

THE TOUCHSTONE OF SINCERITY

JOHN FLAVEL



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ABOUT THIS BOOK



A searching practical treatise expositing Revelation 3:17–18, the Lord's rebuke to the Laodicean church. Flavel probes the dangerous self-deception of **formal religion** — the gap between outward profession and inward grace — with pastoral precision. He enumerates **signs of true grace** against **symptoms of hypocrisy**, calling readers to rigorous self-examination before God. Written in a time of political crisis, the work urges sinners to test their hearts while the window of repentance remains open.



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TITLE PAGE



Signs of grace, and symptoms of hypocrisy; opened in a practical treatise upon Revelation 3:17-18.

Being the second part of *The Saint Indeed*.

By John Flavel, Minister of Christ. Devon.

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THE EPISTLE TO THE READER



Reader,

Among the difficulties and severities of true religion, the faithful searching, and diligent keeping of our hearts are found in the first and highest rank of difficulties; these two take up the main work of a Christian between them, this is the labor, this is the work. I had hopes that these essays for the searching of the heart might much sooner have followed my former for keeping the heart: but providence has reserved it for the fittest season.

It comes to your hand, Reader, in a day of straits and fears, a dark and gloomy season, when the nations about us are made drunk with their own blood, and filled with [illegible] of astonishment; in a day when [illegible] ready to pass to us, and a storm seems to be rising in the fears of many, and threatening the Protestant interest in these reformed nations. Statesmen very considerable for piety and learning from that scripture, Revelation 13:3, 'The deadly wound (namely, that given the beast by the Reformation) was healed,' have concluded that Popery will once more overrun the reformed nations; and one of great renown in all the churches of Christ, foretelling this furious (but short) storm,

comforts the people of God with this, that it is likely to fall heaviest upon the worshippers in the outward court, namely, the formal professors of the times.

Oh! How much is every man now concerned to have his estate and condition well cleared, and to give all diligence to make his calling and election sure!

It should both amaze and grieve a pious mind, to see how some ingenious persons can sit with unwearied patience and pleasure racking their brains upon some dry school problem, or some nice mathematical point; while no reasons or persuasions can prevail with them to spend one serious hour in the search and study of their own hearts.

It was the saying of the great Cicero, 'I would give all the wealth in the world that I might wholly live in my studies, and have nothing to hinder me.' What a brave offer had that been, if heaven and the clearing of a title to it had been the subject-matter of those studies! Another said, 'Believe me, it were a sweet death to die in the study of the mathematical arts.' And I should be apt to believe it too, did I not know that eternal judgment immediately follows death; and that they who stand at the door of eternity have higher matters to mind than mathematical niceties. To discern the harmonies and proportions in nature is pleasant, but to discern the harmony and proportion of the signs of grace laid down in the Word, with the works of grace wrought in our souls, is a far more pleasant and necessary employment; and to be extinguished in such a work as this, were a lovely death indeed. Blessed is that servant, whom his Lord when he comes shall find so doing.

My friends, a day of trouble is near, a dying hour approaches us, and when our eye-strings, and heart-strings are breaking, when we are taking the last grasp of Christ and the promises, you will then know to what purpose those hours spent in such work as this were. Search yourselves, indeed search yourselves before the decree brings forth, as that text may be read (Zephaniah 2:1-2). Enter into your chamber, Christian, and shut your door; apply yourself closely to this employment you are here directed to; and however times shall govern, whether it be fair or foul weather abroad, you shall never repent such an expense of your time. A devout soul once said, 'I never found rest anywhere except in my book and my closet.' I am never better than when I am at my book, or on my knees.

This may seem but a dull melancholy life to the brisk and airy spirits of these times; but let us be content with it as it is, and leave them (if we cannot have their company) to their sportiveness and frolics, never once grudging them their short and dearly bought pleasures. Assurance that sin is pardoned and Christ is ours; with the unspeakable joys that are inseparably connected therewith, is that white stone, and new name, which none knows but he that receives it; for no words can possibly signify to another what that soul tastes and feels in such an hour as that is.

And be not discouraged at the difficulty of obtaining it; this white stone is no philosopher's stone, which no man could ever say he had in his own hand, for many a Christian has really found it in waiting upon the Lord by prayer, and diligently searching the Scriptures and his own heart.

Reader, the time will come when they that scoff at the serious diligence of the saints, and make many a pleasant jest upon the most solemn and awful things in religion, will tremble when they shall hear the midnight-cry, 'Behold the Bridegroom comes'; and see the lamps of all vain and formal professors expire, and none admitted into the marriage, but such whose lamps are furnished with oil, that is, such whose professions and duties are enlivened and maintained by vital springs and principles of real grace within them.

It is a very remarkable story that Melchior Adams records in the life of Gobelinus, that a little before his time there was a play set forth at Eisenach in Germany, of the wise and foolish virgins, wherein the Virgin Mary, who was one of the five saints that represented the wise virgins, was brought in with the rest, telling the foolish virgins that cried to her for oil, that it was too late; and then others representing the foolish virgins fell a weeping and making most bitter lamentations.

Hereat Prince Frederick (who was one of the spectators) greatly amazed, cried out, 'What is our faith worth, and to what purpose are all our good works, if neither Mary, nor any other saint can help us!' And such was his consternation, that it threw him into a sore and violent disease, which ended in an apoplexy, of which he died about four days after.

If the representation of these things in a play ended the life of so great a man so tragically; oh, think with yourself, Reader, what will the effects of the Lord's real appearance in the clouds of heaven, and the mourning and wailing of the tribes of the earth in that day be? Think, I say, and think again, and again, what the dis-

mal effects of such a sight and sound will be upon all that neglect serious preparation themselves, and scoff at them that do prepare to meet the Lord.

The design of this manual is to bring every man's gold to the touchstone and fire, that is, every man's grace to the trial of the word, that thereby we may know what we are, what we have, and what we must expect and trust to at the Lord's coming. I claim no gift of discerning spirits. Such an extraordinary gift there once was in the church, and very necessary for those times (wherein Satan was so busy, and the canon of Scripture not completed) which the Apostle calls the gift of discerning spirits (1 Corinthians 12:10); and some are of opinion that by virtue of this gift, Peter discerned the hypocrisy of Ananias and Sapphira, but whatever that gift was, it has utterly ceased now; no man can claim it, but the ordinary aids and assistances of the Spirit are with us still, and the living oracles are among us still, to them we may freely go for resolution of all doubts, and decision of perplexed cases: and thus we may discern our own spirits, though we lack the extraordinary gift of discerning other men's spirits.

I have little to say of this treatise in your hands, more than that it is well aimed, and well designed, however it be managed: the ear tries words, as the mouth tastes meat; these things will relish according to the palates it meets with.

It is not the pleasing, but profiting of men that I have labored for herein. I know of nothing in it that is likely to wound the upright, or slightly heal the hypocrite, by crying peace, peace, when there is no peace. Scripture light has been my guide, and with that thread in my hand, I have followed the search of hypocrisy through the labyrinths of the heart. Some assistance I hope I have had also

from experience; for Scripture and experience are such relatives, and the tie between them so discernible, as nothing in nature can be more so. What we feel in our hearts, we might have read in the Scriptures before ever we felt it.

That the blessing of God may go forth with it, and accompany it to your soul, Reader, is the heart's desire and prayer of

Your and the church's servant in Christ, John Flavel.

CHAPTER 1



Although the Revelation is a compendium of intricate visions and obscure prophecies, containing almost as many mysteries as words, yet that cloud overshadows the prophetical part only; which begins where this chapter (with the doctrinal part) ends: here the waters are found no deeper than in other places of Scripture; but if we go a little farther they become an overflowing flood. Hitherto we touch ground, but a step farther delivers us into the deeps, which are above the head of the tallest Christians: here the Spirit speaks doctrinally, and clearly; but in the following chapters mystically, and in great obscurity.

Seven epistles are found in this doctrinal part, immediately dictated from heaven, and sent by John to the seven churches of Asia, to instruct, correct, encourage, and confirm them, as their several cases required.

My text falls in the last epistle, sent to the church of Laodicea; the worst, and most degenerate of all the rest. The best had their defects, and infirmities; but this labored under the most dangerous disease of all. The fairest face of the seven had some spots, but a dangerous disease seems to have invaded the very heart of this.

Not that all were equally guilty, but the greatest part (from which the whole is named) were lukewarm professors; who had a name to live, but were dead, who being never thoroughly engaged in religion, easily embraced that principle of the Gnostics which made it a matter of indifference to own or deny Christ in time of persecution. The most convenient doctrine that some professors are acquainted with. This lukewarm temper Christ hated; he was sick of them, and loathed their indifference: 'I wish,' said he (verse 16), 'you were either cold or hot'; an expression of the same force as that in 1 Kings 18:21, 'How long halt you between two opinions?' And is manifestly translated from the qualities of water, which is either cold, or hot; or lukewarm, a middle temper between both, and more nauseous to the stomach than either of the former. Cold is the complexion and natural temper of those that are wholly alienated and estranged from Christ and religion. Hot is the gracious temper of those that know and love Jesus Christ in an excellent degree. Lukewarm, or tepid, is the temper of those who have too much religion to be esteemed carnal, and too little to be truly spiritual; a generation that is too politic to venture much, and yet so foolish as to lose all: they are loath to forsake truth wholly, and more loath to follow it too closely: the form of religion they embrace as an honor, the power of it they judge a burden.

This is that temper which the Lord hates; and this was the disease of Laodicea, which Christ the great and only heart-anatomist and soul-physician discovers in verse 17, and prescribes a cure for it in verse 18. So that the words resolve themselves into two parts: first, a faithful discovery; secondly, a proper remedy, of the disease of Laodicea.

First, their disease is faithfully discovered to them, both in its symptoms, cause, and aggravation.

First, its symptom: an unconcerned, indifferent, regardless spirit in matters of religion; neither hot, nor cold; the true temper of formal professors, who never engaged themselves thoroughly and heartily in the ways of God, but can take, or leave, as times govern, and worldly interest comes to be concerned.

Secondly, its cause and root, which is the defect and want of the truth, and power of inward grace; noted in these expressions: 'You are wretched, and miserable, poor, blind, and naked'; that is, you are destitute of a real principle, a solid work of grace; these five epithets do all point at one and the same thing; namely, the defectiveness and rottenness of their foundation. The two first, wretched and miserable, are more general, concluding them in a sad condition, a very sinful and lamentable estate: the three last, poor, blind, and naked, are more particular, pointing at those grand defects, and flaws in the foundation, which made their condition so wretched and miserable.

First, poor, that is, void of righteousness, and true holiness before God; these are the true riches of Christians, and whoever lacks them is poor, and miserable; however much he may have in gifts of the mind, or treasures of the earth.

Secondly, blind, that is, without spiritual illumination, and so knowing neither their disease, nor their remedy; the evil of sin, or necessity of Christ.

Thirdly, naked, without Christ, and his righteousness. Sin is the soul's shame and nakedness. Christ's pure and perfect righteousness is its covering, or garment: this they lacked, however

richly their bodies were adorned. These were Laodiceans, that is, a just, righteous people; (according to the notion of that word) whose garments with which they covered themselves, were made of the home-spun thread of their own righteousness.

Thirdly, the disease of Laodicea is here opened to them in its aggravations. 'You say I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; but do not know,' etc.

To be really graceless, and Christless is a miserable condition; but to be so, and yet be confidently persuaded of the contrary, is more miserable: to have the very symptoms of death upon us, and yet tell those that pity us that we are as well as they, is lamentable indeed.

O the efficacy of a spiritual delusion! This was their disease, gracelessness, and the aggravation of it was their senselessness.

Secondly, we have a proper remedy prescribed (verse 18): 'I counsel you to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that you may be rich,' etc. In which we have to consider, first, what is prescribed for the cure; secondly, where it is to be had; thirdly, how to be obtained.

First, what are the remedies prescribed, and they are three: gold, white raiment, and eye-salve. First, gold: the cure of poverty; indeed, gold tried in the fire, that is, grace that has been variously proved already, and the more it is proved, the more its truth will be conspicuous. The next is white raiment, the remedy against nakedness. And lastly, eye-salve, the effectual cure of blindness. Under these choice metaphors, more choice and excellent things are shadowed, even spiritual graces, real holiness, more precious than gold. Christ's imputed righteousness, the richest garment in all the

wardrobe of heaven; and spiritual illumination, the most excellent eye-salve that ever was or can be applied to the mental eye or understanding of man in this world.

Secondly, where these precious remedies may be had, and you find Christ has the monopoly of them all; 'of me,' says Christ in the text; he is the repository of all graces. Angels, ministers, ordinances, cannot furnish you with them, without Christ.

Thirdly, how they may be obtained from him; 'buy of me': on this place Estius and others build their doctrine of merit; which is to build a superstructure of hay and stubble upon a foundation of gold. The very language of the text itself destroys such conceits: for what have they that are poor, wretched, miserable, and want all things, to give as a price, or by way of merit, for those inestimable treasures of grace? 'Buying,' therefore, in this place, can signify or mean no more than the acquisition, coming, or obtaining these things from Jesus Christ in the use of such means and methods as he has appointed, and in the use of these we merit grace no more than the patient merits of his physician by coming to him and carefully following his prescriptions in the use of such medicines as he freely gives him: and that place, Isaiah 55:1 (from which this phrase seems to be borrowed) fully clears it: 'He that has no money, let him come and buy wine, and milk, without money and without price.'

From all which, these three observations fairly offer themselves to us.

Doctrine 1: That many professors of religion are under very great and dangerous mistakes in their profession.

Doctrine 2: That true grace is exceeding precious, and greatly enriches the soul that possesses it.

Doctrine 3: That only that is to be accounted true grace which is able to endure all those trials appointed, or permitted for the discovery of it.

The first doctrine naturally rises out of the scope of the text, which is to awaken and convince unsound professors.

The second from the use the Holy Ghost makes of the best and choicest things in nature, to shadow forth the inestimable worth and preciousness of grace.

And the third, from that particular, and most significant metaphor of gold tried in the fire; by which I here understand, a real and solid work of grace, evidencing itself to be so, in all the proofs and trials that are made of it; for whatever is probational to grace, and puts its soundness and sincerity to the test, is to it what fire is to gold. In this sense it is used in Scripture, Psalm 66:10: 'You have tried us as silver is tried'; and Zechariah 13:9: 'I will bring the third part through the fire and will refine them as silver is refined, and try them as gold is tried.' So that whatever it is which examines and tries grace, whether it be sound and sincere, that is the fire Christ here speaks of; and such grace as abides these trials, is the gold here intended.

CHAPTER 2



SECTION 1.

All flattery is dangerous, self-flattery is more dangerous, but self-flattery in the business of salvation is the most dangerous of all.

To pretend to the good we know we have not is gross hypocrisy; to imagine and persuade ourselves of the good we have not, though we think we have it, is formal hypocrisy; and this was the case of those self-deceivers in the text.

My design in this discourse is not to shake the well-built hopes of any man, or beget groundless jealousies; but to discover the real dangerous flaws in the foundation of many men's hopes for heaven: everything is as its foundation is, and a weak foundation will fail the work built on it — that failing, all fails.

There is a twofold self-suspicion or fear in God's own people. The one is a fearful caution, awaking the soul to the use of preventive means for avoiding danger; this is laudable. The other is a groundless suspicion of reigning hypocrisy, tending only to de-

spondency; this is culpable: by the former the soul is guarded against danger, by the latter it is betrayed into needless trouble, and debarred from peace.

Good men have sometimes more fear than they ought, and wicked men have less than they ought: the former do sometimes shut their eyes against the fair evidences of their own graces, the latter shut their eyes against the sad evidences of their sin and misery. There is an evil in both, but not equally dangerous; for he that shuts his eyes against his own graces and privileges, loses but his peace and comfort for a time; but he that shuts his eyes against the evidences of his sin and misery loses his precious soul to all eternity! Of this latter sort of self-deceivers the world is full, and these are the men I am concerned with in this point.

O that some men had less trouble! and O that some had more! If the foolish virgins had been less confident, they had certainly been more safe (Matthew 25). If those glorious professors in Matthew 7:22 had not shut their eyes against their own hypocrisy, Christ had not shut against them the door of salvation and glory. Ananias and Sapphira; Hymenaeus, and Philetus; Alexander and Demas: with multitudes more of that sort, are the sad instances and proofs of this point. It is said, Proverbs 30:12, 'There is a generation that is pure in their own eyes, and yet is not washed from their filthiness.' Through what false spectacles do the men of that generation look upon their own souls? The men of that generation are multiplied in this generation: never was any age overrun with a generation of vain, self-deceiving, formal professors, as this generation is.

Three things I shall here endeavor to do. First, to give evidence beyond contradiction to this sad truth: that among professors are found many self-deceivers.

Second, to assign the true causes and reasons why it is so.

Third, to improve it in those practical inferences the point affords.

****SECTION 2.****

That there are multitudes of such self-deceivers among professors, will appear — first, by this, that there are everywhere to be found more professors than converts. Unregenerate professors, whose religion is the effect of education. Christianity by the favor of an early providence was the first comer, it first bespoke them for it-self; these are Christians of a human creation, rather born than new-born believers. Now, all these are self-deceived, and heading to damnation, under the efficacy of strong delusion; for if a man thinks himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself, says the Apostle (Galatians 6:3). Such our birth-privilege, without the new birth, is nothing; indeed, worse than nothing, as to the last, and great account; that which stands for a great sum in our arithmetic, is nothing, it is but a cipher, you see, in God's. Except a man be born again, say the lips of truth, he cannot see the kingdom of God (John 3).

Poor self-deceivers, ponder those words of Christ; you have hitherto thought that your civil education, your dead and heartless [reconstructed: duties] were enough to denominate you Christians

before God; but go now, and learn what that Scripture means; and be assured, you must experience another manner of conversion, or else it is impossible for you to escape eternal damnation.

Secondly, it is too manifest by this, that many professors are only acquainted with the externals of religion; and all their duties are no more but a compliance of the outward man with the commands of God: this is the superficial religion which deceives and betrays multitudes into eternal misery. True religion seats itself in the inward man, and acts effectually upon the vital powers: killing sin in the heart, and purging its designs and delights from carnality and selfishness; engaging the heart for God, and setting it as a bow in its full bend for him, in the approaches we make to him: but how little are many professors acquainted with these things!

Alas! if this be all we have to stand upon, how dangerous a station is it! What is external conformity, but an artificial imitation of that which only lives in the souls of good men? Thus was Jehu deceived; he did many acts of external obedience to God's command, but Jehu took no heed to walk in the way of the Lord God of Israel with his heart (2 Kings 10:31); and this was his overthrow.

This also was the ruin of those [illegible], Ezekiel 33:31, they came and sat before the Lord as his people; the word came to them as a lovely song; they were mightily charmed with the modulation of the prophet's voice and his lively gestures; but all the while their hearts went after their covetousness: what abundance of such pharisaical, superficial religion is everywhere to be found!

Thirdly, it appears by this, that every trial made by sufferings upon professors blows away multitudes like dry leaves in autumn, by a stormy wind; many fall from their own steadfastness in shak-

ing times: prosperity multiplies vain professors, and adversity purges the church of them. 'Then shall many be offended' (Matthew 24:10).

This the Scripture everywhere marks as a symptom of hypocrisy (Psalm 78:8): 'A generation that did not set their heart aright: and whose spirit was not steadfast with God.' 'They went out, that they might be made manifest, that they were not of us' (1 John 2:19). 'For when tribulation or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he is offended' (Matthew 13:21). But should one have told them in the days of their first profession, that all their zeal and labor in religion would have ended in this, it is likely they would have replied as Hazael to the man of God (2 Kings 8:13): 'What is your servant a dog, that he should do this thing!' How changed from what he was!

Oh how unlike is their dark and dirty ending, to their glorious and hopeful morning! These professors have more of the moon than of the sun; little light, less heat; but many changes: they deceive many, indeed, they deceive themselves, but cannot deceive God. During the calm, what a flourish do they make! and with what gallantry do they [illegible]! By and by you may hear of dreadful tempests, and soon after you may see a lamentable shipwreck, after a furious storm; and no wonder, for they lacked that [illegible], that firmness and establishment in themselves that would have kept them tight and stable.

Fourthly, it is too apparent by this, that many professors secretly indulge and shelter beloved lusts under the wings of their profession. This, like a worm at the root, will wither and kill them

at last, however fragrant they may seem to be for a season. Gideon had seventy sons, and one illegitimate son; and that one illegitimate son was the death of all his seventy sons.

Some men have many excellent gifts, and perform multitudes of duties, but one pet sin indulged and allowed, will destroy them all at last. He that is partial as to the mortification of his sins, is undoubtedly hypocritical in his profession. If David's evidence was good for his integrity, surely such professors will never clear themselves of hypocrisy. 'I was also upright before him, and kept myself from my iniquity,' said he (Psalm 18:23); this is the right eye, and right hand which every sincere Christian must pluck out, and cut off (Matthew 5:29-30).

Which is a metaphor from surgeons, whose manner it is when the whole is endangered by any part, to cut it off, lest all perish.

Their suppressing some lusts raises their confidence; the indulging of one razes the foundation of their hopes, and thus they deceive themselves.

Fifthly, this also manifests the self-deception of many professors: that the secret duties of religion, or at least the secret intercourse of the soul with God in them, are a secret hid from the knowledge and experience of many professors.

To attend the ordinances of God in their seasons they know, to pray in their families at the stated hours thereof they know; but to retire from all the world into their closets, and there to pour out their hearts before the Lord, they know not.

To feel something within, paining them like an empty hungry stomach until they have eaten that hidden manna, that bread secret; that is, refreshed their souls with real communion with the

Lord there; this is a mystery locked up from the acquaintance of many that call themselves Christians; and yet this is made a characteristic mark of a sincere Christian by Christ himself in Matthew 6.

O Reader, if your heart were right with God, and you did not cheat yourself with a vain profession, you would have frequent business with God, which you would be as loath your dearest friend, or the wife of your heart, should be privy to. Religion does not lay all open to the eyes of men. Observed duties maintain our credit, but secret duties maintain our life. It was the saying of a pagan about his secret correspondence with his friend, 'What need the world be acquainted with it? you and I are theater enough to each other.' There are enclosed pleasures in religion, which none but renewed spiritual souls do feelingly understand.

Lastly, how many more profess religion in these days, than ever made religion their business! Philosophy tells us there is a main-business, and a by-business; the same is found in religion also.

There are those that give themselves to the Lord (2 Corinthians 8:5), whose way of life or trade is heaven (Philippians 3:18), the end or scope of whose life is Christ (Hebrews 13:7-8), who give religion the precedency both in time and affection (Psalm 5:3; Romans 12:11), who are constant and indefatigable in the work of the Lord (1 Corinthians 15:58).

And there are also those that take up religion rather for ostentation, than for an occupation; who never mind the duties of religion, but when they have nothing else to do; and when their outward man is engaged in the duties of it, yet their heart is not in it;

they hear, they pray, as Chrysostom speaks, but their souls, their thoughts and minds are abroad. It is not their business to have fellowship with God in duties, to get their lusts mortified, their hearts tried, their souls conformed to the image of God in holiness.

They pray as if they prayed not, and hear as if they heard not: and if they feel no power in ordinances, no quickening in them, it is no disappointment at all to them; for these were not their designs in drawing near to God in these appointments.

And thus you see what numbers of professors deceive themselves.

SECTION 3.

And if we seriously inquire into the grounds and causes of this self-deception among professors, we shall find these conspiring to delude and cheat them, in the great concern of their salvation.

First, the natural deceitfulness of the heart, than which nothing is more treacherous and false (Jeremiah 17:9): 'The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked.' The heart is the greatest supplanter, the most crafty and subtle cheat of all; it deceives us as Jacob did his brother, (to whose name this text alludes). It defeats us of our heavenly heritage, as Jacob supplanted him in his earthly one; while we are gone hunting after earthly trifles. And wherein its deceitfulness principally appears, you may see by the solemn caution of the Apostle James (James 1:22), where he warns us to beware, that in hearing the word we deceive not ourselves by false reasonings; for so the word imports, and may be strictly rendered, 'false-reasoning themselves,' namely, by

making false syllogisms, whereby they mistakenly conclude about their spiritual and eternal estate and condition, and fool themselves.

The time will come when a man's own heart will be found to have the chief hand in his ruin; and what Apollodorus did but fancy his heart said to him, some men's hearts will tell them in earnest when they come to the place of misery and torment: 'I have been the cause of all this; I have betrayed you into all these torments.', 'It was my laziness, my credulity, my averseness to the ways of strict godliness, mortification, and self-denial that have forever undone you.' When you sat under the convincing truths of the gospel; it was I that whispered those atheistical surmises into your ear, persuading you all you heard was but the intemperate heat of a hot-brained zealot; when the judgments of God were denounced, and the misery you now feel was forewarned and threatened, it was I that whispered what the tongue of another once spoke out, 'I will believe it when I come there.'

Surely this is a great truth which was observed by the wisest of men: 'He that trusts in his own heart is a fool' (Proverbs 28:26), and thousands of such fools are to be found among professors.

Secondly, Satan is a chief conspirator in this treacherous design; 'we are not ignorant,' said the Apostle, 'of his devices,' — his sophistry and sleights (2 Corinthians 2:11), his schemes, trains and methods of temptation, which are thoroughly studied, and artificially molded and ordered; even such systems as tutors and professors of arts and sciences have, and read over to their students; as one judiciously observes, to be the import of that text, Ephesians 6:11. Nor is it to be wondered at, considering his vast knowledge, deep malice, and long experience in this art of cheating; together

with the great corruption and proneness of the hearts of men to close with his devices, and believe his impostures; that so vast a number of souls are taken captive by him at his will (2 Timothy 2:26).

It is the god of this world that blinds the minds of them that believe not (2 Corinthians 4:3-4). The god of this world, (so called by a figure of speech) who leads a world of poor deluded wretches to destruction, having first blinded their minds, that is, deluded them, and with his hellish art practiced upon their understanding, that leading and directing faculty, which is to the soul what eyes are to the body.

I remember Basil brings in Satan thus insulting Christ, 'I have them, I have them: for all your blood and miracles, your wooings and beseechings, your knockings and strivings, I have cheated you of them at the very gates of heaven: for all their illuminations, and tasting of the powers of the world to come; I have shipwrecked them in the very mouth of the harbor.'

Thirdly, the common works found in unregenerate souls deceive many, who cannot distinguish them from the special works of the Spirit in God's elect: see that startling Scripture, Hebrews 6:4, where you find among the common operations of the Spirit upon apostates, illumination, which gives perspicuity to their minds in discerning spiritual truths, and that frequently with more distinctness and depth of judgment than some gracious souls attain to; besides, it is the matter out of which many rare and excellent gifts are formed in admirable variety, which are singularly useful to others as they are exercised in expounding the Scriptures, defending the truths of Christ by solid arguments, preaching, pray-

ing, etc., and make the subjects of them renowned and honored in the church of God; while in the meantime, they are dazzled with their own splendor, and fatally ruined by them.

There you find also tasting as well as enlightening. So that they seem to abound not only in knowledge, but in sense also, that is, in some kind of experience of what they know; for experience is the bringing of things to the test of spiritual sense. They do taste, or experience the good that comes by the promises of the word, and discoveries of heaven and glory; though they do not feel experimentally the transforming efficacy of these things upon their own souls.

Now that illumination furnishing them with excellent gifts (as was noted before), enabling them to assent to gospel truths, which the Scripture calls faith (Acts 8:12), and working in them conviction of sin (1 Samuel 15:24), reformation of life (2 Peter 2:20), and touching their affections also with transient joy in the discovery of those truths.

And this taste which comes so near to the experience which the sanctified soul enjoys: these things seem to put their condition beyond all controversy, and lay a foundation for their ill-built confidence; nothing is more apt to beget and nourish such a confidence than the meltings and workings of our affections about spiritual things; for as a grave divine has well observed, such a man seems to have all that is required of a Christian, and to have attained the very end of all knowledge, which is operation and influence upon the affections. When they shall find heat in their affections, as well as light in their minds; how apt are they to say (as these self-deceivers in the text did) they are rich, and have need of nothing! Now of all the false signs of grace, by which men deceive them-

selves, none are so dangerous and destructive to souls, as those that come nearest to true ones: never does Satan more effectually and securely manage his cheats, than when he is transformed into an angel of light.

Among this sort of self-deceivers, how many gifted men, and among that sort some employed in the office of the ministry, will be found! whose daily employment being about spiritual things, studying, preaching, praying, etc., they conclude themselves sanctified persons, because they are occupied about sacred employments, as if the subject must be holy, because the object is sacred. O that such would seriously ponder those two scriptures: Matthew 7:22, 'Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord; have we not prophesied in your name? and in your name have cast out devils? and in your name done many wonderful things?' and 1 Corinthians 9:27, '...lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway.'

Lastly, to add here no more, this strengthens self-deceit exceedingly in many, namely, their observations of and comparing themselves with others. Thus the Pharisees (those gross self-deceivers) trusted in themselves that they were righteous and despised others (Luke 18:9); their low rating of others gave them that high rate and value of themselves: and thus the proverb is made good, 'In the land of the blind, the one-eyed man is king.'

Thus the false apostles cheated and befooled themselves (2 Corinthians 10:12): 'But they measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise.' God has not made one man a measure or standard to another man, but his Word is the common beam or scale to try all men.

These men are as sharp-sighted to note other men's evils, as their own excellencies; they eye the miscarriages of others with derision, and their own performances with admiration.

They bless themselves when they behold the profane in their impieties (Luke 18:11): 'God, I thank you that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector' — as if to say, 'O what a saint am I in comparison to these miscreants!' The Pharisee's religion you see runs all upon 'nots'; a negative holiness is enough for him; and the measure he takes of it is by comparison of himself with others more externally vile than himself. A Christian may say with praise and humility, 'I am not as some men are,' but though he knows nothing against himself, yet is he not thereby justified (1 Corinthians 4:4); he neither rakes together the enormities of the vilest, nor the infirmities of the holiest, to justify and applaud himself as these self-deceivers do. And these are the causes and occasions of that general deception, under which so great a part of the professing world bow down, and perish.

SECTION 4.

In the last place I shall improve this point variously according to its importance and usefulness, with as much brevity and closeness of application as I can.

Use 1 shall be for caution to professors. Before I tell you what use you should make of it, I must tell you what use you may not make of it.

First, do not make this use of it, to conclude from what has been said, that all professors are but a pack of hypocrites, and that there is no truth nor integrity in any man: this is both intolerable arrogance to ascend the throne of God, and unparalleled uncharitableness to judge the hearts of all men.

Some men are as apt to conclude others to be hypocrites, by measuring their hearts by their own, as others are to conclude themselves saints, by comparing their own excellencies with other men's corruptions: but blessed be God there is some grain among the heap of chaff, some true diamonds among the counterfeit stones. The devil has not the whole piece; a remnant according to election belongs really to the Lord.

Secondly, do not make this use of it, that assurance must necessarily be impossible, because so many professors are found to be self-deceivers.

That assurance is one of the great difficulties in religion, is a great truth; but that it is therefore unattainable in this world, is very false. Popish doctrine indeed makes it impossible, but that doctrine is practically refuted in the comfortable experience of many souls: all are commanded to strive for it (2 Peter 1:10): 'Give diligence to make your calling and election sure'; and some have the happiness to obtain it (2 Timothy 1:12): 'For I know whom I have believed, and I am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed to him against that day.'

Let the similar works upon hypocrites resemble as much as they will the saving works of the Spirit upon believers; yet God does always, and the saints do sometimes plainly discern the difference.

Thirdly, do not make this use of it, to conceal and hide the truths or graces of God, or refuse to profess, and confess them before men, because many professors deceive themselves and others also; by a vain profession, because another professes what he has not, must you therefore hide or deny what you have? It is true, the possession of grace and truth in your own souls is that which saves you; but the profession and confession of it, is that which honors God, and sometimes is the instrument to save others: it is your comfort that you feel it; it is others' comfort to know that you do so. Ostentation is your sin, but a serious and humble profession is your duty (Romans 10).

SECTION 5.

Use 2: Having shown you in the former section what use you ought not to make of this doctrine, I will next show you what use you ought to make of it; and surely you cannot improve this point to a better purpose than from it to take warning and look to yourselves, that you be not of that number who deceive themselves in their profession. If this be so, allow me to closely press that great apostolic caution (1 Corinthians 10:12): 'Let him that thinks he stands, take heed lest he fall.' O professors, look carefully to your foundation; be not high-minded, but fear: you have perhaps done and suffered many things in and for religion; you have excellent gifts, and sweet comforts, a warm zeal for God, and high confidence of your integrity; all this may be right (for ought I or you know) but yet it is possible it may be false also; you have sometimes judged yourselves, and pronounced yourselves upright; but remember your final sentence is not yet pronounced by your Judge. And what if God weighs you again in his more equal balance, and should say,

'You are weighed in the balance and found wanting'? What a confounded man will you be under such a sentence! Things that are highly esteemed of men, are an abomination in the sight of God; he sees not as man sees.

Your heart may be false, and you not know it; indeed, it may be false, and you be strongly confident of its integrity.

The saints may approve you, and God condemn you (Revelation 3:1): 'You have a name that you live but you are dead.' Men may say, 'There is a true Nathanael,' and God may say, 'There is a self-deceiving Pharisee.'

Reader, you have heard of Judas and Demas, of Ananias and Sapphira, of Hymenaeus and Philetus; once renowned and famous professors, you have heard what they proved at last. Take heed their case is not your own; do they not all as it were with one mouth cry to you, O professor! if you will not come where we are, do not deceive yourself as we did: if you expect a better place and lot, be sure you get a sincerer heart: had we been more self-suspicious, we had been more safe.

I would not scare you with needless jealousies, but I would fain prevent fatal mistakes. Do you not find your hearts deceitful in many things? Do they not shuffle over secret duties? Do they not censure the same evils in others, which they scarcely reprove in yourselves? Are there not many by-ends in duties? Do you not find they are far less affected with a great deal of service and honor done to God by others, than with a little by yourselves?

Is it not hard to look upon other men's excellencies without envy, or upon your own without pride?

And are you not troubled with a busy enemy as well as with a bad heart? Has he that circuits the whole world observed you? Has he not studied your constitutional sins, and found out that sin which most easily besets you? Has he less malice against your souls than others? Surely you are in the very thick of temptations; thousands of snares are round about you. Oh how difficult are the righteous saved! How hard to be upright! How few even of the professing world win heaven at last!

O therefore search your hearts, professors, and let this caution go down to your very inmost parts; let him that thinks he stands, take heed lest he fall.

Away with rash uncharitable censures of others, and be more just and severe in censuring yourselves. Away with dry and unprofitable controversies, and spend your thoughts upon this great question, 'Am I sound, or am I rotten at heart?', 'Am I a new creature, or an old creature still in a new creature's dress and habit?' Beg the Lord that you be not deceived in that great point (your integrity) whatever else you may be mistaken in. Pray that you be not given up to a needless, careless, and vain spirit, and then have religious duties for a rattle to still and quiet your consciences.

Surely, that groundwork can never be laid too sure, upon which so great a stress as your soul and eternity must depend. It will not repent you (I dare promise) when you come to die, that you have employed your time and strength to this end: while others are panting after the dust of the earth, and saying, 'Who will show us any good?', be you panting after the assurances of the love of God, and crying, 'Who will show me how to make my calling and election sure?'

O deceive not yourselves with names and notions! Think not, because you are for a stricter way of worship, or because you associate with (and are accordingly named) one of the more reformed professors; that therefore you are safe enough: alas! how small an interest have titles, modes, and denominations in religion? Suppose a curious artist takes a lump of lead and refines it, and casts it into the mold; from which it comes forth shining, and bearing some noble figure, suppose of an eagle; yet it is but a leaden eagle. Suppose the figure of a man, and that of the most exact lineaments and proportions; yet still it is but a leaden man. Indeed, let it bear the figure of an angel, it is but a leaden angel: for the base and ignoble matter is the same as it was, though the figure be noble. Even so, take an unregenerate carnal man, let his life be reformed, and his tongue refined; and call him a zealous conformist, or a strict non-conformist; call him a Presbyterian, an Independent, or what you will; he is all the while but a carnal conformist, or non-conformist; an unregenerate Presbyterian, a carnal Independent; for the nature is still the same, though the stamp and figure his profession gives him, is not the same.

O my friends, believe it, fine names, and brave words, are of little value with God. God will no more spare you for these, than Samuel did Agag for his delicate ornaments and spruce appearance: either make sure the root of the matter, or the leaves of a vain profession will not long cover you.

To be deceived by another is bad enough, but to deceive ourselves is a thousand times worse.

To deceive ourselves in truths of the superstructure is bad, and they that do so shall suffer loss (1 Corinthians 3:12); but to deceive ourselves in the foundation is a desperate deceit, and shipwrecks

all our hope and happiness at once.

If any man lose his money by a cheat it troubles him, but to lose his soul by a cheat will undo him: if a man lose an eye, an ear, a hand, a foot; yet as Chrysostom speaks, God has given these members double; so that there is another left; but the soul is one, and only one, and if that be damned, you have not another to be saved.

O therefore be restless till it be, and till you know it be out of eternal danger.

SECTION 6.

Use 3: In conclusion, if so many professors of religion are cheated in their profession, let all that are well satisfied and assured of their integrity bless the Lord while they live, for that mercy. O it is a mercy that no unsanctified soul can have; indeed, it is a mercy that many gracious souls cannot obtain, though they seek it with tears; and would part with all the pleasant things they have in the world to enjoy it.

This is that mercy that gives souls the highest pleasures this world is acquainted with, or the state of this mortality can bear: for let the well-assured soul but consider what it is assured of: Christ with the purchases of his blood. O what is this! 'I am my beloved's, and my beloved is mine' (Song of Solomon 2:16); what vital, ravishing, overpowering efficacy is in that voice of faith. Let it but look back a few years, and compare what it was with what it is: it was far off, it is now made near (Ephesians 2:12-13). It was not beloved, but is now beloved (Romans 9:25-26); it had not obtained mercy, but now has obtained mercy (1 Peter 2:10). Or let the as-

sured soul look forward and compare what it now is and has, with what it shortly shall be made and put in possession of: 'Beloved,' said the Apostle, 'now are we the sons of God, but it does not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is' (1 John 3:2).

I say, let the assured soul but steep its thoughts by meditation in these subjects, and it is as impossible to keep it from transports of joy, as it is for a man to forbear laughing when he is tickled.

O what a life you have in comparison to other men! Some have two hells, one present, another coming; you have two heavens; one in hand, the other in hope. Some of your own brethren in Christ, that have been it may be many years panting after assurance, are still denied it; but God has indulged so peculiar a favor to you. Bless the Lord, and make his praise glorious.

CHAPTER 3



SECTION 1.

The Lord Jesus here chooses the most pure, precious, re-splendent, durable, and valuable thing, in all the treasures and magazines of nature, to shadow forth saving grace, which is infinitely more excellent: certainly that must be the best thing, which the best things in nature can but imperfectly shadow forth. What was the golden oil emptied through the two golden pipes (Zechariah 4) but the precious graces of God, flowing through Christ, into all his members! Gold is precious, but one drachm of saving grace is more precious than all the gold of Ophir. 'It cannot be gotten for gold, neither shall silver be weighed for the price of it' (Job 28:15). Truly gold and silver, sapphires, diamonds and rubies are not worth the mentioning, when saving grace is once mentioned. For consider it,

First, in its cause, and fountain from where it flows; and you shall find it to be the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22), who upon that account is called the Spirit of Grace (Hebrews 10:29). It derives its original from the most high; it is spirit born of Spirit (John

3:6). By the rules of morality, all human diligence and industry can never produce one gracious habit or act alone (2 Corinthians 3:5): 'Not that we are sufficient of ourselves,' etc.

Indeed, we do not speak to the incomparable worth of grace, when we say, it is the fruit and birth of the Spirit; for so are common gifts also. There are several emanations from this Sun, diverse streams from this fountain; but of all his operations and productions, this of saving grace is the most noble and excellent. Gifts are from the Spirit as well as grace, but grace is more excellent than the best gifts (1 Corinthians 12:31): 'Covet earnestly the best gifts, and yet I show to you a more excellent way.' Hence you read in Philippians 1:10 of things that are excellent, or as the original might be rendered, things that differ; namely, in respect of excellency; not good and evil, but as less good, and more good, differ. Gifts have their value and preciousness, but the best gifts differ as far from grace, as brass from gold; though both are generated by the influence of the same source. Gifts (as one says) are dead graces, but graces are living gifts: it is the most excellent production of the highest and most excellent cause.

Secondly, consider it in its nature, and you will find it divine (2 Peter 1:4): 'partakers of the divine nature,' namely in our sanctification; not that it gives us the properties of the divine nature, they are incommunicable; but the similitude, and resemblance of it is stamped upon our souls, in the work of grace.

'The new man is renewed in knowledge, after the image of him that created him' (Colossians 3:10). The schoolmen and some of the fathers place this image or resemblance of God, in the natural faculties of the soul, namely the understanding, memory and will; which is a shadow of a Trinity in Unity: but it rather consists in the

renovation of the faculties by grace; for in this we bear the divine image upon our souls, and that image or resemblance of God in holiness, is the beauty and honor of our souls.

It is their beauty: 'How fair, and how pleasant are you, O love, for delights!' said Christ of his people (Song of Solomon 7:6). Natural beauty consists in the symmetry, and comely proportion of parts each with other; spiritual beauty is the harmony or agreeableness of our souls to God: and as it is our chiefest beauty, so certainly it is our highest honor; for it gives us access to God, who is the fountain of honor and glory; and this makes the righteous more excellent than his neighbor; let his neighbor be what he will, though the blood of nobles run in his veins, the righteous is more excellent than he; except saving grace also be diffused into his soul.

Thirdly, consider it in its recipient subject, and you will find its value still to increase; for the precious oil of saving grace is never poured into any other than an elect vessel.

Hence faith, one branch of sanctification, is with respect to its subject, styled 'the faith of God's elect' (Titus 1:1). Whoever finds true grace in his soul, may (during the evidence of it) from it strongly conclude his election, looking backward, and his salvation, looking forward (Romans 8:30): it marks and seals the person in whom it is for glory. 'God has set apart him that is godly for himself' (Psalm 4:3).

Fourthly, view the precious worth of grace in its excellent effects and influences upon the soul, in which it resides.

First, it adorns it with incomparable ornaments, which are of great price in the sight of God (1 Peter 3:4); indeed it reflects such beams of glory in the soul where its seat is, that Christ himself the author, is also the admirer of it (Song of Solomon 4:9): 'You have ravished my heart, my sister, my spouse; you have ravished my heart, with one of your eyes, with one chain of your neck.' And as one overcome with its excelling beauty, he says, 'Turn away your eyes from me, for they have overcome me' (Song of Solomon 6:5).

Second, it elevates and ennobles a man's spirit beyond all other principles in man. It sets the heart and affections upon heaven, and fills them up with the glory of the invisible world (Philippians 3:20): 'But our citizenship is in heaven, from where we look for a Savior.' While others are trading for corn, and wine, and sheep and oxen, for feathers and trifles, the gracious soul is trading with God for pardon and peace; for righteousness and life; for glory and immortality. 'Truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Christ Jesus' (1 John 1:3).

Third, it does not only raise the spirit by conversing with God, and things above; but transforms the soul, by that converse, into the likeness of those heavenly objects it converses with. 'It changes them into the same image' (2 Corinthians 3:18); so that though the sanctified man still remains who he was, he is not what he was before; the very temper of his spirit is altered.

Fourth, it does not only transform the soul in which it is, but preserves the subject in which it dwells: it is a singular preservative from sin; so that though sin is in them still, and works in them still; yet it cannot prevail in them so as to fulfill the lusts of it, as it was wont to (Galatians 5:17). Sin conceives, but cannot bring forth fruit to death; this gives it a miscarrying womb.

Fifth, grace does not only preserve the soul from sin, but establishes the soul in whom it is, far beyond any other arguments without, or any other principles within a man. 'It is a good thing that the heart be established with grace' (Hebrews 13:9). This is what the Apostle calls our own steadfastness; or that ballast we have within ourselves; which keeps us tight and stable. O the excellencies of grace!

Sixth, to conclude, it is the root of all that precious fruit which we bring forth to God in this world. It is the root of every gracious word in our lips, and of every gracious work in our hands: be the matter of our gracious thoughts never so excellent, the matter of our heavenly discourses and prayers never so sweet; still grace is the root of the matter (Job 19:28). O then what a precious thing is grace!

Fifthly, view it in its properties, and you will soon discover its transcendent excellencies: the richest epithets are no hyperboles here; we speak not beyond the value of it, when we call it supernatural grace, for so it is. It comes down from above, from the Father of Lights (James 1:17); nature can never be improved to that height, however much its admirers boast of it. Nor do we strain too high, when we call it immortal grace; for so God has made it: this is that water which springs up in the sanctified soul into eternal life (John 4:14). It will not die when you die, but ascend with the soul from which it is inseparable; and be swallowed up with it into glory (Romans 8:10). You may outlive your friends, you may outlive your estates, you may outlive your gifts; but you cannot outlive your graces.

Shall I say it is the most sweet and comfortable thing that ever the soul was acquainted with in this world, next to Jesus Christ, the author and fountain of it? Surely if I so speak, I have as many witnesses to attest it, as there are gracious souls in the world: nothing is more comfortable than grace, except Christ, and yet without grace no soul can feel the comforts of Christ, in the troubles of life, or in the straits of death: this is a spring of comfort.

Sixthly, consider it in its design and scope; and you will still discern more and more of its precious excellency: for what is the aim and end of God in the infusions and improvements of grace, but to temper and mold our spirits by it, into a readiness and fitness for the enjoyment of himself in the world to come? (Colossians 1:12): 'Giving thanks to the Father, who has made us fit to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light' — compare this with 2 Corinthians 5:5: 'Now he that has worked us for this very thing is God.'

O blessed design! How precious must that work be, which is wrought for so high and glorious a purpose as this is! No work more excellent, no end more noble.

Seventhly, consider the means and instruments both principal, and subordinate, employed in this work: many blessed instruments are set to work to beget, conserve, and improve it in our souls: and these speak the precious worth of it: no wise man will dig for a base and worthless metal, with golden pickaxes. The blood of Christ was shed to procure it (Hebrews 13:12).

The Spirit of God is sent forth to form and create it; for it is his own workmanship (Ephesians 2:10); his fruit (Galatians 5:22).

The ordinances and officers of the gospel were at first instituted, and ever since continued in the church, for this work's sake (John 17:17; Ephesians 4:12); it is the fruit of Christ's blood; indeed, it has cost the sweat and blood of the dispensers of the gospel too.

Indeed, all the works of providence look this way; and aim at this thing (Romans 8:28). What is the errand of all God's rods, but to make us partakers of his holiness? (Hebrews 12:10).

Eighthly, the high value that the most high God sets upon grace, shows it to be an excellent thing indeed: it is of great price in his sight (1 Peter 3:4); no service finds acceptance with God, but what is performed by grace: none but sanctified vessels, are fit for the Master's use. 'The end of the commandment is love, out of a pure heart' (1 Timothy 1:5).

The weakest performances of grace find acceptance with him, though burdened with many sinful weaknesses and infirmities (Hebrews 11:31-32). If God so prizes it, well may we: he that made the jewel, best understands the value of it.

Ninthly, the hypocritical pretenses made to it all over the professing world, show what a most precious and desirable thing it is: if there were not some singular glory in it, why does everyone covet to be reputed gracious? Indeed, the devil himself baits many of his hooks of temptation with a show of grace: for he knows sin has no native beauty of its own to entice; and therefore he borrows the paint and pretense of holiness, to cover it. But O what a dilemma will the hypocrite be posed with at last? And how can he answer it when God shall demand:

'If grace were evil, why did you so seek the name and reputation of it? And if it were good, why did you satisfy yourself with the empty name and shadow of it only?'

Tenthly, to conclude; the incomparable esteem that all good men have for it, shows it to be a thing of inestimable price.

Grace is the sum of all their prayers, the scope of all their endeavors, the matter of their chief joy, the reward of their afflictions and sufferings. Their chief joys and sorrows, hopes and fears in this world, are taken up about it: by all which it appears that its price is above rubies; and all the gold and silver in the world are but dung and dross in comparison with it.

SECTION 2.

Containing six practical inferences from this precious truth.

Inference 1: Is saving grace more precious than gold? Let them that have it bless God for it, and not boast: men's hearts are as apt to puff up and swell with spiritual, as with material gold: it is hard to be an owner of much of this gold, and not be lifted up with it. To keep down your heart, and preserve your eyes from being dazzled with these gracious excellencies; it will be needful for you, Christian, sometimes to consider,

That although grace is one of the most excellent things that ever God created, yet it is but a creature, a dependent thing (2 Corinthians 5:17).

Indeed, it is not only a creature, but a very imperfect creature yet in your soul; laboring under many weaknesses (Philippians 3:12), and sometimes ready to die (Revelation 3:2).

Though it can do many things for you, yet it cannot justify you before God: you cannot make a garment of it to cover your guilt, nor plead the dignity of it at God's bar for your discharge; it is not your inherent, but Christ's imputed righteousness that must do that for you; though in other respects it is very necessary.

Indeed, remember: however excellent it may be, it is not the native growth and product of your hearts; all the grace you have is foreign to your nature; and what you have, is received (1 Corinthians 4:7).

And lastly, remember: he that is most proud and conceited of his own graces, will be found to be the owner of least grace, and has most cause to question whether he has any or not. It is the nature of grace to humble, abase and empty the soul; and it is the strength of our corruptions which thus puffs us up with vain conceits.

Inference 2: Is saving grace more excellent than gold? What cause then have the poorest Christians to be well satisfied with their lot? To others God has given Ishmael's portion, the fatness of the earth; to you Isaac's, the graces of their covenant: the portion is paid in brass, yours in gold. Many of you are poor in the world, but rich in faith; and heirs of the kingdom which God has promised (James 2:5). What is the dust of the earth, to the fruits of the Spirit? You are troubled that you have no more of the world; it may be if you had more gold, you would have less grace: you do not consider how many are poor and wretched in both worlds; moneyless, and Christless too. You do not consider that you are near come to that state, in which all your wants will be fully supplied; where you shall not need the treasures of the earth, and have your desires satisfied out of the treasures of grace and glory.

Inference 3: Is saving grace gold, indeed infinitely more precious than gold? Then surely declining Christians are great losers, and have cause to be great mourners. The diminishment of the least degree of grace, is more to be lamented than the loss of the greatest sum of gold.

Though the habits of grace are not lost; yet the acts of grace may be suspended (2 Samuel 12:31). The degrees of grace may be diminished (Revelation 3:3). The evidences of grace may be clouded, and consequently the comforts of grace may be suspended (Isaiah 50:10); and the least of these is such a loss, as all the treasures of the earth cannot repair: well therefore may declined Christians challenge the first place among all the mourners in the world.

Inference 4: Is grace so invaluablely precious? How precious then ought the ordinances of God to be to our souls, by which grace is first communicated, and afterwards improved in our souls! 'The law of your mouth is better to me than thousands of gold and silver' (Psalm 119:72); and good reason, while it imparts and improves that to which gold and silver are but dross and dung.

None but those that value not grace, will ever slight the means, or despise and injure the instruments of it. It is a sad sign of a graceless world, when these precious things fall under contempts and slights.

Inference 5: If grace is so precious, how watchful should all gracious persons be in times of temptation! The design of temptation is to rob you of your treasure: when cutpurses get into the crowd, we are wont to say, 'Friends, look to your purses.' How

many brave Christians have we read and heard of, that have rather chosen to part with their lives, than with their graces, who have 'resisted to blood, striving against sin' (Hebrews 12:4).

O Christians, you live in a cheating age; many seeming Christians have lost all, and many real Christians have lost much; so much, that they are likely to see but little comfort in this world: who are likely to go mourning to the grave with that lamentation (Job 29:2-3): 'O that it were with me as in times past!'

Inference 6, to conclude: Is there such precious worth in saving grace? Then bless God for it, and diligently use all means to increase and improve it in your souls. It is gold for preciousness, and for usefulness; and must not be laid up in a napkin: that is a sin condemned by the very scope of that parable (Matthew 25:14-15, etc.).

All Christians indeed have not the same advantages of improvement, but all must improve it according to the advantages they have, in order to give an account. Reserved Christians who live too abstracted from the society and communion of others, and do not disperse their streams abroad to the benefit of others; nor improve the graces of others for their own benefit, are wanting both in their own duty and comfort. See you a man rich in grace; O trade with him if you can, to improve yourselves by him; and the rather, because you know not how soon death may snatch him from you, and with him all his stock of grace is gone from you too, except what you made your own while you conversed with him. But alas, alas! Instead of holy profitable soul-improving communion, some are sullenly reserved; some are negligent and lazy; some are litigious and wrangling; more apt to draw forth the dross,

than the gold; that is, the corruptions, than graces, of others. And how few there are that drive a profitable trade for increase of grace, is sad to consider.

And as grace is not improved by communion with men, so I doubt most Christians thrive but little in their communion with God: we are too seldom in our closets, too little upon our knees, and when we are there, we gain but little; we come not off such gainers by duty as we might. O Christians, think when you are hearing, and praying, 'I am now trading with heaven for that which is infinitely better than gold; God is rich to all that call upon him, what a treasure may I get this hour, if the fault be not in my own heart?' And thus of the second observation.

CHAPTER 4



SECTION 1.

The most wise God has seen it fit to set all his people in a state of trial in this world. First, he tries, and then he crowns them. (James 1:12): 'Blessed is the man that endures temptation,' that is, probation or trial, 'for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life,' etc.

No man can say what he is, whether his graces be true or false, till they be tried and examined by those things which are to them as fire is to gold. These self-deceivers in the text thought they had grace; indeed, they thought they had been rich in grace; but it proved no better than dross: and therefore Christ here counsels them to buy of him gold tried in the fire, that is, true grace indeed, which appears to be so upon the various proofs and examinations of its sincerity which are to be made in this world, as well as in the great solemn trial it must come to in the world to come.

The Scriptures speak of a twofold trial, namely, a trial of men's opinions and a trial of their graces.

First, the opinions and judgments of men are tried as by fire, in which sense we are to understand that place, 1 Corinthians 3:12-13: 'Now if any man build upon this foundation, gold, silver, precious stones; wood, hay, stubble — every man's work shall be made manifest, for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire, and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is.'

This text speaks of such persons as hold the foundation of Christianity, but yet build upon it such doctrines and practices, as were no more able to endure the trial, than hay, wood, or stubble can endure the fire. Such a person hereby brings himself into danger, and though the Apostle will not deny the possibility, yet he asserts the difficulty of his salvation: 'He shall be saved, yet so as by fire,' that is, as a man is saved by leaping out of his house at midnight when it is all on fire about his ears: for so that phrase imports (Amos 4:11; Jude 23); glad to escape naked, and with the loss of his goods, blessing God, he has his life as a trophy: as little regard shall such have to their erroneous notions, and unscriptural opinions at last.

Secondly, the graces of men are brought to the test as well as their opinions. Trial will be made of their hearts, as well as of their heads; and upon this trial the everlasting safety and happiness of the person depends: if a man's opinions be some of them found hay or stubble, yet so long as he holds the head, and is right in the foundation, he may be saved; but if a man's supposed graces be found to be so, all the world cannot save him: there is no way of escape if he finally deceives himself in this: and of this trial of graces my text speaks: sincere grace is gold tried by fire.

There is a twofold trial of grace, active, and passive.

First, an active trial of it, in which we try it ourselves (2 Corinthians 13:5): 'Examine yourselves, prove yourselves,' that is, measure your hearts, duties and graces by the rule of the word; see how they answer to that rule; bring your hearts and the word together by solemn self-examination: confer with your inmost parts, and commune with your own hearts.

Secondly, a passive trial of it: whether we try it or not, God will try it; he will bring our gold to the touchstone, and to the fire. 'You, O Lord, know me, you have seen me and tried my heart toward you,' said the prophet (Jeremiah 12:3).

Sometimes he tries the strength and ability of his servants' graces, and thus he tried Abraham (Hebrews 11:17); and sometimes he tries the soundness and sincerity of our grace; so the Ephesian angel was tried, and found dross (Revelation 2:2). And so Job was tried and found true gold (Job 23:10). These trials are not made by God for his own information, for he knows what is in man, his eyes pierce his heart and inmost parts; but for our information, which is the true sense of Deuteronomy 8:2: 'You shall remember all the way which the Lord your God led you these forty years in the wilderness, to humble you, and to prove you, to know what was in your heart,' that is, to make you know it, by giving you such experiments and trials of it in those wilderness straits and difficulties.

And these are the trials of grace I am here to speak of, not excluding the active trials made by ourselves; no, all these trials made by God upon us are designed to put us upon the trial of ourselves: when God tries, we should try too.

Now the method into which I shall cast this discourse, shall be to show you,

First, what those things are which try the sincerity of our graces, as fire tries gold.

Secondly, for what ends does God put the graces of his people upon such trials in this world.

Thirdly, that such grace only is sincere as can endure these trials.

Fourthly and lastly, to apply the whole to the main uses of it.

****SECTION 2.****

First, what those things are which try the sincerity of grace, as fire tries gold.

Before I enter into particulars, it will be needful to acquaint you, that the subject before me is full of difficulties. There is need (as one speaks) of much cautious respect to the various sizes and degrees of growth among Christians, and the vicissitudes of their inward case: else we may darken and perplex the way instead of clearing it.

The portrait of a Christian is such as none can draw to one model, but with respect to the infancy of some, as well as the age and strength of others.

Great heed also ought to be had in the application of marks and signs; we should first understand them, before we try ourselves, or others by them. Marks and signs are by some distinguished into exclusive, inclusive, and positive: exclusive marks serve to shut out bold pretenders, by showing them how far they

come short of a saving work of grace, and they are commonly taken from some necessary common duty, as hearing, praying, etc. He that does not these things, cannot have any work of grace in him; and yet if he does them, he cannot from thence conclude his estate to be gracious: he that so concludes deceives himself.

Inclusive marks rather discover the degrees than the truth of grace, and are rather intended for comfort than for conviction: when we find them in ourselves, we do not only find sincerity, but eminence of grace: they being taken from some raised degree and eminent acts of grace in confirmed and mature Christians.

Between the two former there is a middle sort of marks, which are called positive marks; and they are such as are always and only found in regenerate souls. The hypocrite has them not; the mature Christian has them, and that in an eminent degree; the poorest Christian has them in a lower but saving degree. Great care must be taken in the application of them: and it is past doubt that many weak and injudicious Christians have been greatly prejudiced by finding the experiences of eminent Christians proposed as rules to measure their sincerity by. Alas! these no more fit their souls, than Saul's armor fit David's body.

These things being premised, and a due care carried along with us through this discourse; I shall next come to the particulars and show you what those things are which discover the state and tempers of our souls. And though it be true, that there is no condition we are in, no providence that befalls us, but it takes some proof, and makes some discovery of our hearts: yet to limit this discourse, and fall into particulars as soon as we can, I shall show

what trials are made of our graces in this world, by our prosperity, and our adversity, by our corruptions, and our duties: and lastly by our sufferings upon the score and account of religion.

SECTION 3.

First, prosperity, success, and the increase of outward enjoyments, are to grace what fire is to gold. Riches and honors make trial of what we are, and by these things many a false heart has been detected, as well as the sincerity and eminence of others' graces discovered: we may fancy the fire of prosperity to be rather for comfort than trial; to refresh us rather than to prove us; but you will find prosperity to be a great discovery; and that scarcely anything proves the truth and strength of men's graces and corruptions more than it does. Bernard said, 'It is a rare virtue, humility in honor'; to find humility with honor is to find a phoenix. Let an obscure person be lifted up to honor, and however steady and well-composed he was before, it is a thousand to one that his eyes will dazzle and his head run round when he is upon the lofty pinnacle of praise and honor. (Proverbs 27:21): 'As the refining pot for silver, and the furnace for gold; so is a man to his praise': put the best gold into the refining pot of praise, and it is a great wonder if a great deal of dross does not appear. Isaiah 39:2: the vain glory of good Hezekiah rose like a froth or scum upon the pot, when heated by prosperity. It was such a refining pot to Herod as discovered him to be dross itself (Acts 12:23). How did that poor worm swell under that trial into the conceit of a god? And was justly destroyed by worms, because he forgot himself to be one. We little think what a strange alteration an exalted estate will make upon our spirits. When the prophet would abate the vain confidence of

Hazael who could not believe that ever he should be turned into such a savage beast as the prophet had foretold: he only tells him, 'The Lord has shown me that you shall be king over Syria' (2 Kings 8:13). The meaning is, 'Do not be too confident, Hazael, that your temper and disposition can never alter to that degree; you have never yet sat in a throne; when men see the crown upon your head, then they will better see the true temper of your heart.'

How humble was Israel in the wilderness, tame and tractable in a lean pasture; but bring them once into Canaan, and the world is strangely altered; then, 'we are lords, we will come no more to you,' said they (Jeremiah 2:7, 31). Prosperity is a crisis both to grace and corruption. Hence is that caution to Israel (Deuteronomy 8:11-12): 'When you have eaten, and are full, then beware lest you forget the Lord your God.' 'Then beware,' — that is the critical time; surely that man must be acknowledged rich, very rich in grace, whose grace suffers no diminution or eclipse by his riches; and that man deserves double honor, whose pride the honors of this world cannot provoke and inflame.

It was a sad truth from the lips of a pious divine in Germany upon his deathbed; being somewhat disconsolate by reflecting upon the barrenness of his life: some friends took from that an occasion to commend him, and remind him of his painful ministry, and fruitful life among them; but he cried out, 'Take away the fire, for I still have chaff in me'; meaning that he felt his ambition like chaff catching fire from the sparks of their praises. Like this was the saying of another, 'He that praises me, wounds me.'

But to descend into the particular discoveries that prosperity and honor make of the want of grace in some, and of the weakness of grace in others: I will show you what symptoms of hypocrisy ap-

pear upon some men under the trials of prosperity, and what signs of grace appear in others under the same trial.

SECTION 4.

Prosperity discovers many sad symptoms of a naughty heart, and among others these are ordinarily most conspicuous.

First, it casts the hearts of some men into a deep oblivion of God, and makes them lay aside all care of duty: rare are the altars that smoke in the houses of the rich. Riches and honors make men forget God (Deuteronomy 32:13-15): Jeshurun sucked honey out of the rock, ate the fat of lambs, and kidneys of wheat; but what was the effect of this? He kicked, and forsook God which made him, and lightly esteemed the rock of his salvation; instead of lifting up their hearts in a humble thankful acknowledgment of God's bounty, they lifted up the heel in a wanton abuse of his mercy: in the fattest earth we find the most slippery footing.

He that is truly gracious may in prosperity remit some degrees, but a carnal heart there loses all that which in a low condition he seemed to have. Agur's prayer against riches for himself, no doubt was built upon his frequent observation of how it was with others (Proverbs 30:8-9): 'Lest I be full, and deny God.' It is said in Ecclesiastes 5:12 that the abundance of the rich will not allow him to sleep, and I wish that were the worst injury it did him; but alas, it will not allow him to pray, to meditate, to allow time and thoughts about his eternal concerns; he falls asleep in the lap of prosperity, and forgets that there is a God to be served, or a soul to be saved. O this is a dangerous symptom of a very graceless heart.

Secondly, prosperity meeting with a graceless heart, makes it wholly sensual, and entirely swallows up its thoughts and affections: earthly things transform and mold their hearts into their own similitude and nature: the whole strength of their souls goes out to those enjoyments. So those graceless, yet prosperous persons are described (Job 21:11-13): 'They take the timbrel and harp, and rejoice at the sound of the organ, and spend their days in wealth'; they take the timbrel, not the Bible. They rejoice at the sound of the organ — not a word of their rejoicing in God. They send forth their little ones in the dance — that is all the catechism they are taught. They spend their days in wealth — their whole time, that precious stock and talent, is wholly laid out upon these sensuous things: either the pleasure of it powerfully charms them, or the cares of it wholly engross their minds; so that there is no time to spare for God. 'They live in pleasure on the earth,' as James 5:5 says, just as the fish lives in the water, its proper element; take them off from these things, and put them upon spiritual, serious, heavenly employments, and they are like a fish upon dry land.

Now though prosperity may too much influence, and ensnare the minds of good men, and estrange them too much from heavenly things; yet thus to engross their hearts, and convert them into their own similitude and nature, so that these things should be the center of their hearts, the very proper element in which they live, is utterly impossible.

A hypocrite indeed may be brought to this, because though Janus-like, he has two faces, yet he really has but one principle, and that is wholly carnal and earthly: so that it is easy to make all the water flow in one channel, to gather all into one entire stream, in which his heart shall pour out all its strength to the creature.

But a Christian indeed has a double principle that acts him: though he has a law of sin, that moves him one way, there is in him also the law of grace, which thwarts and crosses that principle of corruption; so that as grace cannot do what it would, because of sin; so neither can sin do what it would, because of grace (Galatians 5:17).

The heart of a Christian in the midst of ensnaring sensitive enjoyments finds indeed a corrupt principle in it, which would incline him to fall asleep upon such a soft pillow; and forget God and duty: but it cannot; oh no, it cannot do so; there is a principle of grace within him that never leaves jogging, disturbing, and calling upon him, till he rises and returns to his God, the true rest of his soul.

Thirdly, a false pretender to religion, a hypocritical professor meeting with prosperity and success, grows altogether unconcerned about the interest of religion, and senseless of the calamities of God's people. Thus the prophet convinces the Jews of their hypocrisy (Amos 6:1-6): they were at ease in Zion, and trusted in the mountain of Samaria: and so having a shadow of religion, and a fullness of all earthly things, they fell to feasting and sporting; they drank wine in bowls, and anointed themselves with the chief ointment, but were not grieved for the affliction of Joseph. They did not mourn over the breaking and tearing to pieces of Joseph; they were out of danger once, so let the church shift for itself; they were secure in a warm nest, let the birds of prey catch and devour that flock with which they sometimes associated — they were not touched by it. Moses could not do so, though in the greatest security, and abundance of the honors and pleasures of Egypt (Acts 7:23). Nehemiah could not do so, though the servant and favorite

of a mighty monarch, and wanting nothing to make him outwardly happy: yet the pleasures of a king's court could not cheer his heart, or scatter the clouds of sorrow from his face, while his brothers were in affliction, and the city of his God lay waste (Nehemiah 2:1-3). Nor indeed can any gracious heart be unconcerned and senseless; for that union that all the saints have with Christ their head, and with one another as fellow members in Christ, will beget sympathy among them in their sufferings (1 Corinthians 12:26).

SECTION 5.

But as the fire of prosperity discovers this, and much more dross in a graceless heart; so it discovers the sincerity and grace of God's people. I do not say that it discovers nothing but grace in them. O that it did not! Alas! many of them have had a great deal of dross and corruption discovered by it, as was noted before: but yet in this trial, the graciousness and uprightness of their hearts will appear in these and such like workings of it.

First, under prosperity, success and honor, the upright heart will labor to suppress pride, and keep itself lowly and humble; and still the more grace there is, the more humility there will be. If God lifts him up, he will lay himself low, and exalt his God high. So did Jacob when God had raised and enlarged him (Genesis 32:10): 'I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth which you have shown to your servant, for with my staff I passed over this Jordan, and now I am become two bands.'

Great was the difference in Jacob's outward condition at his return, from what it was at his first passage over Jordan: then poor, now rich; then single and comfortless, now the head of a great

family. Yet, though his outward estate was altered, the frame of his heart was not altered. Jacob was a holy and humble man when he went out, and so he was when he returned: he saw a multitude of mercies about him, and among them all, not one but was greater than himself.

I dare not say every Christian under prosperity can at all times manifest like humility; but I am sure whatever pride and vanity may rise in a gracious heart tried by prosperity, there is that within him which will check it: he dares not allow such proud thoughts to lodge quietly in his heart: for alas, he sees that in himself, and that in his God, that will abase him; grace will make him look back to his original condition, and say with David, 'What am I, O Lord God, and what is my father's house, that you have brought me this far?' (2 Samuel 7:18).

It will make him look within, and see the baseness of his own heart, and the corruptions that are there, and wonder at the dealings of God with so vile a creature. O, thinks he, if others did but know what I know of myself, they would abhor me more than now they esteem and value me.

Secondly, prosperity usually draws forth the saints' love to the God of their mercies; that which heats a wicked man's lusts, warms a gracious man's heart with love and delight in God.

These were the words of that lovely song which David sang in the day that the Lord delivered him out of the hand of all his enemies, and from the hand of Saul, and he said, 'I will love you, O Lord my strength' (Psalm 18 title and verse 1, compared): these outward things are not the main grounds and motives of their love to God; no, they love him when he takes away, as well as when he

gives: but they are sanctified instruments to inflame their love to God: they boil up a wicked man's lusts, but they melt a gracious man's soul. O in what a pang of love did David go into the presence of God under the sense of his mercies, his melting mercies; when he thus poured out his whole soul in a stream of love to his God (2 Samuel 7:19-20): 'Is this the manner of men, O Lord God! and what can David say more to you!' — an expression that turns up the very bottom of his heart.

Thirdly, prosperity and comfortable providences do usually become cautions against sin when they meet with a sanctified soul. This is the natural inference of a gracious soul from them: 'Has God pleased me? then has he obliged me to take more care to please him. O let me not grieve him, that has comforted me.' So Ezra 9:13: 'After such a deliverance as this, should we again break your commandments!', 'What! break his commandments who has broken our bonds! God forbid.'

It was an excellent resolution of a Christian once, who receiving an eminent mercy, at the same time felt himself under the power of a special corruption; 'Well,' said he, 'now will I go forth in the strength of this mercy to mortify and subdue that corruption.' I will not measure every Christian by the eminent workings of grace in some one; but surely so far I may safely go, that sincerity knows not how to sin, because grace has abounded, any more than it dares to sin, that grace may abound.

Fourthly, a truly gracious soul will not be satisfied with all the prosperity and comforts in the world for his portion. 'Not your gifts, Lord, but yourself,' is the voice of grace: when providence had been more than ordinarily bountiful in outward things to Luther, he began to be afraid of its meaning, and earnestly

protested, God should not put him off with so little. 'The Lord is my portion, said my soul' (Lamentations 3:24); and the soul can best tell what it has made its choice, and on which it has bestowed its chief delights and expectations.

An unsound heart will accept these for its portion: if the world is secure to him, and his designs fail not there; he can be content to leave God, and soul, and heaven, and hell at hazard: but so cannot the upright. These things in subordination; but neither these, nor anything under the sun in comparison with, or opposition to God.

CHAPTER 5



SECTION 1.

That adversity is a furnace to try of what metal our hearts are, none can doubt, that has either studied the Scriptures, or observed his own heart under afflictions.

When the dross and rust of hypocrisy and corruption had almost eaten out the heart of religion among the Jews; then said God, 'I will melt them, and try them; for what shall I do for the daughter of my people?' (Jeremiah 9:7). Here affliction is the furnace, and the people are the metal cast into it; and the end of it is trial. 'I will melt them and try them; what other course shall I take with them? If I let them alone, their lusts like the rust and canker in metals will eat them out.' Prosperity multiplies professors, and adversity brings them to the test: then hirelings quickly become changelings: the gilded potsherd glistens till it comes to scouring. The devil thought Job had been such a one, and moves that he may be tried this way; being confident he would be found but dross in the trial (Job 1:11). But though the furnace of affliction discovered some dross in him (as it will in the best of men), yet he came forth as gold.

In this furnace also grace is manifested: it is said (Revelation 13:10): 'Here is the patience and faith of the saints,' that is, here is the trial and discovery of it in these days of adversity. It was a weighty saying of Tertullian to the persecutors of the church in his days, 'Your wickedness is the trial of our innocency.' Constantius the father of Constantine made an exploratory decree, that all who would not renounce the Christian faith, should lose their places of honor and profit; this presently separated the dross from the gold; which was his design: for many renounced Christianity, and were thereupon renounced by him; and those that held their integrity, were received into favor.

In time of prosperity, hypocrisy lies covered in the heart like nests in the green bushes; but when the winter of adversity has made them bare, everybody may see them without searching.

But to fall into closer particulars, it will be necessary to inquire what effects of adversity are common to both the sound, and the unsound; and then what are proper to either in this close trial by adversity.

SECTION 2.

It will be expedient to the design I manage in this discourse, to show in the first place what are common effects of adversity to both the godly and ungodly; for in some things they differ not, but as it is with the one, so also with the other, as:

First, both the godly and ungodly may fear adversity before it comes. To be sure a wicked man cannot, and it is evident many godly men do not come up to the height of that rule (James 1:2), to

count it all joy when they fall into various temptations, or trials by adversity.

It is said (Isaiah 33:14): 'The sinners in Zion are afraid, trembling surprises the hypocrite,' — namely, under the apprehension of approaching calamities: and it is true also, the saints in Zion may be afraid. 'My flesh trembles for fear of you, and I am afraid of your judgments,' said holy David (Psalm 119:120); and Job said (Job 3:25): 'The thing which I greatly feared has come upon me.' There is a vast difference between a saint's first meeting with afflictions, and his parting with them: he entertains them sometimes with trembling, he parts with them rejoicing, smiling on them, and blessing them in the name of the Lord. So that by this the upright, and the false heart, are not discriminated: even sanctified nature declines sufferings and troubles.

Secondly, both the godly and ungodly may entertain afflictions with regret and unwillingness when they come: afflictions and troubles are wormwood and gall (Lamentations 3:19), and that does not go down pleasantly with flesh and blood (Hebrews 12:11): 'No affliction for the present seems joyous, but grievous' — he means to God's own people. They are in heaviness through manifold temptations or trials by the rod (1 Peter 1:6). When God gives the cup of affliction into the hands of the wicked, how do they resist and loathe it? How their stomachs rise at it! And though the portion of the saints' cup is much sweeter than theirs (for that bitter ingredient of God's vindictive wrath is not in it), yet even they shrink from it, and are loath to taste it.

Thirdly, both the one and the other may be impatient and fretful in adversity: it is the very nature of flesh and blood to be so. 'The wicked are like the troubled sea which cannot rest, whose wa-

ters cast forth mire and dirt' (Isaiah 57:20). It is an allusion to the unstable and stormy ocean: you know there is naturally an ebbing and working in the sea, whether it be incensed by the wind or not; but if a violent wind blows upon the unquiet ocean, oh what raging and foaming is there! What abundance of trash and filth does it at such times cast out!

Now, though grace makes a great difference between one and another, yet I dare not say, but even a gracious heart may be very unquiet and tumultuous in the day of affliction. Sanctified souls have their passions and lusts which are too little mortified, even as sweet-briar, and holy-thistles have their prickles, as well as the worthless bramble. Jonah was a good man, yet his soul was sadly distempered by adverse providences (Jonah 4:9): 'Yes,' said he, even to his God, 'I do well to be angry, even to death.'

Fourthly, both the one and the other may be weary of the rod, and think the day of adversity a tedious day, wishing it were once at an end. Babylon shall be weary of the evil that God will bring upon it (Jeremiah 51:64); and O that none of Zion's children were weary of adversity too! How sad a moan does Job make of his long-continued affliction (Job 16:6-7): 'Though I speak, my grief is not assuaged; and though I forbear, what am I eased?', 'But now he has made me weary.'

And if you look into Psalm 6:3, 6, you may see another strong Christian even tired in the way of affliction: 'My soul,' said David in that place, 'is sore troubled: but you, O Lord, how long!', 'I am weary with my groaning.'

Fifthly, both the one and the other may be driven to their knees by adversity. 'Lord, in trouble they have visited you, they have poured out a prayer when your chastening was upon them' (Isaiah 26:16). Not that a godly person will pray no longer than the rod is at his back; O no, he cannot live without prayer long, however few calls he has to that duty by the rod: but when the rod is on his back, he will be more frequently, and more fervently upon his knees. Indeed many graceless hearts are like children's tops which will go no longer than they are whipped; they cannot find their knees and their tongues, till God finds a rod to excite them — a dangerous symptom. The same affliction may put a gracious and a graceless soul to their knees; but though in the external matter of duty, and in the external call or occasion of duty they seem to agree; yet is there a vast difference in the principles, manner, and ends of these their duties; as will evidently appear in its proper place in our following discourse.

But by what has been said in this section you may see how in some things the holy upright soul acts too like the unsanctified, and in other things how much the hypocrite may act like a saint: he may be externally humbled, as was Ahab; he may pray under the rod (Malachi 2:13); indeed and request others to pray for him, as did Simon (Acts 8:24).

SECTION 3.

But though the sound and unsound heart differ not in some external behavior under the rod; yet there are effects of adversity which are proper to either, and will discriminate them. To which end let us first see what effects adversity is usually followed with in un-

sound and carnal hearts: and we shall find among others, these five symptoms of a naughty heart appearing under crosses and afflictions.

First, a graceless heart is not quickly and easily brought to see the hand of God in those troubles that befall it, and be duly affected with it (Isaiah 26:11): 'Lord, when your hand is lifted up they will not see': when it has smitten, or is lifted up to smite, they shut their eyes: it is the malice of this man, or the negligence of that, or the unfaithfulness of another that has brought all this trouble upon me. Thus the creature is the horizon that terminates their sight, and beyond that they usually see nothing: sometimes indeed the hand of God is so immediately manifested, and convincingly discovered in afflictions, that they cannot avoid the sight of it, and then they may (in their way) pour out a prayer before him; but ordinarily they impute all to second causes, and overlook the first cause of their troubles.

Secondly, nor is it usual with these men under the rod to retire into their closets, and search their hearts there; to find out the particular cause and provocation of their affliction. 'No man repented of his wickedness, saying, What have I done?' (Jeremiah 8:6). What cursed thing is there with me, that has thus incensed the anger of God against me? God visits their iniquities with afflictions, but they visit not their own hearts by self-examination. God judges them, but they judge not themselves; he shows their iniquities in a clear glass, but none says, 'What have I done?' This phrase, 'What have I done?' is the voice of one that recollects himself after a rash action; or the voice of a man astonished at the discovery afflictions make of his sins; but no such voice as this is ordinarily heard among carnal men.

Thirdly, an unsound professor if left to his choice, would rather choose sin than affliction; and sees more evil in that, than in this.

And it cannot be doubted if we consider, the principle by which all unregenerate men are acted, is sense not faith: hence Job's friends would have argued his hypocrisy (Job 36:21), and had their application been as their rule, it would have concluded it: 'This, namely sin, you have chosen, rather than affliction.'

I do not say that an upright man cannot commit a moral evil, to escape a penal evil. O that daily observation did not too plentifully furnish us with sad instances of that kind! But upright ones do not, dare not upon a serious deliberate discussion and debate choose sin rather than affliction; what they may do upon surprises, and in the violence of temptation is of another nature.

But a false and unsound heart discovers itself in the choice it makes upon deliberation, and that frequently, when sin and trouble come in competition. Put the case, says Augustine, a ruffian should with one hand set the cup of drunkenness to your mouth, and with the other a dagger to your breast; and say, 'Drink or die': you should rather choose to die sober, than to live a drunkard. And many Christians have resisted to blood striving against sin, and with renowned Moses chosen affliction, the worst of afflictions; indeed death itself in the most formidable appearance, rather than sin: and it is the habitual temper and resolution of every gracious heart so to do, though those holy resolutions are sometimes overborne by violence of temptation.

But the hypocrite dreads less the defilement of his soul, than the loss of his estate, liberty or life. If you ask on what ground then does the Apostle suppose (1 Corinthians 13:3) a man may give his

body to be burned, and not have love? that the salamander of hypocrisy may live in the flame of martyrdom? The answer is at hand: they that choose death in the sense of this text, do not choose it to escape sin, but to feed and indulge it. Those strange adventures (if any such be) are rather to maintain their own honor, and enroll their names among worthy and famous persons to posterity; or out of a blind zeal to their espoused errors and mistakes; than in a due regard to the glory of God, and the preservation of integrity. I fear to speak it, but it must be spoken, said Jerome: that even martyrdom itself, when suffered for admiration and applause, profits nothing; but that blood is shed in vain.

Fourthly, it is the property of an unregenerate soul under adversity to turn from creature to creature for support and comfort, and not from every creature to God alone. So long as their feet can touch ground, that is, feel any creature relief or comfort under them, they can subsist and live in afflictions; but when they lose ground, when all creature refuge fails, then their hearts fail too.

Thus Zedekiah and the self-deceiving Jews, when they saw their own strength failed them, and there was little hope left that they should deliver themselves from the Chaldeans, what do they in that strait? Do they with upright Jehoshaphat say, 'Our eyes are upon you'? No, their eyes were upon Egypt for succor, not upon heaven: 'Well, Pharaoh and his aids are left still, all hope is not gone' (Jeremiah 37:9). See the like in Ahaz in a sore plunge and distress; he courts the king of Assyria for help (2 Chronicles 28:29); that project failing, why then he will try what the gods of Damascus can do for him — any way rather than the right way: 'If I cannot bend the gods above, I will move the powers below.'

So it is with many others. If one child die, what do they do — run to God and comfort themselves in this, 'The Lord lives though my child die'? If an estate be lost and a family sinking, do they with David comfort themselves in the everlasting covenant, ordered and sure? No; but if one relation is gone, there is another alive; if an estate be gone, yet not all: something is left still, and the case will mend.

As long as ever such men have any visible encouragement, they will hang upon it; and not make up all in Christ, and encourage themselves in the Lord. To tell them of rejoicing in the Lord when the fig tree blossoms not, is what they cannot understand.

Fifthly, to conclude, an unsound heart never comes out of the furnace of affliction purged, mortified, and more spiritual and holy than when he was cast into it: his scum and dross is not there separated from him. Indeed, the more they are afflicted, the worse they are. 'Why should you be stricken any more? You will revolt more and more' (Isaiah 1:5). And to keep to our metaphor, consult Jeremiah 6:29: God had put that incorrigible people into the furnace of affliction, and kept them long in that fire; and what was the issue? The prophet says, 'The bellows are burned, the lead is consumed of the fire, the founder melts in vain, etc.; reprobate silver shall men call them, because the Lord has rejected them.'

If the fire of affliction be continually blown till the very bellows be burned, that is, the tongue, or rather the lungs of the prophet, which have some resemblance to bellows; though these be even spent in reproving and threatening, and denouncing woe upon woe, and judgment upon judgment; and God fulfills his word upon them; yet still they are as before; the dross remains. Though Jerusalem be made a furnace, and the inhabitants the flesh boiling

in it over a fierce fire of affliction; yet as is noted (pertinently to my discourse) in Ezekiel 24:6, 12, the scum remains with them, and cannot be separated by the fire; and the reason is plain, because no affliction in itself purges sin, but as it is sanctified, and works in the virtue of God's blessing, and in pursuance of the promises.

O think on this, you that have had thousands of afflictions in one kind and another, and none of them all have done you good; they have not mortified, humbled, or benefited you at all. And thus you see what the effects of adversity are when it meets a graceless heart.

SECTION 4.

By this time, Reader, I suppose you are desirous to know what effects adversity and afflictions are wont to have when they meet with an honest and sincere heart; only before I come to particulars, I think it needful to acquaint you, that the fruits of afflictions are mostly after-fruits, and not so discernible by the Christian himself under the rod, as after he has been exercised by it (Hebrews 12:11), and calmly reflects upon what is past; nor does every Christian attain the same measure and degree: some rejoice, others commonly submit. But I think these seven effects are ordinarily found in all upright hearts that pass under the rod.

First, the sincere and upright soul betakes itself to God in affliction (Job 1:20). When God was smiting, Job was praying; when God afflicted, Job worshipped. So David (Psalm 116:3-4): 'I found sorrow and trouble, then I called upon the name of the Lord.' And

when the messenger of Satan buffeted Paul, 'For this cause,' said he, 'I besought the Lord three times' (2 Corinthians 12:8). Alas, where should a child go in distress but to its Father?

Secondly, he sees, and owns the hand of God in his afflictions: however much or little of the instruments of trouble appear. 'The Lord has taken away,' said Job (Job 1:21). 'God has bidden him,' said David (2 Samuel 16:10). If the blow comes from the hand of a wicked man, yet he sees that wicked hand in God's righteous hand (Psalm 17:14). And this apprehension is fundamental to all that communion men have with God in their afflictions, and to all that peaceableness and gracious submission of their spirits under the rod; he that sees nothing of God in his troubles, has nothing of God in his soul.

Thirdly, he can justify God in all the afflictions and troubles that come upon him, be they never so severe. 'You are just in all that is brought upon us,' said Nehemiah (Nehemiah 9:33). 'You have punished us less than our iniquities deserve,' said Ezra (Ezra 9:13). 'It is of the Lord's mercy we are not consumed,' said the church (Lamentations 3:22). 'Are we in Babylon? it is a mercy we are not in hell.' If God condemns him, yet he will justify God: if God casts him into a sea of trouble, yet he will acknowledge in all that sea of trouble, there is not one drop of injustice. 'If I have not deserved such usage from the hands of men, yet I have deserved worse than this at the hands of God.'

Fourthly, afflictions are wont to melt and humble gracious hearts: there is a habitual tenderness planted in their spirits, and just occasion quickly draws it forth: and so usual a thing it is for gracious hearts to be humbled under the afflictions of God, that affliction is upon that score called humiliation — the effect put for

the cause; to show where one is, the other will be (2 Corinthians 12:21): 'My God will humble me,' that is, he will afflict me with the sight of your sins and disorders. And if a gracious soul is so apt to be humbled for other men's sins, much more for his own.

Fifthly, the upright soul is inquisitive under the rod to find out that evil for which the Lord contends with him by affliction (Job 10:2): 'Show me why you contend with me'; and Job 34:31: 'That which I see not, teach me; if I have done iniquity, I will do no more.' So Lamentations 3:40: 'Let us search and try our ways, and turn again to the Lord'; in afflicting, God searches them, and under affliction they search themselves: willing they are to hear the voice of the rod, and glad of any discovery it makes of their hearts.

Sixthly, the upright heart chooses to die under affliction rather than to be delivered from it by sin. I say this is the choice and resolution of every upright heart, however it may be sometimes overborne by the violence of temptation (Hebrews 11:35): 'not accepting deliverance,' namely, upon sinful terms and conditions.

They are sensible how the flesh smarts under the rod, but had rather it should smart, than conscience should smart under guilt. Affliction, says an upright soul, grieves me, but sin will grieve God; affliction wounds my flesh, but sin will wound my soul. Deliverance I long for, but I will not pay so dearly for it, however much I desire it. I would rather not buy my peace by repentance: outward ease is sweet, but inward peace is sweeter.

Seventhly, he prizes the spiritual good gotten by affliction, above deliverance from it; and can bless God from his heart for those mercies however near his flesh has paid for them (Psalm 119:67, 71): 'It is good for me that I have been afflicted.' Such is the

value the people of God have for spiritual graces, that they cannot think them a dear purchase, whatever their flesh has paid for them. The mortification of one lust, one discovery of sincerity, one manifestation of God to their souls, does much more than make amends for all that they have endured under the rod.

Is patience improved, self-acquaintance increased, the vanity of the creature more effectually taught, longings after heaven inflamed? O blessed afflictions that are attended with such blessed fruits! It was the saying of a holy man under a sore trouble for the death of an only son; when in that dark day God had graciously manifested himself to his soul; 'O,' said he, 'I would be contented (if it were possible) to lay my only son in the grave every day I have to live in the world, for one such discovery of the love of God as I now enjoy.'

CHAPTER 6



SECTION 1.

Prosperity and adversity put sincerity to the trial, but nothing makes a deeper search into our bosoms, nothing sifts our spirits more narrowly, or tells us what our state is more plainly than our behavior toward that corruption that dwells in us; the thorn is next neighbor to the rose: sin and grace dwell not only in the same soul, but in the same faculties. The collier and the fuller dwell in one room, what one cleanses the other blackens: of all the evils God permits in this world, none is more grievous to his people than this. They sometimes wonder why the Lord will allow it to be so; why, surely among other wise and holy ends of this permission, these are some.

They are left to try you, and to humble you; there is no intrinsic goodness in sin, yet however in this it occasions good to us, that by our behavior toward it we discern our sincerity. The touchstone is worthless in itself, but it serves to try the gold. (1 John 3:9-10): 'Whoever is born of God does not commit sin, for his seed remains in him, and he cannot sin, because he is born of God; in this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil' — that is, in respect of their behavior toward sin, the one and the other is

plainly manifested: this is that which separates the dross from the gold, and shows you what the true state of men's persons, and the temper of their hearts is. By 'not sinning' we do not understand a total freedom from it in this world, as if it implied any such perfection of the people of God in this world in the Popish and Pelagian sense: nor yet do we take it in the Arminian sense, who to avoid the argument of the orthodox, will understand it of the sin against the Holy Ghost — what a strange thing would it be to make that a characteristic mark of distinction between the godly and ungodly, which so very few even of the most ungodly are ever guilty of?

But the manner of our behavior toward sin, and our demeanor toward it before, under, or after the commission of it; in this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil.

Now there are five things relating to sin that discriminate and mark the state of persons; the difference is discernible:

In our: 1. Abstinence from sin. 2. Hatred of sin. 3. Troubles about sin. 4. Subjection to sin. 5. Opposition of sin.

SECTION 2.

The grounds and motives of our abstinence very clearly manifest the state of our souls; what they are in the regenerate, and unregenerate, is our next work. And let it be considered:

First, that an unsound and unrenewed heart may abstain from one sin, because it is contrary to, and inconsistent with another sin: for it is with the sins of our natures, as it is with the diseases of our bodies: though all diseases are contrary to health, yet some diseases (as the fever and the palsy) are contrary to each other. So are prodigality and covetousness, hypocrisy and profaneness:

these oppose each other, not for mutual destruction as sin and grace do, but for superiority, each contending for the throne, and sometimes taking it by turns. It is with such persons as with that possessed man (Matthew 17:15), whom the spirit cast sometimes into the fire, sometimes into the water: and if one subdue the other, yet the heart is in the vassalage of that lust that is uppermost in the soul.

Secondly, an unrenewed soul may be kept from the commission of some sin; not because there is a principle of grace within him, but because of some providential constraint without him, or upon him: for it often falls out, that when men have conceived sin and are ready to execute it, providence claps on the fetters of restraint, and hinders them from executing it.

This was the case of Abimelech (Genesis 20:6, 17, compared): 'I withheld you.' And though persons so restrained have not the benefit of such providences, yet others have; for by it a world of mischief is prevented in the world, which otherwise would break out; and to this act of providence we owe our lives, liberties, estates and comforts in this world.

Thirdly, an unsound heart may not commit some sins; not because he truly hates them, but because his constitution inclines him not to them: these men are rather beholden to a good temper of body, than a gracious temper of soul. Some men cannot be drunkards if they would; others cannot be covetous and base. They are made of a more refined metal than others; but chaste and liberal, just and sober by nature — it is nature still: the best nature in all its endowments, is but nature at the best.

Fourthly, a graceless heart may be restrained from sin by the force of education and principles of morality instilled into it that way. Thus Jehoash was restrained from evil (2 Kings 12:2): 'And Jehoash did that which was right in the sight of the Lord all the days in which Jehoiada the priest instructed him.' The fear of a parent or master will do a great deal more with some in this case, than the fear of God. The influence of a strict education nips off the excrescences of budding vice. The way we are taught when young, we keep when old: this is the influence of man upon man; not the influence of the regenerating Spirit upon men.

Fifthly, a graceless heart may be kept from some sins by the fear of the consequences, both in this world, and that to come. Sin that is followed with infamy and reproach among men, may on this ground be forborne; not because God has forbidden it, but because human laws will punish it, and the sober world will brand us for it: and some look farther, to the punishment of sin in hell: they are not afraid of sin, but they are afraid to burn.

Here sin is like a sweet rose in a brake of thorns: fain we would have it, but are loath to tear our flesh to come by it. It is well that sin is prevented any way, but to be kept on this ground from sin, does not prove the estate of the person to be good. And here you see some of the grounds on which carnal men are restrained: and in this the children of the devil are manifest.

SECTION 3.

But there are grounds of abstinence from sin, by which the children of God are manifested, and such are these that follow.

First, a sincere heart dares not sin because of the eye and fear of God which is upon him: so you find it in Job 31:1, 4; he dared not allow his thoughts to sin, because he lived under the awe of God's eye. Nehemiah dared not do as former governors had done: though an opportunity presented itself to enrich himself; because of the fear of God (Nehemiah 5:15). The soul that lives under the awe of this eye will be as conscientious where no discovery can be made by creatures, as if all the world looked on (Leviticus 19:14): 'You shall not curse the deaf, nor put a stumbling block before the blind; you shall fear your God, I am the Lord.'

What if a man does curse the deaf, they cannot hear him; and what if he puts a stumbling block before the blind, they cannot see him: true, but God sees him, God hears him, that is enough to a man that has the fear of the Lord upon his heart.

Secondly, as the fear of God, so the love of God, is a principle of restraint from sin in the soul that is upright. This kept Joseph from sin (Genesis 39:9): 'How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God!'

He speaks as a man that feels himself bound back from sin by the goodness and love of God that had been manifested to him: 'Has he delivered me from the pit into which my envious brothers cast me? Has he in so miraculous a way advanced me to this honor and power in Egypt? And shall I, after all his kindness and love to me, sin against him? O how can I do this against so good, so gracious a God?' (Psalm 97:10): 'You that love the Lord hate evil.' He will cry out in the hour of temptation, 'Is this your kindness to your friend?', 'Do you thus repay the Lord for all his kindnesses?'

Thirdly, as the love of God, so the intrinsic evil and filthiness that is in sin keeps the gracious soul from it (Romans 12:9): 'Abhor that which is evil' — hold it in horror as hell itself: or as the French translation has it, 'be in horror'; as the apprehensions of hell, so the apprehensions of sin's filthiness press horror upon the mind that is sanctified: nothing is more loathsome to a holy soul. Its aversions from it are with the highest indignation and loathing.

Fourthly, the renewed nature of a Christian restrains him from sin (Galatians 5:17): 'The Spirit lusts against the flesh, so that you cannot do the thing that you would.' You cannot — why cannot you? Because it is against your new nature.

Beloved, this is a very remarkable thing in the experience of all renewed men, that upon the renovation of men's principles, their delights, and their aversions and loathings are laid quite crosswise and opposite to what they were before. In their carnal state, vain company, and sinful exercises were their delight. To be separated from these, and tied to prayer, meditation, heavenly discourse, and godly company; O what a bondage that would have been! Now to be tied to such carnal society, and restrained from duties of godliness and the society of the godly, becomes a much sorer bondage to the soul.

Fifthly, experience of the bitterness of sin is a restraint to a gracious heart. They that have had so many sick days, and sorrowful nights for sin as they have had, are loath to taste that wormwood and gall again, which their soul has still in remembrance (2 Corinthians 7:11): 'In that you sorrowed after a godly sort, what carefulness it worked!' He would not grapple with those inward

troubles again; he would not have the cheerful light of God's countenance eclipsed again for all, and much more than all the pleasures that are in sin.

Sixthly, the consideration of the sufferings of Christ for sin, powerfully withholds a gracious soul from the commission of it (Romans 6:6): 'Our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin.' Were there a knife or sword in the house that had been thrust through the heart of your father, would you ever endure the sight of it? Sin was the sword that pierced Christ, and so the death of Christ becomes the death of sin in his people. Thus the children of God, and the children of the devil are manifest, in the principles and reasons of their abstinence from sin.

SECTION 4.

Secondly, they are also manifested by their hatred of sin: this puts a clear distinction between them: for no false or unregenerate heart, can hate sin as sin; he may indeed,

First, hate sin in another, but not in himself: thus one proud man hates another. Diogenes said, 'I spurn the pride of Plato' — when he trampled Plato's fine clothes under foot; but as Plato smartly replied, 'You trample upon my pride, but it is with greater pride.' 'Why,' said Christ to the hypocrite, 'do you behold the mote in your brother's eye, but consider not the beam that is in your own eye?' (Matthew 7:3). How quick in espying, and rash in censuring the smallest fault in another, is the hypocrite! It was but one fault, and that but a small one, a mere mote, that he could find

in another; yet this he quickly discerns. It may be there were many excellent graces in him; these he overlooks, but the mote he plainly discerns.

It may be that mote in his brother's eye had drawn many tears from it; but these he takes no notice of; and meanwhile there is a beam, that is, a great, horrid, flagrant evil in himself; but it is too near him to be discerned, or bewailed: this is a sad symptom of a naughty heart.

Secondly, he may hate it in its effects, and consequences; not in its own nature: as the thief hates the gallows, not the wickedness that he has done. It is not sin in itself, but sin in its connection with hell, that is frightful to him.

The unsound professor could wish that there were no such threatenings in the Bible against sin: when sin tempts him, 'I would,' said he, 'but I fear the consequence.' 'O sin, could I separate you from hell, nothing should separate you and me.'

Thirdly, he may hate it in a mood or fit, but not with a rooted habitual hatred. It is plain from 2 Peter 2:22 that sin may sometimes lie upon the conscience of an unregenerate man, as a load lies upon a sick stomach; and so he may discharge himself of it, by reformation, restitution, etc., but a little time reconciles the quarrel between him and his lust again: if they fall out they will fall in again; 'the dog is returned to his vomit, and the sow that was washed, to her wallowing in the mire.'

But an upright soul hates sin in another manner, and in this hatred of sin the children of God are manifest.

First, the opposition of sin to God, is the very ground and formal reason upon which a gracious soul opposes and hates it: if it be opposite to the holy nature and law of God, it cannot but be odious in his eyes. This put David's heart in anguish (Psalm 51:4): 'Against you, you only have I sinned': as if to say, 'I have wronged Uriah greatly, I have wronged myself and family greatly; but the wrong I have done to others is not worth naming, in comparison of the wrong I have done to you.'

Secondly, the upright soul hates sin in himself, more than he hates it in any other: as a man hates a serpent in the hedge, but much more in his own bosom. (Romans 7:23): 'But I see another law in my members'; and verse 21: 'I find then a law, that when I would do good, evil is present with me': as if to say, 'I don't know how others find it, but I am sure I find sin in my very bosom, in my very inmost parts, it is present with me. O wretched man that I am!' A gracious soul can mourn to see sin in others; but to find it in himself pierces him to the very heart.

Thirdly, the gracious soul hates not only this or that particular sin, but the whole kind, everything that is sinful. True hatred is of the whole nature or kind (Psalm 119:104): 'I hate every false way'; his reasoning proceeds from sin as sin; concluding against every sin. Sins that are profitable, and pleasant, as well as sins that have neither profit nor pleasure; sins that are secret as well as sins that are open, and will defame him.

And before this trial a false heart cannot stand; for he always indulges some lust: there is an iniquity which he cannot be separated from.

Fourthly, the sincere soul hates sin with an irreconcilable hatred: there was a time when sin and his soul fell out, but there never will be a time of reconciliation between them again.

That breach which effectual conviction once made, can never be made up any more: 'They will return no more to folly' (Psalm 85:8); and indeed it seems to them that have suffered so much for sin, that have endured so many fears and sorrows for it; the greatest folly in the world to return to sin again. No, they admire the mercy of their escape from sin, to their dying day; and never look back upon their former state but with shame and grief.

Ask a convert, would you be back again where once you were? Would you be among your old companions again? Would you be fulfilling the lusts of the flesh again? And he will tell you he would not run the hazard to abide one day or one night in that condition again, to gain all the kingdoms of the world the next morning.

Fifthly, the sincere soul hates sin with a superlative hatred: he hates it more than any other evil in the world besides it. Penal evils are not pleasant in themselves, but yet if he must endure them, or sin; then sufferings are his choice (Hebrews 11:25): 'Choosing rather to suffer affliction than enjoy the pleasures of sin'; the worst of sufferings, rather than the best of sin.

Sixthly, to conclude, so deep is the hatred that upright ones bear to sin, that nothing pleases them more than the thoughts of a full deliverance from it does (Romans 7:25): 'I thank God, through Jesus Christ our Lord.' What does he so heartily thank God for? O for a prospect of his final deliverance from sin, never to be entangled, defiled, or troubled with it any more: and this is one thing that sweetens death to the saints, as much as anything in the world

can do, except Christ's victory over it, and lying in the grave for us. To think of a grave is not pleasant in itself, but to think of a parting time with sin, that is sweet and pleasant indeed.

****SECTION 5.****

Thirdly, the children of God and the children of the devil, pure gold, and vile dross, are manifest as in hatred of sin, so in their troubles, and sorrow about sin.

All trouble for sin does not argue sincerity; some have reason to be troubled even for their troubles for sin. So have they who:

First, are only troubled for the commission of some more gross sins that startle the natural conscience, but not for inward sins that defile the soul. Judas was troubled for betraying innocent blood, but not for that base lust of covetousness that was the root of it, or the want of sincere love to Jesus Christ (Matthew 27:4-5). Outward sins are sins of greater scandal; but heart-sins are often times sins of greater guilt: to be troubled for grosser sins, and have no trouble for ordinary sins daily incurred, is an ill sign of a bad heart.

Secondly, a graceless heart may be much troubled at the discovery of sin, when it is not troubled for the guilt of sin (Jeremiah 2:26): 'As the thief is ashamed when he is found, so is the house of Israel ashamed.' Hence it is that they stick not to commit ten sins against God, to hide one sin from the eyes of men. It is a mercy that sin is the matter of men's shame, and that all are not arrived at that height of impudence to declare their sin as Sodom, and glory in their shame; but to be ashamed only because men see it,

and not with Ezra to say (Ezra 9:6), 'O my God, I am ashamed, and blush to look up to you' — ashamed that God sees it, is but hypocrisy.

Thirdly, a graceless heart may be troubled for the rod that sin draws after it, but not for sin itself as it provokes God to inflict such rods.

But the troubles of upright ones for sin are of another kind and nature.

First, they are troubled that God is wronged, and his Spirit troubled by their sins. So the penitent prodigal: 'I have sinned against heaven, and in your sight' (Luke 15:21). 'Against heaven,' that is, against him whose throne is in heaven, a great, glorious, and infinite Majesty: a poor worm of the earth, has lifted up his hand against the God of heaven.

Secondly, they are troubled for the defilement of their own souls by sin: hence they are compared in Proverbs 25:26 to a troubled fountain; you know it is the property of a living spring when any filth falls into it, or that which lies in the bottom of its channel is raised and defiles its streams, never to stop working till it has purged itself of it, and recovered its purity again.

So it is with a righteous man; he loves purity in the precept (Psalm 119:140), and he loves it no less in the principle and practice: he thinks it is hell enough to lie under the pollution of sin, if he should never come under damnation for it.

Thirdly, they are troubled for the estrangements of God, and the hiding of his face from them because of their sin. It would go close to an ingenuous spirit to see a dear and faithful friend whom he has grieved, to look strange and shy upon him at the next meet-

ing; as if he did not know him. Much more does it go to the heart of a gracious man to see the face of God turned from him, and not to be toward him as in times past. This went to David's heart after his fall, as you may see (Psalm 51:11): 'Cast me not away from your presence, and take not your holy Spirit from me': as if to say, 'Lord, if you turn your back upon me, and estrange yourself from me, I am a lost man: that is the greatest mischief that can befall me.'

Fourthly, their troubles for sin run deep, compared to what other men's do. They are strong to bear other troubles, but faint and quail under this (Psalm 38:4). Other sorrows may for the present be violent, and make more noise; but this sorrow soaks deeper into the soul.

Fifthly, their troubles for sin are more private and silent troubles than others are; their sore runs in the night (Psalm 77:2). Not but that they may, and do open their troubles to men (and it is a mercy when they meet with a judicious, tender, and experienced Christian to unbosom themselves to); but when all is done, it is God and your soul alone that must whisper out the matter. That is sincere sorrow for sin indeed, which is expressed secretly to God in the closet.

Sixthly, their troubles are incurable by creature comforts: it is not the removing of some outward pressures and inconveniences, that can remove their burden; nothing but pardon, peace, and witnessed reconciliation can quiet the gracious heart.

Seventhly, their troubles for sin are ordinate and kept in their own place; they dare not stamp the dignity of Christ's blood upon their worthless tears and groans for sin. Augustine once prayed:

'Lord, wash my sinful tears in the blood of Christ,' — that was once the desire of a true penitent. And thus our trouble for sin shows us what our hearts are.

SECTION 6.

Fourthly, the behavior and carriage of the soul with respect to subjection to the commands of sin, shows what our estate and condition is. This will separate dross from gold. All unregenerate men are the servants of sin; they subject themselves to its commands. The Scripture sometimes calls this a conversation in the lusts of the flesh (Ephesians 2:3); sometimes the selling of themselves to sin (1 Kings 21:20). Now as a judicious divine observes, though the children of God complain with Paul (Romans 7:14-15) that they are sold under sin, yet there is a vast difference between these two: the saints are sold to it by Adam, but others by their own continued consent. But to show you the difference in this matter, I conceive it necessary to show, wherein the reigning power of sin does not consist, and then wherein it does: that you may plainly discern who are in subjection to the reigning power of their corruptions, and who are not. Now there are diverse things common both to the regenerate and unregenerate, and we cannot say the dominion of sin lies in any or in all of them, namely, abstractly and simply considered.

First, both one and other having original corruption dwelling in them, may all find this fountain breaking forth into gross and scandalous sins: but we cannot say that because original corruption thus breaks forth into gross and scandalous sins in both; therefore it must necessarily reign in the one, as well as in the other. A righteous man may fall before the wicked, as it is Proverbs

25:26; he may fall in the dirt of grosser iniquities, and furnish them with matter of reproach. So did David, Peter, Abraham, and many more of the Lord's upright-hearted ones, whose souls nevertheless sin did not reign over, by a voluntary subjection to its commands; nor must this embolden any to sin with more liberty.

Secondly, though an upright soul falls once and again into sin, though he reiterates the same act of sin, which he has repented of before; yet it cannot merely from thence be concluded, that therefore sin reigns over him, as it does over a wicked man that makes it his daily trade. I confess every reiteration of sin, puts a further aggravation upon it: and it is sad we should repent, and sin; and sin, and repent. But yet you read (Proverbs 24:16): 'A just man falls seven times, and rises up again.' Job's friends were good men, yet he tells them (Job 19:3): 'These ten times have you reproached me.' This indeed shows a heart that really needs purging; for it is with relapses in spiritual matters, as it is with relapses into natural diseases: a recidivation or return of the disease shows that the morbid matter was not duly purged; but though it shows the foulness, it does not always prove the falseness of the heart.

Thirdly, though one may be impatient of the reproof of his sin, as well as the other; yet that alone will not conclude sin to be in full dominion over one, as it is over the other.

It is a pity any good man should storm at a just rebuke of sin; that such a precious ointment as is proper to heal, should be considered to break his head: but yet flesh will be tender and touchy; even in good men. Asa was a good man, and yet he was wroth with the prophet who reprov'd him (2 Chronicles 16:10). Yet I doubt not but their consciences smite them for it, when pride suffers not

another to do it: a reproof may be ill-timed, and ill-managed by another; and so may provoke; but they will hear the voice of conscience in another manner.

Fourthly, though in both some one particular sin may have more power than another, yet neither does this alone conclude that therefore that sin must reign in one, as it does in another. Indeed the beloved lust of every wicked man is king over his soul; but yet a godly man's constitution, calling, etc. may incline him more to one sin than another; and yet neither that, nor any other may be said to be in dominion. For David speaks of his iniquity, that is, his special sin (Psalm 18:23), which some suppose to be the sin of lying, from that intimation in Psalm 119:29; yet you see in one place he begs God to keep him from it, and in the other he tells us he kept himself from it, and both show he was not the servant of it.

Fifthly, though both may sin against knowledge, yet it will not follow from thence, that therefore sins against knowledge must necessarily be sins in dominion in the one, as they are in the other. There was too much light abused and overridden in David's deliberated sin; as he confesses (Psalm 51:6), and the sad story itself too plainly shows; and yet in the main, David was an upright man still, though this consideration of the fact severely wounded his integrity, and stands upon record as a caution to all others.

SECTION 7.

We have seen what does not infer the dominion of sin in the former particulars, being simply considered; I shall next show you what does; and how the sincere and false heart are distinguished in

this trial.

First, assent and consent upon deliberation marks the soul to be under the dominion of sin: when the mind approves sin, and the will gives its full consent to it; this sets sin in its throne, and puts the soul into subjection to it: for the dominion of sin consists in its authority over us, and our voluntary subjection to it. This you find to be the character of a wicked graceless person (Psalm 36:4): 'He devises mischief upon his bed; he sets himself in a way that is not good; he does not abhor evil.'

The best men may fall into sin through mistake, or be precipitated into sin through the violence of temptation; but to devise mischief, and set himself in an evil way; this notes full assent of the mind, and then to not abhor evil notes full consent of the will; and these two being given to sin, not only antecedently to the acting of it, but also consequently to it: to like it afterward, as well as before; this puts the soul fully under the power of sin; what can it give more?

This, as one says, in direct opposition to the Apostle (Romans 12:1), is to present their bodies a dead sacrifice, unholy, and abominable to God; acceptable to the devil, which is their unreasonable service: all men by nature are given to sin, but these men give themselves to it.

Secondly, the customary practice of sin subjects the soul to the dominion of sin: and so 'he that is born of God, does not commit sin' (1 John 3:9). Fall into sin, indeed the same sin, he may, and that often; but then it is not without reluctance, repentance, and a protest entered by the soul in heaven against it: so that sin has not a quiet possession of his soul; he is not the servant of sin, nor does

he willingly walk after its commandments. But so do its own servants; it is their daily practice (Jeremiah 9:3): 'They proceed from evil to evil.'

Thirdly, delight in sin proves the dominion of sin. So the servants of sin are described (Isaiah 66:3): 'They have chosen their own ways, and their soul delights in their abominations.'

Look as our delight in God is the measure of our holiness; so our delight in sin is the measure of our sinfulness. Delight in sin is one of the uppermost rungs of the ladder, and much higher the soul of a sinner cannot go, till it be turned off into hell. 'It is a sport to a fool to do mischief' (Proverbs 10:23). Never merrier than when he has the devil for his playmate, says one upon that place.

Fourthly, impatience of Christ's yoke and government, argues the soul to be the subject of sin. This is clear from the Apostle's reasoning in Romans 6:17-18: 'But God be thanked, that you were the servants of sin, but you have obeyed from the heart the form of doctrine which was delivered to you; being then made free from sin, you became the servants of righteousness': where you see plainly, that no man can have his freedom from sin, that does not come into Christ's service, and yield himself up to his obedience.

So then to fret at Christ's laws that tie us from our lusts, to be weary of all spiritual employments as an intolerable burden, never to be in our element and center till we are off from God, and plunging in the world and our lusts; this is a sad mark of a soul in subjection to sin.

Objection: But may not an upright soul find some weariness in spiritual things?

Answer: Doubtless he may, for he has flesh as well as spirit, and though the spirit is willing, the flesh is weak: he is sanctified but in part, and his delight in the law of God is but according to, or after the inner man (Romans 7:22); but he sees another law in his members, that is, contrary inclinations. However, if he is weary sometimes in the duties of godliness, to be sure he is more weary out of them, and is not centered and at rest till he is with his God again. But the carnal heart is where it would be when it is in the service of sin: and as a fish upon dry land, when engaged in spiritual duties, especially such as are secret, and have no external allurements of reputation to engage him to them.

But whatever surprises or captivities to sin may befall an upright soul, yet it appears by these eight following particulars, that he is not the servant of sin, nor in full subjection to it.

First, though he may be drawn to sin, yet he cannot reflect upon his sin without shame and sorrow; which plainly shows it to be an involuntary surprise. So Peter wept bitterly (Matthew 26:75), and David mourned for his sin heartily. Others can fetch new pleasures out of their old sins by reflecting on them: and some can glory in their shame (Philippians 3:19); some are stupid and senseless after sin, and the sorrow of a carnal heart for it, is but a morning dew: but it is far otherwise with God's people.

Though a saint may be drawn into sin, yet it is not with a deliberate and full consent of his will. Their delight is in the law of God (Romans 7:22). They do that which they would not (verse 16), that is, there are inward dislikes from the new nature. As for the case of David, which seems to have so much counsel and deliberation in it,

yet it was not in a single act; it was not in the general course of his life. He was upright in all things — that is, in the general course and tenor of his life (1 Kings 15:5).

Though an upright soul may fall into sin, yet he is restless and unquiet in that condition, like a bone out of joint. And that speaks him to be none of sin's servants. On the contrary, if a man is engaged in the external duties of religion, and is restless and unquiet there, his heart is not in it. He is not at rest until he is again in his earthly business — this man cannot be reckoned Christ's servant. A gracious heart is much better employed in the work of sin than a carnal heart is when employed in the work of religion. That is a good rule: that which is truly in a thing is what rests in it by nature. That is a man's true temper in which he is at rest. Poor David fell into sin, but he had no rest in his bones because of it (Psalm 51:10-12). If his heart is off from God and duty for a little while, yet he recollects himself, and says as in Psalm 116:7, 'Return unto your rest, O my soul.'

Though a sincere Christian falls into sin and commits evil, yet he does not proceed from evil to evil as the ungodly do (Jeremiah 9:3), but makes his fall into one sin a caution to prevent another sin. Peter by his fall got establishment for time to come. If God will speak peace to them, they are careful to turn no more to folly (Psalm 85:8). 'In that you sorrowed after a godly sort, what carefulness it worked — yes, what fear?' (2 Corinthians 7:11). It is not so with the servants of sin; one sin leaves them much more disposed to another sin.

A sincere Christian may be drawn to sin, but yet he would be glad with all his heart to be rid of sin. It would be more to him than thousands of gold or silver, that he might grieve and offend God no

more. And that shows sin is not in dominion over him. He that is under the dominion of sin is loath to leave his lusts. Sin's servants are not willing to part with it — they hold it fast and refuse to let it go. But the great complaint of the upright is expressed by the apostle according to the true sense of their hearts in Romans 7:24: 'Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?'

It appears they yield not themselves willingly to obey sin, in as much as it is the matter of their joy when God orders any providence to prevent sin in them. 'Blessed be the Lord,' said David to Abigail, 'and blessed be your advice, and blessed be you, that have kept me this day from shedding blood' (1 Samuel 25:32-33).

Here is blessing upon blessing for a sin-preventing providence. The author is blessed, the instrument blessed, the means blessed. It is a blessed thing in the eyes of a sincere man to be kept from sin. He reckons it a great deliverance, a very happy escape, if he is kept from sin.

This shows that some who may be drawn to commit sin yet are none of the servants of sin — that they heartily beg the assistance of grace to keep them from sin. 'Keep back your servant from presumptuous sins,' says the Psalmist (Psalm 19:13), 'let them not have dominion over me.' As if to say, 'Lord, I find propensities to sin in my nature — yes, and strong ones too; if you leave me to myself, I am carried into sin as easily as a feather down the torrent.' 'O Lord, keep back your servant.' And there is no petition that upright ones pour out their hearts to God in, either more frequently or more ardently, than to be kept back from sin.

This shows the soul not to be under the dominion of sin — that it not only cries to God to be kept back from sin, but uses the means of prevention itself. It resists sin as well as prays against it (Psalm 18:23): 'I was also upright before him, and kept myself from my iniquity.' So Job 31:1: 'I have made a covenant with my eyes.' And yet more fully in Isaiah 33:15: he shakes his hands from holding bribes, and stops his ears from hearing of blood, and shuts his eyes from seeing evil. See with what care the portals are shut at which sin is used to enter. All these things are very relieving considerations to poor souls questioning their integrity under the frequent surprises of sin.

****SECTION 8.****

Fifthly, our opposition to and conflict with sin discovers what we are — gold or dross.

There are conflicts with sin both in the regenerate and in the unregenerate, but there is a vast difference between them, as will appear in the following account.

First, there is a universal and there is a particular opposition to sin. The former is found in regenerate, the latter in unregenerate souls. A gracious heart hates every false way (Psalm 119:104), and must needs do so because he hates and opposes sin as sin. So he has no sin held in delight, no excepted or reserved lust, but fights against the whole body and every limb and member of the body of sin.

But it is not so with the hypocrite or carnal professor — he has evermore some reserved sin that he cannot part with.

Secondly, there is an opposition between the new nature and sin, and there is an opposition between natural conscience and sin. The former is the case of an upright soul; the latter may be of a self-deceiver.

A regenerate person opposes sin because there is an irreconcilable antipathy between it and the new nature in him, as is clear from Galatians 5:17: 'The flesh lusts against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh, and these are contrary the one to the other.' By flesh understand corrupt nature; by spirit, not only the spirit of man, but the Spirit of God, or the principle of regeneration in man. By the lusting of these two against each other, understand the desire and endeavor of each for the other's destruction and ruin. And the ground of all this is the contrariety of these two natures.

These are contrary to one another. There is a twofold opposition between them: one formal, in that their very natures are opposite; the other effective, in that their workings and designs are opposite, as it is between fire and water.

But the oppositions found in unrenewed souls against sin are not from their nature, for sin is suitable enough to that, but from the light that is in their minds and consciences, which scares and terrifies them. Such was that in Darius (Daniel 6:14): he was sore displeased with himself, and set his heart on Daniel to deliver him, and labored until the going down of the sun to deliver him. Here the contest was between sense of honor on one side, and conviction of conscience on the other.

Sometimes a generous and noble disposition opposes sordid and base actions. 'I am greater, and born for greater things, than that I should be a slave to my body,' said a brave heathen.

Thirdly, there is a permanent and there is a transient opposition to sin. The former is the case of God's people; the latter of temporary and unsound professors.

The saint, when he draws the sword in this warfare against sin, throws away the scabbard. There is no end of this combat with sin until life ends. Their life and their troubles are finished together (2 Timothy 4:7): 'I have fought the good fight, and have finished my course.'

But in other men it is but a transient quarrel — out with sin one day, and in again another. The reason is plain from what was noted before: it is not the opposition of two natures. It is like the opposition of the wind and the tide — these may be contrary and make a stormy sea today, but the wind may come about and go as the tide goes tomorrow. But in a Christian it is as the opposition of the river and the dam — one must give way to the other, there is no reconciling them. But the other, like the dog, returns to his vomit (2 Peter 2:22).

Fourthly, there is an opposition to the root of sin, and an opposition to the fruits of sin. A gracious soul opposes root and fruit, but others oppose the latter only. The great design of an upright soul is not only to lop off this or that branch, but to kill the root of sin which is in his nature (Romans 7:24): 'Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?'

But the great care and endeavors of others is to suppress outward acts of sin and escape the mischievous consequences of it. Indeed, their study is, as Lactantius phrases it, to hide rather than to kill their lusts.

Fifthly, there is an opposition to sin in the strength of God, and an opposition to sin in our own strength. The former is proper to a real Christian; the latter is found frequently with unsanctified persons. When a Christian goes forth against any sin, it is in the strength of God. So you read their rule directs them (Ephesians 6:10): 'Be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might; take unto you the whole armor of God.' And suitably, you shall find them frequently upon their knees, begging strength from heaven against their lusts. 'For this cause I besought the Lord three times,' says Paul (2 Corinthians 12:8) — that is, often and earnestly — that the temptation might depart from him.

But others go forth against sin only in the strength of their own resolutions. These resolutions, or vows which they have put themselves under, are as frequently frustrated as made.

Sixthly, there is a successful opposition to sin, and an opposition that comes to nothing. The former is that of true Christians; the latter is found among unregenerate men.

The work of mortification in the saints is progressive and increasing. Hence Romans 6:6: 'Our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed.' Sin dies in believers much as crucified persons used to die — a slow, lingering, gradual, but sure death. Its vigor and life expires by degrees. Or as a consumptive person dies — for to that also he alludes here. There is a disease called a consumption of the whole, and those that die of that disease languish more and more until at last they drop by imperceptible degrees and steps into the grave.

But in the unregenerate, whatever conflicts they have with sin, no corruption falls before it. It may be said of them, as the church in another case complains of herself (Isaiah 26:18): 'We have been in pain; we have, as it were, brought forth wind; we have not wrought any deliverance in the earth, neither have the inhabitants of the world fallen.' So it fares with these professors — they pray, they hear, they vow, they resolve; but when all is done, their lusts are as strong and vigorous as ever. No degree of mortification appears after all.

And thus much of the trial of our sincerity by our carriage toward sin.

CHAPTER 7



SECTION 1.

We now come, according to the method proposed, to make trial of the truth or falseness of grace by the duties we daily perform in religion. And certainly they also have the use and efficacy of fire for this discovery (1 John 2:4-5): 'He that says, I know him, and keeps not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him; but whoso keeps his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected; and hereby know we that we are in him.'

This is a practical lie of which the apostle speaks here, by which men deceive others for a while, and themselves forever. A lie not spoken but done — when a man's course of life contradicts his profession. The life of a hypocrite is but one long continued lie. He says or professes he knows God, but takes no care at all to obey him in the duties he commands. He either neglects them, or if he performs them, it is not as God requires. 'If they draw near to him with their lips, yet their heart is far from him' (Isaiah 29:13). 'You are near in their mouth, but far from their minds' (Jeremiah 12:2).

There are some that feel the influence and power of their communion with the Lord in duties, going down to their very inmost parts. And there are others whose lips and tongues only are

touched with religion.

This is an age of light and much profession. Men cannot now keep up a reputation in the sober and professing world while they let down and totally neglect the duties of religion. But surely if men would be but just to themselves, their very performances of duty would tell them what their hearts are.

SECTION 2.

For there are, among others, the following particulars that do very clearly distinguish the sound from the unsound professor.

First, the designs and true aims of men's hearts in duty will tell them what they are.

A hypocrite aims low (Hosea 7:14): 'They have not cried unto me with their heart when they howled upon their beds; they assembled themselves for corn and wine, and they rebel against me.' It is not for Christ and pardon, for mortification and holiness, but for corn and wine, that they make a market of religion. All their ends in duty are either carnal, natural, or legal — it is either to accommodate their carnal ends, or to satisfy and quiet their consciences. And so their duties are performed as a sin-offering to God.

But an upright heart has very high and pure aims in duty. 'The desire of their soul is to God' (Isaiah 26:8); their soul follows hard after God (Psalm 63:8). 'One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after: that I might dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to see the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in his temple' (Psalm 27:4). These are the true eagles that soar toward the sun and will not stoop to low and earthly objects. Alas, if the

enjoyment of God is missed in a duty, the greatest enlargements of gifts will not satisfy. He comes back like a man that has taken a long journey to meet his friend upon important business and lost his labor — his friend was not there.

Secondly, the engagement of men's hearts to God in duties will tell them what they are. The hypocrite takes little heed to his heart (Isaiah 29:13). They are not truly grieved for the hardness, deadness, unbelief, and wanderings of their hearts in duty as upright ones are. Nor do they engage their hearts and labor to get them up with God in duty as his people do. 'I have sought your favor with my whole heart,' says David (Psalm 119:58). They are not pleased in duty until they feel their hearts stand toward God like a bow in its full bent. I do not say it is always so with them — what would they give that it might always be so! But surely if their souls in duty are empty of God, they are filled with trouble and sorrow.

Thirdly, the conscience men make of secret as well as public duties will tell them what their hearts and graces are — true or false. A vain professor is conscientious in the former, and either negligent or at best formal in the latter. For he finds no inducements of honor, applause, or ostentation of gifts externally moving him to them. Nor has he any experience of the sweetness and benefit of such duties internally to allure and engage his soul to them.

The hypocrite therefore is not for the closet but the synagogue (Matthew 6:5-6). Not but that education, example, or the impulse of conscience may sometimes drive him there; but it is not his daily delight to be there — his meat and drink to retire from the clamor of the world to enjoy God in secret. It is the observation of others that is the great inducement to these men to perform their duties. 'Verily,' says our Lord (verse 2), 'they have their reward' —

they have carried off all the benefit and advantage that ever they shall have by religion. Much good may they do with their applause and honor; let them make much of that airy reward, for it is all that ever they shall have.

But now for a soul truly gracious, he cannot long subsist without secret prayer. It is true, there is not always an equal freedom and delight, a like enlargement and comfort in those retirements. But yet he cannot be without them. He finds the want of his secret communion in his public duties. If he and his God have not met in secret and had some communion in the morning, he sensibly feels it in the deadness and unprofitableness of his heart and life all the day after.

Fourthly, the spirituality of our duties tries the sincerity of our graces. An unregenerate heart is carnal while engaged in duties that are spiritual. Some men deceive themselves in thinking they are spiritual men because their employment and calling is about spiritual things (Hosea 9:7). This indeed gives them the name, but not the frame, of spiritual men. And others judge themselves spiritual persons because they frequently perform and attend upon spiritual duties. But alas, the heart and state may be carnal notwithstanding all this. O my friends, it is not enough that the object of your duties is spiritual — that they respect a holy God. Nor that the matter be spiritual — that you be conversant about holy things. But the frame of your heart must be spiritual. A heavenly temper of soul is necessary. And what are the most heavenly duties without it?

The end and design you aim at must be spiritual — the enjoyment of God, and a growing conformity to him in holiness. Else, multiply duties as the sand on the seashore, and they will not

amount to one evidence of your sincerity. 'God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit,' says the apostle (Romans 1:9). He seems to appeal to God in this matter: 'I serve God in my spirit, and God knows that I do so.' 'I dare appeal to him that it is so; he knows that my heart is with him, or would be with him in my duties.' O how little satisfaction do gracious hearts find in the most excellent duties, if God and their souls do not sensibly meet in them!

Certainly, reader, there is a time when God comes near to men in duty, when he deals familiarly with men and sensibly fills their souls with unusual powers and delights. The near approaches of God to their souls are felt by them, for souls have their senses as well as bodies. And now their minds are abstracted and marvelously refined from all that is material and earthly, and swallowed up in spiritual excellencies and glories.

These are the real foretastes of glory, which no man can by words make another to understand as he himself does who feels them.

These seasons, I confess, do but rarely occur to the best of Christians, nor continue long when they do. Alas, this wine is too strong for such weak vessels as we are. 'Hold, Lord,' said a holy man once, 'it is enough; your poor creature is a clay vessel and can hold no more.' This is that joy unspeakable and full of glory which is mentioned in 1 Peter 1:7-8 — something that words cannot describe. These seasons are the golden spots of our lives, when we are admitted to these near and ineffable views and tastes of God. Possibly some poor Christians can say but little to these things; their sorrows are exercised in duties more than their joys. They are endeavoring to mount, but the stone hangs at the heel. They essay

but cannot rise to that height that others do, who are gotten up by their laboring faith into the upper region, and there display their wings and sing in the sunbeams. But though they cannot reach this height, yet they have no satisfaction in duties wherein there is no intercourse between God and their souls.

That which contents another will not content a Christian. If the king is absent, men will bow to the empty chair; but if God is absent, an empty duty gives no satisfaction to a gracious spirit. The poorest Christian is found panting after God by sincere desires, and laboring to get up that dead and vain heart to God in duty. Though alas, it is many times but the rolling of the returning stone against the hill. Yet he never expects advantage from a duty wherein the Spirit of God is not. Nor does he expect the Spirit of God to be where his own spirit is not.

Fifthly, assiduity and constancy in the duties of religion makes a notable discovery of the soundness or rottenness of men's hearts. The hypocrite may show some zeal and forwardness in duties for a time, but he will tire and give out at length. 'Will he delight himself in the Almighty? will he always call upon God?' (Job 27:10). No, he will not. If his motions in religion were natural, they would be constant; but they are artificial. He is moved by external inducements, and so must needs be off and on. He prays himself weary of praying, and hears himself weary of hearing. His heart is not delighted in his duties, and therefore his duties must needs grow stale and dry to him after a while. There are three seasons in which the zeal of a hypocrite may be inflamed in duties.

First, when some imminent danger threatens him, and some sharp rod of God is shaken over him. 'When he slew them, then they sought him, and returned and inquired early after God'

(Psalm 78:34). O the goodly words they give, the fair promises they make. And yet all the while they do but flatter him with their lips and lie to him with their tongues (verses 36-37). For let but that danger pass over and the heavens clear up again, and he will restrain prayer and return to his old course again.

Secondly, when the times countenance and favor religion, and the wind is at his back. O what a zeal will he have for God! So in the stony ground (Matthew 13:5), the seed sprang up and flourished until the sun of persecution arose, and then it faded away, for it had no depth of earth — no deep, solid, inward work or principle of grace to maintain it.

Thirdly, when self-ends and designs are accommodated and promoted by these things. This was the case of Jehu (2 Kings 10:16): 'Come, see my zeal' — for what? For a base self-interest, not for God. How fervently will some men pray, preach, and profess while they sensibly feel the income and profit of these duties to their flesh — while they are admired and applauded!

These external incentives will put a hypocrite into a hot fit of zeal, but then, as it is with a man whose color is raised by the heat of a fire and not by the healthfulness of a good constitution, it soon fades and falls again.

But blessed be God, it is not so with all. The man whose heart is upright with his God 'will keep judgment and do righteousness at all times' (Psalm 106:3) — whether danger threatens or not, whether the times favor religion or not, whether his earthly interest is promoted by it or not. He will be holy still. He will not part

with his duties when they are stripped naked of those external advantages. As the addition of these things to religion did not at first engage him, so the subtraction of them cannot disengage him.

If his duty becomes his reproach, yet Moses will not forsake it (Hebrews 11:26). If he loses company and is left alone, yet Paul will not flinch from his duty (2 Timothy 4:16). If hazard surrounds duty on every side, yet Daniel will not quit it (Daniel 6:10). For they considered these things at first and counted the cost. They still find religion is rich enough to pay the cost of all that they can lose or suffer for its sake — yes, and with a hundredfold reward, now in this life. They never had any other design in engaging in religious duties but to help them to heaven. And if they recover heaven at last, whether the way to it prove better or worse, they have their design and ends. And therefore they will be steadfast, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing their labor is not in vain in the Lord (1 Corinthians 15:58).

Sixthly, the humility and self-denial of our hearts in duties will try what they are for their integrity and sincerity toward God. Does a man boast his own excellencies in prayer as the Pharisee did (Luke 18:10-11): 'God, I thank you that I am not as other men' — which he speaks not in a humble acknowledgment of the grace of God that distinguishes man from man, but in a proud ostentation of his own excellencies? Does a man make his duties his saviors and trust in them with a vain confidence of their worth and dignity (Luke 18:9)? Surely his heart, which is thus lifted up within him, is not upright (Habakkuk 2:4). But if the heart is right indeed, it will express its humility — in all other things, but especially in its duties, wherein it approaches the great and holy God.

First, it will manifest its humility in those awful and reverential apprehensions it has of God, as Abraham did (Genesis 18:27): 'Behold now, I that am but dust and ashes have taken upon me to speak unto God.' The humility of Abraham's spirit is in some measure to be found in all Abraham's children.

Secondly, in those low and vile thoughts they have of themselves and their religious performances. Thus that poor penitent in Luke 7:38 stood behind Christ weeping. 'Yet the dogs eat the crumbs,' says another (Mark 7:28). 'I am more brutish than any man,' says a third (Proverbs 30:2). 'I abhor myself in dust and ashes,' says a fourth (Job 42:6). And as little esteem they have for their performances: 'All our righteousnesses are as filthy rags' (Isaiah 64:6). I do not deny that there is pride and vanity in the most upright ones; but whatever place it finds in their conversations with men, it finds little room in their conversations with God. Or if it does, they loathe it, and themselves for it.

Thirdly, but especially their humility in duty is discovered in renouncing all their duties in point of dependence, and relying entirely upon Christ for righteousness and acceptance. They have special regard to duties in point of obedience, but none at all in point of reliance.

Seventhly, the communion and intercourse between God and men in duties notably discovers what their persons and graces are. And it must needs do so, because whatever communion the hypocrite has with duties, or with saints in duties, to be sure he has none with God.

None can come near to God in duty but those that are made near by reconciliation. Special communion with Christ is founded in real union with Christ. But 'the wicked are estranged from the womb' (Psalm 58:3).

But there is real communion between God and his people in duties. 'Truly our fellowship — our communion — is with the Father and with the Son' (1 John 1:3). God pours forth his Spirit upon them, and they pour forth their hearts to God. It is sensibly manifest to them when the Lord comes near to their souls in duty, and as sensible are they of his retreats and withdrawals from their souls (Song of Songs 3:1, 4). They find their hearts like the heliotrope, open and shut according to the approaches and withdrawals of the divine presence. Those that never felt anything of this nature may call it a fancy, but the Lord's people are abundantly satisfied of the reality thereof.

Their very countenance is altered by it (1 Samuel 1:18). The sad and cloudy countenance of Hannah cleared up — there was fair weather in her very face — as soon as she knew she had audience and acceptance with her God. I know all communion with God does not consist in joys and comforts. There is as real communion with God in the mortifying and humbling influences of his Spirit upon men as in the cheering and refreshing influences thereof. I know also there is great diversity in the degrees and measures thereof. It is not alike in all Christians, nor with the same Christian at all times. But that real Christians have true and real communion with God in their duties is as true and manifest in the spiritual sense and experience of the saints as their communion with one another.

Eighthly, growth and improvement in grace in duties notably distinguishes the sound and unsound heart. All the duties in the world will never make a hypocrite more holy, humble, or heavenly than he is. But as the watering of a dry stick will sooner rot it than make it flourishing and fruitful. What was Judas the better for all those heavenly sermons, prayers, and discourses of Christ which he heard? And what will your soul be the better for all the duties you perform weekly and daily if your heart is unsound? It is plain from John 15:4 that there must be an implantation into Christ before there can be an improvement in fruitful obedience. And it is as plain from 1 John 2:14 that the virtues of the ordinances must remain — the efficacy and powers that we sometimes feel under them must abide and remain in the heart afterward — or we cannot grow and be made fruitful by them.

But the false professor is neither rooted in Christ by union with him, nor does or can he retain the virtue of ordinances within him. But like one that views his face in a glass and quickly forgets what manner of man he was, his head may grow and his knowledge may increase, but he has a dead and withered heart.

But as the saints have real communion with God in duties, so they do make improvements answerable thereunto. There is most certainly a ripening of their graces that way — a changing or gradual transformation from glory to glory, a springing up to that full stature of the man in Christ. 'They that are planted in the house of the Lord shall flourish in the courts of our God' (Psalm 92:13-14). There is pure and sincere milk in the breasts of ordinances. A believer sucks the very breasts of Christ in his duties, and does grow

(1 Peter 2:2). They grow more and more judicious, experienced, humble, mortified, and heavenly by conversing with the Lord so frequently in his appointments.

There is, I confess, a more discernible growth and ripening in some Christians than in others. 'The faith of some grows exceedingly' (2 Thessalonians 1:3); others more slowly (Hebrews 5:12). But yet there are improvements of grace in all upright ones — habits are more deeply rooted, or fruits of obedience more increased.

Objection: If any upright soul is stumbled at this, not being able to discern the increase of his graces after all his duties.

Answer: Let such consider that the growth of grace is discerned as the growth of plants is — which we perceive rather to have grown than to be growing. Compare time past and present, and you may see it. But usually our eager desires after more make us overlook what we have as nothing.

Ninthly, the assistances and influences of the Spirit in duties shows us what we are. No vital, sanctifying influences can fall upon carnal hearts in duties. The Spirit helps not their infirmities, nor makes intercession for them with groanings that cannot be uttered, as he does for his own people (Romans 8:26-27). They have his assistances in the way of common gifts, but not in the way of special grace. He may enable them to preach judiciously, not experimentally; to pray orderly and neatly, not feelingly, believably, and broken-heartedly. 'For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God' (Romans 8:14). He never so assists but where he has first sanctified. Carnal men furnish the materials of their duties out of the strength of their parts — a strong memory

and a good invention are the fountains from which they draw. But it is otherwise with souls truly gracious. They have ordinarily a threefold assistance from the Spirit with reference to their duties.

First, before duties, exciting them to it, making them feel their need of it, like the call of an empty stomach. 'When you said, Seek my face; my heart answered, Your face, Lord, will I seek' (Psalm 27:8).

Secondly, in their duties, furnishing both matter and affection, as in that text already cited (Romans 8:26), guiding them not only what to ask, but how to ask.

Thirdly, after their duties, helping them not only to suppress the pride and vanity of their spirits, but also to wait on God for the accomplishment of their desires.

Now though all these things wherein the sincerity of our hearts is tried in duties are found in great variety as to degrees among the saints, yet they are mysteries unknown by experience to other men.

CHAPTER 8



SECTION 1.

We are now arrived at the last trial of grace proposed — namely, by sufferings for religion.

Thousands of hypocrites embark themselves in the profession of religion in calm; but if the wind rises and the sea swells, and they see religion will not transport them safely to the cape of their earthly hopes and expectations, they desire to be landed again as soon as may be, for they never intended to ride out a storm for Christ. So you find in Matthew 13:20-21: 'He endures for a while, but when tribulation or persecution arises because of the word, by and by he is offended.'

But yet it is not every trial by suffering that separates gold from dross, and therefore my business will be to show:

First, when the fire of sufferings or persecution is hot and vehement enough to separate them.

Secondly, why it must needs discover hypocrisy when it is at that height.

Thirdly, what advantages sincere grace has to endure that severe and sharp trial.

SECTION 2.

Now the fire of persecution or sufferings for religion may be judged intense and high enough to separate gold and dross.

First, when religion exposes us to eminent hazard of our deepest and dearest interests in this world — such as our liberties, estates, and lives. Now it is a fierce and fiery trial indeed. Sometimes it exposes the liberties of its professors (Revelation 2:10): 'The devil shall cast some of you into prison.' Sometimes their estates (Hebrews 10:34): 'You took joyfully the spoiling of your goods.' And sometimes their lives (Hebrews 11:37): 'They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, they were slain with the sword.' While it goes no higher than some small inconveniences of life, reputation and sense of honor will hold a false heart. But when it comes to this, few will be found able to endure it but those that expect to get no more by religion than their souls, and count themselves in good case if they can but save them with the loss of all that is dear to them in this world.

Here the false heart balks; here it usually fades and falters.

Secondly, the fiery trial is then high when there remain no visible hopes of deliverance or outward encouragements to sense that the scene will alter. 'When we see not our signs, there is no more any prophet, nor any that can tell us how long' — as the case of the church was in Psalm 74:9. Then their hands hang down and their hearts faint. Nor is it to be wondered at, when the length of troubles proves so sore a temptation even to the upright as to put forth their hands to iniquity (Psalm 125:3). If such a temptation shakes such men as build on the rock, it must quite overturn those whose foundation is but sand.

Thirdly, when a false professor is engaged alone in sufferings and is singled out from the herd as a deer to be run down. Now it is a thousand to one but he quits religion to save himself. Good company will encourage a faint-hearted traveler to jog along a great way. But if he is forsaken by all, as Paul was, with no man to stand by him; if left alone, as Elijah was — what can encourage him to hold out?

Indeed if they had the same invisible supports those good men had — that the Lord was with them — that would keep them steady. But wanting that encouragement from within, and all shrinking away from without, they quickly tire downright.

Fourthly, when near relations and intimates oppose and tempt us. The prophet speaks of a time 'when a man's foes shall be the men of his own house' — it may be the wife of his bosom (Micah 7:5-6). O what a trial is that which Christ mentions in Luke 14:26 — when we must hate father and mother, wife and children, or quit our claim to Christ and heaven! This is hard work indeed.

How hard did that truly noble and renowned Galeacius Caracciolus find this! O what a conflict he found in his bowels! Now Christ and our dearest interest come to meet like two men upon a narrow bridge — if one goes forward, the other must go back. And now the predominant interest can no longer be concealed.

Fifthly, when powerful temptations are mixed with cruel sufferings — when we are strongly tempted as well as cruelly persecuted. This blows up the fire to a vehement height. This was the trial of those precious primitive believers (Hebrews 11:35-37): 'They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, they were tempted.'

Here were life, liberty, and preferment set upon one hand, and death in its most formidable shape upon the other. This cannot but be a great trial to any. But especially when a cruel death and tender temptation meet, then the trial goes high indeed.

SECTION 3.

And that such sufferings as these will discover the falseness and rottenness of men's hearts cannot be doubted, if you consider that this is the fire designed by God for this very use and purpose — to separate the gold from the dross. So you will find it in 1 Peter 4:12: 'Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial, which is to try you' — that is, the very design and aim of providence in permitting and ordering it is to try you. The design of Satan is to destroy you, but God's design is to try you. Upon this account you find the hour of persecution, in a suitable notion, called the hour of temptation or probation (Revelation 3:10). Then professors are sifted to the very bran, searched to the very bottom principles. 'This is the day that burns as an oven, in which all the proud and all that do wickedly shall be as stubble' (Malachi 4:1).

First, in that day the predominant interest must appear and be discovered. It can be concealed no longer. 'No man can serve two masters,' says Christ (Luke 16:13). A man may serve many masters if they all command the same things, or things subordinate to each other. But he cannot serve two masters if their commands clash and interfere with each other. And such are the commands of Christ and the flesh in a suffering hour. Christ says, 'Be faithful unto death.' The flesh says, 'Spare yourself, and enjoy the comforts of life.' Christ says, 'He that loves father or mother, wife or children, lands or inheritances more than me, is not worthy of me.'

Flesh says, 'He that will grieve and break the hearts of such dear relations, and forsake when he might keep such earthly accommodations, is not worthy of them.'

Thus the two interests come into full opposition. Now have but patience to wait a little, and you shall discern which is predominant. A dog follows two men while they both walk one way, and you know not which of the two is his master. Stay but a little till their path parts, and then you shall quickly see who is his master. So it is in this case.

Secondly, in that day sensible supports fail, and all a man's relief comes in by the pure and immediate actings of faith. Were it not for those reliefs, his heart would soon faint and die away under discouragements (2 Corinthians 4:17-18): 'We faint not, whilst we look not at the things which are seen, for they are temporal, but at the things which are not seen, for they are eternal.' That is, as long as we keep our eye intently fixed upon the invisible and eternal things of the coming world, we feel ourselves fainting and dying away under the troubles and afflictions of this world. 'I had fainted,' says David, 'if I had not believed.' How then, suppose you, shall the hypocrite live at such a time, who has no faith to support him — no relief but what comes in through the senses?

Thirdly, in that day all mere notion and speculation about religion vanishes, and nothing relieves and satisfies the suffering soul but what it really believes and has satisfying proof and experience of in itself. There are a great many prettily pleasing notions with which our minds are entertained with some delight in times of peace, which can do us no service at all in the day of trouble. And for our speculative, unpractical knowledge of the greatest truths in religion, as little service is to be expected from them. Except we

have better evidence and security about them, we shall be loath to venture all upon the credit of them. That is a very considerable passage to this purpose in Hebrews 10:34: 'You took joyfully the spoiling of your goods, knowing in yourselves that you have in heaven a better and more enduring substance.' This knowing in ourselves is by inward, sensible experience, taste, and feeling, which is abundantly satisfying to the soul. And it stands opposed to all that traditional knowledge we receive from others, which, as it leaves the mind fluctuating, so leaves the heart also dead and comfortless.

Fourthly, in that day the root and foundation of a man's faith and hope is tried, and then they that have built upon the sand must needs fail. For everything is as its foundation is. Principles are to us what a root is to a tree, or a foundation to a house. A flaw or grand defect there ruins all. This we find to be the very scope of those two famous parables in Luke 14:25 and Matthew 13:21. Lesser troubles shake but the branches, but these try the root. If nothing is found there but self-ends, the force of education, the influence of examples, surely when the winds rise high and beat upon it, they will quickly lay the loftiest professor even with the ground.

And thus you see what a crisis an hour of temptation — the suffering hour — is, and what discoveries of hypocrisy it must needs make. For now the hypocrite, like Orpah, will forsake religion, but sincerity will make the soul cleave to it, as Ruth did to Naomi.

SECTION 4.

What advantages sincerity gives the soul for its establishment and perseverance in suffering times, I shall briefly account for in the following particulars.

First, sincere godliness dethrones that idol — the love of this world — in all true Christians. And this is what makes men shrink and flinch from Christ in a day of suffering. I do not deny that even believers themselves love the world too much. But they love it not as their chief good; it is not their portion or happiness. 'If any man so love the world, the love of the Father is not in him' (1 John 2:15). However much a sincere Christian loves the world, yet still it is in subordination to the love of God (John 21:15). Sincerity can consist with no other love of the world; it will not suffer such a cursed weed to grow under its shadow.

Now, what is it but this inordinate, supreme love of the creature that makes men forsake Christ in time of temptation? This was the ruin of that young man (Matthew 19:22): 'He went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.' This was the overthrow of Demas (2 Timothy 4:10): 'He has forsaken me,' says the apostle, 'having loved this present world.' The love of this world, like sap in green wood, will not suffer you to burn for Christ. Get but the heart mortified to the creature by a discovery of better things in heaven, and it will establish and fix your spirit so that it shall not be in the power of creatures to shake you off from Christ your foundation.

Secondly, sincerity knits the soul to Christ, and union with him secures us in the great trials. The hypocrite, having no union with Christ, can have no communion with him, nor communications of grace from him. So that little stock of his own being quickly spent — I mean natural courage and resolution — and no income from

Christ, he must needs give up in a short time. But it is with a believer in a day of trouble as it is with a garrison besieged by land but free and open to the sea, from which fresh supplies are daily sent in to relieve it. 'As the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also abounds by Christ' (2 Corinthians 1:5). Fresh aids and daily supplies proportionable to our expenses and decays of strength. 'Strengthened with all might in the inner man, according to his glorious power, unto all patience and long-suffering with joyfulness' (Colossians 1:11). And this is the believer's great advantage by his union with Christ in a day of trial.

Thirdly, as sincerity unites the soul with Christ, so it sets the heart upon heaven and things eternal (Colossians 3:1 and following). Surely nothing is more conducive to our stability than this, in the hour of temptation.

This is the most effectual preservative from temptations upon the right hand and upon the left. Moses could cast a kingdom at his heels, despise the riches, pleasures, and honors of Egypt, while his eye was fixed upon him that is invisible, and he had respect to the recompense of reward (Hebrews 11:24-26). And it was a brave reply of the forty martyrs to Valens the emperor, tempting them with the preferments and honors of the world: 'Why do you offer these trifles to us, when you know the whole world is contemned by us?' And for temptations on the left hand, how little can they move that soul who realizes the glory of the approaching world, and sees the afflictions and sufferings of this world preparing him for and hastening him to the enjoyment of it. Temptations meet but with cold entertainment from such souls.

Fourthly, sincerity drives but one design, and that is to please and enjoy God. And what can more establish and fix the soul in the hour of temptation than this? The reason why the hypocrite is unstable in all his ways is given us by the apostle James (1:8): 'He is a double-minded man' — a man of two souls in one body, as a profane wretch once boasted, that he had one soul for God and another for anything else. But all the designs of a gracious heart are united in one, and so the entire stream of his affections runs strong.

It is base, selfish ends and self-interests that, like a great many ditches cut out of the bank of a river, draw away the stream out of its proper channel and make its waters fail. But if the heart is united for God, as the expression is in Psalm 86:11, then we may say of such a Christian what was said of a brave young soldier: whatever he wills, he does with all his might. And this is the ground of that saying: 'God deliver me from a man of only one design' — a man of one design puts all his strength to carry it; nothing can stand before him.

Fifthly, sincerity brings a man's will into subjection to the will of God. And this being done, the greatest danger and difficulty is over with such a man. This is that holy oil which makes the wheels of the soul run nimbly even in difficult paths of obedience. Let but a man be once brought to that — 'The will of the Lord be done' (Acts 21:14) — to see the highest reason of cheerful obedience in the holy, just, and good will of God. Then the difficulty is over: he can suffer quietly what men inflict unjustly.

Sixthly, sincerity takes its measures of present things by the rules of faith and eternity. It goes not by the same reckoning and account that others do, who judge of things by sense and the re-

spects they have to the present world (2 Corinthians 4:18): 'We look not at the things that are seen, but at the things that are not seen.' And this is given there as the reason for his not fainting under present difficulties. So Romans 8:18: 'I reckon that the sufferings of the present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.' He will not allow himself to undervalue eternal glory by once mentioning present sufferings in a way of bemoaning himself for them. A steady eye upon the other world makes us more than conquerors over the troubles of this world.

Seventhly, to conclude: sincerity alone has all the heavenly aids and assistances to stability and perseverance in suffering times. Upright ones — and such only — have Christ's intercession in heaven for them (Romans 8:34). They have the Spirit's consolation in all their troubles (1 Peter 4:14): 'The spirit of glory and of God rests on them.' They have the beneficial ministry of angels, who are sent forth on their account (Hebrews 1:14). They have a stock of prayers going for them all the world over (Ephesians 6:18). They have multitudes of precious promises in the Scriptures, for every line, word, and syllable of which the faithfulness of God stands engaged. So that it is impossible such gold should perish in the fire.

And thus of the several ways by which grace is here tried.

CHAPTER 9



SECTION 1.

These are some of the ways and methods in which God brings his gold to the touchstone and to the fire, even in this world, before the awful and solemn trial they must come to in the final judgment. And if we desire to be satisfied as to what the design and end of God is in making such probations of his people:

We must conclude in the general that he certainly designs his own glory and his people's advantage and profit in them. If he suffers them to be tried by reproaches, happy are they — the spirit of glory and of God rests on them; there is their profit. And though his name be evil spoken of, yet in the meekness of their spirits he is glorified, as it is in 1 Peter 4:14. 'If the scourge slays suddenly, he laughs at the trial of the innocent' (Job 9:23) — not at their afflictions, but at the effects and blessed issues and results of them. Not that it gives them pain, but that it gives him glory. Upon this account the apostle bids us count it all joy when we fall into various temptations or trials. And still the more trials, the more joy; for thereby God will produce such effects as are more precious than gold that perishes (1 Peter 1:7). O who can value the comfort that is tasted by the soul upon the trial and discovery of its sincerity!

When after some sore temptation wherein God has helped us to maintain our integrity, or after some close pinching affliction wherein we have discovered in ourselves a sweet resignation to and contentment in the will of God — a heart cleaving to the Lord, purged and made more spiritual under the rod — we can turn to the Lord and appeal to him as the prophet did (Jeremiah 12:3): 'But you, O Lord, know me; you have seen me, and tried my heart toward you.'

Who can duly value such an advantage? who would exchange such a comfort for all the gold and silver in the world! However many trials God brings his people under, to be sure neither his own glory nor their interest shall suffer any damage by them.

SECTION 2.

But more particularly, let us bring our thoughts close to the matter before us, and we shall find many great advantages and benefits rising out of these trials of sincerity.

First, hereby hypocrisy is unmasked and discovered. The mask is plucked off from the false professor, and his true natural face and complexion shown to the world. And in this there is a great deal of good.

Objection: Good, you will say — where does it lie? All the world sees the mischief and sad effects of it. Many are stumbled, many are hardened by it. 'Woe to the world because of offenses' (Matthew 18:7).

Answer: True, some are prejudiced and hardened by it, so as never to have good thoughts of the ways and people of God more. That is sad indeed. However, therein God accomplishes his word

and executes his decree. And though these perish, yet:

First, others are warned, awakened, and set to searching their own hearts more narrowly than ever. And this is good: 'Now these things were our examples; wherefore let him that thinks he stands take heed lest he fall' (1 Corinthians 10:11-12).

Secondly, hereby sin is shamed. And it is good when sin that has exposed men to so much shame shall itself be exposed to shame. This is the just reward of sin (Jeremiah 13:25-26): 'This is your lot, the portion of your measures from me,' says the Lord, 'because you have forgotten me and trusted in falsehood, therefore will I discover your skirts upon your face, that your shame may appear.'

The turning up of the skirt is a modest expression of exposing a person to the greatest shame. In the day of trial, God by discovering hypocrisy shames the hypocrite. And surely many such discoveries are made of men in this day; we may see sin that lurked close in the heart before, now laid open before all Israel and before the sun.

Thirdly, hereby the poor self-deceiving hypocrite has the greatest opportunity and advantage that ever was before him in all his life to recover himself out of the snare of the devil. Now all his pretenses are gone. Now that which, like a shield, was advanced against the arrows of reproof and conviction is gone. Now a poor creature stands naked and stripped out of all his pleas, as a fair and open mark to the word and his own conscience. And happy will it be for him if now the Lord makes conviction to enter point-blank into his soul. All these are blessed effects of the discovery of hypocrisy.

Secondly, by these trials integrity is cleared up, and the doubts and fears of many upright and holy ones are allayed and quieted, resolved and satisfied.

O what would many a poor Christian give for satisfaction in that great point of sincerity! How many tears have been shed to God in secret upon that account? How many hours have been spent in examination of his own heart about it, and still jealousies and fears hang upon his heart? He doubts what he may prove at last. Well, says God, let his sincerity then come to the test. Kindle the fire and cast in my gold. Trials are the highway to assurance. Let my child see that he loves me more than these — that his heart is upright with me. I will try him by prosperity and by adversity, by persecutions and temptations, and he shall see his heart is better than he suspects it to be. This shall be the day of resolution to his fears and doubts.

The apostle, speaking of heresies (1 Corinthians 11:19), puts a necessity upon them: 'There must be heresies, that they which are approved may be made manifest.' The same necessity there is — and for the same end — of all other trials of grace: that the lovely, beautiful, sweet face of sincerity may be opened sometimes to the world to enamor them, and to the soul in whom it is, to satisfy it that it does not personate a Christian but lives the very life of a Christian, and has the very spirit and principles of a Christian in him.

Thirdly, by these trials pride and self-confidence are destroyed and mortified in the saints as much as by anything in the world. We never see what poor, weak creatures we are until we come to the trial. It is said (Deuteronomy 8:2): 'God led Israel through the desert to prove them and to humble them.' When we are proved,

then we are humbled. Those that highly reckon their graces before the trial see they must come to another account and take new measures of themselves after they have been upon trial.

'Ah, little did I think,' says one, 'that I had so much love for the world and so little for God, until afflictions tried it.' 'I could not have believed that ever the creature had gotten so deep into my heart, until providence either threatened or made a separation — and then I found it.' 'I thought I had been rich in faith, until such a danger befell me, or such a want began to pinch hard; and then I saw how unable I was to trust God for protection or provision.' O it is a good thing that our hearts be kept humble and lowly, however rich they may be in grace.

Fourthly, by trials grace is kept in exercise, and the gracious soul is preserved from security and spiritual slothfulness. Trials are to grace what the continual agitations of the waters are to the sea, or what the racking of wines from the lees is to it. Were it not for our frequent trials and exercises, we should quickly settle upon the lees. Our duties would be — as God complains of Ephraim — like flat, dead drink (Hosea 4:18). 'Moab has been at ease from his youth, and he has settled on his lees, and has not been emptied from vessel to vessel, neither has he gone into captivity; therefore his taste remained in him, and his scent is not changed' (Jeremiah 48:11).

Much after that rate it would be with our hearts, did not the Lord frequently try and exercise them. Let the best man be without some trial or other but a few months, and you may find the want of it in his prayers and conversations quickly. O what a taint of formality will be found in them! And is it for the honor of God or the profit of his people that it should be so? No, no — the Lord knows

it is not. But how shall their spirits be reduced to the former zealous, heavenly temper again? Why, says the Lord, they must go into the furnace again. 'I will melt them and try them, for how shall I do for the daughter of my people?' (Jeremiah 9:7). 'I love them too well to lose them for want of a rod.' 'Alas, if I should suffer things to go on at this rate, what will become of them in a little time?' 'What delight can I take in their duties when the faith, fervor, humility, and holy seriousness of their spirits is wanting in them?' 'I will therefore refine them as silver is refined, and try them as gold is tried; and they shall call upon my name, and I will hear them; and I will say, it is my people; and they shall say, The Lord is my God' (Zechariah 13:9). And thus the Lord reconciles himself again with his people.

Thus he recovers them to their true temper, and thus his visitations preserve their spirits. And when the Lord sees these sweet effects of his trials upon them, it greatly pleases him. 'O, now,' says God, 'I like it.' 'This providence has done them good; this rod was well bestowed; the letting loose of this temptation or that corruption upon them has made them find their knees again.' 'Now I hear the voice of my child again.'

Beloved, this is a blessed fruit and effect of our frequent trials. And however ungrateful they are to flesh and blood, which affects ease and is loath to be disturbed, yet it is necessary to the preservation of our spirits.

Fifthly, by the trial of our graces Satan is defeated, and his accusations of the saints are found to be mere slanders. It is a very common thing with the devil and wicked men to accuse the people of God of hypocrisy, and to tell the world they are not the men and women they are taken to be. And that if their inside were but

turned out by some thorough trial or deep search, it would appear that religion did not indeed live in their souls as they pretend, but that they only act a part and personate heavenly and mortified persons upon the public stage of profession.

Thus the accuser of the brethren suggests the hypocrisy of Job (chapter 2, verse 5): 'Put forth your hand now and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will curse you to your face.' As if to say, 'Well might Job serve you while you have been so bountiful a master to him; he has been well rewarded for all the service he has done you.' 'But if you stop the current of his prosperity, you shall see how quickly he will stop the course of his duty: a few lashes from your hand will make him curse you to your face.' But O what shame and disappointment was it to that envious spirit, and what a vindication of Job's integrity, when under the greatest trials of his faith and patience he still held fast his integrity and showed himself as great a pattern of patience under the cross as he had been of piety in the days of his greatest prosperity. Satan gets nothing by bringing forth the saints upon the stage to be made a spectacle to angels and men (1 Corinthians 4:9).

Sixthly and lastly, the frequent trials of grace exhibit a full and living testimony against the atheism of the world. These prove beyond all words or arguments that religion is no fancy, but the greatest reality in the world. Men would make religion but a fancy, and the zeal of its professors but the intemperate heat of some crazed brains, overheated with a fond notion.

Those that never felt the real influences of religion upon their own souls will not believe that others feel them. Serious piety has become the ludicrous subject with which the wanton wits of this atheistical world sport themselves. But behold the wisdom and

goodness of God, exhibiting to the world the undeniable testimonies of the truth of religion as often as the sincere professors thereof are brought to the test by afflictions from the hand of God, or persecutions from the hands of men. Here is the faith and patience of the saints. Here is the courage, meekness, and self-denial shining as gold in the fire. They have the real proofs of it before their eyes. Instead of casting them into hell and convincing them by eternal fire, God is pleased to cast his own people into the fire of affliction, that those who scoff at them may be convinced at an easier and cheaper rate. It is no new thing to see the enemies of religion brought over to embrace it by the constancy and faithfulness of the saints in their trials and sufferings for it. God grant that the atheism of this present generation does not occasion a more fiery trial to the people of God in it than they have yet suffered.

CHAPTER 10



SECTION 1.

Before I offer you the proofs and evidences of this truth, it will be necessary to prevent some mistakes that may be occasioned by misunderstanding of it.

Caution 1. In the first place, we are not to think assurance of our sincerity impossible to be had in this life, because as long as we live here we are in a state of trial. And however many trials have already been made upon us, yet still there are more to come. We know not what we shall prove in future trials, though God has kept us upright in former ones. No, no — this is none of my meaning, nor does such a conclusion necessarily follow this assertion. For a Christian that has rightly closed with Christ at first, and been faithful in the duties of active and passive obedience hitherto, may be assured upon good grounds of a victory before he comes to the fire of his remaining trials. So was the apostle (Romans 8:35 and following): 'Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Nay, in all these we are more than conquerors through him that has loved us.' Here is an assured triumph before the combat. So Job 23:10: 'But he knows the way that I take; when

he has tried me, I shall come forth as gold.' He appeals to God for the sincerity of his heart so far as he had hitherto gone in the way of religion, and thence concludes that whatever trials God should bring him to for time to come, he should come forth as gold — that is, he should not lose one grain by the fire. And this confidence of a gracious soul is built not only upon experience gained in former trials, but upon faith in the power, promises, and faithfulness of God, which are engaged for him in the covenant of grace to keep him in the greatest dangers that befall him in this world.

He believes the power of God is able to make him stand, though he has no power or might in himself to overcome the least temptation. 'You are kept' — kept as with a garrison — 'by the power of God through faith unto salvation' (1 Peter 1:5). When Christ has once taken possession of the soul by his Spirit, he fortifies it by his power as a garrison, so that, using the means, it may not be surprised or betrayed into the enemy's hand so as finally to be lost.

He builds this confidence also upon the promises of God, which are his security in all future dangers. How are all the pages of the Bible bespangled with such promises, as the firmament is with bright and glorious stars! Such are these of the first magnitude: 'Christ shall confirm you to the end, that you may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ; God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord' (1 Corinthians 1:8-9). And no less satisfying and sweet is that in Jeremiah 32:40: 'I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from them to do them good; but I will put my fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from me.' And of the same nature is that in John 10:27-28: 'My sheep hear my voice,

and I know them, and they follow me; and I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand.'

If there is any hypocrite in sheep's clothing, he has no part nor lot in this promise; but it secures the whole flock of Christ, great and small, against all danger.

He also builds his assurance upon the faithfulness of God, which stands engaged to make good every line, word, and syllable of his promises to his people. So we find it in 1 Corinthians 10:13: 'There has no temptation taken you but such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that you are able; but will with every temptation make a way to escape, that you may be able to bear it.' And 2 Thessalonians 3:3: 'But the Lord is faithful, who shall establish you and keep you from evil.'

Add to this the constant, prevailing intercession of Christ in heaven for his people in all their trials, and you will see that a sincere Christian need not deny himself the joy and comfort of his assurance upon the account and supposition of his future trials.

SECTION 2.

Caution 2. Nor do we here suppose in this assertion that inherent grace in the saints has a sufficiency of ability in itself to endure the greatest and severest trials that can befall it in this world. It is certain that it shall be carried safely through all, but not in its own strength and ability.

That is a true observation of the learned Gerson: 'The most perfect creatures, left to themselves, are weights tending toward ruin.' This was exemplified in the angels that fell, and in Adam, though in a perfect state. Divine preservation is the prop which supports the best creatures from ruin. Grace itself is but a creature, and therefore a dependent being. It is but a stream that depends upon the supply of the fountain. If the fountain does not let itself forth, what becomes of the stream? That is a true and judicious observation of the learned Dr. Ames: 'The perseverance of believers, or the immutability of their condition, if we view the whole ground and reason of it, is not wholly from within, nor wholly from without itself; but partly from the nature of the spiritual life which flows from Christ into them, and partly from the keeping, protection, and direction of God.' That protection is always afforded to this life of grace, and this life of grace always needs that protection. The best of men are but men at best, as one speaks. It was not Peter's grace and resolution that kept him, but Christ's care of him and intercession for him (Luke 22:32). 'Be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might,' says the apostle (Ephesians 6:10). 'Without me,' says Christ, 'you can do nothing' (John 15:5).

Neither of these is what I have before me to prove. But this is what I aim at: that such seeming grace as was never yet brought to the trial, nor will be able to bear the trial when God shall bring it thereto, must not pass for current — as too frequently it does — among us. Such grace will neither comfort us now nor save us hereafter.

SECTION 3.

First, great numbers of persons in the professing world are deceived and destroyed by trusting to seeming and untried grace. This was the miserable condition of those Laodicean professors in the text. They reckoned themselves rich, but were really poor. All is not gold that glisters. Their gold, as they accounted it, was never tried in the fire. If a man's whole estate lay in some precious stone — suppose a rich diamond — how concerned should he be to have it thoroughly tried, to see whether it will bear a smart stroke with the hammer or fly like a Bristol diamond under it? All that you are worth lies in the truth and sincerity of your grace. And until that is tried, you know not whether you are worth anything or nothing.

Reader, there are two sad sights in the world which cannot but deeply affect every upright heart. One is to see so many thousands of rational and ingenious men in the Roman Church, by an implicit faith in their guides, venturing their souls upon their bare word — never searching the Scriptures with their own eyes, but wholly trusting to the infallibility of the pope or a council. And this while they would fear to take their word for a sum of money without some further security. It is amazing to behold the soul-destroying, easy credulity of these men. But this is a stroke of madness and spiritual infatuation judicially inflicted upon them, that the judgment which is written might be fulfilled in them: 'God shall send them strong delusions, that they should believe a lie' (2 Thessalonians 2:11).

And yet more amazing is that stroke of God upon multitudes of vain and formal professors even in the Reformed Protestant churches, where no man is restrained from searching the Scriptures. Nay, where men are so frequently and earnestly pressed from Sabbath to Sabbath to examine themselves and prove

their own work. That yet so many are content to leave all at hazard, and without any more ado or further search in the matter, credit the report of their own deceitful hearts and take all for granted without due trial or examination.

Surely, no one thing sends more souls daily to hell out of the professing world than this. The five foolish virgins — that is, the unprincipled professors in the Reformed churches — perished this way. They took it for granted all was well because they had lamps of profession as well as others. And they saw not the cheat until the cry was heard at midnight and their unfurnished lamps went out (Matthew 25).

Secondly, the promises of salvation are made over to tried grace, and such only as will endure the trial. So James 1:12: 'Blessed is the man that endures temptation; for when he is tried he shall receive the crown of life which God has promised to them that love him.' He must be first tried, and then crowned. 'If a man strive for masteries, yet is he not crowned, except he strive lawfully' (2 Timothy 2:5). He manifestly alludes to the Roman games, to which there were judges appointed to see that no foul play was offered contrary to the law for wrestling. Where it was found, the crown was denied them. Not to him that sets forth in the morning with resolution and gallantry, but to him that holds out till the evening of his life, is the promise made (Matthew 10:22): 'He that endures to the end shall be saved.' So Romans 2:7: 'To them who by patient continuance in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality — eternal life.' And once more (Hebrews 3:14): 'We are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end.' So that if you should endure some

few slighter troubles and faint at last — give out when a closer trial befalls you — all your labors and sufferings are in vain. Sincerity and final perseverance are the conditions of all special promises.

Thirdly, every man's graces and duties must be tried and weighed by God in the great day. And if they cannot endure these lesser trials to which God exposes them now, how will they endure that severe and exact trial to which he will bring them then? No man can search his own heart with that exactness in this world as God will search it in the world to come.

I may say in this case to you as the Lord spoke to Jeremiah (chapter 12, verse 5): 'If you have run with the footmen and they have wearied you, then how can you contend with horses? And if in the land of peace wherein you trusted they have wearied you, then how will you do in the swelling of Jordan?' This was spoken to encourage the prophet to constancy in his work. As if the Lord had said, 'O Jeremiah, do the strivings of the men of Anathoth — your own town — dishearten you? Pluck up your spirits and faint not; there are harder trials than these that you must undergo at Jerusalem.' 'These are no more to what is coming than the running with footmen is to contending with horses, or the passing of a small rivulet to the swellings of Jordan.'

To allude to this: if our graces and duties cannot bear these lighter trials — if a little lift of prosperity or lighter stroke of adversity discover so much falseness, rottenness, pride, and selfishness in the heart — if we cannot resist the motions of corruptions but yield ourselves to obey sin in the lusts of it — if we can neither keep our hearts with God in duties nor mourn for our wanderings from him — if a few scoffs from wicked tongues or trials of persecution from the hands of men will cause us to faint in the way and turn

back from following the Lord — what shall we do when he comes whose fan is in his hand and who will thoroughly purge his floor (Matthew 3:12), who will try every man's work as by fire (1 Corinthians 3:13), search the secrets of all hearts (Romans 2:16), and weigh every man to his ounces and drachmas? Surely we can take little comfort in that which is so unable to bear the severe trials of that day, that it cannot stand before the slighter trials of this day.

Fourthly, true grace is willing to be tried, and nothing is more desirable to an upright soul than to know his own condition. If therefore we shun the trial and are loath to search ourselves, or be searched by the Lord, our condition is suspicious and we can take little comfort in it. It was David's earnest desire (Psalm 139:23) that God would thoroughly search his heart and mind, and see if there were any way of wickedness in him. False grace is shy of God's eye; it cares not to be examined. But this is the delight of sincere ones: 'Every one that does evil hates the light, lest his deeds should be reprov'd; but he that does truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God' (John 3:20-21).

The reason is plain why hypocrisy cannot endure to come to the touchstone and test. Hypocrites, having a secret consciousness of their own guilt and unsoundness, know that by this means their vain confidence would quickly be confuted and all their reputation for religion blasted. But O, if men dare not stand before the word as it is now opened and applied by ministers, how will they stand when it shall be opened and applied in another manner by Jesus Christ?

O professor, if your condition is good and your heart right, you will desire to know the very worst of yourself. And when you have made the deepest search you can, you will still fear you have not been severe enough and impartial enough toward yourself. Nothing will give you more content than when you feel the word dividing your soul and spirit, your joints and marrow. Nothing so much comforts you under or after an affliction as the discovery it has made of your heart. You will seem to feel with what affections those words came from the prophet's lips (Jeremiah 12:3): 'But you, O Lord, know me; you have seen me, and tried my heart toward you.' O what a refreshing sweetness will stream through your heart and all the powers of your soul when you can make the like appeal to God with like sincerity! And certainly, without such a disposition of spirit toward the trial of our graces, we can have little evidence of the truth of them.

CHAPTER 11



SECTION 1.

Inference 1. Are there such a variety of trials appointed to examine the sincerity of men's graces? How great a vanity then is hypocrisy, and to how little purpose do men endeavor to conceal and hide it! We say murder will out, and we may as confidently affirm hypocrisy will out. When Rebekah had laid the plot to disguise her son Jacob, and by personating his brother to get the blessing, Jacob thus objected against it: 'My father peradventure will feel me, and I shall seem to him as a deceiver, and I shall bring a curse upon me, and not a blessing' (Genesis 27:12). As if he said, 'But what if my father detects the cheat — how then shall I look him in the face? how shall I escape a curse?' After the same manner every upright soul scares itself from the way of hypocrisy. 'If I dissemble and pretend to be what I am not, my Father will find me out.' Ah, there is no darkness nor shadow of death that can conceal the hypocrite. But out it will come at last, let him use all the art he can to hide it. Oftentimes God discovers him by the trials he appoints in this world. 'Men shall return and discern between the righteous and the wicked, between him that serves God and him that serves him not' (Malachi 3:18). But if he makes a hard shift to

get by a private way to hell, carrying this comfort with him to the last step that nobody knows or thinks he is gone there, yet there will be a day when God will strip him naked before the great assembly of angels and men, and all shall point at him and say:

'Lo, this is the man that made not God his hope; this is he that wore a garment of profession to deceive, but God has now stripped him out of it, and all men see what he is.' 'For there is nothing covered that shall not be revealed, and hidden that shall not be known' (Matthew 10:26). And the apostle assures us (1 Timothy 5:24-25) that they that are otherwise cannot be hidden. If men's works are not good, it is impossible they should be hidden long. A gilded piece of brass may pass from hand to hand a little while, but the touchstone will discover the base metal. If that does not, the fire will.

O sinners, away with your hypocrisy. Be honest, sincere, plain, and hearty in religion. If not, confusion of face shall be your recompense from the Lord — that is what you shall get by it.

Inference 2. Secondly, are there such trials appointed and permitted by the Lord for the discovery of his people's sincerity in this world? Then let none of God's people expect a quiet station in this world. Certainly you shall meet with no rest here. You must go out of one fire into another. And it is a merciful condescension of the Lord to poor creatures thus to concern himself for their safety and benefit. 'What is man, that you should magnify him, and that you should set your heart upon him, that you should visit him every morning, and try him every moment?' (Job 7:17-18).

O, it is a great deal of honor put upon a poor worm, when God will every moment try him and visit him. It argues the great esteem the goldsmith has of his gold, when he will sit by the furnace himself and order the fire with his own hand. When he peers so often and so curiously into the refining pot, to see that none of his precious metal upon which he sets his heart is lost.

Think it not then a debasing to you to be so often exposed to trials. If God did not value you highly, he would not try you so frequently. What would become of you if your condition here should be more settled and quiet than now it is? I believe you find dross enough in your hearts after all the fires into which God has cast you. Surely there is filth enough in the best of God's people to account for all this — it may be a great deal more trouble than they have yet met with. We fancy it a brave life to live at ease. And if we meet with long respites and intervals of trial beyond the usual, we are apt to say, 'We shall never be moved,' as David did (Psalm 30:6), or 'We shall die in our nest' (Job 29:18) — our hard and difficult days are over. But woe to us if God should give us the desire of our hearts in this. See what the temper of those men's spirits is that meet with no changes (Psalm 55:19): 'Because they have no changes, therefore they have not God.' O, it is better to be preserved sweet in brine than to spoil in honey.

Inference 3. Thirdly, let none boast in a carnal confidence of their own strength and stability. You are yet in a state of trial. Hitherto God has kept you upright in all your trials — bless God, but boast not. You are but feathers in the wind of temptation if God leaves you to yourselves. Peter told Christ — and doubtless he spoke no more than he honestly meant — 'Though all men forsake

you, yet will not I.' And you know what he did when the hour of his trial came (Matthew 26:35). Angels left to themselves have fallen. It is better to be a humble worm than a proud angel.

Ah, how many Pendletons will this professing age show, if once God brings us to the fiery trial? 'Let him that thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.' You have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin. None stand upon firmer ground than those that see nothing in themselves to stand upon. He that leans upon his own arm usually benumbs it and makes it useless.

Inference 4. Fourthly, does God kindle so many fires in Zion and set his furnaces in Jerusalem to discover and separate the dross from the gold? How contrary then are those men to God who allow — yes, and prize — the dross of hypocrisy which God hates, and stick not to make the holy God a patronizer and countenancer of it in the hearts and lives of men!

It is amazing to read what Popish pens have impudently written about this matter. Sylvester puts the question, whether it is a sin to make a false show of sanctity, and answers it thus: 'If it is for the honor of God and the profit of others, it is no sin.' Nay, they have a reverence for hypocrisy as a holy art. Vincentius spends a whole chapter in commendation of the hypocrisy of Saint Dominick, and entitles it 'Of the Holy Hypocrisy of that Saint,' reckoning it among his commendations that he had the art of dissembling. And yet one peg higher: 'A religious person,' says another, 'that feigns himself to have more holiness than he has, that others may be edified, sins not, but rather merits.'

Blush, O heavens, that ever such agents of hell should open and sell such wares as this in the public market, and invite the world to hypocrisy as that which makes for the glory of God, the edification of men, and a work meritorious in the hypocrite himself. This is the doctrine of devils indeed.

Inference 5. Fifthly, if it is so that all grace must come to the test and be tried as gold in the fire even in this world, how are all men concerned to lay a solid foundation at first, and thoroughly deliberate the terms upon which they close with Christ and engage in the profession of his name! 'Which of you,' says Christ, 'intending to build a tower, sits not down first and counts the cost?' (Luke 14:28). If some men had sat down at first and pondered the conditions and terms of Christ, they had not been sitting down now, discouraged and tired in the way. The apostle Paul went to work at another rate: he counted all but dung and dross for Christ (Philippians 3:8), and was of the same mind when the actual trial came. For then he tells us he counted not his life dear unto him (Acts 20:24). And the apostle Peter admonishes believers not to think it strange concerning the fiery trial which was to try them (1 Peter 4:12). As if to say, 'Let none of these things be surprises to you; you were told beforehand what you must trust to.' Every Christian must be a martyr, at least in the disposition and resolution of his heart.

O that men would balance the advantages and disadvantages of religion and thoroughly ponder the matter in their deepest thoughts. To the test you must come. The rain will fall and the storm beat upon your buildings. Look carefully therefore to the foundations.

Inference 6. Sixthly and lastly, learn from this point the unavoidable-ness of scandals and offenses in the way of religion. For if there is a necessity of trial, there is also a necessity of scandal. 'It must needs be that offenses come' (Luke 17:1). Why must it needs be? The reason is evident: all must come to the trial, and all are not able to bear it. Our Lord tells us (Matthew 24:8-10) of a day of great straits and perplexity coming. 'And then,' says he, 'shall many be offended.' The day of trial is the day of scandal. By these offenses some are put to searching themselves, and some fall to censuring all others. But the holy God brings about his end both ways — in them that are saved and in them that perish.

SECTION 2.

Well then, if it is so that all must go into the furnace, let every man try his own work. Examine yourselves, professors; search your hearts; commune with your innermost parts. Nothing concerns you more in all the world than this. O that you would be more in your closets, and more often upon your knees. O that you would look into the Bible, then into your hearts, and then to God, saying with David: 'Search me, O God, and know my heart; prove me, and try my mind; and see if there is any way of iniquity in me.' Religion has never thrived in the world since men's heads have been so overheated with notions and controversies and their hearts so sensibly cooled in their closet work. I have elsewhere more largely pressed this duty upon the professors of this generation, and thither shall refer the reader for the present, to see the necessity and importance of this work.

Here I shall only urge the duty of self-trial by some pressing motives and awakening considerations.

Motive 1. The first shall be the exceeding difficulty of this work. Difficulty in some cases may be a discouragement, but where the matter is of absolute necessity as it is here, nothing provokes more to diligence. 'Strive,' says our Lord, 'to enter in at the narrow gate, for many will seek to enter in and shall not be able' (Luke 13:24). A double difficulty is found attending this work of self-trial: difficulty in bringing the heart to it, and difficulty in the right and successful management of it. Who does not find it hard to persuade his heart to such work as this? Nature declines it; flesh and blood relish it not. It is one of the great severities of religion. It is no easy thing to bring a man and his own heart together.

It is in this case as in the study of geography: we are more inquisitive to know, and more delighted when we discover, the rarities of foreign countries and strange things in the remote parts of the world, than those of our own native country. I fear there are many professors of religion that can spend day after day in hearing and love to be disputing fruitless controversies, who never spent one day in searching what influence all those sermons they have heard have had upon their hearts, or in rightly stating and determining that great controversy — in whose right and possession their souls are, and which way they shall go as soon as death has divided them from those mortal bodies. Yes, I doubt many sinful hours are spent in prying into, reporting, and censuring the failings of others, and not one hour faithfully employed in judging their own hearts before the Lord. O, men had rather be about any other work than this — there is no pleasure in it to the flesh.

And yet, however difficult it may be to bring our hearts to the work, it is certainly much more difficult to manage it successfully and bring the great question of our sincerity to a clear result and

issue. O how many upright hearts have sat close to this work many a year, and lifted up many a cry to heaven, and shed many a secret and undissembled tear about it, and yet are still in the dark, their minds greatly perplexed and filled with fear about it. What would they not do? What would they not suffer? What pleasant enjoyment would they not gladly part with to arrive at the desire of their souls — the full assurance of their sincerity! It was the saying of a pious woman: 'I have borne seven children, and they have cost me as dear as ever children cost a mother; yet would I be content to endure all that sorrow over again, to be assured of the love of God to my soul.'

Motive 2. Secondly, as the work is full of difficulty, so the discovery of your sincerity will be full of sweetness and joy unspeakable. It will never repent you that you have prayed and mourned, that you have trembled and feared, that you have searched and tried. Nay, it will never repent you that God has tried you by thousands of sharp afflictions and deep sufferings, if after all your sincerity may be fully cleared up to the satisfaction of your souls. For in the same day your sincerity shall be cleared, your title to Christ will be made as clear to your souls as your sincerity is. You may then go to the promises boldly, and take your own Christ into the arms of your faith, and say, 'My beloved is mine, and I am his.' Yes, you may be confident it shall be well with you in the judgment of the great day, for 'God will not cast away the upright man' (Job 8:20). If the word clears you now, it cannot condemn you then.

O what an ease it is to the soul when the fears and doubts that hung about it are gone! When a man sees what he is, and what he has in Christ and the promises, and what he has to do — even to spend the time between this and heaven in admiring the grace of

God that has delivered him from the ruining mistakes and miscarriages by which so great a part of the professing world perishes to all eternity.

Motive 3. Thirdly, the deep concernment of your souls in the matter to be tried should awaken you to the utmost diligence about it. The trials of men for their life at human bars is but a trifle to this. It is your eternal happiness that stands or falls with your sincerity.

It is said in the trial of opinions that if a man builds hay or stubble upon the foundation, he shall suffer loss, yet he himself may be saved (1 Corinthians 3:12). But if hypocrisy is in the foundation, there is no such relief — there is no possibility of salvation in that case.

Ah, reader, you must be judged forever according to the integrity or hypocrisy of your heart with God. Summon then all the powers of your soul. Bring your thoughts as close as it is possible to bring them to this matter. If there is any subject of consideration able to drink up the spirits of a man, here it is. Never was time put to a higher improvement; never were thoughts spent upon a more important business than this is. Happy is the man that rescues the years, months, days — yes, the very moments of his life — from other employments, to consecrate them to this solemn, awful, and most important business.

Motive 4. Fourthly, how evidential will it be of your sincerity when you are willing to come to the trial of your own hearts!

Suppose your doubts and fears should in some degree remain with you, yet in this you may take some comfort: that if hypocrisy is in your heart, it is not there by your consent. You are not loath to

search and come to the trial, because like Rachel you sit upon your idols. Certainly it is a good sign your heart is right when it is filled with so much fear lest it should be false. You know all the disciples said, 'Master, is it I?' before Judas, who was the traitor, spoke a word. 'Last of all,' says the text, 'Judas said, Is it I?' Our willingness to be tried is a good sign that the desire of our souls is to be right with God.

Motive 5. Fifthly, conclude it to be your great advantage to be thoroughly tried, whatever you may be found to be in the trial. If you are found sincere, you are richly rewarded for all your pains and labor. Never did that man repent of digging and toiling who, after all, hit upon the rich vein that he dug for. What is a vein of gold to a vein of sincerity!

If upon search you find the contrary — a false, hypocritical, unsound heart — yet in that very sad discovery you meet with the greatest advantage that ever you had in your lives for salvation. This discovery is your great advantage. For now your vain confidence being overturned and your ungrounded hopes destroyed, you lie open to the stroke of a deep and effectual conviction of your sin and misery, which is the introductive mercy to all other mercies to your souls. And surely, until you come to that — to give up your false hopes and quit your vain pretensions — there is no hope of you. Christ told the Pharisees (Matthew 21:31): 'Publicans and harlots enter into the kingdom of heaven before you.' Publicans were the worst sort of men, and harlots the worst sort of women, and yet they stood in a fairer way for heaven than the hypocritical Pharisees, because conviction had easier access to their consciences. They had not those defenses and pleas of duty and strictness to ward off the word that the self-deceiving Pharisees had.

I may say of your vain and groundless hopes what Christ in another sense said to the officers that came to seize him in the garden: 'If you seek me, let these go their way.' So it is here: if you expect Christ and salvation by him, let your vain confidences go their way. Away with your masks and disguises, if ever you expect to see Christ. O, it is your happiness to have all these things stripped off and your nakedness and poverty discovered, that you may be rich as the text speaks.

Motive 6. Sixthly, consider how near the day of death and judgment approaches you. Oh, these are searching days in which you cannot be hidden. Will your consciences, do you think, be put off in a dying day as easily as they are now? No, no — you know they will not.

I have heard of a good man that consumed not only the greatest part of the day, but a very considerable part of the night also in prayer, to the great weakening of his body. And being asked by a relation why he did so and prayed to favor himself, he returned this answer: 'O, I must die, I must die.' Plainly intimating that so great is the concernment of dying in a clear and assured condition, that it is richly worth the expense of all our time and strength to secure it.

You know also that after death comes the judgment (Hebrews 9:27). You are hastening to the judgment of the great and terrible God. Death will put you into his balance to be weighed exactly. And what gives the soul a louder call to search itself with all diligence, while it stands at the door of eternity and its turn is not yet come to go before that awful tribunal? O that these considerations might take hold upon our hearts!

CHAPTER 12



SECTION 1.

You see of what importance the duty of self-examination is, and how many things put a necessity and a solemnity upon that work. Now in the close of all, I would offer you some helps for the due management thereof — that is as far as I can carry it. The Lord persuade your hearts to the diligent and faithful application and use of them. The general rules to clear sincerity are these that follow.

RULE 1.

We may not presently conclude we are in a state of hypocrisy because we find some workings of it and tendencies to it in our spirits. The best gold has some dross and alloy in it. Hypocrisy is a weed naturally springing in every ground; the best heart is not perfectly clear and free of it. It may be we are stumbled when we feel some workings or grudgings of this disease in ourselves, and looking into such scriptures as these (John 1:47): 'Behold an Israelite

indeed, in whom there is no guile.' And Psalm 32:1-2: 'Blessed is the man unto whom the Lord imputes not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile.'

This, I say, may stumble some upright soul, not understanding in what an alloyed and qualified sense those scriptures are to be understood. For by 'a spirit without guile' is not understood a person absolutely free from all deceitfulness and falseness of heart. This was the sole prerogative of the Lord Jesus, who was separated from sinners, in whose mouth no guile was found, in whom the prince of this world in all his trials and attempts found nothing. But we must understand it of reigning and allowed hypocrisy. There is no such guile in any of the saints. Distinguish the presence from the predominance of hypocrisy, and the doubt is resolved.

RULE 2.

Every true ground of humiliation for sin is not a sufficient ground for doubting and questioning our estate and condition.

There are many more things to humble us on the account of our infirmity than there are to stumble us on the account of our integrity. It is the sin and affliction of some good souls to call their condition in question upon every slip and failing in the course of their obedience. This is the way to debar ourselves from all the peace and comfort of the Christian life. We find that Joseph was once minded to put away Mary his espoused wife, not knowing that the holy thing which was conceived in her was by the Holy Spirit. It is the sin of hypocrites to take brass for gold, and the folly of saints to call their gold brass. Be as severe to yourselves as you

will, always provided you be just. 'There is one that makes himself rich, and yet has nothing; and there is one that makes himself poor, and yet has great riches' (Proverbs 13:7). Hiram called the cities Solomon gave him 'Cabul' — dirty, for they pleased him not (1 Kings 9:13). It is but an ill requital, an ungrateful return to God for the best of mercies, to undervalue them in our hearts and be ready upon all occasions to put them away as worth nothing.

RULE 3.

A stronger propensity in our nature, and more frequent incidence in our practice, to one sin rather than another does not presently infer our hypocrisy and the unsoundness of our hearts in religion. It is true, every hypocrite has some way of wickedness — some iniquity he delights in, and rolls as a sweet morsel under his tongue; some lust he is not willing to part with, nor can endure that the knife of mortification should touch it. And this undoubtedly argues the insincerity and rottenness of his heart. It is true also that the nature and constitution of the most sanctified man inclines him rather to one sin than to another, though he allows himself in none. Yes, though he sets himself more watchfully against that sin than another, yet he may still have more trouble and vexation, more temptation and defilement from it than from any other.

As every man has his proper gift, one after this manner and another after that (1 Corinthians 7:7), so every man has his proper sin also — one after this manner, and another after that. For it is with original sin as it is with the juice or sap of the earth, which, though it is the common matter of all kinds of fruits, yet is specified according to the different sorts of plants and seeds it nourishes. In one it becomes an apple, in another a cherry, and so on. Just so it

is with original corruption, which is turned into this or that temptation and sin according to this or that constitution or employment it finds us in. In one it is passion, in another lust, in a third covetousness, in a fourth levity, and so on. Now I say, the frequent assaults of this sin — provided we indulge it not, but by setting double guards labor to keep ourselves from our own iniquity, as David did (Psalm 18:23) — will not infer the hypocrisy of our hearts.

RULE 4.

A greater backwardness and indisposedness to one duty rather than another does not conclude the heart to be unsound and false with God, provided we do not inwardly dislike and disapprove any duty of religion, or except against it in our agreement with Christ, but that it rises merely from the present weakness and distemper we labor under.

There are some duties in religion — such as suffering for Christ, bearing sharp reproofs for sin, and the like — that even an upright heart, under a present distemper, may find a great deal of backwardness and loathness to. Yet still he consents to the law that it is good, is troubled that he cannot comply more cheerfully with his duty, and desires to stand complete in all the will of God. Perfection is his aim, and imperfections are his sorrows.

Some Christians have much ado to bring their hearts to fixed, solemn meditation — their hearts fly off from it — but this is their burden that it should be so with them. Truth is, it is a very dangerous sign of hypocrisy when a man's zeal runs out in one channel of obedience only. As physicians observe, the sweating of one part of the body when all the rest are cold is symptomatic and argues an ill

habit. But while the soul heartily approves all the will of God, and sincerely desires to come up to it, and mourns for its backwardness and deadness to this or that duty — and this is not fixed but occasional, under some present indisposition out of which the soul rises by the same degrees as sanctification rises in him and the Lord comes in with renewed strength upon him — this, I say, may consist with and is very ordinarily found to be the case of upright-hearted ones.

RULE 5.

The glances of the eye at self-ends in duties — while self is not the weight that moves the wheels, not the principal end and design we drive at, and while those glances are corrected and mourned for — do not conclude the heart to be unsound and hypocritical in religion. For even among the most deeply sanctified, few can keep their eye so steady and fixed with pure and unmixed respects to the glory of God, but that there will be — alas, too frequently — some by-ends insinuating and creeping into the heart.

These, like the fowls, seize upon the sacrifice, let the soul take what pains it can to drive them away. It is well that our high priest bears the iniquities of our holy things for us. Peter had too much regard for the pleasing of men and did not walk with that upright foot toward the Gentile Christians and the believing Jews in the matter of liberty as became him (Galatians 2:13-14), for which, as Paul says, he ought to be blamed — and Paul did blame him. Yet such a failing as that did not condemn him. In public performances there may be too much vanity; in works of charity, too

much ostentation. These are all workings of hypocrisy in us and matters of humiliation to us. But while they are disallowed, corrected, and mourned over, they are consistent with integrity.

RULE 6.

The doubts and fears that hang upon and perplex our spirits about the hypocrisy of our hearts do not conclude that therefore we are what we fear ourselves to be. God will not condemn everyone for a hypocrite who suspects — yes, or charges himself with — hypocrisy. Holy David thought his heart was not right with God after that great slip of his in the matter of Uriah, and therefore begs God to renew a right spirit in him (Psalm 51:10-12). His integrity was indeed wounded, and he thought destroyed, by that fall.

Holy Master Bradford so vehemently doubted the sincerity of his heart that he subscribed some of his letters — as Master Fox tells us — 'John Bradford the hypocrite, a very painted sepulcher.' And yet in so saying he utterly misjudged the state and temper of his own soul.

SECTION 2.

Well then, let not the upright be unjust to themselves in censuring their own hearts. They are bad enough, but let us not make them worse than they are. But thankfully own and acknowledge the least degrees of grace and integrity in them. And possibly our uprightness might be sooner discovered to us, if in a due composure of spirit we would sit down and attend the true answers of our own hearts to such questions as these.

QUESTION 1.

Do I make the approbation of God or the applause of men the very end and main design of my religious performances (1 Thessalonians 2:4; Colossians 3:23)? Will the acceptance of my duties by men satisfy me, whether God accepts my duties and person or not?

QUESTION 2.

Is it the reproach and shame that attend sin at present, and the danger and misery that will follow it hereafter, that restrains me from the commission of it? Or is it the fear of God in my soul and the hatred I bear to sin as it is sin (Psalm 19:12; Psalm 119:113)?

QUESTION 3.

Can I truly and heartily rejoice to see God's work carried on in the world, and his glory promoted by other hands, though I have no share in the credit and honor of it, as Paul did (Philippians 1:18)?

QUESTION 4.

Is there no duty in religion so full of difficulty and self-denial but that I desire to comply with it? And is all the holy and good will of God acceptable to my soul, though I cannot rise up with like readiness to the performance of all duties (Psalm 119:6)?

QUESTION 5.

Am I sincerely resolved to follow Christ and holiness at all seasons, however the aspects of the times may be upon religion? Or do I bear myself so warily and covertly as to shun all hazards for religion — having a secret reserve in my heart to launch out no further than I may return with safety — contrary to the practice and resolution of upright souls (Psalm 116:3; Psalm 44:18-19; Revelation 22:11)?

QUESTION 6.

Do I make no conscience of committing secret sins or neglecting secret duties? Or am I conscientious both in the one and the other according to the rules and patterns of integrity (Matthew 6:5-6; Psalm 19:12)?

A few such questions, solemnly propounded to our own hearts in a calm and serious hour, would sound them and discover much of their sincerity toward the Lord.

SECTION 3.

And as upright hearts are too apt to apply to themselves the threats and miseries of hypocrites, so hypocrites on the contrary are as apt to catch hold of the promises and privileges pertaining to believers.

To detect therefore the soul-damning mistakes of such deceived souls, O that these following rules might be studied and faithfully applied to their conviction and recovery!

RULE 1.

It is not enough to clear a man from hypocrisy that he does not know himself to be a hypocrite. All hypocrites are not designing hypocrites — they deceive themselves as well as others. 'Many will say to me in that day, Lord, have we not prophesied in your name?' and so on (Matthew 7:22). Hell will be a mere surprise to multitudes of professors. A man may live and die in a blind, ungrounded confidence of his safe condition and not fear his ruin until he begins to feel it.

RULE 2.

Zeal and forwardness in the cause of God and for the reformation of his worship will not clear a man from the danger of hypocrisy. Jehu was a zealous reformer and yet but a painted sepulcher. In the year 1549, the Reformation grew so much in reputation even among the nobles and gentry of Germany, that many of them caused the five letters V. D. M. I. AE. — being the initial letters of the words meaning 'the word of the Lord abides forever' — to be embroidered or set in plates, some upon their cloaks and others upon the sleeves of their garments, to show to all the world that, forsaking all Popish traditions, they would now cleave to the pure doctrine and discipline of the eternal word.

And no doubt they would have been as good as their word, if what was embroidered on their cloaks had been engraved on their hearts. But 'Come, see my zeal' mars all.

RULE 3.

It is no sufficient evidence of a man's own integrity that he hates hypocrisy in another. For as one proud man may hate another, and he that is covetous himself will be apt to censure another for being so — lusts may be contrary to one another as well as all of them contrary to grace — so may a hypocrite loathe in another what he allows in himself. Nay, it is the policy of some to declaim against the hypocrisy of others, thereby to hide their own. Hypocrites are none of the most modest censurers of others (Psalm 35:16).

RULE 4.

The mere performance of private duties will not clear a man from hypocrisy. The influence of education, or the support of reputation, or the impulse of a convinced conscience may induce a man to it. And yet all this while his heart may not be carried thither with hungry and thirsty desires after God. It is not the matter of any duty that distinguishes the sound and unsound professor, but the motives, designs, and ends of the soul in them.

RULE 5.

The reputation and opinion you have gotten among Christians of your sincerity will not be sufficient to clear you from the danger of hypocrisy. Christ tells the angel of Sardis (Revelation 3:1): 'You have a name that you live, and are dead.' The fall of Hymenaeus and Philetus could never have shaken the faith of the saints as it did, had they not had great credit in the church and been men of renown for piety among them.

RULE 6.

Your respect and love for those that are the sincere and upright servants of God will not clear you from the danger of being hypocrites yourselves. For the bare loving of a Christian is not characteristic and evidential of a man's own Christianity, except he love him as such — as he is a Christian, or as he belongs to Christ — and so his sincerity becomes the attractive of your affection. There are a thousand by-considerations and respects that may kindle a man's love to the saints, besides their integrity.

****SECTION 4.****

Well then, if you would indeed see the unsoundness of your own heart, propound such heart-searching questions as these to yourself.

QUESTION 1.

Do I engage my heart to approach to God in the course of my duties? Or do I go in the round of duties, taking no heed to my heart in them? If so, compare this symptom of your hypocrisy with that in 2 Kings 10:31 and Ezekiel 33:31-32.

QUESTION 2.

Am I not swayed and moved by self-interest and carnal respects in the ways of religion — the accommodation of some worldly interest, or the getting of a name and reputation for godliness? If so, how apparently do the same symptoms of hypocrisy appear upon my soul which did upon Judas (John 12:6) and Jehu (2 Kings 9:13-14)?

QUESTION 3.

Have I not some secret reserves in my heart, notwithstanding that face and appearance of zeal which I put on? Certainly, if there is any sin that I cannot part with, any suffering for Christ which I resolve against in my heart, I am none of his disciples. My heart is not right with God — the searcher of hearts himself being judge (Luke 14:26-27).

QUESTION 4.

What conscience do I make of secret sins? Do I mourn for a vain heart, wandering thoughts, spiritual deadness? And do I conscientiously abstain from the practice of secret sins, when there is no danger of discovery, no fear of forfeiting my reputation by it? Is it God's eye or man's that awes me from the commission of sin? Certainly, if I allow myself in secret sins, I am not of the number of God's upright people, whose spirits are of a contrary temper to mine (Psalm 119:113; Psalm 19:12).

SECTION 5.

I will shut up all with five or six concluding counsels — which the Lord impress upon the heart of him that writes, and those that shall read them — to preserve and antidote the soul against the dangerous insinuation and leaven of hypocrisy.

COUNSEL 1.

Entreat the Lord night and day for a renewed and right spirit. All the helps and directions in the world will not antidote and preserve you from hypocrisy. Nothing will be found able to keep you right until sanctification has first set you right (Ezekiel 36:27): 'I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes.'

A bowl may keep in a straight line as long as the impressed force of the hand that delivered it remains strong upon it, but as that wears off so its motion fails, and its own bias sways and turns it. A fright of conscience, a pang of warm affection, the influence of some great example, or a good education may influence an unrenewed soul and push it on in the way of religion for a season. But the heart so influenced must and will return to its own natural course again. And I think there wants nothing but time, or a suitable temptation, to discover the true temper of many a professor's spirit. Pray therefore as that holy man did (Psalm 119:80): 'Let my heart be sound in your statutes, that I be not ashamed.'

COUNSEL 2.

Always suspect and examine your ends in what you do. Sincerity and hypocrisy lie much in your ends and designs. As they are, so are you. The intentions of the heart lie deep. A man may do the same action to a holy end, and his person and service be accepted with God, which another doing for a corrupt end may have reckoned as his sin, and both his person and service be abhorred by the Lord. We find two men riding in one chariot, both of them concerned in the same expedition — Jehu the son of Nimshi and Jonadab the son of Rechab (2 Kings 10:15, 23). But though the work they engaged in was one and the same, yet the different ends they aimed at made the same action an excellent duty in Jonadab

and an act of vile hypocrisy in Jehu. The same thing that two men do is not the same thing. It was the saying of a good soul, commended for a good action: 'The work indeed is good, but I fear the ends of it.' Self-ends are creeping and insinuating things into the best actions.

COUNSEL 3.

Scare yourselves with the daily fears of the sin that is in, and the misery that will follow, hypocrisy. Look upon it as the most odious sin in the eyes of God and men. To want holiness is bad enough, but to simulate and pretend it when we have it not is double impiety. To make religion — the most glorious thing in the world — a mere stepping stone to preferment, and a cover to wickedness: O how vile a thing is it! God made Christ a sacrifice for sin, and the hypocrite will make him a cloak for sin.

And as to the punishments that follow hypocrisy, they are suitable to the nature of the sin. For as hypocrisy is out of measure sinful, so the reward and punishment of it will be out of measure dreadful (Matthew 24:51): 'He shall cut him asunder, and appoint him his portion with hypocrites; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'

COUNSEL 4.

Be daily at work in the mortification of those lusts that breed hypocrisy. It is plain without much sifting that pride, vainglory, self-love, and a worldly heart are the seeds out of which this cursed plant springs up in the souls of men. Dig but to the root, and you

shall certainly find these things there. And until the Lord helps you to kill and mortify these, hypocrisy will spring up in all your duties to God and in all your conversations with men.

COUNSEL 5.

Attend the native voice of your own consciences in the day of sickness, fear, or trouble, and take special notice of its checks or upbraidings, which like a stitch in your side will gird you at such times. Commonly in that lies your greatest danger. Beware of that evil which conscience brands and marks at such times — whether it be your living in the practice of some secret sin, or in the neglect of some known duty. These frights of conscience mark out the corruption wherein your danger mostly lies.

Counsel 6. Let us all that profess religion be uniform and steady in the profession and practice of it, without political reserves and by-ends.

O take heed of this Laodicean neutrality and indifference which Christ hates. Be sure your ground is good, and then be sure you stand your ground. The religion of time-servers is but hypocrisy. They have sluices in their consciences which they can open or shut as occasion requires. Every fox will have at least two holes to his den, so that if one is stopped he may escape at the other. The hypocrite poises himself so evenly in a mediocrity that, as it was said of Baldwin, 'Let Antony win, let Augustus win, all is one.' So let Christ win, or let Antichrist win — he hopes to make every wind that can blow serviceable to waft him to the port of his own interest.

The hypocrite always has more of the moon than of the sun — little light, many spots, and frequent changes. It is easier for him to bow to the cross than to bear the cross, to sin than to suffer.

Our own history tells us of a poor simple woman who lived both in the reigns of Queen Mary and Queen Elizabeth, and would constantly say her prayers both in Latin and English, that she might be sure to please one side or the other. 'Let God,' said she, 'take which likes him best.' What is noted as an act of ridiculous simplicity in her, the time-serving hypocrite accounts a point of deep policy in himself.

The times under Diocletian were pagan, under Constantine Christian, under Constantius Arian, under Julian apostate, and under Jovian Christian again. And all this within the space of seventy years — the age of one man. O what shifting and shuffling there was among the men of that generation. The changes of weather show the unsoundness of men's bodies, and the changes of times the unsoundness of their souls.

Christian, if ever you will manifest and maintain your integrity, be a man of but one design, and be sure that it is an honest and good design — to secure heaven whatever becomes of earth, to hold fast integrity whatever you are forced to let go for its sake.

Take heed of pious frauds. Certainly it was the devil that first married those two words together, for they never did nor can agree between themselves, nor was ever such a marriage made in heaven.

Never study to model religion and the exercises thereof in a consistency with, or subserviency to, your fleshly interests. If your religion is but a mock religion, your reward shall be but a mock

heaven — that is, a real hell.

O the vanity and futility of these projects and designs! Men strive to cast themselves into such modes and stint themselves to such measures of religion as they think will best promote or secure their earthly interests. But it often falls out contrary to their expectation. Their deep policies are ridiculous follies; they become the grief and shame of their friends, and the scorn and song of their enemies. And often it fares with them as with him that placed himself in the middle of the table, where he could reach neither the dish above him nor that below him. And — which is the very best of it — if earthly interests are accommodated by sinful neutrality and Laodicean indifference in religion, yet no good man should once feel a temptation to embrace it, except he thinks that what is wanting in the sweetness of his sleep may be fully recompensed by the stateliness of his bed and the richer furniture of his chamber. I mean, that a fuller and higher condition in the world can make amends for the loss of his inward peace and the quiet repose of a good conscience. These by-ends and self-interests are the little passages through which hypocrisy creeps in upon the professors of religion.

O let this be your rejoicing, which was Paul's: 'the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world' (2 Corinthians 1:12).

Let that be your daily prayer and cry to heaven which was David's (Psalm 25:21): 'Let integrity and uprightness preserve me, for I wait on you.'

Counsel 7. Keep your hearts day and night under the awe of God's all-seeing eye. Remember that he beholds all your ways and ponders all your thoughts. However covertly hypocrisy may be carried for a time, all must and will come out at last (Luke 12:3). Secrecy is the main inducement to hypocrisy, but it will fall out with the hypocrite as it did with Ottocar the king of Bohemia, who refused to do homage to Rudolph the emperor until at last, chastised with war, he was content to do him homage privately in a tent. But the tent was so contrived by the emperor's servants that by drawing one cord it was taken entirely away. And so Ottocar was exposed on his knees doing homage in the view of three armies.

Reader, awe your heart with God's eye. Know that he will bring every secret thing into judgment. Thus did Job, and it preserved him (Job 31:1, 4). Thus did David, and it preserved him (Psalm 18:21-23). Thus do you also, and it will preserve you blameless and without guile to the day of Christ.

The End.

THANKS FOR READING



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