THE GRACE AND DUTY OF BEING SPIRITUALLY MINDED

JOHN OWEN

The Grace and Duty of Being Spiritually Minded

John Owen

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About this Book

A masterwork of Puritan spirituality built on Romans 8:6 — "to be spiritually minded is life and peace." Owen probes the **nature and evidences of genuine spiritual mindedness**, distinguishing thoughts that arise from an internal principle of grace from those merely occasioned by preaching, prayer, or conviction. Across two parts and twenty-one chapters, he presses believers to examine their affections, meditations, and walk, calling them to the **highest degrees of heavenly-mindedness** as the only true foundation of life and peace.

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The Preface

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I want to give the reader a brief explanation of the nature and purpose of this straightforward discourse that follows. My hope is that it will guide you as you read, and serve as some explanation for why I decided to publish it. You should know that the thoughts shared here were originally private meditations for my own use, written during a season when I was completely unable to do anything for the benefit of others — and when I had little expectation that I would ever be able to do so again in this life. When I found some benefit and satisfaction in working through these meditations, and when God graciously restored a measure of strength to me, I continued with the same subject as I taught a private congregation. I did this partly because of the personal benefit I had received from these meditations, and partly because I believed the duties urged throughout this discourse were timely and needed to be declared and pressed upon the minds and consciences of believers, given all that is happening around us. Setting aside what others choose as their own methods and goals, I will acknowledge the two things that guide my work throughout my entire ministry. I aim to share those truths whose power I hope I have genuinely experienced in some measure, and to urge those duties which present circumstances, temptations, and other situa-

tions make especially necessary to attend to. In ministry generally, the whole counsel of God concerning the salvation of the Church through Jesus Christ must be declared; but in particular, we should not fight aimlessly — like men beating the air or shooting arrows at random without any clear target or purpose. We must know the flock we oversee, and we must carefully consider their needs, their graces, their temptations, their understanding, their strengths, and their weaknesses. When the preparation of the Word to be preached flows from a zeal for God's glory and compassion for people's souls — and when it is delivered with appropriate reverence for God whose Word it is, and with authority toward those who receive it, with a deep sense of the great account that both preachers and hearers will soon give before the judgment seat of Christ — then we may have a confident expectation of a blessed outcome. But my present purpose is simply to explain why I judged it fitting to preach and publish this brief, plain discourse on the grace and duty of being spiritually minded, given the present circumstances of most Christians. The first thing I want to point out is the world's persistent pressure to impose itself on people's minds, and the many subtle ways it possesses and fills them. If the world succeeds in filling the minds, thoughts, and affections of people with itself, it will in some cases fortify the soul against faith and obedience, and in others it will weaken all grace and put eternal life at risk.

If we love the world, the love of the Father is not in us; and when the world fills our thoughts, it will entangle our affections. First, the current state of all public affairs — along with the sense that private individuals have a stake in them — constantly occupies the thoughts of many people and has become almost the only topic

of conversation. The world is in a great commotion right now. In many places it has been torn loose from all stable foundations, and this makes people's minds dizzy with its constant changes, or disorderly as they wait for what comes next.

Thinking about these things is both permissible and unavoidable — as long as it does not overwhelm the mind through sheer volume, intensity, and urgency, leaving no room or time for spiritual matters.

As a result, people live and talk as if the world were everything, when in comparison it is nothing.

When people come to perform or attend any spiritual duty with their affections still warm and stirred up by thoughts of worldly things, it is very difficult — if not impossible — for them to stir up any grace to its proper and vigorous exercise. Unless the world's influence — its ability to insinuate itself into people's minds and fill them completely — is carefully resisted and counteracted, at least to the point where it does not reshape the mind into its own image, the grace of being spiritually minded, which is life and peace, cannot be attained or maintained.

None of us can be delivered from this snare in this season without a watchful effort to keep our minds in constant contemplation of spiritual and heavenly things, sustained by the strong attachment of our affections to them — as will become clear in the discourse that follows.

There are also abundant and clear signs that an earthly, worldly frame of spirit prevails in many who claim to follow the Christian religion — so much so that it is long past time they seriously considered how inconsistent this is with the power and spiri-

tuality of the very religion they profess. There is hardly a way in which such a frame can be shown to prevail among many — indeed, among the majority of such professing Christians — that is not already plain for everyone to see. In their habits, clothing, and attire; in their usual conversations and wasted time; in their excessive entertainment of themselves and others to the edge of excess; and in many other similar things — many show such a conformity to the world (a thing strictly forbidden) that it is hard to tell them apart from the world. These things reveal that carnal affections dominate the minds of many, and whatever may be claimed to the contrary, this is incompatible with spiritual peace. The purpose of this discourse is partly to call people away from this evil state of heart and mind — to expose its sin and danger, to direct them to the ways and means by which change can be achieved, to fill their thoughts and affections with better objects, and to press upon them that exercise of grace which is absolutely required of all believers if they desire life and peace. It may be judged as a weak effort toward achieving that end. But it cannot be denied that it has two advantages: first, that it is timely; and second, that it is sincerely intended. And if it achieves only this one result — that it moves others who have more ability and opportunity than I have to bring their efforts to bear against the world's forceful and persistent pressure to occupy the minds of professing Christians — then this labor will not have been wasted. But things have come to such a point among us that unless there is a more than ordinarily vigorous exercise of the ministry of the Word — along with other appointed means directed toward the same end — to call professing Christians back to strict mortification of sin, sincerity of life, separation from the ways of the world, heavenly-mindedness, and

delight in the contemplation of spiritual things (all of which the Gospel and the whole nature of the Christian religion require), we will lose the glory of our profession and leave it very uncertain what our eternal condition will be. The same must be said about the love of the world as it concerns the advantages and material benefits that people trust they will gain through it. This is what makes people earthly-minded and furthest from having their conversation in heaven. In pursuing this corrupt affection, many professing Christians wither, become useless and lifeless, giving no evidence that the love of God lives in them. For these and many other reasons, many Christians show themselves to be strangers to spiritual mindedness, to a life of meditation and holy contemplation of things above. Yet unless we are found in these things to a meaningful degree, no grace will thrive or flourish in us, no duty will be rightly performed, no circumstance will be sanctified or turned to profit, and we will not be properly prepared or made fit for the inheritance of the saints in light. Therefore, as was said, the purpose and scope of this discourse is to direct and stir up people to the only remedy for all these evils — the only means by which they may gain a glimpse and foretaste of eternal glory — and especially to those who are in my own condition, namely, drawing very near to departing this world. This discourse is committed to the grace of God for the benefit of the reader.

Chapter 1

ROM. viii. 6._—But to be Spiritually minded is Life and Peace.

The Words of the Text explained.

THE Expression in our Translation sounds differently from that in the Original. To be spiritually minded, say we. In the Original it is ; as that in the former part of the Verse is ; which we render to be carnally minded. In the Margin we read, the minding of the Flesh and the minding of the Spirit. And there is great Variety in the rendring of the words in all Translations both ancient and modern. Prudentia, Sapientia, Intelligentia, Mens, Cogitatio, Discretio, id quod Spiritus sapit; the Wisdom, the Understanding, the Mind, the Thought or Contrivance, the Discretion of the Spirit, that which the Spirit savours, are used to express it. All our English Translations from Tindals the first of them, have constantly used, to be spiritually minded. Neither do I know any words whereby the Emphasis of the Original, considering the design of the Apostle in the place can be better expressed. But the Meaning of the Holy Ghost in them must be further enquired into.

In the whole Verse there are two entire Propositions containing a double Antithesis, the one in their Subjects, the other in their Predicates. And this Opposition is the highest and greatest that is beneath eternal Blessedness, and Eternal Ruine.

The Opposite Subjects, are the minding of the Flesh, and the minding of the Spirit; or the being carnally minded, and spiritually minded. And these two, do constitute two States of Mankind, to the One of which every individual Person in the World does belong. And it is of the highest Concernment to the Souls of men, to know whetherof them they appertain to. As to the Qualities expressed by the Flesh and the Spirit, there may be a mixture of them in the same Persons at the same time; there is so in all that are Regenerate. For in them the Flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit lusts against the Flesh, and these are contrary, Gal. 5:17. Thus different contrary actings in the same Subject constitute not distinct States. But where either of them is predominant or has a prevalent Rule in the Soul, there it makes a different State. This Distinction of States, the Apostle expresss verse 9. But ye are not in the Fesh, but in the Spirit. Some are in the flesh; and cannot please God, verse 8. They are after the flesh, verse 5. they walk after the flesh, verse 1. they live after the flesh, verse 13. This is one State. Others are in the Spirit, verse 9. after the Spirit, verse 5. walk after the Spirit, verse 1. This is the other State. The first sort are carnally minded, the other are spiritually minded. Unto One of these does every living Man belong, he is under the ruling Conduct of the Flesh or of the Spirit; there is no middle state; though there are different Degrees in each of these as to Good and Evil.

The Difference between these two States is great, and the distance in a manner infinite, because an Eternity in Blessedness or Misery does depend upon it. And this at present is evidenced by the different Fruits and Effects of the Principles and their Operations which constitute these different States; which is expressed in the Opposition that is between the Predicates of the Proposition; For the minding of the Flesh is death; but the minding of the Spirit is Life and Peace.

I. To be carnally minded is death. Death as it is absolutely poenal, is either Spiritual or Eternal. The first of these it is formally, the other meritoriously. It is formally death spiritual; for they that are carnally minded, are dead in Trespasses and Sins, Eph. 2:1. For those who fulfill the desires of the flesh and of the mind, are by nature Children of wrath, verse 3. are penally under the power of spiritual death. They are dead in sins and the uncircumcision of the flesh, Col. 2:13. And it is death eternal, Meritoriously. For if ye live after the flesh ye shall dye, Rom. 8:13. as the Wages of Sin is death, Chapter 6:23.

The Reason why the Apostle denounces so woful a doom, so dreadful a Sentence on the carnal mind, he declares in the two next Verses. For the carnal mind is Enmity against God; for it is not subject to the Law of God, nor indeed can be; so then they that are in the flesh cannot please God. If it be thus with the Carnal mind, it is no wonder that to be carnally minded is death; it is not meet it should be any thing else. That which is Enmity against God, is under the Curse of God.

In Opposition hereto it is affirmed, that to be spiritually minded, or the minding of the Spirit, is life and peace. And these are the things which we are particularly to inquire into; Namely,

What is this minding of the Spirit; and then How it is Life and Peace.

1. The Spirit in this Context is evidently used in a double sense, as is usual where both the Holy Spirit himself and his Work on the Souls of men, are related to. (1.) The Person of the Spirit of God himself, or the Holy Ghost is intended by it, verse 9. If so be that the Spirit of God dwells in you. And so also verse 11. The Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead. He is spoken of as the principal efficient Cause of all the spiritual Mercies and Benefits here and afterwards insisted on. (2.) It is used for the Principle of spiritual Life wrought in all that are regenerate by the Holy Ghost. For that which is born of the Spirit is Spirit, Joh. 3:6.

It is most probable that the name Spirit is here used in the latter sense, not for the Spirit-himself, but for that which is born of the Spirit, the Principle of spiritual Life in them that are born of God. For it is in its Nature, Actings, Inclinations, and Operations opposed to the flesh, verse 1.4, 5; But the Flesh here intended is that inherent corrupt Principle of Depraved Nature, whence all evil Actions do proceed, and wherewith the Actions of all Evil Men are vitiated. The Opposition between them is the same with that mentioned and declared by the Apostle, Gal. 5:17, 18, &c. Wherefore the Spirit in this Place is the holy vital Principle of new Obedience wrought in the Souls of Believers by the Holy Ghost, enabling them to live to God.

2. Unto this Spirit there is ascribed, which, as we have intimated, is translated with great Variety. , is the principal Power and Act of the mind. It is its Light, Wisdom, Prudence, Knowledge, Understanding and Discretion. It is not so with respect to Speculation, or Ratiocination meerly; which is , or . But this is its

Power as it is practical, including the habitual frame and Inclination of the Affections also. It is its faculty to conceive of things with a delight in them and adherence to them, from that suitableness which it finds in them to all its Affections. Hence we translate sometimes to think, that is, to conceive and judge, Rom. 12:3. Sometimes to set the Affections, Col. 3:2. to have such an Apprehension of things as to cleave to them with our Affections. Sometimes to mind; to mind earthly things, Phil. 3:19. which includs that relish and savour which the mind finds in the things it is fixed on. No where does it design a Notional Conception of things only; but principally the engagement of the Affections to the things which the mind apprehends.

the word here used, expresss the actual exercise, of the Power of the mind before described. Wherefore the minding of the Spirit, is the actual exercise of the mind as renewed by the Holy Ghost, as furnished with a principle of spiritual life and light in its conception of spiritual things, and the setting of its Affections on them, as finding that relish and savour in them, wherewith it is pleased and satisfied.

And something we must yet further observe, to give light to this Description of the minding of the Spirit as it is here spoken of.

1. It is not spoken of absolutely as to what it is in it self, but with respect to its Power and Prevalency in us; significantly rendered, to be spiritually minded; that is, to have the mind changed and renewed by a Principle of spiritual Life and Light, so as to be continually acted and influenced thereby to thoughts and Meditations of spiritual things, from the Affections cleaving to them with delight and satisfaction. So on the contrary it is, when Men mind earthly things. From a Principle of love to them, arising

from their suitableness to their corrupt Affections, their Thoughts, Meditations and Desires are continually engaged about them. Wherefore,

2. Three things may be distinguished in the great Duty of being spiritually minded under which Notion it is here recommended to us.

1. The actual exercise of the Mind in its thoughts, Meditations and desires about things spiritual and Heavenly. So is it expressed in the Verse foregoing. They that are after the flesh, do mind the things of the flesh; they think on them, their contrivances are about them, and their desires after them. But they that are after the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. They mind them by fixing their Thoughts and Meditations upon them.

2. The Inclination, Disposition and frame of the mind, in all its Affections whereby it adheres and cleaves to spiritual things. This minding of the Spirit resides habitually in the Affections. Wherefore the of the Spirit, or the mind as renewed and acted by a spiritual Principle of light and life, is the Exercise of its Thoughts, Meditations and desires on spiritual things, proceeding from the Love and delight of its Affections in them, and engagement to them.

3. A Complacency of mind from that Gust, Relish and Savour which it finds in spiritual things, from their suitableness to its Constitution, Inclinations and desires. There is a Salt in Spiritual things, whereby they are condited and made savoury to a renewed Mind; though to others they are as the White of an Egge, that has no taste or savour in it. In this Gust and Relish lyes the sweetness and satisfaction of spiritual Life. Speculative Notions about

Spiritual things, when they are alone are drye, sapless and barren. In this Gust we taste by Experience that God is Gracious, and that the Love of Christ is better than Wine, or whatever else has the most grateful relish to a sensual Appetite. This is the proper Foundation of the Joy which is unspeakable and full of Glory.

All these things do concurr in the minding of the Spirit, or to constitute any Person spiritually minded. And although the Foundation of the whole Duty included in it, lyes in the Affections, and their immediate Adherence to spiritual things, whence the Thoughts and Meditations of the mind about them do proceed, yet I shall treat of the distinct Parts of this Duty in the Order layd down, beginning with the Exercise of our Thoughts and Meditations about them. For they being the first genuine Actings of the Mind, according to the Prevalency of Affections in it, they will make the best and most evident discovery of what nature the Spring is from whence they do arise. And I shall not need to speak distinctly to what is mentioned in the third place, concerning the Complacency of the Mind in what its Affections are fixed on, for it will fall in with sundry other things that are to be spoken to.

But before we do proceed, it is not amiss, as I suppose, to put a remark upon those important Truths, which are directly contained in the Words, proposed as the Foundation of the present Discourse. As,

1. To be spiritually minded is the great distinguishing Character of true Believers from all Unregenerate Persons. As such, is it here asserted by the Apostle. All those who are carnally minded, who are in the flesh, they are unregenerate, they are not born of God, they please him not, nor can do so, but must perish

for ever. But those who are spiritually minded, are born of God, do live to him, and shall come to the Enjoyment of him. Hereon depends the Trial and Determination of what State we do belong to.

2. Where any are Spiritually minded, there and there alone is Life and Peace. What these are, wherein they do consist, what is their Excellency and Preeminence above all things in this World, how they are the Effects and Consequents of our being spiritually minded, shall be afterwards declared.

There is neither of these Considerations, but is sufficient to demonstrate of how great Concernment to us it is to be spiritually minded, and diligently to inquire whether we are so or no.

It will therefore be no small Advantage to us, to have our Souls and Consciences always affected with, and in due Subjection to the Power of this Truth; Namely, that to be spiritually minded is Life and Peace; whence it will follow, that whatever we may think otherwise, if we are not so, we have neither of them, neither Life nor Peace. It will, I say, be of use to us, if we are affected with the Power of it. For many greatly deceive themselves in hearing the Word. They admit of Sacred Truths in their Understanding, and assent to them; but take not in the Power of them on their Consciences, nor strictly judge of their State and Condition by them, which proves their Ruine. For hereby they seem to themselves to believe, that whereof in truth they believe not one Syllable as they ought. They hear it, they understand it in the Notion of it, they assent to it, at least they do not contradict it, yea they commend it oftentimes and approve of it. But yet they believe it not. For if they did, they would judge themselves by it, and reckon on it, that it will be with them at the last day, according as things are determined therein.

Or such Persons are as the Apostle James declares, like a man beholding his natural face in a Glass; for he beholds himself and gos his ways, and straightway forgetts what manner of man he was, Jam. 1:23, 24. There is a Representation made of them, their State and Condition to them in the Word; they behold it, and conclude that it is even so with them, as the Word does declare. But immediately their minds are filled with other thoughts, acted by other Affections, taken up with other Occasions, and they forget in a moment the Representation made of themselves and their Condition. Wherefore all that I have to offer on this Subject will be utterly lost, unless a firm persuasion hereof be fixed on our minds, unless we are under the Power of it, that to be spiritually minded is life and peace; so that whatever our Light and Profession be, our Knowledge or our Duty, without this we have indeed no real Interest in Life and Peace.

These things being premised, I shall more practically open the Nature of this Duty, and what is required to this frame of spirit. To be Spiritually minded may be considered either as to the Nature and Essence of it, or as to its Degrees; for one may be so more than another, or the same Person may be more so at one time than another. In the first way it is opposed to being carnally minded, in the other to being earthly minded.

To be carnally minded is, as the Apostle speaks, Death, it is so every way; and they who are so, are dead in trespasses and sins. This is opposed to being Spiritually minded as to its Nature or Essence. Where a man as to the Substance and Being of the Grace and Duty intended is not Spiritually minded, he is carnally minded, that is, under the power of Death spiritual, and obnoxious

to death Eternal. This is the principal Foundation we proceed upon; whence we demonstrate the indispensible necessity of the frame of mind enquired after.

There are two ways wherein Men are Earthly-minded. The one is absolute, when the love of earthly things is wholly predominant in the mind. This is not formally and properly to be carnally minded, which is of a larger extent. The one Denomination is from the Root and Principle, namely, the Flesh; the other from the Object, or the things of the Earth. The latter is a branch from the former, as its root. To be earthly minded, is an operation and effect of the carnal mind in one especial way and Instance. And it is as exclusive of Life and Salvation as the Carnal mind it self, Phil. 3:19. Joh. 2:16. This therefore is opposed to the Being of Spiritual mindedness, no less than to be carnally minded, is. When there is in any a Love of earthly things that is predominant, whence a Person may be rightly denominated to be earthly minded, he is not nor can be spiritually minded at all; he has no Interest in the frame of heart and Spirit intended thereby. And thus it is evidently with the greatest part of them who are called Christians in the World, let them pretend what they will to the contrary.

Again; there is a being Earthly-minded, which consists in an inordinate Affection to the things of this World. It is that which is sinful, which ought to be mortified, yet is it not absolutely inconsistent with the Substance and Being of the Grace enquired after. Some who are really and truely spiritually minded, yet may, for a time at least, be under such an inordinate Affection to, and care about earthly things, that if not absolutely, yet comparatively, as to what they ought to be and might be, they may be justly said to be earthly minded. They are so in respect of those degrees in being

spiritually minded, which they ought to aim at, and may attain to. And where it is thus, this Grace can never thrive or flourish, it can never advance to any eminent degree.

This is the Zoar of many Professors; that little one wherein they would be spared. Such an earthly-mindedness as is wholly inconsistent with being Spiritually minded, as to the State and Condition which depends thereon, they would avoid. For this they know would be absolutely exclusive of Life and Peace; They cannot but know that such a frame is as inconsistent with Salvation, as living in the vilest sin that any man can contract the Guilt of. There are more ways of Spiritual and Eternal death than one, as well as of Natural. All that dye, have not the Plague; and all that perish eternally are not guilty of the same profligate sins. The Covetous are excluded from the Kingdom of God, no less severely than Fornicators, Idolaters, Adulterers and Thieves, Cor. 6:9, 10. But there is a Degree in being earthly minded, which they suppose their Interest, Advantages, Relations and Occasions of life do call for, which they would be a little indulged in; They may abide in such a frame without a disparagement of their Profession. And the truth is, they have too many companions to fear an especial Reflexion on themselves. The Multitude of the Guilty take away the sense and shame of the Guilt. But besides, they hope well that it is not inconsistent absolutely with being spiritually minded; Only they cannot well deny but that it is contrary to such degrees in that grace, such thriving in that Duty, as is recommended to them. They think well of others who are Spiritually minded in an eminent degree. At least they do so as to the thing it self in general; for when they come to particular Instances of this or that man, for the most part, they esteem what is beyond their own Measure to be lit-

tle better than pretence. But in general to be Spiritually minded in an eminent degree, they cannot but esteem it a thing excellent and desirable. But it is for them who are more at leasure than they are; their Circumstances and Occasions require them to satisfy themselves with an inferior measure.

To obviate such Pretences I shall insist on nothing in the Declaration of this Duty and the necessity of it, but what is incumbent on all that believe, and without which they have no Grounds to assure their Conscience before God. And at present in general I shall say, Whoever he be, who does not sincerely aim at the highest degree of being spiritually minded, which the means he enjoys would lead him to, and which the light he has received does call for; who judgs it necessary to his present Advantages, Occasions and Circumstances, to rest in such measures or degrees of it, as he cannot but know that they come short of what he ought to aim at, and so does not endeavor after Completeness in the Will of God herein, can have no satisfaction in his own mind, has no unfailing Grounds, whereon to believe that he has any thing at all of the Reality of this Grace in him. Such a Person possibly may have Life which accompanies the Essence of this Grace, but he cannot have Peace which follows on its Degree in a due Improvement. And it is to be feared, that far the greatest number of them who satisfy themselves in this Apprehension, willingly neglecting an Endeavor after the further Degrees of this Grace, and growth in this Duty, which their Light or Convictions, and the means they enjoy do suggest to them, are indeed carnally minded, and every way obnoxious to death.

Chapter 2

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Romans 8:6 — But to be spiritually minded is life and peace.

The words of the text explained.

The expression in our translation sounds different from the original Greek. We say "to be spiritually minded," but the original uses a single Greek word; similarly, the first part of the verse uses a parallel word that we render "to be carnally minded." In the margin we read "the minding of the flesh" and "the minding of the Spirit." Translators across the centuries have rendered these words in a wide variety of ways. Latin versions have used terms meaning wisdom, understanding, mind, thought, discretion, and "that which the Spirit savors." All our English translations, beginning with Tyndale's — the earliest of them — have consistently used the phrase "to be spiritually minded." I know of no words that can better express the emphasis of the original, given the apostle's purpose in the passage. But we must still inquire more deeply into what the Holy Spirit means by these words.

The whole verse contains two complete statements, each forming a double contrast — one in their subjects and the other in their results. This contrast is the greatest and most profound there is short of eternal blessedness and eternal ruin.

The contrasting subjects are "the minding of the flesh" and "the minding of the Spirit" — or being carnally minded and being spiritually minded. These two define two states of humanity, and every individual person in the world belongs to one of them. It is of the highest importance to a person's soul to know which of these two states they belong to. As for the qualities expressed by "the flesh" and "the Spirit," they can both be present in the same person at the same time — this is true of all who are regenerate. In them the flesh wars against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh, and these are contrary to each other, Galatians 5:17. These opposing forces operating within the same person do not by themselves create two distinct states. But whichever of them is dominant and holds the ruling control in a person's soul, that is what determines their state. The apostle expresses this distinction of states in verse 9: "But you are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit." Some are in the flesh and cannot please God, verse 8. They are after the flesh (verse 5), they walk after the flesh (verse 1), they live after the flesh (verse 13). This is one state. Others are in the Spirit (verse 9), after the Spirit (verse 5), they walk after the Spirit (verse 1). This is the other state. The first group are carnally minded; the other are spiritually minded. Every living person belongs to one of these — they are under the ruling direction of either the flesh or the Spirit. There is no middle ground, though there are varying degrees of good and evil within each state.

The difference between these two states is immense — the distance is almost infinite, because an eternity of blessedness or misery depends on it. This difference is evident right now in the contrasting fruits and effects that flow from the principles operating in

each state. This contrast is expressed in the opposing results stated in the verse: for the minding of the flesh is death, but the minding of the Spirit is life and peace.

First, to be carnally minded is death. Death in its full penal sense is either spiritual or eternal. The carnal mind produces the first of these directly, and the second it deserves. It is directly spiritual death, for those who are carnally minded are dead in trespasses and sins, Ephesians 2:1. Those who fulfill the desires of the flesh and of the mind are by nature children of wrath (verse 3), and are under the penalty of spiritual death. They are dead in sins and in the uncircumcision of the flesh, Colossians 2:13. And the carnal mind merits eternal death: "For if you live according to the flesh, you will die," Romans 8:13 — just as "the wages of sin is death," Romans 6:23.

The apostle explains in the next two verses why he pronounces such a dreadful verdict on the carnal mind: "Because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so, and those who are in the flesh cannot please God." Given what the carnal mind is, it is no surprise that to be carnally minded is death — it could not be anything else. Whatever is in enmity against God is under the curse of God.

In contrast, it is declared that to be spiritually minded — the minding of the Spirit — is life and peace. These are the things we need to examine carefully: What is this minding of the Spirit? And how is it life and peace?

First, the word "Spirit" in this passage is clearly used in two senses, as is common where both the Holy Spirit himself and his work in people's souls are in view. The person of God's Spirit — the Holy Ghost — is one sense, as in verse 9: "If indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you." And also verse 11: "The Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead." He is presented as the primary and efficient cause of all the spiritual blessings described here and afterward. The word is also used for the principle of spiritual life that the Holy Ghost works in all who are regenerate. "For that which is born of the Spirit is spirit," John 3:6.

It is most likely that the word "Spirit" here is used in the second sense — not for the Spirit himself, but for what is born of the Spirit: the principle of spiritual life in those who are born of God. In its nature, activity, inclinations, and operations, this principle is opposed to the flesh (verses 1, 4, 5). The flesh here refers to the inherent corrupt principle of fallen human nature, from which all evil actions proceed, and which corrupts the actions of all ungodly people. The contrast between them is the same as the one the apostle describes in Galatians 5:17-18 and following. Therefore, in this passage, "the Spirit" refers to the holy, life-giving principle of new obedience that the Holy Ghost works in the souls of believers, enabling them to live to God.

Second, the Greek word translated here with such variety refers to the primary power and act of the mind. It encompasses the mind's light, wisdom, prudence, knowledge, understanding, and discernment. This is not merely speculation or abstract reasoning. Rather, it is the mind's practical capacity — including the habitual orientation and inclination of the affections. It is the mind's ability to perceive things with delight and to hold on to

them, recognizing in them a suitableness to all its affections. This is why in some places we translate the word as "to think" — meaning to form a conception and make a judgment, Romans 12:3. In other places it is rendered "to set the affections" — Colossians 3:2 — meaning to perceive things in such a way as to hold them with the affections. In still others it is "to mind" — "to mind earthly things" (Philippians 3:19) — which includes the relish and pleasure the mind finds in the things it is focused on. Nowhere does the word denote a merely intellectual understanding of things; its primary meaning is the engagement of the affections toward the things the mind grasps.

The noun form used here describes the actual exercise of this mental power. Therefore, the minding of the Spirit is the active exercise of the mind as renewed by the Holy Ghost — equipped with a principle of spiritual life and light — in its understanding of spiritual things and the setting of its affections on them, finding in them the pleasure and satisfaction that comes from their suitableness to its renewed nature.

We need to observe a few more things to clarify this description of the minding of the Spirit as it is spoken of here.

First, this is not described in terms of what it is in itself in the abstract, but in terms of its power and dominance in us. It is significantly rendered "to be spiritually minded" — that is, to have the mind changed and renewed by a principle of spiritual life and light, so that it is continually moved and directed by that principle toward thoughts and meditations on spiritual things, with the affections clinging to those things with delight and satisfaction. The same dynamic works in the opposite direction when people mind earthly things. Out of a rooted love for earthly things — a love that

arises because those things suit their corrupt affections — their thoughts, meditations, and desires are constantly occupied with them. And so:

Second, three things can be distinguished in the great duty of being spiritually minded, as it is presented to us here.

First, the actual exercise of the mind in its thoughts, meditations, and desires about spiritual and heavenly things. This is expressed in the preceding verse: those who are after the flesh mind the things of the flesh — they think about them, their plans center on them, and their desires reach toward them. But those who are after the Spirit mind the things of the Spirit. They direct their thoughts and meditations toward those things and fix them there.

Second, the inclination, disposition, and orientation of the mind in all its affections, by which it holds fast to spiritual things. This minding of the Spirit resides habitually in the affections. Therefore, the minding of the Spirit — the mind as renewed and moved by a spiritual principle of light and life — is the exercise of its thoughts, meditations, and desires on spiritual things, flowing from the love and delight of its affections in those things and its commitment to them.

Chapter 3

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A closer look at the nature of this grace and duty of being spiritually minded. How it shows itself in our thoughts.

Having laid out the general concerns of the frame of mind commended to us, we can now inquire more specifically into its nature, working through the description already given in distinct points. We will pursue two goals together: first, to show what spiritual-mindedness is and what it consists of; and second, to show how it makes itself evident, so that we can form a sound judgment about whether it is truly in us or not. We will pay no attention to those who neglect or despise these things under any pretext whatsoever. For this is the Word by which we will all soon be judged: to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace.

Thoughts and meditations — as they flow from spiritual affections — are the first things in which spiritual-mindedness consists and by which it makes itself known. Our thoughts are like the blossoms on a tree in spring. You can see a tree in spring completely covered with blossoms, with nothing else visible. Many of those blossoms fall off and come to nothing. Often where there are the most blossoms, there is the least fruit. Yet there is no fruit of any

kind — good or bad — that does not come from some of those blossoms. The mind of a person is covered with thoughts the way a tree is covered with blossoms. Most thoughts fall away, fade, and come to nothing — they end in emptiness. Sometimes where the mind produces the most thoughts, it produces the least fruit; the mind's energy is spent and consumed in them. Yet there is no fruit we actually produce — whether good or bad — that does not come from some of these thoughts. Therefore, thoughts ordinarily give the best and most reliable measure of the condition of our minds and hearts. "As a man thinks in his heart, so is he" — Proverbs 23:7. In cases of intense or violent temptation, the true state of a person's heart cannot be judged by the number of thoughts focused on a particular object. Whether those thoughts come from Satan's suggestions or from inner darkness, distress, and horror, they press themselves so persistently on the mind that all its thoughts become caught up in them. It is like a man caught in a storm at sea — his thoughts run in a completely different direction than they would if he were safe and going about his normal affairs. But ordinarily, voluntary thoughts are the best measure and indicator of the condition of our minds. Just as the nature of the soil is judged by the grass it produces, so the disposition of the heart is revealed by the dominant voluntary thoughts. These thoughts are the soul's primary activity — the way the heart pours out and expends the treasure it holds; they are the first waters that rise and flow from the spring. Every person's heart is his treasury, and the treasure within it is either good or evil, as our Savior tells us. There is both a good and a bad treasure of the heart — but whatever a person has, whether good or evil, it is there. This treasure is continually opening and spending itself, though it can never be exhausted. For

it has a source in either nature or grace, which no amount of spending can diminish — in fact, it grows stronger through use. The more you spend of the treasure in your heart of any kind, the more that kind of treasure will increase. Whether good or evil, it grows through exercise and expression. And the primary way the heart pours itself out is through the thoughts of the mind. If the heart is evil, thoughts are for the most part vain, filthy, corrupt, wicked, and foolish; if the heart is under the power of a principle of grace and therefore contains a good treasure, it pours itself out in thoughts suited to its nature and in keeping with its inclinations.

So these thoughts give the best measure of the condition of our minds and hearts. I mean voluntary thoughts — the ones the mind naturally gravitates toward, is inclined to, and ordinarily settles into when left to itself. People may have many thoughts about the demands of their work and the business of daily life, which still give no true indication of the inner state of their hearts. Similarly, those whose calling is to study Scripture and the things revealed in it, and to preach them to others, cannot help having many thoughts about spiritual things — yet they may be, and often are, as far from being spiritually minded as anyone. They may be compelled by their work to think about spiritual things morning and evening, yet their minds may be in no way made spiritual by this. It would do all of us who are preachers well to examine ourselves honestly on this point. The same is true of those who make it a habit to read Scripture — perhaps so many chapters every day. Despite diligently completing their routine, they may be furthest from being spiritually minded. See Ezekiel 33:31. But there is a certain pattern and course of thoughts that people ordinarily turn to when not occupied with immediate concerns. If these thoughts

are vain, foolish, proud, ambitious, sensual, or corrupt, such is the mind and its true condition. If they are holy, spiritual, and heavenly, the condition of the mind may be judged accordingly. But these things need to be explained more fully.

The defining description of the condition of people's minds in an unregenerate state — before the renewal of their natures — is that "every intent of the thoughts of their hearts was only evil continually," Genesis 6:5. They are constantly manufacturing fantasies and imaginations in their hearts, stamping them into thoughts that are vain, foolish, and wicked. All other thoughts in them are occasional; these are the natural and genuine product of their hearts. This is why the clearest and sometimes the earliest evidence of the bottomless evil treasure of filth, foolishness, and wickedness that is in the human heart by nature is the countless multitude of evil imaginations that are forged within it and thrust out every day. So the wicked are described as like the restless sea, whose waters churn up mud and dirt, Isaiah 57:20. There is a fullness of evil in their hearts, like the volume of water in the sea. This fullness is stirred and kept in constant motion by their lusts and violent desires. Hence the mud and filth of evil thoughts are constantly churned up within them.

It is therefore clear that the dominance of voluntary thoughts is the best and most reliable indicator of the inner condition and state of the mind. If this is true on the one side — for the carnal mind — it is equally true on the other side for the spiritual. Therefore, being spiritually minded means, first of all, that the general pattern and stream of thoughts we naturally return to —

the thoughts we welcome because they suit our affections — are about spiritual things. This is what the minding of the Spirit consists of.

But since all people — unless they are terribly corrupt — have some thoughts about spiritual things, and yet we know not everyone is spiritually minded, we need to consider what is required of such thoughts for them to be a reliable indicator of the state of our minds. Three things are required.

First, they must be natural — arising from within ourselves, not prompted by outward occasions. The psalmist mentions the inward thoughts of people, Psalms 49:11 and 64:6. Since all thoughts are inward acts of the mind, this expression might seem to make no real distinction. But the difference is not in the formal nature of the thoughts, but in their causes, origins, and occasions. Inward thoughts are those that arise purely and solely from a person's own inner principles, dispositions, and inclinations — not suggested or triggered by any external object. In wicked people, such thoughts are the stirrings of their lusts, by which they entice and seduce themselves, James 1:14. Their lusts generate thoughts that lead and encourage them to make provision for the flesh. These are their inward thoughts. Thoughts that constitute the minding of the Spirit are of the same kind — they are the first natural outflow and genuine action of the habitual disposition of the mind and soul.

Consider covetous people: their covetousness produces two kinds of thoughts. First, thoughts triggered by outward objects and opportunities. This is what happened with Achan, Joshua 7:21: "When I saw among the spoil a beautiful mantle from Shinar and two hundred shekels of silver and a bar of gold, then I coveted them." The sight of these things, along with the opportunity to take

them, stirred up covetous thoughts and desires in him. This happens to others every day, when their circumstances bring them into contact with the objects of their lusts. Some may be surprised into thoughts by such objects even when their minds are not habitually inclined that way. That is why, when we recognize such objects, it is our duty to avoid them. But people of the same covetous type also have thoughts of this kind that arise entirely from within themselves — from their own dispositions and inclinations, without any outward provocation. "The vile person speaks villainy, and his heart works iniquity," Isaiah 32:6. He does this just as "the generous person devises generous things" (verse 8) — out of his own disposition and inclination, he is scheming in his thoughts about how to act on them. Similarly, an impure person has two kinds of thoughts regarding the gratification of his lusts. First, those triggered in his mind by external objects. Stage plays, wild parties, dances, and the company of shameless people and those with corrupt speech all contribute their corrupting influence. To avoid this snare, Job made a covenant with his eyes, Job 31:1. And our Savior gives that pointed statement about the evil of it in Matthew 5:28. But an impure person also has a habitual spring of these thoughts within himself, constantly drawing and disposing him toward them. This is why the apostle Peter says that such people have eyes full of adultery that never stop sinning, 2 Peter 2:14. Their own affections make them restless in their thoughts and schemes about sin. The same is true of those given to excess in wine or strong drink. Pleasing thoughts are stirred up in them by the object of their craving when it is set before them. This is why Solomon advises against the very occasion of them, Proverbs 23:31. But it is their own habitual disposition that carries them to

pleasing thoughts about satisfying their lusts, as he describes in verses 34-35. The same pattern holds in other cases. Thoughts of this latter kind — those arising from within — are a person's inward thoughts; and it is this kind of thought about spiritual things that marks someone as spiritually minded.

The psalmist says in Psalm 45:1: "My heart is stirred by a noble theme; I address my verses to the King." He was meditating on spiritual things — on the person and kingdom of Christ. His heart was bubbling up (as the original puts it) a noble theme. The image is drawn from a lively spring of living water: out of its own fullness and vitality, it bubbles up the water that flows and runs from it. This is how it is with the thoughts of those who are spiritually minded. There is a living fullness of spiritual things in their minds and affections that wells up into holy thoughts about them.

This is the basis for our Savior's great description of spiritual life. It is "a well of water springing up to eternal life," John 4:14. The Spirit with His graces, dwelling in the heart of a believer, is a well of living water. And it is not like an ordinary well that, even though it contains living water, does not send out its refreshing water by itself without some instrument or effort to draw it up. Our Savior made this point in response to the woman's objection when He mentioned giving living water: "Sir, You have nothing to draw with and the well is deep; where then do You get that living water?" (verse 11). "True," He says in effect, "that is the nature of dead, earthly things — they are of no use unless you have instruments, ropes, and buckets to draw them up. But the living water I give is of a different nature. It is not water held in a pit or cistern outside of you, from which it must be drawn; it is within you — not dead and idle, but continually springing up for the use and refresh-

ment of those who have it." This is exactly how the principle of the new creature — the new nature, the Spirit and His graces in the hearts of believers — works. Of itself and from itself, without any external prompting, it inclines and moves the whole soul toward spiritual activity that tends toward eternal life. Such are the thoughts of those who are spiritually minded. They arise from the inward principle, inclination, and disposition of the soul — they are the welling-up of this spring of living water; they are the minding of the Spirit.

Our Savior describes this in Matthew 12:35: "The good man brings out of his good treasure what is good." First the man must be good — as He said just before, make the tree good, otherwise the fruit cannot be good (verse 33). A person is made good through grace in the transformation and renewal of his nature, for in ourselves we are evil in every way. This good man has a treasure in his heart. So does every person, as the next words show: "the evil man brings out of his evil treasure." This is the great difference between people in this world. Every person has a treasure in his heart — that is, a prevailing, inexhaustible principle that drives all his actions and operations. But in some this treasure is good; in others it is evil. That is, the prevailing principle in the heart — which carries along with it all its dispositions and inclinations — is in some people good and gracious, and in others it is evil. Out of this good treasure, a good person brings forth good things. The first opening of it, the first bringing it to light, happens through these thoughts. The thoughts that naturally arise out of the heart are of the same nature as the treasure within it. If the thoughts that naturally spring up in us are mostly vain, foolish, sensual, earthly, and self-centered, then such is the treasure in our hearts — and such are

we. But where thoughts that naturally flow from the heart's treasure are spiritual and holy, this is evidence that we are spiritually minded.

Where this is not true of our thoughts, they give no such evidence. People may have many thoughts about spiritual things — and have them often — that do not arise from this inner principle, but can be traced to two other causes: inward compulsion, or outward occasions.

First, what might be called inward compulsion. This comes through conviction of sin. Conviction places a kind of force on the mind — an impression that causes it to act contrary to its own habitual disposition and inclination. Water naturally flows downward. But apply a pump to it that compresses it and forces it through an opening, and it will shoot upward vigorously, as if that were its natural direction. The moment the force stops, it immediately returns to its own natural tendency and flows back down. This is often how it is with people's thoughts. Their thoughts are earthly — their natural course is downward, toward the earth and earthly things. But when an effective conviction presses on the mind, it forces the thoughts upward toward heavenly things. The person may think about them much and often, as if that were the mind's natural direction. But the moment the power of conviction fades or passes — so that the mind no longer feels its force and pressure — the thoughts return to their old pattern, just as water flows back down.

This condition is vividly described in Psalm 78:35-37: "And they remembered that God was their rock, and the Most High God their Redeemer. But they deceived Him with their mouth and lied to Him with their tongue. For their heart was not steadfast toward

Him, nor were they faithful in His covenant." People in trouble, danger, sickness, fear of death, or under genuine conviction of sin from the preaching of the Word will try to think and meditate on spiritual things. They may even be greatly troubled that they cannot think about them more, and feel it is foolish to think about anything else. But as relief and deliverance approach, these thoughts fade and disappear. The mind will no longer be compelled to make room for them. The prophet gives the reason for this in Jeremiah 13:23: "Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard his spots? Then you also can do good who are accustomed to doing evil." They have a different habit, have been trained in a different course — the mind's inclination runs another way — and they will not tend toward spiritual things any longer than the impression of conviction is upon them.

And it is a sign of very poor spiritual progress — of a very low and weak degree of this frame of heart and of spiritual-mindedness — when our thoughts of spiritual things rise and fall according to renewed external convictions. If when we are under God's correction in our own lives or in our relationships, or when facing fears of death, and at the same time experience some renewed conviction of sin — whether in things we have done or duties we have neglected — we then try to be more spiritually minded through steadier thoughts on spiritual things (which we have been failing at), and yet these thoughts fade as the convictions themselves ease or are removed — then we have attained a very low degree of this grace, if we have any share in it at all.

Water that rises and flows from a living spring runs steadily and constantly, unless blocked or diverted by some powerful obstacle; but water from a thunderstorm runs fast and furiously for a

time, then quickly dries up. Spiritual thoughts that arise from a prevailing internal principle of grace in the heart are steady and constant in the same way — uninterrupted unless a temptation temporarily breaks their flow. But those thoughts stirred up by the thunder of conviction, however strong their current may be for a season, quickly dry up and disappear entirely.

Second, spiritual thoughts may arise in the minds of those who are not spiritually minded through outward means and occasions. I mean means that are genuinely useful and appointed by God for this very purpose among others — to generate and stir up holy thoughts and affections in us. But there is a difference in how they operate. In some people, these means excite the inward principle of the mind to act in holy thoughts according to its own sanctified disposition and dominant affections. This is their proper end and use. In others, they only incidentally suggest such thoughts, thoughts that spring from mere intellectual engagement with the ideas presented. Even so, these means serve an important purpose in people's souls in this second way — though thoughts produced this way do not prove that a person is spiritually minded. When you cultivate and fertilize good land and it produces abundant crops, this is evidence that the soil itself is good and fertile — the cultivation merely provides the occasion and advantage for the soil to express its own fruit-bearing power. But if you pile large amounts of manure on a field and it produces only a handful of growth here and there where the fertilizer lay, you would conclude the soil is barren — it produces nothing by itself. The means we will discuss are like cultivating fertile soil — they help it bear fruit by drawing out its own productive power. They stir up holy affections toward holy thoughts and desires. But in others whose hearts

are barren, these means only occasionally produce a few spiritual thoughts here and there, which gives no evidence of a gracious heart or spirit. But because this is a matter of great importance, it will be handled separately on its own.

And, which is yet more astonishable, men abide in the Duty of Prayer, and that in constancy, in their Families, and otherwise, and yet live in known sins. Whatever spiritual thoughts such men have in and by their Prayers, they are not spiritually minded. Shall we now say that all such Persons are gross Hypocrites; such as know they do but mock God and Man; know that they have not Desires nor Aims after the things which they mention in their own Prayers; but do these things either for some corrupt end, or at best to satisfy their Convictions? Could we thus resolve, the whole difficulty of the Case were taken off. For such double minded Men have no Reason to think that they shall receive any thing of the Lord, as James speaks, Chapter 1:7. Indeed they do not. They never Act Faith with reference to their own Prayers. But it is not so with all of this sort. Some judge themselves Sincere, and in good Earnest in their Prayers, not without some Hopes and Expectations of Success. I will not say of all such Persons, that they are among the Number of them concerning whom the Wisdom of God says, Because I called to them, and they refused; they shall call on me, but I will not answer, they shall seek me early, and shall not find me. Prov. 1:18, 19, 20, 21. And although we may say to such Persons in general, Either leave your Sinning, or leave your Praying, from Psal. 50:16, 17. and that with respect to present Scandal, and certain Miscarriage in the End if both be continued in; yet in particular I would not advise any such Person to leave off his Praying untill he had left his Sin. This were to advise a sick

Man to use no Remedies untill he were well cured. Who knows but that the Holy Spirit who works when and how he pleass, may take a Time to Animate these lifeless Prayers, and make them a means of Deliverance from the Power of this Sin. In the mean time the Fault and Guilt is wholly their own, who have effected a Consistency between a way in Sinning and a Course in Praying. And it ariss from hence, that they have never laboured to fill up their Requests with Grace. What there has been of Earnestness or Diligence in them, has been from a Force put upon them by their Convictions and Fears. For no man was ever absolutely prevailed on by Sin, who prayed for Deliverance according to the mind of God. Every Praying man that perishs was an Hypocrite. The Faithfulness of God in his Promises will not allow us to Judge otherwise. Wherefore the Thoughts that such Persons have of Spiritual things even in their Duties, do not arise from within, nor are a natural Emanation of the Frames of their Hearts and Affections.

3. Earnestness and appearing Fervency in Prayer, as to the outward delivery of the Words of it, yea though the mind be so affected as to contribute much thereunto, will not of themselves prove, that the Thoughts of men therein do arise from an Internal Spring of Grace. There is a Fervency of Spirit in Prayer, that is one of the best Properties of it, being an earnest Acting of Love, Faith and Desire. But there is a Fervency wherewith the mind it self may be affected, that may arise from other Causes.

1. It may do so from the ingagement of Natural Affections to the Object of their Prayer, or the things Prayed for. Men may be mighty Earnest and Intent in their minds, in praying for a Dear Relation, or for Deliverance from Eminent Troubles, or Imminent

Dangers; and yet all this Fervour arise from the vehement Actings of Natural Affections about the things prayed for, excited in an especial manner by the present Duty. Hence God calls the earnest cryes of some for Temporal things, not a Crying to him, but an Howling, Hosea 7:14. That is, the cry of hungry Ravenous Beasts, that would be satisfied.

2. Sometimes it ariss from the sharpness of Convictions, which will make men even Roar in their Prayers for disquietment of Heart. And this may be where there is no true Grace as yet received, nor it may be ever will be so. For the perplexing Work of Convictions, goes before real Conversion; and as it producs many other Effects and Changes in the mind, so it may do this of great Fervency in Vocal Prayers, especially if it be accompanied with outward Afflictions, Pains or Troubles. Psal. 78:34, 35.

3. Oftentimes the Mind and Affections are very little concerned in that Fervour and Earnestness which appear in the outward Performance of the Duty. But in the exercise of Gifts and through their own utterance, men put their Natural Affections into such an Agitation, as shall carry them out into a great Vehemence in their Expressions. It has been so with sundry Persons, who have been discovered to be Rotten Hypocrites, and have afterwards turned Cursed Apostates. Wherefore all these things may be, where there is no gracious Spring, or Vital Principle, Acting it self from within in Spiritual Thoughts.

Some it may be will design an Advantage by their Conceptions to the Interest of Prophaneness and Scoffing. For if there may be these evils under the Exercise of the Gift of Prayer, both in Constancy and with Fervency; if there may be a total want of the Exercise of all true Grace with it and under it; then it may be all

that is pretended of this Gift and its Use, is but Hypocrisie and Talk. But I say, (1.) It may be as well pretended, that because the Sun shining on a Dung-hill, does occasion offensive and noisom Steams, therefore all that is pretended of its Influence on Spices and Flowers, causing them to give out their Fragrancy, is utterly false. No man ever thought that Spiritual Gifts did change, or renew the Minds and Natures of Men; where they are alone they only help and assist to the useful Exercise of Natural Faculties and Powers. And therefore where the Heart is not savingly renewed, no Gifts can stir up a saving Exercise of Faith. But where it is so, they are a means to cause the Savour of it to flow forth. (2.) Be it so that there may be some Evils found under the Exercise of the Gift of Prayer, what remedy for them may be proposed? Is it that men should Renounce their use of it, and betake themselves to the Reading of Prayers only? (1.) The same may be said of all Spiritual Gifts whatever, for they are all of them liable to Abuse. And shall we reject all the Powers of the World to come, the whole complexe of Gospel Gifts, for the Commuication whereof the Lord Christ has promised to continue his Spirit with his Church to the end of the World, because by some they are abused? (2.) Not only the same, but far greater evils may be found in and under the Reading of Prayers, which needs no further Demonstration than what it gives of it self every Day. (3.) It is hard to understand, how any benefit at all can accrue to any by this Relief, when the Advantages of the other way are evident.

Wherefore the Inquiry remains, How we may know to our own satisfaction, that the Thoughts we have of Spiritual things in the Duty of Prayer, are from Internal fountain of Grace, and so are an

evidence that we are Spiritually minded, whereto all these things do tend. Some few things I shall offer towards Satisfaction herein.

1. I take it for granted on the Evidence before given, that Persons who have any Spiritual Light, and will diligently Examine and Try their own Hearts, will be able to discern what real Actings of Faith, of Love, and Delight in God, there are in their Duties; and consequently what is the Spring of their Spiritual Thoughts. In general we are assured, that he that believs, has the Witness in himself. Joh. 5:10. Sincere Faith will be its own Evidence. And where there are Sincere Actings of Faith, they will evidence themselves, if we try all things impartially by the Word. But if men do, as for the most part they do, content themselves with the Performance of any Duty, without an Examination of their Principles, Frames and Actings of Grace in them, it is no wonder if they walk in all Uncertainty.

2. When the Soul finds a sweet Spiritual Complacency in and after its Duties, it is an Evidence that Grace has been acted in its Spiritual Thoughts and Desires. Jer. 31. The Prophet receivs a long gracious Message from God, filled up with Excellent Promises and Pathetical Exhortations to the Church. The whole is as it were summed up in the close of it. Verse 25. For I have satiated the weary Soul, and I have replenished every sorrowful Soul. Whereon the Prophet adds, Vpon this I awaked, and beheld, and my Sleep was sweet to me. God's gracious Message had so composed his spirits, and freed his mind from Trouble, as that he was at quiet Repose in himself, like a man asleep. But after the end of it, he stirrs up himself to a Review and Consideration of what had been spoken to him: I awaked and beheld, or I stirred up my self, and considered what had been delivered to me; And saith he, my Sleep

was sweet to me; I found a gracious Complacency in, and Refreshment to my Soul, from what I had heard and received. So is it oftentimes with a Soul that has had real Communion with God in the Duty of Prayer. It finds it self both in it, and afterwards when it is awakened to the consideration of it, spiritually refreshed, it is sweet to him.

This holy Complacency, this Rest and sweet Repose of mind, is the Foundation of the Delight of Believers in this Duty. They do not pray only because it is their Duty so to do, nor yet because they stand in need of it, so as that they cannot live without it, but they have delight in it; and to keep them from it, is all one as to keep them from their daily food and refreshment. Now we can have no delight in any thing but what we have found some Sweetness, Rest and Complacency in. Without any such Experience we may do or use any thing, but cannot do it with delight. And it ariss (1.) From the approach that is made to God therein. It is in its own Nature an Access to God on a Throne of Grace. Ephes. 2:18. Heb. 10:19, 20. And when this Access is Animated by the Actings of Grace, the Soul has a Spiritual Experience of a nearness in that Approach. Now God is the Fountain and Center of all Spiritual Refreshment, Rest and Complacency: And in such an Access to him, there is a refreshing Taste of them Communicated to the Soul. Psal. 36:7, 8, 9. How excellent is your Loving kindness, O God! therefore the children of men put their Trust under the shadow of your Wings. They shall be abundantly satisfied with the Fatness of your house: and you shalt make them Drink of the River of your pleasures. For with you is the fountain of Life: in your Light we shall see Light. God is proposed in the Excellency of his Loving Kindness, which is comprehensive of his Goodness, Grace and Mercy. And so is he also as

the Spring of Life and Light, all Spiritual Powers and Joyes. Those that believe, are described by their Trust under the shadow of his Wings. In his Worship, the Fatnesse of his House, they make their Approaches to him. And the Fruit hereof is, that he makes them to Drink of the River of his Pleasures, the satisfying, refreshing Streams of his Grace and Goodness; they approach to him as to the Fountain of Life, so as to Drink of that Fountain, in renewed Communications of Life and Grace; and in the Light of God, the Light of his Countenance, to see Light, in satisfying Joy. In these things does consist, and from them does arise that Spiritual Complacency which the Souls of Believers do find in their Duties. (2.) From the due Exercise of Faith, Love and Delight, the Graces wherein the Life of the new Creature does principally consist. There is a suitableness to our Natural Constitution, and a secret Complacency of our Natures in the proper Actings of Life Natural, for its own Preservation and Encrease. There is so in our Spiritual Constitution, in the proper Actings of the Powers of our Spiritual Life to its Preservation and Encrease. These Graces in their due Exercise, do Compose and Refresh the mind, as those which are Perfective of its State, which quell and cast out whatever troubles it. Thence a blessed Satisfaction and Complacency befalls the Soul. Herein he that believs has the witness in himself. Besides, Faith and Love are never really Acted on Christ, but they prepare and make meet the Soul to receive Communications of Love and Grace from him; which it never fails of, although it be not always sensible thereof. (3.) From the Testimony of Conscience, bearing witness to our sincerity, both in Aims, Ends and Performances of the Duty. Hence a gracious Repose of Mind and great Satisfactoriness does ensue.

If we have no Experience of these things, it is evident that we walk at Random in the best of our Duties; For they are among the principal things that we do or ought to Pray for. And if we have not Experience of the Effects of our Prayers in our Hearts, we neither have advantage by them, nor give Glory to God in them.

But yet here, as in most other Spiritual things, one of the worst of Vices is ready to impose it self in the room and place of the best of our Graces. And this is, Self-pleasing in the Performance of the Duty. This instead of a Grace steeped in Humility, as all true Grace is, is a vile effect of Spiritual Pride, or the offering of a Sacrifice to our own Net and Drag. It is a glorying in the Flesh; for whatever of Self any does glory in, it is but Flesh. When men have had enlargements in their Expressions, and especially when they apprehend that others are satisfied or affected therewith, they are apt to have a secret Self-pleasing in what they have done, which before they are aware turns into Pride and a noxious Elation of mind. The same may befall men in their most Secret Duties, performed outwardly by the Aid of Spiritual Gifts. But this is most remote from and contrary to that Spiritual Complacency in Duty which we speak of, which yet it will pretend to, untill it be diligently Examined. The Language of this Spiritual Complacency is, I will go in the strength of the Lord God, I will make mention of your Righteousness, of yours only, Psal. 71:16. That of Spiritual Pride is; God I thank you that I have done thus and thus; as it was expressed by the Pharisee. That is in God alone, this is in Self. That draws forth the Savour of all Graces: this immediately covers and buries them all, if there be any in the Sul. That fills the Soul eminently with Humility and Self-abasement; this with a lifting up of the mind, and Proud Self-conceit. That casts out all Remembrance

of what we have done our selves, retaining only a sense of what we have received from God, of the impressions of his Love and Grace. This blots out all Remembrance of what we have freely received from God, and retains only what we have done our selves. Wherever it is, there is no due sense either of the Greatness or Goodness of God.

Some it may be will say, that if it be so, they for their parts are cut off. They have no experience of any such Spiritual rest and complacency in God in or after their Prayers. At the best they begin them with tears and end them in sorrow; and sometimes they know not what is become of them, but fear that God is not glorified by them, nor their own souls bettered.

I answer, (1.) There is great Spiritual Refreshment in that Godly sorrow which is at work in our Prayers. Where the Holy Ghost is a Spirit of Grace and Supplication he causs Mourning, and in that Mourning there is Joy. (2.) The secret Encouragement which we receive by praying, to adhere to God constantly in Prayer, ariss from some experience of this Holy Complacency, though we have not a sensible evidence of it. (3.) Perhaps some of them who make this complaint, if they would awaken and consider, will find that their souls, at least sometimes, have been thus refreshed, and brought to an holy Rest in God. (4.) Then shall you know the Lord, if you follow on to know him. Abide in seeking after this Complacency and satisfaction in God, and you shall attain it.

3. It is a sure Evidence that our Thoughts of Spiritual things in our Supplications are from an internal Spring of Grace, and are not meerly occasioned by the Duty it self, when we find the daily fruit

and advantage of them; especially in the preservation of our Souls in an holy, humble watchfull frame.

Innumerable are the Advantages, Benefits and Effects of Prayer; which are commonly spoken to. Growth in Grace and Consolation is the substance of them. Where there is continuance in Prayer, there will be Spiritual Growth in some proportion. For men to be Earnest in Prayer and Thriftless in Grace, is a certain Indication of prevalent corruptions, and want of being Spiritually Minded in Prayer it self. If a man eats his daily food, let him eat never so much, or so often, if he be not nourished by it, his Body is under the Power of prevalent distempers. And so is his Spiritual Constitution, who thrivs not in the use of the food of the New Creature. But that which I fix upon with respect to the present inquiry, is the Frame that it preserves the soul in. It will keep it humble and upon a diligent watch as to it's dispositions and actings. He who prays as he ought, will endeavor to live as he prayes. This none can do who does not with diligence keep his heart to the things he has prayed about. To pray earnestly and live carelesly, is to proclaim that a man is not Spiritually minded in his prayer. Hereby then we shall know what is the Spring of those spiritual Thoughts, which our minds are exercised withall in our supplications. If they are influenced to a constant daily watch for the preservation of that frame of Spirit, those dispositions and Inclinations to spiritual things which we pray for, they are from an internal Spring of Grace. If there be generally an unsuitableness in our minds to what we seem to contend for in our Prayers, the Gift may be in exercise, but the Grace is wanting. If a man be every day on the Exchange, and there talks diligently and earnestly about Merchandize and the Affairs of Trade, but when he comes home

thinks no more of them, because indeed he has nothing to do, no interest in them, he may be a very poor man notwithstanding his pretences. And he may be spiritually very poor who is on occasions fervent in prayer, if when he retires to himself, he is not carefull and diligent about the matter of it.

4. When Spiritual Affections and due preparation of heart to the Duty do excite and animate the Gift of Prayer, and not the Gift make impressions on the Affections, then are we Spiritually Minded therein. Gifts are Servants not Rulers in the Mind; are bestowed on us to be serviceable to Grace, not to lead it, but to follow it, and to be ready with their Assistance on its exercise. For the most part where they lead all, they are all alone. This is the natural order of these things. Grace habitually inclins and disposs the heart to this Duty. Providence and Rule gives the occasions for its excercise; Sense of Duty calls for preparation. Grace coming into actual exercise, Gifts come in with their Assistance. If they lead all, all is out of order. It may be otherwise sometimes. A Person indispos'd and lifeless, ingaging into Prayer in a way of Obedience, upon conviction of Duty, may in and by the Gift have his Affections excited, and Graces engaged to its proper Work. It may be so, I say; but let men take heed how they trust to this Order and Method. For where it is so, there may be little or nothing of the Exercise of true Grace in all their fervour and Commotion of Affections. But when the genuine Actings of Faith, Love, holy Reverence and gracious Desires, do stir up the Gift to its Exercise, calling in its assistance to the expression of themselves; then are the Heart and Mind in their proper Order.

5. It is so when other Duties of Religion are equally regarded and attended to with Prayer it self. He, all whose Religion lyes in Prayer and Hearing, has none at all. God has an equal respect to all other Duties, and so must we have also. So is it expressed as to the Instance of Alms; Acts 10:31. And James placs all Religion herein, because there is none without it; Jam. 1:27. I shall not value his Prayers at all, be he never so earnest and frequent in them, who gives not Alms according to his Ability. And this in an especial manner is required of us who are Ministers; that we be not like an hand set up in cross Ways, directing others which way to go, but staying behind it self.

This digression about the Rise and Spring of Spiritual Thoughts in Prayer, I judged not unnecessary, in such a time and season wherein we ought to be very jealous, lest Gifts impose themselves in the room of Grace, and be careful that they are employed only to their proper End, which is to be serviceable to Grace in its Exercise, and not otherwise.

3. There is another Occasion of Thoughts of spiritual things, when they do not spring from a living Principle within, and so are no evidence of being spiritually minded. And this is the Discourse of others. They that fear the Lord will be speaking one to another, of the things wherein, his Glory is concerned, Mal. 3:16. To declare the Righteousness, the Glory of God, is the Delight of his Saints. Psal. 145. 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8. Great is the Lord, and greatly to be Praised, and his Greatness is unsearchable. One Generation shall praise your Works to another, and shall declare your mighty Works. I will speak of the Glorious honor of your Majesty, and of your wondrous Works. And men shall speak of the might of your terrible Acts; and I will declare your Greatness. They shall abun-

dantly utter the memory of your great Goodness, and shall sing of your Righteousness. The Lord is gracious and full of Compassion, slow to Anger and of great Mercy. And accordingly there are some who are ready on all occasions to be speaking or making mention of things Divine, Spiritual and Holy, and it is to be wished that there were more of them. All the flagitious sins that the World is filled withall, are not a greater evidence of the Degeneracy of Christian Religion, than this is, that it is grown unusual, yea a shame or scorn for men to speak together of the things of God. It was not so when Religion was in its primitive Power and Glory; nor is it so with them who really fear God, and are sensible of their Duty. Some I say there are who embrace all occasions of Spiritual Communication. Those with whom they do converse, if they are not Profligate, if they have any spiritual Light, cannot but so far comply with what they say, as to think of the things spoken which are spiritual. Oft times the Track and Course of mens thoughts, lye so out of the way, are so contrary to such things, that they seem strange to them, they give them no Entertainment. You do but cross their way with such Discourses, whereon they stand still a little and so pass on. Even the Countenances of some men will change hereon, and they betake themselves to an unsatisfied silence, untill they can divert to other things. Some will make such replies of empty words, as shall evidence their Hearts to be far enough estranged from the things proposed to them. But with others, such occasional Discourses will make such Impressions on their minds, as to stir up present thoughts of Spiritual things. But though frequent occasions hereof may be renewed, yet will such Thoughts give no evidence that any man is spiritually minded. For they are not genuine, from an internal Spring of Grace.

From these causes it is, that the Thoughts of Spiritual Things are with many, as Guests that come into an Inn, and not like Children that dwell in the House. They enter occasionally, and then there is a great stir about them, to provide meet entertainment for them. Within a while they are disposed of, and so depart to their own occasions, being neither lookt nor enquired after any more. Things of another nature are attended to; New Occasions bring in new Guests for a season. Children are owned in the House, are missed if they are out of the way, and have their daily Provision constantly made for them. So is it with these occasional Thoughts about Spiritual things. By one means or other they enter into the mind, and there are entertained for a season. On a sudden they depart, and men hear of them no more. But those that are Natural and Genuine, arising from a living spring of Grace in the Heart, disposing the mind to them, are as the Children of the House; They are expected in their places and at their seasons. If they are missing, they are enquired after. The Heart calls it self to an Account whence it is that it has been so long without them, and calls them over into its wonted converse with them.

Chapter 4

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Outward means and occasions of thoughts about spiritual things that do not prove a person to be spiritually minded. The preaching of the Word. The exercise of gifts. Prayer. How we can know whether our thoughts about spiritual things during prayer are truly spiritual thoughts that prove we are spiritually minded.

First, one such means is the preaching of the Word itself. The Gospels record that many people heard it gladly, received it with joy, and did many things willingly in response to its preaching. We see the same thing happening with many people every day. None of this can occur without many thoughts in such people's minds about the spiritual content of the Word. For such responses are the effects of such thoughts, and once stirred up in the mind, they produce more thoughts of the same kind. Yet those the Gospels describe in this way were all hypocrites — they were never spiritually minded.

Our Savior explains the reason for this failure in Matthew 13:20-21: "The one on whom seed was sown on the rocky places, this is the man who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; yet he has no firm root in himself, but is only temporary."

The good thoughts such people have do not arise from any principle within themselves. Neither their affections nor their thoughts about these things have any inner root from which to grow. This is how it is with many who live under the present preaching of the Gospel. Spiritual thoughts are continually suggested to them, and they stay with those thoughts to varying degrees depending on how deeply they are affected. I am not speaking of those who despise what they hear, or of those who hear it as if by the roadside — who understand nothing and immediately lose all impression of it. I am speaking of those who listen with some attentiveness and receive the Word with some joy. These people gradually grow in knowledge and understanding, and so they cannot help having some thoughts about spiritual things. Yet for the most part, as was said, their thoughts are like water running after a rainstorm. They pour out as if flowing from a strong living spring, but in fact there is no spring at all. Once the rainwater is spent, the channel is dry — nothing remains but stones and dirt. When the teaching of the Word falls on such people like rain showers, it gives a current — sometimes stronger, sometimes weaker — to their thoughts toward spiritual things. But they have no well of water in them springing up to eternal life. After a while their minds dry up from such thoughts; nothing remains but earthiness — and perhaps a fouler kind at that.

It must be noted that the best of men — the most holy and spiritually minded — may and indeed should have their thoughts about spiritual things stirred up, multiplied, and confirmed by the preaching of the Word. This is one of the purposes of preaching, one of its chief uses for those who truly receive it. It does this in two ways: first, as the spiritual food of the soul, by which the prin-

ciple of life and grace is sustained and strengthened. The more this happens, the more we will grow in spiritual-mindedness. Second, as it provides occasion for the exercise of grace. By presenting to the soul the proper objects of faith, love, fear, trust, and reverence, it draws all those graces into active exercise. Therefore, although vigorous spiritual thoughts may be prompted by the Word — being more active during and after its preaching than at other times — this is nothing more than the natural effect of the ordinance working exactly as God designed it. And it is no evidence that those in whom this happens are not spiritually minded; on the contrary, it is evidence that they are. Yet where people have no thoughts of spiritual things except those prompted by the outward preaching of the Word, such thoughts do not prove them to be spiritually minded. Their efforts in these things are like those of a person struggling in a dream. Under some oppression of spirit, the imagination seizes on something urgently desired or feared. The dreamer seems to strive with all his strength — to run or push or press forward — but all in vain; everything fails, and there is no relief until he wakes up. So these people, under impressions received from the Word, seem to strive and contend in their thoughts and resolutions to comply with what is put before them; but their strength fails, they find no success — for lack of a principle of spiritual life — and after a time they give up their effort until it is occasionally revived again. Now the thoughts that arise from an inward principle of grace during the preaching of the Word, aroused to its proper exercise, are distinguishable from those that are merely suggested to the mind by the external preaching. First, genuine spiritual thoughts are specific acts of faith and love directed toward the very things being preached — they belong to our receiv-

ing the truth in love for it. Love attaches to the goodness of the things themselves, not merely to the truth of the statements in which they are expressed. The other kind of thoughts are only the mind's response to light and truth, without any heartfelt love for the things themselves. Second, genuine spiritual thoughts are accompanied by a settled contentment of soul, arising from love and some experience — greater or lesser — of the power of those things and their suitableness to the new nature or principle of grace within. When our minds discover that what the Word describes is actually true in us — that this is what we most want to be conformed to — it gives a quiet satisfaction and contentment to the soul. The merely occasional thoughts have none of these accompanying marks or effects; they are dry and barren, except perhaps for a few empty words or passing conversation. Third, the genuine thoughts are means of spiritual growth. Some have observed that the natural growth of plants is not gradual and imperceptible, but comes in bursts and noticeable spurts of increase. Both patterns exist in spiritual growth — and the latter kind consists largely in those thoughts that the principle of the new nature is stirred up to by the Word.

Second, the duty of prayer is another means of a similar kind. One of its chief purposes is to stir up, arouse, and draw out the principle of grace — of faith and love — in the heart, to its proper exercise in holy thoughts about God and spiritual things, with affections suited to them. Those who do not intend this end in prayer do not know at all what prayer is. Now all kinds of people have frequent occasion to join with others in prayer, and many are under the conviction that it is their own duty to pray every day — perhaps in their households and otherwise. It is hard to imagine

how people can regularly join with others in prayer, much less how they can pray themselves, without having thoughts about spiritual things every day. Yet it is possible that they have no living root or spring of such thoughts in themselves — those thoughts are merely occasional impressions on the mind produced by the outward performance of the duty. I will give some examples of how this happens, since on many grounds it demands our careful consideration.

Spiritual thoughts can be raised in a person during their own time of prayer through the exercise of their gifts, when there is no acting of grace in them at all. Gifts guide and direct the mind to the subjects of prayer — that is, to spiritual things. But gifts are nothing more than a spiritual development of our natural faculties and abilities. A person cannot speak or express anything without engaging the rational faculties — through invention or memory, or both — working through thoughts. Whatever therefore proceeds from a person's rational faculty in the exercise of their gifts, their thoughts must be engaged in that.

A person may read a long prayer full of spiritual content and never have a single spiritual thought arise in his mind about any of it. Reading in this way requires no real engagement of any mental faculty beyond attention to the words being read. I say this may happen — I do not say it always does, or that it must. But as noted in the exercise of gifts, it is impossible not to have some exercise of reason — through invention, judgment, and memory — and therefore some thoughts about spiritual things. Yet all of this may be merely occasional, arising from the external performance of the

duty, with no living spring or exercise of grace. People with tolerable gifts may continue in this course all their days, to their own satisfaction and others', deceiving both them and their own souls.

Since this is evident both from Scripture and experience, it calls for inquiry as to how it concerns us personally — especially those who have spiritual gifts of their own, and also to some degree those who regularly benefit from the gifts of others in this duty. The question may be asked: how can we know whether the thoughts we have about spiritual things in and through prayer arise only from gifts — whether our own or others' — providing the occasion, or whether they are influenced by a living principle and spring of grace in our hearts? This is a matter of great importance, whatever some may think, and would require a great deal of time to fully resolve. For there is nothing by which refined hypocrites deceive themselves and others more completely, and nothing by which some people give themselves more permission to indulge their lusts, than this form of godliness that denies the power of it. Beyond that, this is an area where the best of believers ought to keep a diligent watch over themselves in every particular instance of this duty. They are especially called to watch in preparation for prayer. If they are ever careless here, they may rest satisfied with a bare exercise of gifts — when on honest examination, they would find no evidence of grace actually operating in what they have done. I will therefore give a resolution to this inquiry as briefly as I can. To that end, observe:

First, it is an old complaint that spiritual things are filled with great obscurity and difficulty — and it is true. Not that there is any such thing in the things themselves, for they all come from the Father of lights and are full of light, order, beauty, and wisdom.

Light and order are the only means by which anything makes itself known. The ground of all darkness and difficulty in these things lies in ourselves. We can see the moon and stars more clearly and steadily than we can look at the sun when it shines at full brightness. This is not because there is more light in the moon and stars than in the sun, but because the sun's light is greater than our visual faculty can directly bear. In the same way, we can more clearly grasp the truth and distinct nature of moral and natural things than heavenly and spiritual ones. See John 3:12. Not because there is less substance or reality in spiritual things, but because our understanding is better suited to comprehend the former. The latter are above us. We know only in part, and our minds are liable to be hindered and confused in their grasp of heavenly and spiritual things by ignorance, temptations, and all kinds of biases. In nothing are people more prone to error than in applying these things to themselves and judging their own standing in them. Fear, self-love, and the pull of temptations and corruptions all work together to darken the mind's light and corrupt its judgment. In no area does the deceitfulness of the heart — or of sin, which amounts to the same thing — act more powerfully. Hence many say peace to themselves when God speaks no peace to them; and some who are children of light walk in darkness. Hence the apostle's fervent prayer for help in this matter, Ephesians 1:16-19. There is also a great similarity between temporary faith and saving, enduring faith — and between gifts and grace in their operations, which is the very thing under consideration. It must therefore be acknowledged that without the special light and guidance of the Spirit of God, no one can form a sound judgment about his own state and

his own duties that will be a stable foundation either for glorifying God or for obtaining peace in his own soul. This is why the great majority of people constantly deceive themselves in these things.

But ordinarily, under this blessed guidance in the search of ourselves and our duties, we can come to a settled assurance about whether our prayers are shaped by faith and animated by grace, or whether they derive only from the power of our natural faculties strengthened by knowledge and spiritual gifts — and consequently whether our spiritual thoughts in prayer spring from a vital principle of grace or are merely occasional impressions made on the mind by the performance of the duty itself.

If people are willing to deceive themselves — to hide from themselves, to walk carelessly with God, to leave everything to chance, to put off all examination until judgment day, and so never hold themselves accountable for the true nature of their duties in any particular instance — it is no wonder that they neither do nor can make any distinction in this matter about the true nature of their thoughts in spiritual duties. Two things are required.

First, we must honestly and rigorously examine and test the condition and activity of our minds in holy duties by the Word of truth — and then not be afraid to say plainly to our own souls what the Word says to us. This diligent examination should cover our principles, aims, ends, and actions — the whole conduct of our souls in every duty. See 2 Corinthians 13:5. If a man receives a large sum of money and only looks at the outward appearance and markings, he may think he has a great store of genuine gold and silver — when in fact he has only piles of lead and copper. But a person who depends on money as the support of his daily life will test everything he receives — by the scale and the touchstone — es-

pecially in a time when much counterfeit money is in circulation. If a person measures his duties only by count and number, he may be utterly deceived — spiritually poor and bankrupt — while imagining himself rich, well-stocked, and in need of nothing. Some duties may appear to hold up on the scale by weight, but will not hold up on the touchstone as to worth. Both tests must be used if we do not want to be wrong in our accounting. God himself, even in the midst of a multitude of duties being performed, calls the people to test and examine themselves to see whether those duties contain faith and grace, and whether they are likely to be accepted by Him. Isaiah 58:2-5.

Second, we must add to our own diligent inquiry fervent prayers to God, asking Him to search and test us — to examine our sincerity and reveal to us the true state of our hearts. We have an explicit example of this in Psalm 139:23-24: "Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me and know my anxious thoughts; and see if there be any hurtful way in me, and lead me in the everlasting way." This is the only way we can have the Spirit of God bearing witness to our sincerity, together with our own conscience. Both the importance and the difficulty of this matter call for divine assistance — since God alone fully and perfectly knows what is in the hearts of people.

I have no doubt that through the honest use of these means, a person can come to genuine assurance in his own mind — an assurance that will not deceive him — about whether he truly animates and enlivens his thoughts of spiritual things in duties with inward vital grace, or whether those thoughts are merely impressions made on his mind by the occasion of the duty itself.

This is a duty of great importance and urgency, now that hypocrisy has made such great inroads into the Christian profession, and gifts have crowded out grace in its primary operations. No people are in greater danger of walking carelessly with God than those who live in the exercise of spiritual gifts in duties, to their own satisfaction and others'. For they may reassure themselves with the appearance of everything that should be in them as a reality and a power — when in fact there is nothing of it at all. And so it has happened. We have seen many who were earnest in the exercise of this gift and who later turned into vile and corrupt apostates. Some have been known to live in sin and indulge their lusts while continuing steadily in their duties. Isaiah 1:15. And we sometimes hear prayers that reveal plainly to any spiritually sensitive ear that they are the product of the brain — worked out through the gifts of memory and invention — without any evidence of humility, reverence, or godly fear; without any acting of faith and love. They flow like wine, yet smell and taste of the foul cask they come from. It is therefore necessary that we submit ourselves to the most rigorous examination, lest we be found not to be spiritually minded even in our spiritual duties.

Gifts are gracious gifts of Christ, given to make grace useful to ourselves and others — and they may even make grace useful to others who have no grace in themselves. But as to our own souls, they are of no benefit except to stir grace up to its proper exercise and to serve as a vehicle carrying it into its proper use. If we do not always keep this in view when exercising our gifts, we would be better off without them. If instead, gifts begin to impose themselves on us in practice — so that we rest satisfied with spiritual light acting through our inventions, memories, and judgments,

with whatever ready expression comes — then no form of prayer can be more damaging to our souls. Wine taken moderately and at the right time helps the stomach digest, quickens the natural energy, and strengthens the body's functions — it is useful and beneficial. But taken in excess, it does not help the body but burdens it; it takes on itself what nature should only be assisted in doing, and it fills people's bodies with disease as well as their souls with sin. So while spiritual gifts are used only to excite, aid, and assist grace in its operations, they are immeasurably useful. But if they substitute for grace — taking on themselves everything that grace should do — they are harmful and destructive. We therefore need to be very diligent in this inquiry: whether our spiritual thoughts, even in our prayers, are not more the product of the duty itself than they are the natural spring of a gracious principle in our hearts — whether they are the genuine operations of saving grace.

Second, where spiritual thoughts in prayer are merely occasional in the way described, such prayers will not be a means of spiritual growth for the soul. They will not make the soul humble, holy, watchful, and diligent in universal obedience. Grace will not thrive under even the most consistent practice of such duties. It is a striking thing to see how, despite frequent prayer and an apparent fervency in it, many of us make no visible progress in the fruits of grace — and it is to be feared, no growth in the root of grace either. God's hand is not too short to save, nor His ear too dull to hear. He is the same as in days of old, when our fathers cried to Him and were delivered, when they trusted in Him and were not put to shame. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever; prayer is the same as it ever was and will not lose any of its effectiveness as long as this world endures. Why then is there so

much prayer among us and so little result? I am not speaking about the outward circumstances of God's providence — afflictions or persecutions — in which God always acts in sovereignty and often gives the most beneficial answer to our prayers by denying our requests. I mean what the psalmist describes from experience: "On the day I called, You answered me; You made me bold with strength in my soul," Psalm 138:3. Where prayers are truly effective, they will bring in spiritual strength. But many people's prayers seem very spiritual — they express every kind of need for grace that could be conceived — and they are continued with constancy. God forbid that we should judge them all to be hypocritical and entirely insincere. Yet there is a deficiency somewhere, and it needs to be examined. For those prayers are not being answered in such a way that those who pray them are being strengthened with strength in their souls. There is not the spiritual thriving and growth in grace that might be expected to accompany such supplications.

I know that a person may pray often, sincerely and persistently for a particular mercy, grace, or deliverance from a specific temptation, and yet experience no spiritual supply of strength coming in as a result. Paul prayed three times for the removal of his affliction, and yet the experience of it continued. In such a case there may be no failure in prayer, and yet the specific grace sought may not be attained. For God has other holy ends to accomplish in the soul by that experience. But how people can continue in prayer generally, in a manner that appears outwardly consistent with God's will, and yet not grow at all in spiritual strength in their souls — that is hard to understand.

And what is more astonishing still: some people continue in the duty of prayer — consistently, in their households and otherwise — and yet live in known sins. Whatever spiritual thoughts such people have in and through their prayers, they are not spiritually minded. Shall we then say that all such people are gross hypocrites — people who know they are only mocking God and men, who know they have no real desires or aims after the things they mention in their own prayers, and who go through the motions either for some corrupt purpose or at best to quiet their convictions? If we could resolve it that simply, the whole difficulty would be gone. For such double-minded people have no reason to think they will receive anything from the Lord, as James says in chapter 1:7. And indeed they do not. They never exercise faith with reference to their own prayers. But not all of this sort are in that category. Some judge themselves sincere and in earnest in their prayers, not without some hope and expectation of an answer. I will not say of all such people that they are among those of whom the wisdom of God says, "Because I called and they refused... then they will call on me, but I will not answer; they will seek me diligently but they will not find me," Proverbs 1:24-28. And although we may say to such people generally — citing Psalm 50:16-17 — either stop sinning or stop praying (with respect to the present scandal and the certain failure of both if they continue together), yet in particular I would not advise any such person to give up praying until he has given up his sin. That would be like advising a sick man to stop taking remedies until he is well. Who knows but that the Holy Spirit, who works when and how He pleases, may choose a time to bring life to those lifeless prayers and make them a means of deliverance from the power of that sin? In the meantime the fault and

guilt are entirely their own, belonging to those who have managed to make sinning and praying compatible in their lives. This arises from the fact that they have never labored to fill up their requests with grace. Whatever earnestness or diligence there has been in them has come from a force exerted by their convictions and fears. For no one was ever ultimately overcome by sin who prayed for deliverance according to the mind of God. Every praying man who perishes was a hypocrite. The faithfulness of God in His promises allows us to draw no other conclusion. Therefore, the thoughts about spiritual things that such people have even in their duties do not arise from within, and are not a natural outflow of the condition of their hearts and affections.

Third, outward earnestness and apparent fervency in prayer — in the delivery of the words, and even where the mind is inwardly affected to some degree — will not by itself prove that a person's thoughts in prayer arise from an internal spring of grace. There is a fervency of spirit in prayer that is one of its finest qualities — it is the earnest exercise of love, faith, and desire. But there is also a fervency by which the mind itself may be moved that can arise from other causes.

First, it may arise from the engagement of natural affections to the object of the prayer or the things being prayed for. A person may be intensely earnest and focused in praying for a dear loved one, or for deliverance from a pressing trouble or imminent danger — and yet all this fervor may arise from the powerful stirring of natural affections about the things prayed for, heightened by the occasion of the duty. This is why God calls the earnest crying of

some people for material things not prayer to Him but howling, Hosea 7:14 — the cry of hungry, desperate animals that want to be fed.

Second, this kind of fervency can arise from the sharpness of conviction, which may cause people to cry out in their prayers from profound distress of heart. And this may happen where no true grace has yet been received — and where it may never be received. For the distressing work of conviction comes before genuine conversion, and as it produces many other changes and effects in the mind, so it may produce this: great fervency in vocal prayer, especially when accompanied by outward affliction, pain, or trouble. Psalm 78:34-35.

Third, sometimes the mind and affections are very little involved in the fervency and earnestness that appears in the outward performance of the duty. Rather, in the exercise of gifts and through their own expression, people put their natural affections into such a state of agitation that it carries them into great vehemence in their expressions. This has been true of a number of people who were later exposed as rotten hypocrites and who afterwards became hardened apostates. Therefore all these things may be present where there is no gracious spring or vital principle acting from within in spiritual thoughts.

Some may want to use all this as ammunition for irreverence and mockery. If these evils can exist alongside the exercise of the gift of prayer — in constancy and with fervency — and if all true grace can be entirely absent from it; then perhaps everything claimed about this gift and its use is nothing but hypocrisy and empty talk. But I say: first, by the same reasoning one could argue that because the sun shining on a dunghill produces foul and of-

fensive vapors, everything said about its effect on spices and flowers — causing them to release their fragrance — must be entirely false. No one ever supposed that spiritual gifts changed or renewed the minds and natures of people. Used alone, gifts only help and assist the useful exercise of natural faculties and powers. Therefore, where the heart is not savingly renewed, no gifts can stir up a saving exercise of faith. But where the heart is so renewed, gifts become a means of causing that faith's fragrance to flow out. Second, even if there are some evils found in the exercise of the gift of prayer, what remedy is proposed? Is it that people should give up this gift and resort only to reading written prayers? First, the same could be said of all spiritual gifts whatsoever, for they are all liable to abuse. And shall we reject all the powers of the age to come — the entire range of gospel gifts, for the communication of which the Lord Christ has promised to continue His Spirit with His Church until the end of the world — because some abuse them? Second, not merely the same, but far greater evils may be found in and under the reading of written prayers — this needs no further proof than what every day provides for itself. Third, it is hard to understand how any benefit at all could come from this proposed remedy, when the advantages of the other way are so evident.

The inquiry therefore remains: how can we know to our own satisfaction that the thoughts we have of spiritual things in the duty of prayer are from an internal fountain of grace, and thus are evidence that we are spiritually minded — which is the goal of everything discussed here? I will offer a few things toward answering this.

First, I take it as established from the evidence already given that people who have any spiritual light, and who will diligently examine and test their own hearts, will be able to discern what genuine actings of faith, love, and delight in God are present in their duties — and consequently what is the true source of their spiritual thoughts. In general, we are assured that "he who believes in the Son of God has the testimony in himself," 1 John 5:10. Sincere faith will be its own evidence. And where there are sincere actings of faith, they will make themselves evident, if we test everything honestly by the Word. But if people do what most people do — content themselves with the performance of a duty without examining their principles, their inner state, and their actings of grace within it — it is no wonder if they walk in complete uncertainty.

Chapter 5

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Further evidence of thoughts about spiritual things that arise from an internal principle of grace, by which they prove we are spiritually minded. How the abundance of these thoughts serves as such evidence, and to what degree.

Second, the second evidence that our thoughts about spiritual things proceed from an internal fountain of sanctified light and affections — and that they are acts or fruits of being spiritually minded — is that they abound in us, that our minds are filled with them. We may say of them what the apostle says of other graces: "If these qualities are yours and are increasing, they render you neither useless nor unfruitful." It is a wonderful thing when our minds are like the land of Egypt in the years of plenty, when it produced grain by the armful — when spiritual thoughts flow from the well of living water within us in a full and steady stream. But there is a level of abundance that is necessary to give evidence of being spiritually minded.

Two effects are attributed to this frame of spirit: first life, and then peace. The nature and existence of this grace depends on the first consideration — its flowing from an internal principle of grace

— and the effect and consequence of this is life. But that it is also peace depends on this degree and measure of activity in our spiritual thoughts. This is what we must now consider.

The defining mark of all people in a state of fallen nature and departure from God is that "every intent of the thoughts of their hearts was only evil continually," Genesis 6:5. Not all people in that condition are swearers, blasphemers, drunkards, adulterers, idolaters, or similar. Those are the vices of particular individuals, the products of particular constitutions and temptations. But this is true of all of them, every single one: all the imaginations of the thoughts of their hearts are evil — and continually so. Some are evil in their subject matter, some in their ends, and all in their principle — for out of the evil treasure of the heart nothing can proceed that is not evil. The vast multitude of open sins in the world gives a clear picture of the nature and effects of our departure from God. But the person who can contemplate the uncountable number of thoughts passing through every individual's mind every day — all evil, and that without ceasing — will gain a far greater comprehension of it.

We therefore have no greater evidence of a change in us from this state and condition than a change worked in the course of our thoughts. Abandoning this or that particular sin is not evidence of a transfer out of this state. As noted, particular sins arise from particular lusts and temptations, and they are not the immediate universal consequence of that depravity of nature which is the same in all. What is universal is the vanity and wickedness of the thoughts and imaginations of the heart. A change there is a blessed evidence of a change of state. A man cured of one specific disease is not necessarily healthy — he may still have the prevailing seeds of other

diseases in him and die of a different illness the next day. But when a person is restored from sickness to a good and healthy balance of blood and vital energy — when all the principles of life and health are restored — his bodily condition has genuinely changed. The cure of a particular sin may still leave behind it the seeds of eternal death, which can quickly do their work. But the person who has experienced a change in the very characteristic that belongs essentially to the state of fallen nature has been spiritually healed. And the more the stream of our thoughts is turned, the more our minds are filled with thoughts of a contrary nature, the greater and more certain is our evidence of a transfer out of that fallen state and condition.

Nothing is so staggering as the sheer multitude of thoughts in the human mind. They fall from us like leaves from trees shaken by the autumn wind. To have all these thoughts — all the various fantasies of the heart, all the conceptions being formed and stirred up in the mind — to be evil, and that continually: what a pit of horror and confusion that must be. Deliverance from this loathsome and hateful state is worth more than the whole world. Without it, neither life, nor peace, nor immortality, nor glory can ever be obtained.

The purpose of conviction is to put a stop to these evil thoughts, to reduce their number, and thereby to lessen their guilt. What deserves the name of conviction of sin must address inward thoughts of the mind, not merely outward actions. Conviction alone can, for a season, bring about a significant change in a person's thoughts — and it does this especially when combined with superstition directing the thoughts to other objects. These two together — conviction and superstition — are the source of all

the devotional religion found in Roman Catholicism. Conviction tries to put some stop and limits to thoughts that are absolutely evil and corrupt, and superstition suggests other objects for them, which the mind readily embraces — but it is a futile effort. The minds and hearts of people are constantly manufacturing and coining new thoughts and imaginations. The thinking faculty is always active. Like the streams of a mighty river running into the ocean, so are the thoughts of a natural person — and through self they run straight into hell. It is foolish to put a dam before such a river to restrain its currents. For a brief time there may be a check, but the water will quickly break down all obstacles or overflow all its banks. There is no way to redirect its course except to provide new channels for its water and divert the flow into them. The powerful stream of people's evil thoughts will admit of no dams or barriers to stop them. There are only two ways of relief from them: one addressing their moral evil, the other their natural abundance. The first is by throwing salt into the spring — as Elisha healed the waters of Jericho — that is, by having the heart and mind seasoned with grace; for the tree must be made good before its fruit will be. The other is to turn the stream into new channels — giving it new aims and ends, fixing it on new objects. In this way we will abound in spiritual thoughts, for abound in thoughts we will, whether we choose to or not.

This is the point of the apostle's counsel in Ephesians 5:18-19: "Do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs." When people are drunk to excess with wine, it quickly becomes obvious what vain, foolish, and ridiculous imaginations fill their minds. In contrast to this, the apostle urges be-

lievers to be filled with the Spirit — to seek such a participation in Him that He fills their minds and hearts, just as others fill themselves with wine. To what end? For this purpose: that He by His grace may fill them with holy spiritual thoughts, just as on the other side, those drunk to excess are filled with thoughts that are foolish, vain, and wicked. This is what verse 19 declares, for the apostle urges us to express our abounding thoughts in the kinds of duties that give them a natural outlet.

Therefore, when we are spiritually minded, we will abound in spiritual thoughts — thoughts about spiritual things. The mere presence of such thoughts will not sufficiently prove that we are spiritually minded unless we abound in them. This leads to the main question on this point: what measure should we assign, and how can we know when we truly abound in spiritual thoughts so that they may serve as evidence that we are spiritually minded?

I answer in general: among other scriptures, read through Psalm 119 with understanding. Consider what David expresses about himself there — his constant delight in and continual thoughts about the law of God, which was the only form of divine revelation at that time. Test yourselves by that example. Examine whether you can honestly say the same words he said — if not in the same degree of zeal, at least with the same sincerity of grace. You may say: that was David. It is not for us, not our duty, to be like him — or at least not to equal him. But as far as I can tell, we must be like him if we ever intend to come to the place where he is. It will ruin our souls if, when we read in Scripture how God's saints describe their experience of faith, love, delight in God, and constant meditation on Him, we acknowledge that it was true of them — that they were good and holy people — but conclude that it is

not necessary for us. These things are not written in Scripture to show what they were, but to show what we ought to be. Everything recorded about them was written for our instruction, 1 Corinthians 10:11. And if we do not have the same delight in God that they had — the same spiritual-mindedness in thoughts and meditations on heavenly things — we have no grounds to believe we please God as they did or will go to the place where they have gone. The profession of a life with God is accepted by many at a very low and easy standard. Their thoughts are mostly vain and earthly, their conversation hollow and sometimes corrupt, their lives at best unsteady and inconsistent in obedience — and yet all is well, all is life and peace. The holy people of old who received the testimony that they pleased God did not walk before Him that way. They meditated continually in the law; thought of God in the night seasons; spoke of His ways, His works, His praise; their whole delight was in Him, and in all things they pressed hard after Him. I have pointed especially to the example of David. And it is a promise of the grace to be administered through the Gospel that "he who is feeble among them at that day will be like David," Zechariah 12:8. If we are not like David in his spiritual-mindedness, it is to be feared we are not partakers of that promise. But so that we may better judge ourselves on this point, I will add a few practical rules to go along with this example.

First, consider what proportion your thoughts about spiritual things bear to your thoughts about other things. Our principal interest and concern, as we profess, lies in things spiritual, heavenly, and eternal. Is it not foolish to suppose that our thoughts about these things should not bear some proportion to those about other things — in fact, that they should not exceed them? No one en-

gaged in earthly affairs would pretend that his chief concern is in something he rarely thinks about compared to everything else. This is not how men approach their families, their businesses, or their daily obligations. It is a truth not only established by Him who is Truth, but evident in common sense: where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. And the affections of the heart express themselves through the thoughts of the mind. Therefore, if our principal treasure is — as we profess — in spiritual and heavenly things (and woe to us if it is not), then our affections and consequently our desires and thoughts will be principally fixed on them.

To better examine ourselves by this rule, we must consider what kinds of other thoughts people have — and for our present purpose, these can be grouped under the following headings.

First, there are thoughts occupied with a person's work and the legitimate demands of daily life. These are countless and never-ending — especially for those who rise early and go to bed late, who eat their bread through careful diligence, who are particularly industrious in their ways. People consider themselves right in having these thoughts and judge them a duty, in their proper place and measure. But no mind can fathom the sheer multitude of these thoughts — partly in planning, partly in conversation — that are engaged and spent on such things. And the more immersed in them a person is, the more that person and others regard him as diligent and praiseworthy. There are also those who have no particular necessity or calling requiring much engagement, and yet by their words and actions reveal themselves to be almost entirely confined in their thoughts to themselves, their relationships, their children, and their personal concerns — matters that are mostly

trivial, and yet they feel entirely justified in them. All kinds of people would do well to examine what proportion their thoughts about spiritual things bear to their thoughts about everything else. I fear that for most, the proportion will be found to be very small — for many, nearly nothing at all. What evidence then can they have that they are spiritually minded, that their principal interest lies in things above? Someone may ask whether it is really necessary for people to think about spiritual and heavenly things as much and as often as they think about the lawful affairs of their work. I say more than that — more often — if we are what we profess to be. Generally, the best kind of people, in relation to both God and others, are those who are active in their work — one kind or another. But even among the best of these, many will continually spend the strength of their minds and the energy of their spirits on their affairs all day long — and as long as they can pray morning and evening, with a few occasional spiritual thoughts here and there, they suppose they have done well enough. This is like a man claiming his great plan is to prepare for a voyage to a distant country where his inheritance lies — but all his thoughts and schemes are about a few trifles he would have to leave behind if he actually made the journey, while he scarcely thinks at all about his main purpose. We all profess to be bound for heaven, immortality, and glory — but is it any evidence that we truly intend it, if all our thoughts are consumed with the trifles of this world that we must leave behind, and we have only occasional thoughts of things above? I will show elsewhere, God willing, how people can be spiritually minded even in their earthly work. If no relief can be found

there, I truly do not know what to say for those whose thoughts about spiritual things do not at least keep pace with — indeed, exceed — what they give to their daily work.

This whole principle is grounded in what our Savior says in Matthew 6:31-34: "Do not worry then, saying, 'What will we eat?' or 'What will we drink?' or 'What will we wear for clothing?'... But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. So do not worry about tomorrow." When we have done everything we can — when we have made the most of earthly things — all that earthly life amounts to, at bottom, is what we eat, what we drink, and what we wear. Our Savior does not forbid us to give any thought to these things at all, but He limits our thinking about them in two ways. First, we must not give them a thought accompanied by anxiety and worry that reflects distrust of the Father's care and providence — this is the point of the whole passage. Second, we must not give them a constancy and engagement of spirit equal to what we ought to give to spiritual things. Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness. Let that be the chief and primary focus of your thoughts and conscience. We may therefore conclude that at the very least, spiritual thoughts must far outweigh thoughts about earthly things.

Let a person diligently engaged in his daily work test himself by this rule every evening. Let him consider what thoughts he has had about his earthly affairs, and what about spiritual things, and then ask himself honestly whether he is spiritually minded. Do not be deceived: as a person thinks, so is he. And if we regard it as an unusual or unreasonable thing that our thoughts should be more

exercised about spiritual things than about the affairs of our work, we should not be surprised if, when we come to the trial, we find we have neither life nor peace.

Moreover, we all know how often, when we are engaged in spiritual duties, other thoughts break in and impose themselves on our minds. Thoughts about our earthly concerns will do this. The world frequently makes raids on the road to heaven to disturb those traveling and on the way. There is nothing more frequently complained of by those who are awake to their duty and aware of their weakness. Consider therefore how often, on the other hand, spiritual thoughts break in and as it were impose themselves on your minds while you are engaged in your earthly affairs. Sometimes, no doubt, this happens to all true believers. The bride in the Song of Songs says: "Before I was aware, my soul set me over the chariots of my noble people," Song of Songs 6:12. The grace within her own soul surprised her into a ready and willing desire for spiritual communion with Christ, even when she was intent on other concerns. But if thoughts of heavenly things that arise in us this way bear no proportion to the thoughts pressing in from the other side, it is evidence of which frame and principle is dominant in us.

Second, there is a great multitude of thoughts in people's minds that are vain, useless, and altogether worthless. These are typically, through a dangerous mistake, regarded as harmless — because their content is supposedly not sinful. And so people tend to dismiss them for their foolishness rather than their guilt. But they arise from a corrupt fountain and grievously pollute both the mind and the conscience. Wherever there are vain thoughts, there is sin. Jeremiah 4:14. Such thoughts include all those countless

imaginations by which people picture themselves as what they are not, doing what they do not do, enjoying what they do not enjoy, and disposing of themselves and others entirely as they please. That our nature is prone to this destructive foolishness — which in those with especially powerful imaginations has driven people to madness — we owe entirely to our cursed departure from God and the emptiness that took hold of our minds as a result. Hence the prince of Tyre thought himself a god, sitting in the seat of God, Ezekiel 28:2. The same has been true of others. And even in those whose imaginations are kept within somewhat better order and limits, if traced back to their source, they will be found to spring — some from pride, some from sensual lusts, some from love of the world, all from self and the ancient ambition to be like God and to arrange everything according to our own will. I know of no greater misery or punishment in this world than the degrading of our nature to such vain imaginations — and perfect freedom from them is part of the blessedness of heaven. It is not my present task to show how sinful they are — let them be regarded merely as fruitless, foolish, worthless, and absurd. But let people examine themselves about the number of these vain, useless thoughts that wander through their minds day and night. If it seems too strict to require that thoughts about spiritual things should exceed those spent on a person's lawful work, let people at least consider what proportion their spiritual thoughts bear to those that are altogether vain and useless. Do many not give more time to the latter than to holy meditations, without any effort to put the one to death or to stir up and enliven the other? Are not these vain thoughts more at home

in the mind — more habitual to their seasons — than holy thoughts are? And shall we suppose that those with whom it is so are spiritually minded?

Third, there are thoughts that are formally evil — evil in their very nature, being corrupt schemes for satisfying the desires and lusts of the flesh. These will also press in on the minds of believers. But they are always recognized as declared enemies of the soul and are watched against. I will therefore make no comparison between them and spiritual thoughts, for they abound only in those who are carnally minded.

Second rule: consider whether thoughts about spiritual things consistently take possession of their proper seasons. There are certain times in the course of people's lives when they withdraw into their own thoughts. Even the busiest people in the world have some time to think to themselves. And those who have no such intention — being afraid perhaps of becoming wiser or better than they are — still spend time in this way whether they want to or not. The person who is so occupied with the concerns of others that he has no time to consider the state of his own household and family is a fool — much more so the person who spends all his thoughts on other things and never uses them to examine how things stand with himself and his own soul. Yet however busy people are, they can hardly avoid having some seasons — some regular and some occasional — when they are left alone with their own thoughts: evenings and mornings, times of waking in the night, the necessary pauses from ordinary affairs, times of walking, traveling, and the like — these are all such seasons.

If we are spiritually minded — if thoughts of spiritual things abound in us — they will ordinarily and consistently claim these seasons, treating them as their own rightful time. For these seasons are explicitly assigned to spiritual meditation through biblical rule, expressed in both examples and commands. See Psalm 16:7-8; Psalm 92:2; Deuteronomy 6:7. If these times are usually surrendered to other ends and occupied with thoughts of a different kind, this is clear evidence that spiritual thoughts have little influence on our minds and little controlling presence in our souls. It is our duty to give spiritual thoughts designated times taken away from other things that claim them. But if instead we rob spiritual thoughts of time that belongs to them — time that nothing else has any just claim to — how does the love of spiritual things dwell in us? Most professing Christians are convinced it is their duty to pray morning and evening, and it is to be wished that all were found doing this. But if they ordinarily suppose that completing those duties fully discharges them from any further exercise of spiritual thoughts — and then direct their minds to worldly, useless, or vain things — they cannot claim to be spiritually minded.

And it must be noted — and it will be found to be true — that if the seasons that rightfully belong to meditation are taken from it, those times will become the worst-spent minutes of our lives. Vain and foolish thoughts, corrupt imaginations, will make themselves at home in people's minds during those times, and will habituate themselves to expect a welcome — and from there they will become insistent in demanding entry. Hence, for many people, those precious moments of time that could greatly benefit their souls toward life and peace — if they were truly spiritually minded — instead become the greatest source of trouble, sorrow, and confu-

sion. For the vain and evil thoughts that some people allow themselves to indulge in during such seasons are, or ought to be, a burden on their consciences heavier than they can bear. What God's providence offers for their good is turned into a snare, and God rightly leaves to the fruits of their own folly those who so despise His gracious provision for their benefit. If we cannot give to God even our spare time, it is evident that we can give Him nothing at all. Micah 2:1: "They devise iniquity while on their beds." The times that are meant for holy contemplation they use to fill their minds with wicked imaginations — and when morning comes they carry those out; all day long they act consistently with the schemes and fantasies of the night. Many will have reason to lament for eternity those seasons of leisure that could have been developed into eternal blessedness.

If we intend to hold on to this grace of being spiritually minded — if we want any evidence of it in ourselves, without which we can have no evidence of life or peace, and without which anything we claim of them is merely the effect of spiritual carelessness — we must work to secure the rightful claim of spiritual thoughts to these seasons, and actually put them in possession of them.

Third, consider how we feel about missing these seasons. When negligence, temptation, occasional distractions, or the demands of life have pulled us away from thoughts of God, of Christ, of heavenly things — at times when we should have been engaged in them — how do we feel when we look back on this? A carnal mind is perfectly satisfied with omitting any duty, as long as there is a plausible excuse. If it has missed a material opportunity because it was attending to a spiritual duty, it will feel deep regret and perhaps like the duty even less afterward. But a gracious soul

— one who is truly spiritually minded — will mourn when reviewing such omissions, and will be stirred by each one to greater watchfulness in the future. The soul will say: how little have I been with Christ today? How much time has passed without a single thought of Him? How foolish of me to have missed that opportunity! I am in debt to my own soul, and will have no rest until it is made right.

If we are truly spiritually minded, we will carefully review the times and seasons when we should have exercised our thoughts in spiritual meditation — and if we have lost them or any of them, we will mourn our own negligence. But if we can let such seasons and opportunities slip by again and again without regret or self-reflection, it is to be feared we are growing worse and worse. The habit of missing these times will make way for further neglect, until we become altogether cold toward them.

And indeed the terrible waste of time found among many professing Christians is greatly to be mourned. Some waste it on themselves, in a constant stream of fruitless, trivial thoughts about their own affairs. Some waste it in empty conversation with others, in which they mostly build one another up in vanity. How much of this time could — and indeed should — be redeemed for holy meditation? May the Lord make all professing Christians feel the weight of their lost seasons, so that they may be more watchful in the future in this great matter of their souls. Little do some realize how much light, assurance, joy, and readiness to face either the cross or heaven they might have attained, if only they had seized every available season for exercising their thoughts on spiritual things — those who are now at a loss in all of these things and are caught off guard by every fear or difficulty that comes their way.

This is the first aspect of being spiritually minded. Although spiritual-mindedness does not absolutely and essentially consist in this alone, it is inseparable from it and is the most trustworthy indication of it. And so we have discussed the abounding and abiding in thoughts about spiritual things — thoughts that arise and spring naturally from a living principle, a spiritual frame and disposition of heart within.

1. The Soul will come to a more satisfactory abiding sense of the Reality of them. Things of Imagination which maintain a value of themselves by Darkness, will not bear a diligent search into them. They lose of their Reputation on every serious Inquiry. If rational men would but give themselves the Liberty of free Indagation by their own Thoughts, it would quickly cashiere the Fools Paradise of Mahomet, the Purgatory of the Papists, and all such Creatures of Imagination and Superstition. But where things are real and substantial, the more they are enquired into, the more they evidence their being and subsistence. It is not therefore every Profession of a Faith of a future state of Blessedness that will realize it in our Minds. And therefore for the most part it is rather a Notion that men have of Heavenly things which they do not contradict, than any solid satisfaction in, or spiritual sense of their Reality. For these are things that Eye has not seen, nor Ear heard, nor will enter into the Heart of man to conceive, whose existence, nature and real state are not easily comprehended. But through the continual Exercise of holy thoughts about them, the Soul obtains an entrance into the midst of them, finding in them both durable substance and Riches. There is no way therefore to strengthen Faith to any degree, but by a daily Contemplation on the things themselves. They who do not think of them frequently,

shall never believe them sincerely. They admit not of any collateral Evidence, where they do not evidence themselves to our Souls. Faith, as we said, thus exercised, will give them a subsistence, not in themselves, which they have antecedent thereunto; but in us, in our Hearts, in the Minds of them that do believe. Imagination creates its own Object; Faith finds it prepared before-hand. It will not leave a bare Notion of them in the Understanding, but give them a spiritual subsistence in the Heart; as Christ himself dwells in our hearts by Faith. And there are two things that will discover this subsistence of them in us. (1.) When we find them in a continual Readiness to rise up in our Minds, on all Occasions wherein the Thoughts and Remembrance of them are needfull and useful to us. There are many seasons, some whereof shall be immediately spoken to, and many Duties wherein and whereto the Faith and Thoughts of things invisible and eternal are needful to us, so as that we cannot fill up those Seasons, nor perform those Duties in a due manner without them. If on all such occasions they do from the inward frame of our minds present themselves to us, or through our acquaintance and familiarity with them, we recurre in our Thoughts to them, they seem to have a real subsistence given to them in our Souls. But if on such occasions wherein alone they will yield us help and relief, we accustom our selves to other Thoughts, if those concerning them are as it were out of the way, and arise not in our minds of their own accord, we are yet strangers to this effect of Faith. (2.) They are realized to us, they have a subsistence in us, when the Soul continually longs to be in them. When they have given such a Relish to our Hearts, as the first Fruits of Glory, that we cannot but desire on all opportune

Considerations, to be in the full enjoyment of them, Faith seems to have had its effectual work herein upon us. For want of these things do many among us walk in Disconsolation all their Dayes.

2. It will gradually give the Heart an acquaintance with the especial nature and use of these things. General Thoughts and Notions of Heaven and Glory, do but fluctuate up and down in the Mind, and very little influence it to other Duties. But assiduous Contemplation will give the mind such distinct Apprehensions of Heavenly things as shall duely affect it with the Glory of them. The more we discern of the Glory and Excellency of them in their own nature, of their suitableness to ours, as our only proper Rest and Blessedness, as the Perfection and complement of what is already begun in us by Grace, of the restless tendency of all gracious Dispositions and Inclinations of our Hearts towards their Enjoyment, the more will Faith be established in its cleaving to them; so in the Contemplation of these things consists the principal food of Faith, whereby it is nourished and strengthened. And we are not to expect much work, where there is not provision of proper Food for them that labor. No wonder if we find Faith faint and weak in the work it has to do, which oft times is great and weighty, if we neglect to guide it daily to that which should administer strength to it.

(2.) It will give Life and Exercise to the Grace of Hope. Hope is a glorious Grace, whereto blessed Effects are ascribed in the Scripture, and an effectual Operation to the supportment and consolation of Believers. By it are we purified, sanctified, saved. And to summe up the whole of its excellency and efficacy, it is a principal way of the working of Christ as inhabiting in us, Col. 1:27. Christ in you the hope of Glory. Where Christ evidencs his

Presence with us, he gives us an infallible hope of Glory; he gives us an assured Pledge of it, and works our Souls to an expectation of it. Hope in general is but an uncertain Expectation of a future Good which we desire. But as it is a Gospel Grace, all uncertainty is removed from it, which would hinder us of the Advantage intended in it. It is an earnest Expectation proceeding from Faith, Trust and Confidence, accompanied with longing desires of Enjoyment. From a Mistake of its Nature it is, that few Christians labor after it, exercise themselves to it, or have the benefit of it. For to live by Hope, they suppose inferres a State not only beneath the Life of Faith and all assurance in believing, but also exclusive of them. They think, to hope to be saved is a condition of men who have no grounds of Faith or Assurance. But this is to turn a Blessed fruit of the Spirit, into a common Affection of nature. Gospel Hope is a fruit of Faith, Trust and Confidence. Yea the height of the actings of all Grace issues in a well grounded hope, nor can it rise any higher, Rom. 5. 2, 3, 4, 5.

Now the Reason why men have no more use of, no more benefit by this excellent Grace, is because they do not abide in Thoughts and contemplation of the things hoped for. The especial Object of Hope is Eternal Glory. Col. 1:27. Rom. 5:2. The peculiar use of it is, to support, comfort and refresh the Soul in all Trials, under all weariness and Despondencies, with a firm expectation of a speedy entrance into that Glory, with an earnest desire after it. Wherefore unless we acquaint our selves by continual Meditation with the Reality and Nature of this Glory; it is impossible it should be the Object of a vigorous active Hope, such as whereby, the Apostle says, we are saved. Whithout this we can neither have that

Evidence of Eternal things, nor that valuation of them, nor that preparedness in our minds for them, as should keep us in the exercise of Gracious Hope about them.

Suppose sundry Persons engaged in a Voyage to a most remote Countrey, wherein all of them have an Apprehension that there is a place of Rest and an Inheritance provided for them. Under this Apprehension they all put themselves upon their Voyage, to possess what is so prepared. Howbeit some of them have only a general Notion of these things, they know nothing distinctly concerning them, and are so busied about other affairs, that they have no leisure to inquire into them, or do suppose that they cannot come to any satisfactory knowledge of them in particular, and so are content to go on with general Hopes and Expectations. Others there are who by all possible means acquaint themselves particularly with the nature of the Climate whither they are going, with the Excellency of the Inheritance and Provision that is made for them. Their Voyage proves long and wearisome, their Difficulties many and their Dangers great, and they have nothing to relieve and encourage themselves, but the Hope and expectation of the Countrey whither they are going. Those of the first sort will be very apt to despond and faint; their general hopes will not be able to relieve them. But those who have a distinct Notion and Apprehension of the State of things whither they are going, and of their incomparable Excellency, have always in a readiness wherewith to chear their minds and support themselves.

In that Journey or Pilgrimage wherein we are ingaged towards an Heavenly Countrey, we are sure to meet with all kinds of dangers, difficulties and Perils. It is not a general Notion of Blessedness that will excite and work in us a spiritual refreshing

Hope. But when we think and Meditate on future Glory as we ought, that Grace which is neglected for the most part as to its benefit, and dead as to its exercise, will of all others be most Vigorous and active, puting it self forth on all occasions. This therefore is an inestimable Benefit of the Duty exhorted to, and which they find the Advantage of, who, are really Spiritually minded.

3. This alone will make us ready for the Cross, for all sorts of Sufferings that we may be exposed to.

There is nothing more necessary to Believers at this season, than to have their minds furnished with provision of such things as may prepare them for the Cross and Sufferings. Various Intimations of the mind of God, Circumstances of Providence, the present State of things in the World, with the instant Peril of the latter dayes, do all call them hereto. If it be otherwise with them, they will at one time or other be wofully surprized, and think strange of their Trials, as if some strange thing did befall them. Nothing is more useful to this end, than constant Thoughts and contemplations of Eternal things and future Glory. From thence alone can the Soul have in a readiness, what to lay in the Ballance against all sorts of Sufferings. When a Storm begins to arise at Sea, the Mariners bestir themselves in the Management of the Tackling of the Ship, and other Applications of their Art for their safety. But if the Storm encrease and come to extremity, they are forced to forego all other means and betake themselves to a Sheat-Anchor, to hold their Ship steady against its violence. So when a Storm of Persecution and Troubles begins to arise, men have various ways and considerations for their Relief. But if it once comes to extremity, if Sword, Nakedness, Famine, and Death, are inevitably com-

ing upon them, they have nothing to betake themselves to that will yield them solid Relief, but the consideration and Faith of things Invisible and Eternal.

So the Apostle declares this State of things, 2 Cor. 4. 16, 17, 18. the words before insisted on. For which cause we faint not, but though our outward man perish, yet the inward is renewed day by day. For our light affliction which is but for a moment, works for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of Glory; while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal. He lays all sorts of Afflictions in one Scale, and on the consideration of them, declares them to be light and but for a moment. Then he layes Glory in the other Scale, and finds it to be ponderous, weighty, and Eternal; an exceeding weight of Glory. In the one is Sorrow for a little while, in the other Eternal Joy. In the one Pain for a few moments, in the other everlasting Rest; In the one is the loss of some few temporary things, in the other the full fruition of God in Christ, who is all in all.

Hence the same Apostle casts up the account of these things, and gives us his Judgment concerning them, Rom. 8:18. For I reckon that the Sufferings of this present time are not to be compared with the Glory that shall be revealed in us; there is no comparison between them, as if one had as much Evil and Misery in them, as the other has of Good and Blessedness; as though his State was any way to be complained of, who must undergo the one whilest he has an interest in the other; or as though to escape the one, he hazard the enjoyment of the other.

It is inseparable from our Nature to have a fear of and aversation from great distressing Sufferings, that are above the power of Nature to bear. Even our Lord Jesus himself, having taken on him all the sinless Properties of our Natures, had a fear and aversation, though holy and gracious with respect to his own. Those who through a stout-heartedness do contemn them before their Approach, boasting in themselves of their Abilities to undergo them, censuring such as will not unadvisedly engage in them, are such as seldom glorify God when they are really to conflict with them. Peter alone trusted to himself that he would not forsake his Master, and seemed to take the Warning ill that they should all do so; and he alone denyed him. All Church Stories are filled with Instances of such as having born themselves high before the Approach of Trials, have shamefully miscarried when their Trials have come. Wherefore it is moreover allowed to us, to use all lawfull means for the avoiding of them. Both Rules and Examples of the Scripture give sufficient warranty for it. But there are Times and Seasons wherein without any Tergiversation they are to be undergone to the Glory of God, and in the discharge of our Duty, confessing Christ before men, as we would be owned by him before his Father in Heaven. All things do now call us to prepare for such a season, to be Martyrs in Resolution, though we should never really lose our lives by Violence. Nothing will give us this Preparation, but to have our minds exercised in the Contemplation of Heavenly things, of things that are Invisible and Eternal. He who is thus Spiritually Minded, who has his Thoughts and Affections set on things above, will have always in a Readiness what to oppose to any circumstance of his Sufferings.

Those views which such an one has had by Faith, of the increated Glories above, of the things in Heavenly Places, where Christ sits at the right hand of God, of the Glory within the Vail, whereby they have been realized and made present to his Soul, will now visit him every moment, abide with him continually, and put forth their efficacy to his supportment and refreshment. Alas! what will become of many of us, who are grovelling continually on the Earth, whose Bellies cleave to the Dust, who are strangers to the Thoughts of Heavenly Things, when distressing troubles shall befall us? Why shall we think that refreshing Thoughts of things above will then visit our Souls, when we resisted their admittance in dayes of Peace? Do you come to me in your distress, saith Jepthe, when in the time of your Peace you drove me from you? When we would thus think of Heavenly things to our Refreshment, we shall hardly get them to make an abode with us. I know God can come in by the mighty Power of his Spirit and Grace, to support and comfort the Souls of them who are called and even surprized into the greatest of Sufferings. Yet do I know also that it is our Duty not to Tempt him in the neglect of the ways and means which he has appointed for the communication of his Grace to us.

Our Lord Jesus Christ himself, as the Author and finisher of our Faith, for the Joy that was set before him, endured the Cross and despised the Shame, Heb. 12:2. His Mediatory Glory in the Salvation of the Church, was the Matter of the Joy set before him. This he took the view and prospect of in all his Sufferings, to his Refreshment and Supportment. And his Example, as the Author and finisher of our Faith, is more efficaciously instructive than any other Rule or Precept. Eternal Glory is set before us also; It is the Design of Gods Wisdom and Grace, that by the contemplation of it

we should relieve our selves in all our Sufferings, yea and rejoyce with Joy unspeakable and full of Glory. How many of those blessed Souls now in the enjoyment of God and Glory, who passed through fiery Trials and great Tribulations, were enabled to sing and rejoyce in the Flames by a Prepossession of this Glory in their Minds through Believing? yea some have been so filled with them, as to take off all sense of pain under the most exquisite Tortures. When Stephen was to be Stoned, to encourage him in his Sufferings and comfort him in it, the Heavens were opened, and he saw Jesus standing at the right hand of God. Who can conceive what contempt of all the Rage and madness of the Jews, what a neglect of all the pains of Death this view raised his holy Soul to? To obtain therefore such views frequently by Faith, as they do who are truely Spiritually minded, is the most effectual way to encourage us to all our Sufferings. The Apostle gives us the force of this encouragement in a comparison with Earthly things. Cor. 9:25. Every man who strivs for the mastery, is temperate in all things; Now they do it to obtain a corruptible Crown, but we an incorruptible. If men when a corruptible Crown of vain Honor and Applause is proposed to them, will do and endure all that is needfull for the Attainment of it, and relieve themselves in their hardships with Thoughts and Imaginations of attaining it, grounded on uncertain hopes; shall not we who have a Crown immortal and invisible proposed to us, and that with the highest assurance of the enjoyment of it, chearfully undergo, endure and suffer what we are to go through in the way to it?

4. This is the most effectual Means to wean the heart and affections from things here below; to keep the mind to an undervaluation, yea a Contempt of them as occasion shall require. For there is

a season wherein there is such a contempt required in us of all Relations and enjoyments, as our Savior calls, the hating of them; that is, not absolutely but comparatively, in comparison of him and the Gospel, with the Duties which belong to our Profession, Luke 14:26. If any man come to me, and hate not Father and Mother, and Wife and Children, and Brethren and Sisters, yea and his own Life also, he cannot be my Disciple. Some I fear if they did but consider it, would be apt to say, This is an hard saying, who can bear it? and others cry out with the Disciples in another case, Lord who then can be saved? But it is the Word whereby we must be judged, nor can we be the Disciples of Christ on any other Terms. But here in an especial manner lyes the wound and weakness of Faith and Profession in these our dayes. The Bellies of men cleave to the Dust, or their Affections to earthly things.

I speak not of those who by Rapine, Deceit and Oppression, strive to enrich themselves; nor of those who design nothing more than the Attainment of Greatness and Promotions in the world, though not by ways of open wickedness; least of all of them who make Religion and perhaps their Ministry therein, a Means for the attaining Secular ends and Preferments. No wise man can suppose such persons, any of them, to be spiritually minded, and it is most easie to disprove all their pretences. But I intend only those at present, whose ways and Means of attaining Riches, are lawfull, honest and unblameable; who use them with some moderation, and do profess that their Portion lyes in better things; so as it is hard to fasten a Conviction on them in matter of their conversation. Whatever may seem to reflect upon them, they esteem it to be that whose omission would make them foolish in their Affairs, or negligent in their Duty. But even among these also, there is oft

times that inordinate Love to present things, that esteem and valuation of them, that concernment in them, as are not consistent with their being Spiritually minded. With some their Relations, with some their Enjoyments, with most both in Conjunction, are an Idol which they set up in their hearts, and secretly bow down to. About these are their Hopes and Fears exercised, on them is their Love, in them is their Delight. They are wholly taken up with their own concerns, count all lost that is not spent on them, and all time mispent that is not engaged about them. Yet the things which they do, they judge to be good in themselves, their hearts do not condemn them as to the Matter of them. The Valuation they have of their Relations and Enjoyments they suppose to be lawful, within the bounds which they have assigned to it. Their care about them is in their own minds but their Duty. It is no easie matter, it requires much Spiritual Wisdom to fix right boundaries to our Affections and their actings about Earthly things. But let men plead and pretend what they please, I shall offer one Rule in this case which will not fail. And this is, that when men are so confident in the good State and measure of their affections and their Actings towards earthly things, as that they will oppose their ingagements into them, to known Duties of Religion, Piety and Charity, they are gone into a sinfull excess. Is there a State of the Poor that requires their Liberality and Bounty? you must excuse them, they have Families to provide for; when what is expected from them signifies nothing at all, as to a due provision for their Families, nor is what would lessen their Inheritances or Portions one Penny in the issue. Are they called to an Attendance on seasons of Religious Duties? they are so full of Business, that it is impossible for them, to have leisure for any such occasions; so by all

ways declaring that they are under the power of a prevalent predominant. Affection to earthly things. This fills all places with lifeless, sapless, useless Professors, who approve themselves in their condition, whilest it is visibly unspiritual and withering.

The Heart will have something whereon in a way of Preeminence, it will fix it self and its Affections. This in all its perpetual motions it seeks for rest and satisfaction in; And every man has an Edge, the Edge of his Affections is set one way or other, though it be more keen in some than others. And whereas all sorts of things, that the Heart can fix upon or turn the Edge of its Affections to, are distributed by the Apostle into things above and things beneath, things Heavenly and things Earthly, if we have not such a view and prospect of Heavenly things as to cause our Hearts to cleave to them and delight in them, let us pretend what we will, it is impossible but that we shall be under the power of a predominant Affection to the things of this World.

Herein lyes the great Danger of Multitudes at this present season. For let men profess what they will under the power of this frame, their Eternal state is in hazard every moment. And Persons are ingaged in it in great variety of Degrees. And we may cast them under two Heads.

1. Some do not at all understand that things are amiss with them, or that they are much to be blamed. They plead as was before observed, that they are all lawful things which their hearts do cleave to, and which it is their Duty to take care of and regard. May they not delight in their own Relations, especially at such a time when others break and cancel all Duties and bonds of Relation in the service of and provision they make for their Lusts? May they not be careful in good and honest ways of diligence about the

things of the world, when the most either lavish their time away in the pursuit of bestial Lusts, or heap them up by deceit and Oppression? May they not contrive for the promotion of their children in the world, to adde the other hundred or thousand pounds to their Advancement, that they may be in as good condition as others, seeing he is worse than an Infidel who provides not for his own family? By such reasonings and secret Thoughts do many justifie themselves in their earthly mindedness. And so fixed they are in the Approbation of themselves, that if you urge them to their Duty, you shall loose their acquaintance, if they do not become your Enemies for telling them the Truth. Yea they will avoid one Duty that lys not against their earthly Interest, because it leads to another. They will not ingage in Religious Assemblies, or be constant to their Duty in them, for fear Dutyes of Charity should be required of them or expected from them: On what Grounds such Persons can satisfy themselves that they are Spiritually-minded, I know not. I shall leave only one Rule with Persons that are thus minded. Where our Love to the world, has prevailed by its reasonings, pleas and pretences, to take away our fear and jealousy over our own hearts, lest we should inordinately love it, there it is assuredly predominant in us.

2. Others are sensible of the evil of their hearts, at least are jealous and afraid lest it should be found that their hearts do cleave inordinately to these things. Hence they endeavor to contend against this evil, sometimes by forcing themselves to such Acts of Piety or Charity as are contrary to that frame, and sometimes by labouring a change of the frame it self: Especially they will do so when God is pleased to awaken them by Trials and

Afflictions, such as write Vanity and Emptiness on all earthly enjoyments. But for the most part they strive not lawfully, and so obtain not what they seem to aim at.

This Disease with many is mortal; and will not be throughly cured in any but by the due exercise of this part of Spiritual-mindedness. There are other Duties required also to the same end, namely, of the Mortification of our Desires and Affections to earthly things, whereof I have treated elsewhere. But without this or a fixed contemplation on the Desirableness, Beauty and Glory of Heavenly things, it will not be attained. Further to evince the Truth hereof, we may observe these two things. First, If by any means a man do seem to have taken off his Heart from the Love of present things, and be not at the same time taken up with the Love of things that are Heavenly, his seeming Mortification is of no advantage to him. So persons frequently through Discontent, Disappointments or dissatisfaction with Relations, or meer natural Weariness, have left the world, the Affairs and cares of it, as to their wonted conversations in it, and have betaken themselves to Monasteries, Convents, or other Retirements suiting their Principles, without any Advantage to their Souls. Secondly, God is no such severe Lord and Master, as to require us to take off our Affections from, and mortifie them to those things which the Law of our Nature makes dear to us, as Wives, Children, Houses, Lands and Possessions, and not propose to us somewhat that is incomparably more excellent to fix them upon. So he invites the Elect of the Gentiles to Christ, Psal. 45:10. Hearken O Daughter, and consider, and encline yours ear, forget also yours own People and your Fathers house; that is, come into the Faith of Abraham, who forsook his Country and his Fathers house to follow God whither ever

he pleased. But he proposs this for their encouragement, ver. 11. So shall the King greatly desire your Beauty, for he is your Lord, and worship you him. The Love of the Great King is an abundant satisfactory Recompence for parting with all things in this world. So when Abrahams Servant was sent to take Rebecka for a Wife to Isaac, he required that she should immediately leave Father and Mother, Brothers and all enjoyments, and go along with him; But withall, that she might know her self to be no loser thereby, he not only assured her of the Greatness of his Master, but also at present he gave her Jewels of Silver, and Jewels of Gold, and Rayment, Gen. 24:53. And when our Savior requires that we should part with all for his sake and the Gospel, he promiss an hundred Fold in lieu of them even in this Life, namely, in an Interest in things Spiritual and Heavenly. Wherefore, without an assiduous Meditation on Heavenly things, as a better, more noble and suitable Object for our Affections to be fixed on, we can never be freed in a due manner from an inordinate Love of the things here below.

It is sad to see some Professors who will keep up spiritual Duties in Churches and in their Families, who will speak and discourse of Spiritual Things, and keep themselves from the open Excesses of the world; yet when they come to be tryed by such Duties as entrench on their Love and adherence to Earthly Things, quickly manifest how remote they are from being Spiritually-minded in a due manner. Were they to be tryed, as our Savior tryed the young man who made such a profession of his conscientious and religious conversation; Go sell what you have, give to the poor, and follow me; something might be pleaded in excuse for their Tergiversation. But alas! they will decline their Duty when they are not touched to the hundredth part of their enjoyments.

I bless God, I speak not thus of many of my own knowledge; and may say with the Apostle to the most to whom I usually speak in this manner; But Beloved we are perswaded better things of you, and things that accompany Salvation, though we thus speak, Heb. 6:9. Yea, the same Testimony may be given of many in this City, which the same Apostle gives to the Churches of Macedonia, Cor. 8:1, 2, 3. Vnderstand the Grace of God bestowed on the Churches of Macedonia, how that in a great Trial of Affliction, the Abundance of their Joy and their Poverty abounded to the Riches of their Liberality. For to their Power, and beyond their Power, they were willing of themselves. There has been nothing done amongst us, that may or can be boasted of, yet considering all Circumstances, it may be there have not been more Instances of true Evangelical Charity in any Age or Place for these many years. For them who have been but useful and helpful herein, the Lord remember them for good, and spare them according to the Multitude of his Mercies. It is true, they have not, many of them, founded Colledges, built Hospitals, or raised works of State and Magnificence. For very many of them are such, as whose deep Poverty comparatively has abounded to the Riches of their Liberality. The Basks and Bellyes of multitudes of poor and needy Servants of Christ have been warmed and refreshed by them, blessing God for them. Thank's be to God, saith the Apostle in this case, for his unspeakable Gift, Cor. 9:15. Blessed be God who has not left the Gospel without this Glory, nor the Profession of it without this evidence of its Power and Efficacy. Yea God has exalted the Glory of Persecutions and Afflictions. For many, since they have lost much of their enjoyments by them, and have all endangered continually, have abounded in Dutyes of Charity beyond

what they did in the dayes of their fulness and prosperity. So out of the Eater there has come forth meat. And if the world did but know what Fruits in a way of Charity and Bounty, to the Praise of God and Glory of the Gospel, have been occasioned by their making many poor, it would abate of their satisfaction in their successes.

But with many it is not so. Their Minds are so full of earthly things, they do so cleave to them in their Affections, that no sense of Duty, no Example of others, no concernment of the Glory of God or the Gospel, can make any impressions on them. If there be yet in them so much Life and Light of Grace, as to design a Deliverance from this woful condition, the means insisted on must be made use of.

Especially this Advice is needful to those who are Rich, who have large Possessions, or abound in the Goods of this world. The Poor, the Afflicted, the Sorrowful are prompted from their outward circumstances as well as excited by inward Grace, frequently to remember and to think of the Things above, wherein lyes their only Reserve and Relief against the trouble and urgency of their present condition. But the enjoyment of these things in abundance, is accompanyed with a two-fold evil, lying directly contrary to this Duty.

1. A Desire of encrease and adding thereunto. Earthly enjoyments enlarge mens Earthly Desires; and the Love of them grows with their income. A moderate stock of Waters, sufficient for our use, may be kept within ordinary banks. But if a Flood be turned into them, they know no bounds, but overflow all about them. The encrease of Wealth and Riches enlargs the Desires of men after them, beyond all bounds of wisdom, sobriety, or safety. He that

labours hard for his daily bread, has seldom such earnest vehement Desires of an Addition to what he has, as many have who already have more than they know how to use, or almost what to do withal. This they must have more, and the last Advantage serves for nothing but to stir them up to look out for another. And yet such men would on other Accounts be esteemed good Christians, and Spiritually minded, as all Good Christians are.

2. They draw the Heart to value and esteem them, as those which bring in their satisfaction, and make them to differ from those whom they see to be poor and miserable. Now these things are contrary to, and where they are habitually prevalent, inconsistent utterly with being Spiritually minded. Nor is it possible, that any who in the least degree are under their power, can ever attain Deliverance, unless their Thoughts are fixed, and their Minds thereby possessed with due apprehensions of invisible things and eternal Glory.

These are some few of those many Advantages which we may obtain by fixing our Thoughts and Meditations, and thereby our Affections on the things that are above. And there are some things which make me willing to give some few Directions for the practice of this Duty. For whatever else we are and do, we neither are nor can be truely Spiritually minded, whereon Life and Peace depend, unless we do really exercise our Thoughts to Meditations of Things above. Without it all our Religion is but vain. And as I fear, men are generally wanting and defective herein in point of Practice; so I do also, that many through the Darkness of their Minds, the weakness of their Intellectuals, and Ignorance of the nature of all things

unseen, do seldom set themselves to the Contemplation of them. I shall therefore give some few Directions for the Practice of this Duty.

Chapter 6

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The objects of spiritual thoughts — what they are occupied with — as evidence that those who have them are spiritually minded. Rules for maintaining steadiness in contemplating heavenly things. Motives for fixing our thoughts on them with steadiness.

Before I move on to the next major topic — which is the principal thing, the foundation of the grace and duty we are examining — some further discussion is needed to make what has already been said more practically useful. This involves inquiring into what the proper objects of those thoughts should be — the thoughts which, given the qualifications already laid out, are the evidence of being spiritually minded. This may prove helpful to many by assisting them to fix their wandering minds, which tend to drift into all kinds of uncertainty. This has happened to us because of the disorder and weakness of our souls' faculties: sometimes what the mind guides and directs toward in spiritual and heavenly things, the will and affections — through their depravity and corruption — will not comply with, and so the mind's good intentions come to nothing. Other times, what the will and affections are inclined to and ready for, the mind through its weakness and instability cannot lead them to accomplish — so the desire is

present, but we do not know how to carry it out. Many are barren in this duty because they do not know what to fix upon, or how to exercise their thoughts once they have chosen a subject for meditation. They waste their time in fruitless longing to use their thoughts more profitably, rather than actually making progress in the duty itself. They exhaust themselves not because they are unwilling to go, but because they cannot find the way. Therefore, both of these things will be addressed: what are the proper objects of our spiritual thoughts, and how we can maintain steadiness in contemplating them. To that end, I will first give some general rules, and then some specific examples by way of guidance.

First, pay attention to the special calls of God's providence and apply your minds to thoughts about the duties required by them. There is a voice in all significant providential dealings. "The voice of the Lord calls to the city, and it is sound wisdom to fear Your name; hear the rod and who has appointed it," Micah 6:9. There is a call, a cry in every rod of God, in every chastening providence — and in it He makes a declaration of His name, His holiness, His power, His greatness. Every wise and grounded person will work to discern this and respond to the call. God is greatly provoked when this is not done. "Lord, when Your hand is lifted up, they do not see it. Let them see Your zeal for Your people and be put to shame," Isaiah 26:11. If therefore we would apply ourselves to our present duty, we must wisely consider what God is saying in His current providential dealings in the world. Do not listen to anyone who would interpret them as anything other than plain declarations of His displeasure and anger against the sins of people. Is not His wrath being revealed from heaven against the ungodliness of people — especially those who suppress the truth in unrighteous-

ness, or who are false and hypocritical professors of the Gospel? Does He not also clearly declare the uncertainty and instability of all earthly things, from life itself down to the least possession? And how vain and foolish it is to cling to them inordinately. The fingers that appeared and wrote the doom of Belshazzar on the wall did so in letters no one could read and words no one could understand except Daniel. But God's present call in these things is written plainly on the wall — clear enough for a runner to read as he passes. If the heavens are gathering black clouds, and thunder is rolling over us, anyone continuing on their journey who refuses to believe a storm is coming will have to bear its full fury.

Grant then that this is the voice of providence — that these are indications of the mind and will of God — what duties are we being called to by them? They can be grouped under two headings.

First, a diligent inward examination and a holy watchfulness over ourselves with regard to those ways and sins against which God's displeasure is being declared. We take it for granted that present providences are indications of God's anger and displeasure. But once that is established, most people tend to lay the causes on others and excuse themselves. As long as they see others more wicked and shameless than themselves — people openly guilty of crimes they find revolting even to think about — they lay all the blame on those others and fear only that they will suffer along with them. But when the storm came on the ship at sea — where there was only one man who feared God — when lots were cast to find whose fault it was, the lot fell on him, Jonah 1:7. The cause of the present storm may just as well be the secret sins of professing Christians as the open provocations of ungodly people. God will punish severely those He has known, Amos 3:2. Therefore

it is certainly our duty to search diligently, so that nothing be found resting in us against which God is declaring His displeasure. Beware of negligence and complacency here. When our Savior told His disciples that one of them would betray Him, the one who was actually guilty was the last to say, "Lord, is it I?" Let no sense of spiritual security, no conviction of sincerity in any duty, no visible contrast between yourself and others in the world, divert your mind from diligence in this duty. The voice of the Lord calls to the city, and the person of wisdom will heed His name.

Second, a diligent effort to live in a holy surrender of ourselves — our persons, lives, families, and all our possessions — to the sovereign will and wisdom of God, so that we may be ready to give up all things at His call without complaint. This too is plainly declared in the voice of present providences. God is putting wings on people's wealth, shaking their homes, stripping away the visible protections of their lives, and proclaiming the instability and uncertainty of everything below. If we are not determined to contend with Him, there is nothing left to give us even a moment's rest and peace except a holy surrender of all to His sovereign pleasure.

Do you want to know what to fix your thoughts on so that they may be evidence of your being spiritually minded? I say: dwell frequently on these things. They lie before you, they call out to you, and they will give you a worthwhile occupation. Count them part of your responsibility, give them some portion of your time, and do not stop until your conscience bears witness that you have sincerely settled both of these duties in your mind — which will never happen without much thinking about them. Unless it is so with you, God will be greatly displeased at your neglect of His coming and His call, now that it is so plain and clear. Fear the terrible

warnings recorded in Proverbs 1:24-28 and Isaiah 56:12 and 66:4. And if any calamity — public or private — overtakes you while you are neglecting these duties, you will be terribly unprepared and will not know which way to turn for relief. This present season, therefore, is a special opportunity for you to test and discover whether you are spiritually minded. The wisdom of faith is to stir up and draw grace into active exercise in response to present occasions. If this grace dwells habitually in you, it will express itself in many thoughts about these present duties.

But unfortunately, for the most part, people are prone to walk contrary to God in these things, as the wisdom of the flesh is contrary to Him in everything. We see a striking example of this with regard to these duties, especially the second one. First, who among us makes a diligent inward search and examination of heart and ways with respect to the causes of God's displeasure and judgments? Generally, when the signs and evidences of that displeasure are most prominent, the world is full of outrageous and provocative sins. These visibly announce themselves as the causes of God's coming wrath on the children of disobedience. Hence most people tend to lay all blame for present judgments on them and to remove it entirely from themselves. And so, typically, self-examination is never less practiced than when it is most needed. I will not deny that the open, brazen sins of the world are the procuring cause of God's temporal wrath against it. But the wisest course for us is to refer those people's final judgment to the great day of judgment. The apostle directs us to this in 1 Thessalonians 1:6-10. Our duty is to consider in what ways judgment begins at the house of God, and to examine ourselves in light of that.

The other part of our present duty in responding to the voice of providence is a humble surrender of ourselves and all our concerns to the will of God, holding our earthly and temporal possessions loosely in our affections. We neither do this nor can do it — whatever we profess — unless our thoughts are greatly exercised about the reasons for it and the motives to it. For this is how faith puts its power to work in the mortification of self and all earthly attachments. Without this exercise of thought, we cannot make any true surrender of ourselves to the will of God. But how many at present openly walk contrary to God in this? The ways, expressions, and conversations of people make this plain. Their love for present things, their schemes for increasing and preserving them, grow and thrive under God's very calls to the contrary. So it was in the days of Noah: they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, right up until the day Noah entered the ark. Can the majority of professing Christians today give testimony to exercising their thoughts on things that would dispose them to this holy surrender? That they are meditating on God's calls, and from that preparing themselves to relinquish everything at His time and pleasure? How can people claim to be spiritually minded when the current of their thoughts runs in direct opposition to the mind of God?

Here lies the root of their self-deception. They are professing Christians in a special sense — they consider themselves believers, hope they will be saved, and have many evidences for it. But one negative piece of evidence will cancel a hundred positive ones. "All these things I have kept," said the young man; "One thing you still lack," said our Savior. And the lack of that one thing made all the rest useless to him. Many things you have done, many things you

are doing, many grounds of hope remain with you — neither you nor others doubt your condition. But are you spiritually minded? If this one thing is lacking, all the rest will not help you — you have in fact neither life nor peace. And what grounds do you have to judge that you are spiritually minded, if the current of your thoughts runs in direct opposition to God's present calls? If at such a time as this your love of the world is as strong as ever — perhaps even stronger; if your desires to secure the things of this life for yourself and your family are intense; if the daily work of your mind is not focused on how you may attain a constant surrender of yourself and all you have to the will of God — something that cannot be achieved without much thinking and meditation on the reasons for it and the motives to it — then I cannot understand how you can judge yourself to be spiritually minded.

If anyone therefore says they would abound more in spiritual thoughts but simply do not know what to fix them on, I propose this in the first place as something that will lead them to the proper performance of their present duties.

Second, personal trials and temptations call for the exercise of our thoughts in a particularly focused way. If a person has a physical illness, pain, or disease, it will cause him to think about it whether he wants to or not — and certainly if he is wise, he will do so. And he will not merely complain about how it hurts but will inquire into its causes and seek its cure. Yet there are some diseases — like lethargy — that by their very nature remove all sense and awareness of themselves; and some progress so slowly and secretly, like a wasting fever, that they go unnoticed. But both of these are fatal. Shall people then be more negligent about the spiritual diseases of their souls? — so that they are beset with many

temptations, the root of all spiritual diseases, and give no thought to them at all? Is it not to be feared that where this is the case, those temptations are either of the kind that by their own nature have taken away spiritual feeling, or by their deceptiveness are quietly leading a person toward eternal death? To have one's mind unoccupied with these things is to be dangerously asleep, Proverbs 23:34-35.

I acknowledge there is some difficulty in how to exercise our thoughts rightly about our temptations. For the primary way temptations gain power is by stirring up multiplied thoughts about their objects, or about what they are leading toward. This is brought about or occasioned in several ways. First, through the prior power of lust in the affections. This will fill the mind with thoughts. The heart coins imaginations in compliance with them. These are the ways and means by which lust draws the heart away from duty and entices to sin, James 1:14 — at the very least the means by which people come to have eyes full of adultery, 2 Peter 2:14, or to live in constant contemplation of the pleasures of sin. Second, they arise and are occasioned by renewed presentations of the object of sin. This is twofold: real, as when Achan saw the gold bar and coveted it, Joshua 7:21 and Proverbs 23:31 — against which is the psalmist's prayer, "Turn away my eyes from looking at vanity," and Job's covenant in chapter 31:1; or imaginary, when the imagination — infected and tainted by lust — continually presents to the mind the pleasure of sin and the acting out of it. In this way people make provision for the flesh to fulfill its lusts, Romans 13:14. Third, through Satan's suggestions — he uses all his craft and strategies to stir up thoughts about the very sin to which the temptation is leading. And a temptation seldom fails of its purpose

when it can stir up a multitude of unprofitable thoughts about its object. For when temptations multiply thoughts about sin — proceeding from some or all of these causes — and the mind has accustomed itself to welcome them, those in whom this happens need nothing more than the opportunity and occasion of having external restraints removed to go ahead and commit the actual sin. Having devised wickedness in their minds, they practice it when it is in their power to do so, Micah 2:1. It is in no way safe to advise such people to dwell in thoughts about their temptations — all such thoughts will only work against them.

I speak only to those for whom their temptations are their affliction and their burden. Even such people must be very careful about how they allow their thoughts to dwell on the subject matter of their temptation, lest it become a snare and prove too much for them. A person may begin thinking about an object with abhorrence and disgust — and if it concerns a temptation, may end in pleasure and approval. The deceitfulness of sin latches on to something in the mind that lust then lingers on with delight, and so corrupts the whole frame of spirit with which the person began. There have been cases where people entered a situation with the resolve to condemn sin and were instead trapped by the occasion into committing the very sin they intended to condemn. Therefore, it is rarely safe for someone who is actually engaged in a temptation to dwell in sustained thoughts about what the temptation is about or the sin it is leading to. Sin has a thousand ways of doing harm and is able to infuse its poison into the affections through everything it has ever used as bait — especially if it has already defiled the mind with pleasurable contemplations of it. Indeed, sometimes a person of some spiritual strength who is engaged in performing duties,

when the subject matter of his temptation is suddenly presented to him so as to take hold of his thoughts — in that instant, as they say of one who has looked at Medusa's head, he is turned to stone. His energy freezes, his strength is gone, all actings of grace cease, his armor falls away, and he surrenders himself as prey to his temptation. Only a fresh supply of grace can bring him any deliverance. Therefore, while people are engaged with a temptation, I do not advise them to spend time in thoughts about the temptation's subject matter. For sometimes memories of past gratification of their lusts, sometimes fresh ambushes from the pull of corruption not yet mortified, sometimes Satan's craft in fixing their imagination on it — all of these can prove too strong and carry them into fresh compliance with the very sin they want to be delivered from.

But this season calls in a special way for the exercise of thoughts on the ways and means of deliverance from the snare in which you are caught, or the danger you find yourself exposed to. Think about the guilt of sin, so that you may be humbled. Think about the power of sin, so that you may seek strength against it. Do not think about the substance of sin — the worldly things suited to the lusts of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life — lest you be further entangled. The present direction is this: think deeply about the ways of relief from the power of your particular temptation, which is leading you toward sin. But this is something people are very reluctant to come to, unless they are spiritually minded. I am not speaking of those who love their chains, who glory in their yoke, who are actually comfortable enough with their temptations because those temptations give the most satisfying entertainment to their minds. Such people hardly know what to do unless they can dwell in their thoughts on the objects of their lusts,

and multiply such thoughts continually. The apostle calls this making provision for the flesh to fulfill its lusts. Their chief trouble is that outward restraints prevent them from acting on those lusts to the fullest extent. These people dwell close to those fools who mock at sin, and will before long take up their residence among them.

But I am speaking, as I said before, only of those whose temptations are their affliction and who groan for deliverance from them. Let such people be made aware of the great — indeed the only — way of relief in this distress, as expressed in Hebrews 2:17-18: "He is a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God; for since He Himself was tempted in that which He has suffered, He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted." And Hebrews 4:15-16: "For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need." Let them know that their only way of deliverance is through the active exercise of faith — thoughts directed toward Christ, His power to aid those who are tempted, and the ways by which He provides sufficient grace for that purpose. Retreating to Him for relief when temptations press hard — that is what they can hardly be brought to do. They are ready to say: are not the rivers of Damascus better than all the waters of Israel? Would it not be better to trust our own promises, resolutions, and efforts, along with other escape routes within our own power? I will say nothing against any of those in their proper place, insofar as they are supported by Scripture. But this I say: no one will ever be delivered from tormenting temptations to the

glory of God and their own spiritual benefit, except through the active exercise of faith in Jesus Christ and the sufficiency of His grace for their deliverance. But when people are not spiritually minded, they cannot fix their thoughts on spiritual things. Therefore people waste away daily under their temptations — their temptations gain ground on them, until the breach grows as wide as the sea and there is no healing it.

I mention this only to show the weight and necessity of the duty being proposed. For when people under the power of conviction are pressed by temptation, they will do anything rather than turn to the only effective relief. Some will groan and cry out under their distress from the torment of the conflict between their temptations and their convictions. Some will turn to the counterfeit relief offered by any false religion. But to apply themselves in thoughts of faith to Jesus Christ, whose grace alone is sufficient for all — that they will not be persuaded to do.

We are all subject to temptations. Those who are unaware of it are already under the power of what the temptation leads to. Temptations are of two kinds. First, there are extraordinary temptations, in which God's hand is involved in a special way for our rebuke. It is true that God does not tempt anyone in the formal sense of leading them to sin. But He orders temptations insofar as they are afflictions and chastisements. This is what happens when He allows a particular inward corruption to come together with a particular outward temptation, and permits that combination to gain some power. Of these, there is no doubt that any person who is not judicially hardened can recognize both the disease and the remedy. But the ordinary pattern of temptations that we encounter requires diligent attention both to discover them and to find deliverance

from them. And it is to be feared that many are kept in spiritual weakness, uselessness, and darkness all their days through the power of their temptations, yet never know what those temptations are or where they lie. These gray hairs are scattered on them, yet they know it not; some people even take satisfaction in the very things and ways that are their temptations. Yet through due watchfulness, diligence, and wisdom, people can know both the disease of their hearts in their prevailing corruptions, and the ways by which temptation excites that disease — including the occasions it uses and the advantages it exploits. For example: a person may have outstanding gifts and usefulness or success in his labors, which gains him great esteem with others. Such a person will hardly avoid a double temptation. First, spiritual pride and self-exaltation. This is why the apostle does not permit a novice — someone inexperienced in the ways of grace and the deceits of sin — to hold the office of ministry, lest he be lifted up with pride and fall into the condemnation of the devil, 1 Timothy 3:6. Paul himself was not without danger of this, 2 Corinthians 12:7. The best of people can hardly guard their minds against the secret workings of pride after success and praise, unless they keep those thoughts continually balanced by thoughts of their own vileness in the sight of God. Second, slackness in pursuing thorough mortification — which they justify by their acceptance and success in ministry above others. It would be greatly to be desired that all of us who are ministers would be careful in these things; for although some of us may not much please others, we may please ourselves sufficiently to expose our souls to these snares. And the effects of carelessness here openly damage the Gospel. Others are much occupied with the world and its affairs. Negligence in spiritual watch-

fulness, vanity in conversation, love of earthly things, and conformity to the world will on all occasions impose themselves upon them. If they do not understand their temptations in this, spiritual-mindedness will be steadily eroded in them. Those who are rich have their own particular temptations — usually many, plausible, and effective — and those who are poor have theirs as well. Some people's snares lie in their constitutions, others in their company, most in the various circumstances of life. Those who are maintaining any reasonable watch over themselves — who are exercising any wisdom and self-observation — can know where their temptations lie, what advantages those temptations use to perplex their minds and endanger their souls.

In these cases, people are generally taught what the ways and means of deliverance and preservation are. Three things are required for this duty, and spiritual wisdom for all three. First, know what your particular temptations are — the ones through which you suffer, and by which the life of God is being hindered in you. If this is neglected or disregarded, no person can maintain either life or peace, or be spiritually minded. Second, know your remedy and your relief — what it consists in alone. Many duties are required of us for this purpose, and they are useful. But know with certainty that not one of them — not all of them combined — will bring relief to the glory of God and your own peace without a direct application of faith to Him who is able to aid those who are tempted. Therefore, third, here lies your great duty with respect to your temptations: a constant exercise of your thoughts on the love, care, compassion, and tenderness of Christ, and on His ability to help,

aid, and save those who believe — in such a way as to strengthen your faith and trust in Him. This will prove surely successful and victorious.

The same duty applies to any pressing, prevalent, widespread temptation. There are seasons when an hour of trial comes upon the earth to test those who live in it. What if a person should judge that such an hour has now come — and that the power of darkness is at work in it? What if he should be persuaded that a widespread spiritual deadness, coldness, sluggishness, and decay in grace — especially in the vigorous exercise of zeal, love, and delight in God — along with a general indifference to holy duties, are the effects of this hour of trial? I do not say definitively that this is the case — let others judge as they see fit. But if someone does judge this to be so, it is undoubtedly his duty to exercise his thoughts on how he may escape in this day of trial and be counted worthy to stand before the Son of Man. He will find it important to dwell in his mind on the reasons and motives for watchfulness, and on how he may obtain such supplies of grace as will effectively preserve him from such decay.

Third, all things in religion — both in faith and practice — are to be objects of such thoughts. As they are presented or come to mind in great variety on all kinds of occasions, we ought to give them room in our meditations. To hear things, to have them presented to us — perhaps through a divine ordinance — and then to let them slip away like water poured into a leaking vessel, is the ruin of many souls. I will therefore select some specific examples, as was proposed before, of things which I judge those who would be spiritually minded ought to dwell on and abound in thought about.

First, it is our duty to keep our minds focused on the things that are above — eternal things — both in regard to their reality, their present condition, and our future enjoyment of them. In this the life of this grace and duty consists. To be heavenly-minded — that is, to mind the things of heaven — and to be spiritually minded are the same thing. Or heavenly-mindedness is the effect of being spiritually minded in terms of its origin and essence, or the first proper expression of it. It is the cause of spiritual-mindedness as to its growth and degrees, and it is the evidence of spiritual-mindedness in lived experience. I cannot understand how it is possible for someone whose chief interest lies in things above not to have many thoughts of them. This is the apostle's great counsel, based on our share in Christ and our conformity to Him, Colossians 3:1-2: "Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth." It is fitting for those who, through the power of Christ's resurrection, have been raised to newness of life to have their thoughts exercised on the state of things above — on the presence of Christ there. And the singular benefit of looking toward these things and meditating on them is explained in 2 Corinthians 4:16-18: "Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day. For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal." Not to give way to despair under the daily decay of the outer man and the approach of death, to bear afflic-

tions as light and momentary, to thrive inwardly through it all — these are unspeakable mercies and privileges. Can you attain a better frame of mind? Is there anything you would more desire, if you are a believer? Is it not better to have such a mind than to enjoy all the peace and security the world can provide? One of the chief means by which we become partakers of these things is a proper meditation on things unseen and eternal. These are the things that lie within the veil — on which we should cast the anchor of our hope in all the storms we encounter, Hebrews 6:19-20 — about which we will speak more later.

Without doubt, the majority of Christians are greatly lacking in this duty — partly for want of understanding of these things, partly for want of delight in them. They think little of an eternal country. Wherever people are, they typically do not neglect thoughts of the country where their inheritance lies. If they are away from it for a time, they still work to acquaint themselves with its most important matters. But this heavenly country, where our eternal inheritance lies, is not regarded. People do not exercise themselves in thoughts of things eternal and invisible as they ought. If they did, it would be impossible for their minds to remain so earthly and their affections to cling so strongly to present things. A person who gazes steadily at the sun — though he cannot bear the full brightness of its beams — will find his eyes so affected by it that when he looks away, he can see almost nothing around him; everything appears dark to him. And the person who gazes steadily in his meditations on things above — eternal things — though he cannot fully comprehend their glory, will find that a veil is cast over all the desirable beauties of earthly things, drawing his affections away from them.

People live and act under the conviction that a state of immortality and glory is coming. This belief greatly comforts them in their sorrows, sufferings, and temptations. Yet for many, it is only a reserve to fall back on when they can remain here no longer. As for daily contemplation of the nature and causes of that glory, or any real entrance into it through faith and hope, most are complete strangers to it. If we are spiritually minded, nothing will be more natural to us than to have many thoughts of eternal things — both because all our chief interests lie there, and because those things are excellent and glorious in themselves. The direction therefore is: make heavenly things — the things of the future state of blessedness and glory — a primary object of your thoughts. Think about them deeply. Meditate on them often. Many are discouraged in this by their ignorance and spiritual blindness, and by their inability to form steady and clear conceptions of invisible things. Hence one of two things tends to befall them when they try to meditate on things above. First, the glory of those things — the glory of God in them, being essentially infinite and incomprehensible — immediately overwhelms them and in a moment leaves them completely at a loss, unable to frame a single thought about them. Or second, they lack the skill and ability to form proper conceptions of invisible things, and to arrange them in their minds in such a way as to think about them calmly and steadily. Both of these will be addressed later. For now I will only say this:

Whoever sincerely engages in this duty according to what he has — and persists in it consistently — will make such a refreshing and satisfying progress in his understanding of heavenly things that he will be greatly encouraged. We are kept in darkness, ignorance, and unsteadiness in meditation about them not because of

the nature of the things themselves, but because of our own laziness, negligence, and readiness to be turned aside by the perception of difficulties — by the lion in the road. Therefore I will consider two things: first, what are the chief motives to this duty of fixing our thoughts on things above, and what advantages do we receive from it; and second, some directions for how and on what specific aspects of things above we may exercise our thoughts.

First, faith will be increased and strengthened by it. Invisible things are the proper objects of faith. Faith is "the evidence of things not seen," Hebrews 11:1. Therefore, in our thoughts about them, faith is exercised in its proper sphere — which is the chief means of its growth and increase. Two things will follow from this.

First, the soul will arrive at a more settled and satisfying sense of the reality of these things. Things born of imagination — which maintain their appeal through obscurity — cannot withstand careful examination. They lose their reputation with every serious inquiry. If rational people would simply give themselves the freedom to think through these things thoroughly, they would quickly demolish Muhammad's fool's paradise, the purgatory of Rome, and all such products of imagination and superstition. But where things are real and substantial, the more they are examined, the more they demonstrate their existence and solidity. It is not merely professing belief in a future state of blessedness that makes it real to our minds. For the most part, what people have of heavenly things is only a concept they do not contradict, rather than any solid satisfaction in or spiritual sense of their reality. These are things no eye has seen, no ear has heard, and no human heart has been able to conceive — their existence, nature, and true state are not easily grasped. But through the continual exercise of holy

thoughts about them, the soul obtains entrance into the midst of them and finds in them both lasting substance and riches. There is no way to strengthen faith to any meaningful degree except through daily contemplation of these things themselves. Those who do not think about them frequently will never believe them sincerely. They will not be established by any indirect evidence when they have not given their own evidence to our souls. Faith, as we said, exercised in this way will give them a substance — not in themselves, which they already have apart from our faith — but in us, in our hearts, in the minds of those who believe. Imagination creates its own object; faith finds it already prepared. Faith will not leave a bare concept in the understanding, but will give these things a spiritual reality in the heart — just as Christ himself dwells in our hearts by faith. Two things will reveal this reality of them in us. First, when we find them in constant readiness to rise up in our minds on all occasions when the thought and remembrance of them is needful and useful. There are many seasons — some of which will be addressed shortly — and many duties in which faith in invisible and eternal things is necessary to us, so that we cannot rightly use those seasons or perform those duties without them. If on all such occasions these things present themselves to us from the inner frame of our minds — or through familiarity and acquaintance with them, we naturally turn our thoughts to them — then they seem to have been given real substance in our souls. But if on occasions where they alone would yield us help and relief, we habitually turn to other thoughts instead — if thoughts of eternal things are, as it were, out of the way and do not rise in our minds of their own accord — then we are still strangers to this effect of faith. Second, they are made real to us — they have substance in us

— when the soul continually longs to be in them. When these things have given the heart such a taste and relish, as the firstfruits of glory, that the soul cannot help desiring on every fitting occasion to be in their full enjoyment — then faith seems to have done its effective work in us. For lack of these things many among us walk in discouragement all their days.

Second, steady meditation will gradually give the heart a true acquaintance with the particular nature and significance of these things. General ideas and notions about heaven and glory simply float through the mind and have very little influence on us in other duties. But persistent contemplation will give the mind such clear and distinct perceptions of heavenly things as to affect it properly with their glory. The more we perceive the glory and excellence of these things in their own nature — their suitableness to our own nature as our only proper rest and blessedness, as the perfection and completion of what grace has already begun in us, and the restless longing of all gracious dispositions and inclinations of our hearts toward enjoying them — the more firmly will faith be established in clinging to them. In this contemplation, therefore, consists faith's chief food, by which it is nourished and strengthened. We should not expect much work from laborers who have no provision of proper food. It is no wonder that we find faith faint and weak in the work it has to do — which is often great and demanding — when we neglect to lead it daily to what ought to supply it with strength.

Second, this will give life and exercise to the grace of hope. Hope is a glorious grace, to which blessed effects are attributed in Scripture, and it has an effective operation in supporting and comforting believers. By it we are purified, sanctified, and saved. And

to sum up its excellence and power: it is a primary way in which Christ, who lives in us, works, Colossians 1:27 — "Christ in you, the hope of glory." Where Christ reveals His presence with us, He gives us an infallible hope of glory — He provides an assured pledge of it and shapes our souls to a confident expectation of it. Hope in general is merely an uncertain expectation of a future good that we desire. But as a gospel grace, all uncertainty is removed from it — uncertainty that would otherwise rob us of the benefit it is intended to give. It is an earnest expectation flowing from faith, trust, and confidence, accompanied by longing desires for enjoyment. It is through a misunderstanding of its nature that few Christians pursue it, exercise themselves in it, or enjoy the benefit of it. For they suppose that living by hope implies a condition not only inferior to the life of faith and all assurance in believing, but actually excluding them. They think that hoping to be saved is the condition of people who have no grounds for faith or assurance. But this is to turn a blessed fruit of the Spirit into a common emotion of natural desire. Gospel hope is a fruit of faith, trust, and confidence. Indeed, the fullest and highest actings of all grace issue in a well-grounded hope — and grace cannot rise higher than this, Romans 5:2-5.

The reason people make so little use of and receive so little benefit from this excellent grace is that they do not persist in thoughts and contemplation of the things hoped for. The special object of hope is eternal glory, Colossians 1:27 and Romans 5:2. Its particular purpose is to sustain, comfort, and refresh the soul in all trials — under all weariness and discouragement — with a firm expectation of a speedy entrance into that glory, and with an earnest longing for it. Therefore, unless we familiarize ourselves through

continual meditation with the reality and nature of this glory, it is impossible for it to serve as the object of a vigorous and active hope — the kind of hope by which, as the apostle says, we are saved. Without this, we can have neither that evidence of eternal things, nor that valuation of them, nor that readiness of mind for them, as should keep us in the exercise of gracious hope about them.

Chapter 7

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Directions for exercising our thoughts on things above — things future, invisible, and eternal; on God Himself — along with the difficulties and obstacles involved and the way to remove them. Right conceptions of future glory established.

We have already treated in general of the proper objects of our spiritual thoughts as they relate to our present duty. What we last took up is a special instance of this: heavenly things — things future and invisible — along with the fountain and spring of them all in Christ and God Himself. And because people are generally unskilled in this area, and great difficulties arise in the discharge of this part of the duty, I will give some specific directions for it.

First, fill your minds with right conceptions and understandings of things above and of the state of future glory. In this duty we are to look at things that are not seen, 2 Corinthians 4:18. It is by faith alone that we have a view of them, for "we walk by faith, not by sight." And faith can give us no share in them unless we have proper conceptions of them, for it merely assents to and clings to the truth of what is presented to it. The great majority of humanity both deceives itself and feeds on ashes in this matter. They imagine a future state that has no foundation except in their own imagi-

nations. Therefore, the apostle, in directing us to seek and set our minds on things above, adds as guidance for our thoughts the consideration of the chief content of those things: "where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God," Colossians 3:1-2. He wants to lead us to clear perceptions of heavenly things — especially of the presence of Christ in His exaltation and glory. Therefore the true conception of these things, which we are to fill our minds with, may be considered here.

All those who have any conception of a future state of happiness agree on this much: it involves deliverance and freedom from all that is evil. But they do not agree on what constitutes evil. Many regard only those things that are distressing, troublesome, wearing, and destructive to nature as evil — that is, what is painful: sickness, sorrow, loss, poverty, all manner of outward troubles, and death itself. Therefore they suppose that the future state of blessedness will free them from all these things, if they can attain it. These they will place in the balance against the troubles of life — and sometimes against the pleasures of it that they must give up. Indeed, even profane and shameless people will at least in words profess that heaven will give them rest from all their troubles. But it is no place of rest for such people.

To all others as well — to believers themselves — these things are evils from which they expect deliverance in heaven and glory. There is no doubt that it is both lawful and fitting for us to contemplate heaven as a state that will deliver us from all outward troubles, from death itself and everything leading up to it. Heaven is promised as rest to those who are troubled, 2 Thessalonians 1:7. It is our duty under all our sufferings, reproaches, persecutions, troubles, and sorrows to lift our minds up to the contemplation of

that state in which we will be freed from them all. It is a blessed thought about heaven that God will wipe away all tears from our eyes there, Revelation 7:17 — removing far from us all causes of sorrow. And it would be to our benefit if we accustomed our minds more to this kind of relief than we do — if when fears, dangers, and sorrows come upon us, we more readily retreated to thoughts of that state where we will be freed from them all. Even this most elementary consideration of heaven would make thoughts of it more familiar to us and more useful. It would be far better than spending such occasions in empty complaints, uncertain hopes, and futile scheming.

But there is something that to those who are truly spiritually minded has more evil in it than all these things combined — and that is sin. Heaven is a state of deliverance from sin — from all sin, in all its causes, accompaniments, and effects. He is no true believer to whom sin is not the greatest burden, sorrow, and trouble. Other things — such as the loss of dear loved ones or extraordinary physical pain — may at certain moments make a deeper impression on the mind through natural emotions than sins ever have at any one time. So a person may feel a greater sensory discomfort from a toothache that will be gone in an hour than from a wasting fever that will assuredly take his life. But taking the whole course of life into view — with all the activity of the soul in spiritual judgment as well as natural emotion — I do not understand how a person can be a sincere believer for whom sin is not the greatest burden and sorrow.

Therefore, the first and most essential part of the true understanding of heaven is this: it is a state in which we will be eternally freed from sin and all that goes with it — except for the exaltation

of the glory of God's grace in Christ, through the pardon of it. The person who truly hates sin and abhors it — whose chief desire and aim in life is to be as free from it as possible, who walks in self-abasement because of his many disappointments when he hoped sin would act in him no more — cannot help, I believe, frequently retreating for refreshment to thoughts of that state where he will be freed from sin entirely and will triumph over it for eternity. This is a conception of heaven that can be easily grasped and fixed in the mind — one that we can dwell on to the great benefit and satisfaction of our souls.

Frequent thoughts and meditations about heaven under this conception are evidence that a person is spiritually minded. For it is convincing evidence that sin is a burden to him — that he longs to be delivered from it and all its consequences, and that no thoughts are more welcome than those of the state in which sin will be no more. And although people may be troubled by their sins and would willingly be freed from them insofar as those sins disturb their minds and make their consciences uneasy, yet if they rarely look to this relief and find no refreshment in it, I fear their trouble is not what it ought to be. Therefore, when people can wrestle and wrangle with their convictions of sin, yet find their best relief in the hope that things will get better at some point in this life — without any longing desire for the state in which sin will be no more — they give no evidence that they are spiritually minded.

It is quite otherwise with sincere believers as they exercise this duty. For them, what makes the remaining traces of sin most grievous and burdensome is the consideration of God's grace and love, the blood of Christ, the purity and holiness of the Holy Spirit

who dwells in them, and the light, grace, and mercy they have received through the promises of the Gospel. This is what even breaks their hearts and causes some of them to go mourning all day — that anything of what God alone hates should be found or remain in them. In this condition, it is evidence that they are spiritually minded if — alongside watchful efforts to mortify sin thoroughly and cut it out completely, root and branch — they consistently add these thoughts of that blessed state in which they will be absolutely and eternally freed from all sin, with refreshment, delight, and contentment.

These things belong to our direction for fixing our thoughts and meditations on things above. Even the humblest and weakest person who has the smallest spark of sincerity and grace is capable of grasping this and able to practice it. And their sense of the evil of sin will naturally lead them to it every day — if only they do not close their eyes against the light of the refreshment that is in it. Let those who cannot rise in their minds to fixed and stable thoughts about any other aspect of these invisible things dwell on this consideration — they will find in it no small spiritual benefit and refreshment to their souls.

Second, as to the positive content of this glorious future state, people's thoughts and conceptions vary widely. So that we may know both what to avoid and what to embrace, we will briefly consider some of them.

First, many cannot form any rational conception of a future state of blessedness and glory — no understanding in which either faith or reason has any meaningful involvement. They have an imagination of something great and glorious, but what it is they do not know. It is no wonder that such people have no delight in and

no use for thoughts of heaven. When their imaginations have drifted through all kinds of uncertainty for a while, they are swallowed up in nothing. They take it for granted that heaven must be glorious and therefore desirable. But nothing can be truly desirable to them except what suits their present dispositions, inclinations, and principles. And of those things, nothing is to be found in the true spiritual glory of heaven or in the eternal enjoyment of God. These things do not suit the inclinations of their minds and flesh, and therefore they cannot rise to any consistent desires for them. Hence, to please themselves, they begin to imagine what is not. But since what is truly heaven does not please them, and what does please them is not heaven and will not be found there, they rarely if ever attempt in any earnest to exercise their thoughts about it.

It would be well if darkness and ignorance about the true nature of the future state and eternal glory did not greatly hinder believers themselves from taking delight in them and meditating on them. They have nothing fixed or settled in their minds to turn to in their thoughts when they would contemplate these things. And by the way, whatever diverts people's minds from the power and life of spiritual worship — as all elaborate ceremonial performances of worship do — greatly hinders them from forming right conceptions of our future state. A promise of eternal life was given to the saints of the Old Testament, but because they were bound to a form of worship that was external and outwardly elaborate, they never had clear and distinct conceptions of the future state of glory. For it was the Gospel that brought life and immortality to light. Therefore, although no living person can see or grasp the infinite riches of eternal glory, it is still the duty of all to be ac-

quainted with its general nature — so that they may have settled thoughts of it, love toward it, and earnest desires for it, all under its own true and proper understanding.

Second, a great part of humanity — the Muslims — who inhabit and possess many of the most prized and desirable regions of the world, conceive the future state of blessedness as consisting in the full satisfaction of their sensual desires and pleasures. This is evidence that the religion they profess has no power or effectiveness in their minds to change them from the love of sin or from placing their happiness in fulfilling the desires of the flesh. It does not at all enlighten their minds to discern beauty in spiritual things, or stir their affections to love those things, or free the soul to seek blessedness in things that are alone suited to its rational nature. For if it did, they would place their happiness and blessedness in those things. Therefore, their conception of paradise is nothing but a device of the god of this world to blind the eyes of people to their eternal destruction.

Chapter 8

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The particular objects of spiritual thoughts on the glorious state of heaven, and what belongs to it. First, Christ himself. Thoughts of heavenly glory in contrast to thoughts of eternal misery. The value of such thoughts. The advantage they provide in suffering.

Having established right conceptions of the glory of the blessed state above, it will help us to fix on certain particulars belonging to it as the special objects of our thoughts and meditations. First, think much about the one who is for us the life and center of all heavenly glory — Christ himself. I will be very brief here, because I have planned a separate treatise on this subject: beholding the glory of Christ both in this life and in eternity. For now I will mention only a few things, because they cannot be omitted on this occasion. The whole glory of the state above is summed up in being ever with the Lord — being where He is and beholding His glory. For in and through Him the blessed manifestation of God and His glory is made forever. And through Him all communications of inward glory come to us. The present brightness of heavenly glory consists in His mediatorial ministry, as I have explained at length elsewhere. He will also be the means of all glorious communications between God and the church for eternity. Therefore, if we are

spiritually minded, we should fix our thoughts on Christ above as the center of all heavenly glory. To help us do this, consider the following things.

First, faith continually turns to Him on account of what He did and suffered for us in this world. For on that basis, forgiveness of sin, justification, and peace with God all depend. This begins with a sense of our own need. But love for Him is no less necessary to us than faith in Him. Though we have powerful reasons to love Him because of what He did and was in this world, the real basis of our attachment to Him is what He is in Himself — as He is now exalted in heaven. If we do not rejoice at the thought of His present glory — if thoughts of it are neither frequent nor refreshing to us — how can His love truly dwell in us?

Second, our hope is that before long we will be with Him forever. If that is so, it is certainly our wisdom and duty to be with Him as much as we can here. It is a hollow claim for anyone to say their greatest happiness lies in being forever in the presence of Christ, while caring nothing about being with Him here in the ways that are available. The only way we can be present with Him here is through faith and love, expressing themselves in spiritual thoughts and affections. It is absurd for people to consider themselves Christians who scarcely think of Christ all day long. And yet some — as an old complaint noted — hardly ever think or speak of Him except when they swear by His name. I have read of people who lived and died in continual contemplation of Him, as far as the limitations of this present life allow. I have known — and do know — people who call themselves to account if He has been absent from their thoughts for more than a few minutes. It is strange that it should be otherwise with those who sincerely love Him; yet

I am sorry to say I know more who show by their lives that it is a rare thing for them to be engaged in serious thoughts and meditations about Him. There are even some who are willing enough to speak occasionally about God, mercy, forgiveness, and His power and goodness — but if you speak to them of Christ with any reference to faith, love, or trust in Him, it seems like a foreign thing to them. Few are aware of any religion beyond what is merely natural. The things of God's wisdom and power in Christ are foolishness to them. Take these directions for carrying out this duty. First, in your thoughts of Christ, be very careful that they are formed and guided according to the rule of the Word — otherwise you will deceive your own soul and hand over the direction of your affections to empty imaginations. Spiritual ideas falling into unrenewed minds once destroyed the power of religion through superstition. People were convinced that they must think much of Jesus Christ and that doing so would make them like Him — but having no true evangelical faith, no wisdom of faith to exercise it rightly in their thoughts and affections, and no real understanding of what it meant to be like Him, they gave themselves over to many foolish inventions and imaginations by which they thought to express their love and conformity to Him. They wanted images of Him to embrace, adore, and weep over. They carried crucifixes with them and wore them next to their hearts, as though resolved to keep Christ always close. They went on pilgrimages to the place where He died and rose again, enduring countless dangers, and would pay everything they had for a fake piece of wood claimed to be from the cross on which He suffered. They tried through long periods of focused thought, fasting, and sleepless vigils to throw their souls into trances and ecstasies in which they imagined themselves

in His presence. They came at last to make themselves physically like Him, obtaining impressions of wounds on their sides, their hands, and their feet. To all these things and others of a similar nature, superstition corrupted people's minds — and all of it grew from a distortion of a genuine truth. For there is no more certain gospel truth than this: that believers ought continually to contemplate Christ through the exercise of faith in their thoughts and affections, and that by doing so they are changed and transformed into His image, as 2 Corinthians 3:18 says. We must not abandon our duty just because others have been mistaken in theirs, nor must we give up the practical foundational principles of religion simply because they have been abused by superstition. But we can see here how dangerous it is to depart in any way from the guidance of Scripture, when the lack of that guidance causes even the best and most noble efforts of the human mind — even the effort to love Christ and be like Him — to end in the gravest offenses.

Pray, therefore, that you may be kept to the truth in all things by diligent attention to its only rule, and by a conscientious submission of your soul to God's authority in it. We must not allow our affections to become attached to the outward appearance or artificial attractiveness of any way of expressing our love to Christ that is not authorized by the Word of truth. Yet I must say this: I would rather be among those who, in expressing their love and affection to Christ, fall into some irregularities and excesses in the manner of expression — provided their worship of Him is neither superstitious nor idolatrous — than among those who, while calling themselves Christians, almost disavow having any thoughts of or affection for the person of Christ. But there is no need to foolishly run into either extreme. God has in Scripture provided suffi-

ciently against both: He has shown us the necessity of actively exercising faith and love toward the person of Christ, and He has also defined the way and means by which we may do so. Whatever our intentions, wherever we depart from His prescribed ways we are not under the guidance of His Spirit — and so we are certain to lose everything we do.

Two things are therefore required if we are to think of Christ and meditate on Him according to the mind and will of God: first, that the means by which He is brought to mind be what God has promised and appointed; and second, that the ongoing presentation of Him as the object of our thoughts and meditations be of the same kind. For both of these purposes, superstitious minds invented the use of images and crucifixes with all their associated practices — and this made all their devotion an abomination. What serves these purposes for believers, however, is the promise of the Spirit and the institutions of the Word. If you want to think of Christ as you ought, follow these two directions. First, pray that the Holy Spirit may remain with you continually to bring Christ to your mind — which He will do in all in whom He dwells, for it belongs to His office. Second, for more fixed thoughts and meditations, take a specific passage of Scripture in which Christ is set forth and presented — either in His person, His office, or His grace — and meditate on it, as in Galatians 3:1.

This duty lies at the foundation of all the blessed communion and exchange that takes place between Jesus Christ and the souls of believers. I know that some despise this idea and consider it ridiculous. But in doing so they do nothing less than renounce Christianity and reduce the Lord Christ to an idol — one who neither knows, sees, nor hears. I am speaking, however, to those who

are not complete strangers to the life of faith — people who know they have no real religion unless they have genuine spiritual communion with the Lord Christ through it. Consider how this is illustrated throughout the Song of Songs. There is not a single instance in that book that does not assume a continual thoughtfulness of Him. And in response to the soul's acts of faith and love — in which He delights — He works through His Spirit to give our minds and hearts a gracious sense of His own love, kindness, and relationship to us. The rich variety of this mutual exchange between Him and the church, the deep tenderness that flows from it, and the blessed state of rest and contentment it produces make up the substance of that holy book. No thought of Christ that proceeds from faith, accompanied by love and delight, will ever be lost. Those who sow this seed will return with their sheaves; Christ will meet them with gracious indications of His acceptance of them, His delight in them, and a return of the sense of His own love to them. He never has been, and never will be, slow to return love to any poor soul. All those gracious and blessed promises He has made — of coming to those who believe in Him, of making His home with them, of dining with them — all these expressions of a gracious presence and intimate communion depend on this duty. We may therefore note three things about these thoughts of Christ. First, they are deeply acceptable to Him as the best evidence of our heartfelt affection: "O my dove, in the clefts of the rock, in the secret place of the steep pathway, let me see your form, let me hear your voice; for your voice is sweet, and your form is lovely," Song of Songs 2:14. When a soul, weighed down by many discouragements and despondencies, withdraws and hides itself from Him, He calls out — longing to see that poor weeping face and to hear

that broken voice that can barely rise above sighs and groans. Second, these thoughts are the only means by which we respond to the gracious communications of His love just described. Through them we hear His knocking, recognize His voice, and open the door of our hearts to give Him entrance so that He may dwell and commune with us. Sometimes the soul is drawn into acts of gracious communion with Christ unexpectedly, as in Song of Songs 6:11. But such experiences are not to be expected unless we abide in those ways and means that prepare our souls to receive and welcome Him. Third, our lack of experience in the power of this holy communion with Christ comes primarily from our neglect of this duty. I have known someone who, after many years of professing faith and holiness, fell into great darkness and distress for this very reason: he had not experienced in himself the sweetness, life, and power of what Scripture testifies about the real communications of Christ's love and the sense of His presence with believers. He understood the doctrine well enough, but did not feel its power — or at least he knew there was more in it than he had experienced. God carried him through that darkness by faith, but also taught him that no sense of these things can enter the soul except through constant thoughtfulness and contemplation of Christ. How many blessed visits do we miss by neglecting this duty. See Song of Songs 5:1-3. Sometimes we are too busy, sometimes careless and negligent, sometimes lazy, sometimes under the power of temptations — so that we neither seek Him nor are ready to receive Him. This is not the way to have our joy abound.

I speak now with special attention to Christ in heaven. The glory of His presence as God and man eternally united, the exercise of His mediatorial office at the right hand of God, the glory of

His present activity on behalf of the church as the minister of the sanctuary and the true tabernacle which God — not man — has established, the love and power and effectiveness of His intercession by which He works to accomplish the salvation of the church, and the approach of His glorious coming in judgment — all these are to be the objects of our daily thoughts and meditations.

Let us not deceive ourselves. Being spiritually minded is not the same as having knowledge of spiritual things in the mind. It is not even about being consistent — or even abundant — in the performance of religious duties, both of which can exist where there is no grace in the heart at all. Being spiritually minded means having a mind that is genuinely and delightfully engaged with heavenly things — the things that are above, and especially Christ Himself at the right hand of God.

Also, think about eternal things in such a way as to continually weigh them against all the sufferings of this life. I have touched on this use earlier, and it is necessary to press it on every occasion. It is very likely that we will yet suffer more than we have. Those who have gone before us did; Scripture foretells that if we will live godly lives in Christ Jesus we must also; we stand in need of it; and the world is ready to bring it upon us. Since we must suffer, it is also necessary — for God's glory and our own salvation — that we suffer in the right way. Mere suffering neither commends us to God nor benefits our souls in any way. When we suffer according to the will of God, it is a remarkable grace, gift, and privilege, as Philippians 1:29 says. But many things are required for this. It is not enough to think we are suffering for the sake of conscience — though if we are not, all our sufferings are wasted. Nor is it enough to suffer for a particular form or expression of religion that we believe to be

true and in accordance with the mind of God, in contrast to what is not. The honor claimed for sufferings on those grounds alone has been greatly tarnished in the days we live in. It is clear that people may endure hard and difficult things out of natural courage, reinforced by deeply held convictions and influenced by hidden self-interested motives — giving testimony to something that is not in accordance with the mind of God. We have seen examples of this in every age, and especially in our own. See 1 Peter 4:14-16. We have seen enough to strip away all appearance of honor from those who are deceived in what they profess when they suffer. But even people may suffer from the same human motivations for what is genuinely in accordance with God's mind — they may even give their bodies to be burned for it — and yet it may not be to His glory or their own eternal benefit. Therefore we must carefully consider all that is required to make our sufferings acceptable to God and honorable to the Gospel.

I have observed in many people an attitude toward suffering that I never saw turn out well when it was tested to the limit. Boldness, self-confidence, a supposed contempt for hardship, and a disdain for others they consider weaker — these are the marks they wear on such occasions. Such attitudes may carry people through a bad cause; they will never carry them through a good one. Gospel truth can only be honorably witnessed to by gospel graces. Distrust of ourselves, a clear understanding of the nature of the evils to be endured and of our own weakness, along with constant prayer to be delivered from suffering or sustained through it, and careful effort to avoid it without violating conscience or neglecting duty — these are far better preparations for entering a time of suffering. Many things belong to learning this first and last

lesson of the Gospel — bearing the cross, or enduring all kinds of suffering for the sake of professing it. But they do not belong to our present purpose. What we press here is simply this: as evidence of our sincerity in suffering, and as an effective means to endure it cheerfully, we must have a continual view of the future state of glory — keeping it in the balance against everything we may have to undergo. For the following reasons:

First, having our minds filled with thoughts of that glory will give us eagerness as we enter into suffering as a matter of duty. Other forms of comfort will present themselves, but they quickly fade and disappear. They are like a quick remedy that gives some temporary relief and then leaves the spirits lower than they were before. Some find comfort in thinking their sufferings are not so severe — that they can endure them and come through safely. But no suffering is so small that it will not prove too much for us without special help from God. Others take comfort in how long the suffering will last — only ten days or six months, and then it will be over. Others draw comfort from the compassion and regard of other people. These and similar thoughts naturally come to all kinds of people, whether they are spiritually minded or not. But when our minds are accustomed to thoughts of the glory that will be revealed, we will cheerfully welcome every way and path that leads there — and suffering for the truth is one of those paths in a special way. Through this lens we can look cheerfully and with contentment on the loss of reputation, honor, possessions, freedom, even life itself — knowing within ourselves that we have better and more lasting comforts to turn to. We can glorify God by our eagerness in entering into suffering in no other way than when

that eagerness rises from a view and valuing of those invisible things He has promised as an abundant reward for everything we can lose in this world.

Second, the greatest hardship in suffering is when it continues for a long time with no reasonable prospect of relief. Many who entered suffering with great courage and resolve have been worn down and exhausted by its duration. Elijah himself was brought to the point of praying that God would take his life and end both his ministry and his troubles. In every age, no small number have been so broken in spirit and so shaken in the exercise of faith that they lost the honor of their confession by seeking deliverance through sinful compromises and denial of the truth. Even when this happens out of sheer exhaustion — for it is Satan's strategy to wear out the saints of the Most High — and even when there remains reluctance in the mind and a lingering love for the truth in the heart, it consistently produces one of two effects. Some, overwhelmed with grief over their failure in their profession, and with a deep sense of their unfaithfulness to the Lord Jesus, are stirred up immediately to bolder acts of confession than they had ever engaged in before, and to a greater provocation of their adversaries — with the result that their former troubles come back doubled, which they frequently endure with great peace. Such examples can be found in every account of great persecutions. Others, however, are intimidated and discouraged in their profession — and perhaps neglected by those whose duty it was to restore them — and through the cunning of Satan they have given way to their decline and become complete apostates. To prevent these evils that arise from prolonged suffering without any hope of deliverance, nothing is more effective than a constant contemplation of the future re-

ward and glory. The apostle declares this in Hebrews 11:35. When the mind is filled with thoughts of the unseen glories of eternity, it always has something to weigh against the longest and most drawn-out suffering — for in comparison to those glories, even the most extended sufferings last only a moment.

I have dwelt at length on these things because they are the particular objects of thought for those who are truly spiritually minded.

2. There are those of whom also it may be said, that God is not in all their Thaughts, though they acknowledge his Essence and Being. For they are not practically influenced in any thing by the Notions they have of him. Such is the Person of whom this is affirmed; Psal. 10:4. He is one who through Pride and Profligacy with hardness in sin, regards not God in the Rule of the World, ver. 4, 5, 11, 13. Such is the world filled withal at this day, as they are described, Tit. 1:16. They profess that they know God, but in their Works deny him, being abominable and disobedient, and to every good work Reprobate. They think, they live, they act in all things as if there were no God, at least as if they never thought of him with fear and Reverence. And for the most part we need not seek far for Evidences of their disregard of God; the Pride of their countenances testify against them, Psal. 10:4. And if they are followed further, cursed Oaths, Licentiousness of Life, and hatred of all that is Good, will confirm and Evidence the same. Such as these may own God in words, may be afraid of him in dangers, may attend outwardly on his Worship; but they think not of God at all in a due manner; he is not in all their Thoughts.

3. There are yet less Degrees of this disregard of God and forgetfulness of him. Some are so filled with Thoughts of the World, and the Occasions of Life, that it is impossible they should think of God as they ought. For as the Love of God, and the Love of the World in prevalent Degrees are inconsistent, (for if a man lovs this World, how dwells the Love of God in him?) so Thoughts of God and of the World, in the like Degree are inconsistent. This is the state of many who yet would be esteemed Spiritually minded. They are continually conversant in their Minds about earthly things. Some things impose themselves on them under the Notion of Duty: They belong to their Callings, they must be attended to. Some are suggested to their Minds from daily occasions and occurrences. Common Converse in the world ingags men into no other but wordly Thoughts: Love and desire of earthly things, their enjoyment and encrease, exhaust the vigour of their Spirits all the day long. In the midst of a multitude of Thoughts arising from these and the like occasions, while their Hearts and Heads are reaking with the steam of them, many fall immediately in their seasons to the Performance of Holy Duties. Those times must suffice for Thoughts of God. But notwithstanding such Duties, what through the want of a due preparation for them, what through the fulness of their minds and Affections with other things, and what through a neglect of Exercising Grace in them, it may be said comparatively, that God is not in all their Thoughts.

I pray God, that this, at least as to some Degrees of it, be not the condition of many among us. I speak not now of men who visibly and openly live in sin, profane in their Principles and profligate in their Lives. The Prayers of such Persons are an Abomination to the Lord; neither have they ever any Thoughts of him, which he

does accept: But I speak of them who are sober in their Lives, industrious in their Callings, and not openly negligent about the outward Duties of Religion. Such men are apt to approve of themselves, and others also to speak well of them; for these things are in themselves commendable and praise-worthy. But if they are traced home, it will be found as to many of them, that God is not in all their Thoughts as he ought to be. Their Earthly Conversation, their vain Communication, with their foolish Designs, do all manifest that the vigour of their spirits, and most intense contrivances of their Minds, are ingaged into things below. Some refuse, transient, unmanaged Thoughts are sometimes cast away on God, which he despiss.

4. Where Persons do cherish secret predominant Lusts in their hearts and lives, God is not in their Thoughts as he ought to be. He may be, he often is much in the words of such Persons, but in their Thoughts he is not, he cannot be in a due manner. And such Persons no doubt there are. Ever and anon, we hear of one and another whose secret Lusts break forth into a discovery. They flatter themselves for a season, but God oft times so orders things in his holy Providence, that their Iniquity shall be found out to be hateful. Some hateful Lust discovers it self to be predominant in them. One is Drunken, another Unclean, a third an Oppressour. Such there were ever found among Professors of the Gospel, and that in the best of times; Among the Apostles one was a Traytor, a Devil. Of the first Professors of Christianity, there were those whose God was their Belly, whose end was Destruction, who minded earthly things, Phil. 3:18, 19. Some may take Advantage at this Acknowledgment, that there are such Evils among such as are called Professors. And it must be confessed that great scandal is

given hereby to the world, casting both them that give it, and them to whom it is given, under a most dreadful woe. But we must bear the reproach of it, as they did of old, and commit the issue of all things to the watchful care of God. However it is Good in such a season to be jealous over our selves and others, to exhort one another daily while it is called to day, lest any be hardened through the Deceitfulness of sin. See Heb. 12:13, 14, 15, 16, 17. And because those with whom it is thus, cannot be spiritually minded; yet are there some Difficulties in the case, as to the predominancy of a secret Lust or Sin, I shall consider it somewhat more distinctly.

1. We must distinguish between a Time of Temptation in some, and the ordinary State of Mind and Affections in others. There may be a season wherein God in his holy wise Orderings of all things towards us, and for his own Glory, in his holy blessed Ends, may suffer a Lust or Corruption to break loose in the Heart, to strive, tempt, suggest, and tumultuate, to the great trouble and disquietude of the Mind and Conscience. Neither can it be denyed, but that falling in conjunction with some vigorous Temptation, it may proceed so far as to surprize the Person in whom it is into actual sin, to his defilement and amazement. In this case no man can say, he is tempted of God, for God temps no man, but every man is tempted of his own Lust and enticed. But yet Temptations of what sort soever they be, so far as they are afflictive, corrective, or penal, are ordered and disposed by God himself. For there is no evil of that nature, and he has not done it. And where he will have the Power of any corruption to be afflictive in any Instance, two things may safely be ascribed to him.

1. He withholds the supplies of that Grace whereby it might be effectually mortifyed and subdued. He can give in a Sufficiency of Efficacious Grace, to repell any Temptation, to subdue any or all our Lusts and Sins. For he can and does work in us to will and to do, according to his Pleasure. Ordinarily he does so in them that believe; so that although their Lusts may rebell and war, they cannot defile or prevail. But to the continual supplies of this actual prevailing Grace he is not obliged. When it may have a Tendency to his holy Ends, he may and does withhold it. When it may be a proud Soul is to be humbled, a careless Soul to be awakened, an unthankful Soul to be convinced and rebuked, a backsliding Soul to be recovered, a froward, selfish, passionate Soul to be broken and meekened, he can leave them for a season to the sore exercise of a prevalent corruption, which under his holy guidance shall contribute greatly to his blessed Ends. It was so in the Temptation of Paul, Cor. 11:7, 8, 9. If a man through disorder and excesses, is contracting many habitual Distempers of Body, which gradually and insensibly tend to his Death; it may be an advantage to be cast into a violent feavour, which threatens immediately to take away his Life. For he will hereby be throughly awakened to the consideration of his Danger, and not only labor to be freed from his Feavour, but also for the future to watch against those Disorders and Excesses which cast him into that condition. And sometimes a loose careless Soul, that walks in a secure formal Profession, contracts many Spiritual Diseases which tend to Death and ruine. No Arguments or Considerations can prevail with him, to awaken himself, to shake himself out of the Dust, and to betake himself to a more diligent and humble walking before God. In this state, it may be, through the permission of God, he is surprized into some

open actual sin. Hereon through the vigorous actings of an enlightened Conscience, and the stirrings of any sparks of Grace which yet remain, he is amazed, terrifyed, and stirs up himself to seek after Deliverance.

2. God may and does in his Providence administer Objects and Occasions of mens Lusts for their Trial. He will place them in such Relations, in such Circumstances, as shall be apt to provoke their Affections, Passions, Desires and Inclinations, to those Objects that are suited to them.

In this state any Lust will quickly get such Power in the Mind and Affections, as to manage continual solicitations to sin. It will not only dispose the Affections towards it, but multiply Thoughts about it, and darken the mind as to those Considerations, which ought to prevail to its Mortification. In this condition it is hard to conceive how God should be in the Thoughts of men in a due manner. However this state is very different from the habitual Prevalency of any secret sin or corruption, in the ordinary course of mens walking in the world, and therefore I do not directly intend it.

If any one shall inquire how we may know this Difference, namely, That is between the occasional Prevalency of any Lust or Corruption in conjunction with a Temptation, and the Power of sin in any Instance habitually and constantly complyed withall, or indulged in the Mind: I answer:

1. It is no great matter whether we are able to distinguish between them or no. For the End why God suffers any corruption to be such a Snare and Temptation, such a Thorn and Bryar, is to awaken the Souls of men out of their security, and to humble them

for their pride and negligence. The more severe are their apprehensions concerning it, the more effectual it will be to this end and purpose. It is Good it may be that the Soul should apprehend more of what is sinful in it, as it is a corruption, than of what is afflictive in it as it is a Temptation. For if it be conceived as a predominant Lust, if there be any spark of Grace remaining in the Soul, it will not rest untill in some measure it be subdued. It will also immediately put it upon a diligent search into it self, which will issue in deep self-abasement, the principal End designed. But,

2. For the Relief of them that may be perplexed in their Minds, about their state and condition, I say, there is an apparent Difference between these things. A Lust or Corruption arising up or breaking forth into a violent Temptation, is the continual Burthen, Grief, and Affliction of the Soul wherein it is. And as the Temptation for the most part which befalls such a Person will give him no rest from its reiterated solicitations; so he will give the Temptation no Rest, but will be continually conflicting with it, and contending against it. It fills the Souls with an Amazement at it self, and continual self-abhorrency, that any such seeds of filth and folly should be yet remaining in it. With them in whom any sin is ordinarily prevalent, it is otherwise. According to their Light and renewed occasional convictions, they have trouble about it, they cannot but have so, unless their Consciences are utterly seared. But this Trouble respects principally, if not solely, its Guilt and Effects. They know not what may ensue on their complyance with it, in this world and another. Beyond this they like it well enough, and are not willing to part with it. It is of this latter sort of Persons of whom we speak at present.

2. We must distinguish between the perplexing sollicitation of any Lust, and the conquering Predominancy of it. The Evil that is present with us, will be solliciting and pressing to sin of its own accord, even where there is no such especial Temptation, as that spoken of before. So is the case stated, so are the nature and Operations of it described, Rom. 1. Gal. 5. And sometimes an especial particular Lust, may be so warmed and fomented by mens constitutions within, or be so exposed to provoking, exciting occasions without, as to bring perpetual trouble on the mind. Yet this may be where no sin has the predominancy enquired after. And the Difference between the perplexing sollicitation of any corruption to sin, and the conquering prevalency of it, lyes in this; that under the former, the Thoughts, contrivances and actings of the mind, are generally disposed and enclined to an opposition to it, and a conflict with it, how it may be obviated, defeated, destroyed, how an absolute victory may be obtained against it. Yea Death it self is sweet to such Persons under this notion, as it is that which will deliver them from the perplexing Power of their Corruptions, so is the state of such a Soul at large represented, Rom. 7. In the other case, namely, of its predominancy, it disposs of the Thoughts actually for the most part, to make provision for the flesh, and to fulfill it in the Lusts thereof. It fills the mind with pleasing contemplations of its Object, and puts it on contrivances for satisfaction. Yea part of the Bitterness of Death to such Persons, is that it will make an everlasting separation between them, and the satisfaction they have received in their Lusts. It is bitter in the Thoughts of it to a worldly minded Man, because it will take him from all his enjoyments, his wealth, profits and advantages. It is so to the sensual Person, as that which finally determines all his pleasures.

3. There is a difference in the Degrees of such a predominant Corruption. In some it taints the Affections, vitiates the Thoughts, and works over the Will to Acts of a secret complacency in sin, but proceeds no farther. The whole Mind may be vitiated by it, and rendered in the Multitude of its Thoughts, vain, sensual, or worldly, according as is the nature of the prevailing Corruption. Yet here God puts bounds to the raging of some mens corruptions, and sayes to their proud waves, thus far shall ye proceed, and no farther. He either layes a restraint on their minds, that when Lust has fully conceived, it shall not bring forth sin, or he sets an hedge before them in his Providence, that they shall not be able in their circumstances, to find their way to what perhaps they do most earnestly desire. A woful Life it is that such Persons lead. They are continually tortured between their Corruptions and Convictions, or the Love of sin, and fear of the Event. With others it pursues its course into outward actual sins, which in some are discovered in this world, in others they are not. For some mens sins go before them to Judgment and some follow after. Some fall into sin upon surprizal, from a concurrence of Temptation with Corruption, and Opportunities; some habituate themselves to a course in sin, though in many it be not discovered, in some it is. But among those who have received any Spiritual Light, and made Profession of Religion thereon, this seldom falls out, but from the great Displeasure of God. For when men have long given way to the Prevalency of sin in their Affections, Inclinations and Thoughts, and God has set many an hedge before them to give bounds to their Inclinations, and to shut up the womb of sin; sometimes by Afflictions, sometimes by fears and dangers, sometimes by the Word; and yet the bent of their Spirits is towards their sin; God

takes off his hand of restraint, removes his hindrances, and gives them up to their own Hearts Lusts, to do the things that are not convenient. All things hereon suits their Desires. and they rush into actual sins and follies, setting their feet in the paths that go down to the Chambers of Death. The uncontrollable Power of sin in such Persons, and the greatness of Gods Displeasure against them, makes their condition most deplorable.

Those that are in this State, of either sort, the first or the latter, are remote from being Spiritually minded, nor is God in all their Thoughts as he ought to be. For,

1. They will not so think and meditate on God. Their Delight is turned another way. Their Affections which are the spring on their Thoughts, which feed them continually, do cleave to the things which are most adverse to him. Love of sin is gotten to be the Spring in them, and the whole stream of the Thoughts which they choose and delight in, are towards the Pleasures of it. If any Thoughts of God come in, as a faint Tyde for a few minutes, and drive back the other stream, they are quickly repelled and carryed away with the strong current of those which proceed from their powerful Inclinations. Yet may such Persons abide in the Performance of outward holy Duties; or attendance to them. Pride of or satisfaction in their Gifts may give them Delight in their own performances, and something in those of others they may be exceedingly pleased withal; as it is expresly affirmed, Ezek. 33:31, 32. But in these things they have no immediate real Thoughts of God, none that they delight in, none that they seek to stirr up in themselves, and those which impose themselves on them they reject.

2. As they will not, so they dare not think of God. They will not, because of the Power of their Lusts; they dare not, because of their Guilt. No sooner should they begin to think of him in Good Earnest, but their sin would lose all its desirable forms and appearances, and represent it self in the Horror of Guilt alone. And in that condition all the Properties of the Divine Nature are suited to encrease the Dread and Terror of the sinner. Adam had heard Gods voice before with Delight and satisfaction; But on the hearing of the same voice after he had sinned, he hid himself and cryed that he was afraid. There is a way for men to think of God with the Guilt of sin upon them, which they intend to forsake; but none for any to do it with the Guilt of sin which they resolve to continue in. Wherefore of all these sorts of Persons it may be said, that God is not in all their Thoughts, and therefore are they far enough from being spiritually minded. For unless we have many Thoughts of God, we cannot be so. Yea moreover there are two things required to those Thoughts which we have of God, that there may be an Evidence of our being so.

1. That we take delight in them, Psal. 30:4. Sing to the Lord, O ye Saints of his, and give thanks at the remembrance of his Holiness. The Remembrance of God, delights and refreshs the Hearts of his Saints, and stirrs them up to Thankfulness.

1. They rejoyce in what God is in himself. Whatever is good, amiable or desireable; whatever is holy just and powerful; whatever is gracious, wise and merciful, and all that is so, they see and apprehend in God. That God is what he is, is the matter of their chiefest Joy. Whatever befalls them in this world, whatever Troubles and Disquietment they are exercised withal, the Remembrance of God is a satisfactory Refreshment to them. For

therein they behold all that is Good and Excellent, the infinite Center of all Perfections. Wicked men would have God to be any thing but what he is. Nothing that God is really and truely, pleass them. Wherefore they either frame false Notions of him in their Minds, as Psal. 50:21. Or they think not of him at all, at least as they ought, unless sometimes they tremble at his Anger and Power. Some Benefit they suppose may be had, by what he can do, but how there can be any Delight in what he is, they know not. Yea all their trouble ariss from hence, that he is what he is. It would be a relief to them, if they could make any abatement of his Power, his Holiness, his Righteousness, his Omnipresence; But his Saints, as the Psalmist speaks, give thanks at the Remembrance of his Holiness.

And when we can delight in the Thoughts of what God is in himself, of his infinite Excellencies and Perfections, it gives us a threefold evidence of our being spiritually minded. (1.) In that it is such an Evidence that we have a gracious Interest in those Excellencies and Perfections, whereon we can say with rejoycing in our selves, this God, thus holy, thus powerful, thus just, good and gracious, is our God, and he will be our guide to Death. So the Psalmist under the consideration of his own frailty and apprehensions of Death in the midst of his years, comforts and refreshs himself with Thoughts of Gods Eternity and Immutability, with his Interest in them, Psal. 102:23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28. And God himself proposs to us, his infinite Immutability as the Ground whereon we may except safety and deliverance, Mal. 3:6. When we can thus think of God and what he is with delight, it is I say an Evidence that we have a gracious Covenant Interest, even in what God is in Himself; which none have but those who are spiritually minded.

2. It is an Evidence that the Image of God is begun to be wrought in our own Souls; and we approve of and rejoyce in it more than in all other things whatever. Whatever Notions men may have of the Divine Goodness, Holiness, Righteousness and Purity, they are all but barren, jejune and fruitless, unless there be a similitude and conformity to them, wrought in their Minds and Souls. Without this they cannot rejoyce in the Thoughts and Remembrance of the Divine Excellencies. Wherefore when we can do so, when such Meditations of God are sweet to us, it is an Evidence that we have some experience in our selves of the excellency of the Image of those Perfections, and that we rejoyce in them above all things in this world.

3. They are so also, in that they are manifest, that we do discern and judge that our Eternal Blessedness does consist in the full Manifestation, and our Enjoyment of God in what he is, and of all his Divine Excellencies. This Men for the most part take for granted, but how it should be so, they know not. They understand it in some measure whose hearts are here deeply affected with Delight in them; they are able to believe that the manifestation and Enjoyment of the Divine Excellencies will give Eternal Rest, satisfaction and complacency to their Souls. No wicked man can look upon it otherwise than a Torment, to abide for ever with Eternal Holiness, Isa. 33:14. And we our selves can have no present prospect into the fulness of future Glory, when God shall be all in all, but through the Delight and satisfaction which we have here in the contemplation of what God is in himself, as the Center of all divine Perfections.

I would therefore press this unknown, this neglected Duty on the minds of those of us in an especial manner, who are visibly drawing nigh to Eternity. The Daies are coming, wherein what God is in himself, that is as manifest and exerted in Christ, shall alone be (as we hope) the Eternal Blessedness and Reward of our Souls. Is it possible that any thing should be more necessary for us, more useful to us, than to be exercised in such Thoughts and Contemplations. The Benefits we may have hereby are not to be reckoned, some of them only may be named. As (1.) We shall have the best Trial of our selves, how our hearts really stand affected towards God. For if upon Examination we find our selves not really to delight and rejoyce in God, for what he is in himself, and that all Perfections are eternally resident in him, how dwells the Love of God in us? But if we can truely rejoyce at the Remembrance of his Holiness, in the Thoughts of what he is, our Hearts are upright with him. (2.) This is that which will effectually take off our Thoughts and Affections from things here below. One spiritual view of the Divine Goodness, Beauty and Holiness, will have more efficacy to raise the heart to a contempt of all earthly things, than any other Evidences whatever. (3.) It will encrease the Grace of being heavenly minded in us, on the Grounds before declared. (4.) It is the best, I had almost said, it is the only Preparation for the future full enjoyment of God. This will gradually lead us into his Presence, take away all fears of Death, increase our longing after Eternal Rest, and ever make us groan to be uncloathed. Let us not than cease labouring with our hearts, until through Grace, we have a spiritually sensible Delight and Joy in the Remembrances and Thoughts of what God is in himself.

2. In Thoughts of God, his Saints rejoyce at the Remembrance of what he is, and what he will be to them. Herein have they regard to all the holy Relations that he has taken on himself towards them, with all the Effects of his Covenant in Christ Jesus. To that purpose were some of the last words of David, 2 Sam. 23. 5. Although my house be not so with God, yet he has made with me an everlasting Covenant, ordered in all things and sure, this is all my Salvation and all my desire. In the prospect he had of all the Distresses that were to befall his Family, he triumphantly rejoycs in the Everlasting Covenant that God had made with him. In these Thoughts his Saints take delight, they are sweet to them and full of refreshment. Their Meditations of him are sweet, and they are glad in the Lord, Psal. 104:34. Thus is it with them that are truely spiritually minded. They not only think much of God, but they take Delight in these Thoughts, they are sweet to them; and not only so, but they have no solid Joy nor Delight, but in their Thoughts of God, which therefore they retreat to continually. They do so especially on great occasions, which of themselves are apt to divert them from them. As suppose a Man has received a signal Mercy, with the matter whereof he is exceedingly affected and delighted. The minds of some men are apt on such occasions to be filled with thoughts of what they have received, and their Affections to be wholly taken up with it. But he who is Spiritually Minded, will immediately retreat to Thoughts of God, placing his Delight and taking up his satisfaction in him. And so on the other side, great Distresses, prevalent Sorrows, strong Pains, violent Distempers, are apt of themselves to take up and exercise all the Thoughts of men about them. But those who are spiritually minded, will in and under them all continually betake themselves to Thoughts of God,

wherein they find relief and refreshment against all that they feel or fear. In every state, their principal Joy is in the Remembrance of his Holiness.

2. That they be accompanied with Godly Fear and Reverence. These are required of us, in all wherein we have to do with God, Heb. 12:28, 29. And as the Scripture does not more abound with Precepts to any Duty, so the Nature of God and our own, with the infinite distance between them, make it indispensably necessary even in the light of the natural Conscience, Infinite Greatness, infinite Holiness, infinite Power, all which God is, command the uttermost reverential fear that our nature are capable of. The want hereof is the spring of innumerable evils, yea indeed of all that is so. Hence are blasphemous abuses of the holy Name of God in cursed Oaths and Execrations; hence it is taken in vain, in Ordinary Exclamations; hence is all Formality in Religion.

It is the spiritual Mind alone that can Reconcile those things which are prescribe us as our Duty towards God. To delight and Rejoyce in him always, to triumph in the Remembrance of him, to draw nigh to him with boldness and confidence, are on the one hand prescrib'd to us: And on the other it is so, that we fear and tremble before him, that we fear that Great and dreadful Name the Lord our God, that we have Grace to serve him with Reverence and Godly Fear, because he is a consuming fire. These things Carnal Reason can comprehend no consistency in; what it is afraid of, it cannot delight in; and what it delights in, it will not long fear. But the Consideration of Faith (concerning what God is in himself, and what he will be to us,) gives these different Graces their distinct Operations, and a blessed Reconciliation in our Souls. Wherefore, all our Thoughts of God ought to be accompanied with an holy

Awe and Reverence, from a due sense of his Greatness, Holiness and Power. Two things will utterly vitiate all Thoughts of God, and render them useless to us.

(1.) Vain Curiosity. (2.) Carnal Boldness. It is inimaginable how the subtle disquisitions and disputes of men, about the Nature, Properties and Councels of God, have been corrupted, rendered sapless and useless by vain Curiosity, and striving for an artificial Accuracy in the expression of mens apprehensions. When the Wits and Minds of men are engaged in such Thoughts, God is not in all their Thoughts, even when all their Thoughts are concerning him. When once men are got into their Metaphysical Curiosities, and Logical Niceties in their Contemplations about God and his Divine Properties, they bid farewell for the most part to all Godly Fear and Reverence. Others are under the power of Carnal Boldness, that they think of God with no other respect, than if they thought of Worms of the earth like themselves. There is no holy Awfulness upon their Minds and Souls in the mention of his Name. By these things may our Thoughts of God be so vitiated, that the heart shall not in them be affected with a Reverence of him, nor any Evidence be given that we are spiritually minded.

It is this holy Reverence that is the means of bringing in Sanctifying vertue into our Souls, from God, upon our Thoughts of him. None that think of God with a due Reverence, but he shall be sensible of Advantage by it. Hereby do we sanctifie God in our Access to him, and when we do so, he will sanctifie and purifie our hearts by those very Thoughts in which we draw nigh to him.

We may have many sudden, occasional, transient Thoughts of God, that are not Introduced into our minds by a preceding Reverential Fear. But if they leave not that fear on our hearts, in

proportion to their continuance with us, they are of no value, but will insensibly habituate us to a common bold frame of Spirit, which he despises.

So is it in the case of Thoughts of a contrary nature. Thoughts of sin, of sinful Objects may arise in our minds from the Remainders of Corruption; or be occasioned by the Temptations and Suggestions of Satan; If these are immediately rejected and cast out of us, the Soul is not more prejudiced by their entrance, than it is Advantaged by their Rejection through the power of Grace. But if they make frequent returns into the minds of men, or make any abode or continuance in their soliciting of the Affections, they greatly defile the Mind and Conscience, disposing the person to the further entertainment of them. So if our occasional Thoughts of God, do immediately leave us, and pass away without much affecting our Minds; we shall have little or no Benefit by them. But if by their frequent visits, and some continuance with us, they dispose Souls to an holy Reverence of God, they are a blessed means of promoting our Sanctification. Without this, I say, there may be thoughts of God to no advantage of the Soul.

There is implanted on our Nature such a sense of a Divine Power and Presence, as that on all sudden occasions and surprizals, it will act it self according to that sense and apprehension. There is Vox Naturae clamantis ad Dominum Naturae: A voice in Nature it self, upon any thing that is suddenly too hard for it, which cryes out immediately to the God of Nature. So men on such occasions without any consideration are surprized into a calling on the Name of God, and crying to him. And from the same natural apprehension it is, that wicked and profane persons, will break forth on all occasions into cursed Swearing by his Name. So men in

such ways have Thoughts of God without either Reverence or Godly fear, without giving any Glory to him, and for the most part to their own disadvantage. Such are all thoughts of God that are not accompanyed with holy Fear and Reverence.

There is scarce any Duty that ought at present to be more press'd on the Consciences of men, than this of keeping up a constant holy Reverence of God in all wherein they have to do with him, both in private and public, in their inward Thoughts, and outward Communication. Formality has so prevailed on Religion, and that under the most effectual means of its suppression, that very many do manifest, that they have little or no Reverence of God, in the most solemn Duties of his Worship; and less it may be in their secret Thoughts. Some ways that have been found out to keep up a pretence and appearance of it, have been and are destructive to it.

But herein consists the very Life of all Religion. The fear of God is in the Old Testament the usual expression of all the due respect of our Souls to him; and that because where that is not in exercise, nothing is accepted with him. And thence the whole of our wisdom is said to consist therein, and if it be not in a prevalent exercise in all wherein we have to do with him immediately, all our Duties are utterly lost as to the Ends of his Glory and the Spiritual Advantage of our own Souls.

Chapter 9

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Spiritual thoughts of God himself. The opposition to them and neglect of them, with their causes and how they may be overcome. How to discover a dominant corruption that drives out proper thoughts of God. The nature of thoughts of God, and what must accompany them.

I have spoken very briefly about the first particular example of the heavenly things we are to fix our thoughts on — namely, the person of Christ. I did so for the reason mentioned earlier: I intend a separate treatise on that subject, exploring how we may behold the glory of Christ in this life and how we will do so for eternity. What I have reserved for last, as the object of thought for those who are spiritually minded, is the absolute foundation and source of all spiritual things — God Himself. He is the fountain from which all these things flow, and the ocean into which they empty. He is their center and their circumference — the point where all things begin, meet, and end. So the apostle concludes his profound discussion of the counsels of the divine will and the mysteries of the Gospel in Romans 11:36: "For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever." All things arise from His power, are arranged by His wisdom toward His glory. From Him, through Him, and to Him are all things. Only under

that understanding are they to be the objects of our spiritual meditations — as they come from Him and tend toward Him. All other things are finite and limited; but they begin and end in what is immeasurable and infinite. So God is all in all. He therefore is — or ought to be — the one supreme and absolute object of our thoughts and desires; all other things exist from Him and for Him. Where our thoughts do not — either directly or indirectly, by natural consequence — tend toward and end in Him, they are not truly spiritual, as 1 Peter 1:21 implies.

Before giving directions on how to exercise our thoughts on God Himself, some things must first be addressed regarding a sinful failure in this area, along with its causes.

First, it is the mark of someone who is boldly and outrageously wicked that God is not in any of his thoughts, as Psalm 10:4 says. That is, God is in none of them. There are many degrees to this absence of thoughts of God, for not all wicked people are equally forgetful of Him.

First, some are under the power of atheistic thoughts: they deny, question, or refuse to acknowledge the very existence of God. This is the highest point that the hostility of the unrenewed mind can reach. One might think that acknowledging God while refusing to submit to His law or will would be just as bad — if not worse — than denying His existence. But it is not so. The refusal to submit is rebellion against His authority; but atheism is hatred toward the only source of all goodness, truth, and being — a hatred rooted in the fact that they cannot acknowledge it without also acknowledging that it is infinitely righteous, holy, and powerful, which would destroy all their desires and their false sense of security. The person described in that psalm may be such a one, for the words can

be read as: "All his thoughts are that there is no God." Yet the context actually describes him as one who despises God's providence more than denies His existence. But there are those whom the same psalmist elsewhere labels fools — though they themselves think all wisdom was born with them and will die with them — as in Psalm 14:1 and Psalm 53:1.

Perhaps no age since the flood has been more filled with open atheism — among those who claim to use and improve reason — than the one we live in. Among the ancient civilized pagans, we occasionally hear of someone branded as an atheist, yet we cannot always be certain whether the charge was fair. But in every nation of Europe today, cities, courts, towns, countryside, and armies abound with people who, if any credit can be given to what they say and do, do not believe there is a God. The reason for this deserves a brief inquiry.

The reason, in general, is simply this: people have drained and wasted the light and power of the Christian religion. Christianity is the fullest revelation of God that He has ever made — and the last He will ever make in this world. If it is despised, if people rebel against its light, if they break free from its claims and become numb to its power, nothing can preserve them from the deepest atheism that human nature is capable of. It is useless to look for help from lesser means when the highest and most powerful has been rejected. Reason and natural light do provide evidence for the existence of God, and arguments from them are still rightly made to confound atheists. They were sufficient to keep people in an acknowledgment of God's power and divine nature when that was the only evidence available to them. But where people have had the benefit of divine revelation, where they have been raised on the

principles of the Christian religion, have had some knowledge of them and made some profession of them — and have then, through love of sin and hatred of everything truly good, rejected all the conviction those principles bring concerning God's existence, power, and rule — they will not be held to any acknowledgment of God by anything that natural reason alone can suggest.

There are, among others, three reasons why there are more atheists among those who live where the Christian religion is professed but its power is rejected than among any other group of people — even more than there were among the pagans themselves.

First, God has chosen to honor His Word above all His other names — above every other way He has revealed Himself to people, as Psalm 138:2 says. Where the Word is rejected and despised, therefore, He will not grant reason or natural light the honor of preserving people's minds from any evil whatsoever. Reason will not have the same power and effect on those who reject the light and authority of divine revelation through the Word as it has — or may have — on those whose best guide it is, who have never had the light of the Gospel. This is why there is often more basic honesty among civilized pagans and Muslims than among degenerate professing Christians. For the same reason, the children of Christian parents are sometimes irredeemably corrupt. Some will say that many people are brought back to God through suffering after having despised the Word. But that is not the case: no one has ever been converted to God by suffering alone if they had already rejected the Word. Suffering may bring people back to the Word, but suffering does not directly turn anyone to God. It is like a good shepherd whose sheep wanders from the flock and will not

hear his call: he sends out his dog, which stops the sheep and nips at it. At that the sheep looks around, hears the shepherd's call, and returns to the flock — as Job 33:19-25 illustrates. But with those who have rejected the Word, God's pattern is this: where the primary means by which He reveals Himself — the means in which He most glorifies His wisdom and goodness — is despised, He not only removes the effectiveness of lesser means but also judicially hardens hearts and blinds eyes so that those lesser means are of no use to them at all. See Isaiah 6:8-12, Acts 13:40-41, Romans 1:21-28, and 2 Thessalonians 2:11-12.

Second, the contempt of gospel light and the Christian religion in its supernatural character — which is where every atheist among us first steps onto the path of transgression — produces in the mind a depraved and corrupt disposition, a mass of every evil that hatred of God's goodness, wisdom, and grace can generate. This leaves the mind wholly inclined toward the worst of evils, just as all our originally sinful inclinations followed immediately on the rejection and loss of the image of God. The best things when corrupted produce the worst stench — as manna rotted and bred worms. When the knowledge of the Gospel is rejected, rotting worms take its place in the mind and grow into vipers and scorpions. Every degree of departure from gospel truth brings a proportionate degree of inclination toward wickedness into the hearts and minds of people, as 2 Peter 2:21 shows. A total departure brings exposure to every evil they are capable of in this world. Since multitudes, through their ignorance, unbelief, temptation, love of sin, pride, and contempt of God, fall away from all submission of soul and conscience to the Gospel — either in their thinking or in their practice, mocking or dismissing all supernatural revela-

tion — they are a thousand times more disposed to outright atheism than people who never had the light or benefit of such revelation. Beware of spiritual decline. Whatever ground the Gospel loses in our minds, sin occupies for itself and its own ends.

Let no one suppose it is otherwise with them. When people grow cold and negligent in their duties of Gospel worship — both public and private — that is in effect a rejection of gospel light. Whatever they may say and claim — that in other areas of their minds and lives things are fine — in truth they are not. Sin will, and does, increase in them in proportion to those spiritual declines, and sooner or later it will make itself visible. If they are not utterly hardened, they will likely see it themselves — either inwardly in their loss of peace, or outwardly in the pattern of their lives.

Third, when people are determined not to see, the brighter the light that shines around them, the more tightly they must shut their eyes. All atheism springs from a decision not to see things invisible and eternal. Love of sin, a firm commitment to continuing in it, and the powerful pull of sinful inclinations against everything that is good all make it in such people's interest that there be no God to call them to account. For a supreme, unavoidable judge and eternal rewarder of good and evil is inseparable from the very concept of a divine being. Since the most glorious light and undeniable evidence of these things shines forth in Scripture, those who are determined to keep loving sin and living in it must shut their eyes with every art and power at their disposal — otherwise that light will pierce their minds and torment them. They do this through

outright atheism, which alone promises to give them security against the light of divine revelation. Against all lesser convictions, they might take shelter under lesser forms of it.

It is therefore not a mark against the Gospel, but a mark in its honor, that so many openly declare themselves atheists in places where gospel truth is known and professed. For no one can have even the slightest inclination or temptation toward atheism until they have first rejected the Gospel — which immediately exposes them to the worst of evils.

Nor is there any means for the recovery of such people. The arguments against atheism that have been made in this and other ages — drawing on reason and natural light to prove the existence of God — have been useful in exposing the foolishness of evil men who try to justify themselves. But I seriously doubt whether those arguments have changed the minds of any of them. No one is under the power of atheistic thoughts for long except someone who has been drawn into them by the desire to live freely and without accountability in sin. Such people know it is in their interest that there be no God, and they are willing to take shelter in the bold claims and reasoning of those who, by the same means, have hardened and blinded their own minds into such foolish thinking. But the most rational arguments for the existence of God will never effectively cure a dominant love of sin and an habitual pattern of sinful living in those who have resisted and rejected the means and motivations to repentance declared in divine revelation. And unless the love of sin is cured in the heart, thoughts that acknowledge God will not take root in the mind.

Second, there are those of whom it may also be said that God is not in their thoughts — even though they acknowledge His existence. They are not practically influenced in any area of life by the ideas they hold about Him. Such is the person described in Psalm 10:4: someone who, through pride and a hardened life in sin, pays no attention to God's rule over the world (verses 4, 5, 11, 13). The world today is full of people like those described in Titus 1:16: they claim to know God, but by their actions they deny Him, being detestable and disobedient and unfit for any good work. They think, live, and act in all things as if there were no God — or at least as if they never thought of Him with fear and reverence. For the most part we need not look far for evidence of their disregard for God; the arrogance on their faces speaks against them, as Psalm 10:4 says. And if you look more closely, profane oaths, a dissolute life, and hatred of everything good will confirm and demonstrate the same. Such people may acknowledge God with their words, may fear Him when in danger, and may attend outwardly on His worship — but they do not truly think of God at all; He is not in their thoughts.

Third, there are still lesser degrees of this disregard for God and forgetfulness of Him. Some are so consumed with thoughts of the world and the demands of daily life that it is impossible for them to think of God as they should. For just as love for God and predominant love for the world are incompatible — for if someone loves the world, how can the love of God dwell in him? — so thoughts of God and thoughts of the world, when one dominates, are incompatible. This is the condition of many who would still consider themselves spiritually minded. Their minds are constantly occupied with earthly things. Some of those things press

themselves as matters of duty: they belong to their work and must be attended to. Others arise from the daily events and circumstances of life. Ordinary engagement with the world draws people into nothing but worldly thoughts; love and desire for earthly things, their enjoyment and accumulation, exhaust the energy of their souls all day long. In the middle of this flood of thoughts from such concerns — while their hearts and heads are still steaming with them — many turn directly at their appointed times to the performance of religious duties. Those times must suffice for thoughts of God. Yet even in those duties — partly because of inadequate preparation for them, partly because their minds and affections are already full of other things, and partly because of a failure to actively exercise grace — it may fairly be said that God is not in their thoughts.

I pray God that this — at least in some degree — is not the condition of many among us. I am not speaking now of those who visibly and openly live in sin, godless in their thinking and dissolute in their lives. The prayers of such people are an abomination to the Lord, and they never have any thoughts of Him that He accepts. I am speaking of those who are sober in their lives, hardworking in their callings, and not openly negligent about the outward duties of religion. Such people are apt to think well of themselves, and others speak well of them too — for these things are in themselves commendable and praiseworthy. But if you look more closely, you will find in many of them that God is not in their thoughts as He ought to be. Their earthly conversation, their empty talk, and their foolish plans all show that the energy of their spirits and the deep-

est workings of their minds are absorbed in things below. A few scattered, passing, unengaged thoughts are occasionally thrown toward God — which He despises.

Fourth, where people are nurturing secret, dominant sins in their hearts and lives, God is not in their thoughts as He ought to be. He may be — and often is — very present in the words of such people, but in their thoughts He is not and cannot be in the way He ought. And there are certainly such people. From time to time we hear of one person and another whose secret sins break out into the open. They flatter themselves for a season, but God often arranges things in His holy providence so that their evil is exposed and seen for what it is. Some ugly, dominant sin reveals itself: one person is a drunkard, another is sexually immoral, a third is an oppressor of others. Such people have always been found among those who profess the Gospel, even in the best of times — among the apostles themselves, one was a traitor, a devil. Among the first professors of Christianity there were those whose god was their appetite, whose end was destruction, who were focused entirely on earthly things, as Philippians 3:18-19 describes. Some may take advantage of this acknowledgment — that such evils exist among those who are called Christians. And it must be admitted that great scandal is given by this to the world, bringing a dreadful judgment on both those who give the offense and those who receive it. But we must bear the reproach of it as believers always have, and commit everything to the watchful care of God. In such a season, it is good to be watchful over ourselves and others, to encourage one another daily while there is still time, lest anyone be hardened by sin's deceitfulness. See Hebrews 12:13-17. And because those in

this condition cannot be spiritually minded — and yet there are real difficulties in determining whether a particular sin is truly dominant — I will consider this more carefully.

First, we must distinguish between a season of temptation in some cases and the ordinary settled state of the mind and affections in others. There may be a season in which God, in His holy and wise ordering of all things for His own glory and blessed ends, allows a sinful desire or corruption to break loose in the heart — striving, tempting, suggesting, and stirring up great trouble and unrest in the mind and conscience. It cannot be denied that when this coincides with a powerful external temptation, it may go so far as to catch the person off guard and draw them into actual sin, to their defilement and horror. In this case, no one can say they are being tempted by God, for God tempts no one; rather, every person is tempted by their own sinful desire and enticed. Yet temptations of every kind, insofar as they are afflictive, corrective, or disciplinary, are ordered and arranged by God Himself. There is no evil of that nature that He has not in some sense brought about. And where He wills that the power of a particular corruption be used as an affliction, two things may safely be attributed to His work.

First, He withholds the supply of grace by which the corruption might be effectively put to death and brought under control. He can give sufficient and powerful grace to repel any temptation and subdue any or all of our sinful desires. For He can and does work in us both to will and to act according to His pleasure. He ordinarily does this for believers, so that although their sinful desires may rebel and wage war, they cannot defile the soul or prevail. But He is not obligated to supply this active, prevailing grace without in-

terruption. When it serves His holy purposes, He may and does withhold it. When a proud soul needs to be humbled, a careless soul needs to be awakened, an ungrateful soul needs to be convicted and rebuked, a backsliding soul needs to be restored, or a willful, self-centered, hot-tempered soul needs to be broken and made gentle, He can leave them for a time under the severe pressure of a prevailing corruption — which under His holy guidance will greatly serve His blessed ends. This was the case in Paul's temptation, as described in 2 Corinthians 12:7-9. Consider a person who through disorder and excess is gradually developing many habitual bodily ailments that are slowly and imperceptibly moving toward his death: it may actually be an advantage to him to be struck down by a violent fever that immediately threatens his life. For he will then be thoroughly awakened to the danger he is in and will not only work to be freed from the fever but will also take care in the future to guard against the disorders and excesses that brought him to that point. In the same way, a loose and careless soul who walks in a comfortable but hollow profession sometimes contracts many spiritual diseases that tend toward death and ruin. No arguments or reasoning can stir him to wake up, shake off his complacency, and begin walking more diligently and humbly before God. In this state, it may be that by God's permission he is suddenly overtaken in some open actual sin. At that point, through the powerful workings of an awakened conscience and the stirring of whatever sparks of grace still remain, he is shocked, terrified, and moves to seek deliverance.

Second, God may and does in His providence bring into a person's path the objects and occasions that provoke their sinful desires — for the purpose of testing them. He places people in rela-

tionships and circumstances that are well suited to arouse their affections, passions, desires, and inclinations toward the very things they are prone to.

In this condition, any sinful desire will quickly gain such power over the mind and affections that it constantly presses for sin. It does not only bend the affections toward sin, but multiplies thoughts about it and darkens the mind to the considerations that ought to motivate it to put that sin to death. In this state, it is hard to see how God could be in a person's thoughts in the way He ought to be. Yet this condition is very different from a sin or corruption that is habitually and routinely dominant in the ordinary course of a person's life — which is the situation I am actually addressing.

If anyone asks how to tell the difference — between a sin or corruption that breaks out in connection with a specific temptation, and a sin that is habitually and consistently indulged in the mind — here is the answer.

First, it may not matter much whether we can distinguish between them. The reason God allows any corruption to become such a snare and source of temptation — such a thorn and briar — is to awaken souls from their complacency and humble them for their pride and negligence. The more seriously they take it, the more effectively it will accomplish that purpose. It may actually be better for the soul to feel more of what is sinful in the corruption than of what is merely painful about the temptation. For if the soul sees it as a dominant sin, and if any spark of grace remains in the soul, it will not rest until the sin is in some measure overcome. It will also

immediately drive the soul into careful self-examination, which will produce deep self-humbling — the very outcome God intends. But there is more to say.

Second, for the relief of those who may be troubled in their minds about their spiritual condition, I will say this: there is a clear difference between these two things. A sinful desire or corruption that breaks out into violent temptation is a constant burden, grief, and affliction to the soul in which it lives. Just as the temptation will give such a person no rest through its repeated urgings, so he gives the temptation no rest either — he is constantly struggling against it and fighting it. It fills the soul with horror at itself and continual self-loathing that such seeds of corruption and foolishness are still remaining within. With those in whom a particular sin is ordinarily dominant, it is different. In proportion to their spiritual understanding and their occasional fresh convictions, they do have trouble about it — they cannot help it, unless their consciences are completely seared. But that trouble is mainly, if not entirely, about its guilt and consequences — what may come of it, in this world or the next. Beyond that, they like it well enough and have no real desire to give it up. It is this second kind of person that I am addressing.

Second, we must distinguish between the troubling pressure of a sinful desire and its conquering dominance. The evil that is present in us will press and push toward sin on its own, even without the kind of special external temptation described earlier. This is how the situation is framed and how the nature and workings of indwelling sin are described in Romans 7 and Galatians 5. Sometimes a particular sinful desire may be so inflamed by a person's own constitution from within, or so exposed to provoca-

tive circumstances from without, as to bring constant trouble to the mind. Yet this can be true even where no sin has the dominance we are discussing. The difference between the troubling pressure of a corruption toward sin and its conquering dominance is this: under the former, the thoughts, plans, and workings of the mind are generally disposed and inclined toward opposing and fighting it — how to overcome it, defeat it, destroy it, and gain a complete victory over it. In fact, death itself is sweet to such people under this understanding, since it is the thing that will finally deliver them from the tormenting power of their corruptions. The state of such a soul is described at length in Romans 7. In the other case — where a sin is truly dominant — it directs the thoughts mainly toward making provision for the flesh and fulfilling its desires. It fills the mind with pleasurable contemplation of its object and drives it to devise ways of satisfying it. For such people, part of the bitterness of death is that it will permanently separate them from the satisfaction they have found in their sinful pleasures. Death is bitter in the thoughts of the worldly-minded person because it will take him from all his enjoyments, his wealth, his profits, and his advantages. It is bitter to the sensually-minded person as the thing that finally ends all his pleasures.

Third, there are degrees even within dominant corruption. In some people it taints the affections, corrupts the thoughts, and works the will toward acts of secret delight in sin — but goes no further. The whole mind may be corrupted by it and rendered vain, sensual, or worldly in the majority of its thoughts, depending on the nature of the prevailing sin. Yet at this point God sets limits on the raging of some people's corruptions and says to their proud waves: this far you may go, and no further. He either places a re-

straint on their minds so that when sinful desire has fully conceived it does not bring sin to birth, or He sets a fence in His providence so that in their circumstances they cannot find their way to what they most strongly desire. It is a miserable life that such people lead — constantly torn between their corruptions and their convictions, between love for sin and fear of the consequences. In others, sin runs its full course into outward, actual sins — which in some cases are exposed in this world, and in others are not. For some men's sins go before them to judgment, and some follow after. Some fall into sin suddenly, through the convergence of temptation with corruption and opportunity; others settle into a habitual pattern of sin — in many cases hidden, in some discovered. But among those who have received any spiritual light and have made a profession of religion, this rarely happens except by God's great displeasure. When people have long given way to the dominance of sin in their affections, inclinations, and thoughts — and God has repeatedly set fences before them to restrain their inclinations and prevent sin from bearing full fruit, sometimes through afflictions, sometimes through fears and dangers, sometimes through the Word — and yet their hearts keep pressing toward their sin, God lifts His restraining hand, removes His obstacles, and gives them over to the desires of their own hearts to do what is disgraceful. At that point everything falls in line with their desires, and they rush into actual sins and folly, stepping onto the paths that go down to the chambers of death. The uncontrollable power of sin in such people, and the greatness of God's displeasure against them, makes their condition deeply pitiable.

Those who are in either of these states — the first or the second — are far from being spiritually minded, and God is not in their thoughts as He ought to be. For this reason:

First, they will not think and meditate on God. Their delight has turned elsewhere. Their affections — which are the spring that feeds their thoughts — cling to the things most opposed to Him. Love of sin has become the dominant spring in them, and the whole current of the thoughts they choose and take pleasure in flows toward the enjoyment of that sin. If any thoughts of God enter in, like a weak tide pressing for a few minutes against the other current, they are quickly repelled and swept away by the strong flow of thoughts generated by their powerful inclinations. Such people may still keep up the outward performance of religious duties and attend to them. Pride in their abilities or satisfaction in their own religious performance may give them pleasure in what they do, and they may be greatly pleased with what they observe in others — as is explicitly stated in Ezekiel 33:31-32. But in all these things they have no genuine immediate thoughts of God — none that they delight in, none that they seek to stir up in themselves — and those that press themselves in on them they push away.

Second, they will not think of God — and they dare not either. They will not, because of the power of their sinful desires; they dare not, because of their guilt. The moment they were to begin thinking seriously about God, their sin would lose all its attractive appearance and stand before them in the horror of guilt alone. And in that condition every attribute of God's nature is suited to increase the dread and terror of the sinner. Adam had heard God's voice before with delight and satisfaction — but after he had sinned, hearing that same voice made him hide himself and cry out

that he was afraid. There is a way for people to think about God with the guilt of sin upon them if they intend to forsake that sin — but there is no way for anyone to do so while clinging to guilt and resolving to continue in it. Of all these kinds of people, therefore, it can be said that God is not in their thoughts — and they are far from being spiritually minded. For we cannot be spiritually minded without having many thoughts of God. Beyond that, there are two things required of those thoughts if they are to serve as evidence that we are spiritually minded.

First, we must take delight in them, as Psalm 30:4 says: "Sing praise to the Lord, you His godly ones, and give thanks to His holy name." The remembrance of God delights and refreshes the hearts of His saints and stirs them up to thankfulness.

First, they rejoice in what God is in Himself. Whatever is good, lovely, or desirable; whatever is holy, just, and powerful; whatever is gracious, wise, and merciful — all of this, and everything that it encompasses, they see and find in God. That God is what He is — that is the source of their deepest joy. Whatever happens to them in this world, whatever troubles and anxieties they face, the remembrance of God is a satisfying refreshment to them. For in it they behold all that is good and excellent — the infinite center of all perfections. Wicked people would have God be anything but what He actually is. Nothing about what God truly and really is pleases them. Therefore they either construct false ideas of Him in their minds, as Psalm 50:21 describes, or they do not think of Him at all — at least not as they should — except when they occasionally tremble at His anger and power. Some benefit they suppose can be had from what He is able to do, but how there could be any delight in what He is, they cannot understand. In truth, all their trouble

arises from the fact that He is what He is. It would be a relief to them if they could somehow diminish His power, His holiness, His righteousness, His omnipresence. But His saints, as the psalmist says, give thanks at the remembrance of His holiness.

When we can delight in thoughts of what God is in Himself — in His infinite excellencies and perfections — it gives us a threefold evidence that we are spiritually minded. First, it is evidence that we have a gracious personal share in those excellencies and perfections, on the basis of which we can say with joy: this God — this holy, powerful, just, good, and gracious God — is my God, and He will be my guide until death. So the psalmist, in contemplating his own weakness and the prospect of death in the middle of his years, comforts and refreshes himself with thoughts of God's eternity and unchangeableness and his personal stake in them, as in Psalm 102:23-28. God Himself puts forward His infinite unchangeableness as the ground on which we may expect safety and deliverance, as in Malachi 3:6. When we can think of God and what He is with delight, it is, I say, evidence that we have a gracious covenant share in what God is in Himself — and none have this except those who are spiritually minded.

Second, it is evidence that the image of God has begun to be formed in our souls, and that we value and rejoice in it more than in anything else. Whatever ideas people may have of God's goodness, holiness, righteousness, and purity, those ideas are barren, hollow, and fruitless unless there is a likeness and conformity to those things worked in their minds and souls. Without this they cannot rejoice in thoughts and remembrance of the divine excellencies. Therefore when we can do so — when meditations on God

are sweet to us — it is evidence that we have some personal experience of the excellence of the image of those perfections, and that we rejoice in them above all other things in this world.

Third, they are also evidence that we recognize and are convinced that our eternal blessedness consists in the full manifestation and enjoyment of God as He is — in all His divine excellencies. Most people simply assume this to be true without understanding how it could be so. Those whose hearts are here deeply affected with delight in God's excellencies begin to understand: they are able to believe that the manifestation and enjoyment of the divine excellencies will give their souls eternal rest, satisfaction, and contentment. No wicked person can see it as anything other than a torment to dwell forever with eternal holiness, as Isaiah 33:14 says. And we ourselves can have no present glimpse into the fullness of future glory — when God will be all in all — except through the delight and satisfaction we have here in contemplating what God is in Himself as the center of all divine perfections.

Chapter 10

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What aspect of God we are to think and meditate on. His being; reasons for meditating on it; obstacles to it; how those obstacles are overcome. Thoughts of God's omnipresence and omniscience — why they are especially necessary, and the reasons for this. The same regarding His omnipotence. The value and benefit of such thoughts.

The preceding discussion has covered general matters: the nature, manner, and approach of our thoughts on God. What remains is to give some specific examples of what we are to think about in a particular way — and what will occupy our thoughts if we are truly spiritually minded. For now I will not focus on the things that concern God's grace and love in Christ Jesus, which belong under a different heading, but on those things that relate immediately to the divine nature itself and its holy essential attributes.

First, think much about the being and existence of God. This is the foundation of all our relationship with Him and access to Him, as Hebrews 11:6 says: "He who comes to God must believe that He is." This is the first object of faith, and the first act of reason. Being the sole foundation of all religion, it is our duty to exercise multi-

plied, renewed thoughts about it on every occasion. For many who are not outright atheists still live without any solid, well-grounded conviction of God's existence — they do not believe it in a way that practically influences them. It is true that the natural light inborn in us, through the proper exercise of reason, can give any rational person grounds for confidence in the existence of God. But in most people, this awareness has been preempted by tradition and upbringing, which has led them to assent to it without knowing how or why. They have never questioned it and suppose they have no reason to. Nature itself recoils at the first thought of denying God's existence — but if such people are ever brought on some urgent occasion to think seriously about it, they find themselves lost and wavering, without any firm, unshakeable conviction of its truth. Therefore, while our knowledge of God's existence is grounded at its foundation in natural light, the working of conscience, and the proper exercise of reason applied to the works and effects of infinite power and wisdom, it must also be deepened and made practically useful through faith in divine revelation and personal experience of divine power through that revelation. Through this faith we ought to allow frequent thoughts of God's being and existence to enter our minds. Two reasons make this duty especially important in the age we live in.

First, because of the widespread atheism — both in thinking and in practice — that abounds around us. The reasons for it have already been given, and the reality of it is plain to any ordinary observer. There are two reasons why, in light of this, we ought to abound in faith-filled thoughts about the existence of God. First, we are called to give a special testimony in opposition to this cursed product of hell. The spiritually minded person cannot help

having many thoughts about the existence of God, thereby giving glory to Him. As Isaiah 43:9-12 says: "All the nations have gathered together so that the peoples may be assembled. Who among them can declare this and proclaim to us the former things? Let them present their witnesses that they may be justified, or let them hear and say, 'It is true.' 'You are My witnesses,' declares the Lord, 'And My servant whom I have chosen, so that you may know and believe Me and understand that I am He. Before Me there was no God formed, and there will be none after Me. I, even I, am the Lord, and there is no savior besides Me. It is I who have declared and saved and proclaimed, and there was no strange god among you; so you are My witnesses,' declares the Lord, 'and I am God.'" And Isaiah 44:8: "Do not tremble and do not be afraid; have I not long since announced it to you and declared it? And you are My witnesses. Is there any God besides Me, or is there any other Rock? I know of none." Second, occasions for such thoughts will be constantly provided for us. The atheistic impiety, thinking, and behavior that abounds around us is a grievous burden to every godly soul. Without frequent retreat to thoughts of God's existence, there is no relief or refreshment to be found under that burden. Such was the situation of Noah in the old world and of Lot in Sodom — and it made their faith shine all the more brilliantly.

Second, because of the bewildering confusion that fills all of life in the world today. Whatever has ever served in former times as a test of faith for God's people, it abounds today. Profane and dissolute people have never had stronger outward appearances to reinforce their atheism, and godly people have never faced greater trials to their faith with respect to the visible state of things in the world. The psalmist in an earlier time was nearly swept into unbe-

lieving complaints on such an occasion, as Psalm 73:2-3 shows. And such moments may come upon us too, leading us to say with him: "Surely in vain I have kept my heart pure and washed my hands in innocence; for I have been stricken all day long and chastened every morning." This is why, when the prophet Habakkuk was wrestling with thoughts about a state of affairs like the one we face today — which he describes in Habakkuk 1:6-12 — he grounds his thinking in a fresh exercise of faith in God's being and attributes in verse 12-13. David also makes that his retreat in a similar situation in Psalm 11:3-5.

In a season like this one, for both the reasons just given, those who are spiritually minded will give much exercise to their thoughts about the being and existence of God. They will say within themselves: truly there is a reward for the righteous; truly God is one who judges in the earth. From this will follow such an understanding of His immensity, His eternal power, His infinite wisdom, and His absolute sovereignty as will hold their souls firm and steadfast through the worst storms of temptation that may come upon them.

Yet there are two things that weaker believers may encounter in their thoughts about God's being and existence that may cause them some difficulty.

First, knowing the weakness of our minds when faced with direct contemplation of things infinite and incomprehensible, Satan will sometimes take advantage of this to inject blasphemous imaginations in opposition to what we are trying to fix our thoughts on. He will choose that very moment — counting on our weakness and his own subtle methods — to press his temptations toward atheism through entangling questions, just when we are seeking to refresh

our souls with thoughts of God's being and excellencies. "But is there really a God? How do you know there is a God? Could it be otherwise?" — this is what he says to our minds. For from his very first temptation, which took the form of an entangling question — "Indeed, has God said you shall not eat from any tree of the garden?" — he has continued working in much the same way. So he dealt with our Savior Himself: "If You are the Son of God" — that is, casting doubt. In such a case the apostle gives us the rule: "In addition to all, take up the shield of faith with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one," Ephesians 6:16. Faith will act in two ways on such an occasion.

First, by immediately and with disgust rejecting such diabolical suggestions. So our Savior did in a not dissimilar case: "Get behind Me, Satan." Therefore, if any such thoughts are suggested to you or seem to arise in your mind, know with certainty that they come no less directly from the devil than if he were personally standing before you in visible form. If he appeared visibly, every one of you would arm yourself with total defiance of whatever he offered. No less is necessary in this case, when you may feel him though you cannot see him. Do not let his flaming arrows stay in your mind for even a moment. Do not enter into any negotiation or argument about them. Reject them with indignation, and reinforce your rejection of them with some fitting word of Scripture, as our Savior did. If an enemy throws a lit grenade into a person's clothing, he does not stop to think about whether it will burn — he shakes it off immediately. Deal no differently with these flaming arrows, lest by remaining in you they set your imagination ablaze with greater disturbance.

Second, if these suggestions do not fully depart after this effort to drive them out, turn immediately — without further argument — to your own experience. When the devil asks you the question, if you try to answer him you will be trapped. But if you instead turn the question on yourself and look to your own experience for the answer, you will defeat all his purposes.

There are arguments that can be drawn, as mentioned, from natural light and reason properly exercised, sufficient to defeat objections of that kind. But these are not our proper weapons when we ourselves are under temptation, which is the only situation now under consideration. Such arguments require longer and calmer reasoning than such a state allows, and they are not the sanctified means appointed for our relief.

What we need is something suited to suggestions that arise during our meditations. In those moments we are not to reason on philosophical principles but to take up the shield of faith to extinguish these flaming arrows. And if Satan can on such occasions draw us into long debates about the existence of God, he has achieved his goal — by pulling us away from the very meditation on God that we intended. In time he will make it a habitual pattern: no sooner do we begin to think of God than we must immediately argue about His existence.

The right approach for a true believer in this situation is to retreat immediately to personal experience, which will pour shame and contempt on Satan's suggestions. Every believer who has understanding and takes time to exercise the wisdom of faith in reflecting on himself and on God's dealings with him has a witness within himself of God's eternal power and divine nature — as well as all those other perfections of His nature which He is pleased to

manifest and glorify through Jesus Christ. Therefore, when Satan suggests that there is no God, such a believer will be able to say: you might as well tell me that I do not live or breathe, that food does not nourish me or clothing keep me warm, that I do not know myself or anything else — for I have spiritual sense and experience of the contrary. He is like the man of old who, when a clever philosopher tried to prove through logical argument that motion does not exist, gave no answer to the arguments but simply stood up and walked. "How often have I experienced the power and presence of God in prayer," such a person will say, "as though I had not merely heard of Him by hearing but had seen Him with my own eyes? How often has He put forth His power and grace in me through His Spirit and His Word with undeniable evidence of His being, goodness, love, and grace? How often has He refreshed my conscience with the sense of forgiveness of sin, speaking a peace to my soul that all the world could not produce? In how many afflictions, dangers, and troubles has He been a present help and relief? What real outflowings of life and power from Him have I obtained in meditating on His grace and glory?" Like the man who had been blind and answered the Pharisees in their trapping questions: "Whatever else may be the case, one thing I know — I was blind, and now I see." In the same way such a soul will say: whatever may be in this temptation from Satan, one thing I know full well — I was dead, and I am alive; I was blind, and now I see; and this by an effect of divine power.

This shield of faith, wielded through the hand of personal experience, will extinguish Satan's flaming arrows, and he will suffer a double defeat. First, his temptations will be repelled by the proper means of resistance — at which point he will not only stop

his attack but actually flee from you. "Resist the devil," the apostle says, "and he will flee from you." He will depart not merely to leave you in peace but as one who has been defeated and put to shame. It is for lack of this kind of vigorous resistance that many remain so long entangled in the thorns of this temptation. Second, recalling our experiences of God will lead us into the active exercise of every kind of grace — which is the greatest possible disappointment to our adversary.

Second, in thinking about God's being and existence, we are prone to become overwhelmed, as if the object is too great and glorious for our minds to take hold of. Eternity and immensity — everything understood as infinite — tend to disarm the mind from its clear and focused activity and reduce it, as it were, to nothing. For some people, not being able to stay with the strict logic of things, vain and foolish imaginations arise — along with questions like: "How can these things be, since we cannot comprehend them?" Others are simply at a loss and turn their thoughts away, as they would turn their eyes from the bright rays of the sun. Two things are advisable in this case.

First, turn to a holy wonder at what you cannot comprehend. In these matters, we cannot see God and live. Even in eternal life they cannot be fully grasped — only what is infinite can fully comprehend what is infinite. Here in this life, they are the objects of faith and worship. We may find rest and satisfaction in them when our inquiries and reasonings only produce unrest and may even overwhelm us. Infinite glory does not permit us any close approach except through faith alone. When the soul bows down before God's awesome greatness and incomprehensible perfections — finding itself to be nothing and God to be all — it will find rest

and peace in these things, as Romans 11:33-36 illustrates. We can barely hold a steady thought about the greatness of the world and all the nations and peoples in it — yet both the world and all its peoples are but dust on the scales and a drop in the bucket, like emptiness, like nothing, compared with God. What else can our thoughts of Him produce but holy wonder?

Second, when contemplating any one infinite attribute of God has left us lost and unsettled in our minds, it helps to redirect our thoughts to the effects of that attribute — the effects we have or can have personal experience of. For what is too high and great to grasp in itself becomes accessible to our understanding through its effects. So the invisible things of God are known through and in the things that are visible. And there is no attribute of the divine nature of which we may not have some experience of its effects in and upon ourselves. We may consider these effects and, in the streams, taste something of the fountain we cannot directly approach. Through them we are led to a holy wonder at what is in itself infinite, immeasurable, and incomprehensible. I cannot comprehend the immensity of God's nature — I may not even fully understand what immensity means — yet if I find through experience and firmly believe that He is always present wherever I am, I have faith in it and am satisfied with it.

Second, alongside thoughts of God's being, thoughts of His omnipresence and omniscience ought to be our constant companions. We cannot take a single step in a life lived before Him without remembering that He is always and everywhere present with us, and that the condition of our hearts and our inward thoughts are continually before His view just as much as our outward actions. While we ought to live under a constant awe and fear of God

rooted in these truths, there are also particular seasons in which our minds need to be in the active contemplation of them — seasons in which, without such thoughts, we will not be preserved in our duty.

The first such season is when the times, places, and circumstances of temptation and potential sin converge. For some people, certain company creates such a season; for others, privacy and opportunity do the same. Some people carelessly and recklessly throw themselves into social settings that they know have been sources of temptation and sin to them. Every such entry into a gathering where they know from experience what has happened before is itself an act of sin — and it is just on God's part to leave them to all the evil consequences that follow. Others either seek out or are repeatedly thrown into such company, and no sooner are they involved than they forget all thought of God and give themselves over not only to worthless conversation but to various kinds of excess. David knew the danger of such occasions and describes his approach to them in Psalm 39:1-3: "I said, 'I will guard my ways that I may not sin with my tongue; I will guard my mouth as with a muzzle while the wicked are in my presence.' I was mute and silent, I refrained even from good, and my sorrow grew worse. My heart was hot within me, while I was musing the fire burned; then I spoke with my tongue." As for their evil words and behavior, he would have no part in them. As for good conversation, he judged it unsuitable — like casting pearls before swine. So he was silent even in that, though it grieved and troubled him. But this silence became in him afterward the occasion for those excellent meditations expressed in the following verses. When entering these situations, if people would remember God's presence with

them in those very places — and the holy severity of the eye that is on them — it would put a holy restraint on their spirits and take away the pleasure of those festivities whose appeal comes entirely from temptation and sin. The person who neither walks humbly nor carefully — who, when unnecessarily thrown into the company of wicked or profane people on occasions where others give themselves unusual freedom for corrupt talk or excess in some form, does not at the moment of entering call to mind the presence and all-seeing eye of God, and at leaving consider whether his conduct befitted that presence and that eye — that person is not walking as he should. But sadly, the pretense of business and necessary obligations, commercial relationships, family connections, and the ordinary flow of social life — combined with the assumption that all kinds of company are acceptable for recreation — have driven the remembrance of God from most people's minds, even in the very moments when they cannot be preserved from sin without it.

This has tarnished the beauty of godly living among most people, leaving very few with any convincing evidence of being spiritually minded.

Therefore, whether people enter and engage broadly in all kinds of social settings by their own choice or out of necessity, let them know this for certain: if they do not continually keep their hearts and spirits under the restraint of thoughts and awareness of God's omnipresence and omniscience — that He is always with them and His eye always upon them — they will not be kept from snares and sinful failures.

Indeed, such thoughts are necessary for all of us, even in the best company, to ensure that we conduct ourselves rightly at all times.

For some people, privacy, secrecy, and opportunity are also occasions of temptation and sin. This is true of people under conviction who have not yet fully turned to God. Many a good beginning has been completely ruined by this kind of occasion and temptation. Privacy and opportunity have overthrown many such people even in their best resolutions. And these are dangers to all who are not yet openly and flagrantly wicked. Terrible fruits come every day from these occasions. We need no other proof of their power and effectiveness in tempting to sin than the visible results they produce. And what they are to some, they may be to all, if not carefully guarded against. This is why the apostle speaks of the shameful things that are done in the darkness, where secrecy and opportunity meet. Therefore, this is precisely the kind of season that calls for thoughts of God's omnipresence and omniscience — and those who are spiritually minded will not fail to have them, at least to some degree.

"God is in this place" — and "the darkness is no darkness to Him; light and darkness are both alike to Him" — these are sufficient thoughts to set in the balance against any temptation that arises from secrecy and opportunity. A single thought of the actual presence of the holy God and the open view of His all-seeing eye will do more to quiet those inflamed affections that lust stirs up on such occasions than any other consideration whatsoever. A quick retreat to this thought at the very first stirring by which temptation assaults the soul will be its strong tower where it is safe.

Second, times of solitude and quiet reflection are another season calling for the exercise of our minds in thoughts of God's omnipresence and omniscience. These give us the truest test of whether we are spiritually minded or not. What we are in them is

what we truly are and nothing more. Yet in some of those times — such as walking or traveling — vain thoughts and foolish imaginations are extremely ready to press on our minds. Whatever is stored in the affections or memory will at such times offer itself for our attention. And where people have formed habits around certain kinds of things, those things will press in for possession of their thoughts, almost whether they want them or not. The psalmist shows us the way to prevent this in Psalm 16:7-8: "I will bless the Lord who has counseled me; indeed, my mind instructs me in the night. I have set the Lord continually before me; because He is at my right hand, I will not be shaken." His inner being — his affections and secret thoughts — gave him counsel and instructed him in all such seasons. But how did they come to have that wisdom and faithfulness? In themselves they are the seat of all sinful desires and corruption, capable only of misleading him. It was entirely from this one source: he set the Lord always before him. Continual awareness of God's presence with him kept his mind, heart, and affections in such awe and reverence of God that they always guided him toward his duty. But I believe I addressed the proper management of our thoughts in this kind of season earlier.

Third, times of great difficulty, danger, and inner turmoil are a season calling for the same duty. Suppose a person is left alone in his trials for the sake of the Gospel, as it was with Paul when everyone forsook him and no one stood by him. Suppose he is brought before rulers, governors, or judges who are filled with rage and armed with power against him, with everything arranged to fill him with dread and terror. The duty of such a person is to draw his thoughts away from everything visibly present and fix them on the omnipresence and omniscience of God. God sits among those

judges even though they do not acknowledge Him; He rules over them as He pleases; He knows the cause of the oppressed and vindicates them when the world condemns them, and He can deliver them whenever He chooses. With thoughts like these, those holy souls supported themselves when they stood before the furious face of the bloodthirsty tyrant on one side and the blazing furnace on the other, as in Daniel 3:14. "Our God whom we serve is able to save us from the furnace of blazing fire; and He will deliver us out of your hand, O king. But even if He does not, let it be known to you, O king, that we are not going to serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up." Thoughts of God's presence and power gave them not only comfort and strength in their distress when they were alone and helpless, but also courage and resolve to defy the tyrant to his face. And when the apostle was brought before Nero, that monster of cruelty and wickedness, and everyone deserted him, he declares that the Lord stood by him and strengthened him, as in 2 Timothy 4:17. He refreshed himself with thoughts of God's presence, and received the blessed fruit of it.

Therefore, in such moments — when hearts are ready to tremble, when everything around appears filled with dread and terror and all help seems far away — it is both the duty and the wisdom of people to draw their thoughts away from all outward and present appearances and fix them on the presence of God. This will greatly change how things appear to their minds. They will find that strength, power, and wisdom are entirely on their side — and that everything arrayed against them is, in reality, only emptiness, foolishness, and weakness.

When Elisha's servant saw the place surrounded by an army with horses and chariots sent to take them, he cried out in fear: "Alas, my master! What shall we do?" But when the prophet prayed and the Lord opened the young man's eyes to see the heavenly guard — the mountain full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha — his fear and panic vanished, as in 2 Kings 6:15-17. And when in similar extremity God opens the eye of faith to behold His glorious presence, we will no longer be afraid of the threat of people. This is how the holy martyrs of old triumphed and even despised their persecutors. Our Savior Himself made it the ground of His own support in a similar situation, as in John 16:32: "Behold, an hour is coming, and has already come, for you to be scattered, each to his own home, and to leave Me alone; and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with Me." If we can fill our souls with the awareness that when we are left alone in our trials and dangers — without any encouragement from friends or help from other people — we are not truly alone, because the Father is with us, it will sustain us under our despair and enable us to carry out our duties.

Fourth, special providential warnings call for thoughts of God's omnipresence and omniscience. So Jacob, after his nighttime vision, immediately concluded: "Surely the Lord is in this place, and I did not know it." We frequently receive such warnings. Sometimes they come through events considered to be accidental, from which we are strangely delivered. Sometimes they come through things we see happen to others — through thunder, lightning, storms at sea or on land. For all the works of God, especially those that are remarkable and unusual, have a voice by which He speaks to us. The first thought that will arise in a spiritually

minded person in such a season is: God is in this place; He is present — the living and all-seeing One — as Hagar confessed on a similar occasion in Genesis 16:13-14.

Third, have frequent thoughts of God's omnipotence — His almighty power. Most people may suppose they have little need to be urged toward this, since no one has ever doubted it; who does not grant it on every occasion? People do grant it in general terms, for eternal power is inseparable from the very concept of a divine being. So the apostle links them together: "His eternal power and divine nature," as in Romans 1:20. Yet few truly believe it for themselves and in the way they ought. To believe in the almighty power of God with reference to ourselves and all our concerns — temporal and eternal — is one of the highest and most noble acts of faith, containing all other acts of faith within it. For this is what God first proposed as the proper object of faith when entering into covenant with us: "I am God Almighty," as in Genesis 17:1. It is also the conclusion Job arrived at after his long season of testing: "I know that You can do all things, and that no purpose of Yours can be thwarted," as in Job 42:2. "God has spoken once; twice I have heard this: that power belongs to God," as the psalmist says in Psalm 62:11. This was something God found it necessary to repeatedly impress upon him. For we are easily struck by the visible power of earthly rulers and opponents, and we begin to suppose that things will go according to their will because of their strength. But it is entirely otherwise: all created beings are feeble ciphers that can do nothing; power belongs to God — it is a jewel in His royal crown that He will not allow any to seize. If the proudest of them overstep the limits of what He currently permits, He will send worms to consume them, as He did to Herod.

It is utterly impossible for us to walk before God to His glory, or with any real peace, comfort, or satisfaction in our souls, unless our minds are continually engaged with thoughts of His almighty power. Everything that happens to us, everything we hear that carries even the smallest trace of danger, will unsettle our minds — either making us tremble like leaves in the wind or sending us to foolish or sinful forms of relief — unless we are firmly grounded in faith in this truth. Consider the promises God has made to the church that are on record and not yet fulfilled. Consider the present condition of the church in the world, with all that belongs to it — all the fears and dangers it faces, all the trials it endures. We will quickly find that unless this anchor holds firm, we will be tossed about in constant uncertainty and exposed to the most violent temptations, as Revelation 19:6 suggests. To this end, God Himself calls us to these thoughts in His answer to the despondent complaints of the church in its greatest dangers and calamities, as in Isaiah 40:28-31: "Do you not know? Have you not heard? The Everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth does not become weary or tired. His understanding is inscrutable. He gives strength to the weary, and to the one who lacks might He increases power. Though youths grow weary and tired, and vigorous young men stumble badly, yet those who wait for the Lord will gain new strength; they will mount up with wings like eagles, they will run and not get tired, they will walk and not become weary."

Consider one example that is the constant concern of us all. We are exposed to death at every moment. It is no farther from any of us because we fail to think about it as we should. Death will lay our bodies in the dust, where they will have no more capacity or power in themselves to rise again than any other portion of the earth

from which they are made. Their recovery must be an act of external almighty power — when God shall have His desire for the work of His hands, when He calls and we answer Him out of the dust. Death will also pass the soul into an invisible world, bringing a final end to all relationships, enjoyments, and circumstances here below. I am not speaking of those who are hardened and far from righteousness — people who live and die like animals, or who live under the power of terrible presumption without any serious thought about their future and eternal state. But for all others: what comfort or satisfaction can any person have in his life — a life on which everything depends, and which is passing from him at every moment — unless he has continual thoughts of the mighty power of God by which God is able to receive his departing soul and raise his body out of the dust?

Without pressing further into specific details: this is how it is with those who are spiritually minded, and this is how it must be with all of us if we claim that privilege. They are filled with thoughts of God — in contrast to the mark of the wicked: that God is not in their thoughts. It is greatly to be feared that when many of us are weighed in this balance, we will be found too light. People may perform outward religious duties; they may hear the Word with some pleasure and do many things gladly; they may avoid the corruptions that are in the world through lust and may not go to the same extremes of excess and self-indulgence as others. Yet they may still be strangers to inward thoughts of God filled with delight and contentment. I cannot see how it can be otherwise for those whose minds are over and over filled with earthly things —

however much they may satisfy themselves with appeals to their callings and lawful enjoyments, or claims that they are not in any excessive way set on the pleasures or profits of the world.

Walking with God and living for Him is not merely a matter of avoiding outward sins and performing outward duties — even if those duties are carried out diligently and in great number. All of this can be done on such principles, for such purposes, and with such a condition of heart as to find no acceptance with God. It is our hearts that He requires, and the only way we can give them to Him is through our affections and holy thoughts of Him with delight. This is what it means to be spiritually minded; this is what it means to walk with God. Let no one deceive himself: unless he abounds in holy thoughts of God, unless meditating on God is sweet to him, everything else he claims will fail him in the day of testing.

This is the first thing by which we may give ourselves evidence that we are under the direction of the mind of the Spirit — that we are spiritually minded. I have dwelt on it at greater length because it contains the first perceptible outflow of the spring of living water in us — the first active expression of spiritual life in our own experience. I should now move on to consider our affections, whose state and condition these thoughts are the only genuine outward expression of. But since there are, or may be, some who are aware of their own weakness and failure in the part of this duty that we have been discussing, and who may be falling into discouragement as a result, we must follow the example of the One who will not quench the smoldering wick or break the bruised reed — by offering some relief to those who are sincere yet are struggling under a sense of their own weakness.

Lastly, Be not discouraged with an Apprehension, that all that you can attain to in the discharge of this duty is so little, so contemptible, as that it is to no purpose to persist in it. Nor be wearied with the difficulties you meet withal in its performance. You have to do with him only in this matter, who will not break the bruised Reed, nor quench the smoaking Flax; whose will it is, that none should despise the day of small things. And if there be in this Duty a ready Mind, it is accepted according to what a man has, and not according to what he has not. He that can bring into this Treasure only the Mites of broken Desires and Ejaculatory Prayers, so they be his best, shall not come behind them who cast into it out of their greater abundance in Ability and Skill. To faint and give out because we cannot arise to such a height as we aim at, is a fruit of Pride and Unbelief. He who finds himself to gain nothing by continual Endeavours after holy fixed Meditations, but only a living active sense of his own Vileness and Unworthiness, is a sufficient gainer by all his Pains, Cost and Charge. But ordinarily it shall not be so; Constancy in the Duty will give Ability for it. Those who conscientiously abide in its Performance, shall increase in Light, Wisdom and Experience, untill they are able to manage it with great Success. These few plain Directions may possibly be of some use to the weaker sort of Christians, when they find a disability in themselves to the discharge of this Duty, wherein those who are Spiritually minded ought to be peculiarly exercised.

Chapter 11

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Various things offered for the relief, instruction, and direction of those who complain that they do not know how, and are not able, to hold their minds to holy thoughts of God and spiritual or heavenly things. Rules concerning regular spiritual meditation.

Some will say — and indeed many say this on every occasion — that in all their duty toward God there is nothing in which they are more at a loss than this one thing: fixing or exercising their thoughts and meditations on heavenly or spiritual things. They acknowledge it as a duty; they see its excellence and its inexpressible usefulness. But although they try and attempt it often, they cannot seem to achieve anything except what leaves them ashamed both of their efforts and of themselves. They find their minds unsteady, prone to wander and drift, or to be pulled toward other things — unable to stay fixed on the object they intended to meditate on. Their abilities are limited, their thinking feels barren, their memory is unreliable, and their capacity to organize their thoughts into right order is weak. For the most part they do not know what to think about, and when they do settle on something they immediately find themselves stuck and so give up. At that point other thoughts or thoughts of other things seize the opportunity to take

over — and what began as spiritual meditation ends in idle, earthly wandering. For these reasons they are often too discouraged to even begin the duty, or they give it up almost as soon as they start, and count themselves fortunate if they come away no worse for the attempt — which often happens. They do not find this to be the case with their other duties. To those who are genuinely concerned about this — to whom this lack and failure is a real burden, who grieve under it and desire to be freed from it or at least comforted in their struggle with it — I offer the following.

First, the sense of the emptiness of our minds that a careful examination of this issue will produce ought to greatly humble and abase our souls. Why is it this way with us — that we cannot stay in thoughts and meditations of spiritual and heavenly things? Is it because we have no real stake in them? Perhaps they are worthless and unprofitable, so that there is no point spending our thoughts on them? In truth, they alone are truly worthwhile, useful, and desirable — everything else in comparison to them is but loss and rubbish. Or is it because the faculties and powers of our souls were not originally designed for contemplating these things and delighting in them? That too is false. They were all given to us — all created by God — for precisely this purpose, fitted with inclinations and capacity to dwell with God in all things without aversion or weariness. Nothing was so natural, easy, and pleasant to them as steady contemplation of God and His works. The cause of all this evil therefore lies at our own door. All of this, and every other evil, came upon us through the entrance of sin. Solomon captures this in his survey of all the causes and effects of vanity: "Behold, I have found only this, that God made men upright, but they have sought out many schemes," as in Ecclesiastes 7:29. Through sin, our

minds — which were created in a state of blessed devotion to God — were completely turned away from Him, and not only that but filled with hostility toward Him. In this condition, the vanity that dominates the mind is both the person's sin and their punishment. It is their sin in its constant pull toward things vain, foolish, sensual, and wicked, as the apostle describes at length in Ephesians 4:17-19 and Titus 3:3. And it is their punishment in that, having been turned away from the highest Good — in whom alone true rest is found — they are filled with darkness, confusion, and restlessness, like a troubled sea that cannot be still, whose waters stir up mud and mire.

By grace our minds are renewed — changed and delivered from this condition — but only partially. The principle of vanity is no longer dominant in us to the point of alienating us from the life of God or keeping us in hostility toward Him. Those who are so renewed do not walk in the vanity of their minds as others do, as Ephesians 4:17 says. Others go through all their ways and circumstances with a constant stream of vain thoughts flowing through their minds. But the remnants of that vanity are still actively at work in us, affecting all the workings of our minds toward God with uncertainty and instability. It is like a person who receives a serious wound to a vital part of the body: the wound may heal enough that death does not follow immediately, yet it may leave him weak and lame for the rest of his life, hindering him in all the activities that require his full strength. The vanity of our minds has been cured enough to deliver us from spiritual death, but such a wound and such weakness remain that they both weaken and hinder us in all the operations of spiritual life. This is why those who have made any real progress in grace are acutely aware of this van-

ity as the greatest burden on their souls, and groan for such a complete renewal of their minds as would perfectly free them from it. This is primarily what they have in mind in that anguished cry of Romans 7:24: "Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death?" They groan under a sense of it every day. Nothing troubles them more than observing how it defeats their intentions to contemplate heavenly things, how it frustrates their best resolutions to stay in the spiritual exercise of faith and love, and how it imposes on them thoughts of things that they — in themselves or in their consequences — utterly detest. Nothing do they fear more, nothing is more grievous and burdensome to them, nothing do they groan more to be delivered from. When there is war in any place, those involved must keep watch over all their enemies and all their attempts. But if they are vigilant and diligent against the enemies visible outside who openly fight against them, while neglecting those who are treacherously working within — betraying their plans and weakening their strength — they will certainly be ruined. Wise people attend first to what is within, knowing that if they are betrayed from the inside, everything they do against their open enemies is useless. In the warfare we are engaged in, we have enemies of every kind who openly and visibly fight against our souls through various temptations. It is our duty to watch against these, to contend with them, and to seek victory over them. But this internal vanity of the mind is what works in all things to betray us — weakening all our graces or hindering their proper operation, and opening the doors of our hearts to our wicked enemies. If our primary effort is not to expose, suppress, and destroy this traitor, we will not succeed in our spiritual warfare.

Since this is the root cause of all that inability of mind to steadiness in holy thoughts and meditations that you are complaining of, when you feel it, turn your attention to its source. Labor to be deeply humbled, and to walk humbly under a sense of the remaining vanity of your mind. In this way some wholesome fruit may be drawn from this bitter root, and something nourishing may come out of what seems only to devour. When you cannot stay in holy thoughts of God and your relationship to Him, and you reflect on this cause of it for the purpose of further humbling and self-abasement, your good intentions are not wasted. Let such a person say: I began to think of God, of His love and grace in Christ Jesus, of my duty toward Him — and where do I find myself now, just a few minutes later? I have wandered to the ends of the earth, into useless and earthly things; or I am so stuck that I have no inclination to continue the work I set out to do. O wretched person that I am — what a cursed enemy I have within! I am ashamed of myself, weary of myself, disgusted with myself — who will deliver me from this body of death? Such thoughts may be just as profitable to him as the ones he originally set out to have.

It is true that we can never be fully freed from all the effects of this vanity and instability of mind in this world. Unchanging devotion to God — always, in all the powers and affections of our minds — is reserved for heaven. But great progress in conquering and expelling this vanity can be attained — more, I fear, than most people have experienced, yet what all should be striving toward. If we apply ourselves as we should to the growth of spiritual light and grace; if we labor diligently to dwell and abound in thoughts of spiritual things with love for them and delight in them; if we guard against entertaining and approving in our minds the kinds of

thoughts and things that feed and confirm this vain frame — then, though not absolute perfection, a blessed degree of heavenly-mindedness can be reached, representing the closest approach to glory that is possible in this life. If a person cannot attain the physique of an athlete or strength like that of Samson, a wise person will still not neglect the means that will enable him to carry out the ordinary duties of life. In the same way, although we cannot attain perfection in this area — though we must always be pressing toward it — a wise person will still pursue such a degree of healing from this spiritual ailment as will enable him to carry out all the duties of the life of God. But if in everything else people feed the vanity of their own minds — if they allow them to wander continually after things foolish, sensual, and earthly, deliberately supply them with material for that end, and make no effort to put this evil frame to death — it is useless for them to hope or expect that their minds will ever be steady in thoughts of heavenly things. If this is the case with anyone — as it is to be feared it is with many — their first duty is to heed the words of our Lord Jesus Christ: "Make the tree good, and then the fruit will be good" — and not before. When the power of sanctifying grace has made the mind habitually spiritual and heavenly, thoughts of such things will come naturally and be accompanied by delight. But they will not be so until the God of peace has sanctified us completely in spirit, soul, and body, preserving us blameless until the coming of Jesus Christ.

Second, always be aware of your own inability to stir up or properly manage spiritual thoughts — thoughts of things spiritual and heavenly. In this area, people tend to assume that since they may think of what they please, they are therefore able to. Thoughts are their own, so they suppose they need no help for them regard-

less of what kind they are. They cannot think as they ought in spiritual things, but they do not recognize they cannot do anything at all without God's help. Nothing will convince them of this error until they are burdened by personal experience of the opposite in spiritual things. But the counsel on this point is explicitly stated by the apostle from his own experience in 2 Corinthians 3:5: "Not that we are adequate in ourselves to consider anything as coming from ourselves, but our adequacy is from God." He is speaking primarily of ministers of the Gospel — and specifically of those most richly furnished with spiritual gifts and graces, as he states in verse 6. If this is true of them, even with respect to the work and duties of their calling, how much more is it true of others who do not have their graces or their office? Therefore, if people disregard God's present, active grace and the supply of His Spirit — if they assume they can exercise their minds in spiritual thoughts on their own — they will simply be frustrated with themselves when they are disappointed, not understanding what the problem is, and they will spend their lives in a lifeless and fruitless condition.

By the strength of their natural abilities, people can form thoughts of God and heavenly things in their minds according to what they know of them. They can organize them according to learned methods and express them clearly to others. But even while doing all this, they may be far from being spiritually minded. For there may be in their thoughts no active exercise of faith, love, or holy delight in God — no grace at all. But these are precisely the things we are asking about — thoughts in which the graces of the Spirit are in their proper exercise. With respect to those, we have no sufficiency in ourselves; all our sufficiency must be from God. There is perhaps no truth more widely acknowledged in theory,

among people of understanding and knowledge, than this — that of ourselves we can do nothing. And yet there is perhaps none more neglected in daily practice. People profess that they can do nothing of themselves, and yet go about their duties as if they could do everything.

Third, remember that I have not so far been discussing formal, scheduled meditation. That requires different rules and instructions. By formal or scheduled meditation I mean the deliberate fixing, directing, and ordering of one's thoughts upon some spiritual or divine subject, with the aim of affecting one's own heart and soul with it or with the truths it contains. This distinguishes it from studying the Word, where the primary aim is to learn the truth or to teach it to others. It is also distinct from prayer, where God Himself is the immediate object. In meditation, the goal is to affect the heart and mind with love, delight, and humility. Up to this point I have been describing only what it means to be spiritually minded — specifically in this matter of our thoughts as they flow from the habitual condition of our hearts and affections — and what the regular pattern of our thoughts ought to be with respect to all the occasions of the life of God. A person can be ready and disposed for this even while still unskilled in or incapable of formal, scheduled meditation. Scheduled meditation requires such a deliberate exercise of one's natural faculties and abilities as some — through weakness and lack of training — are simply not capable of. But what we have been urging up to this point is not beyond reach for anyone in whom the Spirit of faith and love dwells, for it is nothing more than the frequent and active exercise of those graces. So ask yourself: Do your heart and affections lead you to many thoughts of God and spiritual things? Do they spring up in

you like water in a well of living water? Are you ready on every occasion to welcome such thoughts and to dwell in them as opportunity arises? Do you labor to have ready in your mind what you need for times of temptation and duty? Is God in Christ — and the things of the Gospel — the regular refuge of your soul? If so, even if you are unable to carry out a structured, formal meditation in your mind, you may still be spiritually minded.

A person may not have the capacity and ability to run a large trading business. The knowledge of all kinds of goods and markets, of the world and its nations, along with the planning and accounting required for such a trade, may be beyond his understanding, and he may quickly ruin himself by attempting it. Yet this same person may be quite capable of running a small retail shop — and may thrive just as well and build just as solid a life as those with greater capacities who pursue larger and more risky ventures. So it may be for some in this matter. Their natural mental faculties are not sufficient to enable them to engage in formal, scheduled meditation. They cannot put things into the kind of orderly structure it requires, or shape the conceptions of their mind into clear and expressive words. Yet when it comes to frequency of thoughts about God and a disposition of mind toward such thoughts, they may thrive and prove more proficient than many others with greater natural ability. However, since formal meditation is a necessary duty — and in fact the principal way our spiritual thoughts exercise themselves in a profitable manner — I will give attention to it in the following direction.

Fourth, whatever principle of grace we have in our minds, we cannot attain a ready exercise of it — whether in formal meditation or in any other form of spiritual activity — without great diligence

and great difficulty.

At the beginning of this discussion it was noted that there is a difference, in this grace, between its essence, substance, and reality — which we would not deny to people despite many failures and weaknesses — and the degree of it in which it has its principal and useful exercise. This is like the difference between natural life and its activity in a weak, diseased body, versus in one of good constitution and vigorous health. Assuming, then, that the reality of this grace is planted in our minds by the Holy Spirit as a core part of that new nature which is God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works — still, for it to grow and develop, as with every other grace, our own diligent care, watchfulness, and spiritual striving in all holy duties are required. Even the most fertile ground, if left uncultivated, will not produce a useful harvest. Let no one think that this condition of a spiritual mind — with its readiness and disposition for all holy thoughts of God, Christ, and spiritual and heavenly things at all times and on all occasions — will simply come upon him and remain with him without effort. It is as reasonable to expect a poor man to become wealthy without industry, or a weak man to become strong and healthy without food and exercise, as to expect to be spiritually minded without earnest pursuit of it. What, then, is required for this? Several things can be named without which this holy condition will not be attained.

First, a continual watch must be kept in and over the soul against the invasion of vain thoughts and imaginations — especially in seasons when they are most likely to gain ground. If they are allowed to break into the mind, if we form the habit of welcoming them, if they are accustomed to dwelling within us, it is point-

less to hope or desire to be spiritually minded. This is central to that duty which our Savior so frequently and emphatically charges us all with — to watch, as in Mark 13:37. Unless we keep strict watch here, we will be betrayed into the hands of our spiritual enemies, for all such vain thoughts are nothing but making provision for the flesh to fulfill its desires — even if those desires are not fulfilled in actual outward sin. This is the substance of the command given in Proverbs 4:23: "Watch over your heart with all diligence, for from it flow the springs of life."

Second, carefully avoid all social settings and activities of this life that tend — under various pretenses — to draw and seduce the mind into an earthly or sensual frame. If people willingly pursue things which they have found by experience — or could learn by observation — pull their minds away from a heavenly frame toward what is contrary to it, and do not watch to avoid such things, they will reap the fruit of their own choices. In truth, the ordinary social behavior of many professing Christians among themselves and with others — walking, talking, and conducting themselves just like everyone else, being as absorbed in the world as the world itself is — has drained the inner grace of being spiritually minded and tarnished the outward glory of their profession. The example David followed shows how careful we ought to be about this, as in Psalm 39:1-3, which was already mentioned.

Third, place a holy restraint on the mind to keep it to the duty of spiritual thoughts and meditations, pressing it continually with a sense of their necessity and usefulness. The mind is naturally prone to pull away from purely spiritual duties, through the working of the flesh that remains in it. The more inward and purely spiritual a duty is — and the less outward benefit it offers — the

more the mind will tend to resist it. This is truer of private prayer than of public worship, and truer still of meditation than of prayer. Other things will pull the mind aside — objects from without, and various stirrings of the affections from within. A holy constraint must be placed upon the mind, with a quick rejection of whatever arises to divert or disturb it. Therefore we must call upon all motivating considerations — such as the love of Christ, as in 2 Corinthians 5:14 — to hold the mind steady in its duty.

Fourth, diligently use the means to furnish the soul with that light and knowledge of heavenly things that will provide a constant supply of material for holy thoughts and meditations from within ourselves. This was addressed at length earlier. The lack of it is what keeps many people from making even the smallest progress in these duties. A person may have skill and ability for a trade, but if he has no materials to work with, he must stop and leave his work alone. So it is with the work of holy meditation: whatever the ability of a person's natural faculties — his inventiveness or memory — if he is not equipped with knowledge of spiritual and heavenly things, which are the subject matter of such meditations, he must set the work aside. This is why the apostle prays for the Colossians that the word of Christ would richly dwell in them in all wisdom, as in Colossians 3:16 — that is, that they might abound in knowledge of the mind of Christ, without which we will be unfit for this duty.

Fifth, persevere in your conflict with Satan, who by various schemes and the throwing of flaming arrows works continually to divert us from these duties. He is seldom if ever absent from such occasions. Anyone furnished to any degree with spiritual wisdom and understanding will find him more noticeably active in his craft

and opposition with respect to this duty than in any other area. When we stand before the Lord in this way, he is always at our right hand ready to resist us, and his strength is often great. As noted earlier, people often set out with genuine intention to exercise themselves in holy thoughts, but end in vain imaginations — taking up with trivial things rather than continuing in this duty. Steadiness in resisting him on these occasions is a major part of our spiritual warfare. We can recognize him at work by his methods and instruments: he works through the injection of vain, foolish, or corrupt imaginations. When these begin to rise in our minds at the very times we intend to engage them in spiritual meditation, we may know with certainty where they are coming from.

Sixth, keep careful watch that no root of bitterness springs up and defiles us — that no sinful desire or corruption becomes dominant in us. When that is the case, if people make any attempt in response to their convictions to engage in these duties, they will be laboring in the fire, where all their efforts will immediately be consumed.

Seventh, a dying to the world in our affections and desires — along with moderation in pursuing the necessary things of this life — is also necessary for this. Indeed, without it no one can in any sense be said to be spiritually minded. Without it, our affections cannot be kept under the power of grace in such a way that spiritual things will always be pleasant and nourishing to us.

Some may say that if all these things are required for this, it will take up a person's entire life and time to be spiritually minded. They hope they can attain it at a lower cost and without giving up all the other pleasures and comforts of life that a strict observance of these things would demand.

My answer is this: however hard it may sound to some, I must say it — and my conscience would reproach me if I did not — that if the principal part of our time is not given to these things, then whatever we suppose, we have in reality neither life nor peace. The firstfruits of everything were to be offered to God, and in sacrifices He required the blood and the fat of the inward parts. If the best is not His, He will have nothing. The same is true of our time. Tell me, I ask you, how you can spend your time and your life better, or to better purpose — and if you can show me, I will say: go on and prosper. I know that some spend so much of their time so much worse that it is a shame to witness. Do you think you came into this world to spend all your time and energy on your work, your trade, your pleasures — on satisfying the desires of the flesh and the mind? Do you have time to eat, drink, sleep, and talk unprofitably — perhaps even harmfully — in all kinds of unnecessary social settings, but not enough time to live to God in the very essentials of that life that consists in these things? You entered this world under this law: it is appointed for all people to die once, and after that comes judgment. The reason your life here is given to you is to prepare you for that judgment. If this is neglected, if the principal part of your time is not used with this end in view, you will fall under the sentence of that judgment for eternity.

But people are prone to misunderstand this. They may think these things are meant to pull them away from their lawful work and recreation — which they are generally afraid of and unwilling to sacrifice for any spiritual condition at so high a price. They may suppose that making people spiritually minded means turning them into dull, disengaged people who pay no attention to the legitimate demands of life. But let no one be mistaken: I am not

proposing something that can be easily or honestly dismissed. People are well able to defend their callings and enjoyments and to satisfy their consciences against any argument to the contrary. Yet there is a time when we are obligated to part with everything and give ourselves wholly to following Christ in all things, as in Matthew 19:21. And if we neglect or refuse that when the time comes, it is evidence that we are hypocrites. There was a time when superstition had such power over people's minds that multitudes were persuaded to abandon all — their family connections, their callings, their goods, their property — and give themselves to long pilgrimages and grueling military campaigns, in compliance with that superstition. It is no credit to our profession that we have so few examples of people parting with everything to give themselves to heavenly retreat. But that is not what I am proposing here. My aim is not to take people out of their lawful earthly callings but to bring spiritual affections and thoughts into the management of all of them. The things I have mentioned will not take away any time you can legitimately claim — rather, they will sanctify it all.

I admit that the person who dares take on a life of complete withdrawal from the world must be greatly advanced in spirituality, and must also be convinced that he is not called to a usefulness among other people that would be incompatible with such a life — for some, such a withdrawal could prove a disadvantage. Yet for those whose circumstances allow it, this is attainable. Through the proper exercise and growth of grace, people can reach such a settled heavenly-mindedness — such a freedom from attachment to all things below — as to give themselves up entirely and continually to heavenly meditation, to great advancement in all grace, and

to a nearness to glory. I would hope this was the experience of many in ancient times who renounced the world entirely — including all family ties, social position, and inheritance — and withdrew to deserts and wildernesses to live in continual divine contemplation. But afterward, when great numbers whose minds were not similarly prepared — through genuine growth in grace and dying to the world — took to monastic withdrawal under the same pretenses, the devil, the world, sensual desires, superstition, and every kind of evil followed them, found them out, and took possession of them, to religion's unspeakable harm and disgrace.

Therefore this is not what I am inviting ordinary believers to. Let those who are both able and free to pursue it, receive it. The general body of Christians have lawful callings, work, and responsibilities in which they should ordinarily remain. In order that they too may live to God within those responsibilities, they would do well to consider two things.

First, diligence in one's calling is in itself highly commendable. If nothing else, it has the advantage of being a means of keeping people from those excesses of lust and self-indulgence that they are otherwise prone to fall into. And if you consider the two broad categories into which most of humanity falls — those who are hardworking in their affairs, and those who spend their time as much as possible in idleness and pleasure — the former are far more admirable and desirable. Yet even diligence in one's calling is capable of being greatly abused. An earthly mindset, greed, devouring what should be holy time devoted to duties, uselessness before God, and similar destructive vices can seize and possess people's minds. There is no lawful calling that automatically excludes the grace of being spiritually minded in those who practice

it — nor any that automatically includes it. People in the most ordinary of lawful callings may be spiritually minded, and people in the highest and most distinguished positions may not be. Consider the calling of ministry: the work and duty of it call those engaged in it to have their minds and thoughts occupied with spiritual and heavenly things. They are to study those things, meditate on them, commit them to memory, and proclaim them to others. It will be said: surely such people must necessarily be spiritually minded. If they go no further than what is described, I say they must necessarily be so — in the same way that printers must necessarily be well-read in letters, since they are constantly handling them. A person may engage with great industry in all these activities and yet have a mind that is entirely remote from being spiritual. The evidence shows this happens, and the reasons for it are clear. It requires as much — if not more — watchfulness, care, and humility for a minister to be spiritually minded in the discharge of his calling as it does for any other kind of person in theirs. This is so, among other reasons, because the sheer frequency of dealing with such thoughts professionally, combined with directing them toward others in their expression, will drain them of their personal power and effect. A minister will benefit little from his own ministry if he does not first seek personal experience in his own heart of the power of the truths he teaches to others. And it is evident that this failure is as prevalent among ministers as among any other group of Christians, as every occasion of testing makes plain.

Second, although diligence in any honest calling is right and good, unless people labor to be spiritually minded in the exercise of that diligence, they have neither life nor peace. All the things mentioned earlier are necessary for this — I do not see how any of

them can be reduced. In fact, more is required than what has been expressed, and if this account were burned and rewritten, many additional things would need to be added. The objection based on the time required to observe these things carries no real weight. For a person can accomplish just as much work while spiritually minded as while carnal. Spiritual thoughts will hinder you in your calling no more than vain and earthly thoughts — which people of all kinds manage to find time for in the middle of their work. If you fill a container with chaff, you can still pour a great deal of water into it, which will be held in the same space alongside the chaff. Even if it is necessary for you to take in much of the world's chaff into your mind, your mind is still capable of receiving such a measure of grace as will keep it sincere toward God.

Fifth, this spiritual condition will never be maintained, nor will the duties described ever be performed as they should, unless we set aside some portion of time specifically for them. I am speaking only to those who, I assume, already set apart some daily time for holy duties such as prayer and reading the Word — and who find by experience that this serves them well. For the most part, if they lose their appointed times, they lose their duties entirely. Some have found that when the pressure of business and a flood of demands first drove them away from their fixed time for duties, it led gradually to a pattern of neglecting those duties altogether. Therefore it is wise to set apart regularly some portion of time for the exercise of our thoughts about spiritual things in the way of meditation. I will close this discussion with some specific directions for those who feel inadequate for the discharge of this duty.

First, choose and set apart a suitable time — a time that is free from other demands and distractions. Since we have a duty to redeem time for holy duties, such a season will be all the more valuable the greater the cost of setting it apart. We are never to serve God with what costs us nothing — and this applies to time as to everything else. If we allow only the leftover scraps of our time to this duty — when we have nothing else to do, and perhaps when weariness has left us fit for nothing else — we should not expect to achieve much in it. This is one powerful reason why people are so cold, formal, and lifeless in spiritual duties: the times and seasons they assign to them. When the body is exhausted from the labor and demands of the day, and the mind perhaps also made sluggish by necessary refreshment, people think themselves fit to meet with God about the weighty concerns of His glory and their own souls. This is what God condemns through the prophet in Malachi 1:8: "When you present the blind for sacrifice, is it not evil? And when you present the lame and sick, is it not evil? Why not offer it to your governor? Would he be pleased with you? Or would he receive you kindly?" Both natural law and all the laws of holy worship require that we serve God with the best we have, just as all the fat of the inward parts was to be offered in sacrifice. Shall we think of offering to God time in which we would not be fit to appear before an earthly ruler? Yet such, in my view, are the seasons — especially evening seasons — that most people choose for the duties of holy worship. It would be worth reflecting on how little of the choicest of your time you have freely offered to God beyond what He has claimed for Himself by eternal law — so that you may be stirred to greater diligence in the future. Therefore, if you are serious about this duty, choose for it the seasons when you are most fit

— when the natural energy of your spirit is most free and alert. Some may say that this may be the very time when the demands of the world are calling most urgently for your attention. I say that is exactly the season I would recommend. If you can discipline your mind to redeem that time for God at that cost, your efforts will be fruitful. But do not simply trust to whatever times present themselves. Do not take them up at random. Let the time itself be a freewill offering to God — taken from the top of the pile, from the choicest part of your useful time.

Second, preparation of the mind in proper reverence of God and spiritual things is required before this duty begins. When we enter into this duty by rushing into thoughts of heavenly things without due reverent preparation, we will quickly find ourselves at a loss. See the rule given in Ecclesiastes 5:1-2. The grace to serve God with reverence and godly fear is required in everything we do with Him — and in this duty especially, since our engagement with Him is immediate and particular. Make it your first aim, therefore, to get your heart deeply affected with an awesome reverence of God and a holy regard for the heavenly nature of the things you intend to meditate on. This will compose your mind, and the roots of other thoughts — whether vain or earthly — that are prone to arise and pull you away from this duty will be driven out. The principles of these contrary thoughts are like Jacob and Esau: they struggle in the same womb, and often Esau comes out first and seems for a time to hold the birthright. When various thoughts are contending in our minds — some pulling toward this world and some toward another — the worldly ones may win for a season. But where a proper reverence of God has cast out the slave woman and her

children — that is, the workings of the flesh in its vain thoughts and imaginations — the mind will be free to exercise itself in spiritual things.

Third, earnest desires for a renewed taste and sense of spiritual things are required. If we enter this duty merely from a conviction of its necessity — if we set ourselves to it simply because we think we ought to and it would be wrong to neglect it entirely — we should not expect to be fruitful in it. But when the soul has at some point tasted that the Lord is good, when its meditations on Him have been sweet, when spiritual things have had a flavor and richness in the mind and affections — and when the soul comes to this duty with earnest desire for the same experience again, and indeed for more of it — then it is on the path of genuine progress. This will also give us the perseverance to press through to the end of what we undertake, since we know from prior experience what is to be found there, if we dig and search for it as for treasure.

If you think this duty can be properly carried out in some other way; if you think it is not worth all this effort and preparation — then judge by your past experience whether it would not be better to stop attempting it altogether and leave it alone. It is better to lie quietly on the ground than to keep trying to rise and never once succeed. Remember how many failed attempts you have made at it — and how they have all come to nothing, or to something just as useless as nothing. I cannot promise that in this way you will always succeed — but I am afraid you will never succeed in this duty without things of the same kind and purpose as what I have described.

After this preparation, if you still find yourself troubled and unable to continue comfortably in spiritual thoughts to your refreshment, take these two directions for your relief.

First, cry and sigh to God for help and relief. Lament the darkness, weakness, and instability of your mind, groaning inwardly for deliverance. And if your intended meditations end in nothing more than a renewed and gracious sense of your own weakness and insufficiency, along with a turning to God for fresh supplies of strength, they are by no means lost as far as spiritual account goes. Hezekiah's thoughts in his meditation did not seem to have much order or coherence when he expressed them: "Like a swallow, like a crane, so I twitter; I moan like a dove; my eyes look wistfully to the heights; O Lord, I am oppressed, be my security," as in Isaiah 38:14. When the soul labors sincerely for communion with God but sinks into fragmented, confused thoughts under the weight of its own weakness — yet looks to God for relief — its chattering and mourning will be accepted by God and will be profitable to the one who offers it.

Second, fill in the gaps of your broken thoughts with brief prayers that arise spontaneously, responding to either the subject you were meditating on or to your failure in handling it. So it was with Hezekiah in the example just mentioned: where his own meditations were weak and fragmented, he cried out in the middle of them, "O Lord, I am oppressed, be my security." Meditation is properly understood as a blend of spiritual perception of God and heavenly things — held in the thoughts and conceptions of the mind — together with desires and prayers that flow from it.

It is good and profitable to have a specific intended subject in mind when entering meditation. I have explained at length earlier what things are the proper objects of thought for those who are spiritually minded. These may also be considered more deliberately as subject matter for formal meditation. Such subjects may be drawn from a recent personal spiritual experience, from some warning God has given us, from something that particularly struck us in reading or hearing the Word, from what we find the present condition and state of our mind and soul requires — or, serving as a supply for all of these most frequently, the person and grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. When something of this kind is specifically chosen before the time of meditation, and a time is set aside with it in view, the mind will be held in place and kept from wandering after various subjects — a tendency through which it loses itself and brings nothing to completion.

Finally, do not be discouraged by the sense that what you are able to attain in this duty is so small and feeble as to be not worth continuing. Do not be worn down by the difficulties you meet with in performing it. In this matter you are dealing with the One who will not break a bruised reed or quench a smoldering wick — the One whose will it is that no one should despise the day of small things. And if there is a willing mind in this duty, it is accepted according to what a person has, not according to what he does not have. The person who can bring to this treasury only the small coins of broken desires and brief prayers — if those are his best — will not fall behind those who bring from their greater abundance of ability and skill. To give up and stop because we cannot rise to the height we were aiming for is a fruit of pride and unbelief. The person who finds that all his continual efforts at holy, fixed medi-

tation gain him nothing but a living, active sense of his own unworthiness is gaining enough from all his effort. But ordinarily it will not remain at that level: consistency in the duty will develop ability for it. Those who conscientiously persist in its performance will grow in light, wisdom, and experience until they are able to carry it out with great benefit. These few plain directions may perhaps be of some use to weaker Christians when they find in themselves an inability for this duty — in which those who are spiritually minded ought to be especially exercised.

And what if that which we esteem allowable Love, Care and Industry, should prove to be the Fruit of earthly Affections, inordinate and predominant in us; what if we miss in our measures, and that which we approve of in our selves, should be disapproved of God; we are cast for ever, we belong to the World, and with the World we shall perish.

It may be said, that if it be so difficult to distinguish between these things, namely the lawful use of things here below, and their abuse, the allowable Industry about them, and the inordinate Love of them, on the Knowledge whereof our Eternal Conditions depends, it is impossible but men must spend their time in solicitous anxiety of Mind, as not knowing when they have aright discharged their Duty.

Ans. (1) I press these things at present no further, but only to show how dangerous a thing it is for any to encline in his Affections to the Things of this World, wherein an excess is ruinous, and hardly discoverable. Surely, no Wise-man will venture freely and frequently to the edge of such a Precipice. He will be jealous of his Measures, lest they will not hold by the Rule of the Word. And a due Sense hereof is the best preservative of the Soul,

from cleaving inordinately to these things below. And when God in any Instance, by Afflictions, or otherwise, shews to Believers their Transgression herein, and how they have exceeded, Job. 38.8, 9. it makes them careful for the future. They will now or never be diligent, that they fall not under that peremptory Rule. Joh. 2:14.

Secondly, Where the Soul is upright and sincere, there is no need in this case of any more Solicitousness or Anxiety of Mind, than there is to or about other Duties. But when it is byased and acted by self-Love, and its more strong Inclinations to things present, it is impossible men should enjoy Solid Peace, or be freed from severe reflexions on them by their own Consciences, in such Seasons wherein they are awakened to their Duty, and the Consideration of their State; nor have I any thing to tender for their Relief. With others it is not so, and therefore I shall so far digress in this place, as to give some directions to those who in sincerity would be satisfyed in this lawful use and enjoyment of earthly things; so as not to adhere to them with inordinate Affections.

First, Remember always that you are not Proprietors, nor absolute Possessors of these things, but only Stewards of them. With respect to men, you are or may be just Proprietors of what you enjoy, with Respect to him who is the great Possessor of Heaven and Earth, you are but Stewards. This Stewardship we are to give an account of, as we are taught in the Parable, Luk. 16.1, 2. This rule always attended to, will be a Blessed Guide in all Instancss and Occasions of Duty.

But if a man be left in Trust with Houses and large Possessions, as a Steward for the right Lord, Owner, and Proprietor of them, if he fall into a pleasing Dream, that they are all his own, and use

them accordingly, it will be a woful Surprisal to him, when he shall be called to account for all he has received and laid out, whether he will or no. And when indeed he has nothing to pay. It will scarce be otherwise with them at the great Day, who forget the trust which is committed to them, and suppose they may do what they will, with what they call their own.

Secondly, There is nothing in the ways of getting, enjoying or using of these things, but givs its own Evidence to Spiritual Wisdom, whether it be within the bounds of Duty or no. Men are not lightly deceived herein, but when they are evidently under the Power of corrupt Affections, or will not at all attend to themselves and the Language of their own Consciences. It is a mans own Fault alone, if he know not wherein he does exceed.

A due Examination of our selves in the Sight of God, with respect to these things, the Frame and Actings of our Minds in them, will greatly give check to our corrupt Inclinations, and discover the Folly of those Reasonings, whereby we deceive our selves into the Love of Earthly things; or justify our selves therein, and bring to Light the Secret Principle of Self-Love, which is the Root of all this evil.

Thirdly, If you would be able to make a right Judgement in this Case, be sure that you have another Object for your Affections, which has a predominant Interest in your Minds, and which will Evidence it self so to have on all Occasions. Let a Man be never so observant of himself, as to all Outward Dutys required to him, with respect to these earthly things; let him be liberal in the Disposal of them on all Occasions, let him be watchful against all Intemperance and Excesses in the use of them; yet if he has not another Object for his Affections, which has a prevailing Influence

upon them, if they are not set upon the Things that are above, one way or other, it is the World that has the Possession of his Heart. For the Affections of our Minds will, and must be placed in chief, on things below, or things above; there will be a predominant Love in us; and therefore, although all our Actions should testify another Frame, yet if God, and the things of God be not the Principal Object of our Affections, by one way or other, to the World we do belong; this is that which is taught us so expresly by our Savior, Luk. 16.9, 10, 11, 12, 13. And I say to you, make to your selves Friends of the Mammon of Unrighteousness, that when you fail, they may receive you into everlasting Habitations. He that is faithful in that which is least, is faithful also in much: and he that is unjust in the least, is unjust also in much. If therefore you have not been faithful in the unrighteous Mammon, Who will commit to your trust the true Riches? And if ye have not been faithful in that which is anothert Mans, who shall give you that which is your own? No Servant can serve two Masters; for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other; ye cannot serve God and Mammon.

Fourthly, Labor continually for the Mortification of your Affections to the things of this World. They are in the State of corrupted Nature, set and fixed on them, nor will any Reasonings or Considerations effectually divert them, or take them off in a due manner, unless they are mortifyed to them by the Cross of Christ. Whatever Change be otherwise wrought in them. it will be of no Advantage to us. It is Mortification alone, that will take them off from earthly things to the Glory of God. Hence the Apostle having given us that Charge, Set your Affections on things above, and not on things below on the Earth, Col. 3:2. Adds this, as the only way

and means whereby we may do so, Mortify therefore your Members that are on the Earth. verse 5. Let no man think that his Affections will fall off from earthly things of their own accord. The keenness and sharpness of them, in many things, may be abated by the decay of their natural Powers in Age, and the like. They may be mated by frequent Disappointments, by Sicknesses, Pains and Afflictions, as we shall see immediately; or they may be willing to a Distribution of earthly Enjoyments, to have the Reputation of it, wherein they still cleave to the World, but under another shape and appearance. They may be startled by Convictions, so as to do many things gladly, that belong to another Frame. But or one pretence or other, under one appearance or other, they will for ever adhere and cleave to earthly things, unless they are mortified to them, through Faith in the Blood and Cross of Christ. Gal. 6:14. VVhatever thoughts you may have of your selves in this matter, unless you have the Experience of a work of Mortification on your Affections, you can have no refreshing ground of Assurance, that you are in any thing Spiritually-Minded.

Fifthly, In all Instances of Duty belonging to your Stewardship of earthly things, attend diligently to the Rule of the Word: without this, the Grace exhorted to, may be abused. So of old, under a pretence of a relinquishment of the things of this World, because of the danger in adhering to them, their own, Superstition, and the Craft of other men prevailed with many, to part with all they had to the Service of others, not better, it may be, not so good as themselves. This Evil wholly arose from want of attendance to the Rule of Truth, which gives no such Direction in ordinary Cases. But there is not much seen in these days, of an Excess in that kind. But on the other hand, in all Instances of Duties of this nature, most

mens Minds are habitually influenced with Pretences, Reasonings, and Considerations, that turn the Scales as to what they ought to do in proportion in this Duty, on the side of the World. If you would be safe, you must in all Instances of Duty, as in works of Charity, Piety, and Compassion, give Authority in and over your Souls, to the Rule of the Word. Let neither Self nor Unbelief, nor the Custom and Example of others be heard to speak; but let the Rule alone be attended to, and to what that speaks, yeild, Obedience.

Unless these things are found in us, none of us, no man living, if it be not so with him, can have any refreshing Evidence or Assurance, that he is not under the Power of an inordinate, yea, and predominant Love to this World.

And indeed to add a little further on the Occasion of this Digression, it is a sad thing to have this Exception made against the State of any Man, on just Grounds; yea, but he loves the World. He is sober and industrious, he is constant in Dutys of Religion, it may be, an earnest Preacher of them, a man of sound Principles, and blameless as to the Excesses of Life; but he loves the World. The Question is, how does this appear? it may be, what you say, is but one of those evil Surmises which all things are filled withal. Wherefore, I speak it not at all to give countenance to the rash Judging of others, which none are more prone to, than those, who one way or other are eminently guilty themselves. But I would have every man judge himself, that we be none of us Condemned of the Lord. It notwithstanding the things mentioned, any of us do center in Self, which is supplyed and filled with the World, if we preffer Self above all other things, do aim at the Satisfaction of Self in what we do well or ill, are useless to the only Good and Blessed

Ends of these earthly things, in supplying the wants of others, according to the Proportions wherewith we are intrusted; it is to be feared, that the World, and the things that are in it, have the Principal Interest in our Affections.

And the danger is yet greater with them who divert on the other Extream. Such are they, who in Pride of Life, Vanity in Apparrel, Excess in Drinking, pampering the Flesh every day, tread close on the heels of the World, if they do not also fully keep Company with it. Altogether in vain is it for such Persons to countenance themselves with an Appearance of other Graces in them, or the sedulous Performance of other Dutys. This one Rule will eternally prevail against them; If any man love the World, the Love of the Father is not in him. And by the way, let men take heed how they walk in any Instance against the known Judgement and Practise of the wiser, or more experienced sort of Christians, to their Regret and Sorrow, if not to their Offence and Scandal, or in any way whereto they win the Consent of their own Light and Conscience, by such Reasonings and Considerations, as will not hold weight in the Ballance of the Sanctuary. Yet thus, and no otherwise is it with all them, who under a Profession of Religion, do indulge, to any Excesses wherein they are conformed to the World.

Fifthly, God makes a Hedge against the Excess of the Affections of men, rational and any way enlightned, to the things of this World, by suffering the Generality of men to carry the use of them, and to be carried by the abuse of them, into Actings so filthy, so abominable, so ridiculous as Reason it self cannot but abhor. Men by them transform themselves into Beasts and Monsters, as

might be manifested by all sorts of Instances; hence the Wise-man prayed against Riches, lest he should not be able to manage the Temptations wherewith they are accompanied; Prov. 30:8.9.

Lastly, to close this matter, and to show us what we are to expect, in case we set our Affections on things here below, and they have thereby a predominant Interest in our Hearts, God has positively determined and declared, that if it be so, he will have nothing to do with us, nor will accept of those Affections which we pretend we can, and do spare for him, and Spiritual things. If we abstain from open Sins, if we abhor the Lewdness and Uncleanness of men in the World, if we are constant in religious Dutys, and give our selves, up to walk after the most strict sort in Religion, like Paul in his Pharisaism, may we not, will some say or think, find acceptance with God, though our Hearts cleave inordinately to the things of this VVorld? I say, God has preremptorily determined the contrary; and if other Arguments will not prevail with us, he leaves us at last to this, Go love the World and the things of it, but know assuredly? you do it to the eternal Loss of your Souls. Joh. 2:15. Jam. 4. These few Instances have I given of the Arguments and Motives whereby God is pleased to deter us from fixing our Affections on things here below. And they are most of them such only, as he maks use of in the Administation of his Providence. There are two other Heads of things, that offer themselves to our Consideration.

First, The Ways, Means, Arguings, and Enticements which the VVorld makes use of, to draw, keep, and secure the Affections of Men to it self.

Secondly, The Secret, Powerful Efficacy of Grace, in taking off the Heart from these things, turning and drawing it to God, with the Arguments and Motives that the holy Spirit maks use of, in and by the VVord to this End; and wherein we must show what is the Act of conquering Grace, wherein the Heart is finally prevailed on, to choose and adhere to God in Love immutable. But these things cannot be handled in any measure, according to their nature and importance, without such length of Discourse, as I cannot not here divert to. I shall therefore proceed to that which is the proper and peculiar Subject before us.

Chapter 12

What is required in, and to our Affections, that they may be Spiritual. A threefold work on the Affections described.

TO declare the Interest of our Affections in this Frame of being Spiritually-Minded, and what they contribute thereunto, I shall do these three things.

First, Declare what is required hereto, that our Affections may be Spiritual, wherein lyes the Foundation of the whole Duty.

Secondly, What are their Actings when they are so Spiritual.

Thirdly, What are the means whereby they may be kept and preserved in that Frame, with sundry other things of the like nature How our Affections are concerned in, or do belong to the Frame of Mind enquired after, has been before declared. Without Spiritual Affections, we cannot be Spiritually-Minded. And that they may be of this use, three things are required.

First, Their Principle.

Secondly, Their Object.

Thirdly, The way and manner of their Application to their proper Object, by Vertue of that Principle.

First, As to the Principle acting in them, that our Affections may be Spiritual, and the Spring of our being Spiritually-Minded, it is required that they be changed, renewed, and in-laid with Grace, Spiritual and Supernatural. To clear the Sense hereof, we must a little consider, what is their State by Nature, and then, by what means they may be wrought upon, as to a Change, or a Renovation. For they are like to some things, which in themselves, and their own Nature, are poisonous; but being corrected, and receiving a due Temperament, from a mixture of other Ingredients, become Medicinal, and of excellent Use.

First, By nature, our Affections all of them are depraved and corrupted. Nothing in the whole Nature of Man, no Power or Faculty of the Soul is fallen under greater Disorder and Depravation by the Entrance of Sin, than our Affections are. In and by them is the Heart wholly gone and turned off from God, Tit. 3:3. It were a long work to set forth this Depravation of our Affections, nor does it belong to our present Design. Some few things I shall briefly observe concerning it, to make way to what is proposed concerning their Change.

First, This is the only Corruption and Depravation of our Nature, by the Fall evident in and to Reason, or the Light of Nature it self. Those who were wise among the Heathen, both saw it and complained of it. They found a weakness in the Mind, but saw nothing of its darkness and depravation,as to things Spiritual. But they were sensible enough of this Disorder and Tumult of the Affections in things moral, which renders the Minds of men like a troubled Sea, whose Waters cast up Mire and Dirt. This greatly aggravates the neglect of them who are not sensible of it in themselves, seeing it is discernable in the Light of Nature.

Secondly, They are as depraved, the Seat and Subject of all Lusts, both of the Flesh and of the Spirit. Yea, Lust or evil Concupiscence is nothing but the irregular Motion and Acting of our Affections, as depraved, defiled, corrupted, Rom. 7:9. Hence, no one Sin can be mortifyed without a Change wrought in the Affections.

Thirdly, They are the Spring, Root, and Cause of all actual Sin in the World, Mat. 15.9. The evil Heart in the Scripture, is the corrupt Affections of it, with the Imaginations of the Mind whereby they are excited and acted. Gen. 6:5. These are they, which at this time fill the whole World with Wickedness, Darkness, Confusion and Terror. And we may learn what is their Force and Efficacy from these Effects. So the nature of the Plague is most evident, when we see thousands dying of it every week.

Fourthly, They are the way and means whereby the Soul applies it self to all sinful Objects and Actings. Hence are they called our Members, our earthly Members; because, as the Body applies it self to its Operations by its Members, So does the Soul apply it self to what belongs to it, by its Affections. Rom. 6:13. Col. 3:5.

Fifthly, They will not be under the Conduct of the Mind, its Light, or Convictions. Rebellion against the Light of the Mind, is the very form whereby their Corruption acts it self, Job. 24.13. Let the Apprehensions of the Mind, and its Notions of Good and Evil be what they will, they reject them, and lead the Soul in pursuit of their Inclinations. Hence, no natural Man whatsoever, does in any measure answer the Light of his Mind, or the Convictions of his Understanding; but he sees and approves of better things follow-

ing those that are worse. And there is no greater Spiritual Judgement, than for men to be given up to, themselves, and their own evil Affections, Rom. 1:26.

Many other Instances might be given of the greatness of that Depravation which our Affections are fallen under by Sin; these may suffice as to our present purpose.

In general, this Depravation of our Affections by nature, may be reduced to two Heads.

First, An utter Aversation from God and all Spiritual things. In this lyes the Spring of all that Dislike of God and his Ways, that the Hearts of Men are filled withal. Yea, they do not only produce an Aversation from them, and Dislike of them, but they fill the Mind with an Enmity against them. Therefore, Men say in their Hearts to God, Depart from us, for we desire not the Knowledge of your Ways; What is the Almighty that we should serve him? Or what profit should we have if we Pray to him? Job. 21.14, 15. see Rom. 1:28. Chap. 8. 7, 8.

Secondly, An inordinate cleaving to things vain, earthly, and sensual; causing the Soul to engage into the pursuit of them, as the Horse rushes into the Battle.

Whil'st our Affections are in this State and Condition, we are far enough from being Spiritually-Minded, nor is it possible to engage them into an Adherence to, or Delight in Spiritual things.

In this State, they may be two ways wrought upon, and yet not so renewed, as to be serviceable to this End.

First, There may be various temporary Impressions made on them, sometimes there is so by the Preaching of the Word. Hereon Men may hear it with joy, and do many things gladly. Sometimes it

is so by Judgements, Dangers, Sicknesses, Apprehensions of the approach of Death, Psal. 34, 78.35, 37. These things take men off for a season from their greedy Delight in earthly things, and the pursuit of the Interest of Lust in making Provision for the Flesh. On many other Occasions, by great variety of Causes, there may be temporary Impressions made on the Affections, that shall seem for a season, to have turned the stream of them. And thereon we have many, who every day will be wholly as it were for God, resolved to forsake Sin, and all the Pleasures of it; but the next return to all their former Excesses. For this is the Effect of those Impressions, that whereas Men ordinarily are predominantly acted by Love, Desire, and Delight, which lead them to act according to the true natural Principles of the Soul: now they are for a Season acted by Fear, and Dread, which put a kind of Force on all their Inclinations. Hereon they have other thoughts of Good and Evil, of Things Eternal and Tmporal, of God and their own Duty for a season. And hereon, some of them may, and do persuade themselves, that there is a Change in their Hearts and Affections, which there is not; like a Man who perswades himself that he has lost his Ague, because his present Fit is over. The next trial of Temptation carries them away again to the World and Sin.

There are sometimes sudden Impressions made on Spiritual Affections, which are always of great Advantage to the Soul, renewing its Engagements to God and Duty. So was it with Jacob, Gen. 28:16, 17, 18, 19, 20. So is it often with Believers in hearing the Word, and other Occasions. On all of them they renew their cleavings to God with Love and Delight. But the Effect of these

Impressions on unrenewed Affections, are neither Spiritual nor durable. Yea, for the most part, they are but Checks given in the Providence of God, to the raging of their Lusts. Psal. 9:20.

Secondly, They are liable to an habitual Change. This the Experience of all Ages gives Testimony to. There may be an habitual Change wrought in the Passions and Affections of the Mind, as to the inordinate and violent pursuit of their Inclinations, without any gracious Renovation of them. Education, Philosophy, or Reason, long Afflictions, Spiritual Light and Gifts have wrought this Change. So Saul upon his Call to be King, became another Man. Hereby, Persons naturally passionate and furious have been made sedate and moderate; and those who have been sensual, have become temperate; yea, and haters of Religion, to be Professors of it. All these things, and many more of the like nature have proceeded from a Change wrought upon the Affections only; whil'st the Mind, Will and Conscience have been totally unsanctified.

By this Change, where it is alone, no man ever became Spiritually-Minded. For whereas there are two parts of the Depravation of our Affections, that whereby they are turned off from God, and that whereby they inordinately cleave to other things; their Change principally, if not only, respects the latter. They are brought into some Order with respect to present things. The Mind is not continually tossed up and down by them, as the Waves of the Sea, that are troubled and cast up mire and dirt. They do not carry those in whom they are into vitious sensual Actions, but they allow them to make Vertue in Moderation, Sobriety, Temperance, Fidelity, and Usefulness in several Ways, to be their Design. And it is admirable to think what Degrees of Eminency in

all sorts of Moral Vertues upon this one Principle of moderating the Affections, even many among the Heathens attained to. But as to their Aversation from God and Spiritual things, in the true Spiritual Notion of them, they are not cured by this Change. At least this Change may be, and yet this latter not be wrought.

Again, This Alteration does but turn the Course or Stream of Mens Affections, it does not change the Nature of them. They are the same in their Spring and Fountain, as ever they were, only they are habituated to another Course than what of themselves they are inclined to. You may take a young Whelp of the most fierce and savage Creatures, as of a Tygar, or a Wolf, and by custom or usage, make it as tame and harmless as any domestick Creature, a Dog or the like. But although it may be turned to quite another way or course of acting, than what it was of it self enclined to, yet its nature is not changed. And therefore, frequently on Occasion, Opportunity, or Provocation it will fall into its own savage Inclination. And having tasted of the Blood of Creatures, it will never be reclaimed. So is it with the depraved Affections of men with respect to their Change; their streams are turned, they are habituated to a new Course, their Nature is not altered, at least not from rational to Spiritual, from earthly to heavenly. Yet this is that which was most beautiful and desirable in nature, the Glory of it, and the utmost of its Attainments. He who has by any means proceeded to such a moderation of his Affections, as to render him kind, benign, patient, useful, preferring public Good before private, inordinate, and temporate in all things, will rise up in Judgement against those, who professing themselves to be under the Conduct of the Light of Grace, do yet by being morose, angry, selfish, wordly, manifest that their Affections are not subdued by

the Power of that Grace. Wherefore, that we may be Spiritually-minded, there is yet another work upon our Affections required, which is their internal Renovation, whereby not only the Course of their Actings is changed, but their Nature is altered, and Spiritually renewed. I intend that which is expressed in that great Evangelical Promise, Isai. 17.6, 7, 8, 9. The Wolf shall dwell with the Lamb, the Leopard shall lye down with the Kid, and the Calf and the young Lion and the Fatlings together, and a little Child shall lead them, and the Cow and the Bear shall feed, their young ones shall lye down together, and the Lion shall eat Straw like the Ox, and the sucking Child shall play on the hole of the Asp, and the weaned Child shall put his Hand on the Cockatrice Den. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy Mountain. A Change and Alteration is promised in the Natures, Principles, and first Inclinations of the worst and most Savage Sinners, who pass under the Power of Gospel Grace.

This is that which is required of us in a way of Duty, Ephes. 4:13. And be ye renewed in the Spirit of your Minds. There is a Renovation of the Mind it self, by the Communication of Spiritual Saving Light and Understanding thereunto, whereof I have treated elsewhere at large, see Rom. 12:2. Ephes. 1:17, 18. But the Spirit of the Mind, that whereby it is enlivened, lead and disposed to its Actings, that is to be renewed also. The Spirit of the Mind is in this Place opposed to the Old Man, which is corrupt according to deceitful Lust, or depraved Affections, verse 22. These therefore are that Spirit of the Mind which encline, bend, and lead it to act suitably to its Inclinations, which is to be renewed. And when our Affections are enclined by the saving Grace of the holy Spirit, then are they renewed, and not else. No other Change will give them a

Spiritual Renovation. Hereby those things which are only natural Affections in themselves, in them that believe, become Fruits of the Spirit. Gal. 5:22. The Fruit of the Spirit is Love, Joy, Peace, &c. They continue the same as they were in their Essence, Substance, and natural Powers, but are changed in their Properties, Qualities, Inclinations, when ever a new Nature is given to them. So the Waters at Marah were the same Waters still, before and after their Cure. But of themselves, and in their own nature, they were bitter, so as that the People could not drink them; in the casting of a Tree into them, they were made sweet and useful, Exod. 15:25, 26. So was it with the Waters of Jerico, which were cured by casting Salt into them, 2 King. 19, 20, 21. Our Affections continue the same as they were on their Nature and Essence, but they are so cured by Grace, as that their Properties, Qualities, and Inclinations are all cleansed or renewed. The Tree or Salt that is cast into these Waters whereby the Cure is wrought, is the Love of God above all, proceeding from Faith in him by Christ Jesus.

Chapter 13

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The seat of spiritual-mindedness in the affections. The nature and function of the affections. The ways and means God Himself uses to call the affections of people away from the world.

In the account given at the beginning of this discussion of what it means to be spiritually minded, it was organized under three headings.

The first was the habitual condition, disposition, and inclination of the mind in its affections.

The second was the regular exercise of the mind in its thoughts, meditations, and desires about heavenly things.

To these was added, third, the contentment of the mind in the relish and sweetness it finds in spiritual things as it thinks and meditates on them.

The second of these has been addressed so far, as the one that leads to the others and gives the most perceptible evidence of the condition being examined. In it consists the stream that, rising from the fountain of our affections, flows into a holy rest and contentment of mind.

The first and third I will now address together, and in doing so complete the account of what it means to be spiritually minded.

Spiritual affections — by which the soul clings to spiritual things, taking in such a relish and sweetness of them as to find rest and satisfaction in them — are the particular spring and substance of being spiritually minded. This is what I will now explain and confirm further.

The great contest between heaven and earth is over the affections of that poor creature we call man. That the world should compete for them is no surprise — it is the highest thing the world can aspire to. Everything here below has no greater ambition than to possess the affections of people. And since the world lies under the curse, no greater harm can come to us than for the world to succeed in this aim. But that the holy God should enter the contest and strive for the affections of people — this is an act of infinite condescension and grace. He does this explicitly: "My son, give me your heart," as Proverbs 23:26 says. It is our affections He asks for — and comparatively nothing else. He will certainly accept nothing from us without them. The richest and most costly sacrifice will not be accepted if it is without a heart. All the ways and methods of His dealings through His Word, and all the purposes of His effectual grace, are suited to and designed for this end: to recover the affections of people to Himself. He expresses this concerning His Word in Deuteronomy 10:12: "And now, Israel, what does the Lord your God require from you, but to fear the Lord your God, to walk in all His ways and love Him, and to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul?" And concerning the Word of His grace, He declares the same purpose in Deuteronomy 30:6:

"Moreover the Lord your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul."

On the other side, all the devices of the world — all the paint and cosmetic it puts on its face, all the great promises it makes, all the false appearances and costumes it dresses itself in with Satan's help — have no other purpose than to draw and hold the affections of people to itself. And if the world is preferred over God in this competition for our affections, we will justly perish with the world for eternity — rejected by the One we have rejected, as Proverbs 1:24-25 and 1:31 say.

Our affections are, in a real sense, everything we have. They are all we have to give — the only power of our souls by which, so to speak, we can give ourselves away from ourselves and become another's. The other faculties of our souls, even the most noble, are suited to receive into our own advantage. But through our affections we can give away what we are and what we have. By them we give our hearts to God, as He requires. Therefore, we give everything to the one to whom we give our affections — our very selves and all we have. And to the one to whom we do not give our affections, whatever else we give, we give nothing of substance at all.

In everything we do for others, whatever is good, valuable, or praiseworthy in it comes from the affection with which we do it. To do anything for others without animating affection is in effect to despise them — for we are silently declaring that they are not worth our heartfelt effort. To give to the poor under their pressure without pity or compassion; to supply the needs of fellow believers without love and kindness; and similar acts and duties — these are things of no real value. They commend us neither to God nor to

people. The same is true in our relationship to God and the world. Whatever we do in the service of God, whatever duty we perform at His command, whatever we endure or suffer for His name — if it does not flow from our souls clinging to Him through our affections, He despises it and does not own us. As Song of Songs 5 says, if a man were to offer all the wealth of his house for love, it would be utterly contemned — love cannot be bought or purchased. In the same way, if a person were to offer all the wealth of his house to God without love, it would be equally despised. On the other hand, however diligent and hardworking we may be in the things of this world, if the world does not have our affections, we are not truly of the world and do not belong to it. Affections are the seat of all sincerity — the jewel of every relationship with God and people, the life and soul of everything that is truly good and praiseworthy. Whatever people may profess, they are what their affections are. Hypocrisy is the deceitful interposition of the mind — using various motives and pretenses — between a person's affections and their profession, making them appear to be what they are not. Sincerity is the open expression of the reality of a person's affections, which makes them genuine and useful.

The affections are in the soul what the rudder is to a ship: if held by a skilled hand, it turns the whole vessel wherever the helmsman chooses. If God holds the powerful hand of His grace on our affections, He turns our souls into compliance with His purposes — in mercy, afflictions, trials, and all kinds of providence — and holds them steady against all the winds and storms of temptation, so that they are not driven onto dangerous rocks. Such a soul alone is teachable and responsive to every indication of God's will.

All others are stubborn and obstinate — hardened in heart and far from righteousness. And when the world holds the hand on our affections, it turns the mind — and all the energy of the soul — toward its own interests and concerns. It is useless to contend with anything that has the power of our affections in its grip; it will prevail in the end.

Given all these considerations, it is of the highest importance to carefully examine how things stand in our affections and what their prevailing direction is. "As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another," as the wise man says in Proverbs 27:17. Every person has an edge that can be sharpened by outside helps and advantages. The dominant inclination of a person's affections is his edge. In whatever direction that is set, he cuts and works sharply — but he is blunt and dull to everything else.

Since our affections must be either spiritual or earthly in the direction that dominates — since either God has our hearts or the world does, and either our edge is toward heaven or toward things below — before I address the nature and workings of spiritual affections, I will consider and set out some of the arguments and motivations that God uses to call our affections away from the desirable things of this world. These arguments are weighty and compelling — so much so that to ignore them would be to show the greatest contempt for divine wisdom and goodness. They also serve to press and reinforce the reasons and motivations set before us to set our affections on things that are above — which is to be spiritually minded.

First, God has in every kind of way poured contempt on the things of this world in comparison to things spiritual and heavenly. All things here below were at first made beautiful and in order, and

were declared by God Himself to be very good — not only in their nature and being but in the purpose for which they were designed. They were then desirable to people, and the enjoyment of them would have been a pure blessing with no danger of temptation. For they were God's means to lead people to the knowledge of Him and to love for Him. But since the entrance of sin — through which the world fell under the curse and into the power of Satan — the things of the world in his hands have become effective means of drawing the heart and affections away from God. For it is the world and the things of it, as summarized by the apostle in 1 John 2:15-16, that alone compete for our affections and seek to be the object of them. Sin and Satan simply court the world on the world's behalf, seeking to draw people's affections away from God. Through them the god of this world blinds the eyes of unbelievers, and the primary way he works in them is by promising satisfaction to all the desires of people's minds while making the lack of those things seem dreadful and terrifying. The world being now in this state and used to this end — through Satan's cunning and the foolishness of the human mind — God has demonstrated through various means that all these things are vain, empty, unsatisfying, and utterly to be despised in comparison with eternal things.

First, He did this most powerfully and clearly in the life, death, and cross of Christ. What value can be found in this world once the Son of God has lived in it without a place to lay His head, and has left it on a cross? If there had been anything of real worth in earthly things, He certainly would have enjoyed them — if not crowns and empires, which were entirely within His power, then at least such goods and possessions as people of sober thinking and moderate desires consider adequate. But things were arranged

quite otherwise, to show that there is nothing of lasting value in these things except what sustains life for the performance of service to God — in which alone they serve eternal purposes. He never attained or enjoyed more than the daily provision of bread from the stores of providence, and this is the only provision He has instructed us to pray for, as in Matthew 6:11. In His cross, the world displayed all its supposed good qualities and all its powers, and gave to those who believe a naked and unadorned view of what it truly is. It is not one bit more attractive now than it was when it had gotten Christ upon the cross. Hence the apostle's conclusion in Galatians 6:14: "But may it never be that I would boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world." Since I have believed — since I have had a sense of the power and virtue of Christ's cross — I am done with all things in this world; it is a dead thing to me, and I have no affection for it. This is what made the difference between the promises of the old covenant and the new. Many of the promises of the old covenant concerned temporal things — the good things of this world and this life. Those of the new are mostly about things spiritual and eternal. God would not fully call the church away from regard for earthly things until He had given a clear demonstration of their emptiness, vanity, and insufficiency in the cross of Christ, as in 2 Corinthians 4:16-18.

Why such hurry, my friend? What is the point of rising early and going to bed late, eating the bread of anxious toil? Why this diligence, why these schemes, why this saving and hoarding of wealth? What is all this effort and planning for? One person answers: to secure enough of this world for myself and my children — to give them a start in life, to build an estate, to provide them some

comfort and some standing in the world. These are reasonable-sounding aims, and I would never discourage anyone from the exercise of diligence in their lawful calling. Yet I know that for many, this is simply a pretense and cover for a shameful attachment of their affections to the world. Therefore, in all these things, be persuaded to sometimes fix your eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith. Behold how He is set before us in the Gospel — poor, despised, mocked, persecuted, nailed to the cross, and all of this at the hands of this world. Whatever your plans and ambitions, let His cross continually stand between your affections and this world. If you are believers, your hope is that within a few days you will be with Him forever. To Him you must give an account of yourselves and of what you have done in this world. Will it be acceptable to Him to declare what you saved from this world, what you gained, what you protected and wrapped yourself in, and what you left behind? Was this any part of His work and business in this world? Has He left us an example of any such course? Therefore, no one can set his affections on things here below who has any regard for the pattern of Christ or is influenced in any degree by the power and effectiveness of His cross. "My love is crucified," said one holy martyr of old — He whom his soul loved was crucified, and with Him, his love for all things below. Do you find your affections ready to become entangled with the things of this world — your desires to increase them, your hopes to keep them, your fears of losing them, your love for them and delight in them — actively occupying your mind, possessing your thoughts, and shaping your conversations? Step aside for a moment and by faith contemplate the life and death of the Son of God. It will be a blessed mirror in which you can see what contemptible things those are that you

trouble yourself about. To think that any of us could love or value the power, wealth, goods, or reputation of this world after having had a spiritual view of them in the cross of Christ!

It may be said that the circumstances described were necessary for the Lord Christ because of the particular work He had to do as Savior and Redeemer of the church. And therefore it does not follow that we ought to be poor and lack all things as He did. I agree it does not — and I have throughout allowed for honest diligence in our callings. But this does follow unavoidably: what He willingly gave up and trampled on for our sake ought not to be the object of our affections. Nor can such affections prevail in us if He truly dwells in our hearts by faith.

Second, God has done the same in His dealings with the apostles and generally with all who have been closest to Him and most useful to His glory in the world — especially since life and immortality were brought to light by the Gospel. He had great work for the apostles to do — work of the greatest importance to His kingdom. The laying of the foundations of Christ's glorious kingdom in the world was committed to them. One might think He would have provided them, if not with political power or papal authority, then at least with high church offices, dignities, and preferments — the kind of positions that would have allowed them to engage with princes and freed them from the contempt of common people. But infinite wisdom disposed things quite otherwise for them and their circumstances in this world. God both allowed them to experience the common afflictions and hardships of this life — which He uses to take away the sweetness of present enjoyment — and they lived and died in a condition of poverty, distress, persecution, and reproach. God set them forth as examples in two respects: as exam-

ples of light, grace, zeal, and holiness in their lives, and also to show how little the abundance of earthly things matters to our true blessedness or to God's love for us — and equally, that the complete lack of those things can coexist with the highest share of His love and favor. As in 1 Corinthians 4:9-13: "For, I think, God has exhibited us apostles last of all, as men condemned to death; because we have become a spectacle to the world, both to angels and to men... To this present hour we are both hungry and thirsty, and are poorly clothed, and are roughly treated, and are homeless; and we toil, working with our own hands; when we are reviled, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure; when we are slandered, we try to conciliate; we have become as the scum of the world, the dregs of all things, even until now." If this consideration carries no weight with others, it surely ought to with those who are called to preach the Gospel and are successors to the apostles. Nothing could be more absurd, shameful, and out of step with what God's wisdom and will plainly revealed through His dealings with those first and most honored ministers of the Gospel, than for such people to eagerly pursue worldly advantages — political power, wealth, riches, and honor. In earlier ages there were efforts to separate those who were in any way dedicated to the ministry of the Gospel from all secular positions and income. Some maintained that such people were to own nothing of their own but were to live on charitable contributions from the people. But this view was quickly condemned as heresy in Wycliffe and others. Another group arose who claimed to hold this position for themselves personally, though they would not bind all others to the same rule. This produced various groups of begging friars, whom the powerful and wealthy within the church thought fit to laugh at and ignore. In more re-

cent times this dispute has ended: the clergy have happily secured the victory and consider themselves entitled to everything they can obtain by any means, and anyone who thinks differently is considered guilty of a serious offense. But these things are not our present concern. It was not so from the beginning. And it is a serious question whether, pursuing such a course, people are able to maintain the frame of mind that is life and peace.

Third, God continues to pour contempt on the things of this world by always giving by far the greatest share of them to the most wicked people — His own declared enemies. This was a cause of stumbling under the old covenant but is highly instructive under the new. No one would consider things of real value what a wise man daily throws out to pigs, making little or no use of them in his own household. Those monsters of men, Nero and Heliogabalus, had more control over and more possession of the things of this world than the best of men have ever had. Such villains in their nature, so destructive to human society that their nonexistence would have been in humanity's interest — yet more of the world was poured on them than they knew how to enjoy, possess, use, or abuse. Look at the great treasures and powers of this world as held in the hand of one of these monsters — placed there by divine providence — and you can see at what rate God values them.

In our own day, the greatest, most fertile, and most valuable regions of the earth have been given to the Ottoman ruler and other eastern powers — Muslims or pagans — who are prepared for eternal destruction. And if we look closer to home, we can see whose hands hold the power of the chief nations of Europe, and to what ends that power is used. The very most that some Christian professors among us aim for and dream of — what they imagine

would make them wonderfully happy — would not, if you gathered hundreds of them together, equal the waste that the kinds of rulers just mentioned generate in a single day.

Is God not declaring through this that the things of this world are not to be valued or treasured? If they had genuine worth in themselves, would the holy and righteous God distribute them in this way? Most of those He loves and who enjoy His favor not only comparatively receive the smallest portion of these things, but are also pressed with all the hardships that the lack of those things brings. His open and declared enemies, meanwhile, have more than they know what to do with. Who would fix his heart and affections on those things which God pours into the laps of the vilest people — as a snare to them in this life and an addition to their condemnation forever? It seems that in taking the world you take the curse, death, and hell along with it — and what profit is it for a man to gain the whole world and lose his own soul? What can any person do in response to this, if he is not willing to give up all his hopes and expectations from God, except retreat to faith in things spiritual and eternal — as containing an excellence incomparably beyond all that can be enjoyed here below?

Fourth, God continues to provide constant examples of the uncertainty and unsatisfying nature of earthly things by thoroughly disappointing those who placed their hopes in them. The ways this happens are many, and the examples so multiplied, that most people in the world — unless they are like the fool in the parable who told his soul to rest for many years because his barns were full — live in constant fear and anxiety that they will quickly lose whatever they have, or else they exist under the power of a dull, false security. On this point, the wise man in Ecclesiastes 12 gives such

an account that nothing can be added to it and nothing in reason or experience can contradict it. By these and similar means God pours contempt on all things here below, exposing the foolishness and deceptiveness of the promises the world uses to lure our affections to itself. This must therefore be laid as the foundation of all our thinking about whom or what we will give our affections to: God has not only declared these things insufficient to give us the rest and happiness we seek, but He has also poured contempt on them in His holy and wise ordering of them in the world.

Second, God has added to their vanity by shortening human life — reducing our time in this world to so brief and uncertain a span that it is impossible to find any solid satisfaction in what we enjoy here. As the psalmist expresses it: "Behold, You have made my days as handbreadths, and my lifetime as nothing in Your sight." From this he draws two conclusions.

First, that every person at his best estate is nothing but vanity.

Second, that every person walks in a vain show: "Surely every man walks about as a phantom; surely they make an uproar for nothing; he amasses riches and does not know who will gather them," as in Psalm 39:5-6. The uncertainty and brevity of human life make all people's striving and scheming about earthly things both vain and foolish. When people lived eight or nine hundred years, they had the opportunity to extract all the sweetness from created comforts, to accumulate vast stores of them, and to make long-range plans around them. Yet when they did so, it all ended in the violence, oppression, and wickedness that brought the flood on the ungodly world. And so it remains: the more and the longer people enjoy these things, the more — apart from the sovereign remedy of grace — they will abound in sin and provocation of God.

God has reduced human life to the small portion of seventy years, adding that any extension beyond that is likely to bring only toil and sorrow. Beyond that, even that span is cut short for most by countless unexpected events and circumstances. Therefore, within those seventy years, consider how long it takes before people even begin to taste and enjoy the things of this life; how many things go wrong and wear them out before the end of their days; how few, not one in a thousand, actually reach that age; and what uncertainty surrounds every living person as to whether their life will continue even to the next day. We will see that the holy, wise God has left no such adequate season for the enjoyment of these things as would give them any real lasting value. And when on the other side we remember that this person of such brief duration in the world was made for eternity — for eternal blessedness or eternal misery, a state that depends entirely on his relationship to things above and on setting his affections on them — those who give themselves up to things below have forfeited both their reason and defied the grace of God.

Third, God has openly and plainly declared the danger that lies in these things when it comes to enjoying and using them, and how countless souls are ruined by an excessive clinging to them. For they are the substance of those temptations by which the souls of people are destroyed forever — the fuel that feeds the fire of their lusts until they are consumed by it.

People who live under the power of spiritual conviction do not fall into sin and perish eternally except through temptation — that is the swamp in which this particular plant grows. For those who live and die in the wildness of their natural state, without any restraint from conviction in their minds, they need no external

temptations — only opportunities to act out their desires. But for those who are in any way convinced of sin, righteousness, and judgment — so as to aim at ordering their lives with some sense of these realities — they do not fall into actual sin except through temptation. Whatever it is that causes, occasions, and overcomes a convicted person so that he sins — that is temptation. And this is therefore the great means of the ruin of people's souls.

Now, though there are many sources of temptation — many contributing causes of its effectiveness, including sin within, Satan without, and other people — the material of nearly every ruinous temptation is drawn from this world and its things. From it Satan takes all his arrows; from it corrupt people derive all their means of corrupting others; and from it comes all the fuel for sin and lust. And what makes this worse is that everything in the world contributes to this end. "All that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life," as in 1 John 2:16. This is not a direct inventory of all the things that exist in the world, nor a classification of them under different categories, but rather a description of the principal sinful desires of the human mind — desires to which all the things of the world serve as fuel. Therefore, not only is the raw material of all temptations drawn from the world, but everything in the world is well suited and ready to be misused to that end. For it would be easy to show that there is nothing desirable or valuable in this entire world that cannot be traced back to a service of one or other of these desires, and made to work in the interest of temptation and sin.

When people hear these things, they are prone to say: let this warning apply to those who are openly wicked and dissolute in sin. For the unclean, the drunkards, the oppressors, the proud and am-

bitious — yes, perhaps it applies to them. But as for themselves, they use the things of this world with proper moderation, so that these things are no snare to them. But the truth is this: however these things may be used and for whatever purpose, if a person's affections are set on them, then in one way or another everything in the world becomes a snare and temptation. We should therefore be very careful about clinging to that which is the cause and means of the ruin of countless souls. Through the warnings He gives us about this, God's purpose — as far as the use of means is concerned — is to teach us the vanity and danger of fixing our affections on things below.

Fourth, things are so arranged in God's holy and wise providence that it requires great spiritual wisdom to distinguish between the lawful use and the abuse of earthly things — between a proper care about them and an excessive clinging to them. Few people make this distinction correctly, and as a result many will discover their great mistake on the last day. The disappointments they will face regarding their earthly enjoyments and their use of what was entrusted to them are illustrated in Matthew 25:34 to the end of the chapter.

Chapter 14

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What is required of our affections for them to be spiritual. A threefold work on the affections described.

To explain the role of our affections in being spiritually minded and what they contribute to it, I will do three things.

First, I will explain what is required for our affections to be spiritual — which is where the foundation of the whole duty lies.

Second, I will describe how the affections act when they are spiritual.

Third, I will describe the means by which they may be kept and preserved in that condition, along with various related matters. How our affections are involved in the frame of mind we are examining has already been explained. Without spiritual affections, we cannot be spiritually minded. And for them to serve this purpose, three things are required.

First, their source or principle.

Second, their object.

Third, the way and manner in which they are applied to their proper object, by virtue of that principle.

First, concerning the source or principle that operates in them: for our affections to be spiritual and the foundation of our being spiritually minded, they must be changed, renewed, and filled with spiritual and supernatural grace. To understand this clearly, we must briefly consider their natural condition and then the means by which they can be worked upon so as to be changed and renewed. For they are like certain things that are in themselves and in their own nature poisonous — but when corrected and properly balanced through a mixture of other ingredients, they become medicinal and of excellent use.

First, by nature all our affections are corrupted and depraved. Nothing in the whole nature of a human being — no power or faculty of the soul — has fallen into greater disorder and depravity through sin than our affections. Through and by them the heart has entirely turned away from God, as Titus 3:3 describes. It would take a long discussion to set out the full extent of this depravity of our affections, and it does not belong to our present purpose. I will briefly note a few things about it to prepare the way for what is to be said about their renewal.

First, this is the one corruption and depravity of our nature following the fall that is evident to reason and natural light itself. Wise people among the pagans both saw it and complained about it. They perceived a weakness in the mind but could see nothing of its darkness and depravity in relation to spiritual things. But they were clearly aware of this disorder and tumult of the affections in moral matters, which makes the minds of people like a troubled sea whose waters cast up mud and dirt. This greatly increases the guilt of those who are not aware of it in themselves, since it is visible even in the light of nature.

Second, in their depraved state, the affections are the seat and subject of all sinful desires — both of the flesh and of the spirit. Indeed, lust or evil desire is nothing but the irregular movement and activity of our affections as they are depraved, defiled, and corrupted, as Romans 7:9 describes. Therefore, no single sin can be put to death without a change being worked in the affections.

Third, they are the source, root, and cause of all actual sin in the world, as Matthew 15:19 says. The evil heart spoken of in Scripture is the corrupt affections of it, together with the imaginations of the mind by which they are stirred up and acted upon, as in Genesis 6:5. These are what fill the whole world at this time with wickedness, darkness, confusion, and terror. We can learn something of their force and effectiveness from these effects — just as the nature of a plague is most evident when thousands are dying from it every week.

Fourth, they are the means by which the soul applies itself to all sinful objects and actions. This is why they are called our members — our earthly members — because just as the body applies itself to its activities through its physical members, so the soul applies itself to what belongs to it through its affections, as in Romans 6:13 and Colossians 3:5.

Fifth, they will not submit to the direction of the mind — to its light or its convictions. Rebellion against the light of the mind is the very form in which their corruption expresses itself, as in Job 24:13. Whatever the mind's understanding of good and evil may be, the corrupted affections reject it and drive the soul in pursuit of their own inclinations. Therefore no unrenewed person, in any degree, lives up to the light of his mind or the convictions of his understanding; instead, he sees and approves of better things while

following what is worse. And there is no greater spiritual judgment than for people to be given over to themselves and their own evil affections, as in Romans 1:26.

Many other instances could be given of the greatness of the depravity into which our affections have fallen through sin; these may be sufficient for our present purpose.

In general, this natural depravity of our affections can be summarized under two headings.

Chapter 15

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The work of the renovation of our affections. How it differs from any other impression on, or change worked in them, and how it can be identified as such. The first instance: the universality that accompanies spiritually renewed affections. The order in which our affections are exercised with respect to their objects.

What concerns us here is to examine what kind of work has been done on our affections — or in them — and how it differs from those changes that, whatever they do or accomplish, will never make us or our affections spiritual.

We must use our best diligence in this, because the main way that multitudes deceive themselves — convincing themselves that the saving grace of the Gospel has truly worked in them — is a change they notice in their affections, which can occur on many occasions without any spiritual renovation.

First, regarding the temporary and occasional impressions on the affections mentioned earlier — whether from the Word or from any other divine warning through afflictions or mercies — these are common to all kinds of people. There are some whose consciences are seared as with a hot iron, as 1 Timothy 4:2 describes,

who have become past feeling — numb to all calls, warnings, and rebukes — and have given themselves over to sensuality, working all kinds of uncleanness with greediness, as Ephesians 4:19 says. Such people, having hardened themselves through a long course of sin and having been given over to a depraved mind and vile affections as a judgment of God, may receive no impressions on their affections whatsoever — nothing that moves them with any sense of spiritual and eternal things. They may be terrified by danger, sudden judgments, and other displays of God's wrath from heaven against ungodliness — but they are not drawn to take shelter in thoughts of spiritual things. Nothing but hell itself will awaken them to a right consideration of themselves and eternal things.

It is different with the general run of people who are not openly profligate and shameless in their sinning. Even though they remain in a natural condition and a course of sin — neglecting known duties — yet by one means or another, and most often through the preaching of the Word, their affections are stirred toward heavenly things.

Sometimes they are afraid; sometimes they have hopes and desires about spiritual matters. These stir them to make resolutions and some temporary efforts to change their lives, to abstain from sin, and to perform holy duties. But as the prophet complains, their goodness is like the morning cloud and like the early dew — it passes away. Yet through these experiences, many poor and ignorant souls deceive themselves and cry, "Peace, peace," when there is no peace. They will sometimes express such feeling in their complaints about their long neglect of spiritual things that others may have good hopes for them — but when put to the test, it all comes to nothing.

For anyone with spiritual discernment, it is not difficult to tell the difference between these occasional impressions on the affections and the spiritual renovation we are examining. This one mark is enough: they are all temporary and fleeting. They remain for only a while, as our Savior says, and any occasion defeats all their effectiveness. They may be frequently renewed, but they never last. Some pass away immediately and are completely lost between the place where a person hears the Word and the moment they return home — and if they search for those impressions again, they are gone forever. Others last longer in the mind and produce some outward effects — but none of them will hold up under any real test or shock of temptation.

Yet I have something to say to those who have such impressions on their affections and receive warnings through them.

First, do not despise them, for God is in them. Even if He may not be working in them through saving grace, He may be working in them something preparatory to it. These are not ordinary human experiences — they are special divine warnings.

Second, work to retain them, or to keep their impression on your heart and conscience. You have gained nothing by losing so many of them already. And if you continue to neglect them, after a while you will receive them no more.

Third, do not read more into them than they actually are. Do not immediately conclude that your soul is in a good condition simply because you were moved while hearing the Word, or during a sickness, or in a time of danger. Many people conclude from this

that all is now well with them and rest content in that thought — until they are fully swallowed up again in their former spiritual dullness.

Second, we should consider the difference between the habitual change of the affections described earlier and that renovation by grace which makes them spiritual. This is something we all need to examine carefully. Multitudes are deceived here, and it leads to their ruin. They base their present peace on — and build their hopes of eternal life upon — a kind of change in themselves that will not hold up under scrutiny. This difference must therefore be examined by the light of Scripture and the experience of true believers.

First, there is a double universality that accompanies the spiritual renovation of our affections.

The first is subjective — with respect to the affections themselves.

The second is objective — with respect to spiritual things.

First, sanctification extends to the whole spirit, soul, and body, as 1 Thessalonians 5:23 says. When we say that we are sanctified only in part, we do not mean that any part, power, or faculty of the soul is left entirely unsanctified — only that the work is not yet perfect in any of them. Sin may retain greater power in some one affection — such as anger, fear, or love — producing more frequent outbursts and effects there than in the others. Likewise, one affection may be more prominently sanctified in some people than in others, since a person's natural temperament and various outward circumstances may give certain affections an advantage toward sanctification. So some people find little difficulty in mortifying all

other lusts and corruptions compared to the struggle they face with some one disordered affection or corruption. David may have had this in mind in Psalm 18:23. I have known people who shone remarkably in all other graces, and yet could barely avoid giving serious offense through the excess of their passions and how easily they were provoked. Yet they recognized that setting themselves to the sincere and vigorous mortification of that particular disorder was the strongest evidence of their sincerity in everything else. For the true test of self-denial lies in the things our natural inclinations pull toward most strongly. Nevertheless, as was said: where this work of renovation has taken place, every affection is sanctified and renewed — not one is left entirely in the service of sin and Satan. So even where sin works hard to claim certain affections for its own purposes — taking advantage of the weaknesses already mentioned — those affections are still enabled and made fit for acts of grace, and in their proper seasons they do in fact act accordingly. There is no affection of the mind — even one from which the soul and conscience has suffered the greatest damage, the very ground where the contest between sin and grace is most fiercely fought — that does not have its spiritual use and exercise when the mind is renewed.

Some people are so subject to anger and passion that it seems they are entirely under its power and control — yet they also know how to be angry and not sin, being righteously angry at sin in themselves and others. As 2 Corinthians 7:7 speaks of — what indignation, what righteous zeal. Indeed, God sometimes allows an unusually strong degree of corruption to remain in one affection, so that it may occasion the continual exercise of grace in the other affections. Yet all of them are sanctified in their degree — both the

one that is supported and the one that does the supporting. Therefore, just as the remaining sin in believers is called the old man — which is to be crucified in all its members, because it clings to the whole person in all his powers and faculties — so the grace planted in our nature is called the new man, because nothing in us is untouched and unaffected by it. As nothing in our nature escaped the taint of sin, so nothing in our nature is excluded from the renovation that comes through grace. The person in whom any one affection remains completely unrenewed has not had a single affection graciously renewed in him. Let people beware how they indulge any depraved affection, for it will be an unavoidable mark against their sincerity. Do not think — do not even say, like Naaman — 'God be merciful to me in this one thing; in all other things I will be for Him.'

God requires the whole heart and will have it — or nothing. The chief work of a Christian is to make all his affections, in all their operations, serve the life of God, as Romans 6:17 teaches. And the person who is wise will keep a continual watch over those affections where he finds the greatest resistance to this. Every affection is originally sanctified according to the role it is meant to play in the life of holiness and obedience.

To be wholehearted for God, to follow Him fully, to cling to Him with purpose of heart, to have the heart renewed to love Him — all of this requires that all our affections be renewed and sanctified, without which none of it is possible. When this is not the case, there is a divided heart — a heart split in two — which God abhors: "Their heart is divided; now they will be found guilty," as Hosea 10:2 says.

It is the same with the other kind of change described earlier. Whatever may be worked on the affections when they are not spiritually renewed, that change — whatever its degree — is not universal; it does not affect the whole mind in all its powers and affections. Until a living and prevailing principle and habit of grace is planted in the soul, sin will not only cling at the root to all the faculties, powers, and affections — it will, under any change they may undergo, keep rule and dominion in some of them. This is what happened with the young man who came to the Lord Jesus Christ to ask what he must do to obtain eternal life, as in Mark 10:17-22.

So there are many who have been brought to moderation, sobriety, and self-control in other things, and yet the love of money remains in them in a dominant degree — which, as the apostle says, is a root of all kinds of evil. Others seem religious but cannot control their tongues when it comes to anger, envy, hatred, and the like — and so their religion is worthless.

Most people, in their various forms of religious profession, claim not only to be religious but even zealous — yet they set no limits on their affections for earthly pleasures and possessions. And some in former times who had most remarkably subdued their passions and affections in every other area became the greatest enemies and persecutors of the Gospel.

Some who appear to have undergone a tremendous change through superstitious devotion still walk in the spirit of Cain toward all the disciples of Christ — as is evident with the leading devotees in the Church of Rome — and in other settings we see some who go about calmly persecuting and working for the destruction of other Christians. Some will nurse one secret lust or another that they cannot help but know is destructive to their souls.

Some love the praise of men, which will never allow them to be truly spiritually minded — as our Savior testifies of certain people, saying they could not believe because they loved human praise. This was the well-known failing of all the ancient philosophers. Many of them, through the principles of reason and through severe self-discipline, had brought their affections to a great degree of moderation regarding earthly things. Yet at the same time, they were all slaves to vanity and the praise of men — until the public observation of this fact, and the contradictions between their lives and their claims to virtue, caused them to lose that reputation as well among thoughtful and discerning people. And in general, if people who are not spiritually renewed were able to truly search themselves, they would find that some of their affections have undergone no change at all — that they remain a quiet dwelling place for sin, where it exercises its rule and dominion.

Second, there is an objective universality in spiritual things when it comes to the renovation of our affections — that is, spiritually renewed affections fix themselves on and cleave to all spiritual things in their proper places and for their proper ends. The reason for our attachment to any one of them is the same reason for our attachment to all of them: their relation to God in Christ. Therefore, when our affections are renewed, we make no selective choices among spiritual things — clinging to some while rejecting others as Naaman did — but rather we cleave equally to all of them in their proper places and degrees. And if through darkness and ignorance we do not recognize some of them as being from God — such as, for instance, the observance of the Lord's Day — this is of immense disadvantage to us. An equal respect to all of God's commands is required of us. Yet there are real distinctions among spir-

itual things, and therefore a person may and should value one more highly than another in terms of love and esteem — while still being sincere toward all of them.

First, God Himself — that is, as He is revealed in and through Christ — is in the first and highest place the proper and fitting object of our renewed affections. He is loved for Himself alone. This is the source, the center, and the chief object of our love. The person who does not love God for Himself — that is, for what He is in Himself, and for what He is and will be to us in Christ through Himself alone (considerations that are inseparable) — has no true affection for any spiritual thing whatsoever. Not a few deceive themselves here, or are deceived by others, which should make us all the more rigorous and diligent in examining ourselves. They suppose they love heaven and heavenly things and the duties of worship — a persuasion that may come over them on many grounds and occasions — but that will not hold up under real examination. Yet as for God Himself, they can give no evidence that they love Him: neither on the basis of the glorious excellencies of His nature, with their natural relationship to Him and dependence on Him, nor on the basis of His self-revelation in Christ and the exercise of His grace there. But whatever may be claimed, there is no genuine love for God that does not flow from these things as its proper foundation. Because everyone claims to love God — and takes offense at anyone who would think them so base as not to — even while living in open enmity and hatred toward Him, we must examine ourselves strictly as to the actual grounds for our claim. Do we truly see an excellence, a beauty, a desirableness in the glorious attributes of His nature — such that our souls are refreshed and satisfied by the thoughts of them through faith, and we look

forward to the enjoyment of them as our blessedness — so that we genuinely rejoice at every reminder of His holiness? Is it our deep joy and satisfaction that God is what He is? Does our love flow from the glorious self-revelation He has made of all His holy excellencies in Christ, and from the communication of Himself to us in and through Him? If this is truly the case, then our love for God springs from the renovation of our affections, and He is gracious and generous to us. But if we say we love God yet truly cannot say why — or if our profession of love is rooted only in upbringing and the social expectation that it is the height of wickedness not to love Him — we will be at a loss when we are called to give account. This is the first object of our affections.

Second, in other spiritual things, renewed affections cleave to them in proportion to how much God is present in them. God alone is loved for Himself; all other things are loved for His sake, in the measure and degree of His presence in them. This alone gives them their value in renewed affections. For instance, God is present in Christ — in the human nature of the man Christ Jesus — in a way that is utterly unique, in one sense incomprehensible, unlike anything else of its kind. Therefore the Lord Christ, even as to His human nature, is the object of our love and affections in a way and to a degree that nothing else — spiritual or eternal — should be or ought to be, apart from God Himself. All other spiritual things become objects of our affections through the presence of God in them, and they take their nature and significance from the degree of that presence. They should accordingly be the objects of our affections in proportion to that degree. Evidence of God's presence in things and persons is the only thing that draws renewed affections to them.

Third, in those things that seem equal in terms of what of God is in them, our love may still go out more prominently to one than to another on certain special occasions and for particular reasons. Some particular truth, together with the grace communicated through it, may have been the means of our conversion to God, or of our special growth, or of our consolation in a time of distress — and it is impossible that the mind would not hold a special regard and appreciation for such truths and the grace given through them. The same applies to certain duties: we may have found such a lively interchange and communion with God in some of them that we take a particular delight in them.

But despite these differences, spiritually renewed affections do cleave to all spiritual things as such. The true reason for this is the same in every case — namely, God's presence in them — though renewed affections act toward them in various ways, one example of which I will give.

Our Savior divides spiritual things into those that are heavenly and those that are earthly — comparatively speaking — in John 3:12: "If I told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things?"

The heavenly things are the deep and mysterious counsels of God's will. Renewed affections cling to these with holy admiration and contented submission, capturing the understanding in devotion to what it cannot fully comprehend. The apostle expresses this in Romans 11:33-36: "Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways! For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who became His counselor? Or who has first given to Him that it might be paid back to him again? For from Him and

through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen." What the mind cannot comprehend, the heart admires and adores — delighting in God and giving Him glory in all things.

The earthly things our Savior refers to in that passage are the work of God on the souls of people in their regeneration — a work carried out here on earth. Toward these things, the affections act with delight and great thankfulness. The experience of God's grace in and upon believers is sweet to their souls. One way or another, they cling to all of these things — they have no dominant aversion to any of them. They have regard for all of God's commands, delight in all His counsels, and love for Himself and all His ways.

Whatever other change may have been worked on the affections — if they are not spiritually renewed — this is not the case. For just as they do not truly cleave to any spiritual things for their own proper nature and the evidence of God's presence in them, there are always some spiritual things toward which those with unrenewed affections maintain an aversion and hostility. This condition may not immediately reveal itself, but it will show itself on any special test. This is what happened with the hearers of our Savior in John 6. A great impression was made on their affections by what He taught them about the bread of God that came down from heaven and gave life to the world — so much so that they cried out, "Lord, always give us this bread," as verse 34 records. But when the deeper meaning of it was explained, they disliked it and said, "This is a hard saying; who can accept it?" as verse 60 says — and they then fell away from both Him and His teaching, even though they had followed Him long enough to be counted among His disciples, as verse 66 shows.

I say, therefore, that whenever people's affections are not renewed — whatever other change may have been worked in them — just as they have no true delight in any spiritual things or truths for their own nature and sake, so there will always be certain points at which they maintain their natural hostility and aversion to them. This is the first difference between spiritually renewed affections and those in which some kind of change has been worked through other causes.

All Grace and Spiritual Strength is originally seated in the nature of God, verse 28. But what relief can that afford to us who are weak, feeble, fainting. He will act suitably to his nature, in the Communication of this Grace and Power, verse 29. But how shall we have an Interest in this Grace, in these Opperations: wait on him in the Ordinances of his Worship, verse 31. The Word as Preached, is the Food of our Souls whereby God administrs Growth and Strength to them, Joh. 17:17.— Pet. 2:23. Desire, says he the sincere Milk of the Word, that ye may grow thereby. But what Encouragement have we thereunto, if so be, says he, you have tasted that the Lord is gracious. If in and by the Dispensation of this Word, you have had Experience of the Grace, the Goodness, the Kindness of God to your Souls, you cannot but desire it and delight in it. And otherwise, you will not do so. When men have fate some good while under the Dispensation of the VVord, and in the enjoyment of other Ordinances, without tasting in them and by them, that the Lord is gracious, they will grow weary of it and them. Wherefore, Prayer is the way of his Appointment for the Application of our Souls to him, to obtain a Participation of all needful Grace, which therefore he has proposed to us in the Promises of the Covenant, that we may know what to ask, and how

to plead for it. In the Sacraments the same Promises are seal'd to us, and the Grace represented in them effectually exhibited. Meditation confirms our Souls in the Exercise of Faith about it, and is the especial Opening of the Heart to the Reception of it. By these means I say, does God communicate all Supplies of renewing, strengthening, and sanctifying Grace to us, that we may live to him in all Holy Obedience, and be able to get the Victory over our Temptations. Under this Apprehension do Believers approach to God in the Ordinances of his Worship. They come to them as the means of Gods Communication to their Souls. Hence they cleave to them with Delight, so far as their Affections are renewed. So the Spouse testifys of her self; I sate down under his Shadow with great Delight, Cant, 2.3. In these Ordinances is the protecting refreshing Presence of Christ. This she rested in with great Delight.

As they come to them with these Designs and Expectations, so they have Experience of the Spiritual Benefits and Advantages which they receive by them, which more and more engags them to them in their Affections and Delights. All these things, those who have a Change wrought in their Affections, but not a Spiritual Renovation, are Strangers to. They neither have the Design before mentioned in coming to them, nor the Experience of this Efficacy now proposed in their Attendance on them. But these Benefits are great; as for Instance, when Men find the worth and Effect of the Word Preached on their Souls in its enlightning, refreshing, strengthening, transforming Power; when they find their Hearts warmed, their Graces excited and strengthened, the Love of God improved, their Disponding Spirits under Trials and Temptations relieved, their whole Souls gradually more and more Conformed to Christ: when they find themselves by it extricated out of Snares,

Doubts, Fears, Temptations, and brought to Satisfaction and Rest, they cannot but delight in the Dispensation of it, and rejoyce in it as the Food of their Souls. And it is a great Hinderance to the Encrease of Spiritual Life, and Obstruction to Fruitfulness, Thrnkfulness, and Consolation, when we are negligent in our Meditation about the Benefits that we receive by the Word, and the Advantages which we have thereby. For whil'st it is so with us, we can neither value the Grace of God, in granting us this Inestimable Priviledge, nor perform any Duty with respect to it, in a right manner. This renders it an especial Object of our Affections as Spiritually renewed. That Secret Love to, and Heavenly Delight in the Statutes and Testimonies of God, which David expresss, Psal 119. arose from the Spiritual Benefit and Advantage which he received by them, as he constantly declares. And the sole Reason on the other hand, why men grow so careless, negligent, and cold in their Attendance to the Preaching of the Word, is because they have no Experience of any Spiritual Benefit, or Advantage by it. They have been brought to it by one means or another, mostly by conviction of their Duty. Their Minds have been variously affected with it, to a Joy in the hearing of it, and readiness to sundry Duties Of Obedience. But after a while, when a sense of those Temporary Impressions is worn off, finding no real Spiritual Benefit by it, they loose all delight in it, and become very indifferent as to its Enjoyment. The Frame which such Persons at length arrive to is described, Mal. 1:13. and 3.14. And none can give any greater Evidence of the Decay of all manner of Grace in them, or of their being destitute of all Saving-Grace, than when they apostatize from some degree of Zeal for, and Delight in the Dispensation of the Word of God, with such a cursed Indifference, as many are over-

taken withal. It cannot be otherwise. For seeing this is a way and means of the Exercise of all Grace, it will not be neglected, but where there is a Decay of all Grace; however Men may please themselves with other Pretences. And when they are thus ensnared, every foolish Prejudice, every Provocation, every wanton Opinion and Imagination will confirm them in, and increase their gradual Backsliding.

And as it is with Believers, as to the hearing of the Word in general, so it is as to the Degrees of Advantage which they find by it. VVhen Men have enjoyed the Dispensation of the Word in a peculiar manner, Spiritual and Effectual, if they can be content to forego it, for that which is more cold and lifeless, provided it possesss the same time, and outward Form with the other, it is no great Evidence that their Souls do prosper. It is therefore those alone, who having a sense of the Efficacy of the Word on their Souls and Consciences to all the holy Ends of it, who cleave to it with Spiritual Love and Delight. They continually remember what holy Impressions it has made on them, what Engagements it has brought their Souls into, what encouragements to Faith and Obedience it has furnished them withal, and long after renewed Sense of its Enjoyments. When we do not find in our selves this Foundation of Spiritual delight in the Dispensation of the Gospel, we can have no great Evidence that our Affections are renewed.

So also it is in the Duties of Prayer and Meditation. VVhen the Soul of a Believer has had Experience of the Communion which it has had with God in them, or either of them; of the Spiritual Refreshment which it has had from them, of the Benefits and Mercies which are obtained by them, in recovery from Temptations, Snares, Despondencies, in Victory over Sin and

Sathan, in Spiritual Impressions, working it to an holy watchful Frame, which has abode with it in other VVayes and Occasions, with the like Advantages wherewith fervent and Effectual Prayer, and sincere Heavenly Meditation are accompanied, it cannot but have Love to them, and Delight in them; But if indeed we have no Experience of these things, if we find not these Advantages in and by these Duties; they cannot but be a Burden to us, nor do serve to any other End but to satisfy Convictions. He who had the benefit of a serene and wholsome Air, in a recovery from many Diseases and Distempers, with the Preservation of his Health so obtained, will love it and prize it, and so will he these Duties, who has been Partaker of any of these Saving Mercies and Priviledges wherewith they are accompanied. Some have been delivered from the worst of Temptations, and the nearest Approach of their Prevalency (as to destroy themselves) by a sudden Remembrance of the Frame of their Souls, and the Intimations of Gods Love, in such or such a Prayer, at such a time. Some have had the same Deliverance from Temptations to Sin, when they have been carried away under the Power of their Corruptions, and all Circumstances have concurr'd under the Apprehensions of it, a Sudden Thought of such a Prayer or Meditation with the Engagement they made of themselves therein to God, has caused all the weapons of Sin to fall out of its hands, and all the Beauties of its Allurements to disappear.

When others have been under the Power of such Dispondencies and Disconsolations, as that no present tenders of Relief can approach to them, they have been suddenly raised and refreshed by the Remembrance of the intimate Love and Kindness between Christ and their Souls, that has evidenced it self in former Duties. Multitudes in Feares, Distresses and Temptations, have

found Relief to their Spirits, and Encouragement to their Faith in the Remembrance of the Returnes they have had to former Supplications in the like Distresses. These are Grounds of Spiritual Delight in these Duties.

Heartless, Lifeless, wordy Prayer, the Fruit of Convictions and Gifts, or of Custom and outward Occasions however multiplyed, and whatever Devotion they seem to be accompanied withal, will never ingage Spiritual Affections to them. When these things are absent, when the Soul has not Experience of them, Prayer is but a lifeless Form, a dead Carcase, which it would be a torment to a Soul Spiritually alive to be tied to. There may be a Season indeed, when God will seem to hide himself from Believers in their Prayers, so as they shall neither find that Life in themselves which they have done formerly, nor be sensible of any gracious Communications from him, but this is done only for a time, and principally to stir them up to that Fervency and Preseverance in Prayer, as may recover them into their former, or a better Estate than yet they have attained to. The like may be said concerning all other Duties of Religion, or Ordinances of Divine Worship.

Fourthly, Believers whose Affections are Spiritually renewed do delight greatly in the duties of Divine Worship, because they are the great instituted way whereby they may give Glory to God. This is the first and principal End of all Duties of Religion as they respect divine Appointment, namely, to ascribe and give to God the Glory that is his due. For in them all, Acknowledgement is made of all the glorious Excellencies of the divine Nature, our dependance on him, and relation to him. And this is that which in the first place, Believers design in all the Duties of divine Worship. And the Pattern set us by our Blessed Savior in the Prayer he taught his

Disciples directs us thereunto. All the first Requests of it concern immediately the Glory of God, and the Advancement thereof. For therein also all the Blessedness and Safety of the Church is included. Those who fail in this design, do err in all that they do, they never tend to the mark proposed to them. But this is that which principally animates the Souls of them that believe in all their Duties; this their universal Relation to him, and Love in that Relation makes necessary. Wherefore that way and means whereby they may directly and solemnly ascribe and give Glory to God, is pretious and delightful to them. And such are all the duties of divine Worship. These are some of the things wherein the respect of Affections Spiritually renewed, to Ordinances and Duties of divine Worship, does differ from the Actings of Affections towards the same Object which are not so santifyed and renewed.

There are yet other things accompanied with the same Evidence of the difference between Affections Spiritually renewed, and those which have only a general Change wrought in them, by Convictions and some outward Occasions, which must in one or two Instances more be insisted on, with the Consideration of such Cases as derive from them. For my design herein, is not only to declare when our Minds are Spiritually renewed, but also what is the nature and operation of our Affections, whereby we are constituted and denominated, Spiritually-Minded, which is the Subject of our whole Inquiry. Herein then we shall proceed.

Chapter 16

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The second difference between spiritually renewed affections and those that have been changed only by knowledge and conviction. The grounds and reasons why people who are not spiritually minded may still take delight in the duties of worship and be diligent in performing them.

The second difference is this: there can be a change in the affections in which people find delight in the duties of religious worship and are diligent in observing them — but it is the spiritual renovation of the affections that produces true delight in God through Christ in any duty of worship whatsoever.

Where the truth of the Gospel is known and publicly professed, there is great variety in people's minds, ways, and practices regarding the duties of worship. Many are spiritually indifferent in both mind and life, and at least practically despise or wholly neglect these duties. These are stubborn-hearted and far from righteousness, as Titus 1:16 indicates. Some attend to them formally and perfunctorily, driven by their upbringing and perhaps some conviction of their necessity. But many are diligent in their observance — according to the way they have chosen and are satisfied with — and even take great delight in it, and yet give no evidence of

any spiritual renovation of mind. Indeed, the way some express their devotion — through superstition and idolatry — is incompatible with spiritual renovation or any other saving grace. We must therefore carefully examine the grounds and reasons why people can take delight in divine worship according to their own convictions about how it should be done, and yet remain entirely unrenewed in their minds.

First, people may be greatly moved by the outward form and manner of worship, with no delight in what is internal, real, and spiritual about it, as John 5:35 shows: "He was the lamp that was burning and was shining, and you were willing to rejoice for a while in his light." Similarly, many took delight in Ezekiel's preaching because of his eloquence and the elegance of his parables, as Ezekiel 33:31-32 describes. This gave them both delight and diligence in hearing him, so that they called themselves the people of God — while continuing to live in sin and chasing after greed. The same can happen today with respect to the spiritual gifts of those who preach the Word. I am not denying that people may be more delighted and satisfied with the gifts and preaching of one minister than another, and yet be sincere in that delight — because they may find more spiritual benefit there than from others, and material better suited to their growth. But what I am addressing here has to do only with outward circumstances that please the minds of people, as 2 Timothy 4:3-4 warns.

This was most evident under the Old Testament, while the people had physical ordinances and an earthly sanctuary. Often under that system the people fell into all kinds of idolatry and superstition. And when they did not, the body of them was still carnal and unholy, as is plain from the whole record of God's dealings with

them through His prophets and in His providences. Yet they took great delight in the outward ceremonies of their worship, placing all their confidence of acceptance with God in those external observances. Those who truly and genuinely believed looked through all the ceremonies to Christ, whom they foreshadowed — without that faith, the ceremonies were a yoke and a burden nearly unbearable, as Acts 15 shows. But those who were carnal delighted in the ceremonies for their own sake, and on that account rejected the one who was the life and substance of them all. This same tendency also became a major cause of the apostasy of the Christian church. To maintain some appearance of spiritual affections, people introduced fleshly stimulants into worship — things like elaborate music and ornate ceremonies. They found such things necessary to make the worship of God agreeable to their minds and affections, and through them they appeared to have great devotion. If some people could mentally separate the service of God from the external order, variety, spectacle, and music that move them, they would find no delight in it at all — they would look on it as something to be endured. How else can one make sense of what happens among the Catholics: they will attend their solemn worship with great earnestness and many apparent signs of devotion, sometimes through difficulty and danger. And yet, when they are present, they do not understand a single word by which their minds might be stirred to genuine acts of faith, love, and delight in God. Only order, ceremony, music, and other stimulants of the fleshly affections make any real impression on them. Spiritually renewed affections have no stake in these things. In fact, those in whom they are present would find that such things distract their minds from the real work of worship rather than aiding in it. This

will be evident to them, unless they are willing to lose their spiritual affections — the active work of faith and love — and replace them with a fleshly and imaginary devotion. Hence two people may attend the same ordinances of worship with equal delight, yet for very different reasons — like two men entering the same garden, filled with every variety of herbs and flowers; one ignorant of plants, the other a skilled herbalist. Both may be equally delighted — one by the colors and fragrance of the flowers, the other by reflection on their various natures, their uses in medicine, and the like. It can be the same in the hearing of the Word: one person is moved by the outward manner of delivery, another by its spiritual power, at the very same moment. For this reason, Augustine tells us that Athanasius abolished a certain style of singing at Alexandria — not congregational psalm-singing, but a kind of melodic chanting in the reading of Scripture and certain offices of worship that had begun to be introduced at that time. The reason Athanasius gave was that the inflection of the voice and musical cadence might divert people's minds from the spiritual affection required in sacred duties. Whatever genuine order exists in the worship of God — an order that is itself an expression of divine wisdom — it is suited to and helpful for spiritual affections, because it proceeds from the same Spirit by which they are internally renewed, as Colossians 2:5 implies: "beholding your order." Everything appointed by God is both useful and delightful to them. None can say with greater depth of admiration, "How lovely are Your dwelling places, O Lord," as Psalm 84:1-2 expresses, than those whose affections have been renewed. Yet their delight does not end there, as we will see shortly.

Second, people may take delight in the outward performance of worship because it gives them a way to satisfy their conscience — to comply, in some measure, with what it demands of them. When the conscience is awakened to a sense of the necessity of such duties — those that make up the substance of worship — it will give the mind no rest or peace in neglecting them. When those duties are attended to at the times that knowledge, conviction, and custom call for, the conscience is satisfied enough that the mind finds present ease and relief. And when the soul becomes accustomed to finding relief this way, it will not only be diligent in performing these duties and avoid skipping them — it will actually come to delight in them, because it finds such great benefit from them. This is why many people will not skip their morning prayer, even though they are fully resolved to spend the rest of the day in sin. And there are very few who diligently labor to live and walk in a manner that matches their own prayers; yet everything in our prayers that goes beyond our actual efforts to live accordingly is nothing more than the exercise of spiritual gifts responding to conscience. Others find in these duties a temporary relief from trouble — like the temporary cooling a fever patient experiences from drinking cold water, which eases the flames for a time but does not cure the illness. They use these duties as an antidote against the poison and sting of sin, which calms the rage of guilt but cannot expel its venom.

Or these duties serve them the way the sin offerings did under the law. Those offerings gave a guilty person immediate relief. But as the apostle says, they could not make people perfect. They did not entirely remove a conscience condemning for sin. As soon as any duty was neglected, the sense of sin returned — and not only regarding the act, but the person himself feeling condemned under

the law. The sacrifices then had to be repeated for a renewed covering. This is what gave that people of the flesh such delight and satisfaction in those sacrifices that they trusted in them for righteousness, life, and salvation. So it is with people who are consistent in spiritual duties purely out of conviction. The performance of those duties brings them present relief and ease — it may not heal their wound, but it dulls the pain and scatters their immediate fears. This is why they perform them frequently, and often not without delight — because they find ease in doing so. And those are in a somewhat dangerous condition who, upon feeling guilt for any sin, run to their prayers for relief, and once they have prayed feel quite at ease in mind and conscience — even though they have obtained no real sense of forgiveness, and no real strength against that sin.

Someone might object: do not all people — even the best of people — perform spiritual duties out of a conviction of their necessity? Do they not know it would be sinful to omit them, and so find satisfaction in their minds when they have performed them? Yes, they do — but there is a difference. It is one thing to perform a duty out of conviction of its necessity as an ordinance of God, where the conviction concerns only the duty itself. It is another thing to perform a duty in order to satisfy a troubled conscience about other sins, or to quiet the conscience under its distress about them — and it is this second kind we are speaking about. This kind begins and ends in self — self-satisfaction is its only aim. By it, people seek some rest and quiet in their own minds, which they cannot find any other way. But when a duty is performed in faith — out of conviction of its necessity as God's ordinance and its use-

fulness in the way of His grace — the soul begins and ends in God. It seeks no satisfaction in the duty itself, nor finds it there, but only in and from God through it.

Third, the main reason why people whose affections have been changed but not spiritually renewed take delight in the holy duties of worship is that they place their righteousness before God in those duties — and hope on that basis to be accepted by Him. They do not know — they do not seek — any righteousness other than one of their own making. Whatever notions they may hold about the righteousness of faith or the righteousness of Christ, what they actually trust in practice is their own righteousness — and this reveals itself in their consciences whenever they are truly put to the test. Indeed, when they cry out to God and claim faith in Christ, they quickly show that their principal trust is placed in themselves. Now among all the things they can claim in the way of duty and obedience, nothing carries a more plausible appearance of righteousness than what they do in the worship of God and the exercise of religious acts toward Him. This is what He expects from them — what is due to Him in the light of their conscience — the best they can do to please Him, and therefore what they must put their trust in, or trust in nothing. They secretly suppose not only that there is a righteousness in these acts that stands on its own, but that it can even make up for their sins to some degree. And so, knowing they will frequently fall into sin, they quiet their conscience by increasing their duties and renewing their diligence in performing them.

It is hard to overstate what delight and satisfaction people will take in anything that seems to contribute to a righteousness of their own. For such things appeal to and satisfy all the principles of

fallen human nature once it has come under the weight of conviction concerning sin, righteousness, and judgment.

This is what made the Jews of old cling so stubbornly to the ceremonies and sacrifices of the law, and prefer them above the Gospel, the kingdom of God, and its righteousness, as Romans 10:3-4 shows. They looked to the law for righteousness and sought it there. Those who had been kept for many generations in only a tolerable observance of the ceremonies — and only with great difficulty — when they had learned to place all their hopes of righteousness in them, clung to them at the cost of both their temporal and eternal ruin, as Romans 9:31-33 describes. And when people were persuaded that righteousness could be earned through acts of generosity and supposed charity in giving their wealth to the church, those who were otherwise covetous, greedy, and oppressive would freely pour out gold and surrender their entire estate — along with all their ill-gotten goods — to obtain it. Such is the powerful hold that the desire for self-righteousness has on the human mind. It is the soul's strongest defense against Christ and the Gospel — the last stronghold by which self maintains its position against the grace of God.

Therefore, those who place their righteousness — or the greater part of it — in the duties of religious worship will not only be diligent in performing them, but will often multiply and accumulate them. This will be especially true if those duties can be performed in a way that pleases their affections with an outward show of humility and devotion, without requiring any real exercise of faith or sincere love for God. So it is with many people in all kinds of reli-

gion — whether the form of worship they follow is true or false, appointed by God or rejected by Him. The prophet addresses precisely this in Isaiah 1:11-19 and Micah 6:7-8.

Fourth, the reputation that comes from devotion in religious duties may almost imperceptibly lead the unrenewed mind into great diligence and delight in performing them. However divided people may be in their views and practices about religion — however different or even contrary their ways of worship — it is among all kinds of people, and even in the secret thoughts of those who outwardly scorn such things, a mark of reputation to be devout, diligent, and strict in the duties of religion as they understand them. This has a powerful influence on the minds of people when pride quietly rules them and they love the praise of men more than the praise of God.

This consideration will be especially compelling when people believe that the honor and reputation of the tradition they profess — in competition with others — depends largely on their reputation for strictness in religious duties. In that case, they will not only be personally diligent but zealous in drawing others into the same observances. These two motivations — personal reputation and the reputation of their group — were the life and soul of the Pharisaism of old. The more people's minds are driven by these considerations, the more their love for and delight in those duties that earn them reputation will grow and thrive.

I am not suggesting that people are — or at least I am not speaking of those who are — such outright hypocrites as to do everything they do in religion merely to be seen and praised by others, being driven in all public duties by that motive alone, as some of the Pharisees were. I am speaking about those who, though

moved by the convictions and motives just described, also allow this corrupt desire for reputation and human praise to operate alongside them. For whenever such a motive is allowed in and becomes strong in the mind, it will broadly influence the affections toward delight in those duties by which that end can be achieved — until the person is so habituated to them that he performs them with great apparent satisfaction.

Fifth, I should note superstition in the last place. As an undue fear of God's nature, will, and ways — built on false ideas and perceptions of them — superstition can appear in the minds of people in all kinds of religion, true and false. It is an inward fault of the mind. As it concerns the outward ways and means of religious service — consisting in the devout performance of duties God does not accept but actually forbids — it belongs only to religion that is false and corrupt. How superstition in both its forms draws people into the performance of religious duties — often with the most scrupulous diligence, and sometimes with almost superhuman efforts to go beyond normal human limits — would take too long to describe here. It is enough to have named it among the reasons why people whose affections are not spiritually renewed may yet take great delight in the diligent performance of outward religious duties. Our purpose in all of this is to identify the true nature of this grace and duty of being spiritually minded. We have established that it requires our affections to be spiritually and supernaturally renewed. And because there can be a great change worked on people's affections with respect to spiritual things where there is nothing of this supernatural renovation, our present inquiry is: what are the differences between the activity of spiritually renewed affections and those that have been merely changed by occasional

circumstances? And since the great exercise of affections takes place in the duties of worship, I have been laying out the grounds and reasons why people with unrenewed minds often take delight in the duties of worship and are diligent in performing them.

From these and similar considerations, it can be shown that the greater part of the devotion in the world does not spring from the spiritual renovation of the mind — without which it is not accepted by God. What remains is to provide further evidence in service of the inquiry we are pursuing: namely, what are the grounds and reasons why those whose minds and affections are spiritually renewed take delight in the ordinances of worship and attend to their observance with care and diligence? Because this is a matter of great importance, and is useful in other contexts as well, I will treat it separately in the following chapter, so that the reader may understand it more clearly — both in terms of the doctrine itself and in terms of its place in our larger discussion.

Two Cases deriving from this Principle and Consideration, may be here spoken to, and shall be so; the first in this, and the other in the following Chapter. The one is concerning the Slowness and Imperceptibility of the Growth of our Affections in their Assimulation to Heavenly things, with the Causes and Reasons of it. The other is, the Decays that frequently befall Men in their Affections to Spiritual things instead of growing and thriving in them, with the Reasons and Causes thereof.

First, This Progress and Growth of our Affections into Spirituality and Heavenliness, into Conformity to the things they are set upon, is oftentimes very slow, and some times imperceptible. Yea, for the most part, it is a hard thing to find it Satisfactorily in our selves or others. Our Affections stand like Shrubs in the

Wilderness, which see not when good coms, and are not like Plants in a Garden enclosed, which is watered every day. But it is not so without our Folly and our Sin.

The Folly that keeps many in this Condition, consists herein; The generality of Christians are contented with their present measures, and design little more, than not to lose the ground they have gained. And a pernitious Folly it is that both ruines the Glory of Religion, and deprives the Souls of Men, of Peace and Consolation. But so it is, Men have some grounds of Persuasion, or at least they hope, and suppose they have such grounds, that they are passed from Death to Life, that they are in a State of Grace and Acceptance with God. This State they will endeavor to preserve by a diligent Performance of the Dutys it requirs, and the avoidance of such Sins, whereby they might make a forfeiture of it. But as for earnest watchful Endeavours and Diligence to thrive in this State, to grow in Grace, to be changed from Glory to Glory into the Image of Christ, to press forwards towards the mark of the High-Calling, and after Perfection to lay hold upon Eternal Life, to be more holy, more humble, more righteous, more Spiritually-minded, to have their Affections more and more transformed into the likeness of things above; they are but few, that sincerely and diligently apply themselves to it, or to the means of these things. The Measures which they have attain'd to, give Satisfaction to the Church, and Reputation in the World, that they are Professours, and some so speak Peace to their own Souls. To be more holy and heavenly, to have their Affections more taken up with the things above, they suppose somewhat inconsistent with their present Occasions and

Affairs. By this means has Religion lost much of its Glory, and the Souls of Men have been deprived of the principal Advantages of it in this World.

Such Persons are like to men who live in a Country whereni they are not only pressed with Poverty, and all sorts of Misery; but are also obnoxious to grievous Punishments, and Death it self, if they are taken in it. In this Condition they are told and assured of another Country, wherein so soon as they are arrived, they shall be freed from all Fear of danger of Punishment, and if they pass further into it, they shall meet with Riches, Plenty and a fair Inheritance provided for them. Hereon they betake themselves to their Voyage to obtain an entrance into it, and Possession of it. But no sooner do they come within the Borders, and so are free from Danger, or fear of Punishment and Death, but they sit down and will go no further, to enjoy the good things of the Country whereto they are come. And it falls out with many of them, that through their Sloath, Negligence, and Ignorance, they take up short of the true Bounds and Limits of the Country of Liberty and Peace which they aimed at, whereby Danger and Death surprize them unawares. This ruine could not have befallen them, had they industriously endeavored to enter into the heart of the Country, and have possessed the good things thereof. At best, being only in the Borders, they lead a poor Life all their dayes, exposed to wants and danger.

So it is in this case. Men falling under the Power of Convictions, and those restless Fears wherewith they are accompanied, will stir up themselves, and inquire how they may fly from the Wrath to come, how they may be delivered from the State of Sin, and the Eternal Misery which will ensue thereon.

In the Gospel not only Mercy and Pardon are proposed to them on their believing, which is the first entrance into the Heavenly Country; But Peace, and Joy, and Spiritual Strength upon their Admission into it, and a progress made in it by Faith and Obedience. But many when they have attain'd so far, as that they have some hopes of Pardon and Freedom from the Curse, so as to deliver them from their tormenting Fears, will endeavor to preserve those hopes, and keep that State; but will not pass on to a full Enjoyment of the precious things of the Gospel, by Growth in Grace and Spiritual Affections. But how many of them fall under woful Mistakes. For supposing themselves to be in a Gospel State, it proves in the Issue, that they never entred into it. They were not it may be far from the Kingdom of Heaven, in the same Sense as it was spoken of him who never came thither. There is no way to secure an Interest in the Gospel, as to Pardon and Mercy, Safety and Deliverance, but by a Growth in Grace, Holiness, and Spirituality, which gives an entrance into the choicest Mercies and Priviledges of it.

This Folly of Men in taking up with their Measures, endeavouring only to maintain that State and Condition which they hope they have attained, is the great reason why their Affections do not dayly grow up into Spirituality, through an Assimulation to Heavenly things. And a Folly it is, attended with innumerable Aggravations. As for Instance.

First, It is contrary and destructive to the genuine and principal Property of Gospel Grace. For it is every where compared by our Savior to things which from small Seeds and Beginings, do grow up by a continual Increase to large measures, as to a grain of Mustard Seed, a little leaven, and the like.

That Grace in whose nature it is not to thrive and grow, may Justly be suspected, and ought diligently to be examined by them who take care of their own Souls and would not be eternally deceived.

Secondly, It is contrary to the most excellent or invaluable Evangelical Promises recorded in the Old Testament and the New; and which are amongst the principal Supportments of the Faith, Hope, and Comfort of Believers. God has given them to us, to encourage us to an Expectation of such Supplies of Grace, as shall cause us to thrive and grow against all Opposition, to the utmost of our Continuance in this World. And they are so multiplyed as that there is no need to mention any of them in particular; God evidencing thereby how great is the Grace, and how pretious which he so often promiss, and of what Consideration it is of to our selves, see Psal. 92:13, 14, 15. Isai. 40.28, 29, 30, 31. Wherefore the Folly of taking up with present measures of Grace, Holiness, and Spirituality, is attended with two unspeakable Evils.

First, A Signal Contempt of the Love, Grace, Faithfulness, and Wisdom of God, in giving of us such Promises of Grace, to make us to encrease, thrive, and grow. How can it be done more effectually, than by such a neglect of his Promised Grace.

Secondly, An Evidence that such Persons love not, care not for Grace or Holiness for their own Souls, but meerly to serve their turn at present as they suppose; nor do desire the least of Grace or Priviledge by Christ, without which they can have any hopes to get to Heaven. This sufficiently discovers men to be wholly under the Power of Self-Love, and to center therein; for if they may have so much Grace and Mercy, as may save them, they care for no more.

Thirdly, It is repugnant to the Honor of Gospel Grace, as though it would carry us so far, and no farther in the way to Glory. For it must be known that this sort of Persons who sit down in their present Measures and Attainments either really have no true Grace at all, or that which is of the lowest, meanest, and most imperceptible size and degree. For if any one has attained any considerable Growth in Faith and Love, in the Mortification of Sin, in Heavenly-Mindedness, it is utterly impossible but that ordinarily he will be pressing forward towards farther Attainments, and farther Degrees of Spiritual Strength in the Life of God. So the Apostle declares it in his own Example, Phil. 3:10, 11, 12, 13, 14. What thoughts can these Persons have concerning the Glory, Power, and Efficacy of Gospel Grace, which they suppose they have received. If they measure them by the Effects which they find in themselves, either as to the Mortification of Sin, or Strength to, and Delight in Duties of Holiness, or as to Spiritual Consolation, they can see no Excellency nor Beauty in them. For they do not manifest themselves but in their Success, as they transform the Soul dayly into the Image of Christ.

Fourthly, It is that which has lost the Reputation and Glory of the Religion in the World, and therein the Honor of the Gospel it self. For the most of Professors do take up with such Measures as put no lustre upon it, as give no Commendation to the Religion they profess. For their measures allow them such a Conformity to the World, in their Ways, Words and Actions, in their Gestures, Apparrel, and Attire, as that they are no way visibly to be distinguished from it. Yea, the Ground and Reason why the most do rest in their present measures, is because they will not be further differenced from the World. This has greatly lost the Glory, Honor,

and Reputation of Religion amongst us. And on the other side, if all visible Professors would endeavor continually to grow and thrive in Spirituality of Mind, and Heavenlyness of Affections, with Fruits suited thereunto, it would bring a Conviction on the world, that there is a Secret Invisible Power, accompanying the Religion they profess, transforming them dayly into the Image and Likeness of God.

Fifthly, Whatever is pretended to the contrary, it is inconsistent with all solid Peace of Conscience. For so such thing is promised to any who live in such a Contempt of Divine Promises; nor is it attainable but by the diligent Exercise of all those Graces which lye neglected under this Frame. Few men are able to judge whether they have real, eternal, abiding Peace or no, unless it be in Case of Tryals and Temptations. At other Seasons, general Hopes and Confidences do, or may supply the want of it in their Minds. But when any Fear, Danger, Tryal, or Word of Conviction befalls them, they cannot but inquire and examine how it is with them. And if they find their Affections cold, dead, earthly, carnal, withering, not spiritual or heavenly, there will be an end of their supposed Peace, and they will fall into woful Disquietments, and they will then find that the Root of all this Evil lyes in this Frame and Disposition. They have been so far satisfyed with their present measures or attainments in Religion, as that the utmost of their Endeavours have been, but to preserve their Station, or not to forfeit it by open Sins, to keep their Souls alive from the severe Reflections of the Word and their Reputation fair in the Church of God. Spiritually to thrive, to prosper in their Souls, to wax fat and

flourishing in the Inward Man, to bring forth more fruit as Age increass, to press towards Perfection, are things they have not designed nor pursued.

Hence it is that so many among us, are visibly at an unthrifty stand in the World; that where they were one Year, there they are another, like Shrubs in the Wilderness, not like the Plants in the Garden of God, not as Vines planted in a very fruitful Hill. Yea, though many are sensible themselves, that they are cold, lifeless, and fruitless, Yet will they not be convinced, that there is a necessity of making a dayly progress in Spirituality and Heavenly-Mindedness, whereby the Inward man may be renewed day by day, and Grace augmented with the Increase of God. This is a work as they suppose for them who have nothing else to do; not consistent with their Business, Callings, and Occasions; not necessary as they hope to their Salvation, nor it may be, to be attained by them, if they should set themselves about it. This Apprehension of Imagination, upon the beginning of the Declension, and decay of Christian Religion in the many, Cast of all Holiness and Devotion to a sort of men who undertook to retire themselves utterly out of the World, amongst whom also the Substance of Religion was quickly lost, and a Cloud, or Meteor of Superstition embraced in the Room of it. But this Folly is ominous to the Souls of men.

Those who have made the greatest Progress in the Conformity of their Affections to things Spiritual and Heavenly, know most of its Necessity, Excellency, and Desireableness; yea, without some Progress in it, these things will not be known. Such will testify that the more they attain herein, the more they see there is yet to be attained, and the more they do desire to attain what is behind. Forgetting those things which are behind, they reach forth to the

things that are yet before them; like men running in a Race, whose Prize and Reward is yet before them. Phil. 3:13, 14. It is a comely thing to see a Christian weaned from the World, minding Heavenly Things, green and flourishing in Spiritual Affection. And it is the more lovely, because it is so rare. The generality of them take up with those measures, which neither glorifie God, nor bring in durable Peace into their own Souls.

That which men pretend, and complain of herein, is the difficulty of the Work. They can as they suppose preserve their present Station, but to press forward to grow in Grace, to thrive in their Affections, this is too hard for them. But this Complaint is unequal and unjust and adds to the guilt of their Sloth. It reflects upon the Words of our Savior, that his Yoke is easy, and his Burden Light, that his Commandments are not grievious. It expersss Unbelief in the Promises of God, tendring such Supplies of Grace as to render all the ways of Wisdom easy, yea, Mercy and Peace. It is contrary to the Experience of all who have with any Sincerity and Diligence ingaged in the ways of Gospel Obedience. And the whole cause of the pretended Difficulty lyes in themselves alone; which may be reduced to these two Heads.

First, A Desire to retain some thing, or things, that is, or are inconsistent with such a Progress. For unless the Heart be ready on all Occasions, to esteem every things as Loss and Dung, so as we may win Christ, the work will be accomcompanied with insuperable Difficulties. This is the first Principle of Religion, of Gospel Obedience, that all things are to be despised for Christ. But this Difficulty ariss not from the thing it self, but from our Indisposition to it, and unfitness for it. That which is an easy pleasant Walk to a found and healthy Man, is a toilsome Journey

to him that is diseased and infirm. In particular, while Men will retain an inordinate respect to the World, the Vanities, the Pleasures, the Profits, the Contentments of it; whil'st Self-Love, putting an undue Valuation on our Persons, our Relations, our Enjoyments, our Reputations, does cleave to us, we shall labor in the Fire when we ingage in this Duty; or rather we shall not at all sincerely ingage in it; wherefore the Apostle tells us, that in this case, we must cast off every weight, and the Sin that does so easily beset us, if we intend to run with Joy the Race that is set before us, Heb. 12:1.

Secondly, It is because Men dwell continually upon the Entrances of Religion in the first and lowest Exercise of Grace; some are always beginning at Religion, and the beginning of things are always difficult. They design not to be Compleat in the whole Will of God, nor to give all Graces their perfect Work. They do not with use, habituate Grace to a readiness in all the Actings of it, which the Apostle commends in them that are perfect or compleat, Heb. 5:14. Hence he calls such Persons Babes, and Carnal, comparatively to them that are strong men and Spiriual. Such Persons do not obliege themselves to the whole Work, and all the Duties of Religion, but only what they Judge necessary to them in their present Circumstances. In particular, they do not attempt a thorow-work in the Mortification of any Sin, but are hewing and hacking at it, as their Convictions are urgent, or abate, the Wounds whereof in the Body of Sin, are quickly healed. They give not any Grace its perfect Work, but are always making Essayes, and so give over.

Whil'st it is thus with any, they shall always be deluded with the Apprehensions of insuperable Difficulties, as to the Growth of their Affections in Spirituality and Heavenliness. Remove these things out of the way as the ought to be removed, and we shall find all the Paths wherein we are to walk towards God, to be Pleasantness and Peace.

This is the first Cause whence it is, that there may be Affections truely Spiritual and gratiously renewed in some Persons, who yet do not thrive in an Assimulation and Conformity to Heavenly things. Men take up with their present measures; and thereon pretend either necessary Occasion, or Discouragements from Difficulties in attempting Spiritual Growth in the inward Man. But they may thank themselves, if as they bring no honor to Christ, so they have no solid Peace in their own Souls.

Secondly, As the Evil proceeds from Folly, so it is always the Consequent of Sin, of many Sins, of various sorts. Let us not dwell on heartless Complaints, that we do not find our Affections lively and heavenly; that we do not find the Inward Man to thrive or grow. Let us not hearken after this or that Relief or Comfort under this Consideration, as many things are usually insisted on to that purpose. They may be of use, when Persons are under Temptations, and not able to make a right Judgement of themselves. But in the Course of our ordinary walking with God, they are not to be attended, not retired to. The general Reason of this evil State, is our own sinful Carelesness, Negligence and Sloth, with perhaps an Indulgence to some known Lust or Corruption. And we do in vain seek after refreshing Cordials, as though we were only Spiritually faint, when we stand in need of Launcings and Burnings, as nigh to a Lethargy. It would be too long to give

Instances of these Sins, which fail not effectually to obstruct the thriving of Spiritual Affections. But in general, when men are careless as to that continual Watch which they ought to keep over their Hearts; whil'st they are negligent in holy Duties, either as to the seasons of them, or the manner of their Performance; when they are Strangers to holy Meditation, and self-Examination; whil'st they inordinately pursue the things of the World, or are so tender and delicate, as that they will not undergo the hardship of an heavenly Life, either as to the Inward or Outward Man; much more when they are vain in their Conversation, corrupt in their Communication, especially if under the Predominant Influence of any particular Lust, it is vain to think of thriving in Spiritual Affections. And yet thus it is with all who ordinarily, and in their constant Course are thriftless herein.

Chapter 17

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The delight of believers in the holy ordinances of worship. The grounds and reasons for that delight. How this delight evidences a spiritually minded state.

That all true believers whose minds are spiritually renewed have a singular delight in all the ordinances and institutions of worship is fully evident both in the examples of the saints in Scripture and in their own experience — something they would never willingly give up. It was the greatest cause of their suffering persecution and martyrdom itself in every age. The early Christians under the pagan emperors, and the witnesses for Christ during the period of apostasy, could have avoided the rage of their enemies if they had been willing to omit observing those ordinances (as the Gnostics advised and practiced). But they did not count their lives precious compared to the delight they had in keeping the commands of Christ regarding the duties of worship. David gives us frequent examples of this in his own experience, as in Psalm 42:1-4: "As the deer pants for the water brooks, so my soul pants for You, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God; when shall I come and appear before God? My tears have been my food day and night, while they say to me all day long, 'Where is your God?' These things I remember and I pour out my

soul within me. For I used to go along with the throng and lead them in procession to the house of God, with the voice of joy and thanksgiving, a multitude keeping festival." And in Psalm 63:1-5: "O God, You are my God; I shall seek You earnestly; my soul thirsts for You, my flesh yearns for You, in a dry and weary land where there is no water. Thus I have seen You in the sanctuary, to see Your power and Your glory. Because Your lovingkindness is better than life, my lips will praise You. So I will bless You as long as I live; I will lift up my hands in Your name. My soul is satisfied as with marrow and fatness, and my mouth offers praises with joyful lips." And in Psalm 84:1-4: "How lovely are Your dwelling places, O Lord of hosts! My soul longed and even yearned for the courts of the Lord; my heart and my flesh sing for joy to the living God. The bird also has found a house, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young, even Your altars, O Lord of hosts, my King and my God. How blessed are those who dwell in Your house! They are ever praising You. Selah."

But there is one greater than David here. Our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, on every occasion, declared His delight in and zeal for all the ordinances of worship that were then in force by divine institution and command. He severely rebuked and rejected everything that people had added to worship under the pretense of extra strictness or outward order, placing all such additions under that solemn sentence: "Every plant which My heavenly Father did not plant shall be uprooted" and thrown into the fire. Yet with respect to what was divinely appointed, His delight in it was singular and set an example for all His disciples. It was said of Him that the zeal for God's house had consumed Him — because of the grief in His spirit at seeing its worship neglected, polluted, and despised. This

led Him to cleanse the temple, the seat of divine worship, of its defilers and defilements — not long before His sufferings, openly and to the great provocation of all His enemies. With deep longing He desired to celebrate His last Passover, as Luke 22:15 shows: "I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer." And the apostle makes plain in Hebrews 10:25-27 the expected practice of His disciples regarding the duties of worship He appointed — saying that neglect of them is a reliable sign of an unsound condition, one that tends toward final and cursed apostasy.

These things are clear and beyond question. But our present inquiry is specifically this: what is it that believers delight in within the ordinances and institutions of Gospel worship, and what draws their hearts and minds into diligent observance of them? And in general I say their delight in all ordinances of worship — as the passages already cited make evident — is in Christ Himself, or God in Christ. He alone is what they seek, what they cling to, and in whom they find their satisfaction. They make use of the streams only as channels of communication from the spring. When people are truly renewed in the spirit of their minds, this is how it is. Their regard for the ordinances and duties of worship is as God-appointed means of communion and interchange between Himself in Christ and their souls. Through these Christ communicates His love and grace to us; through them we exercise faith and love toward Him. It is like the treasure hidden in a field — when a man finds it, he sells everything to buy the field, but it is the treasure he is after, not the field itself, as Matthew 13:44 shows. This field is the Gospel and all its ordinances. People sometimes purchase it at great cost — even at the loss of everything they have. But if they obtain only the field and miss the treasure, they have little cause to

rejoice in their purchase. It is Christ the treasure alone — that pearl of great price — who will eternally enrich the soul. The field is to be used only as the means of finding and uncovering the treasure within it. I say, it is Christ alone that renewed affections cling to as the treasure in the preaching of the Gospel — and they cling to all other things in proportion to their relationship to Him or their participation in Him. Therefore, in all the duties of religion and all the ordinances of worship, their search is for the one their souls love, as Song of Songs 1:7 says.

But we must treat these things in more specific detail. Those whose affections are spiritually renewed love, cling to, and delight in the ordinances of worship and the duties of service for the following grounds and reasons.

First, in general, they do so because in and through those ordinances they find faith, love, and delight in God through Christ stirred up and exercised. This is the immediate purpose for which the ordinances were instituted. It is a serious mistake to suppose that any outward duty of worship — whether hearing the Word, prayer, or the sacraments — is appointed for its own sake or accepted for its own sake.

The Jews of old held this kind of thinking about their sacrifices — that the sacrifices were appointed for their own sake and were acceptable service to God purely on their own account. To free them from this dangerous error, God repeatedly declared that He had never appointed them for any such end, as in Jeremiah 7:22-23 and Isaiah 1:12-14. And now, under the Gospel, several things destructive to the souls of people have proceeded from the same mistake. Some have always satisfied and contented themselves with the outward observance of the ordinances, without seeking or

striving for any holy communion with God in them or through them. This describes the condition mentioned in Revelation 3:1. By following this path, most Christians wander off the right way — they cannot give up the ordinances, yet they do not know how to use them to their advantage — until they come fully to that miserable state described in Isaiah 29:13. And some, to entrench this deception further, have taught that there is far more in the outward performance of these duties than God ever placed in them, and that they are made holy simply by the act of performing them.

But all the duties that fall under the second commandment — as indeed all the instituted ordinances of worship — are simply means to express and exercise the graces of the first commandment: faith, love, fear, trust, and delight in God. Their whole purpose is that through them we may act those graces toward God in Christ. When this purpose is not kept in view — when people do not apply themselves to this exercise of grace in them — their outward performance, however solemn, however diligent, however earnest and apparently delightful, is neither acceptable to God nor beneficial to themselves, as Isaiah 1:11 makes plain. This, then, is the first and foundational reason why believers — those whose affections are spiritually renewed — love the ordinances of worship and delight in them. They have found by experience that through those ordinances their faith and love are stirred to active exercise toward God in Christ. When they do not find it working this way, they can find no rest in their souls. For this purpose the ordinances are ordained, set apart, and blessed by God — and therefore they are effective means to that end when their effectiveness is not defeated by unbelief.

Those who have no experience of this in their attendance at the ordinances fall into dangerous extremes, as was said. Some continue their observance with little real regard for God — in a cursed formality — and so make the ordinances a means of their ruin by giving them a false sense of security.

Others reject the ordinances entirely — at least the most solemn of them — and in doing so reject the wisdom, grace, and authority of God who appointed them, because through the power of their own unbelief they find nothing in them.

Since this is the immediate purpose of all divine institutions, since this is the only way we can give glory to God in observing them (which is their ultimate end in this world), and since this is the general aim of believers in the obedience they render to the Lord Christ by their diligent observance of them — we may now consider how and by what means those whose affections are spiritually renewed do and ought to apply their minds and souls to that observance. We can consider two things: first, what they aim at; and then, what they seek to be found exercising and practicing in their use and enjoyment of the ordinances.

First, they come to the ordinances with this desire, aim, and expectation: to be enabled, directed, and stirred up through them to the exercise of divine faith and love. Where this aim is absent, those who attend the ordinances are in varying degrees taking the name of God in vain. These ordinances are what Scripture calls approaches to God — ways of drawing near to Him. To suppose that drawing near to God can consist merely in the outward performance of a duty — whatever its solemnity — is to throw away all due reverence of Him. "Because this people draws near with its words and honors Me with its lips, but its heart is far from Me,"

says the Lord in Isaiah 29:13. The mouth and lips represent by a figure of speech all the means of outward worship and honor. People may use and diligently attend to all of these while their hearts remain far from God — that is, when they are not truly drawing near to Him through faith and love. But all such worship is rejected by God with the clearest signs of His displeasure and indignation against it.

Our souls have no way of approach to God in worship except through faith; no way of clinging and holding fast to Him except through love; no way of remaining in Him except through fear, reverence, and delight. Whenever these are not active, outward duties of worship are far from being a means of approach to God — rather, they leave us at a greater distance from Him than before, and are utterly useless and fruitless to us. This is how it is for most who come to worship — they do not know why they come, and they behave in a way that shows they do not care — and there is no evil in the hearts and ways of people about which God complains more in His Word, since it is accompanied by the highest contempt of Him. Because these ordinances of worship are the means that God's wisdom and grace have appointed for the exercise and growth of divine faith and love — and He therefore sets them apart and blesses them for that purpose — I do not believe that those who despise or neglect these great means of grace have any genuine delight in exercising those graces, or any real desire to grow in them.

I have seen people abandon the means of public worship for various reasons: claiming they have attained such a level of faith, light, and love that they no longer need it; holding the foolish view that the ordinances ceased with the giving of the Spirit, who was in

fact sent to make them useful and effective; nursing some real or imagined offense and taking revenge on public ministry by neglecting it; or simply giving way to lazy peace and carelessness in difficult times, which is how some people end up forsaking the gathering of the saints, as Hebrews 10:25 warns. Yet I have never seen this end in anything other than a great decay — if not a complete loss — of all the exercise of faith and love, and sometimes in outright ungodliness. Such people despise the ways and means that God in His infinite wisdom and goodness has appointed for the exercise and growth of those graces — and that will not prosper. We would do well to remember that the chief way to honor God's name in all the duties of worship, and to obtain their benefit for our own souls, is to approach them conscientiously with a holy desire and aim to be found exercising faith and love toward God in Christ, and to be helped and guided in that exercise through them.

Being actively shaped by this aim is the best preparation for any duty. This is how David expressed his delight in the worship of God: "How lovely are Your dwelling places, O Lord of hosts! My soul longed and even yearned for the courts of the Lord; my heart and my flesh sing for joy to the living God," as Psalm 84:1-2 says. He longed for the tabernacle and its courts, but what he desired and sought was the enjoyment of God Himself — the living God. This was what made him so fervent in his desires for those ordinances. He expresses it this way in Psalm 63:2: "To see Your power and Your glory, as I have seen You in the sanctuary." David had enjoyed deep communion with God and great delight in Him through faith and love in the solemn duties of worship. And it was that experience which fired him with desire for renewed opportunities to the same end.

Second, this aim is not vague, passive, or idle. Those with spiritually renewed affections diligently endeavor, through their use of and attendance at the ordinances, to be found exercising these graces. They not only have a prior intention to do so, but actively strive to that end — not allowing their minds to be pulled away from that pursuit by anything, as Ecclesiastes 5:1 implies. Whatever experience of the ordinances is not quickened and enlivened by this, they count as utterly lost. Neither outward administration nor order will satisfy them when this inward exercise is absent in themselves. Without the inward activity of the life of faith, the outward administration of the ordinances is a dead thing. No believer can find real satisfaction in them or refreshment through them without an inward experience of faith and love working in and through them. This is what we should be constantly mindful of, if we are wise. A watchful Christian will be careful not to lose any duty by settling for its empty shell. And the danger of doing so is not small. Our affections are renewed only in part. As they are still liable to be pulled away and seduced from spiritual engagement in worship — even by earthly and fleshly things, through the corruption that remains in them — there is also a tendency remaining in them to be pleased with the outward elements of religious duties, the very things that satisfy those, as we showed earlier, who have received no gracious renewal at all. The charm and eloquence of a preacher — especially in these days when flowery language, even in sacred things, is so widely celebrated — the orderliness and external circumstances of other duties, and loyalty to a particular party or tradition, are all apt to work their way into our affections with great ease, insofar as those affections remain unrenewed. These things expose the real reasons

why the ordinances of worship are so unprofitable to many who appear to attend them diligently. The reasons can be summed up under three headings.

First, they do not come to the ordinances as the means appointed by God for the exercise of faith and love toward Christ — they do not make that their aim in approaching them — without which everything said about benefit in and through other duties is entirely lost.

Second, they do not strive, in and under the ordinances, to stir up faith and love to their proper exercise.

Third, they allow their minds to be drawn away from the exercise of these graces — partly by occasional temptations, and partly by preoccupation with what is merely outward in the ordinances themselves.

Spiritual affections find no place of rest in any of these things; what they seek and settle in are presentations of God in Christ, of His will and their own duty, that draw out their faith, love, godly fear, and delight into active exercise.

There are two things alone that faith regards in all duties of worship with respect to their outward administration — one absolutely, the other comparatively — both with reference to the end already mentioned: the exercise, growth, and increase of grace in us. The first is that the ordinances must be of divine appointment. Where their origin and observance is traced back to divine authority, there and there alone will they carry divine power and effectiveness. In all these things, faith looks to nothing but divine commands and promises. Whatever looks to anything else is not faith but imagination. This is why the many uncommanded religious

duties in the Roman church — so numerous that if not the whole, at least all the principal parts of their worship consist in them — are such that genuine faith cannot be properly exercised in their performance. The second thing faith regards, comparatively, is the spiritual gifts of those entrusted with the administration of the Gospel ordinances in the public worship of the church. With respect to these gifts, believers may have more delight and satisfaction in the ministry of one person than another, as was mentioned earlier. But this is not because one is more learned, more eloquent, more gifted in speech, or more forceful in delivery than another — it is because they find one person's gifts more suited and more effective in stirring up faith and love to holy exercise in their minds and hearts than others. Therefore they have a particular appreciation for and delight in the ministry of such people, especially when they can enjoy it in good order and without causing offense to others. And ministers who are wise will, in their ministry, set aside everything else and attend to this alone: how they can be genuinely helpful to the faith, love, and joy of believers — so far as those believers are the object of their ministry.

This is the first reason and ground on which spiritually renewed affections cling to the ordinances of worship with delight and satisfaction: namely, because they are the means appointed and blessed by God for the exercise and increase of faith and love, and believers have experienced their effectiveness toward that end.

Second, spiritually renewed affections cling to the ordinances because they are the means through which believers receive a sense of divine love and fresh supplies of divine grace. As far as our affections are renewed, this is the most powerful attraction drawing us to cling to the ordinances with delight and satisfaction.

As was noted, the ordinances are the ways by which we draw near to God. Now we do not approach God as a dry hearth or a barren wilderness where no refreshment is to be found. To claim to be coming to God while expecting nothing good or great from Him is to despise God Himself, to overturn the very nature of the duty, and to deprive our own souls of all benefit from it. The absence of this expectation is what makes the worship of most people useless and fruitless to themselves. We must always come to God as to an eternal spring of goodness, grace, and mercy — of all that our souls need, of all we could desire for our everlasting blessing — and for believers, all of this can be gathered under the two headings mentioned.

First, they come for the communication of a sense of God's love in Jesus Christ. On this alone depends all our peace, consolation, and joy; all our encouragement to do and suffer according to God's will; all our support in our sufferings. In this our souls live, and without it we are of all people the most miserable.

It is the Holy Spirit who is the immediate cause of all these things in us. He pours out the love of God in our hearts, as Romans 5:5 says. He bears witness to our adoption, as Romans 8:15-16 says. And through that adoption He gives us a share in the love of the Father — God as He is love. But the outward way and means through which He communicates and produces these things in us is ordinarily by the dispensation of the Gospel — the preaching of it. He does the same work also in prayer and often in other holy ordinances. For this purpose — to participate in this grace and these mercies — believers come to God through them. They use them as

means to draw water from the wells of salvation and to receive that spiritual sense of divine love which God communicates through them.

So Christ, by His Word, knocks at the door of the heart — and if it is opened by faith, He comes in and dines with them, giving them gracious refreshment through the testimony of His own love and the love of the Father, as Revelation 3:20 and John 14:23 show. This is what believers look for in the ordinances, and what they receive through them in various measures. And though some, through fears and temptations, are not consciously aware of receiving anything, they are still secretly receiving these blessed supplies of grace by which their souls are kept alive — without which they would waste away and perish. So Christ deals with them, as Song of Songs 4:5-6 and Song of Songs 7:12 describe: these ordinances are the gardens and galleries of Christ in which He gives us of His love. Those who are humble and sincere know how often their souls have been refreshed in the ordinances, and how long the impressions of divine grace and love received there have sometimes remained with them, to their unspeakable consolation. They remember what they have received in the opening and application of the exceedingly great and precious promises — how by these they are gradually made more and more partakers of the divine nature; how many times they have received light in darkness, refreshment under despair, and relief in their conflicts with dangers and temptations. This is why spiritually renewed affections cling to the ordinances. Who could help but love and delight in that which he has found by experience to be the means of communicating to him the most priceless mercy and the most invaluable benefit available to him in this life? The man who has found a hidden trea-

sure will always value the place where he found it, even if he could take all of it away at once. But if the nature of the treasure is such that no more can be taken at one time than is sufficient for the present need — yet it is so full and boundless that every time he returns to seek it he is certain to receive fresh supply — he will always prize that place and make it his regular resort. Such is the treasure of grace and divine love that is in the ordinances of worship.

If we are strangers to these things — if we have never received real, effective communications of divine love to our souls in and through the duties of worship — we cannot love them and delight in them as we should. What do people come to hear the Word of God for? What do they pray for? What do they expect to receive from God? Do they come to God as the eternal fountain of living water — as the God of all grace, peace, and consolation? Or do they come to worship without any real purpose, as though approaching an empty spectacle? Do they fight uncertainly in these things — like men swinging at air? Or do they think they bring something to God but expect nothing back from Him — that the best outcome is to please Him by doing what He commands, but that receiving anything from Him is neither expected nor even examined afterward? People who walk in such ways will never attain genuine delight in the ordinances of worship.

Believers have other aims in worship, and chief among them is this: that they may receive fresh and comforting assurances of God's love in Christ — and through them, renewed assurance of their adoption, the forgiveness of their sins, and their acceptance before God. The extent to which they find these things in the duties of holy worship — public or private — will directly shape how

much they love, value, and cling to those duties. Some people are so filled with other thoughts and affections that these things are not their primary aim or desire; or they are content with whatever measure they suppose they have already attained; or they simply are not aware of how much they need fresh communications of divine love made to their souls each day. Some are so ignorant of what they ought to seek in the duties of Gospel worship that genuine aim in them is impossible. Many among the more serious class of professing Christians are too negligent in this regard. They do not long and pant inwardly for renewed pledges of God's love. They do not consider how much they need such things to be encouraged and strengthened for all other duties of obedience. They do not prepare their minds to receive them, nor come with expectation that they will be communicated. They do not rightly fix their faith on this truth: that these holy ordinances and duties are appointed by God first of all as the ways and means of conveying His love and a sense of it to our souls. From this neglect springs all the lukewarmness, coldness, and indifference toward the duties of holy worship that are growing among us. For if people have lost the primary aim of faith in the ordinances, and have come to undervalue the greatest benefit to be obtained through them, where could zeal for them, delight in them, or diligence in attending them possibly come from? Let no one comfort themselves under the power of such spiritual decline — these are unmistakable signs of their inward condition. Such people will grow cold, careless, and negligent toward the duties of public worship; they will put themselves to neither expense nor effort on their account; every circumstance of life will easily divert them and be welcomed as an excuse. And when they do attend, they do so with great indifference and

disengagement. Yet they would have it thought that all is still well within — that they have as much regard for religion as anyone. But these things expose an advanced spiritual disease in the souls of such people as plainly as if it were written across their foreheads: whatever they may claim to the contrary, they are under the power of a devastating decay from all due regard for spiritual and eternal things. I would avoid the company of such people as those who carry an infectious disease — except for the purpose of helping them toward a cure.

But here is where spiritually renewed affections show themselves. When we delight in and value the duties of God's worship because we have found by experience that they are and have been means of communicating a sense of — and renewed assurances of — God's love in Christ, along with all the benefits and privileges that depend on it, then our affections have been renewed by the Holy Spirit.

Second, believers come to the ordinances for fresh supplies of inward, sanctifying, and strengthening grace. This is the second great aim of believers when they draw near to God in worship. They feel the lack of this grace in themselves — in degree and measure — and are keenly aware of it. Indeed, this is one of the great burdens of believers' souls in this world. Everything we do in the life of God can be reduced to two headings.

First, the keeping of all the duties of obedience.

Second, the conflict with and conquest over temptations. We are continually occupied with these two things. Therefore, the great thing we desire, labor for, and long after is spiritual strength and ability to carry out our responsibilities in both areas. This is

what every true believer groans after inwardly, and what he values infinitely above all earthly things. If only he may have sufficient grace in some adequate measure for these ends, he asks for nothing more in this world, whatever else may befall him. God in Christ is the only fountain of all this grace — not a drop of it is to be obtained from anywhere else. And while He communicates it to us of His own sovereign goodness and pleasure, the ordinary way and means by which He does so are the duties of worship, as Isaiah 40:28-31 declares: "Do you not know? Have you not heard? The Everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth does not become weary or tired. His understanding is inscrutable. He gives strength to the weary, and to him who lacks might He increases power. Though youths grow weary and tired, and vigorous young men stumble badly, yet those who wait for the Lord will gain new strength; they will mount up with wings like eagles, they will run and not get tired, they will walk and not become weary."

All grace and spiritual strength have their original source in the nature of God, as verse 28 says. But what comfort does that offer to us who are weak, frail, and ready to faint? He will act in accordance with His nature in communicating this grace and power, as verse 29 says. But how do we gain access to this grace and these workings? By waiting on Him in the ordinances of worship, as verse 31 says. The Word as preached is the food of our souls by which God administers growth and strength to them, as John 17:17 and 1 Peter 2:2 indicate. "Desire the pure milk of the word," Peter says, "so that by it you may grow." And what encouragement is there for this? "If so be you have tasted that the Lord is gracious" — if through the ministry of the Word you have had experience of God's grace, goodness, and kindness to your soul, you cannot help

but desire it and delight in it. Otherwise, you will not. When people have sat for a good while under the preaching of the Word and the enjoyment of other ordinances, without tasting in and through them that the Lord is gracious, they will grow weary of it all. Prayer, therefore, is His appointed way for us to bring our souls to Him and obtain a share in all needful grace — which He has set before us in the promises of the covenant, so that we may know what to ask for and how to plead for it. In the sacraments, those same promises are sealed to us, and the grace represented in them is effectively given. Meditation confirms our souls in the exercise of faith regarding these things, and is a special opening of the heart to receive them. By these means, I say, God communicates all supplies of renewing, strengthening, and sanctifying grace to us — so that we may live for Him in all holy obedience and overcome our temptations. Under this understanding do believers approach God in the ordinances of worship. They come to them as the means by which God communicates to their souls. Therefore they cling to them with delight, as far as their affections are renewed. So the bride in Song of Songs 2:3 testifies: "I sat down under his shade with great delight." In the ordinances is the protecting and refreshing presence of Christ — and in this she rested with great delight.

As believers come to the ordinances with these aims and expectations, they also experience the spiritual benefits and advantages they receive through them — and this more and more binds their affections to them in love and delight. All these things are foreign to those whose affections have been changed but not spiritually renewed. They have neither the aim just described in coming to the ordinances, nor any experience of the effectiveness just set out in attending them. But these benefits are real and great. When people

find the worth and effect of the preached Word on their souls — its enlightening, refreshing, strengthening, transforming power; when they find their hearts warmed, their graces stirred and strengthened, their love for God increased, their despairing spirits under trials and temptations relieved, and their whole souls gradually more and more conformed to Christ; when they find themselves delivered through it from snares, doubts, fears, and temptations, and brought to satisfaction and rest — they cannot help but delight in its ministry and rejoice in it as the food of their souls. And it is a great hindrance to spiritual growth, and a block to fruitfulness, thankfulness, and consolation, when we are negligent about reflecting on the benefits we receive from the Word and the advantages we have through it. For as long as we are that way, we can neither value the grace of God in granting us this invaluable privilege, nor perform any duty with respect to it in a right manner. This is what makes the Word a special object of spiritually renewed affections. That hidden love for and heavenly delight in the statutes and testimonies of God that David expresses throughout Psalm 119 sprang from the spiritual benefit and advantage he received through them — as he constantly declares. And conversely, the only reason people grow so careless, negligent, and cold in their attendance to the preaching of the Word is that they have no experience of any spiritual benefit or advantage from it. They were drawn to it by one means or another — mostly by a sense of duty. Their minds were variously affected by it, moved to joy in hearing it and readiness for various duties of obedience. But after a while, when the sense of those temporary impressions has faded and they find no real spiritual benefit in it, they lose all delight in it and become completely indifferent to it. The condition such people even-

tually arrive at is described in Malachi 1:13 and 3:14. And nothing can give clearer evidence of the decay of all grace in a person — or of their being entirely without saving grace — than when they fall away from some degree of zeal for and delight in the ministry of God's Word, sinking into that cursed indifference that overtakes so many. It cannot be otherwise. Because this is a way and means of the exercise of all grace, it will not be neglected except where there is a decay of all grace — whatever excuses people may tell themselves. And once people are caught in this decline, every foolish prejudice, every offense taken, every careless opinion and whim will confirm and deepen their gradual backsliding.

And what is true for believers with respect to hearing the Word in general is also true with respect to the degree of benefit they find in it. When people have enjoyed the ministry of the Word in a particularly spiritual and effective way, and yet are willing to settle for something colder and more lifeless — as long as it fills the same time slot and maintains the same outward form — that is not a strong sign that their souls are prospering. It is therefore only those who have a sense of the Word's power on their souls and consciences — toward all its holy ends — who cling to it with spiritual love and delight. They continually remember what holy impressions it has made on them, what commitments it has drawn their souls into, what encouragements to faith and obedience it has given them — and they long for renewed experience of its riches. When we do not find in ourselves this foundation of spiritual delight in the ministry of the Gospel, we have little evidence that our affections have been renewed.

The same is true of prayer and meditation. When a believer's soul has experienced the communion it has had with God in these duties — the spiritual refreshment received through them, the benefits and mercies obtained by them — in recovery from temptations, snares, and despair; in victory over sin and Satan; through spiritual impressions that have shaped the soul into a holy, watchful frame that has remained with it in other areas and occasions — along with all the other advantages that accompany fervent, effective prayer and sincere heavenly meditation — it cannot help but love these duties and delight in them. But if we truly have no experience of these things, if we find no such advantages in and through these duties, they cannot help but be a burden to us, serving no purpose beyond satisfying our conscience. A person who has experienced the benefit of clean, healthful air during recovery from many illnesses — and has had his health preserved through it — will love and prize that air. So too will the person who has been a partaker of any of these saving mercies and privileges love the duties through which they came. Some have been delivered from the worst temptations, and from the nearest point of being overcome by them — nearly to the point of destroying themselves — by a sudden remembrance of the frame of their soul and the intimations of God's love received in some prayer, at some particular time. Others have experienced similar deliverance from temptations to sin when they were being carried away under the power of their corruptions and all circumstances seemed to conspire against them — a sudden recollection of some prayer or meditation, and of the commitments made to God in it, has caused every weapon sin held to drop from its hands, and every appealing feature of its enticements to disappear.

When others have been under the power of such despondency and discouragement that no present offer of relief could reach them, they have been suddenly lifted and refreshed by the memory of the intimate love and tenderness between Christ and their souls that had shown itself in past seasons of duty. Multitudes in fears, distress, and temptation have found relief for their spirits and encouragement for their faith in remembering the answers they received to earlier prayers in similar distress. These are the grounds for spiritual delight in these duties.

Empty, lifeless, wordy prayer — the product of mere conviction, spiritual gifts, custom, or outward occasion — however frequently repeated and however devout it may appear, will never engage spiritual affections. When these things are absent — when the soul has no experience of them — prayer is nothing but a lifeless form, a dead shell, which would be a torment to a spiritually alive soul to be tied to. There may be seasons, of course, when God seems to hide Himself from believers in their prayers, so that they find neither the life in themselves they once knew, nor any sense of gracious communication from Him — but this is only for a time, and is primarily meant to stir them up to the kind of fervor and perseverance in prayer that will restore them to their former condition, or to one even better. The same can be said about all other duties of religion and ordinances of worship.

Fourth, believers whose affections are spiritually renewed delight greatly in the duties of worship because those duties are the great appointed way for them to give glory to God. This is the first and chief purpose of all religious duties as they relate to divine appointment: to ascribe and render to God the glory that is His due. For in all these duties, acknowledgment is made of all the glorious

excellencies of the divine nature, our dependence on Him, and our relationship to Him. And this is what believers aim at first in all the duties of worship. The pattern given by our blessed Savior in the prayer He taught His disciples directs us to this: all its opening petitions concern directly the glory of God and its advancement — in which, in fact, all the blessing and safety of the church is also included. Those who fail in this aim err in everything they do and never move toward the goal set before them. But this is what primarily animates the souls of believers in all their duties — their universal relationship to God and the love that relationship produces makes it necessary. Therefore, the way and means by which they can directly and solemnly ascribe and give glory to God is precious and delightful to them. And all the duties of divine worship are exactly that. These are some of the ways in which the relationship of spiritually renewed affections to the ordinances and duties of worship differs from the activity of affections toward the same objects when they have not been sanctified and renewed.

There are yet other things that further evidence the difference between spiritually renewed affections and those in which only a general change has been worked through conviction and outward circumstances — which I must address in one or two more instances, along with related cases that arise from them. My aim here is not only to identify when minds are spiritually renewed, but also to describe the nature and operation of the affections by which we are made and identified as spiritually minded — which is the subject of our whole inquiry. We will now proceed to that.

2dly. Consider that as there are many things dreadfully pronounced in the Scripture against Backsliding and Backsliders in heart, as it is with you, yet also there are especial Calls and

Promises given and proposed to those in your Condition. And know assuredly, that upon your Compliance or non-Compliance with them, depends your everlasting Blessedness or Woe.

Consider both Call and Promise in that Word of Gods Grace, Jer. 3:12, 13, 14. Go and proclaim these Words towards the North, and say, Return you Backsliding Israel, saith the Lord, and I will not cause mine Anger to fall upon you: for I am merciful, faith the Lord, and I will not keep anger for ever. Only acknowledge yours Iniquity that you have transgressed against the Lord your God, and hast scattered your ways to the Strangers under every green Tree, and ye have not obeyed my Voice, saith the Lord. Turn, O backsliding Children, saith the Lord, for I am married to you: and I will take you one of a City, and two of a Family, and I will bring you to Zion. Add thereunto this blessed Promise, Hos. 14:4. I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely: for mine anger is turned away from them. If you design to live and not die, it must be by yielding Obedience to this Call, and pleading this Promise before God, mixing it with Faith. Your Return must be by the Word, Isai. 57.18, 19. Here lies your great Encouragement and Direction, herein lys your only Relief. As you value your Souls, defer not the Duty you are called to one moment. You know not how soon you may be without the reach of Calls and Promises. And he that can hear them without stirring up himself in Sincerity to comply with them, has made already a great Progress towards that length.

(3) As to those who on these and the like Considerations, do not only desire, but will endeavor also to retrieve themselves from this Condition, I shall give no advice at present but this; be in good earnest. As the Prophet speaks in another Case; if you will return, return and come, make through work of it. You must do so at one

time or another or you will perish. Why not now? Why is not this the best Season? Who knows but it may be the only time you will have for it? It were easy to multiply all sorts of Arguments to this purpose. Trifling Endeavours, Occasional Resolutions and Attempts like the early Cloud, and morning Dew, shifting with Warnings and Convictions, by renewed Duties until their Impressions are worn out, will ruine your Souls. Unless there be universal Diligence and Permanency in your Endeavours, you are undone. Then shall ye know the Lord, if you follow on to know him.

But now to return. These things I say, through our Sloth, Negligence, and Sin may befal us, as to our Spiritually renewed Affections. Their Progress in Conformity to Spiritual and Heavenly things, may be slow, imperceptible, yea, totally obstructed for a season; and not only so, but they may fall under Decays, and the Soul therein be guilty of backsliding from God. But this is that which they are capacitated for by their Renovation; this is that whereby the Grace wherewith they are renewed does lead to; this is that which in the diligent use of means, they will grow up to, whereon our Comfort and Peace do depend; namely, an holy Assimulation to those Spiritual and heavenly things which they are set and fixed on, wherein they are renewed and made more Spiritual and Heavenly every day.

Chapter 18

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Assimilation to heavenly and spiritual things through spiritually renewed affections. This assimilation is the work of faith — how and by what means. Reasons why our spiritual affections fail to grow in this assimilation.

When affections are spiritually renewed and fix themselves on spiritual things, there is a transformation worked in them — and in the whole soul — that conforms them to those spiritual and heavenly things, and this is done through faith. But when only a change is worked in the affections through other causes and occasions — not through renewing grace — the spiritual and heavenly things are bent and shaped to fit those affections, and this is done through imagination.

This needs to be addressed at some length, as it gives the most striking distinction between the frames of mind whose difference we are examining. To that end we will set out our thoughts on it in the observations that follow.

First, spiritually renewed affections, in all their activity and throughout their full exercise, are under the guidance and direction of faith. It is faith, in its spiritual light, that leads the soul throughout the whole life of God — we live here by faith, as we will

live hereafter by direct sight. If our affections deviate or drift even slightly from the guidance of faith, they fall away from spirituality and give themselves over to the service of superstition. Next to corrupt worldly self-interest exploited by crafty, self-serving deceivers, this has been the great doorway through which all superstition and false worship has entered the world. Blind affection groping in the dark after spiritual things — without the saving light of faith to guide it — has led the minds of people into all manner of superstitions, imaginations, and practices, and continues to do so today. And wherever affection takes the lead without faith going before to make plain both the way and the destination, both the one who leads and the mind being led will fall into one trap and pit after another.

Therefore spiritually renewed affections do not move or act except as faith reveals their object and directs them to it. It is faith that works through love — we can sincerely love nothing with divine love that we do not truly believe in with saving faith. However intense our affections toward any spiritual thing may be, if they do not spring from faith and are not guided by it, they are neither accepted by God nor will they promote genuine spirituality and holiness in our own souls, as Hebrews 11:6 and Matthew 6:22-23 indicate. This is why we so often see impressive and convincing displays of spiritual affections that last only for a season. They have been stirred up and set in motion by one outward or inward cause or another — but lacking the light of faith to guide them to their proper object, they either wither and die as to any apparent spiritual movement, or they keep the mind tossed back and forth in perpetual restlessness without rest or peace. The foolish man exhausts himself because he cannot find the way to the city. So it was

with those who, because of their following of Christ's teaching, are called His disciples in John 6. When He preached to them about the bread that came down from heaven and gives life to those who feed on it, they were greatly moved and cried out, "Lord, always give us this bread," as verse 34 shows. But when He went on to explain the mystery of it, they had no faith to perceive and receive it — and their affections immediately faded, and they abandoned both Him and His teaching, as verse 66 records.

We may consider one striking example of this pattern. People frequently come under deep and powerful convictions of sin and of the danger and certain misery that comes with it. This stirs up and sets all their affections in motion — especially their fears, hopes, desires, grief, and self-reproach — according to what their condition calls for. Hence they sometimes grow restless in their complaints and turn themselves in every direction for relief, like people who are lost and bewildered in the dark. But in this state and condition, tell them of the only proper way and means of relief — which, whatever the world may say, is Christ and His righteousness alone, together with the grace of God in Him — and they quickly show that these things are foreign to them, things they neither understand nor truly welcome. They cannot see them, they cannot make them out, nor any beauty in them that would make them desirable.

Therefore, after their affections have been tossed about for a season under the power and torment of this conviction, they come to one of two outcomes. Either those affections entirely decay, and the mind loses all sense of any impression from them — so that people wonder to themselves how they were ever so foolish as to be troubled by such gloomy fancies — and they commonly become as

bad as any people living. Or else they settle into a formal, legal religious profession in which they never attain true spiritual-mindedness. This is the best outcome that our affections toward spiritual things can reach when they are not guided by the light of faith.

Second, faith has a clear view of and understanding of spiritual things as they actually are — in their own nature. It is true that the light of faith cannot fully comprehend the nature of all the things that are the objects of its affections, for some are infinite and incomprehensible — such as the nature of God and the person of Christ — and some, such as future glory, are not yet fully revealed. But faith discerns them all in an appropriate way — so that they may be the object of our affections as they actually are in themselves, not as they are distorted or imagined. They are, as the apostle says, spiritually discerned, as 1 Corinthians 2:14 indicates — which is why the natural person cannot receive them, since he has no capacity to discern them spiritually. And this is the chief purpose of the renewal of our minds and the chief quality and effect of faith: to communicate to our minds, and to work in us, a spiritual and saving light by which we may see and discern spiritual things as they actually are in their own nature, kind, and proper use — as Ephesians 1:17-19 describes: "That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him. I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe." And as 2 Corinthians 4:6 says: "God has shone in our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ." The goal God has in mind is to draw

our hearts and affections to Himself. For this purpose He gives us a glorious inward light by which we are enabled to discern the true nature of the things we are to cling to with love and delight. Without this light, we have nothing in our minds but false images of spiritual things — not always false in terms of the doctrine about them, but false as to their reality, power, and effectiveness in us. This is one of the chief effects of faith, as it is the chief aspect of the renewal of our minds: to disclose in the soul and present to the affections things spiritual and heavenly in their true nature, beauty, and genuine excellence. This draws the affections — if they are spiritually renewed — and causes them to cleave with delight to what is so presented. The person who genuinely believes in Christ — who thereby discovers the excellence of His person and the glory of His mediatorial work — will both love Him and, upon believing, rejoice with a joy that is unspeakable and full of glory. So it is in every other case: the more steadily we view spiritual things through faith, the more firm and constant our affections will be in clinging to them. And wherever the mind is darkened about them — through temptation or seduction from the truth — the affections will quickly weaken and decay.

Third, affections thus led to and fixed on spiritual and heavenly things under the light and direction of faith are progressively renewed — made more spiritual and heavenly in themselves. In their clinging to and delighting in those things, they are continually changed and assimilated to the things themselves, becoming more and more what those things are — that is, spiritual and heavenly.

This transformation is worked by faith and is one of its most excellent capacities and operations, as 2 Corinthians 3:18 shows. And the means through which faith works this transformation are

our affections. In our fallen state, it is through our affections that we are conformed to this world; and through our sanctified affections we are transformed by the renewing of our minds, as Romans 12:2 says. This transformation is the introduction of a new form or nature into our souls — different from the one we had before. It is described in Isaiah 11:6-9. It is a spiritual nature that they are changed into. And it is twofold.

First, it is original and foundational — concerning the substance or essence of the new nature — and this is the effect of the first act of divine grace on our souls when we are made new creatures. In this our affections are passive: they do not transform us, but are themselves transformed.

Second, it is gradual in its increase — and in this, faith works in and through the affections.

Whenever the affections cling intensely to any object, they receive an impression from it — as wax receives an impression from a seal pressed into it — which changes them into the likeness of that object. So the apostle says of sensual and immoral people that they have eyes full of adultery, as 2 Peter 2:14 says. Their affections are so completely occupied and filled with their lustful objects that those objects have stamped their own likeness on their imaginations. That impression blots out all others and leaves them with no inclinations but what those objects stir up in them. When people are filled with love for this world — a love that carries all their other affections along with it, directing their hopes, fears, and desires constantly to the same object — they become earthly-minded. Their minds are so transformed into the image of earthly things

themselves, through the effective working of the corrupt principles of sin, self-love, and lust, that they seem to be made of the earth and have no taste for anything else.

In the same way, when by faith people come to embrace heavenly things through the effective working of a principle of spiritual life and grace in them, they are day by day made more heavenly. The inward man is renewed day by day. Love becomes more sincere and fervent, delight more captivating and felt, desires more expansive and intense — and through all of it, a taste and relish for heavenly things grows into refreshing personal experience, as Romans 5:2-5 shows.

This is how one grace is added to another in degrees, as 2 Peter 1:5-6 indicates. The conformity between renewed affections and their spiritual objects — that which can be attained through these means — is great.

Through this process, the mind becomes the temple of God in which He dwells by the Spirit. Christ also dwells in believers, and they in Him. "God is love, and the one who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him," as 1 John 4:16 says.

Love in its proper exercise creates a mutual indwelling between God and believers. In brief, the person whose affections are set on heavenly things in the right way will be heavenly-minded. And through the due exercise of those affections, that heavenly-mindedness will increase. The transformation and assimilation that is worked is not in the object — spiritual things are not changed in themselves, nor in the way they are presented to our minds. The change is in our affections, which are made like those things.

Two cases arising from this principle and consideration will be addressed here — the first in this chapter, the other in the following chapter. The first concerns the slowness and imperceptibility of the growth of our affections in their assimilation to heavenly things, along with its causes and reasons. The other concerns the declines that frequently come upon people in their affections toward spiritual things, rather than growth and progress — along with the causes and reasons for that.

First, this progress and growth of our affections into spirituality and heavenliness — this conformity to the things they are set upon — is often very slow, and sometimes almost imperceptible. Indeed, for the most part, it is difficult to see it clearly in ourselves or in others. Our affections are like shrubs in a wilderness, which do not notice when good weather comes, not like plants in an enclosed garden that is watered every day. But this is not so without our own foolishness and sin.

The foolishness that keeps many in this condition is this: most Christians are content with their present level of grace and aim at little more than not losing the ground they have already gained. This is a damaging foolishness — it robs religion of its glory and deprives people's souls of peace and consolation. But so it is: people have some basis for believing — or at least they hope and suppose they have such a basis — that they have passed from death to life, that they are in a state of grace and acceptance with God. This state they will try to preserve by diligently performing the duties it requires and by avoiding the sins that might cause them to forfeit it. But as for earnest, watchful effort and diligence to thrive in that state — to grow in grace, to be changed from glory to glory into the image of Christ, to press forward toward the goal of the high call-

ing, to lay hold on eternal life, to become more holy, more humble, more righteous, more spiritually minded, to have their affections more and more transformed into the likeness of things above — those who sincerely and diligently apply themselves to this, or to the means of it, are very few. The level they have reached is enough to satisfy the church and establish their reputation in the world as professing Christians — and some speak peace to their own souls on that basis. To be more holy and heavenly, to have their affections more taken up with things above, they suppose is somehow incompatible with their present circumstances and responsibilities. By this thinking, religion has lost much of its glory, and people's souls have been deprived of its chief advantages in this world.

Such people are like men living in a land where they are pressed not only by poverty and every kind of misery, but also face severe punishment and death itself if they are caught there. In this condition they are told and assured of another country, where as soon as they arrive they will be free from all fear of punishment — and if they press further into it, they will find riches, plenty, and a fine inheritance prepared for them. On that news they set out on the journey to gain entry and possession. But no sooner do they cross the border and find themselves free from the danger and fear of punishment and death, than they sit down and refuse to go further — and so never enjoy the good things of the country they have entered. And it happens with many of them that through their laziness, negligence, and ignorance, they settle short of the true borders of the land of freedom and peace they were aiming for — so that danger and death overtake them when they least expect it. This ruin would never have come upon them if they had pressed

on diligently into the heart of the country and taken possession of its good things. At best, remaining only at the border, they lead a poor and exposed life all their days.

So it is in this spiritual matter. People coming under the power of conviction — and the relentless fears that accompany it — will stir themselves up and ask how they may flee from the wrath to come and be delivered from their state of sin and the eternal misery that will follow.

In the Gospel, not only mercy and pardon are held out to them upon believing — which is the first entry into the heavenly country — but also peace, joy, and spiritual strength upon their admission into it, and further progress by faith and obedience. But many, when they have reached the point of having some hope of pardon and freedom from the curse — enough to deliver them from their tormenting fears — will try to preserve those hopes and hold that position, but will not press on to a full enjoyment of the precious things of the Gospel through growth in grace and spiritual affections. And how many of them fall into dreadful mistakes. For supposing themselves to be in a Gospel state, it turns out in the end that they never truly entered it. They were perhaps not far from the kingdom of heaven — in the same sense it was said of a certain person who never actually reached it. There is no way to secure a genuine share in the Gospel's pardon, mercy, safety, and deliverance except through growth in grace, holiness, and spirituality — which is what gives us entrance into the choicest mercies and privileges of it.

This foolishness of settling for present measures — aiming only to maintain the condition people hope they have attained — is the main reason why their affections do not daily grow up into spiritu-

ality through assimilation to heavenly things. And it is a foolishness accompanied by countless aggravations. For instance:

First, it is contrary to and destructive of the essential nature of Gospel grace. For our Savior everywhere compares it to things that grow from small seeds and beginnings into large measures by continual increase — like a grain of mustard seed, a little leaven, and the like.

Grace that by its very nature does not thrive and grow may rightly be called into question, and ought to be carefully examined by those who care about their souls and do not want to be eternally deceived.

Chapter 19

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Declines in spiritual affections, their causes and dangers. Counsel for those who are aware of the evil of spiritual decline.

It must be acknowledged that there is something worse than what we have been addressing — something more opposed to the growth of affections in conformity to heavenly things, which is the proper character of those who are spiritually renewed. This is the spiritual decline that shows itself in tangible and visible effects.

There are many — perhaps most, if not all, who are genuinely converted — who at the beginning of their profession and conversion to God showed a great display of vigorous and active spiritual affections. God takes note of the love of His people's youth — the love of their early commitment to Him.

In some, this vigor of spiritual affections comes from the real power of grace working effectively on their hearts and minds. In others, it comes from other causes — for instance, the relief from conviction brought by spiritual illumination will produce this kind of effect. It often works to the advantage of such people that this change generally comes in their younger years. At that age, their natural affections are active and carry great weight in the whole

soul. Therefore, whatever change is made, it shows itself most prominently then. But as people grow older and develop worldly wisdom, a high regard for earthly things, concern for them, and absorption in them — their spiritual affections weaken and decline every day. They remain in their profession but have lost their first love.

It is a shame and unspeakable foolishness that this should be true of anyone who professes a religion with so many incomparable excellencies to endear and draw them to it more and more. But why should we hide what experience makes plain in broad daylight — what multitudes openly declare about themselves? I therefore regard it as a strong sign — if not an absolute proof of the sincerity of grace, then at least of its life and growth — when, as people grow in age, they grow in their low estimation of earthly things, in their contempt for the world, in acts of generosity and charity, and show no decline in any of these. But I say again: it is common for the early stages of a person's religious profession and conversion to God to be accompanied by vigorous and active affections toward spiritual things. Of those who truly and sincerely believed, it is said that on their believing, they rejoiced with a joy unspeakable and full of glory. And of those who had only a work of conviction worked in them — built up by a temporary faith — that they received the Word with joy and eagerly did many things.

Many remain in this state and continue to thrive, until their affections are wholly transformed into the image and likeness of things above. But with many of all kinds, this does not happen — they fall into miserable declines in their affections toward spiritual things, and consequently in their whole profession and daily life. Their spiritual freshness becomes like drought in summer. They

have no experience of those affections alive and at work within them, nor any comfort or refreshment from them. They bring no honor to the Gospel through any fruit of love, zeal, or delight, nor are they useful in any way to others by their example. Some of them have had apparent recoveries, only to fall back into a lifeless state — warnings, afflictions, sicknesses, and the Word have awakened them, but they have fallen again into a deep sleep — so that they seem like trees whose fruit withers: fruitless, twice dead, uprooted.

Some things need to be said about this miserable condition in general — since it directly opposes the grace and duty of being spiritually minded, and works against the growth of spiritual affections in their assimilation to heavenly things. What is said may be applied to all degrees of this decline, though not all are equally dangerous.

First, there may be a season of temptation in which a soul may sense in itself not only a decline but an utter loss of all spiritual affections — when in fact this is not actually the case. Just as believers may feel and conclude that the Lord has forsaken and forgotten them when He has not, as Isaiah 49:14-15 shows, so under temptation they may feel they have forsaken God when they have not — as a man walking at night may think he has lost his way and be in great distress, when in fact he is still on the right road. For temptation brings darkness and confusion and leads to mistakes and false judgments about everything. They may not find grace working in love, joy, and delight as before, nor that activity of heart and mind in holy duties that spiritual affections once gave them. Yet it may be that the same grace is working just as effectively — and just as

acceptably to God — in godly sorrow, mourning, humility, and self-abasement. People in this situation I set aside from the present discussion.

Second, there may be a general weakening of the affections in their natural activity toward any object — at least in their outward expression and effects — and on this basis, their activity toward spiritual things may feel less noticeable. So people in their younger years may be more ready to express their sorrow through tears, and their joy through a palpable uplift and movement of spirit, than in their more mature years. And this can be the case without any actual decline in the grace that renews the affections.

First, when this is the case, it is a burden to the person who experiences it. They cannot help but grieve and maintain a godly watchfulness over themselves, fearing that the decline they notice is not in their outward natural responses but in the inward and spiritual man. And they will strive for it to be with them as in former days — though they may not be able to attain the same vigor of spirit, the same life, joy, peace, and comfort they once experienced.

Second, in such people there will be no decline in holiness of life or in diligence in religious duties. If the decline is truly in the grace of the affections, it will be accompanied by a proportionate decline in everything else that is part of the life of God. But if it is only a weakening of the natural expression of the affections, no such general decline will follow.

Third, grace in this case will act more vigorously in the other faculties and powers of the soul — in the judgment and will — in their approval of and firm adherence to spiritual things.

Fourth, when people find — or could find — that their affections are still quick, active, and keen toward other things, such as the lawful pleasures and comforts of this life, it is pointless for them to comfort themselves by thinking that the decline they notice is in their natural affections rather than their gracious ones. When we see a person grow more in love with the things of this world and less in love with the things of God as they grow older, it is not because of natural weakness — it is because of the strength of sin.

Under these and perhaps other similar circumstances, there can be a sense of spiritual decline when the reality may not be as severe as it feels. But when the decline is real — as it evidently is with many, and I might almost say with most people in these days — it is a miserable condition of heart, and can never be mourned enough. It stands in direct opposition to that spiritual-mindedness which is life and peace. It is a wasting disease of the soul that threatens it with death every day.

It is not my purpose here to address it in detail, yet I cannot let it pass without some observations, since it is an evil almost epidemic among professing Christians — and in some it has gone so far that they seem to be entirely abandoned by every power of spiritual life.

Now, in addition to all the foolishness and sin we previously identified as causes of the failure to grow in spiritual and heavenly affections — which in the case of actual decline are even more abominable — there is a multiplication of evils that accompanies this state of heart and mind.

First, this is what the Lord Christ is most displeased with in churches and professing Christians above all else. He shows compassion for them in temptations, He suffers with them in persecution, He intercedes for them when they are overtaken by sin — but He threatens those who settle into spiritual decline, as Revelation 2:4-5 and Revelation 3:2 show. This He cannot bear, because it both dishonors Him and He knows it to be ruinous to those in whom it takes hold. He will show more patience with those who are entirely spiritually dead than with those who linger in this state of decline, as Revelation 3:15-16 indicates. This is the only condition other than false worship and idolatry in which He threatens to reject and remove a professing church — to take away His lampstand from it. He who spoke this way to the churches of old speaks the same to us today, for He lives forever, is always the same, and His word is living and unchanging. There is not one of us who is in this condition but the Lord Christ testifies against us through His Word and Spirit. And if He is against us, who will plead our case? Consider what He says in Revelation 2:5 and Revelation 3:3. Who can stand before these solemn expressions of His displeasure? May the Lord help us to take them to heart — lest the one in whom we profess to place our only trust be found in our trial to be our greatest enemy. Beware of those sins that Christ Himself — our only advocate — has marked out as those He will not save us in.

Second, this is what above all things grieves the Holy Spirit. His work is to bring grace to growth and progress in our souls. He begins it, and He carries it forward. And there is no greater grief to a wise and gracious worker than to see his work decay and go backward under his own hand. This is the occasion for those complaints of God found in Scripture about the unfruitfulness and

backsliding of people after all the means and remedies He has used for their fruitfulness and healing. "What more could I have done for My vineyard than I have done?" He says. "Why then, when I looked for grapes, did it produce wild grapes?" Can anything be more a cause of grief and complaint for the Holy Spirit than to see those whom He had once raised up to holy and heavenly affections — whose delights were in and whose thoughts were much occupied with things above — become earthly or sensual, with no perceptible activity of any of His graces in them? That is the condition of those under the power of spiritual decline. And this is the only situation in which God speaks to people in the way of complaint and earnest questioning, using every kind of argument to convince them of their foolishness.

When a wise, tender, and caring parent — who has been diligent in using every means for a child's upbringing, and who for a time has seen that child give real hope — finds the child slackening in diligence, becoming careless about his calling, and delighting in bad company, how anxious and grieved that parent is over him. The heart of the Spirit of God is infinitely more tender toward us than even the most affectionate parent's heart toward an only child. When He, at great cost and care, has nourished and brought us to some growth and progress in spiritual affections — which is where all His concern for us lies — for us to grow cold, dull, and earthly-minded, clinging to the pleasures and lusts of this world: how grieved He is, how provoked. Perhaps this consideration of grieving the Holy Spirit carries little weight with some people — they would have little concern for it if they could only free them-

selves from other consequences. But let such people know: it is impossible for them to give greater evidence of a hardened, shameless settled condition in sin.

Third, this is what in a special way provokes God's judgment against any church, as was suggested earlier. When a church has in its outward profession and worship a reputation for being alive, but as to the power of grace working in the affections is dead — when it is not cold enough to forsake the external ordinances of worship, nor warm enough to enliven its duties with spiritual affections — the Lord Christ will not long bear with it. Indeed, judgment will suddenly break out against such a house of God.

Fourth, this condition is absolutely incompatible with any real, comfortable assurance of God's love. Whatever people in this state may claim to such assurance, it is sinful security — not gracious assurance or peace. And consistently, as professing Christians grow cold and decline in their spiritual affections, spiritual numbness and a false sense of security grow in them as well. This is so, at least, unless they are sometimes overtaken by some greater sin that weighs heavily on their consciences and plunges them for a time into trouble and distress. But that peace with God and a comfortable assurance of salvation could be consistent with a habitual decline in grace — especially in those graces that should be active in our affections — is contrary to the whole testimony of Scripture. To suppose otherwise would be the ruin and poison of religion. I do not say that our assurance and peace with God arise entirely from the activity of grace in us — there are other and more fundamental causes of them. But I do say this: under a habitual decline or decay of grace in the spirituality of our affections, no one can hold or maintain a gracious sense of God's love or of peace with

Him. There is therefore no duty more urgently needed today than a diligent examination and testing of the grounds of one's peace — lest it be with any of us as it was with Laodicea, which was satisfied with its good condition when it was in fact most miserable and nearly beyond hope. Indeed, I must say that it is impossible for many professing Christians we see and converse with to have any solid peace with God. Do people gather figs from thorns, or grapes from thistles? Peace with God is a fruit that will not grow on a shallow, earthly, self-centered mind and way of life. Therefore, whatever such people may claim, they are either asleep in a sinful security or living on the most uncertain hopes, which will likely deceive them in the end. Nothing can be more ruinous to our faith than once supposing it an easy and natural thing to maintain our peace with God. God forbid that anything less than our utmost diligence and continued effort to thrive in every grace should be required for it. The whole beauty and glory of our religion depends on this. To be spiritually minded is life and peace.

Fifth, such a decline as the one described is a dangerous symptom of an unhealthy soul condition — indicating that those in whom it exists may in the end be found to be nothing more than hypocrites. I know such people will have — or think they have — apparent evidence to the contrary, and are quite satisfied of their own sincerity in many things, so that it seems impossible to press on them a sense of being hypocrites. But this reaction comes from a false understanding of hypocrisy. No one, they suppose, is a hypocrite unless he generally or universally pretends in religion to be what he is not — and knows he is not, or at least could easily see he is not. And it is true that this is the broadest description of Pharisaical hypocrisy. But take a hypocrite to be someone who, un-

der the light of knowledge, a public profession, spiritual gifts, and the performance of duties, habitually and willingly falls short in any point of genuine sincerity — and he is no less a perishing hypocrite than the first kind. I do not say that everyone in whom this decline in spiritual affections is prevalent is a hypocrite — God forbid. I only say that where it continues without remedy, it is such a symptom of hypocrisy that anyone wise and concerned for his soul will not rest until he has examined the matter to the bottom. For it seems as though this is the case with such people: they had a false or incomplete work in the conversion to God that they professed. It was made up of conviction of sin, the communication of spiritual light and gifts, an alteration of the affections, and a change of company and conduct. Now it is the nature of such a work to flourish brightly for a season in all the main areas of religious profession. But it is also in its nature to decay gradually until it has withered away entirely. In some, it is destroyed by the power of some vigorous temptation or a particular lust that is given in to, ending in worldliness and sensuality. But in most, it decays gradually until it has lost all its life and energy, as John 15:3 suggests. Therefore, while people find this decay in themselves — unless they have fallen under the power of a deadening false security, or are hardened by the deceitfulness of sin — they cannot help but think it their duty to examine how things truly stand with them: whether they ever genuinely united with Christ and had the saving faith of God's elect, which works through love. For their condition is as though they had only a work of a different and lesser nature. A saving work, by its own nature and in the diligent use of means,

thrives and grows — as the whole of Scripture testifies. It is the false and incomplete working that has no root and is therefore subject to withering.

Chapter 20

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All that remains on the subject now before us is to briefly consider what the state of spiritual affections looks like as they are daily exercised and developed. We will do this by showing:

First, what is their pattern.

Second, what is their rule.

Third, what is their measure — that is, what they may attain to.

First, the pattern we ought to keep continually before our eyes — the one to which our affections should be conformed — is Jesus Christ and the affections of His holy soul. The mind is the seat of all our affections, and our constant aim and effort should be that the same mind that was in Christ Jesus be in us, as Philippians 2:5 says. To have our minds as affected with spiritual things as Christ's mind was, is the central part of our duty and grace. I do not think any person can attain any significant degree of spiritual-mindedness who is not much engaged in contemplating that same mind in Christ, as 2 Corinthians 3:18 suggests. To this end we ought to fill our minds with examples of the holy affections that were in Christ and their blessed exercise on every occasion. Scripture gives us a full picture of them, and we ought to be regularly meditating on

them. What glorious things are said about His love for God and His delight in Him — from which He also delighted to do God's will, with His law lodged at the very center of His affections, as Psalm 40:8 describes. What tenderness and compassion He had for the souls of people — indeed, for all of human kind — in all their sufferings, pains, and distresses. How all His affections were always in perfect order under the direction of His mind and Spirit. From this came His self-denial, His contempt for the world, His readiness for the cross, His willingness to do or suffer according to the will of God. If this pattern is continually before us, it will exercise a transforming power, changing us into the same image. When we find our minds prone to disorder — clinging excessively to the things of this world, agitated by uncontrolled passions, shallow and trivial in conversation, darkened or disturbed by the fumes of disordered lusts — let us call things to account and ask ourselves whether this is the frame of mind that was in Christ Jesus. This, then, is evidence that our affections are spiritually renewed and have made some progress in assimilation to heavenly things: when the soul delights in making Christ its pattern in all things.

Second, the rule of our affections in their fullest spiritual development is Scripture. Two things are addressed in relation to them.

First, their inward activity.

Second, their exercise through the outward ways and means by which they are expressed. Scripture is the complete rule for both. With respect to their inward activity, it gives us one comprehensive law or rule that governs all the others: that we love the Lord our God with all our hearts, souls, minds, and strength. The activity of all our affections toward God is required of us to the highest possible degree — that we prefer and value Him above all things in

every situation; that we cling to Him inseparably; and that nothing we ever do is uninfluenced or undirected by love for God. This perfection, as we will see shortly, is not absolutely attainable in this life — but it is set before us as what the excellence of God's nature requires, what the faculties and powers of our nature were created for, and what we ought to aim at and pursue in all things. The inescapable obligation of this rule is that we should always be sincerely striving to cling to God in all things, to prefer Him above all else, and to delight in Him as our chief good. When this disposition is habitually fixed in our minds, it will declare itself and act itself out in every duty and in every test — when other things contend for the primary place in our affections, as they do every day. If this is not our condition, we will be at a constant loss in all our ways. This is what makes us listless and disengaged in duties, careless in temptation, and forgetful of God when it is impossible to be kept from sin without a proper awareness of His holiness. In short, the absence of a prevailing love for God — kept in continual exercise — is the root of all the unfruitful religious profession that fills the world.

Second, there are outward ways and duties through which our spiritual affections are expressed. The rule for these is also Scripture. The way laid out there is the only channel through which the stream of our spiritual affections flows toward God. The graces required in Scripture are those through which our affections act; the duties it prescribes are those which our affections stir up and energize; the worship it appoints is the arena in which they are exercised. Where this rule has been abandoned, people's religious affections have grown irregular — wild and uncontrollable. All the superstitions that fill the world owe their origin primarily to

people's affections cut loose from the rule of the Word. There is nothing too foolish, absurd, or irrational to have enslaved the souls of people — nothing too horrifying or demanding to have drawn them in. And once they have taken this liberty, corrupt human minds find far greater satisfaction in it than in the regular exercise of affections according to the Word of God. Hence they will rejoice in acts of penance that are not without their hardships; in outward duties of devotion that are burdensome and costly; in everything that has an appearance of wisdom in self-imposed religion, humility, and harsh treatment of the body. Hence all their affections will be more visibly moved by images and pictures, and a tearful devotion stirred in them, than by all the motives and incentives God sets before them in His Word to draw their affections to Himself. Nothing is more erratic than the affections of people tinged with some devotion, when they abandon the rule of Scripture.

Third, there is the matter of the measure of their attainment — what through due exercise and holy diligence they may be raised to. This is not absolute perfection. "Not that I have already obtained it or have already become perfect, but I press on," as the apostle says in Philippians 3:12. But there is something attainable that those who make high claims to perfection seem to be strangers to. The state of our affections under due exercise on heavenly things, and in their assimilation to them, can be described under three things.

First, a habitual readiness to receive spiritual things whenever they are presented. The ways in which spiritual things are presented to our minds are many. They are presented directly in all the ordinances of worship; indirectly and as a natural result, through all the particular providences that affect us, through our

own thoughts and regular meditations, through the movements of the Holy Spirit when He causes us to hear a voice behind us saying, "This is the way, walk in it," through holy conversation with others, and through all kinds of circumstances. And just as the ways of presentation are many, so the times and seasons in which they are set before us encompass all — or at least exclude no season of our lives. Whatever the means of presentation and whenever the moment, if our affections have been properly developed through spiritual exercise, they will be suited to what is presented and ready to welcome it. The absence of this is what produces, on the other hand, evasions and avoidances in duty — a readiness to be distracted — all in order to keep the mind from engaging with and receiving the spiritual things it is not suited to. Therefore, with respect to the solemn way that spiritual things are presented to us — in and through the ordinances of worship — when people have a prevailing reluctance to engage with them, or when they are satisfied with outward attendance but unable to vigorously stir up the inward man to a holy and affectionate engagement with spiritual and heavenly things, it is because they are dominated by the flesh. When people can receive the fiery darts of Satan in temptation into their hearts and allow them to stay there — even nurturing and entertaining them in thoughts of the lusts they ignite — while quickly extinguishing the movements of the Spirit that stir them toward heavenly things, they are worldly-minded. When providences of significance — in afflictions, trials, and deliverances — do not draw the mind into thoughts of spiritual things and stir the affections to welcome them, people are worldly and earthly. When every lust,

corrupt inclination, or passion — anger, envy, displeasure at this or that person or thing — can pull the mind away from responding to the spiritual things presented to it, we are living in the flesh.

It is different when our affections are conformed to spiritual and heavenly things. Whenever something spiritual is presented, the mind finds a natural fit with it — like the response of a well-prepared appetite to nourishing food. Just as the full soul despises even the honeycomb, so a mind under the power of fleshly affections has a deep aversion to all spiritual sweetness. But spiritualized affections desire it, have an appetite for it, and readily receive it on all occasions — as something natural to them, as milk is to newborn infants.

Second, affections that are consistently disposed this way find a genuine taste, a pleasant relish for spiritual things. They taste in them that the Lord is gracious, as 1 Peter 2:3 says. To taste God's goodness is to experience a satisfying relish and sweetness in communion and fellowship with Him. And people whose affections are thus renewed and developed do taste a sweet savor in all spiritual things. Some of them — such as a sense of the love of Christ — are at times almost overwhelming, surpassing what they can contain, so that they are, as it were, lovesick with joy, and rejoice with a joy unspeakable and full of glory. Nor is there any spiritual thing, even those seasoned with affliction or mortification, that is not sweet to them, as Proverbs 27:7 suggests. All wholesome food — all good nourishment, even bitter herbs — is sweet to the hungry person. And when through our affections we have developed a spiritual appetite for heavenly things, however bitter any of them may be to flesh and blood in their nature or in how they come to us — as are all the teachings of the cross — they are all sweet to us, and we can

taste how gracious the Lord is in them. When the soul is filled with earthly things and love for this world, or when the spiritual appetite is lost through spiritual sickness, or corrupted by any dominant sin, heavenly things become tasteless and flat — like what Job describes as the white of an egg, in which there is no flavor. There may be a pleasing flavor given to the imagination in the preaching of the Word; there may be something like it given to the merely notional understanding — while the affections find no satisfaction in the things themselves. But for those who are spiritually minded in the degree we are describing, all spiritual things are sweet, savory, and pleasant — the affections taste them directly, as the palate tastes food.

Third, properly cultivated affections are a fitting storehouse for all the graces — and in this way the treasury of the soul. There are graces of the Spirit whose primary residence is in the understanding and the will — faith itself, for instance. And in faith all other graces are rooted — they grow from that root. Nevertheless, most of them have their principal residence in the affections. There they are kept safe and ready for exercise on all occasions. And when the affections are properly spiritual, there is nothing that tends to the growth or development of the graces — to their nurturing or reviving, which is a constant need, and for which God has made provision in His Word — that they do not readily receive, store up, keep, and preserve. Through this, the affections come to be filled with grace — with all the graces — for there is room in them for all the graces of the Spirit to dwell. And they readily cooperate with the light and direction of faith in bringing those graces to exercise. When faith perceives and determines that something must be done

or endured as a duty to God's glory, affections thus prepared do not shut down or suppress the graces stored in them — they cheerfully offer them for their proper exercise.

These are some of the things that affections conformed to heavenly things will attain to. And this is how spiritually renewed affections work: by being fixed on spiritual and heavenly things, they are progressively conformed to them, made like them, and themselves become more spiritual and heavenly.

This is not how it is with those whose affections have only had an occasional change worked in them through the means described earlier, but have not been spiritually renewed. On the contrary, such people tend to lower and diminish spiritual things — to bring heavenly things down into conformity with their affections, which, however changed, are not spiritual but fleshly. To illustrate this, we may observe the following.

First, these affections operate under the influence of ideas in the mind and understanding that do not give them a clear and accurate picture of spiritual things as they actually are. Where the affections themselves are not spiritually renewed, the mind is also fleshly and unrenewed. And such a mind cannot discern the things of God — nor can it — because they are spiritually discerned. They cannot be rightly understood in their own beauty and glory except by and in a spiritual, saving light — which the unrenewed mind simply does not have. And where they are not presented in this way, the affections cannot receive or cling to them as they should, and will never be conformed to them.

Second, in such people, those ideas are often further distorted and corrupted by fantasy and imagination. They are simply puffed up in their fleshly minds — that is, filled with vain, foolish, and proud imaginings about spiritual things, as the apostle describes in Colossians 2:18-19. And the work of imagination in a fleshly mind is to construct pictures of spiritual things that make them compatible with natural, unrenewed affections.

Third, as this progresses it produces superstition, false worship, and idolatry. For all of these are attempts to represent spiritual things in a way suited to fleshly, unrenewed affections. Hence people suppose themselves to be stirred to love, joy, fear, and delight in the things themselves — when in fact all of it is a response to that false representation of them, shaped to fit them as people of the flesh. These things have been the source of all false worship and idolatry in the Christian world.

First, the mind and affections have been changed and tinged with some devotion through the means previously discussed. In this state they will in one way or another be occupied with spiritual things and are ready to receive impressions from anything superstition is able to impose on them.

Chapter 21

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The second thing required for us to be spiritually minded — with respect to our affections — is the object on which they are focused and to which they adhere. What this is in substance — that is, what spiritual things our affections are to be set upon — has already been described under the discussion of the object of our thoughts and meditations, since they are the same. Indeed, as has been noted, the fixing of our affections on those things is the source and cause of our thoughts about them. What we will now examine is the true understanding and consideration of spiritual and heavenly things that makes them the proper, fitting object of spiritual affections and the reason for their clinging to them. For as was noted earlier, people can have false ideas about spiritual things, under which they may like and embrace them with unrenewed affections. We will therefore examine some of the considerations of heavenly things under which spiritually renewed affections genuinely and satisfyingly cling to them with delight.

First, as they encompass God in Christ — and all other things as deriving from Him and leading to Him — they have in them an infinite beauty, goodness, and loveliness that powerfully draws spiritual affections, and that alone is able to fill them, satisfy them,

and give them rest and contentment. Love is the most governing and powerful affection of the whole soul. But it cannot be fixed on any object without a perception — real or false — of an attractiveness and desirableness in that object, arising from a goodness suited to all its desires.

And our fear, so far as it is spiritual, has divine goodness as its object, as Hosea 3:5 indicates. Unless this is what draws our hearts to God and the things of God, all professed love for Him is nothing but fashioning idols according to our own imaginations, as the prophet says in Hosea 13:2. Therefore, for our affections to cling to spiritual things in the right way, three things are required.

First, that we perceive and find a goodness, a beauty, and from that an attractiveness and desirableness in them. Many people claim to love God and spiritual things but cannot say why. Why they love other things they know quite well — but why they love God they cannot explain. Many are afraid of Him and feel they ought to love Him, and so they claim to do so — even though they know they do not. They merely flatter Him with their lips while their hearts are far from Him. Some are greatly moved by the benefits and mercies they receive from Him, and suppose they love Him on that account. But this kind of love is no other than what the devil falsely accused Job of, as Job 1:8-11 shows. Some take delight in the outward forms and rites of worship, and satisfy themselves that this means they love God and spiritual things — when in fact they are only pleasing their own imaginations and fleshly minds. Many have a traditional sense that they ought to love God — they know no reason why they should not, they know it will go badly for them if they do not — and so they simply assume they do. How few are there who have that spiritual discernment and per-

ception of the divine excellencies — that vision of the goodness and love of God in Christ — by which alone they are drawn after Him and come to delight in Him. Yet this is the foundation of all sincere and genuine love for God. Two things are required for us to perceive an attractive goodness in anything and cling to it with sincere affection.

First, a real worth or excellence in the thing itself.

Second, a suitableness in it to our condition, state, and longing for rest and blessedness. The first is found in God, from what He is in Himself; the second, from what He is to us in Christ. Together these make Him the only fitting object for our affections. Under this understanding we love God for Himself, for His own sake — not exclusive of our benefit in doing so, for the desire for union and enjoyment of Him, which is our only true advantage, is inseparable from this love.

Some may not be able to say that a clear perception of these things was the original foundation and cause of their love for God, and yet they are satisfied that they do genuinely love Him with all their souls. And I say, that may be the case. God sometimes draws the skirt of His own love over the heart of a poor sinner and effectively draws it to Himself — without that person having a clear perception of these things — through a simple sense of the love it has received. So Elijah passed by Elisha and cast his mantle on him in a passing act. But there was such a communication of power in it that Elisha ran after him and would not be put off, even when Elijah said, "Go back, for what have I done to you?" as 1 Kings 19:19-20 records. When God has cast His love on a soul in this way, that soul follows after Him with all its affections. And when

God may seem at times to say, "Go back, for what have I done to you?" — its answer is, "Lord, where shall I go? I cannot leave You. My heart is given up to You and will never be taken back."

But I say to such people and to everyone: if we want refreshing evidence that our love for God is sincere — if we want it to grow and flourish, to be fervent and constant — we must exercise ourselves in contemplating the divine goodness and its suitableness to our souls in and through Jesus Christ. Nor can we cling to any spiritual things whatsoever with sincere affections except under these two considerations of them.

First, that they have a real worth or excellence in themselves.

Second, that they are suited to us and desirable for us. And it is to be mourned how many people walk aimlessly in their profession — not knowing what they are doing or where they are going.

Second, just as we must see an absolute goodness and excellence in spiritual things so that we may fix our affections on them rightly, we must also see it comparatively — in relation to all other things — which gives them priority in our affections above everything else. The test of love lies in its prevailing degree — in whether it is more or less. If we love other things — father, mother, houses, land, possessions — more than Christ, we do not love Him at all. No equality is permitted in this matter — we cannot love temporal and spiritual things equally. If we do not love Christ more than all those things, we do not love Him at all. Therefore, for our affections to cling to spiritual things in the right way, we must see in them an excellence that makes them more desirable than anything else.

With what loving eyes do people look upon their earthly pleasures and possessions; with what a tight grip do they cling to them? They see in them something lovely, something desirable and suited to their affections. Whatever people may claim, if they do not see a greater goodness in spiritual things — something more lovely and more desirable — they do not love those things rightly. It is earthly things that hold the rule over their affections. The psalmist prizes Jerusalem above his highest joy, as Psalm 137:6 says. Another declares that the law of God's mouth was better to him than thousands of gold and silver, as Psalm 119:72 says. "More desirable are the statutes of the Lord than gold, yes, than much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and the drippings of the honeycomb," as Psalm 19:10 says. "For wisdom is better than jewels; and all desirable things cannot compare with her," as Proverbs 8:11 says. This is the only stable foundation for all divine affections: a spiritual perception and judgment of a goodness and excellence in spiritual things incomparably greater than anything in the most desirable things of this world. If the affections of many who make high claims to such love were weighed in this balance, I fear they would be found light and lacking. Nevertheless, it is the duty of those who would not be deceived on this matter — which is of eternal importance — to examine what goodness and excellence they see in spiritual things, what they are actually looking for in them, and on what basis they genuinely value and esteem them above all things in this world. Let no one deceive themselves with empty words and claims while their regard for present earthly enjoyments clearly commands all their affections, care, diligence, and industry — so that a perceptive observer can almost feel them turning toward self while they remain cold, formal, and negligent

toward spiritual things. Of such people we must ask: how does the love of God dwell in them? Even more so when we see people giving not only all their time and strength and the energy of their spirits, but also sacrificing their consciences for the sake of status, honor, advancement, wealth, and ease in the world — and who know in their own hearts that they perform religious duties with an eye to earthly advantages — I cannot see how it is possible for them to perceive and appreciate a goodness and excellence in spiritual things above all others.

A further consideration is required: that all spiritual things proceed from and resolve into an infinite fountain of goodness — such that our affections can come to absolute rest and contentment, and find full and certain satisfaction in them. It is otherwise with all earthly things. People very much want them to be the kind of things that could give complete rest and satisfaction to all their affections. But every one of them — and all of them together — cannot compose the mind in rest and peace for even an hour. They sometimes produce a surge of feeling and seem for a time to have filled the whole soul, leaving it no opportunity to notice their emptiness and vanity. But a little calm reflection shows that they are nothing more than a diversion on a journey or in labor — they are not rest. Hence they are called broken cisterns that will hold no water. Let a person prize earthly things at the highest value a rational creature can possibly be brought to place on them — and there have been extraordinary examples of this. Let him possess them in abundance beyond anything ever enjoyed in this world, or his imagination could previously conceive. Let him be completely assured of their most undisturbed and lasting enjoyment, as far as his own nature and their nature allows. He would still not dare to

claim that all his affections were filled and satisfied by them, or that they gave him perfect rest and peace. If he did make such a claim, the workings of his own mind every day would convict him of falsehood and self-deception.

But all spiritual things derive from and lead to what is infinite — and therefore they are able to fill all our affections and give them full satisfaction in rest and peace. They all lead us to the fountain of living water, the eternal spring of goodness and blessedness.

I do not say that our affections reach this full rest and satisfaction in this life. But where they fall short of it, the deficiency does not lie in the things themselves being unable to give this rest and satisfaction — as is true of everything in the world. It lies in the weakness of our affections themselves, which are only partially renewed and cannot yet take in the full measure of divine goodness that they will receive in another world. But while we are here, the more we receive spiritual things into our minds and souls, and the more firmly we adhere to them, the closer we draw to our rest and our center.

Second, spiritual things are to be considered as they are filled with divine wisdom. I speak not of God Himself, whose essential wisdom is one of the most lovely excellencies of His holy nature, but of all the effects of His will and grace through Jesus Christ. I mean all spiritual truths, all spiritual and heavenly things through which God reveals and communicates Himself to the souls of people, and all the ways and means of our approach to Him in faith and obedience through Christ Jesus. All these are filled with divine wisdom, as 1 Corinthians 2:7, Ephesians 3:10, and Ephesians 1:8-9 show. Now wisdom in itself, and in all its effects, draws rational af-

fections to itself. Most people are brutish in their affections and the use of them — pouring them out for the most part on what is fleshly, sensual, and base. But where affections are at all brought under the guidance of reason, nothing is more attractive to them, more suited to them, or more delightful than what has at least the appearance of wisdom. A wise and good person commands the affections of others, unless it is in their interest to hate and oppose him — which is commonly the case. And where there is true wisdom in the conduct of public affairs, sober people cannot help but approve of it, admire it, and delight in it — while thoughtful people mourn its loss, now that craftiness, falsehood, treachery, and every kind of villainy have driven it from the world. So divine wisdom draws gracious spiritual affections to itself. The psalmist expresses his wonder and delight in the works of God because He made them all in wisdom, as Psalm 104:24 says. The marks of divine wisdom on those works, the wisdom with which they are filled, draw the souls of people into a delightful contemplation of them. But all the treasures, all the glory, of this wisdom are stored up and displayed in the great spiritual things of the Gospel — in the mystery of God in Christ and the dispensation of His grace and goodness to us through Him. The contemplation of this fills believers' souls with holy wonder and delight, and they cling to these things with all their affections. When we see that light is in them — and all other things are in darkness — that wisdom is in them alone, and all other things are filled with vanity and folly, then our souls are truly moved by them and rejoice in them with a joy unspeakable and full of glory.

To most people, this wisdom of God is foolishness. It was so in former times, as the apostle testifies in 1 Corinthians 1, and so it continues to be. Therefore the mystery of the Gospel is despised by them — they can see neither form nor beauty in it for which it should be desired. Nor will any person ever have sincere spiritual affections for spiritual things who has not a spiritual view of the wisdom of God in them.

It is this that draws our souls through holy wonder into unspeakable delight. And the reason why people so generally fall away from any love for the Gospel and lose all satisfaction in its mystery is that they are unable to discern the infinite wisdom that is its source, life, and soul. When our minds are raised to wonder at this wisdom in divine revelation, then our affections will cling to the things that are revealed.

Third, the activity of our affections in their adherence to spiritual things perfects our present condition. What most degrades human nature — what brings it closest to brutishness, and in some ways makes it more vile than even the animal world — is the surrender of the affections to what is sensual, unclean, base, and unworthy of its nobler nature. Hence people are said to debase themselves to hell, as Isaiah 57:9 indicates. And their affections become vile — so much so that being under their power is an effect of avenging justice punishing people for the worst sins, as Romans 1:26 shows. Nothing is more degrading, nothing more contemptible, nothing more like beasts in its baseness or like hell in its punishment than the condition of those who have enslaved their nature to brutal, sensual affections. I say this: vile affections fixed on and clinging to sensual objects degrade human nature and corrupt and enslave all its nobler faculties — even the very con-

sciences and minds of such people are defiled by them. If you observe a person whose affections are set excessively on anything in this world, you can easily see how he slips from his true worth and cheapens himself in it.

But fixing spiritual affections on spiritual objects perfects our present state and condition. Not that we can attain perfection by it, but that in doing so our souls are on a path toward perfection. This may be stated plainly: just as vile affections fixed on and energetically pursuing carnal and sensual things degrade our nature below its rational constitution and cause it to sink into brutishness, so spiritual affections fixed on and clinging to spiritual and heavenly things elevate our nature above its merely natural capacity, moving it toward the state of angels and of the spirits of just people made perfect. And just as brutish affections, when given free rein and pursued with delight and greed, darken the mind and disturb all the rational powers of the soul — "drunkenness and wine take away the heart," as the prophet says, and wickedness alters the understanding — so holy affections fixed on spiritual things elevate, lift, and enlighten the mind with true wisdom and understanding. "For the fear of the Lord is wisdom, and to depart from evil is understanding." And again: just as the power of vile affections fills the soul and conscience with turmoil, disorder, fear, and shame — so that the minds, thoughts, and consciences of those under their power become a kind of hell of confusion and trouble — so spiritual affections rightly exercised on their proper objects keep all things in order throughout the whole soul. They are life and peace. All things are quiet and secure in the mind, and there is order and peace throughout the whole soul — in all its faculties and all their operations — while the affections are in a prevailing and proper

way fixed on the things that are above. Hence many people, after much turmoil in the world and after trying every means to find rest and satisfaction there, have renounced all concern with earthly things and devoted themselves entirely to the contemplation of heavenly ones. Many of them, I acknowledge, were mistaken in the practical forms of their devotion — having had various superstitions imposed on their minds by the cleverness of others. But they were not mistaken in the principle: that tranquility of mind is attainable only by setting our affections on things above. As James 4:1 asks: "What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members?" Where do all the disorders in your minds come from — all the vexations and restlessness, all the passions that sometimes break out in unseemly quarreling? Do they not come from this? The question is directed to you and to your own consciences: from your lusts — that is, the disordered affections that are in constant turmoil within you. Search yourselves and you will quickly see where all your troubles and restlessness come from. Your lusts — your corrupt and disordered affections — are at war inside you, constantly pulling you toward earthly and sensual things. Hence many people are most at peace when they are busy in the world, worst when they are at home among their families — but never in such confusion as when they are forced to go inside themselves.

The proper exercise of our affections on heavenly things has an entirely different tendency and effect. It so unites the mind to them — so brings them into the mind and gives them such a settled presence there — that all the mind's powers and faculties are on a path toward their perfection, as 2 Corinthians 7:1 suggests. True wisdom and understanding with soundness of judgment in eternal

things, holiness in the affections themselves, freedom in the will, power in the heart, and peace in the conscience — all these in their measure follow from this. Whatever tastes we may have of these things, whatever temporary experience we have of them, they will not flourish in us and will not remain with us with any consistency unless we are spiritually minded in this way.

Fourth, our eternal blessedness consists in the full future enjoyment of what is now the present object of our spiritual affections. All people who are convinced of a future eternal state desire, when they depart from this life, to enter into blessedness and glory. Yet they know nothing at all about what that blessedness actually is — even in general terms — and even if they did, they would not know how to desire it rightly. For heaven and blessedness is nothing other than the full enjoyment of what we are here to love and delight in above all else — what is the object of our spiritually renewed affections. Those who have no share in this have no part in or concern with heaven. But this is what gives life to the affections of believers. They know that their eternal blessedness consists in the enjoyment of God in Christ. How this will be their happiness and glory, how it will give them an everlasting, overflowing satisfaction and rest — they understand through the first fruits of it that they receive here. And this is the ultimate object of their affections in this world — and they reach out to all other spiritual things in order to attain it. The more their affections are fixed on these things, the more they are kept in that proper exercise, the closer they draw to this blessed state. When their minds are possessed by this conviction — confirmed in them by daily experience of the sweetness, rest, and satisfaction they find in clinging to God with fervent love and delight — it will be in

vain for any other object to rise in competition and try to draw them away. The more we love God, the more like Him we are, and the closer we are to the enjoyment of Him.

Now the great means of retaining a Sense of the Love of God, which is the only spring of Life and Peace to our Souls, is this Grace and Duty of being Spiritually-Minded. This is evident from the very nature of the Duty. For

(1) It is the Souls preserving of it self in a Frame meet to receive and retain this sense of Gods Love. What other way can there be on our part, but that our Minds which are so to receive it and retain it, are Spiritual and Heavenly, always prepared for that holy Converse and Communion with himself, which he is pleased to grant us through Jesus Christ. And,

(2) It will fix our Thoughts and Affections upon the Grace and Love of God, communicating such an inestimable Mercy to us, as is a Sense of his Love, which is the only means for the Preservation of a Relish of it in our Hearts. He who is in this Frame of Mind, will remember, call over, and ruminate upon all such gracious Pledges of divine Favor; as David is often remembring and calling over what he received in such Places, as in the Land of the Hermonites, and at the Hill Missar, Psal. 42. This is the great way whereby this Treasure may be preserved.

(3) A Person so minded, and he alone, will have a due Valuation of such Intimations and Pledges of Divine Love. Those who are full of other things, whose Affections cleave to them, do never esteem Heavenly Mercies and Priviledges, as they ought. The full Soul loaths the Honey-Comb. And God is well pleased, when an high Valuation is put upon his kindness; as he is greatly pro-

voked by the contrary Frame; which indeed nothing but infinite Patience could bear withal. It is an high Provocation of God, when men are regardless of, and unthankful for Outward temporal Mercies; when they receive them and use them as if they were their own, that they were Lords of them, at least, that they are due to them. Much more is he provoked with our regardlesness of the least of those Mercies, which are the peculiar purchase of the Blood of his Son, and the Effects of his Eternal Love and Grace. He alone who is spiritually-Minded, valus, prizs, and layes up these ininestimable Jewels in a due manner.

(4) Such Persons only know how to use and improve all Communications of a sense of Divine Love. These things are not granted to us to lye by us, without any use of them. They are gratious Provisions wherewith we are furnished to enable us to all other Duties, Conflicts, and Tryals. On all Occasions are they to be called over for our Spiritual Relief and Encouragement. Hereby are they safely retained. For in the due improvement of them, they grow more bright in our Minds every day, and are ready for use, in which posture they are safely preserved. But these things will yet be farther manifest in the Instances that ensue.

(2) This Frame of Mind casts out all Principles, and Causes of Trouble and Disquietment, which are inconsistent with Life and Peace. There are in us by nature Principles of Contrariety and Opposition to Spiritual Life and Peace, with sundry things, whose Abode and Prevalency in us, is inconsistent with them. I shall give only one or two Instances hereof.

(1) It will cast out all Filthiness and Superfluity of naughtiness from our Minds. Without this, we can receive no Benefit by the means of Grace, nor perform any Duty in a right manner, Jam.

1:27. This is that which stands in direct immediate Opposition and Contrariety to our being spiritually Minded, so as they can have no Consistency in the same Person. And they Expel on another like heat and Cold. And where there is this Filthyness and Superfluity of Naughtiness, there is neither Life nor Peace. Unclean Lusts of the Flesh, or of the Spirit, working, tumultuating, acting themselves in the Minds of Men, will not suffer either the Life of Holiness to flourish in them, or any solid Peace to abide with them. The Soul is weakned by them as to all Spiritual Actings, and made like a troubled Sea that cannot rest, whose Waters cast up mire and dirt. Where they are absolutely predominant, there is an Hell within, of Darkness, Confusion and Enmity against God, preparing men for an Hell of Punishment without to Eternity. And according as they remain, or have any Prevalency in us, so are Spiritual Life and Peace impaired and obstructed by them. Now the very nature of this Grace and its universal Exercise is suited to the casting out of all the Relicks of this Filthiness and Supersfluity of Naughtiness. It brings in a Principle into the Mind directly contrary to that from whence they do proceed. All the Actings of it, which we have described, lie in direct tendency to the Extirpation of these Causes of Filthiness which ruine Life and Peace; nor will they by any other way be cast out. If the Mind be not Spiritual, it will be carnal; if it mind not Things above, it will not fix it self inordinately on things below.

(2) That Disorder which is by nature in the Affections and Passions of the Mind, which is directly opposite to spiritual Life and Peace, is cast out, or cured hereby. It is a blessed Promise of the times of the New Testament, of the Kingdom and Rule of Christ, that through the Efficacy of Gospel Grace, The Lion shall

lye down with the Lamb, and the Leopard with the Kid, Isaiah 11:6. Persons of the most intemperate and outragious Passions, shall be made meek and lovely. Where this is not in some measure effected, according to the Degrees of the Prevalency of such Passions in us, we have not been made Partakers of Evangelical Grace. It were an easy Task to demonstrate how the Disorder of our Affections and Passions is destructive of Spiritual Life and Peace. The Contrariety that is in them, and Contradiction to one another, their Violence, Impetuousness, and Restlesness, their readiness to receive and take in Provocations on all Occasions, and frequently on none at all, but what Imagination presents to them, are sufficient Evidences hereof. Can we think that Life and Peace do inhabit that Soul, wherein Anger, Wrath, Envy, Excess in Love to earthly things, no dwell? and on all Occasions exert themselves; there, where there is a continual Tumult, Fighting and Rebellion, as there is where the Passions of the Mind are not under the Conduct of Reason, nor of Grace?

The Nature and principal Effect of this spiritual Mindedness, is to bring all the Affections and Passions of our Minds into that holy Order wherein they were created. This was that uprightness wherein God made us; namely the whole blessed Order of all the Powers, Faculties, and Affections of our Souls, in all their Operations, in order to our living to God. And this is restored to us by this Grace, this Duty of being Spiritually Minded. And wherein it falls short of that Perfection which we had originally; (for the remainders of that Disorder which befell us by Sin, will still in part continue) it is recompenced by the Actings of that new Principle of Gospel Grace which is exercised in it. For every Act of of our Affections towards God, in the Power of Grace, exceeds, and is of

another nature, above that we could do, or attain to, in the State of nature uncorrupted. Hereby are Life and Peace brought into our Souls, and preserved in them.

(3) It is that whereby our Hearts and Minds are taken off from the World, and all inordinate Love thereunto. Where this is in prevalent Degree, there is neither Life, nor Peace. And every excess in it, both weakens Spiritual Life, and disturbs, yea, destroys all solid Spiritual Peace. I have occasionally spoken to it before, as also the way whereby our minding of the things that are above in a due manner, does deliver and preserve our Souls from the Snares of it. And if we diligently examine our selves, we shall find, that in our inordinate Affections, and cleaving to these things, the principal Causes why we thrive no more in the power of Spiritual Life, and whence we meet with so many Disquietments and Dejections of Spirit to the disturbance of our Prace and Rest in God, is from hence. For there is no Grace which is not impaired by it in its nature, or not obstructed by it in its Exercise. Wherefore, to be Spiritually Minded is Life and Peace, because it subdues and expells that inordinate Love to present things, which is destructive of them both, and inconsistent with them.

(4) It preserves the Mind in a due and holy Frame in the Performance of all other Duties. This also is indispensibly required, to the Preservation of Life and Peace, especially to the improvement of them. They will not abide much less thrive and flourish in any Persons who are negligent in holy Duties, or do not perform them in a due manner. And there are four things which impede or hinder us from such an attendance to Holy Duties, as may be advantagious to our Souls; against all which we have relief by being Spiritually Minded.

(1) Distractions.

(2) Despondencies.

(3) Weariness.

(4) Unreadiness of Grace for Exercise.

(1) Distraction of Mind and Thoughts, has this evil Effect, which many complain of, few take the right way of Deliverance from. For this Evil will not be cured by attendance to any particular Directions, without a change of the whole Frame of our Minds. Nothing can give us Relief herein, but a prevalent Delight in being exercised about things Spiritual and Heavenly. For hence arise all our Distractions; the want of fixing our minds on Spiritual things with Delight, makes them obnoxious to be diverted from them on all occasions, yea to seek occasions for such Diversions. It is this frame alone, namely, of Spiritual Mindedness, that will give us this Delight. For thereby the Soul is transformed into the likness of Spiritual things; so as that they are suited to it, and pleasant to our Affections. The mind and the things themselves are thereby so fitted to each other, that on every occasion they are ready for mutual Embraces, and not easily drawn off by any cause or means Of the Distractions so complained of, yea, they will all be prevented hereby.

(2) Despondencys in Duties arise from the frequent Incursions of the Guilt of Sin. The remembrance hereof frequently sollicites the Minds of Persons in their first entrances into Duty, unless they are under especial actings of Grace, stirring them up to earnestness and fervency in what they undertake. At other seasons it renders men Lifeless and Heartless, so as that they know not whether they had best Pray or no, when Duty and Opportunity call them

thereunto. To be Spiritually Minded. we have manifested in many Instances is the great Preservative against these disheartening incursions of sin. It is the Souls watch and guard against them, whence ever they arise or proceed. No lust or corruption can be Prevalent in a Spiritual mind. And this is the Principal cause of such Incursions of Sin, as affect the Soul with a disheartening sense of Guilt. No Affections can abide in any sinful Disorder, where the Mind is so affected. This also gives sin an entrance to a distracting sense of Guilt. But the fole Cure hereof lyes in this Grace and Duty. The like may be said of all other ways, means, and Occasions of such Incursions of Sin.

(3) Weariness in, and of Spiritual Duties, abate their tendency to the Improvement of Life and Peace in us. This Evil ariss from the same Cause with that or Distraction before mentioned. And it is oftentimes encreased by the Weakness and Indispositions of the Flesh, or of the outward man. Sometimes the Spirit is willing, but through the weakness of the Flesh, it is disappointed. The principal cure hereof lyes in that Delight which spiritual Mindedness gives to the Soul in Spiritual things. For where there is constant Delight in any thing, there will be no weariness, at least, not such as shall hinder any from cleaving firmly to the things wherein he does delight. Whil'st therefore we are exercised in a delight in Spiritual things, weariness cannot prevalently assault the Mind. And it is the only Relief against that Weariness which proceeds from the Indispositions of the outward man. For as it will preserve the Mind from attending too much to their Solicitations, crying spare your self, by filling and possessing the Thoughts with other things; so it will offer an holy Violence to the Complaints of the Flesh, silencing them with a sense of, and delight in holy Duties-

(4) The Unreadiness of Grace for its due and proper Excercise, is another thing which defeats us of the Benefit of holy Duties. The Seasons of them are come, sense of Duty carries men to an Attendance to them, and the performance of them. But when they should enter upon them, those Graces of Faith, Love, Fear, and Delight, wherein the Soul and Being of them do consist, are out of the way, unready for a due Exercise; so as that men take up and satisfy themselves with the meer outward Performance of them The Heart and Mind have been taken up with other things, due Preparation has been wanting; men come to them with reaking Thoughts of earthly Occasions; and it is no easy matter in, or immediately out of, such a Frame, to stir up Grace to a due Exercise. But herein lys the very Life of being Spiritually Minded. The nature of it consists in the keeping and preserving all Grace in a Readiness for its Exercise as our Occasions require.

And this is an effectual way whereby this Grace come to be Life and Peace. For they cannot be attained, they cannot be preserved, without such a constancy and Spirituality in all holy Duties, as we shall never arive at, unless we are Spiritually Minded.

Lastly; this frame of mind brings the Soul to, and keeps it at its nearest approaches, to Heaven and Blessedness, wherein lye the eternal springs of life and Peace. According to the Degrees of this Grace in us, such are those of our approaches to God. Nearness to him, gives us our initial conformity to him, by the Renovation of his Image in us, as our Presence with him, will give us Perfection therein; for when we see him we shall be like to him. He therefore alone as he is in Christ being the fountain of Life and Peace, by our drawing nigh to him, and by our Likeness of him, will they thrive and flourish in our Souls.

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