeycomb, dripping comfort into every broken heart. Just as when the body faints we apply a restorative, so when sinners are broken under the weight of their sins, I will give them something to revive them. This text brings comfort to the soul who sits like Job among the ashes, dejected and crushed by a sense of unworthiness. The soul cries: I am unworthy of mercy — what am I, that God should ever look at me? Those with greater gifts and graces may perhaps receive a glance from God, but I am unworthy. Is it your unworthiness that troubles you? What is more unworthy than a bruised reed? Yet there is a promise made to just that: a bruised reed He will not break. The promise is not made to the fig tree or the olive — which are fruitful, productive plants — but to the bruised reed. Though you are contemptible in your own eyes, a broken and battered reed, you may be glorious in the eyes of the Lord. Do not let your unworthiness discourage you. If you see yourself as vile and Christ as precious, this promise belongs to you. Christ will not break you — He will bind up your wounds.

Question: But how do I know whether I have been truly and savingly broken?

Answer: Has God ever brought you to your knees? Has your proud heart been humbled? Have you ever seen yourself as a sinner — nothing but a sinner? Have you ever looked at Christ through weeping eyes? Did those tears flow from eyes of faith?

That is gospel-brokenness. Can you say: Lord, though I do not see You, I love You; though I am in the dark, I cast anchor? That is what it means to be a bruised reed.

Objection 1: But I fear I have not been broken enough.

Answer: It is difficult to set a precise measure of humiliation. In the new birth, as in natural birth, some go through more labor and some less. But how can you tell when you have been broken enough? When your spirit is so troubled that you are willing to let go of the sins that brought you the greatest pleasure and delight — when sin is not merely set aside but has become genuinely disgusting to you. Then you have been broken enough. The medicine has done its work when it has purged out the disease. The soul has been broken enough when the love of sin has been driven out.

Objection 2: But I fear I have not been broken as I should be. My heart feels so hard.

Answer 1: We must distinguish between hardness in the heart and a hard heart. Even the best heart may have some hardness in it. But having some hardness does not mean you have a hard heart. We judge things by their predominant quality. If you walk into a field that has both weeds and wheat, you do not call it a weed field — you call it a wheat field. In the same way, even though there is some hardness in the heart alongside the softness, God — who judges by the better part — sees it as a soft heart.

2. There is a great difference between the hardness found in the godly and the hardness found in the wicked. In the wicked it is natural; in the godly it is only occasional. The hardness of a wicked person is like the hardness of a stone — constant and deep within. The hardness in a child of God is like the hardness of ice — quickly

melted by the warmth of the sun. Perhaps God has temporarily withdrawn His Spirit, and the heart has frozen like ice. But let God's Spirit, like the sun, return and shine on the heart, and it melts with love.

3. Do you not grieve over your hardness? You sigh because you cannot groan as deeply as you wish. You weep because you feel you cannot weep enough. But a truly hard reed cannot weep at all. If you were not a bruised reed, this moisture could not come from you.

Objection 3: But I am a barren reed — I bear no fruit. I fear I will be broken.

Answer: Gracious hearts tend to overlook the good that is in them. They can spot the worm in the leaf but miss the fruit itself. Why do you say you are barren? If you are a bruised reed, you are not barren. The spiritual reed grafted into the true Vine is fruitful. There is enough life in Christ to make all who are grafted into Him bear fruit. Christ distills grace as drops of dew upon the soul. Hosea 14:5-6: I will be as the dew to Israel; he shall blossom like the lily, his branches shall spread out, and his beauty shall be like the olive tree. The God who made a dry rod blossom will make a dry reed flourish.

That is enough on the first expression in the text. I now move to the second.

A smoldering wick He will not snuff out.

Question: What is meant by the smoke?

Answer: The smoke represents corruption. Smoke irritates the eye; sin offends the pure eye of God.

Question: What is meant by smoking flax?

Answer: It means grace mixed with corruption. Just as a small flame can produce much smoke, a small amount of grace can exist alongside much corruption.

Question: What does it mean that Christ will not snuff out the smoldering wick?

Answer: The meaning is that even where there is only a spark of grace amid much sin, Christ will not put out that spark. There is an understatement in the words: He will not quench it — meaning, He will increase it. Nothing is easier to snuff out than a smoldering wick; the slightest touch does it. But Christ will not blow out the spark of grace — He will fan it into flame. He will make this smoldering wick into a blazing candle.

Doctrine: A little grace mixed with much corruption will not be snuffed out. To develop this, I will show three things:

1. That a little grace is often mixed with much corruption in the godly.

2. That this little grace, woven in with corruption, will not be extinguished.

3. The reasons for this.

1. In the godly, a little grace is often mingled with much corruption. Mark 9:24: Lord, I believe — there was some faith there. Help my unbelief — there was corruption mixed with it. In the best saints there is an interweaving of sin and grace, a dark side alongside the light. Much pride mixes with humility; much earthliness mixes with heavenliness. Grace in the godly has a faint taste of the old bitter root it grew on.

In fact, in many of the regenerate there is more corruption than grace — so much smoke you can barely see any fire, so much distrust you can barely see any faith, so much anger you can barely see any gentleness. Consider Jonah, the quarrelsome prophet. He argues with God and actually defends his own anger. Jonah 4:9: I do well to be angry, even to death. There was so much passion that grace was nearly invisible. A Christian in this life is like a glass with more foam than wine, or like a sick body with more illness than vitality. This should humble even the best of us — to see how much corruption is mixed into our grace.

2. This little grace mixed with much corruption will not be extinguished. The smoldering wick He will not snuff out. The disciples' faith at first was very small — they fled and abandoned Christ. That was smoldering flax. But Christ did not put out that small flame. He cherished and revived it. Their faith grew stronger afterward, and they openly confessed Christ. The flax had burst into flame.

3. The reasons why Christ will not extinguish the smoldering flax.

1. Because this small light in the smoldering flax is of divine origin. It comes from the Father of lights, and God will not destroy the work of His own grace. Every living thing by instinct preserves its own offspring. The hen that hatches her chicks will nurture and protect them — she will not destroy them the moment they hatch. God, who has placed this nurturing instinct in creatures to protect their young, will far more certainly cherish the work of His own Spirit in the heart. Would He light the lamp of grace in a soul and then put it out? That would serve neither His interest nor His honor.

2. Christ will not snuff out the beginnings of grace because a little grace is precious, just as more grace is. A small pearl still has value. Though the pearl of faith may be small, if it is a genuine pearl it shines gloriously in God's eyes. A goldsmith accounts for even the smallest filings of gold and does not throw them away. The pupil of the eye is very small, yet it can take in a vast sweep of the sky at a single glance. A little faith can justify a sinner. A weak hand can tie the marriage knot. A weak faith can unite a soul to Christ just as truly as a strong one. A small amount of grace makes us like God. A silver coin bears the king's image just as truly as a large one. The smallest trace of grace bears God's image — and will God destroy His own image? When the temples of Greece were demolished, Xerxes ordered the temple of Diana preserved for the beauty of its architecture. When God destroys all the glory of the world and sets it on fire, He will not destroy even the least grain of grace, because it carries the imprint of His own likeness. That little spark in the smoldering flax is a beam of God's own glory.

3. Christ will not extinguish the smoldering flax because that small light may grow much larger. Grace is compared to a mustard seed — the smallest of all seeds, but when it grows, it becomes the greatest of garden plants and spreads into a tree, as Matthew 13:32 says. The greatest grace was once small. The oak was once an acorn. The most celebrated faith in the world was once in its spiritual infancy. The greatest flame of zeal was once only smoldering flax. Grace, like the waters of the sanctuary, rises higher and higher. Since even the smallest seed of holiness has this growing, ripening nature within it, God will not allow it to be cut off before its time.

4. Christ will not extinguish the smoldering flax because in preserving a small light within a great deal of smoke, the glory of His power shines forth. The trembling soul fears it will be swallowed by sin. But God, by preserving a small measure of grace in the heart — indeed, by making that spark prevail over corruption, as the fire from heaven licked up the water in the trench in 1 Kings 18:38 — wins great glory for Himself. He carries away the trophies of honor. 2 Corinthians 12:9: My power is made perfect in weakness.

1. Notice the difference between how God deals with people and how people deal with each other. People will quench a great deal of light for a little smoke. God will not quench a little light for a great deal of smoke. This is the way of the world: when people see even a small failing in someone else, they let that one failing cancel out a great deal of worth. It is our nature to magnify a small fault and minimize great virtue — to see others' weaknesses and overshadow their excellencies. We notice a star's flickering more than its shining. We criticize others for their temper but never admire them for their godliness. So for a little smoke we see in others, we snuff out much light.

God does not deal this way. For a great deal of smoke, He will not snuff out a little light. He sees the sincerity and overlooks many weaknesses. The smallest sparks of grace He tends and fans gently with the breath of His Spirit until they break into flame.

2. Since Christ will not quench the smoldering flax, we must not quench it in ourselves. If grace has not grown into as great a flame as we see in others, we must not conclude that there is no fire of the Spirit in us at all. That would be to snuff out our own smoldering flax and bear false witness against ourselves. Just as

we must not accept a false accusation, so we must not deny a true one. Fire can lie hidden in the ashes, and grace can be hidden beneath many spiritual disorders. Some Christians are so skilled at accusing themselves of having no grace that they seem to have been hired by Satan to argue his case against themselves.

It is a serious mistake to argue from the weakness of grace to the absence of grace. There is a difference between being weak in faith and having no faith at all. A person with poor eyesight lacks the fullness of sight, but he does not lack sight altogether. A little grace is grace, even when it is smothered under much corruption.

3. If the smallest spark of grace will not be extinguished, it follows as a great truth that there is no ultimate falling from grace. If even the least measure of grace could perish, the smoldering flax would be snuffed out. Grace may be shaken by fears and doubts, but it cannot be uprooted entirely. I grant that what appears to be grace may be lost — this false fire may be blown out. But not the fire kindled by the Spirit. Grace may lie dormant in the soul but not dead — like a person in a coma who does not produce vital signs but is still alive. Grace may be eclipsed but not extinguished. A Christian may lose his joy, like a tree in autumn that has shed its fruit, but the sap remains in the vine. The seed of God remains in him, as 1 John 3:9 says. Grace is a flower of eternity.

This smoldering flax cannot be extinguished by affliction. It is like those trees Pliny describes, growing in the Red Sea, which stand immovable when beaten by the waves and actually flourish more when submerged. Grace is like a true oriental diamond — it sparkles and cannot be broken.

I will admit it is a wonder that grace is not utterly destroyed, especially when we consider two things.

1. The hatred of Satan. He is a malignant spirit who places obstacles in our path to heaven. The devil tries with the wind of temptation to blow out the spark of grace in our hearts. When that fails, he stirs up wicked people and mobilizes the forces of hell against us. What a wonder it is that this bright star of grace is not swept down by the tail of the dragon!

2. It is astonishing that grace can survive when we consider the vast amount of corruption in our own hearts. Sin makes up the greater part of a Christian's inner life. In the best heart there is more sediment than spirit. The heart swarms with sin. How much pride and practical atheism lurks in the soul! Is it not remarkable that this lily of grace can grow among so many thorns? It is as great a wonder that a little grace should be preserved in the midst of so much corruption as to see a candle burning in the sea without being put out.

Yet though grace lives with such difficulty — like a newborn struggling to breathe — it is born of God and therefore immortal. Grace wrestling with corruption is like a ship battered and tossed by the waves, yet it rides out the storm and finally reaches its desired harbor. If grace could die out and be extinguished, how could this text be true: The smoldering wick He will not snuff out?

Question: But why is it that grace — even in its smallest measure — cannot be extinguished?

Answer: It is because of the mighty work of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit of God is the originating source, and He continually stirs up and sustains grace in the heart. He is at work in a believer every

day — He pours in the oil and keeps the lamp of grace burning. Grace is compared to a river of life in John 7:38. The river of grace can never dry up, because the Spirit of God is the spring that feeds it.

That the smoldering flax cannot be extinguished is also clear from the covenant of grace. Isaiah 54:10: The mountains may depart and the hills be removed, but My covenant of peace shall not be removed, says the Lord. If falling from grace were possible, how could this be called an immovable covenant? If grace could die and the smoldering flax be put out, how would our standing in Christ be any better than our standing in Adam? The covenant of grace is called a better covenant in Hebrews 7:22. In what way is it better than the covenant made with Adam? Not only because it has a better guarantor and contains better privileges, but because it has better terms attached to it. 2 Samuel 23:5: It is ordered in all things and secure. Those taken into the covenant will be like stars fixed in their orbits and will never fall away. If grace could die and be put out, it would not be a better covenant.

Objection: But we are told not to quench the Spirit in 1 Thessalonians 5:19. Does this not imply that the Spirit's grace can be lost — that the smoldering flax can be snuffed out?

Answer: We must distinguish between the common work of the Spirit and the sanctifying work. The first may be quenched, but not the second. The common work of the Spirit is like a picture drawn on ice — easily erased. The sanctifying work is like a statue carved in gold — it endures. The Spirit's gifts may be quenched, but not His grace. There is the Spirit's illuminating work and His anointing work. The illuminating work may fail, but the anointing remains. 1 John 2:27: The anointing which you have received from

Him abides in you. The hypocrite's blaze goes out. The true believer's spark lives on and flourishes. The first is the light of a comet — it burns bright and then disappears. The second is the light of a star — steady and lasting.

From all that has been said, let every saint be moved to do two things: 1. Believe his privilege. 2. Pursue his duty.

1. Believe your privilege. This is the matchless happiness of a saint — his coal will not be put out. The grace in his soul, however small and weak, will not give up. It will recover its strength and grow with the growth that God supplies. The Lord will make the smoldering flax into a burning lamp. It would be a terrible thing if a Christian were always swinging back and forth — a member of Christ one day and in the devil's grip the next; his soul illuminated by grace one day and plunged into darkness the next. That would destroy a Christian's comfort and break apart the golden chain of salvation. But be assured, O Christian: He who has begun a good work in you will ripen it to perfection. Christ will lead justice to victory — He will make grace victorious over every opposing corruption. If grace were to finally perish, what would become of the smoldering flax? And how could Christ rightly be called the finisher of faith?

Objection: This is no doubt a wonderful privilege for those who are smoldering flax — those with even the smallest beginnings of grace. But I fear I am not smoldering flax. I cannot see the light of grace in myself.

Answer: Let me comfort the smoldering flax — why do you argue against yourself this way? What makes you think you have no grace? I believe you have more than you would want to give up.

You value grace more than gold. How could you see the worth and beauty of this jewel if God's Spirit had not opened your eyes? You long to believe and grieve that you cannot believe as strongly as you wish. Are not these tears the first signs of faith? You desire Christ and cannot be satisfied without Him. That pulse-beat is evidence of life. Iron cannot move upward on its own. It needs a magnet drawing it. Your heart could not rise in holy longing after God unless some heavenly magnet were already drawing it. Christian, can you say that sin is your burden and Christ is your delight? Can you say with Peter: Lord, You know I love You? That is smoldering flax. And the Lord will not put it out. Your grace will flourish into glory. God will sooner put out the light of the sun than extinguish the dawning light of His Spirit in your heart.

2. Pursue your duty. Two duties are required of believers: 1. Love. 2. Labor.

1. Love. Since the Lord will not put out the smoldering flax but will at last make it victorious over all opposition — how should the smoldering flax burst into love for God! Psalm 31:23: Love the Lord, all you His saints. The saints owe everything to God, and when they have nothing else to offer, surely they can love Him. O saints, it is God who moves grace steadily forward in your souls. He is like a father who gives his son a small amount of money to start with, and as the son trades and grows, the father keeps adding more. So God continually adds to your stock. Every day He is dripping oil into the lamp of your grace and keeping it burning. This should set your hearts on fire with love for God — who will not let the work of grace fail but will bring it to completion. The

smoldering wick He will not snuff out. How should God's people long for heaven, where their constant occupation will be to breathe out love and sound forth praise!

2. The second duty required of Christians is labor. Some may think: if Christ will not put out the smoldering flax but will fan it into a blazing flame all the way to full glory, then we need not strive at all — just leave God to finish His own work. Be careful not to draw a bad conclusion from good premises. What I have said is meant to encourage faith, not to excuse laziness. Do not think God will do our work while we sit idle. Just as God fans the spark of grace by His Spirit, we must fan it by holy effort. God will not bring us to heaven while we sleep — but while we pray. God told Paul that everyone on the ship would reach shore safely, but it had to happen through the means available. Acts 27:31: Unless these men stay in the ship, you cannot be saved. In the same way, the saints will certainly reach salvation and come to shore at last — but they must stay in the ship and use the means of grace, or they will not be saved. Christ assures His disciples that no one will snatch them from His hand, as John 10:28 says. But He also gives this counsel: Watch and pray, that you may not enter into temptation, as Matthew 26:41 says. The seed of God will not die — but we must water it with our tears. The smoldering flax will not be put out — but we must fan it with the breath of our own effort.

The second comfort for the godly is that godliness joins them into a close and glorious union with Jesus Christ. But this will be treated in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER 12



**S**ong of Songs 2:16. My beloved is mine, and I am his.

In the book of the Song of Songs, the love of Christ and His church rushes toward each other like a great torrent.

The text has three general parts.

- 1. A term of affection: my beloved. - 2. A declaration of possession: is mine. - 3. A holy surrender: I am his.

Doctrine: There is a union between Christ and believers that is like a marriage.

After treating marriage at length, the apostle ends the chapter with this: Ephesians 5:32: This is a profound mystery, but I am talking about Christ and the church. What could be closer than union? What could be sweeter? There are two kinds of union with Christ.

1. A natural union. All people share this, since Christ took on human nature — not the nature of angels, as Hebrews 2:16 says. But if this natural union is all there is, it gives little comfort. Thousands are condemned even though Christ is united to human nature in general.

2. There is a sacred union, by which we are mystically united to Christ. This union is not personal in the sense that Christ's divine being merges into the believer's person. If Christ's essence were poured into a believer's person, it would follow that everything the believer did would earn merit before God.

But the union between Christ and a saint is of a different kind.

1. It is covenant-based. My beloved is mine. God the Father gives the bride; God the Son receives the bride; God the Holy Spirit ties the knot. He binds our wills to Christ and Christ's love to us.

2. This union is one of power and influence. Christ unites Himself to His bride through His graces and the flow of His life into her. John 1:16: From His fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. Christ makes Himself one with the bride by conveying His image and stamping the impression of His own holiness upon her.

This union with Christ may rightly be called mystical, for the manner of it is difficult to describe. Just as it is difficult to explain how the soul is united to the body, so it is difficult to explain how Christ is united to the soul. But though this union is spiritual, it is real. Nature often works imperceptibly yet truly, as Ecclesiastes 11:5 says. We do not see the clock hand moving on the face, yet it moves. The sun draws up the vapors of the earth invisibly, yet really. So the union between Christ and the soul, though it cannot be seen by human reason, is real. 1 Corinthians 6:17.

Before this union with Christ, there must be a separation. The heart must be separated from all other loves. Just as in marriage there is a leaving of father and mother — Psalm 45:10: Forget your own people and your father's house — so there must be a leaving of

our former sins and a breaking of the old alliance with hell, before we can be united to Christ. Hosea 14:8: Ephraim shall say, What have I to do any more with idols? Or as the Hebrew puts it: with sorrows. The sins that were once regarded as lovers have now become sorrows. There must be a divorce before there can be a union.

The purpose of our marriage union with Christ is twofold.

1. Dwelling together. This is one purpose of marriage — to live together. Ephesians 3:17: That Christ may dwell in your hearts. It is not enough to visit Christ occasionally in the ordinances — hypocrites may do that. There must be a mutual companionship. We must dwell on thoughts of Christ. 1 John 3:24: He who dwells in God. Married persons should not live apart.

2. Fruitfulness. Romans 7:4: You should belong to another, to Him who was raised from the dead, so that we may bear fruit for God. The bride brings forth the fruit of the Spirit — love, joy, peace, patience, and kindness. Galatians 5:22. Barrenness is a shame in Christ's bride.

This marriage union with Christ is the most noble and excellent union of all.

1. Christ unites Himself to many. In ordinary marriages, one person is taken. But here, millions are taken. Otherwise, poor souls might cry out: Christ has married Himself to that person — but what does that mean for me? I am left out. But no — Christ marries Himself to thousands. It is a holy and chaste union of many. The multitude of persons does not defile this marriage bed. No poor sinner who comes with a humble and believing heart is excluded from being united to Christ.

2. In this holy marriage there is a closer union than any other marriage can achieve. In ordinary marriages two become one flesh, but Christ and the believer become one spirit. 1 Corinthians 6:17: He who is joined to the Lord is one spirit with Him. Since the soul is more excellent than the body and capable of far greater joy, this spiritual union brings in astonishments and delights that no earthly marriage can equal. The joy that flows from the mystical union is unspeakable and full of glory, as 1 Peter 1:8 says.

3. This union with Christ never ends. Three times blessed and more — are those held together by an unbroken bond.

Other marriages come to an end. Death cuts the marriage knot. But this union is eternal. You who are once Christ's bride will never be a widow again. Hosea 2:19: I will betroth you to Me forever. To put it rightly — our marriage with Christ begins precisely where other marriages end: at death.

This life is only the engagement. Among the Jews there was a set period between betrothal and marriage — sometimes a year or more. This life is only the betrothal and the engagement. Promises are made on both sides, and love flows secretly between Christ and the soul. He gives some glimpses of His face, and the soul sends up sighs and drops tears of love. But all this is only the preparation and the beginning of what is to come. The glorious completion and celebration of the wedding is reserved for heaven. There is the marriage supper of the Lamb in Revelation 19:9, and the bed of glory filled with love — where the souls of the elect will find endless satisfaction. 1 Thessalonians 4:17: Then we will always be with the Lord. So death only begins our marriage with Christ.

Application 1: If Christ is the head of the mystical body, as Ephesians 1:22 says, then this doctrine cuts off the Pope. That man of sin usurps this prerogative, claiming to be the head of the church, and in doing so defiles Christ's marriage bed. What blasphemy this is! Two heads is a monstrosity. Christ is head as He is husband. There is no deputy husband, no substitute in His place. The Pope is the beast of Revelation. To make him the head of the church — what would that be but to place the head of a beast on the body of a man?

Application 2: Since there is this marriage union with Christ, let us examine whether we are truly united to Him.

1. Have we chosen Christ as the object of our love? And is this choice grounded in genuine knowledge of Him?

2. Have we consented to the union? It is not enough that Christ is willing to have us — are we willing to have Him? God does not force salvation upon us in such a way that we receive Christ whether we want to or not. We must be willing to receive Him. Many people approve of Christ but never give their consent. And this consent must be —

1. Pure and genuine — we consent to have Christ for His own worth and excellence. Psalm 45:2: You are more beautiful than any of the children of men.

2. It must be an immediate consent. 2 Corinthians 6:2: Now is the accepted time. If we put Christ off with delays and excuses, He may eventually stop calling. His Spirit will strive no longer. And then, poor sinner, what will you do? When God stops wooing, your troubles begin.

3. Have we received Christ? Faith is the bond of the union. Christ is joined to us by His Spirit, and we are joined to Him by faith. Faith ties the marriage knot.

4. Have we surrendered ourselves to Christ? That is what the bride in the text does: I am his. As if she were saying: everything I have is for Christ's use and service. Have we made this surrender? Have we given up our will and our very name to Christ? When the devil tempts us, do we say: we are not our own — we belong to Christ? Our tongues are His; we must not pollute them with oaths. Our bodies are His temple; we must not defile them with sin. If this is true of us, it is a sign that the Holy Spirit has worked this blessed union between Christ and us.

Application 3: Since this mystical union exists, from it we may draw many conclusions.

1. See the dignity of all true believers. They are joined in marriage to Christ. This is not merely resemblance but union — they are not only like Christ but one with Christ. This honor belongs to all the saints. When a king marries a beggar, she is by virtue of that union ennobled and brought into the royal family. Wicked people, by contrast, are united to the prince of darkness, who settles hell on them as their inheritance. But the godly are divinely united to Christ, who is King of kings and Lord of lords, as Revelation 19:16 says. By virtue of this sacred union, the saints are raised above the angels. Christ is the angels' Lord, but He is not their husband.

2. See how blessed a marriage the saints have. They are united to Christ, who is the best husband. Song of Songs 5:10: The greatest among ten thousand. Christ is a husband who has no equal — first for tender care, and second for passionate love.

1. For tender care: no bride could be as concerned for her own soul and reputation as Christ is for hers. 1 Peter 5:7: He cares for you. Christ deliberates and plans constantly about how to advance the work of our salvation. He manages all our affairs and tends to our business as if it were His own — and indeed He has a stake in it. He brings fresh supply to His bride. If she strays from the path, He guides her back. If she stumbles, He steadies her. If she falls, He lifts her up. If she grows dull, He quickens her by His Spirit. If she is stubborn, He draws her with cords of love. If she is sad, He comforts her with promises.

2. For passionate love: no husband compares to Christ in love. The Lord says to His people, I have loved you. And they respond: In what way have You loved us? Malachi 1:2. But we cannot say that to Christ. Christ has given real and undeniable demonstrations of His love to His bride. He has sent her His Word, which is a love letter. He has given her His Spirit, which is a love token. Christ loves more than any other husband ever could.

1. Christ places on His bride a richer robe. Isaiah 61:10: He has clothed me with the garments of salvation; He has wrapped me in the robe of righteousness. Wearing this robe, God looks upon us as if we had never sinned. This robe is as truly ours to justify us as it is Christ's to give. This robe does not merely cover — it adorns. Wearing it, we are counted righteous — not merely as angels, but as Christ Himself. 2 Corinthians 5:21: That we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

2. Christ gives His bride not only His golden garments but His image. He loves her into His own likeness. A husband may love his wife deeply, but he cannot stamp his own image on her. If she is disfigured, he may give her a veil to cover it, but he cannot place

his own beauty upon her. But Christ imparts the beauty of holiness to His bride. Ezekiel 16:14: You were beautiful because of the splendor I gave you. When Christ marries a soul, He makes it beautiful. Song of Songs 4:7: You are altogether beautiful, My love. Christ never considers He has loved His bride enough until He can see His own face reflected in her.

3. Christ pays debts no other husband can. Our sins are the worst debts we carry. All the angels pooled together could not pay a single one of them. But Christ frees us from all of them. He is both husband and guarantor. He says to divine justice, as Paul said about Onesimus: If he owes you anything, charge it to me — I will repay it. Philemon 19.

4. Christ has suffered more for His bride than any husband ever suffered for a wife. He endured poverty and shame. The One who crowned the heavens with stars was Himself crowned with thorns. He was called a companion of sinners, so that we might be made companions of angels. He did not cling to His life. He leaped into the sea of His Father's wrath to save His bride from drowning.

5. Christ's love does not end with His life. He loves His bride forever. Hosea 2:19: I will betroth you to Me forever. No wonder the apostle calls it a love that surpasses knowledge. Ephesians 3:19.

3. See how rich believers are. They are united to the crown of heaven, and by virtue of this marriage union all of Christ's riches flow to them. Sharing flows from union. Christ shares His graces. John 1:16. As long as Christ has them, believers will never lack. And He shares His privileges — justification and glorification. He settles a kingdom on His bride as her inheritance. Hebrews 12:28.

This is the key to the apostle's paradox. 2 Corinthians 6:10: As having nothing, yet possessing all. By virtue of the marriage union, the saints have a share in everything Christ has.

4. See how serious a sin it is to harm the saints. It is an injury done to Christ, because believers are mystically one with Him. Acts 9:4: Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me? When the body was being attacked, the Head in heaven cried out. In this sense people crucify Christ afresh, as Hebrews 6:6 says — because what is done to His members is done to Him. If Gideon took vengeance on those who killed his brothers, as Judges 8:21 records, will not Christ be far more certain to avenge those who wrong His bride? Would a king tolerate having his treasury plundered, his crown thrown in the dirt, his queen executed? Will Christ endure the insults and injuries done to His bride? The saints are the apple of Christ's eye, as Zechariah 2:8 says. Those who strike at His eye must answer for it. Isaiah 49:26: I will feed those who oppress you with their own flesh, and they shall be drunk with their own blood as with sweet wine.

5. See why the saints rejoice so much in the Word and the sacraments — because there they meet with their husband Christ. A wife desires to be in her husband's presence. The ordinances are the chariot in which Christ rides, the lattice through which He looks and shows His smiling face. There Christ displays the banner of His love, as Song of Songs 2:4 says. The Lord's Supper is nothing other than a pledge and down payment of the eternal communion the saints will have with Christ in heaven. Then He will take His bride into His arms. If Christ is so sweet in an ordinance — when we catch only brief and partial glimpses of Him by faith —

then how delightful and overwhelming will His presence be in heaven, when we shall see Him face to face and be forever in His loving embrace?

4. This mystical union provides great comfort to believers in various situations.

1. Comfort in the face of the world's scorn and unkindness. Psalm 55:3: In their anger they hate me. But though we live in an unkind world, we have a kind husband. John 15:9: As the Father has loved Me, so I have loved you. What angel could fully understand how the Father loves the Son? Yet the Father's love for Christ is the pattern and measure of Christ's love for His bride. This love of Christ exceeds all created love as far as the sun outshines a candle. Is this not cause for comfort? Whatever the world may think of me, Christ loves me.

2. Comfort in the face of weakness in grace. The believer can barely hold on to Christ — his grip is trembling. He struggles under a spirit of weakness. But O weak Christian — Here is strong encouragement. There is a marriage union. You are the bride of Christ, and He will be gentle with you as the weaker partner. Will a husband divorce his wife because she is weak or ill? No — he will be all the more tender toward her. Christ hates faithlessness, but He will show compassion toward weakness. When the bride is faint and close to despair, Christ puts His left hand under her head, as Song of Songs 2:6 says. This is the bride's comfort when she is weak: her husband can pour strength into her. Isaiah 49:5: My God shall be my strength.

3. Comfort in the face of death. When believers die, they go to their husband. Who would not be willing to cross through death if it meant meeting Christ on the other side? Philippians 1:23: I desire to weigh anchor and be with Christ. What does the difficulty of the journey matter, when we are going to meet our dearest friend? When a woman is engaged, she longs for the wedding day. After the saints' funeral begins their marriage. The body is a prison to the soul — who would not trade a prison for a marriage bed? How glad Joseph was to leave prison for the king's palace. God in His wisdom allows us to face changes and hardships here, so that He may wean us from the world and make us long for heaven. When the soul is separated from the body, it is united to Christ.

4. Comfort on the day of judgment, when sentence is passed. There is a marriage union — and O Christian, your husband will be your judge. A wife need not fear being condemned in court when her husband is the judge. However many charges the devil brings against you, Christ will blot out your sins in His blood. He will say: Shall I condemn My own bride? What comfort this is! Christ cannot pass sentence against His bride without passing it against Himself, for Christ and His people are one.

5. Comfort in the face of the saints' sufferings. The church of God faces many hardships in this life, but she has a husband in heaven who is mindful of her and who will turn her water into wine. This is a time of mourning for the bride because the bridegroom is away, as Matthew 9:15 says. But soon she will put off her mourning. Christ will wipe the tears of blood from His bride's face. Isaiah 25:8: The Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces.

Christ will comfort His bride after the time of her affliction. He will refresh her with His love. He will take away the cup of trembling and give her the cup of consolation. Then she will forget all her sorrows as she is brought into the banqueting house of heaven, with the banner of Christ's love spread over her.

5. Let me press several duties on those who are in this marriage union with Christ.

1. Make use of this relationship — in two situations.

1. When the law brings charges against you. The law says: here are so many debts that must be paid — and it demands satisfaction. Acknowledge the debt, but hand it over to your husband Christ. It is a principle of law that legal action cannot be taken against a wife as long as the husband is living. So tell Satan, when he accuses you: Yes, the debt is mine — but go to my husband Christ; He will settle it. If we took this approach, we would relieve ourselves of much inner turmoil. By faith we transfer the debt to our husband. Believers are not widows — they are wives. Satan will never go to Christ himself, for he knows that justice has been satisfied and the debt record has been cancelled. But he comes to us demanding payment, trying to distress us. We should send him to Christ — and then all his lawsuits would end. This is a believer's triumph: in himself he is guilty, but in Christ he is righteous. In himself he is stained, but in his head he is clean.

2. When Christ withdraws for a season: Christ may — for reasons best known to Himself — step aside for a time. Song of Songs 5:6: My beloved had turned and gone away. Do not conclude from this that He has left entirely. It is a mark of jealousy in a wife, when her husband has been away a little while, to assume he has

gone for good. Whenever Christ goes out of sight, it is wrong for us to say — as Zion said — The Lord has forsaken me, as Isaiah 49:14 records. This is jealousy, and it wrongs the love of Christ and the beauty of this marriage. Christ may leave His bride in terms of felt comfort, but He will never leave her in terms of the union itself. A husband may be a thousand miles away from his wife, but he is still her husband. Christ may withdraw from His bride, but the marriage knot still holds.

2. Love your husband Christ. Song of Songs 2:5. Love Him even when He is reproached and persecuted. A wife loves her husband even when he is in prison. To kindle your love for Christ, consider three things. 1. Nothing else is worthy of your love. If Christ is your husband, it is not fitting to have other loves — that would stir Christ to jealousy. 2. He is worthy of your love. He is of surpassing beauty. Song of Songs 5:10: altogether lovely. 3. How rich is Christ's love toward you? He loves you in your worst condition. He loves you in affliction. The goldsmith loves his gold in the furnace. He loves you despite your scars and blemishes. The saints' failures cannot fully turn Christ's love away from them. Jeremiah 3:1. How deeply then should the bride love Christ in return! This will be the glory of heaven — our love then will be like the sun at full strength.

3. Rejoice in your husband Christ. Has Christ honored you by bringing you into this marriage union and making you one with Himself? This calls for joy. By virtue of this union, believers share in all of Christ's riches. It was the custom among the Romans that when the wife was brought home, she received the keys to her husband's house — signifying that the household's treasury was now entrusted to her. When Christ brings His bride home to those

glorious dwelling places He has gone ahead to prepare for her, as John 14:2 says, He will hand over the keys of His treasure to her. She will be as rich as heaven can make her. Should not the bride rejoice and sing for joy upon her bed, as Psalm 149:5 says? Christians, however dark the times, you may rejoice in your spiritual union with Christ. Habakkuk 3:17. Let me say plainly: it is a sin not to rejoice. Persistent gloom dishonors your husband. When a wife is always sighing and crying, people will say: this woman must have a cruel husband. Is this how you reflect Christ's love toward you? A mournful bride grieves Christ's heart. I do not deny that a Christian should grieve over daily sin, but to be always weeping — as if mourning without hope — dishonors the marriage. Philippians 4:4: Rejoice in the Lord always. Rejoicing honors your husband. Christ loves a joyful bride. In fact, the very purpose God has in allowing sorrow is to lead us to joy. We sow in tears so that we may reap in joy. The excessive gloom of the godly will make others afraid to embrace Christ. They will begin to doubt whether there is really such satisfying joy in religion as believers claim. O saints of God, do not neglect consolation. Let others see that you have no regrets about your choice. It is joy that brings energy and movement to a Christian. Nehemiah 8:10: The joy of the Lord is your strength. The soul is fastest in its duties when it is carried on the wings of joy.

4. Adorn this marriage relationship, so that you may be a crown to your husband. 1. Wear a veil. We read of the bride's veil in Song of Songs 5:7. This veil is humility. 2. Put on your jewels. These are the graces of the Spirit, which for their brilliance are compared to rows of pearls and chains of gold, as Song of Songs

1:10 says. These precious jewels distinguish Christ's bride from strangers. 3. Conduct yourselves as befits Christ's bride: 1. In purity of mind. 2. In holiness of life.

1. In purity of mind: keep your judgment clean. Do not defile your thinking with error. Error corrupts the mind, as 1 Timothy 6:5 says. It is one of Satan's strategies — first to corrupt the judgment, then the conscience.

2. In holiness of life: it is not fitting for Christ's bride to live as those who have no commitment to Him. Immodesty and a loose tongue do not become a saint. Christ's bride must shine with gospel purity, so that she brings beauty to her husband. A woman once asked what dowry she was bringing her husband. She replied that she had no dowry, but she promised to keep herself faithful. In the same way, though we bring no merit to Christ, He looks to us to keep ourselves pure — not staining the purity He has given us through shameful and scandalous sins.

THE END.

## THANKS FOR READING



If you spotted a typo or have feedback, the email is **[sam@goodsoilapps.com](mailto:sam@goodsoilapps.com)** — or use the in-app feedback form in *Christian Reader*.