

WORKS OF MATTHEW MEAD

by Matthew Mead

The collected works of the Puritan minister Matthew Mead, including 'The Almost Christian Discovered,' which examines how far a person can progress spiritually yet still fall short of genuine saving faith and true conversion.

4 Chapters

Table of Contents

1. A Name in Heaven
2. Almost Christian Discovered; Part 2
3. Almost Christian Discovered; Part 3
4. Power of Grace in Weaning

A Name in Heaven

A NAME IN HEAVEN

the Truest Ground of Joy

By

Matthew Mead

Luke 10:20.

—In this rejoice not, that the spirits are subject to you: but rather rejoice because your names are written in heaven. OUR Lord Christ, here in the text, calls off his disciples from rejoicing much in that which yet was as lawful and likely a cause of rejoicing as any, namely, victory over infernal spirits, and success against the powers of darkness; to fix their joy upon a good infinitely to be preferred to that, and desired before it, and that is, a name written in heaven. "Notwithstanding in this rejoice not, that the spirits are subject to you: but rather rejoice because your names are written in heaven." In the words you have, A prohibition, and an exhortation.

Somewhat from which they are dehorted; somewhat to which they are invited. That from which they are dehorted is, rejoicing in their success over infernal spirits; "Rejoice not in this, that the spirits are subject to you." That to which they are invited is, to rejoice in a mercy of a much nobler nature, and that is, their share and interest in the glory and blessedness above; "Rejoice that your names are written in heaven."

I shall begin with the prohibition, and speak a little to that; "Notwithstanding in this rejoice not, that the spirits are subject to you." This doth clearly imply, that this casting out of devils, by the power of the disciples' ministry, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, was matter of great joy to them; and one would think, if any thing in the world could justify the running out of their joy below God, this casting out of devils might. For, It was a great and miraculous gift of Jesus Christ.

It was a gift foretold by the prophets, as reserved for gospel times.

It was a victory over the most potent enemy, that laughs to scorn all human power, a stronger than he must come and bind him.

It was a victory very conducing to the honour of the Lord Christ, that his naked disciples, in his name alone, could make the powers of hell submit and stoop; so that certainly here was, in the success of this service, sufficient cause of joy to the disciples; and yet saith our Lord Christ to them, "Notwithstanding, in this rejoice not." It is not an absolute prohibition, but rather we may call it a cautionary limitation, Rejoice not so much in this; though it was a true ground of joy, yet the Lord Christ takes them off from it by raising their hearts above it, to a higher and nobler cause of joy; and that for a two-fold end.

First, To free them from the danger of spiritual pride, which is very apt to insinuate itself into our rejoicing: the success of duty is too too apt to puff up and swell us beyond our proportions. The prosperity of the creature in its attempts, becomes a temptation "to sacrifice to its own net, and burn incense to its own drag." [Habakkuk 1:16.] When spiritual pride mixeth itself with our joy in God, we take from him more than we give to him; we rob him of his glory, whilst we rejoice in his mercy.

Therefore the Lord Christ takes them off from this to a higher object; The devils are subject to you, it is true; the power of the gospel in your mouths and ministry, hath cast Satan like lightning from heaven, it is true; and I know that your hearts are filled with joy; for so it is said in the seventeenth verse, "They returned again with joy:" well, saith the Lord Christ, "notwithstanding, in this rejoice not:" why should your affections be terminated in these things, when you have a nobler object for your joy to dilate itself upon, and that is, the electing love of God, your portion in the eternal mansions? Your joy in the subduing infernal spirits may be your snare; whilst they are subject to you one way, spiritual pride may subject you to them another; and so, though you conquer, yet they will overcome; "therefore in this rejoice not."

Secondly, To teach us that no external mercy should terminate the delight of our souls, but that we should use all outward benefits as a ladder whereby to ascend to God in our affections. The way to allay and moderate the joy of the soul, in common and present mercies, is to realize the things of the invisible world, and let out our hearts much to the glories above. The design of Christ and the gospel is to spiritualize the Christian's joy, and place it upon the chiefest good; "therefore in this rejoice not, that the spirits are subject to you."

Question. But you will say, Why should we not?

Answer. I will give you a three-fold reason for it.

Reason 1. Because this gift may be vested where the love of God is not enjoyed; Matthew 7:22-23, "Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name, and in thy name cast out devils, and in thy name done many wonderful works? Then will I profess unto them, I never knew you; depart from me, ye that work iniquity." Many may cast out devils in the name of Christ, and yet after all be cast out themselves by Christ. Judas was once of them that cast out devils, and yet Judas was cast out himself. That enjoyment, whatever it be (be it gifts, be it relations, be it honours) which may be separated from the love of God in Christ, can be no true ground of rejoicing. Therefore what our Lord Christ saith of casting out of devils, I may (upon a parity or superiority of reason) say of all things below, which we place our contentment in, and look upon as matter of joy; "notwithstanding, in this rejoice not."

Reason 2. It is a vanity to rejoice much in any thing which we cannot rejoice in long. What the apostle saith, 1 Corinthians 13:8, "Prophecies shall fail, tongues shall cease, knowledge shall vanish away;" the same I may say of all common and sublunary mercies and comforts, they shall fail and vanish: "The fashion of this world passeth away," 1 Corinthians 7:31.

What pleasure can that man take in his expedition, whose voyage is for a year, and his victual but for a day? who sets out for eternity with the pleasures and contents of nothing but mortality? therefore though you may have all that heart can wish of the comfort and prosperity of this world, yet "notwithstanding, in this rejoice not."

Reason 3. Why should we rejoice much in that which cannot rescue us out of the hands of eternal misery? None of these things we glory in can: they are poor lying delights, which, like Jordan, empty all their sweetness into a stinking and sulphurous lake. When I see the rich man in the parable "clothed with purple, and fine linen, and faring sumptuously every day," Luke 16:19, methinks I could wish my lot might lie at his table, rather than with an ulcerous Lazarus "begging for crumbs at his door;" but when I look again, and find him paying his reckoning in tormenting flames, who would have his pomp and glory at this price? He buyeth his pleasures too dear, who pays for them with the loss of his soul. May we have all the comforts that this world can afford, and yet die comfortless? may we be rejoicing in our relations today, and yet shut out of all relation to God tomorrow? then whatever we possess of the comforts of this world, yet "notwithstanding, in this rejoice not, but rather rejoice because your names are written in heaven." And this brings me to the Exhortation, in which the true ground of a Christian's joy is propounded, and preferred before all other: "rejoice not in this, &c., but rather in that, that your names are written in heaven." Joy in this mercy is not absolutely prohibited, but a higher joy is preferred; an interest in heaven is another-guise mercy than casting out devils on earth; and therefore rejoice much more in this than that. The expression is in manner of speech much like that of our Lord Christ, in John 6:27, "Labour not for the meat that perisheth, but for that meat which endureth to everlasting life;" that is labour not so much for this or for that, or rather for that than this.

Let us a little consider the expression, "Rejoice because your names are written in heaven." The Lord Christ might have said, Rejoice in your discipleship to me, that I have called you out of the world; when "not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble are called," 1 Corinthians 1:26.

Rejoice that ye have followed me in the regeneration, and that ye are become new creatures, when "the whole world lieth in wickedness," 1 John 5:19.

Rejoice that ye are enlightened in the mysteries of the gospel, when "they are hid from the wise and prudent," Matthew 11:25. But if Christ had fixed their joy in any of these, then the fountain and cause of all had been hid, and therefore our Lord Christ leads them to the fountain from whence all these privileges are derived, and that is, the electing love of God; this being the cause of all future good to the creature. Are ye called out of the world? It is "because your names are written in heaven." Are ye begotten of God, and born again? It is "because your names are written in heaven." Are you taken into membership with Christ, and thereby become the sons and daughters of God? It is "because your names are written in heaven." Have you the earnest of your inheritance in the sealings of the spirit upon your hearts? It is "because your names are written in heaven." Can ye subdue corruptions within, and resist temptations without? are the devils subject to you? It is "because your names are written in heaven. Therefore rejoice not so much because the spirits are subject to you; but rather rejoice because your names are written in heaven."

Query. But what is meant by having "our names written in heaven?" how must we understand this?

Answer. The name is in scripture phrase frequently put for the person: Acts 1:15, "The number of the names together were about a hundred and twenty;" that is, the number of the persons. Revelation 3:4, "Thou hast a few names in Sardis, which have not defiled their garments;" a few names, that is, a few saints in Sardis. So that we are not to understand it as if God did literally

write down the names of men; but the expression is to show us what a peculiar and distinct knowledge God hath of persons in the world. When our names are said to be written in heaven, it is a way of speaking borrowed from the customs of men whose names are registered and enrolled in some public records, to keep in memory and assure them of their freedom and privilege in that corporation. The apostle, in Php 4:3, speaks of names written in the book of life; "whose names are in the book of life." And in Revelation 13:8, you read of names written in the book of the Lamb; "All that dwell upon earth shall worship the beast, whose names are not written in the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world." And here in the text you read of "a name written in heaven."

They that have an interest in the electing love of God, that are his chosen ones, their names are written "in the book of life." But these lying in a fallen state with the rest of the lost world, must be redeemed with the blood of Christ, and when they come to share in the redeeming love of Christ, then they may be said to have their "names written in the book of the Lamb." And when the Spirit of grace hath changed and sanctified them, and given them a right to eternal life, then their "names may be said to be written in heaven."

If ye share in the electing love of God, ye shall also share in the redeeming grace of Christ; and if ye are redeemed by Christ, ye shall share in the renewing and sanctifying work of the Spirit.

If your name be written in the book of life, it shall be written in the book of the Lamb; and if it be in the book of the Lamb, it shall be written in heaven; and if it be written there, then "rejoice not that the spirits are subject to you, but rather rejoice because your names are written in heaven." But I conceive that all these various phrases of the Holy Ghost signify one and the same thing, to be written "in the book of life, and in the book of the Lamb," is all one in sense with this phrase before us in the text, of "having our names written in heaven."

Now the writing our names in heaven imports and implies three things.

1st, The foreknowledge of God: The names of believers are said "to be written in heaven," because they are as certainly and as distinctly known to God, as if their names were written and recorded there.

God is said "not to know the wicked," Matthew 7:23; but he "knoweth all that are his." "You only have I known of all the families of the earth," Amos 3:2. "The foundation of the Lord stands sure, having this seal, The Lord knows them that are his," 2 Timothy 2:19.

2dly, The writing our names in heaven implies an interest in the electing love of God, Php 4:3, "whose names are written in the book of life;" that is, who are in an elected state, chosen to salvation and eternal life. The book of life is God's immutable and eternal decree, wherein, as in a book, the names of the elect are written.

"Behold, what manner of love the father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God," 1 John 3:1. "This is the new name in the white stone, which none can know but they that receive it," Revelation 2:17. But then there is also a fitness for heaven; and this lies in our attainments in grace; when we are sanctified throughout, and our measure filled up, then we have a fitness for heaven and the state of glory.

We are decreed to this state by the eternal love of God, from before the foundation of the world; we are redeemed to it by the blood and death of Jesus Christ; we are called to it by the preaching of the gospel; but we are not actually entered into it, till we are renewed and sanctified by the Holy Ghost.

There are four doctrines which the words of the text afford to us.

Doctrine 1. That rejoicing in outward mercies is warrantable; the Lord Christ doth here allow of it, even when he preferreth the joy of a name written in heaven before it.

Doctrine 2. That when the Lord vouchsafeth us any matter of rejoicing in the mercies and blessings he bestoweth upon us, the best of us are too prone to take up with a carnal selfish joy; this doctrine is implied in that, "Rejoice not."

Doctrine 3. That though rejoicing in outward mercies is good and warrantable, yet to terminate our joy, and let our hearts rest in them, is evil and sinful. "Rejoice not in this;" that is, not in this as the chief good, not as the highest cause of joy, not so as to hinder your hearts from a higher and nobler matter of rejoicing.

Doctrine 4. That a right to, and interest in the glories of the world to come, is a greater ground of joy than any thing this world can afford. The greatest ground of joy imaginable is to have a name written in heaven.

I shall pass by the two former doctrines, being only implied in the text, and speak a little to the third, to make way to the last, which I chiefly intend to insist upon.

Doctrine 3. That though rejoicing in outward mercies is good and warrantable, yet to terminate our joy, and let our hearts rest in them, is evil and sinful.

It proceeds from an evil cause.

It hath an evil effect.

First, It proceeds from an evil cause, and that is inordinate love of sensual objects; for joy in anything is proportioned to love. We never rejoice much in any thing but what we love much. Now, to have the choicest respects of an immortal soul laid out upon, and centre in, present and perishing comforts, is a great evil.

Secondly, It hath an evil effect; hereby God is disparaged, the Lord Christ despised, the unseen glories neglected, and the soul in danger of being misled and ruined. See Job 21:7-15.

Thirdly, We hereby make a wrong use of the mercies of God, which are given to raise our hearts, not for our hearts to rest in; to elevate our affections, not to terminate them; to draw our hearts up, not to swallow them up.

Present enjoyments should be as a glass for the soul to take a view of the goodness of God in; David saith, "The earth is full of his goodness," Psalms 33:5. You may enjoy God in every creature, and have an account of his goodness from every comfort. To the believing eye there is a transparency in the creature; faith can see divine goodness and bounty beaming through every mercy; and they that cannot, can never rightly use them, nor innocently enjoy them. The sensual

heart makes a cloud to hide him, of that which God made for a glass, in which we might see him. God made it for a window to let in the light of his love, and we make it a curtain to shut it out. To let our hearts rest in present mercies is to make them our images, our idols, and this is the highest abuse of mercy.

1. This God hath expressly forbidden "Thou shalt not make to thyself the likeness of any thing in heaven above," Exodus 20:4. To make the creature our chief good, is to put it in the room and place of God, and make to ourselves an image like God.

2. This hazards the continuance of our mercies: when once we begin to set up idols, it is time for God to pull them down: when once our hearts centre in them, he will quickly remove them; one of these two things God always doth in this case; either he takes our comforts from us, to recover our respects to himself! or if he leaves them with us, then he withdraws himself.

APPLICATION. Would you not then that your hearts should terminate in any thing below? hearken to a double exhortation.

1. Whatever you love, let it be also your fear; fear will be a bridle to love, nothing hath such advantage upon us to steal our hearts from God, as the things we love and delight in. Have you a child or relation you love, a friend or companion you love, &c. O be jealous of them, for these, "like wine, and new wine, take away the heart," Hosea 4:11.

If what you love be not your fear, it will be your loss and sorrow; if Samson had feared his Delilah as much as he loved her, he had saved both his locks and his life. Solomon's wives became his woe: fondling children often repay their parents dotage in tears and troubles, being thorns in their sides and a grief to their souls: whatever thou overlovest, look to find it thy cross or thy curse.

2. Then live above the pleasures of sense: what, have you no nobler delights? have you not a God to delight in? a Christ to solace your souls in communion with? what a poor thing it is to put your souls off with those delights wherein the brutes have as great a share as you! Where is peace with God? where is joy in the Holy Ghost? where is peace of conscience? where is the hope of glory? where is "a name written in heaven?" these are the only proper pastime for immortal souls. And this leads me to the observation I chiefly aim at.

Doctrine 4. That the greatest ground of joy imaginable is to have "a name written in heaven." An interest in the glories of the other world is a truer and nobler cause of rejoicing than any thing that this world can afford.

I need produce no other proof of the truth of this doctrine than the authority of the text itself; it stands clear in the light of its own evidence; the Lord Christ himself hath said it, and therefore we ought to believe it is so. But why is it so?

Reason 1. "A name written in heaven" is a rich result of electing love, Love is the most comfortable attribute in God, the best name the creature knows him by: "God is love," 1 John 4:16. There are three things to be considered in it.

1. Love acts with a priority to all other attributes. Wisdom contrives the good and felicity of the creature; power and providence mature and bring the contrivements of wisdom to pass; but love hath the first hand in the work. It was love that first summoned the great counsel held by all the

three persons, in Elohim, when neither men nor angels existed.

It was love that first pitched upon the Son, and laid him as the foundation of the whole structure of man's salvation and blessedness. Love sent Christ into the world, love put him to death, love made him an offering for sin, John 3:16. All the attributes of God act in the strength of love, and all the providences of God follow the motions of love.

2. Electing love is the proper source of all our other mercies; so the apostle makes it, Ephesians 1:3-4, "Who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings;" how so? "according as he hath chosen us in Christ." And what those spiritual blessings are, he tells you, Ephesians 1:6, "he hath made us accepted in the beloved. In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace." Ephesians 1:7, "He hath abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence;" Ephesians 1:8, "Having made known to us the mystery of his will." Ephesians 1:9, "In whom we have obtained an inheritance;" Ephesians 1:11, "that is, a name written in heaven." All which the apostle resolves again into electing love, Ephesians 1:11, "being predestinated according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his own will."

3. Love is the only attribute which God hath acted to the utmost: we have never seen the utmost of his power, what God can do; but we have seen the utmost of his love; he hath found a ransom for lost souls; Job 33:28, "He hath laid help upon one that is mighty;" Psalms 89:19, "He hath tabernacled divinity in flesh;" 1 Timothy 3:16, "hath made his soul an offering for sin, laid upon him the iniquity of us all;" Isaiah 53:11, "hath made us the righteousness of God in him;" 2 Corinthians 5:21, "hath accepted us in the beloved;" Ephesians 1:6, "hath made us to sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus;" Ephesians 2:6, "written our names in heaven." How can divine love put forth greater efforts of itself than these?

It is infinite love; and it gives the soul interest in an infinite good, entitles it to an infinite blessedness, and so fills the soul with an infinite satisfaction. And is not an interest in electing love the highest cause of rejoicing? The scripture compares the love of God to wine; Song of Solomon 1:2, "New wine is said to make glad the heart;" Psalms 104:15, but "the love of God is better than wine;" Cant. 14.10, it gives "a name in heaven," which causes an eternal rejoicing.

Reason 2. A name written in heaven is a mercy with a distinction, a peculiar appropriated privilege. David prays, Psalms 106:4-5, "Remember me, O Lord, with the favor thou bearest to thy people;" but the Hebrew reads it thus: "Record me, O Lord, in the good will of thy people." God in good will to his people records their names in the book of life, and there David would be recorded too; and why? "That I may see the good of thy chosen; that I may rejoice in the gladness of thy nation; that I may glory with thine inheritance."

Nothing is so great a cause of rejoicing and glorying as this. What if God give you life, riches, relations, honours? there is no distinction in all this; can you prove your title to the love of God by any or all of these? Solomon says no; Ecclesiastes 9:1, "No man knows love or hatred by all that is before him." A man may have life, and yet be dead to God, dead in sin; a man may be rich, and yet wretched; we may have children, and yet be ourselves children of wrath for all that; God doth not love us in giving us sons, unless he gives us his own Son; a man may have honour, and yet not be honoured of God. Herod was honoured of the people, and yet "eaten up of worms," Acts 12:21, Acts 12:23.

Peculiar mercy causes peculiar rejoicing; common mercies can cause but common joy. A name in heaven is a mercy with a distinction: this is not the lot of all; the names of the greatest part of the world are written in the dust; Jeremiah 17:13, "All that forsake thee shall be ashamed, their names shall be written in the earth; because they have forsaken the Lord, the fountain of living waters." The expression hath much in it; it travels with a curse. The earth is opposed to heaven: as "a name in heaven" imports the greatest happiness, so a name written in the earth implies the greatest misery. The earth is a place of short duration, it shall not always last; "Heaven (that is, the lower heaven) and earth shall pass away," our Lord Christ says, Matthew 5:18. A name written in the earth implies a short duration, a name of no continuance: so says Bildad of the wicked, Job 18:16, "His roots shall be dried up beneath, and above shall his branch be cut off."

The earth is a place of putrefaction and corruption; what is buried in the earth soon turns to rottenness; so that a name in the earth implies rottenness, according to that of Solomon, Proverbs 10:7, "The name of the wicked shall rot."

The earth is a place of oblivion; what is written in heaven is recorded for ever, but what is written in the dust is soon forgotten; so says Bildad of the wicked. "His remembrance shall perish from the earth, and he shall have no name in the street. He shall be driven from light into darkness, and chased out of the world. He shall neither have son nor nephew among his people, nor any remaining in his dwellings. Surely such are the dwellings of the wicked, and this is the place of him that knows not God," Job 18:17-20. The earth is designed for burning; it is decreed to be fuel for the conflagration of the great day, when "the Lord Christ shall be revealed from heaven in flaming fire," 2 Thessalonians 1:7-8. So saith the apostle, 2 Peter 3:10, "The day of the Lord will come, in which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also, and the works that are therein, shall be burnt up." Whatever is of affinity to earth must feel the flames of that trying day: not only the element of earth, but the treasures of the earth, the pleasures of the earth, the names written in the earth, earthly affections, earthly fruitions, earthly designs, earthly hearts: all must together make fuel for that fire; for the earth, and all "the works that are therein, shall be burnt up."

You see what a curse a name written in the earth is; and yet the names of the greatest part of men and women in the world are written there. To have a name written in heaven is the portion but of few; it is a special privilege, by which the Lord doth distinguish his from the rest of the world; and therefore to have a name in heaven is cause of rejoicing indeed.

Reason 3. A name written in heaven, speaks the soul in the highest relation to God; you are his children, his sons and daughters, the adopted of the Lord; and what greater ground of joy imaginable.

Whatever excellency there is in the relation the benefit of that excellency redounds to the correlate by virtue of the tie of that relation.

What is it that first clothes your child with honour and name, but the nobleness of his descent? and how comes your honour and greatness to descend upon him, but by being of the same blood? It is the nearness of the relation that entitles him to all. So all that is in God, all his excellencies, all his attributes, his wisdom, his power, his love, his justice, his providence, all are yours, and work for your benefit and advantage by virtue of this relation.

There is a two-fold relation to God, a relation of servants and of sons. But the difference between them is very great, especially in five things.

1st, The relation of servants is a common relation; all creatures in the world are God's servants, as he is the great master and householder of heaven and earth. God hath servants of all sorts, good and bad; he hath "good and faithful servants," Matthew 25:23, and he hath "wicked and slothful servants," Matthew 25:26. He hath some that honour him, and some that honour him not, but rebel against him. God hath many servants that take wages of him, but do the devil's work.

All creatures stand in this relation to God, the very devils themselves are subject to his command; "Every knee bows to him, both of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth," Php 2:10. But the relation of sons is a peculiar special relation, that appertains but to few. God hath many servants, but he hath but few sons; he hath many in subjection, but few in this relation: all are his subjects, but all are not his sons and daughters.

2dly, The relation of servants is a mercenary relation; the duty of that relation is drawn forth by the rewards of it; servants work for hire, it is wages they chiefly look at. God hath many such servants, that are merely mercenaries in all their duties. They know God is a good master, pays well, and keeps a good table; his commands are equal, and his rewards are bountiful, therefore they own him: as many followed the Lord Christ when he was upon earth, not because of his miracles, but because of his morsels; not because they would be saved, but because "they did eat of the loaves and were filled," John 6:26. It was not for the sake of his person, but his provision; not out of love to the truth, so much as the trencher. The Lord Christ hath many such servants now, that call themselves the Servants of Christ, and Ministers of Christ, but they are but Trencher-Chaplains to him. It is the salary they look at, more than the service; dignities more than duty; the preferments of the church, more than the concernments of it: they have the flesh-hook of the law in their hand, 1 Samuel 2:13-14, often to serve themselves, but the book of the law is in their hand but seldom, whereby they should "save themselves and them that hear them," 1 Timothy 4:16. These follow Christ, indeed, but it is for the loaves; no wages, no work; like them in Malachi 3:14, that cry out, "What profit is it to serve God?" But now the relation of sons is more ingenuous: sons obey and serve in ingenuity; not for the reward, but duty; they labour, because they love. Not but that the children of God may look at the rewards promised. Moses was ingenuous in all his performances, and yet "he had a respect to the recompense of the reward," Hebrews 11:26. Christ was a son in the highest relation, the son of God's choicest regard, Matthew 17:5, and yet it is said of him, in his "enduring the cross, and despising the shame," that he "had an eye to the joy that was set before him," Hebrews 12:2. A dutiful child may look at his inheritance; yet he would pay the obedience of children, though he were to receive no father's blessing.

3dly, The relation of sons, is a communicative relation: the relation of a servant is not so. A master doth not impart all his mind, nor disclose his secrets to his servant; he lays upon him his commands, but doth not betrust him with his secrets. So saith our Lord Christ, John 15:15, "Henceforth I call you not servants, for the servant knows not what his Lord doth." But a father will disclose and communicate his heart to his child; he will tell all his mind, and will, and counsels, to his son.

4thly, The relations of servants gives no claim; it doth not entitle them to the estate of their Lord: the law allows them a present maintenance, but no share in the inheritance. But the relation of a

son is entitling; it gives a claim: by virtue of his sonship, he hath a title to what is his father's; his father's riches, his father's honours, &c.

If you are the "children of God," you are born heirs, and your inheritance is the greatest in this world or in the next; for God himself is your portion; and all he is, and all he hath, is "the lot of your inheritance."

5thly, The relation of servants is not lasting; it is arbitrary, founded in will and pleasure: you take one servant, and put away another, at your pleasure. But the relation of a son is abiding, it lasts for ever, to the end of being: so says our Lord Christ, John 8:35, "The servant abides not in the house for ever, but the son abideth ever." If you are the children of God, you are taken into a lasting relation that shall never end: God is your father for ever, and you are his children for ever; it is an everlasting relation.

How should we rejoice in this near relation to the great God! sons and daughters of God is the highest title I ever heard of in the world. David was made but son-in-law to a king, not born a son; he was not of the blood royal, but by favour taken in and made a son, and it was but a son-in-law neither, by marriage; and this sonship was but to a king, that dies like other men, Psalms 82:7, and yet the thoughts of it wrought to astonishment in him: "Seemeth it a light thing to you to be son-in-law to a king?" 1 Samuel 18:23. What is it then to be taken into an eternal sonship to an everlasting father, before whom the kings of the earth are as grasshoppers; that "bringeth the princes to nothing, and maketh the judges of the earth as vanity?" Isaiah 40:22-23.

Reason 4. "A name written in heaven" gives an assured hope of heaven: we are by this for ever set free from all fear of miscarrying. If ye have a title, never question the possession: if the right be yours, ye shall surely inherit. When you look over a bundle of deeds, and see the name of such a particular person run through them all, and expressly mentioned in the conveyance, and all things run in his name, you conclude that estate his, it belongs to him, and will come to him, for all the law in the world is on his side.

It is so in the case in hand; if ye have "a name written in heaven," the estate is yours, the conveyance is made to you, the covenant is the main deed, which is sealed in the blood of Christ, and therein the inheritance is made over and conveyed to you.

There is an inseparable connection between election and salvation: though there are many links in the golden chain that reaches from one to the other, yet not one of them can be broken: "Whom he did predestinate, them he called; and whom he called, them he justified; and whom he justified, them he also glorified," Romans 8:30.

It is observable in what tense the Spirit of God puts it; not in the future, as a thing to be done, but in a tense that notes it done already, to show the certainty of it. If our "names are written in heaven," we shall as surely share in the glories of it, as if already in possession; nay, we are already in possession:

Partly in Christ, who is already entered upon his inheritance in our right; Hebrews 6:20, "Whither the forerunner is for us entered." Hence that of the apostle, "He hath made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus," Ephesians 2:6.

Partly by the promise: we have the deeds, though we do not enjoy the estate; we keep the title, though we do not possess the inheritance.

Partly in the "first fruits of glory," Romans 8:23, which we receive by the Spirit of God, and the graces of the Spirit in our hearts. Entrance upon the least part of an estate, gives a right to the possession, as well as entrance upon the whole: the least turf of the premises conveys the inheritance, and gives livery [writ to possession] and seisin [possession] of all the demesnes [estate]. Grace in the heart is a turf of the holy land, the land of promise, whereby God doth actually instate us in the glorious inheritance.

APPLICATION. The first use shall be for examination. Is "a name written in heaven," the truest cause of rejoicing? then let us see what cause of rejoicing we may have in ourselves upon this account. The apostle's counsel is plainly to this purpose, Galatians 6:4, "Let every man prove his own work, and then shall he have rejoicing in himself, and not in another."

You have heard that there can be no true cause of joy in the heart, but "a name written in heaven." Is "a name written in heaven" the chief ground of your joy?

Question. But you will reply, Who can say his name is written in heaven? who hath thus far known the mind of the Lord? to whom hath he at any time opened the sealed book of his secret decrees? was ever any man admitted into the regions above, to search the eternal records of the divine purpose?

Answer. Surely no: but yet let me, in answer to this, lay down two conclusions.

First, The knowledge of this, that our names are written in heaven, is attainable: why else are we commanded to "make our calling and election sure?" Would the Lord Christ have called upon us to rejoice, because "our names are written in heaven," if it were a thing that could not be known? Surely therefore it is no such secret as lies out of the reach of faith's attainment.

Indeed, to wicked, unbelieving, and impenitent sinners, the knowledge of this is impossible. How can a man that forsakes God, know that his name is written in heaven, when God says, "They that forsake him, their names shall be written in the earth?" But believers may attain to the knowledge of this.

Secondly, As the knowledge of it is attainable, so it is evident from scripture-instance, that many have attained to it: God hath sometimes unsealed the book of his decrees, and held it open to the believing eye; so that the soul hath been enabled to read its interest in divine love, by the spiritual optics of faith; for "faith is the evidence of things not seen," Hebrews 11:1. Faith can make its passage through all the obstructions that lie in the way between a soul at home in the body, and an absent God; for that is the case of every incarnate christian. The soul is as yet wrapt up in gross matter, imprisoned in flesh, and confined to an abode in a tabernacle of clay; and therefore distanced from God, and utterly incapable of any farther converse and communion with him than what is attainable by the mediation of faith.

Now faith enters within the veil, removes the soul out of the valleys of sense, and sets it upon the highest ground of gospel consolation, that it may stand at the fairest advantage to get a prospect into the glory of the other world. Faith draws infallible conclusions of the goodness of its state, from the immutable decrees of electing love: what else made Job say, "I know that my Redeemer liveth,

and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth; and that though worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see for myself?" Job 19:25-27. And what made Paul glory in the Lord Christ, crying out, "Who loved me, and gave himself for me?" Galatians 2:20, and what made the church say, with so much confidence, "I am my beloved's, and my beloved is mine," Song of Solomon 6:3.

Question. But the great question is, How shall a man be able to know that his name is written in heaven?

Answer. There are certain discoveries of this in a man's self; which if we attend to, we may have a sure proof and witness of.

1. Effectual calling is a sure proof of this: if the call of God hath taken hold of our hearts, then our names are written in heaven. There is an inseparable connection between election and vocation; and therefore, when the apostle bids us "give all diligence to make our calling and election sure;" though election be before calling (the one being an immanent act of God in eternity; the other a transient act of God in time), yet the apostle puts the making our calling sure in the first place; because a man can never be sure he is elected till he is first called.

Now then, if you would know whether your names are written in heaven; satisfy yourselves in this, that the call of God hath taken effectual hold of your hearts. Hath it brought your souls off from every thing below Christ, wholly to follow Christ? It is said, when Christ called Peter and Andrew, they presently "left their nets and followed him," Matthew 4:18-19. Every man hath his nets, somewhat that his soul is entangled in, till the call of God take hold of him. Can you now, with Peter, when God calls, lay aside your nets to follow him? For it is not every call that will witness the truth of our election: there is an external call of the word, that is ineffectual, it prevails not upon the sinner's heart, he turns a deaf ear upon it; this call leaves sinners as it finds them, in their sins and lusts, Matthew 20:16. But then there is an internal call; when Word and Spirit go together, and work together, to bring the soul off from sin, and lust, and self, and world, and all to Jesus Christ, to live upon him as its portion, and conform to him as its pattern. Now if thou art thus called, then is thy name written in heaven: and therefore thou mayest go and rejoice indeed; for if any in the world hath cause, thou hast.

2. If the law of God be written in thy heart, then thy name is written in heaven. It is one of the great promises of the new covenant, that "God will write his law in our hearts," Hebrews 8:10.

Question. Now you will say, What is this law of God?

Answer. It is the law of love, the law of holiness, a law that takes in all the duties that God requires of us, a law of universal obedience: Psalms 40:8, "Thy law is within my heart;" it is a law that comprehends the whole rule of the new creature. The law within is a counterpart of the law without; so that, look whatever the word of God commands, the soul is enabled to perform, when this law is written in the heart.

Question. When is God said to write his law in the heart?

Answer. When he doth powerfully impress a divine principle of grace, by his Holy Spirit, in the heart. Believers are said to be "the epistle of Christ, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God," 2 Corinthians 3:3. An epistle is nothing else but a paper, with the mind of a man

written in it, and sent to another: believers are "the epistle of the living God;" there his mind, and will, and law is written, not in tables of stone, but in the fleshly tables of the heart. So that if the law of God be written in your heart, then may you know that your name is written in heaven.

Converting grace in the heart is the best comment upon the election of God; without which the eternal decree concerning us can never be read with clearness, nor understood with comfort. The decree travails and brings forth, in a work of grace in the heart: the mind of God, concerning our eternal condition, is best known by a sound conversion; for there he speaks plainly; that fountain of love which ran under ground before, now bubbles up and breaks forth. In election, God spake within himself; but in conversion, God speaks to the soul: in election, God wrote our names in heaven secretly; but in conversion, we see them written there openly. A work of grace in the heart carries in it a four-fold witness, That we are the objects of God's election. That sin is pardoned through Christ's satisfaction. That God is reconciled by Christ's intercession. That we are secure as to eternal salvation. And the least of these is worth a whole world. Who would not be willing to know himself the chosen of God? who would not be glad to see sin pardoned? who would not rejoice in a friendship with God, whose wrath burns to the lowest hell? who would not triumph, in an assurance of being saved for ever? Now if grace be wrought in thy heart, this is thy privilege; thou mayest say, with Tamar, Genesis 38:25, "Whose this staff, and this signet, and these bracelets are; his am I;" and thou mayest rejoice in hope of glory. No better witness of our names written in heaven, than the image of God engraven in the heart: say not, "Who shall ascend to heaven?" &c. Romans 10:6. As sinners need not descend in the deep, to search for hell, to see if their names be written, by the wrath and vengeance of God, in eternal misery: no, they may find it nearer home; there is an hell within them; there is the stench and filth of hell in their vile affections; the smoke and flames of hell, in their burning and raging lusts; the darkness of hell in their blind minds; and sometimes the torments of hell in their guilty and self-revenging consciences, that "worm that never dies," Mark 9:44. So many believers find a heaven in their own souls, a heaven of light, of love, of holiness, of joy and praise; "the kingdom of heaven is within you."

3. If true faith be wrought in thy heart, then is thy name written in heaven: 1 John 5:10, "He that believeth on the Son of God, hath the witness in himself." Faith is a sure fruit of electing love: "As many as were ordained to eternal life, believed," Acts 13:48. God doth not, you see from hence, elect us because we believe (election upon faith foreseen is an Arminian dream), but we believe because we are elected; it is some of the first fruits which eternal love brings forth in the heart; final unbelief is a sad witness of a reprobate state: so says our Lord Christ, "Ye believe not, because ye are not of my sheep," John 10:26. Would you know then whether your name be written in heaven? then see what faith is wrought in your heart. Have you ever truly closed with the Lord Jesus Christ? do you heartily embrace him, as he is set forth in the gospel? can you venture your soul, your salvation, your eternal all, upon the single bottom of a Redeemer's righteousness? have you ever had actual application of the blood and righteousness of Christ to your own consciences, to take off that guilt of sin whereby your souls stand bound over to wrath and damnation? this is faith of the operation of God; and wherever this faith is found in the heart the name of that man, that woman, is found in heaven: and therefore well may the apostle say, "In whom believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory," 1 Peter 1:8.

4. If the father's name be written in our foreheads, then are our names written in heaven. In Revelation 14:1, it is said of those that stood with the Lamb upon Mount Sion, that "the Father's

name was written in their foreheads." The name of God is written in the forehead, when we openly confess the truths of God, and are not ashamed of religion; nor ashamed to own God, and his ways, and ordinances, and people, in the midst of a profane, scoffing, and adulterous generation. Now says our Lord Christ, "He that confesses me before men," (that is, the name of Christ written in the forehead) "him will I confess before my father;" that is, he shall have a name written in heaven.

Now where is the name of God written? do ye repine at difficulties, shrink at sufferings, blush at being counted religious? are you ashamed of Christ, his ways, his name, his people? why if so, his name is not in your foreheads. Or can you lift up your heads, and shew your faces, in the cause of Christ? it should be thus, "God is not ashamed to be called our God," Hebrews 11:16. And will you be ashamed to be called his children, his saints, his witnesses? Moses was not, when he "esteemed the reproaches of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt," Hebrews 11:26. He had the father's name in his forehead.

5. If your great work be, to have treasure in heaven, then your names are written in heaven. This is the counsel of the blessed Jesus, Matthew 6:20, "Lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven:" and Luke 12:33, "Provide yourselves bags which wax not old, a treasure in the heavens that faileth not." The treasures of most men are perishing, earthly treasures, cankered and moth-eaten treasures, treasures of vanity. Christians! where is your treasure? is it in this world, or the next? is it in present vanities, or future glory? is it in present contentments, or in everlasting inheritance? is it in corn, and wine, and oil; or is it in the light of God's countenance? is it in profits, pleasures, and honours; or is it in grace and glory? do ye build, and plant, and sow in the other world, that hereafter ye may reap an eternal harvest of blessedness? if so, then are your names written in heaven.

6. If your conversations are in heaven, then are your names written in heaven. Php 3:20, "Our conversation is in heaven." Many profess hope of heaven, but their conversations are in the meanwhile upon the earth: like that foolish actor, that whilst his eyes were fixed upon the earth, cried, O heavens! they savour only earthly things; earthly profits, earthly comforts, earthly vanities.

Let a man's profession be never so heavenly, his prayers and duties never so heavenly; yet if they are over-topped by an earthly conversation, that man's religion is vain. The scripture says expressly, "If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him," 1 John 2:15.

Never talk of a name in heaven, so long as your hearts are buried in the earth: where your hearts are, there your names are: if your hearts are earthly, your names are in the earth, "Carnal, worldly, sensual, enemy to God," that is thy name, and the scripture gives thee no other, James 4:4, "He that is a friend of the world, is the enemy of God."

Now what is your life? how do ye live? do ye live by sense, or do ye live by faith? do ye live upon the creatures, or upon the promises?

It is said of the virtuous woman, Proverbs 31:14, that "she fetcheth her food from far." So doth the true believer; he uses the blessings of the creature, but he lives upon the blessings of the covenant. From far.] That is, far out of the sight and ken [view] of the natural eye: for it is bread the world knows not of. The natural man is blind and cannot see afar off. "God hath set the world in their hearts." Ecclesiastes 3:11. They are strangers to this joy. From far.] "A man's life consists not

in the abundance of things which he possesseth," Luke 12:15. His "life is hid with Christ in God," Colossians 3:3; and from thence are the comforts of his life. "He fetches his food from far:" it is God in Christ, and the glories of the other world that are the bread of his soul. Do ye fetch your food from far, or nearer home? are you fed by sense, with what is next; or doth faith feed you with clusters fetched from the holy land? do ye serve flesh, lust, and sins, and times, which is the basest thralldom? or do ye serve "God and Christ, whose service is perfect freedom?" Romans 6:16; his ye are whom ye serve. The apostle Paul will tell you whom he serves, "The Lord whom I serve in my spirit," Romans 1:9. "Forgetting the things behind, I press towards the mark," Php 3:13. Outward privileges, carnal contentments, perishing hopes, these were once the things before him; but now he hath turned about, and set his face the other way, and left them all behind him.

"I press forward towards the mark." He is now ascending upon the wings of faith and love, above this dung and darkness, to the regions of light and glory

If your conversation be in heaven, it is thus with you in one degree or other. Heavenly concernments are your work, and heavenly comforts are your support. It is not "the fig-tree's blossoms, nor the olive's labour," Habakkuk 3:17, that can comfort and glad you; but it is fruit from the tree of life, in the midst of the paradise of God, that feeds you. If thus your conversation be in heaven, then is your name written in heaven. The next use shall be by way of

EXHORTATION. IS a name written in heaven the highest cause of rejoicing? and can you, upon examination, find that your names are written there? O then set your selah upon this mercy! fix your heart, your joy, your thankfulness upon this privilege. Other things you may rejoice in, in their place, and by the by; but here your joy should be fixed. See how the Apostle breaks out into thanksgiving for this, Ephesians 1:3-6, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in Christ Jesus. According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world; that we should be holy and without blame before him in love. Having predestinated us to the adoption of children, by Jesus Christ, to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will. To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved." His heart dwells in triumph upon this mercy; and so should ours also; the Lord Christ, here in the text, commands it; "Rejoice, because your names are written in heaven."

Now give me leave to propound to you six considerations, which are very proper motives to stir up your hearts to the practice of this duty.

Consider (1.), There is no name like this.

1. It is an honourable name: Isaiah 43:4, "Since thou wast precious in my sight, thou hast been honourable." If God poureth contempt upon the creature, it must needs be vile and base: God is the true fountain of honour; if he puts honour upon us, it is the truest honour in the world.

2. It is "a better name than that of sons and daughters," Isaiah 56:4-5. "Thus saith the Lord to the eunuchs that keep my Sabbaths, and choose the things that please me, and take hold of my covenant; to them will I give in my house a place, and a name better than of sons and daughters." Though they have no children, yet they shall be my children; though they are without a name in the world, yet they shall have a name in my house.

3. It is a durable and lasting name. A name in the world may be lost: The wicked may defame it.

Wickedness may corrupt it.

God may blast it: "Thou hast put out their name for ever and ever," Psalms 9:5.

Time may eat it out of the records of honour. But a name written in heaven, is a durable name, it can never be blotted out: "I will give them an everlasting name that shall never be cut off," Isaiah 56:5. As the inheritance is incorruptible, so the title is unalterable, and the heir immortal.

Consider (2.), A name written in heaven, is a blessing that sweetens all our other blessings. This land is mine, and these riches are mine, and this child is mine, and this honour is mine: yea, and God is mine, and Christ is mine, and the white stone and the new name is mine, and heaven and eternal life is mine: ay, this, this sweetens all.

What if you could be supposed to enjoy all outward blessings imaginable? the fairest estate, the highest honours, the sweetest children, the richest pleasures: yet in the midst of all these, if conscience should secretly gripe you within, and tell you ye are "strangers and enemies to God," ye have no part in Christ, no portion in his death, your names are not in the book of life, ye are the children of God's curse: O, what a heart-sinking would this cause under all your fruitions! this one thing left in doubt, "I know not what will become of my soul to eternity," is enough to bring us into straits in the midst of all our sufficiencies, Job 20:22, to sour all our possessions, and to make the face of all our enjoyments look dim and unpleasant.

Consider (3.), This is that which gives confidence and comfort in death, and makes us strong to grapple with that king of terrors.

What is it which makes even believers themselves, many of them, shrink at the thoughts of death; why, it is want of evidence, they have never seen their names written in the book of life. The sight of this by faith, makes the soul triumph over death and despise the grave, and say with Simeon, "Now, Lord, let thy servant depart in peace, for mine eyes have seen thy salvation," Luke 2:29-30.

"We know," saith the apostle, 2 Corinthians 5:1, "that if our earthly tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." This we know, and are assured of; well, and what is the fruit of this assurance? he tells you in the second and fourth verses: "In this we groan earnestly, desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven, that mortality might be swallowed up of life."

What is death, to the assured believer, but a speedy conveyance to the possession of that glory which divine love has entitled him to from everlasting?

Consider (4.), Herein joy can never run into excess: in temporal things it may; it is possible and common to rejoice and delight in outward mercies too much, for they are every way disproportionable to the vast capacity of the soul; as unable to fill it, as the dim light of a candle is to give day to the world, in the absence of the sun.

Hear what the prophet says in the case, Isaiah 28:20, "The bed is too short for a man to stretch himself upon it, and the covering too narrow for a man to wrap himself in it."

How unsuitable is a short bed for a long body! so are perishing comforts to an immortal soul. And from hence it is that the apostle adviseth, in 1 Corinthians 7:30, that "they that rejoice, should be

as though they rejoiced not;" that is, in worldly things. But in spiritual and eternal concerns, joy cannot exceed; for infinite blessedness calls for infinite joy and delight.

Consider (5.) This will be a lasting and perpetuated joy. Therefore it is congruous and equal that we now rejoice in that which shall be our joy for ever. Other joys have their periods and intermissions, their terms, and vacations; they ebb and flow, blossom and wither; a fit of sickness, or a pang of conscience, extinguishes all: but this joy is abiding, "Your joy shall no man take from you," John 16:22.

It is true, that the "children of God have many causes of sorrow:" if they look inward, strong corruptions, hard hearts, weak graces, many temptations: but yet in God they have continual cause of rejoicing. A name in heaven is an enduring ground of comfort; not like these transient shadows. Can stability be moved, or eternity expire?

Nothing is matter of lasting joy, but that good which is commensurate in duration to the soul that is to be satisfied with it. The times we live in are changeable and uncomposed; the hatred of religion great; we see distractions at home, distresses abroad; the Lord is shaking heaven and earth, church and state: our experience tells us how mutable are the wills, how fickle the favours, how sudden the frowns of men; how vain the hopes, how unsuitable the delights, which are drawn out of broken cisterns; how full of dross and dregs the most refined comforts and contents of the world are. Nothing can be an enduring joy but this, which our Lord Christ propounds in the text, as matter of joy. Who would not therefore retire from the noise of laughter, from the courtships of flattering gallants, the clutter and vainglory of a distracted world, to solace his soul in the joys and delights of the world to come?

Consider (6.), What heaven is; and that will raise your hearts to glory in this privilege of a name written in heaven.

1. Heaven is the habitation of the great God, where he dwells in his infinite glory; so that "a name written in heaven," imports our future inheritance of that glory; according to that of the apostle, Colossians 3:4, "When Christ, who is our life, shall appear: then shall we appear with him in glory."

2. Heaven is a freedom from all evil, both of sin and suffering; so that "a name in heaven" entitles us to a blessed redemption from all evil.

There is no sin there. Grace weakens sin, but it is glory that abolishes it. Old Adam shall there be put off, never to be put on again. The Lord Christ will "present his church, in that day, faultless before the throne of his glory, with exceeding joy," Jude 1:24.

There is no affliction there: sin and sorrow came in together, and they shall go out together. There the Shunamite's son complains no more of his aching head, nor Mephibosheth of his lame feet. There Job's blotches are perfectly cured, and Lazarus's sores are all dried up.

3. Heaven is a place of all perfection. So that "a name written in heaven" entitles us to a perfection of state which we cannot hope for in this world: "Not as though I had already attained, or were already perfect," Php 3:12.

All perfection is above.

There is perfection of faculties: the understanding shall be elevated by the light of glory, into "the vision of God," 1 Corinthians 13:12. The nature of God, the mystery of Three in One, the union of two natures in one person, the course of God's decrees and providence; these are deeps of God, and at present there is darkness upon the face of these deeps; but there the glorified eye shall see all. The will shall there be perfectly holy, and swallowed up into the will of God.

There is perfection of privileges; perfect union and communion. Here we lay hold of Christ; but there we shall have full possession: here we hang upon him, but there we shall dwell in his embraces.

There is perfection of graces: here the children of God have perfection of parts, but not of degrees.

Holiness in the best saint here is mixed with some dregs of flesh and defilement; but there it shall be complete; we shall appear "not having spot or wrinkle," Ephesians 5:27.

Love shall there be perfect: here we are either weary of the act, or apt to make a change of the object of our love, ever and anon swerving and starting aside to the creature; but then we shall act love without ceasing, upon one and the same object, without changing. There shall be an eternal solace and complacency in God.

4. Heaven is the abstract of all blessedness, the sum of all felicity. Reckon up all comforts and pleasures, and satisfactions, and delights, and happinesses, and put them all together, and then separate from them finiteness and imperfection, and that is heaven. So that a name written in heaven imports our future fruition of all blessedness. Yet a little while, and ye shall be let into all this.

All the objects of joy which are scattered among the creatures, are everlastingly heaped up in heaven: so that say what it is you delight and joy in, and I will shew it you there. Is it wealth? why there are "unsearchable riches in heaven," Ephesians 3:8; "durable riches," Proverbs 8:18; unsearchable, and therefore without bottom and without bound: durable, and therefore without end. Do ye delight in honour and dignity? why in heaven, the glory of the great God himself shall be put upon you, Colossians 3:4.

John tells us, "It doth not yet appear what we shall be; but we know, when he shall appear, we shall be like him," 1 John 3:2. "Such honour have all his saints," Psalms 149:9. Is it pleasure you delight in? why in heaven "there are rivers of pleasures," Psalms 36:8. "In thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore," Psalms 16:11. Do ye delight in feasting? why in heaven there is plenty and variety, fulness without satiety; "bread of life, the tree of life, the fountain of life." Do ye delight in music? (it is not fit that such a feast should be without it:) in heaven the saints and angels are in one concord "singing eternal hallelujahs to him that sits upon the throne, and to the Lamb for ever." Do you delight in stately and magnificent structures? why in heaven is "a house not made with hands," 2 Corinthians 5:1. This is "a city, whose walls are jasper, whose foundations are precious stones, whose gates are pearl, whose streets are pure gold," Revelation 21:18-19, Revelation 21:21, "Whose builder and maker is God," 2 Corinthians 5:1.

Thus you see heaven is the comprehension of all good, the abstract of all felicity. And your name is written upon all this; it is all yours, as the apostle says, 1 Corinthians 3:21-22. "All things are

yours, whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come, all are yours."

Ministers are yours, to instruct you. The world is yours, to supply you.

Life is yours, to prepare you for heaven.

Things present are yours, to support you in the way.

Things to come are yours, to crown you in the end.

What then remaineth? but as David adviseth, "Be glad in the Lord, and rejoice ye righteous, and shout for joy all ye that are upright in heart," Psalms 32:11.

Whatever ye enjoy in the world, yet let your joy be in God. Have ye riches, honours, pleasures, children, health, beauty, &c. "notwithstanding, in this rejoice not; but rather rejoice, because your names are written in heaven."

Almost Christian Discovered; Part 2

The Almost Christian Discovered;

Or, The False Professor Tried By Matthew Mead, 1661 QUESTION I. How far may a man go in the way to heaven—and yet be but almost a Christian?

ANSWER. This I will show you in twenty several steps.

Section I. A man may have much KNOWLEDGE, much light; he may know much of God and his will, much of Christ and his ways—and yet be but almost a Christian. For though there can be no grace without knowledge—yet there may be much knowledge where there is no grace; illumination often goes before—when conversion never follows after. The subject of knowledge is the understanding; the subject of holiness is the will. Now a man may have his understanding enlightened—and yet his will not at all sanctified. He may have an understanding to know God—and yet lack a will to obey God. The apostle tells us of some, that, "when they knew God, they glorified him not as God." To make a man altogether a Christian, there must be light in the head—and heat in the heart; knowledge in the understanding—and zeal in the affections. Some have zeal and no knowledge; that is, blind devotion. Some have knowledge and no zeal; that is, fruitless speculation. But where knowledge is joined with zeal, that makes a true Christian.

Objection. But is it not said, "This is eternal life--to know you, the only true God—and Jesus Christ whom you have sent?"

Answer. It is not every knowledge of God and Christ, which interests the soul in eternal life. For why then do the devils perish; they have more knowledge of God than all the men in the world; for though, by their fall, they lost their holiness, yet they lost not their knowledge. They are called daimones, from their knowledge—and yet they are diaboli, from their malice, devils still. Knowledge may fill the head—but it will never better the heart, if there is not somewhat else. The Pharisees had much knowledge, "Behold, you are called a Jew—and rest in the law—and make your boast of God—and know his will," etc.—and yet they were a generation of hypocrites! Alas! how many have gone loaded with knowledge to hell! Though it is true, that it is eternal life to know God and Jesus Christ; yet it is as true, that many do know God and Jesus Christ, who shall never see eternal life.

There is, you must know, a twofold knowledge; the one is common—but not saving; the other is not common—but saving. Common knowledge is that which floats in the head—but does not influence the heart. This knowledge, reprobates may have.

Naturalists say, that there is a pearl in the toad's head—and yet her belly is full of poison. The French have a berry which they call the grape of a thorn. The common knowledge of Christ is the pearl in the toad's head—the grape which grows upon thorns; it may be found in unsanctified men. And then there is a saving knowledge of God and Christ, which includes the assent of the mind—and the consent of the will; this is a knowledge which implies faith; "By his knowledge shall

my righteous servant justify many." And this is that knowledge which leads to life eternal. Now whatever that measure of knowledge is, which a man may have of God—and of Jesus Christ, yet if it is not this saving knowledge--knowledge joined with affection and application—he is but almost a Christian.

He only knows God aright, who knows how to obey him—and obeys according to his knowledge of him. "A good understanding have all those who do his commandments." All knowledge without this, makes a man but like Nebuchadnezzar's image, with "a head of gold—and feet of clay." Some know—but only to know. Some know—but only to be known. Some know—to practice what they know. Now, to know—but to know—that is merely curiosity. To know, to be known—that is merely vain-glory. But to know, to practice what we know—that is gospel duty. This makes a man a complete Christian; the other, without this, makes a man almost—and yet but almost a Christian.

Section II. A man may have great and eminent GIFTS, yes, spiritual gifts—and yet be but almost a Christian. The gift of prayer is a spiritual gift. Now this a man may have—and yet be but almost a Christian—for the gift of prayer is one thing; the grace of prayer is another. The gift of preaching and prophesying is a spiritual gift; now this a man may have—and yet be but almost a Christian. Judas was a great preacher; so were those who came to Christ—and said, "Lord, Lord, we have prophesied in your name—and in your name have cast out devils," etc. You must know that it is not gifts—but grace, which makes a Christian! For,

1. Gifts are from a common work of the Spirit. Now a man may partake of all the common gifts of the Spirit—and yet be a reprobate. They are called common, because they are indifferently dispensed by the Spirit to those who are believers—and to those who are not. Those who have grace have gifts; and those who have no grace, may have the same gifts; for the Spirit works in both. Nay, in this sense he who has no grace, may be under a greater work of the Spirit as to gifts, than he who has most grace. A graceless professor may have greater gifts than the most holy believer! He may out-pray, and out-preach, and out-do them! But true believers, in sincerity and integrity, out-go the mere professor.

2. Gifts are for the use and good of others, they are given for the profiting and edifying of others. So says the apostle, "A spiritual gift is given to each of us as a means of helping the entire church." Now a man may edify another by his gifts—and yet be unedified himself; he may be profitable to another—and yet unprofitable to himself. The raven was an unclean bird: God makes use of her to feed Elijah; though she was not good meat, yet it was good meat she brought. A lame man may with his crutch point to the right way—and yet not be able to walk in it himself. A deformed tailor may make a suit to fit a straight body, though it does not fit him who made it, because of his deformity. The church (Christ's garden enclosed) may be watered through a wooden gutter; the sun may give light through a dusky window; and the field may be well sowed with a dirty hand. The efficacy of the Word does not depend upon the authority of him who speaks it—but upon the authority of God who blesses it. So that another may be converted by my preaching—and yet I may be cast away notwithstanding. Balaam makes a clear and rare prophecy of Christ—and yet he has no benefit by Christ, "There shall come a star out of Jacob—and a scepter shall rise out of Israel." But yet Balaam shall have no benefit by it, "I shall see him—but not now; I shall behold him—but not near." God may use a man's gifts to bring another to Christ, when he himself, whose gifts God uses, may be a stranger unto Christ.

One man may confirm another in the faith—and yet himself may be a stranger to the faith. Pendleton strengthens and confirms Sanders, in Queen Mary's days, to stand in the truth he had preached—and to seal it with his blood—and yet afterwards plays the apostate himself. Johannes Speiserus, a famous preacher of Augsburg in Germany, in the year 1523, preached the gospel so powerfully that many common harlots were converted—and became godly Christians; and yet himself afterwards turned papist and came to a miserable end. Thus the candle may burn bright to light others in their work—and yet afterwards go out in a stink.

3. It is beyond the power of the greatest gifts to change the heart. A man may preach like an apostle, pray like an angel—and yet may have the heart of a devil! It is grace alone which can change the heart; the greatest gifts cannot change it—but the least grace can; gifts may make a man a scholar—but grace makes a man a believer. Now if gifts cannot change the heart, then a man may have the greatest gifts—and yet be but almost a Christian.

4. Many have gone to hell, laden with gifts. No doubt Judas had great gifts, for he was a preacher of the gospel; and our Lord Jesus Christ would not set him to work—and not fit him for the work; yet "Judas is gone to his own place!" The Scribes and Pharisees were men of great gifts—and yet, "where is the wise? where is the scribe?" "The preaching of the cross is to those who perish foolishness." Those who perish, who are they? Who! the wise and the learned, both among Jews and Greeks; these are called "those who perish." A great bishop said, when he saw a poor shepherd weeping over his sin, "The poor illiterate world attain to heaven, while we with all our learning fall into hell."

There are three things which must be done for us, if ever we would avoid eternally perishing.

We must be thoroughly convinced of sin.

We must be really united to Christ.

We must be instated in the covenant of grace.

Now, the greatest gifts cannot stead us in any of these. They cannot work thorough convictions. They cannot effect our union. They cannot bring us into covenant-relation. And consequently, they cannot preserve us from eternally perishing; and if so, then a man may have the greatest gifts—and yet be but almost a Christian.

5. Gifts may decay and perish. They do not lie beyond the reach of corruption; indeed grace shall never perish—but gifts will. Grace is incorruptible, though gifts are not. Grace is "a spring, whose waters fail not," but the streams of gifts may be dried up. If grace be corruptible in its own nature, as being but a creature, yet it is incorruptible in regard of its preserver, as being the new creature; he who did create it in us—will preserve it in us; he who did begin it—will also finish it. Gifts have their root in nature—but grace has its roots in Christ; and therefore though gifts may die and wither, yet grace shall abide forever.

Now if gifts are perishing, then, though he who has the least grace is a Christian, he who has the greatest gifts may be but almost a Christian.

Objection. But does not the apostle bid us "covet earnestly the best gifts?" Why must we covet them—and covet them earnestly, if they avail not to salvation?

Answer. Gifts are good—though they are not the best good; they are excellent—but there is something more excellent, so it follows in the same verse, "Yet I show unto you a more excellent way," and that is the way of grace. One grain of grace—is more worth than a ton of gifts! Gifts may make us rich towards men—but it is grace which makes us "rich towards God." Our gifts profit others—but grace profits ourselves. That whereby I profit another is good—but that by which I am profited myself is better. Now because gifts are good, therefore we ought to covet them; but because they are not the best good, therefore we ought not to rest in them. We must covet gifts for the good of others, that they may be edified; and we must covet grace for the good of our own souls, that they may be saved. No matter how many are bettered by our gifts—yet we shall miscarry without grace.

Section III. A man may have a high PROFESSION of religion, be much in EXTERNAL DUTIES of religion—and yet be but almost a Christian. Mark what our Lord tells them, "Not everyone who says unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven." That is, not everyone who makes a profession of Christ, shall therefore be owned for a true disciple of Christ. "Not all who are descended from Israel are Israel;" nor are all Christians, who make a profession of religion. What a good profession Judas had! He followed Christ, left all for Christ, he preached the gospel of Christ, he cast out devils in the name of Christ, he ate and drank at the table of Christ—and yet Judas was but a hypocrite.

Most professors are like lilies, fair in show—but foul in scent; or like pepper, hot in the mouth—but cold in the stomach. The finest lace may be upon the coarsest cloth. It is a great deceit to measure the reality of our religion—by the bulk of our profession—and to judge of the strength of our graces by the length of our duties. The Scriptures speak of some who having "a form of godliness, yet deny the power thereof." Deny the power; that is, they do not live in the practice of those graces to which they pretend to profess. He who pretends to godliness by a specious profession—and yet does not practice godliness by a holy life, "he has a form—but denies the power." Grotius compares such to the ostrich, which has great wings—but yet does not fly. Many have the wings of a fair profession—but yet use them not to mount upward in spiritual affections—and a heavenly life. But to clear the truth of this, that a man may make a high profession of religion—and yet be but almost a Christian, take a fourfold evidence.

1. If a man may profess religion—and yet never have his heart changed, nor his state bettered; then he may be a great professor—and yet be but almost a Christian. But a man may profess religion—and yet never have his heart changed, nor his state renewed. He may be a constant hearer of the word—and yet be an unconverted sinner still; he may come often to the Lord's table—and yet go away as foul a sinner as he came! We must not think that duties can confer grace. Many a soul has been converted by Christ in an ordinance—but never was any soul converted by an ordinance without Christ. And does Christ convert all who sit under the ordinances? Surely not; for to some, "the Word is a savor of death unto death." And if so, then it is plain, that a man may profess religion—and yet be but almost a Christian.

2. A man may profess religion—and live in a form of godliness in hypocrisy. "Listen to this, O house of Jacob, you who are called by the name of Israel and come from the line of Judah, you who take oaths in the name of the Lord and make mention of the God of Israel—but not in truth, nor in righteousness." What do you think of these people? "They make mention of the name of the

Lord," there is their profession; "but not in truth; nor in righteousness," there is their dissimulation. And indeed there could be no hypocrisy in a religious sense, were it not for a profession of religion; for he who is wicked and carnal, and vile inwardly, and appears to be so outwardly, he is no hypocrite—but is what he appears, and appears what he is. But he who is one thing really, and another thing seemingly—he who is carnal and unholy, and yet seems to be good and holy—he is a hypocrite.

Thus they define hypocrisy to be a counterfeiting of holiness; and this fits exactly with the Greek word, which is, to counterfeit. And to this purpose, the Hebrews have two words for hypocrites; one which signifies faces; and another which signifies counterfeits. So that he is a hypocrite who counterfeits piety, and wears the face of holiness—and yet is without the grace of holiness. He appears to be in semblance, what he is not in substance. He wears a form of godliness without, only as a cover of a profane heart within. He has a profession that he may not be thought wicked; but it is but a profession, and therefore he is wicked. He is the religious hypocrite; religious, because he pretends to it; and yet a hypocrite, because he does but pretend to it. He is like many men in a consumption, who have fresh looks—and yet rotten lungs; or like an apple that has a fair skin—but a rotten core. Many appear righteous, who are only righteous in appearance. And if so, then a man may profess religion—and yet be but almost a Christian.

3. Custom and fashion may make a man a professor. As you have many who wear this or that garb, not because it keeps them warmer, or has any excellency in it more than another—but merely for fashion. Many must have powdered hair, painted faces, feathers in their caps, etc. for no other end—but because they would be fools in fashion. So, many profess Christianity—not because the means of grace warm the heart, or who they see any excellencies in the ways of God above the world—but merely to follow the fashion! Because religion has been uppermost, therefore many have professed it. Religion in fashion makes many professors—but few proselytes; but when religion suffers, then its confessors are no more than its converts; for custom makes the former—but conscience the latter. He who is a professor of religion merely for custom sake, when it prospers, will never be a martyr for Christ's sake, when religion suffers.

They say, that when a house is decaying or falling, all the rats and mice will forsake it. While the house is firm, and they may shelter in the roof, they will stay—but no longer; lest, in the decay, the fall should be upon them, and those who lived at top should die at bottom. My brethren, may I not say, we have many who are the vermin, the rats and mice of religion, who would live under the roof of it, while they might have shelter in it; but when it suffers, they forsake it, lest it should fall, and the fall should be upon them!

I am persuaded this is not the least reason why God has brought persecution; namely to rid it of the vermin. He shakes the foundations of the house, that these rats and mice may leave it—to rid them of it; as the farmer fans the wheat, that he may get rid of the chaff. The halcyon days of the gospel provoke hypocrisy—but the sufferings for religion prove sincerity. Now, then, if custom and fashion make many men professors, then a man may profess religion—and yet be but almost a Christian.

4. If many may perish under a profession of godliness, then a man may profess religion and yet be but almost a Christian. Now, the Scripture is clear, that a man may perish under the highest profession of religion. Christ cursed the fig-tree, which had leaves and no fruit. It is said, that "the

children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness." Who were these—but those who were then the only people of God by profession—and yet these were cast out. In Matthew's gospel, you read of some who came and made boast of their profession to Christ, hoping that might save them. "Lord," say they, "have we not prophesied in your name, cast out devils in your name, done many wonderful works in your name?" Now what says our Lord Christ to this? "Then I will profess unto them, I never knew you; depart from me!" Mark, here are those who prophesy in his name—and yet perish in his wrath! In his name cast out devils—and then are cast out themselves! In his name do many wonderful works—and yet perish as workers of iniquity. The profession of religion will no more keep a man from perishing—than calling a ship the Safe-guard, or the Good-speed, will keep it from sinking. As many go to heaven with the fear of hell in their hearts—so many go to hell with the name of Christ in their mouths.

Now then, if many may perish under a profession of godliness, then may a man be a high professor of religion—and yet be but almost a Christian.

Objection. But is it not said by the Lord Christ himself, "He who confesses me before men, him will I confess before my Father in heaven?" Now, for Christ to say, he will confess us before the Father, is equivalent to a promise of eternal life: for if Jesus Christ confesses us, God the Father will never disown us. True, those who confess Christ, shall be confessed by him; and it is as true, that this confession is equivalent to a promise of salvation. But you must know, that professing Christ, is not confessing him: for to profess Christ is one thing—to confess Christ is another. Confession is a living testimony for Christ, in a time when religion suffers. Profession may be only a lifeless formality, in a time when religion prospers. To confess Christ, is to choose his ways, and own them. To profess Christ, is to plead for his ways—and yet not live in them. Profession may be from a feigned love to the ways of Christ; but confession is from a rooted love to the person of Christ. To profess Christ, is to own him when none deny him; to confess Christ, is to plead for him, and suffer for him, when others oppose him. Hypocrites may be professors; but the martyrs are the true confessors. Profession is a swimming down the stream. Confession is a swimming against the stream. Now many may swim with the stream, like the dead fish—which cannot swim against the stream, with the living fish. Many may profess Christ, who cannot confess Christ; and so, notwithstanding their profession, yet are but almost Christians.

Section IV. To come yet nearer; a man may go far in opposing his SIN—and yet be but almost a Christian. How far a man may go in this work, I shall show you in seven gradual instances.

First, A man may be CONVINCED of sin—and yet be but almost a Christian. For,

1. Conviction of sin may be merely rational, as well as spiritual; it may be from a natural conscience enlightened by the Word, without the effectual work of the Spirit, applying sin to the heart.
2. Conviction of sin may be worn out—and often does not end in sound conversion. Says the church, "We have been with child, we have been in pain, we have brought forth wind." This is the complaint of the church, in reference to the unprofitableness of their afflictions; and it may be the complaint in most, in reference to the unprofitableness of their convictions.
3. Many take conviction of sin, to be conversion from sin; and then sit down and rest in their convictions.

Now then, if convictions may be only from natural conscience; if they may be worn out, or may be mistaken, and rested in for conversion, then a man may have convictions, and be but almost a Christian.

Secondly, A man may MOURN for sin—and yet be but almost a Christian. So did Saul; so did Esau, for the loss of his birthright, which was his sin, and therefore he is called, by the Spirit of God, "profane Esau;" yet, "he sought it again carefully with tears."

Objection. But does not Christ pronounce them blessed, who mourn? "Blessed are those who mourn." Surely then, if a man mourns for sin, he is in a good condition. "You see," says Nazianzen, "that salvation is joined with sorrow."

Solution. I answer, it is true, that those who mourn for sin, in the sense Christ there speaks of, are blessed; but all mourning for sin, does not therefore render us blessed.

1. True mourning for sin must flow from spiritual convictions of the evil, and vileness, and damnable nature of sin. Now, all who mourn for sin, do not do it from a thorough work of spiritual conviction upon the soul; they have not a right sense of the evil and vileness of sin.

2. True mourning for sin, is more for the evil which is in sin, than the evil that comes as a result of sin. It is more because it dishonors God, and wounds Christ, and grieves the Spirit, and makes the soul unlike God, than because it damns the soul. Now there are many who mourn for sin, not so much for the evil that is in it—as for the evil that it brings with it. There is mourning for sin in hell; you read of "weeping and wailing" there. The damned are weeping and mourning for all eternity. In hell, there is all sorrow, and no comfort. As in heaven there is peace without trouble, joy without mourning; so in hell there is trouble without peace, mourning without joy, weeping and wailing incessantly; but it is for the evil which they feel as a result of sin, and not for the evil which is in sin. A man may mourn for sin—and yet be but almost a Christian: it may grieve him to think of perishing for sin, when it does not grieve him that he is defiled and polluted by sin.

Thirdly, A man may make large CONFESSION of sin, to God, to others—and yet be but almost a Christian. How innocently does Saul confess his sin to David? "I have sinned!" says he, "you are more righteous than I! Behold, I have played the fool, and have erred exceedingly!" So Judas makes a full confession, "I have sinned in betraying innocent blood!" Yet Saul and Judas were both rejected by God; so that a man may confess sin—and yet be but almost a Christian.

Objection. But is not a confession of sin a character of a child of God? Does not the apostle say, "If we confess our sins, God is just and faithful to forgive them." No man was ever kept out of heaven for his confessed badness, though many are kept out of heaven for their supposed goodness. True confession of sin is the way to the kingdom of heaven. There are some who confess sin, and are saved; there are others who confess sin, and perish.

1. Many confess sin merely out of custom, and not out of conscience. Many who will never pray—but they will make a long confession of sin—and yet never feel the weight or burden of sin upon their consciences.

2. Many will confess lesser sins—and yet conceal greater; like the patient who complained to his physician of his sore finger, when his liver was rotten.

3. Many will confess sin in the general, or confess themselves sinners; and yet see little, and say less of their particular sins. Where confession is right, it will be distinct, especially of those sins that were our chief sins. So David confesses his blood-guiltiness and adultery; so Paul his blasphemy, persecution, and injury against the saints. It is bad to hear men confess that they are great sinners—and yet cannot confess their particular sins. Though the least sin be too bad to be committed, yet there is no sin too bad to be confessed.

4. Many will confess sin—but it is only under extremity, that is, not free and voluntary. Pharaoh confesses his sin—but it was when judgment compelled him. "I have sinned against the Lord!" says he; but it was when he had eight plagues upon him.

5. Many do by their sins as mariners do by their goods, cast them out in a storm, wishing for them again in a calm. Confession should come like water out of a spring, which runs freely; not like water out of a still, which is forced by fire.

6. Many confess their sins—but with no intent to forsake sin. They confess the sins they have committed—but do not leave the sins they have confessed. Many men use their confession as Lewis the eleventh of France did his crucifix; he would swear an oath, and then kiss it; and swear again, and then kiss it again. So many sin, and then confess they do not well—but yet never strive to do better.

Torsel tells a story of a minister he knew, who would be often drunk, and when he came into the pulpit, would confess it very lamentingly; and yet no sooner was he out of the pulpit—but he would be drunk again; and this would he do as constantly as men follow their trades.

Now then, if a man may confess sin merely out of custom; if he may confess lesser sins—and yet conceal greater; if he may confess sin only in the general, or only under extremity, or if he may confess sin without any intent to forsake sin—then surely a man may confess sin—and yet be but almost a Christian.

Fourthly, A man may FORSAKE sin—and yet be but almost a Christian. He may leave his lusts, and his wicked ways, which he sometimes lived in, and in the judgment of the world become a new man—and yet not be a new creature. Simon Magus, when he hears Philip preaching concerning the kingdom of God, leaves his sorcery and witchcraft, and believes.

Objection. But you will say, this seems contrary to Scripture; for that says, "He who confesses and forsakes sin, shall have mercy;" but I confess sin, yes, not only so—but also I forsake sin; surely therefore this mercy is my portion, it belongs to me.

Answer. It is true, that where a soul forsakes sin from a right principle, after a right manner, to a right end; where he forsakes sin as sin, as being contrary to God, and the purity of his nature—this declares that soul to be right with God, and the promise shall be made good to it, "He shall find mercy." But there is a forsaking sin that is not right—but unsound.

1. Open sins may be deserted—and yet secret sins may be retained. Now this is not a right forsaking; such a soul shall never find mercy. A man may be cured of a wound in his flesh—and yet may die of an infection in his heart.

2. A man may forsake sin—but not as sin; for he who forsakes sin as sin, forsakes all sin. It is impossible for a man to forsake sin as sin, unless he forsakes all that he knows to be sin.

3. A man may let one sin go—to hold another the faster; as a man who goes to sea, would willingly save all his goods; but if the storm arises that he cannot—then he throws some overboard to lighten the vessel, and save the rest. So did they, Acts 27:38. So the unrepentant sinner chooses to keep all his sins; but if a storm arises in his conscience, why then he will heave one lust overboard, to save the life of another!

4. A man may let all sin go—and yet be an unsaved sinner still; for there is the root of all sin in the heart, though the fruit is not seen in the life; the tree lives, though the boughs be lopped off. As a man is a sinner, before ever he acts sin—so (until grace renews him) he is a sinner, though he leaves sin; for there is original sin in him enough to damn and destroy him!

5. Sin may be left—and yet be loved; a man may forsake the practice of sin—and yet retain the love of sin. Now, though leaving sin makes him almost a Christian, yet loving sin shows he is but almost a Christian. It is a less evil to do sin, and not love it—than to love sin and not do it; for to do sin may argue only weakness of grace—but to love sin argues strength of lust. "What I hate—that I do." Sin is bad in any part of man—but sin in the heart is worse than sin in the life; for sin in the life may be only from infirmity—but sin in the heart is the fruit of choice and unregeneracy.

6. All sin may be chained—and yet the heart not changed; and so the nature of the sinner is the same as ever. A lion chained up, is a lion still—as much as if he was let loose to devour. There may be a cessation of combat between enemies—and yet the quarrel may remain still; there may be a making truce, where there is no making peace. A sinner may lay the weapons of sin out of his hand—and yet the enmity against God still remain in his heart. There may be a truce—he may not sin against God; but there can be no peace until he is united to God. Restraining grace restricts the sinner—but it is renewing grace which changes his nature.

Many are restrained by common grace from being open sinners, who are not renewed by saving grace, and made true believers.

Now then, if a man may forsake open sins, and retain secret sins; if he may forsake sin—but not as sin; if he may let one sin go, to hold another the faster; if a man may let all sin go—and yet be a sinner still; if sin may be left—and yet be loved; if all sin may be chained, and yet the heart not changed—then a man may forsake sin—and yet be but almost a Christian.

Section 5. A man may HATE sin—and yet be but almost a Christian. Absalom hated Amnon's immorality with his sister Tamar. Yes, his hatred was so great, that he slew him for it; and yet Absalom was but a wicked man.

Objection. But the Scripture makes it a sign of a gracious heart, to hate sin. Yes, though a man does, through infirmities, fall into sin, yet if he hates it, this is a proof of grace. Paul proves the sincerity of his heart, and the truth of his grace, by this hatred of sin, though he committed it, "What I hate—that I do." Nay, what is grace but a conformity of the soul to God; to love as God loves, to hate as God hates? Now God hates sin—it is one part of his holiness to hate all sin. And if I hate sin, then am I conformed to God—and if I am conformed to God, then am I altogether a Christian.

Answer. It is true, that there is a hatred of sin, which is a sign of grace, and which flows from a principle of grace, and is grace. As for instance: To hate sin, as it is an offence to God, a wrong to his majesty; to hate sin, as it is a breach of the command, and so a wicked disobeying of God's will, which is the only rule of goodness; to hate sin, as being a wicked transgression of that law of love established in the blood and death of Christ, and so, in a degree, a crucifying of Christ afresh. To hate sin, as being a grieving and quenching the Spirit of God, as all sin in its nature is. Thus to hate sin, is grace; and thus every true Christian hates sin.

But, though every man who has grace hates sin, yet every man who hates sin has not saving grace. For a man may hate sin from other principles, not as it is a wrong done to God, or a wounding Christ, or a grieving the Spirit; for then he would hate all sin; for there is no sin but has this in the nature of it. But,

1. A man may hate sin for the shame which attends it, more than for the evil which is in it. There are some sinners, "who declare their sin as Sodom, and hide it not." They sit down in the seat of the scornful; "they glory in their shame." But there are other sinners who are ashamed of sin, and therefore hate it, not for the sin's sake—but for the shame's sake. This made Absalom hate Amnon's immorality, because it brought shame upon him and his sister.

2. A man may hate sin more in others, than in himself. So does the drunkard—he hates drunkenness in another—and yet practices it himself! The liar hates falsehood in another—but likes it himself. Now he who hates sin from a principle of grace, hates sin most in himself; he hates sin in others—but he loathes most the sins of his own heart! 3. A man may hate one sin—as being contrary to another. There is a great contrariety between one sin and another sin, between one lust and another lust. It is the excellency of the life of grace, that it is a uniform life; there is no one grace contrary to another. The graces of God's Spirit are different—but not contrary to one another. Faith, and love, and holiness, are all one. They consist together at the same time, in the same subject; nay, they cannot be parted. There can be no faith without love, no love without holiness; and so, on the other hand, no holiness without love; no love without faith. So that this makes the life of grace an easy and excellent life. But the life of sin is a distracting contradictory life, wherein a man is a servant to contrary lusts. The lust of pride and extravagance, is contrary to the lust of covetousness, etc. Now, where one lust gets to be the master-lust of the soul, then that works a hatred of its contrary. Where covetousness gets the heart, there the heart hates pride; and where pride gets uppermost in the heart, there the heart hates covetousness. Thus a man may hate sin, not from a principle of grace—but from the contrariety of lusts. He does not hate any sin, as it is sin; but he hates it, as being contrary to his beloved sin.

Now then, if a man may hate sin for the shame which attends it; if he may hate sin more in others than himself; if he may hate one sin as being contrary to another—then he may hate sin—and yet be but almost a Christian.

Section VI. A man may make great vows and promises—he may have strong purposes and resolutions against sin—and yet be but almost a Christian. Thus did Saul; he promises and resolves against his sin, "Return, my son David," says he, "for I will no more do you harm." What promises and resolves did Pharaoh make against that sin of detaining God's people? Says he, "I will let the people go, that they may do sacrifice to the Lord." And again, "I will let you go, and you shall stay no longer." And yet Saul and Pharaoh both perished in their sins. The greatest purposes

and promises against sin, will not make a man a Christian. For,

1. Purposes and promises against sin, never hurt sin. We say, "threatened folks live long;" and truly so do threatened sins. It is not new purposes—but a new nature, which must help us against sin. Purposes may bring to the birth—but without a new nature, there is no strength to bring forth. The new nature is the best soil for holy purposes to grow in; otherwise, they wither and die, like plants in an improper soil.

2. Troubles and afflictions may provoke us to large purposes and promises against sin for the future. What is more common, than to vow—and not to pay? to make vows in the day of trouble—which we make no conscience to pay in the day of favor? Many covenant against sin, when trouble is upon them; and then sin against their covenant, when it is removed from them! It was a brave rule that Pliny, in one of his epistles, gave his friend to live by, "That we should continue to be such when we are well—as we promise to be when we are sick." Many are our sick-bed promises—but we are no sooner well, than we grow sick of our promises.

3. Purposes and resolves against sin for the future, may be only a temptation to put off repentance for the present. Satan may put a man on to good purposes for the future—to keep him from present attempts. He knows whatever we purpose, yet the strength of performance is not in ourselves. He knows, that purposes for the future are a putting God off for the present; they are a secret disobedience, to a present duty. That is a notable passage, "Follow me," says Christ, to the two men. Now see what answers they gave to Christ, "Allow me first to go and bury my father," says one. This man purposes to follow Christ, only he would stay to bury his father. Says the other, "Lord, I will follow you—but let me first go and bid them farewell which are at my house." I will follow you—but only I would first go and take my leave of my friends, or set my house in order. And yet we do not find that they ever followed Christ, notwithstanding their fair purposes.

4. Nature unsanctified, may be so far wrought on, as to make great promises and purposes against sin.

1st, A natural man may have great convictions of sin, from the workings of an enlightened conscience.

2d, He may approve of the law of God.

3d, He may have a desire to be saved.

Now these three together—the workings of conscience; the sight of the goodness of the law; a desire to be saved—may bring forth in a man great purposes against sin—and yet he may have no heart to perform his own purposes. This was much like the case of those who who said to Moses, "Go near and listen to all that the Lord our God says. Then tell us whatever the Lord our God tells you. We will listen and obey." This is a fair promise, and so God takes it, "I have heard what this people said to you. Everything they said was good." So said, and so done, had been well. But it was better said than done! For though they had a tongue to promise, yet they had no heart to perform! And this God saw; therefore he said, "Oh, that their hearts would be inclined to fear me and keep all my commands always, so that it might go well with them!" They promised to fear God, and keep his commandments; but they lacked a new heart to perform what an unsanctified heart had promised. It fares with men in this case, as it did with that son in the gospel, who said that "He

would go into the vineyard—but went not."

Now then, if purposes and promises against sin, never hurt sin; if present afflictions may draw out large promises; if they may be the resolves against sin for the future; or from nature unsanctified; surely then a man may promise and purpose much against sin—and yet be but almost a Christian.

Section VII. A man may maintain a strife and combat against sin in himself—and yet be but almost a Christian. So did Balaam; when he went to curse the people of God, he had a great strife within himself. "How shall I curse," says he, "those whom God has not cursed? or how shall I defy those whom the Lord has not defied?" And did not Pilate strive against his sin, when he said to the Jews, "Shall I crucify your king? what evil has he done. I am innocent of the blood of this just man."

Objection. But you will say, "Is not this an argument of grace, when there is a striving in the soul against sin? for what should oppose sin in the heart, but grace? The apostle makes "the lusting of the flesh against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh," to be an argument of grace in the heart. Now I find this strife in my heart, though the remainders of corruption sometimes break out into actual sins, yet I find a striving in my soul against sin.

Answer. It is true, there is a striving against sin, which is only from grace, and is proper to believers. But there is also a striving against sin, which is not from grace, and therefore may be in those who are not true believers. There is a strife against sin in one and the same faculty; the will against the will—the affection against the affection; and this is that which the apostle calls "the lusting of the flesh against the spirit;" that is, the striving of the unregenerate part against the regenerate; and this is ever in the same faculty, and is proper to believers only. An unbeliever never finds this strife in himself. This strife cannot be in him; it is impossible while he not a state of grace. But then there is a striving against sin in divers faculties; and this is the strife that is in those who are not believers. There, the strife is between the will and the conscience; conscience enlightened and terrified with the fear of hell and damnation, then the conscience is against sin; but the will and affections, not being renewed, they are for sin. And this causes great tugging and combats many times in the sinner's heart.

Thus it was with the Scribes and Pharisees. Conscience convinced them of the divinity of Christ, and of the truth of his being the Son of God. And yet a perverse will, and carnal affections, cry out, "Crucify him! Crucify him!" Conscience pleaded for him—it had a witness in their bosoms; and yet their wills were bent against him. Therefore they are said "to have resisted the Spirit;" namely, the workings and convictions of the Spirit in their consciences. And this is the case of many unconverted sinners: when the will and affections are for sin, and plead for it—and conscience is against it, and many times fights the soul away from the doing of it. And hence men take that which opposes sin in them, to be grace—when it is only the work of a natural conscience. They conclude the strife is between grace and sin—the regenerate and unregenerate part; when, alas! it is no other than the contention of a natural conscience against a corrupt will and affections! And if so then, a man may have great strifes and combats against sin in him; and yet be but almost a Christian. A man may desire grace—and yet be but almost a Christian. So did the five foolish virgins, "Give us of your oil." What was that but true grace? It was that oil which lighted the wise virgins into the bridegroom's chamber. They do not only desire to enter in—but they desire oil to light them in. Wicked men may desire heaven—desire a Christ to save them; there is none so wicked upon earth—but desire to be happy in heaven. But here are those who desire grace as well

as glory—and yet these are but almost Christians.

Objection. But is it not commonly taught that desires for grace, are grace? Nay, does not our Lord Christ make it so? "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness; for they shall be filled."

Answer. It is true, that there are some desires of grace which are grace—as,

1. When a man desires grace from a right sense of his natural state; when he sees the vileness of sin, and the woeful, defiled, and loathsome condition he is in by reason of sin; and therefore desires the grace of Christ to renew and change him—this is true grace. This some make to be the lowest degree of saving faith.

2. When a man joins proportionable endeavors to his desires; does not only wish for grace—but work for grace; such desires are grace.

3. When a man's desires are constant and incessant, which cease not but in the attainment of their object; such desires are true grace. They are a part of the special work of the Spirit. They do really partake of the nature of grace. Now it is a known maxim, "that which partakes of the nature of the whole, is a part of the whole;" the filings of gold are gold. The sea is not more really water, than the least drop; the flame is not more really fire than the least spark. But though all true desires for grace, are grace; yet all desires for grace, are not true. For,

1. A man may desire grace—but not for himself—but for somewhat else; not for grace's sake—but for heaven's sake. He does not desire grace, that his nature may be changed, his heart renewed, the image of God stamped upon him, and his lusts subdued in him. These are blessed desires, found only in true believers. The true Christian only can desire grace for grace's sake; but the almost Christian may desire grace for heaven's sake.

2. A man may desire grace, without proportionable endeavors after grace. Many are good at wishing—but bad at working; like him who reposed in the grass on a summer's day, crying out, "O that this were to work!" Solomon says, "The desire of the slothful kills him." How so? "For his hands refuse to labor!" He perishes with all his good desires. The believer joins desires and endeavors together, "One thing have I desired of the Lord—and that will I seek after."

3. A man's desires of grace may be unseasonable. Thus the foolish virgins desired oil when it was too late. The believer's desires are seasonable; he desires grace in the season of grace, and seeks grace in a time when it may be found. "The wise heart will know the proper time and procedure." He knows his season, and has wisdom to improve it. The silly sinner does all his works out of season; he sends away the seasons of grace—and then desires grace when the season is over! The sinner does all too late; as Esau desired the blessing when it was too late, and therefore he lost it; whereas, had he come sooner, he would have obtained it. Most men are wise too late—they come when the market is closed; when the shop is closed, then they have their oil to get. When they lie upon their death-beds, then they desire holy hearts.

4. Desires of grace in many, are very inconstant and fleeting, like the "morning dew, which quickly passes away;" or like Jonah's gourd, which springs up in a night—and withers in a night. They have no root in the heart—and therefore quickly perish.

Now, if a man may desire grace—but not for grace's sake; if desires may be without endeavors; if a man may desire grace when it is too late; if these desires may be but fleeting and inconstant; then may a man desire grace—and yet be but almost a Christian. A man may tremble at the Word of God—and yet be but almost a Christian, as Belshazzar trembled at the handwriting upon the wall.

Objection. But is not that a note of sincerity and truth of grace—to tremble at the Word? Does not God say, "I will look favorably on this kind of person: one who is humble, submissive in spirit, and who trembles at My Word."

Answer. There is a two-fold trembling.

1. One is, when the Word discovers the guilt of sin—and the wrath of God which that guilt brings; this, where conscience is awake, causes trembling and astonishment. Thus, when Paul preached of righteousness and judgment, it is said that Felix trembled.

2. There is a trembling which arises from a holy dread and reverence of the majesty of God, speaking in his Word. This is only found in true believers, and is that which keeps the soul low in its own eyes. Therefore mark how the words run, "I will look favorably on this kind of person: one who is humble, submissive in spirit, and who trembles at My Word." God does not make the promise, merely to him who trembles at the Word; for the devils believe and tremble; the Word of God can make the proudest, stoutest sinner in the world to shake and tremble. But it is "to the one who is humble, submissive in spirit, and who trembles at My Word." Where trembling is the fruit of a spirit broken for sin, and humble in its own eyes; there will God look.

Now many tremble at the word—but not from poverty of spirit, not from a heart broken for sin, and low in its own eyes; not from a sense of the majesty and holiness of God: and therefore, notwithstanding they tremble at the Word, yet they are but almost Christians.

3. A man may delight in the Word and ordinances of God—and yet be but almost a Christian. "They take delight in approaching to God." And it is said of that ground, that it "received the Word with joy," and yet it was but "stony ground."

Objection. But is it not made a character of a godly man, to delight in the Word of God? Does not David say, "He is a blessed man—who delights in the law of the Lord."

Answer. There is a delighting in the Word—which flows from grace, and is a proof of blessedness.

1. He who delights in the Word, because of its spirituality—he is a Christian indeed. The more spiritual the ordinances are, the more does a gracious heart delight in them.

2. When the Word comes close to the conscience, rips up the heart, and discovers sin—and yet the soul delights in it notwithstanding; this is a sign of grace.

3. When delight arises from communion with God—this is from a principle of grace in the soul. But there may be a delight in the Word—where there is no grace.

1. There are many who delight in the Word because of the eloquence of the preacher. They delight not so much in the truths delivered, as in the dress in which they are delivered. Thus it is said of the prophet Ezekiel, "You are very entertaining to them, like someone who sings love songs with a

beautiful voice or plays fine music on an instrument. They hear what you say, but they don't do it!"

2. There are very many who delight to hear the Word, that yet take no delight to do it. So says God of them, "They delight to hear my words—but they do them not."

Now then, if a man may delight in the Word, more because of the eloquence of the preacher, than because of the spirituality of the matter; if he may delight to hear the word—and yet not delight to do it—then he may delight in the word—and yet be but almost a Christian.

Section VIII. A man may be a MEMBER of a Christian church, he may join himself to the people of God, partake with them in all ordinances, and share of all church privileges—and yet be but almost a Christian. So the five foolish virgins joined themselves to the wise, and walked together. Many may be members of the church of Christ—and yet not members of Christ, the head of the church. There was a mixed multitude which came up with the church of Israel out of Egypt. They joined themselves to the Israelites, owned their God, left their own country—and yet were Egyptians in heart notwithstanding; "All are not Israel, that are of Israel." The church in all ages has had unsound members: Cain had communion with Abel; Ishmael dwelt in the same house with Isaac; Judas was in fellowship with the apostles; and so was Demas with the rest of the disciples. There will be some tares in the finest wheat—and it will be so until the harvest. The dragnet of the Gospel catches bad fish as well as good. God has a church where there are no members but such as are true members of Christ—but it is in heaven, it is the "church of the first-born;" there are no hypocrites, nor rotten, unsound professors, none but the "spirits of just men made perfect;" all is pure wheat that God lays up in that garner; there the chaff is separated to unquenchable fire. But in the church on earth the wheat and the chaff lie in the same heap together; the Samaritans will be near of kin to the Jews when they are in prosperity: so while the church of God flourishes in the world, many will join to it; they will seem Jews, though they are Samaritans; and seem saints, though yet they are no better than almost Christians.

Section IX. A man may have great HOPES of heaven, great hopes of being saved—and yet be but almost a Christian. Indeed there is a hope of heaven which is "the anchor of the soul sure and steadfast," it never miscarries, and it is known by four properties.

First, It is a hope which purifies the heart, and purges out sin, "He who has this hope, purifies himself even as God is pure." That soul that truly hopes to enjoy God, truly endeavors to be like God.

Secondly, It is a hope which fills the heart with gladness, "We rejoice in hope of the glory of God."

Thirdly, It is a hope that is founded upon the promise: as there can be no true faith without a promise, so, nor any true hope. Faith applies the promise, and hope expects the fulfilling the promise. Faith relies upon the truth of it, and hope waits for the good of it.

Fourthly, It is a hope that is wrought by God himself in the soul; who is therefore called, "the God of hope," as being the Author as well as the Object of hope. Now, he who has this hope shall never miscarry. This is a right hope; the hope of the true believer, "Christ in you, the hope of glory." But then, as there is a true and sound hope, so there is a false and rotten hope; and this is much more common, as bastard-pearls are more frequently worn than true pearls. There is nothing more common, than to see men big with groundless hopes of heaven, as,

1. A man may have great hope of heaven—who has no true grace. You read of the "hope of hypocrites." The performance of duties is a proof of their hope; the foolish virgins would never have done what they did, had they thought they should have been shut out after all. Many professors would not be at such pains in duties as they are, if they did not hope for heaven. Hope is the great motive to action: despair cuts the sinews of all endeavors. That is one reason why the damned in hell cease acting toward an alteration of their state, because despair has taken hold of them: if there were any hope in hell, they would up and be doing there. So that there may be great hope where there is no grace; experience proves this; formal professors are men of no grace—but yet men of great hopes. Nay, many times you shall find that none fear more about their eternal condition—than those who have most cause of hope. And none hope more—than those who have most cause of fear!

2. A man may hope in the mercy, and goodness, and power of God, without eyeing the promise; and this is the hope of most. God is full of mercy and goodness, and therefore willing to save; and he is infinite in power, and therefore able to save; why therefore should I not rest on him? Now it is presumption, and therefore sin, to hope in the mercy of God, otherwise than by eyeing the promise; for the promise is the channel of mercy, through which it is conveyed. All the blessedness the saints enjoy in heaven, is no other than what is the fruit of promise relied on, and hoped for here on earth. A man has no warrant to hope in God—but by virtue of the promise.

3. A man may hope for heaven—and yet not cleanse his heart, nor depart from his secret sins. That hope of salvation that is not accompanied with heart-purification, is a vain hope.

4. A man may hope for heaven—and yet be doing the work of hell; he may hope for salvation—and yet be working out his own damnation, and so perish in his confidences. This is the case of many, like the tower who looks one way, and rows another; many have their eyes on heaven whose hearts are in the earth; they hope in God—but choose him not for a portion; they hope in God—but do not love him as the best good, and therefore are will have no portion in him, nor good by him; but will perish without him, notwithstanding all their hopes. "What is the hope of the hypocrite, though he has gained, when God takes away his soul?"

Now then, if a man may have great hope of heaven, who has no grace; if he may hope in mercy, without eyeing the promise; if he may hope without heart-purifying; if he may hope for heaven—and yet do the work of hell; surely then a man may have great hopes of heaven—and yet be but almost a Christian.

Section X. A man may be under great and visible CHANGES, and these wrought by the ministry of the word—and yet be but almost a Christian, as Herod was. It is said, "when he heard John the Baptist, he did many things, and heard him gladly." Saul was under a great change when he met the Lord's prophets; he turned prophet too. Nay, it is said that "God gave him another heart." Now, was not this a work of grace? and was not Saul here truly converted? One would think he was; but yet indeed he was not. For though it is said, God gave him another heart, yet it is not said, that God gave him a new heart. There is a great difference between another heart, and a new heart; God gave him another heart to fit him for a ruler—but gave him not a new heart to make him a believer. Another heart may make another man—but it is a new heart that makes a new man. Again Simon Magus is a great proof of this truth: he was under a great and visible change; of a sorcerer he was turned to be a believer; he left his witchcrafts and sorceries, and embraced the

gospel; was not this a great change? If the drunkard does but leave his drunkenness, the swearer his oaths, the profane person his profaneness—they think this is a gracious change, and their state is now good. Alas! Simon Magus did not only leave his sins—but had a kind of conversion; for, "he believed, and was baptized."

Objection. But is not that man who is changed, a true Christian?

Answer. Not every change makes a man a Christian: indeed there is a change, that whoever is under it is a true Christian. When a man's heart is so changed, as that it is renewed: when old things "are done away, and all is become new;" when the new creature is wrought in the soul, when a man is "turned from darkness to light, from the power of Satan to God;" when the mind is enlightened, the will renewed, the affections made heavenly—then a man is a Christian indeed. But you must know that every change is not this change. For,

1. There is a civil change, a moral change, as well as a spiritual and supernatural change. Many men are changed in a moral sense, and one may say, they are become new men; but they are in heart and nature the same men still. They are not changed in a spiritual and supernatural sense, and therefore it cannot be said of them, that they have become new creatures. Restraining grace may cause a moral change; but it is renewing grace which must cause a saving change. Now, many are under restraining grace, and so changed morally, that are not under the power of saving grace, and so changed savingly.

2. There is an outward change, as well as an inward change. The outward change is often without the inward; though the inward change is never without the outward. A man's heart cannot be sanctified—but it will influence the life; but a man's life may be reformed—and yet never affect or influence the heart.

3. A man may be converted from a course of profaneness—to a form of godliness; from a filthy lifestyle—to a fair profession; and yet the heart be the same in one and the other. A rotten post may be painted without—and yet unsound within. It is common to have the "outside of the cup and platter" made clean—and yet the inside foul and filthy.

Now then, if a man may be changed morally—and yet not spiritually; outwardly—and yet not inwardly, from a course of profaneness to a lifeless form of godliness; then a man may be under great and visible changes—and yet be no more than almost a Christian. I do not speak this to discountenance any change, short of that which is spiritual; but to awaken you to seek after that change which is more than moral. It is good to be outwardly renewed—but it is better to be savingly renewed.

I know how natural it is for men to take up with anything like a work of conversion, though it be not conversion; and resting in that, they eternally perish. Beloved, let me tell you, there is no change, no conversion, can stead your souls in the day of judgment, on this side that saving work, which is wrought on the soul by the Spirit of God, renewing you throughout! The sober man, without this change, shall as surely go to hell—as the foolish drunkard. Morality and civility may commend us to men—but not to God. They are of no value in the procurement of eternal salvation. A man may go far in an outward change—and yet be not one step nearer heaven, than he who was never under any change. Nay, he may be, in some sense, further off; as Christ says, the Scribes and Pharisees were further from heaven, with all their show of godliness, than publicans and harlots, in

all their sin and immorality. Because, resting in a false work, a partial change, we neglect to seek after a true and saving change.

There is nothing more common than to mistake our state, and by proud thoughts, misjudge our condition, and so perish in our own delusions. The world is full of these foolish builders, who lay the foundation of their hopes of eternal salvation upon the sand. Now, my brethren, would you not mistake the way to heaven, and perish in a delusion? Would you not be found fools at last? for none are such fools as the spiritual fool, who is a fool in the great business of salvation. Would you not be fools for your souls, and for eternity? O then labor after, and pray for, a thorough work of conversion! Beg of God that he would make a saving change in your souls, that you may be altogether Christians! All other changes below this saving change, this heart change, make us but almost Christians.

Section XI. A man may be very ZEALOUS in the matters of religion—and yet be but almost a Christian. Jehu did not only serve God, and do what he commanded him—but was very zealous in his service, "Come with me, and see my zeal for the Lord Almighty!" and yet in all this Jehu was a base hypocrite. Joash was a great reformer in Jehoiada's time; it is said, "He did that which was right in the sight of the Lord, all the days of Jehoiada the priest." But when Jehoiada died, Joash's zeal for God died with him, and he becomes a base wretch.

Objection. But the apostle makes zeal to be a note of sound Christianity, "It is good to be zealously affected in good things;" nay, it seems to be the qualification for obtaining eternal life; "The kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force."

Answer. It is true, there is a zeal which is good, and which renders the soul highly acceptable to God—a zeal which never misses of heaven and salvation. Now this is a zeal which is a celestial fire; the true temper and heat of all the affections to God and Christ. It is a zeal wrought and kindled in the soul by the Spirit of God, who first works it, and then sets it on work. It is a zeal which has the Word of God for its guide, directing it in working, both in regard of its object and end, manner and measure. It is a zeal which checks sin, and forwards the heavenly life. It is a zeal which makes the glory of God its chief end; which swallows up all by-ends, "Zeal for your house has eaten me up." But all zeal is not this kind of zeal. There is a false zeal, as well as a true. Every grace has its counterfeit. As there is fire, which is true heavenly fire, on the altar, so there is strange fire: Nadab and Abihu offered strange fire upon God's altar. There are several kinds of zeal, none of which are true and sound—but false and counterfeit. I shall instance in eight particulars:

First, There is a blind zeal, a zeal without knowledge. "They have a zeal," says the apostle, "but not according to knowledge." Now as knowledge without zeal is fruitless; so zeal without knowledge is dangerous. It is like wild-fire in the hand of a fool; or, like the devil in the man possessed, that threw him sometimes into the fire, sometimes into the water. The eye is the light of the body, and the understanding is the light of the soul. Now, as the body, without the light of the eye, cannot go without stumbling; so the soul, without the light of the mind, cannot act without erring. Zeal without knowledge, is like a false light in a dark night, which leads a traveler out of his way, into the bogs and mire. This was the zeal of Paul, while he was a Pharisee: I was zealous towards God, as you are all this day; and I persecuted this way unto the death." And again, "I truly thought with myself, I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth." And,

"Concerning zeal, persecuting the church." "They shall put you out of the synagogue; yes, the time comes, that whoever kills you, will think that he does God service." This is great zeal—but yet it is blind zeal; and that God abhors!

Secondly, There is a partial zeal: in one thing, fire-hot; in another stone-cold; zealous in this thing—and yet careless in another. Many are first-table Christians, zealous in the duties of the first-table—and yet neglect the second. Thus the Pharisees were zealous in their Corban—and yet unnatural to their parents, allowing them to starve and perish. Others are second-table Christians, zealous in the duties of the second-table—but neglect the first; more for righteousness among men, than for holiness towards God. But he whose religion ends with the first-table, or begins with the second—he is a fool in his profession; for he is but almost a Christian. The woman who was for the dividing the child, was not the true mother; and he who is for dividing the commands, is not a true believer. Jehu was zealous against Ahab's house—but not so against Jeroboam's calves. Many are zealous against sin of opinion, that yet use no zeal against the sins of their life. Now, as we know that the sweat of the whole body is a sign of health—but the sweat of some one part only, shows a distemper, and therefore physicians do reckon such a heat to be symptomatic. So where zeal reaches to every command of God alike, that is a sign of a sound constitution of soul; but where it is partial, where a man is hot in one part, and cold in another, that is symptomatic of some inward spiritual distemper.

Thirdly, There is a misplaced zeal; fixed upon unsuitable and disproportionable objects. Many are very zealous in trifling things that are not worth it; and trifling in the things which most require it; like the Pharisees, who were diligent tithers of mint, anise, and cummin—but neglected the "weightier matters of the law; judgment, mercy, and faith." They had no zeal for these, though very hot for the other! Many are more zealous for a ceremony, than for the substance of religion; more zealous for bowing at the name of Jesus, than for conformity to the life of Jesus; more zealous for a holy vestments, than for a holy life; more zealous for the inventions of men, than for the institutions of Christ. This is a superstitious zeal, and usually found in men unconverted, in whom grace never was wrought! Against such men, heathen will rise up in judgment. When was it that Paul was so "exceeding zealous of the traditions of his fathers," as he says—but only when he was in his wretched and unconverted state? as you may see in the next verses, "But when it pleased God to call me by his grace, then I conferred not with flesh and blood." Paul had another kind of zeal then, actuated by other kind of principles.

Fourthly, There is a selfish zeal, which has a man's own end for its motive; Jehu was very zealous—but it was not so much for God, as for the kingdom; not so much in obedience to the command, as in design to step into the throne; and therefore God threatens to punish him for that very thing he commands him to do! "I will avenge the blood of Jezreel upon the house of Jehu;" because he shed that blood, to gratify his lust—not to obey God. So Simeon and Levi pretend great zeal for circumcision, seem very zealous for the honor of God's ordinances, when in truth their zeal was covetousness, and revenge upon the Shechemites.

Fifthly, There is an external zeal: such was that of the Scribes and Pharisees. They would not eat with unwashed hands—but yet would live in unseen sins. They would wash the cup often—but the heart seldom. They would paint the outside—but neglect the inside. Jehu was a mighty external reformer—but he reformed nothing within, for he had a base heart under all. "Jehu took no heed to

walk in the law of the Lord with all his heart." Though his coat was fair, his liver was rotten. Our Lord Christ observes of the Pharisees, "They pray, to be seen of men;" and fast, so "that they may appear to men to fast."

Sixthly, There is a zeal which runs out upon others; like the candle in the lantern, which sends all the heat out at the top; or as the lewd woman Solomon mentions, whose "feet abide not in her own house." Many are hot and high against the sins of others—and yet cannot see the same in themselves. It is easy to see faults in others—and as hard to see them in ourselves! Jehu was zealous against Baal and his priests, because that was Ahab's sin; but not against the calves of Bethel, because that was his own sin. This zeal is the true character of a hypocrite; his own garden is overrun with weeds, while he is busy in looking over his neighbor's garden.

Seventhly, There is a sinful zeal: all the former may be called sinful from some defect; but this I call sinful in a more special notion, because against the life of religion. It is a zeal against true religion, which flies not at profaneness—but at the very power of godliness; not at error—but at truth; and is most hot against the most spiritual and important truths of the times. Whence else are the sufferings of men for the truth—but from the spirit of zeal against the truth? This may be called a devilish zeal; for as there is the faith of devils, so there is the zeal of devils, "Therefore his rage is great, because he knows his time is short."

Eighthly, there is a scriptureless zeal, that is not butted and bounded by the Word—but by some base and low end. Such was Saul's zeal, when God bids him destroy Amalek, "and spare neither man nor beast;" when contrary to God's command, he spares the best of the sheep and oxen, under pretense of zeal for God's sacrifice. Another time, when he had no such command, then he slew the Gibeonites "in zeal to the children of Israel and Judah." Many a man's zeal is greater then and there, when and where he has the least warrant from God. The true spirit of zeal is bounded by Scripture; for it is for God and the concerns of his glory: God has no glory from that zeal that has no scripture-warrant.

Now then, if the zeal of a man in the things of God may be only a blind zeal, or a partial zeal, or a misplaced zeal, or a selfish zeal, or an external zeal, or a zeal regarding others, or a sinful zeal, or a scriptureless zeal—then it is evident, that a man may be very zealous in the matters of religion—and yet be but almost a Christian.

Section XII. A man may be much in PRAYER—he may pray often, and pray much; and yet be but almost a Christian. So did the Pharisees, whom yet our Lord Christ rejects for hypocrites.

Objection. But is not a praying-frame an argument of a sincere heart? Are not the saints of God called "the generation of those who seek the face of God?"

Answer. A man is not therefore a Christian, because he is much in prayer. I grant that those prayers that are from the workings and sighings of God's Spirit in us; from sincere hearts lifted up to God; from a sense of our own emptiness, and God's infinite fullness; that are suited to God's will, the great rule of prayer; that are for spiritual things, more than temporal; that are accompanied with faith and dependence—such prayers speak a man to be altogether a Christian. But a man may be much in prayer—and yet be a stranger to such prayer. As,

1. Nature may put a man upon prayer; for it is a part of natural worship. It may put a child of God upon prayer—so did Christ, "He went and fell on his face, and prayed, saying, O my Father! if it be possible, let this cup pass from me." This was a prayer of Christ which flowed from the sinless strugglings of nature, seeking its own preservation.

2. A man may pray in pretense, for a covering to some sin—so did those devout Pharisees, "Woe to you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for you devour widows' houses, and for a pretense make long prayers. Therefore you shall receive the greater damnation!" So the Papists seem very devout to pray a rich man's soul out of purgatory; but it is to cheat the heir of much of his estate, under pretense of praying for his father's soul.

3. A man may pray—and yet love sin; as Augustine before conversion prayed against his sin—but was afraid God would hear him, and take him at his word. Now, God hears not such prayers, "If I regard iniquity in my heart—God will not hear my prayer."

4. A man may pray much for temporal things, and little for spiritual things; and such are the prayers of most men, crying out most for temporal things. More for, "Who will show us any good?" than for, "Lord, lift upon us the light of your countenance upon me." David copies out the prayer of such, "That our sons may be as plants, and that our daughters may be as corner-stones, polished after the similitude of a palace: that our garners may be full, etc." This is the carnal prayer; and this David calls vanity, "They are strange children, whose mouth speaks vanity."

5. A man may pray—and yet be far from God in prayer, "This people draw near to me with their mouths, and honor me with their lips—but their heart is far from me." A man may pray—and yet have no heart in prayer; and that God chiefly looks at, "My son, give me your heart." The Jews have this sentence written upon the walls of their synagogues, "Prayer, without the intention of the mind, is but a body without a soul." Many are so conscientious that they dare not but pray; and yet so irreligious, that they have no heart in prayer. A common work of God may make a man conscionable to do duties—but nothing less than giving grace in the heart, will make a man conscionable in the doing of them.

6. A man's prayer may be a lie. As a profession without sanctity is a lie to the world—so prayer without sincerity is a lie to God. It is said of Israel, that they "sought God, and inquired early after him." They were much in prayer, and God calls all but a lie. "Nevertheless, they did flatter him with their mouths, and they lied to him with their tongues, for their heart was not with him." "Hearken to my prayer, that goes not out of feigned lips," says David.

7. Affliction and the pressure of outward evils, will make a man pray, and pray much. "When he slew them—then they sought Him, and returned, and inquired early after God." The heathen mariners called every man upon his god when in a storm: when they fear drowning, then they fall to praying, Jonah 1:5. Mariners are for the most part none of the devoutest, nor much addicted to prayer. They will swear twice, where they pray once; and yet it is said, "They cry to the Lord in their trouble;" and hence you have a proverb, "He who cannot pray let him go-to sea." "They poured out a prayer when your chastening was upon them."

Now then, if nature may put a man upon prayer; if a man may pray in pretense, and design; if a man may pray—and yet love sin; if a man may pray mostly for temporal things; if a man may pray—and yet be far from God in prayer; if prayer may be a lie, or it may be only the cry of the soul

under affliction—surely then, a man may be much in prayer—and yet be but almost a Christian.

Objection. But suppose a man prays, and prevails with God in prayer, surely that is a witness from heaven of a man's sincerity in prayer. Now, I pray—and prevail; I ask—and am answered.

Answer. A man may pray, and be answered; for God many times answers prayers in judgment. As God is sometimes silent in mercy, so he speaks in wrath; and as he sometimes denies prayer in mercy, so he sometimes answers in judgment. When men are over-impudent in something their lusts are upon, and will take no nay, then God answers in judgment. "He gave them their own desire." They had desired quails, and God sent them. But now mark the judgment, "While the meat was in their mouths, the wrath of God came upon them, and slew them!"

Objection. But suppose a man's affections are much stirred in prayer—what then? Is not that a true note of Christianity?

Answer. So was Esau's, when he sought the blessing. "He sought it carefully with tears." A man may be affected with his own parts in a duty, while good notions pass through his head, and good words through his lips: some good motions also may stir in his heart—but they are but sparks which fly out at the tunnel of the chimney, which suddenly vanish; so that it is possible a man may pray, and prevail in prayer; pray, and be affected in prayer—and yet be but almost a Christian.

Section XIII. A man may SUFFER for Christ in his goods, in his name, in his person—and yet be but almost a Christian. Every man who bears Christ's cross on his shoulders, does not, therefore, bear Christ's image in his soul.

Objection. But does not our Lord Christ make great promises to those who suffer, or lose anything for him? Does he not say, "Everyone who has forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive a hundred fold, and shall inherit everlasting life"? Surely they are true Christians to whom Christ makes this promise.

Answer. There is a suffering for Christ, that is a note of sincerity, and shall have its reward. That is, when a man suffers for a good cause, upon a good call, and with a good conscience, for Christ's sake, and in Christ's strength; when his sufferings are a filling up "that which is behind of the sufferings of Christ;" when a man suffers as a Christian, as the apostle has it, "If a man suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed;" when a man thrusts not himself into sufferings—but stays God's call—such suffering is a proof of integrity. But, every suffering for Christ is not suffering as a Christian. For,

1. A man may suffer for Christ, for that profession of religion that is upon him; the world hates the show of religion. Times may come, that it may cost a man as dear to wear the livery of Christ, as to wear Christ himself. Alexander had like to have lost his life for the gospel's sake, yet he was that Alexander, as is generally judged, that afterwards made shipwreck of faith, and greatly opposed Paul's ministry.

2. A man may suffer for Christ—and yet have no true love to Christ. This is supposed, "Though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profits nothing." Love to Christ is the only noble ground of suffering; but a man may suffer much upon other ends.

* Out of opinion of meriting by our sufferings, as the Papists; or, * Out of vain glory, or for applause among professors; some have died, that their names might live; or, * Out of a Roman resolution, or stoutness of spirit.

* Out of a design of profit, as Judas forsook all for Christ, hoping to mend his market by closing with him; or, * Rather to maintain an opinion, than for truth's propagation.

Socrates died for maintaining that there was but one God; but he died rather for his own opinion, than for God's sake. Thus, a man may suffer for professing Christ—and yet suffer upon wrong principles. Now then, if a man may suffer for Christ, from the profession that is upon him, or suffer for Christ—and yet not truly love him; then a man may suffer for Christ—and yet be but almost a Christian.

XIV. A man may be CALLED by God, and embrace this call—and yet be but almost a Christian. Judas is a famous instance of this truth: he was called by Christ himself, and came at the call of Christ; and yet Judas was but almost a Christian.

Objection. But is not the being under the call of God, a proof of our interest in the predestinating love of God? Does not the apostle say, "Whom he predestinated, those he called?" Nay, does he not say, in the next verse, "Whom he called, those he justified?" Nay, does not God call all whom he intends to save?

Answer. Though God calls all those who shall be saved, yet all shall not be saved whom God calls. Every man under the gospel is called of God in one sense or other—but yet every man under the gospel shall not therefore be saved, "For many are called—but few chosen." There is a twofold call of God—internal, and external.

1. There is an INTERNAL call of God. Now, this call is a special work of the Spirit, by the ministry of the Word, whereby a man is brought out of a state of nature, into a state of grace; "out of darkness into light, from being vessels of wrath, to be made heirs of life." I grant, that whoever is under this call of God, is called effectually and savingly, to be a Christian indeed. "Every man who has heard and learned of the Father, comes to me."

2. There is a call of God which a man may have—and yet not be this call. There is an EXTERNAL call of God, which is by the ministry of the Word. Now every man who lives under the preaching of the gospel, is thus called. God calls every person to repent, and lay a sure foundation for heaven and salvation, by the Word you hear this day. But every man who is thus called, is not therefore a Christian. For, a. Many under the call of God, come to Christ—but are not converted to Christ—they have nothing of the grace and life of Christ; such as he, who, when Christ sent out his servants to bid guests unto the marriage, came in at the call of Christ—but yet "had not on the wedding garment;" that is, had none of the grace and righteousness of Jesus Christ. b. Many that are under the call of the gospel, come to Christ—and yet afterwards fall away from Christ; as Judas and Demas did. It is said, when Christ preached a doctrine that his disciples did not like, that "from that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him."

Now then, if many are only under this external call of God; if many that come to Christ are not converted to Christ—but fall away from Christ; then a man may be called of God—and yet be but almost a Christian.

Section XV. A man may have the SPIRIT of God—and yet be but almost a Christian. Balaam had the Spirit of God given him when he blessed Israel, "Balaam saw Israel abiding in tents, and the Spirit of the Lord came upon him." Judas had; for by the Spirit he cast out devils; he was one of those who came to Christ, and said, "Lord, even the devils are subject to us!" Saul had, "Behold, a company of prophets met him; and the Spirit of God came upon him, and he prophesied among them."

Objection. But you will say, "Can a man have the Spirit of God—and yet not be a Christian?" Indeed, the Scripture says, "If any man has not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his;" but surely if any man have the Spirit of Christ, he is his!

Answer. There is a having of the Spirit, which is a sure mark of saintship. Where the Spirit is—an effectual prevailing principle of grace and sanctification, renewing and regenerating the heart: where the Spirit is a potent worker, "helping the soul's infirmities: where the Spirit is so as to "abide forever." But every man who has the Spirit, has not the Spirit in this manner. For,

1. A man may have the Spirit only transiently, not abidingly. The Spirit may be in a man—and yet not dwell in a man. The Spirit is wherever he dwells—but he does not dwell wherever he is; he is in all—but dwells in saints only. The hypocrite may have the Spirit for a season—but not to abide in him forever.

2. A man may have the Spirit—and yet not be born of the Spirit. Every true Christian is born of the Spirit. A hypocrite may have the gifts of the Spirit—but not the graces. The Spirit may be in him by the way of illumination—but not by way of sanctification; by way of conviction—but not by way of conversion. Though he may have much common grace for the good of others, yet he may have no special grace for the good of himself; though his profession is spiritual, yet his state and condition may be carnal.

3. A man may have the Spirit—only as a Spirit of bondage. Thus, many have the Spirit working only to bondage. "The Spirit of bondage is an operation of the Holy Spirit by the law, convincing the conscience of sin, and of the curse of the law, and working in the soul such an apprehension of the wrath of God, as makes the thoughts of God a terror to him." This Spirit may be, and often is, without saving grace: this operation of the Spirit was in Cain and Judas. There are none who receive the Spirit of adoption—but they first receive the Spirit of bondage: yet many receive the Spirit of bondage—who never receive the Spirit of adoption.

4. A man may have the Spirit of God working in him—and yet the Spirit may be resisted by him. It is said of the Jews, "They rebelled, and vexed his Holy Spirit." And the same sin is charged upon their children, "You stiff-necked, and uncircumcised in heart, you have always resisted the Holy Spirit; as your fathers did, so do you." The hypocrite retains not the Spirit so long as to come up to regeneration and adoption—but quenches the motions of the Spirit, and thereby miscarries eternally.

5. A man may have the Spirit—and yet sin that unpardonable sin. He may have the Holy Spirit—and yet sin the sin against the Holy Spirit. Nay, no man can sin this sin against the Spirit—but he who has some degree of the Spirit. The true believer has so much of the Spirit, such a work of it in him, that he cannot sin that sin, "He who is born of God, sins not;" to wit, that "sin unto death," for that is meant. The ungodly sinner, he cannot sin that sin, because he is carnal and

sensual, having not the Spirit. A man must have some measure of the Spirit—who sins this sin. So has the hypocrite—he is said to be "partaker of the Holy Spirit," and he alone is capable of sinning the sin against the Holy Spirit.

Now then, if a man may have the Spirit transiently only, not abidingly; if a man may have the Spirit—and yet not be born of the Spirit; if he may have the Spirit only as a Spirit of bondage; if a man may have the Spirit working in him—and yet may be resisted by him; if a man may have the Spirit and yet sin that unpardonable sin against Him; then surely a man may have the Spirit of God—and yet be but almost a Christian.

Section XVI. A man may have FAITH—and yet be but almost a Christian. The stony ground, that is, those hearers set out by the stony ground, "for a while believed." It is said, that many believed in the name of Christ, yet Christ dared not "commit himself to them." Though they trusted in Christ, yet Christ would not trust them; and why? "because he knew all men." He knew they were rotten at root, notwithstanding their faith. A man may have all faith, to the removing of mountains—and yet be a mere hypocrite.

Objection. But how can this be, that a man may have faith—and yet be but almost a Christian? Does not our Lord Christ promise eternal life and salvation to all who believe? Is not this the Gospel that is to be preached to every creature, "He who believes shall be saved"?

Answer. Though it is true what our Lord Christ says, that "he who believes shall be saved," yet it is as true, that many believe that shall never be saved; for Simon Magus believed. Yes, James says, "The devils believe and tremble;" now none will say devils shall be saved. As it is true, what the apostle says, "All men have not faith," so it is as true, that there are some men have faith, who are no whit the better for their faith. You must know therefore there is a two-fold faith, 1. Special and saving. 2. Common and not saving.

1. There is a saving faith. This is called "faith of the operation of God." It is a work of God's own Spirit in the soul. It is such a faith as rests and casts the soul wholly upon Christ for grace and glory, pardon and peace, sanctification and salvation. It is a united act of the whole soul—the understanding, will and affections, all concurring to unite the soul to an all-sufficient Redeemer. It is such a faith as "purifies the heart," and makes it clean; it influences and gives strength and life to all other graces. Now, whoever has this faith, is a Christian indeed; this is the "faith of God's elect."

2. But then, there is a common faith, not saving, a fading and temporary faith; there is the faith of Simon Magus, as well as the faith of Simon Peter. Simon Magus believed—and yet he was in the "gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity." Now Simon Magus had more followers than Simon Peter. The faith of most men will at last be found to be no better than the faith of Simon Magus. For,

First, The faith of most is but a temporary faith, endures for a while, and then dies and perishes. True and saving faith, such as is the faith of God's elect, cannot die: it may fail in the individual acts—but not in the habit; the sap may not be in the branch—but it is always in the root. That faith which perishes, that faith a man may have and perish.

Secondly, there is a faith which lies only in generals, not in particulars. As there is a general and particular object of faith, so there is a general and particular faith. The general object of faith is the

whole Scripture; the particular object of faith is Christ in the promise. Now many have a general faith to believe all the Scripture—and yet have no faith to make particular application of Jesus Christ in the promise. Devils and reprobates may believe the truth of the Scripture, and what is written of the dying and suffering of Christ for sinners; but there are but few that can close up themselves in the wounds of Christ, and by his stripes fetch in healing to their own souls.

Thirdly, There is a faith that is seated in the understanding—but not in the will. This is a very common faith. Many assent to the truth. They believe all the attributes of God—that he is just, holy, wise, faithful, good, merciful, etc. But notwithstanding, they do not rest on him. They believe the commands are true—but yet do not obey them. They believe the promises are true—but yet do not embrace and apply them. They believe the threatenings are true—but yet do not flee from them. Thus their faith lies in assent—but not consent; they have faith in their judgment—but none to take execution. By assent they lay a foundation—but never build upon it by application. They believe that Christ died to save those who believe—and yet they believe not in Christ, that they may be saved.

O my brethren, it is not a believing head—but a believing heart—which makes a Christian! "With the heart, man believes to righteousness." Without this our "faith is vain—and we are yet in our sins."

Fourthly, There is a faith without experience; many believe the Word upon hearsay, to be the Word of God; but they never felt the power and virtue of it upon their hearts and consciences. Now what good is it to believe the truth of the Word—if a man's conscience never felt the power of the Word? What is it to believe the truth of the promise—if we never tasted the sweetness of the promise? We are in this case like a man who believes the description others make of strange countries—but never traveled them to know the truth; or as a patient who believes all the physician says—but yet never takes his remedies. We believe the Word, because we cannot gainsay it; but yet we have no experience of any saving good wrought by the word, and so are but almost Christians.

Fifthly, There is a faith which is without brokenness of heart, which does not avail to melt or soften the heart, and therefore is not true faith. For the least true faith is ever joined with a bending will, and broken heart.

Sixthly, There is a faith which does not transform the heart; faith without fruit, which does not bring forth the new creature in the soul—but leaves it in a state of sin and death. This is a faith which makes a man a sound professor—but not a sound believer. He believes the truth—but not as it is in Jesus; for then it would change and transform him into the likeness of Jesus. He believes that a man must be changed, who would be saved—but yet is not savingly changed by believing. Thus, while others believe to salvation, he believes to damnation: for "his web shall not become a garment; neither shall he cover himself with his work."

Now then, if a man's faith may be but temporary, or may lie only in generals, or may be seated in the understanding only, or may be without experience, or may be without a broken heart, or without a new heart; surely then a man may have faith, he may taste of this "heavenly gift," and yet be but almost a Christian.

Section XVII. A man may go further yet—he may possibly have a LOVE to the people of God—and yet be but almost a Christian. Every kind of love to those who are saints, is not a proof

of our saintship. Pharaoh loved Joseph, and advanced him to the second place in the kingdom—and yet Pharaoh was but a wicked man: Ahab loved Jehoshaphat and made a league with him, and married his daughter Athaliah to Jehoram, Jehoshaphat's son—and yet Ahab was a wicked wretch. But you will say this seems to contradict the testimony of the Scriptures; for that makes love to the saints and people of God, a sure proof of our regeneration, and interest in life eternal, "We know that we have passed from death to life—because we love the brethren." Nay, the Spirit of God puts this as a characteristic distinction between saints and unconverted sinners, "In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whoever does not righteousness, is not of God, neither he who loves not his brother." By brethren we do not understand brethren by place, those who are of the same country or nation, such as are called brethren in Romans 9:3, Acts 7:23, Acts 7:25. Nor do we understand brethren by race, those who are descended of the same parents; such are called brethren in James 1:2. But by brethren we understand brethren by grace, and supernatural regeneration, such as are the children of God; and these are the brethren whom to love is a sure sign that we are the children of God.

Answer. To this I answer, that there is a love to the children of God, which is a proof of our being the children of God. As for instance, when we love them as such, for that very reason, as being the saints of God, when we love them for the image of God, which appears in them, because of that grace and holiness which shines forth in their conversations; this is truly commendable, to love the godly for godliness sake, the saints for saintship sake—this is a sure testimony of our Christianity. The love of grace in another, is a good proof of the life of grace in ourselves. There can be no better evidence of the Spirit of Christ in us, than to love the image of Christ in others. For this is a certain truth—that a sinner cannot love a saint as such; "an Israelite is an abomination to an Egyptian." There is a contrariety and natural enmity between the two seeds; between the children of the world, and those whom the Father in his eternal love has "chosen out of the world."

It is likeness which is the great ground of love. There is the highest dissimilitude and unlikeness between an unregenerate sinner, and a child of God, and therefore a child of God cannot love a sinner as a sinner, "In whose eyes a vile person is despised." He may love him as a creature; he may love his soul, or he may love him under some relation which he stands in to him. Thus God loves the damned spirits, as they are his creatures—but as fallen creatures, he hates them with an infinite hatred. So to love a sinner, as a sinner, this a child of God cannot do; so neither can a sinner love a child of God as a child of God. That he may love a child of God, that I grant—but it is upon some other consideration; he may love a person that is holy, not the person for his holiness—but for some other respect. As,

1. A man may love a child of God for his loving, peaceable, courteous deportment to all with whom he converses. Religion beautifies the life of a man and sets him off to the eye of the world. The grace of God is no friend to morose, churlish, unmannerly behavior among men; it promotes an affable demeanor and sweetness to all; and where this is found, it wins respect and love from all.

2. A man may love a saint for his outward greatness and splendor in the world; men are very apt to honor worldly greatness, and therefore the rich saint shall be loved and honored, while the poor saint is hated and despised. This is as if a man should value the goodness of his sword by the embroidery of his belt; or his horse for the beauty of his trappings, rather than for his strength and swiftness. True love to the children of God, reaches to all the children of God, poor as well as rich,

slave as well as free, ignoble as well as noble, for the image of Christ is alike amiable and lovely in all.

3. A man may love a child of God for his fidelity and usefulness in his place: where the power of religion takes hold of a man's heart, it makes him true to all his trusts, diligent in his business, faithful in all his relations; and this obliges respect. A carnal master may prize a godly apprentice or servant, who makes conscience of pleasing his master, and is diligent in promoting his interest. I might instance in many things of the like nature, as charity, beauty, wit, learning, parts, etc., which may procure love to the people of God from the men of the world. But this love is no proof of true Christian love. For,

First, It is but a natural love arising from some carnal respect, or self-ends. That love which is made by the Scripture an evidence of our regeneration, is a spiritual love, the principal loadstone and attraction whereof is grace and holiness; it is a love which embraces a "righteous man in the name of a righteous man."

2. A carnal man's love to saints, is a limited and bounded love; it is not universal "to the seed." Now as in sin, he who does not make conscience of every sin, makes conscience of no sin as sin; so he who does not love all in whom the image of Christ is found, loves none for that of the image of Christ which is found in them.

Now then, if the love we bear to the people of God may possibly arise from natural love only, or from some carnal respect; or if it is a limited love, not extended to all the people of God—then it is possible that a man may love the people of God—and yet be no better than almost a Christian.

Section XVIII. A man may OBEY the commands of God, yes, many of the commands of God—and yet be but almost a Christian. Balaam seems very conscientious of steering his course by the compass of God's command. When Balak sent to him to come and curse the people of God, says Balaam, "If Balak would give me his house full of silver and gold, I cannot go beyond the Word of the Lord my God!" And so says he, "The word that God puts in my mouth, that shall I speak!" The rich young ruler also went far in obedience, "All these have I observed from my youth up;" and yet he was but a hypocrite, for he forsook Christ after all.

Objection. But is it not said, "He who has my commandments, and keeps them, he it is that loves me; and he who loves me shall be loved of my Father; and I will love him, and manifest myself unto him?" And does not our Lord Christ tell us expressly, "You are my friends, if you do whatever I command you?" And can a man be a friend of Christ and be but almost a Christian?

Answer. There is an obedience to the commands of Christ, which is a sure proof of our Christianity and friendship to Christ. This obedience has a threefold property. It is,

1. Evangelical.
2. Universal.
3. Continual.

First, It is evangelical obedience, and that both in matter and manner, ground and end. In the matter of it; and that is what God requires, "You are my friends, if you do whatever I command

you." In the manner of it; and that is according as God requires, "God is a Spirit, and those who worship him, must worship him in spirit and in truth." In the ground of it; and that is, "a pure heart, a good conscience, and a sincere faith." In the end of it; and that is, the honor and glory of God, "Whatever you do, do all to the glory of God."

Secondly, It is a universal obedience, which extends itself to all the commands of God alike: it respects the duties of both tables. Such was the obedience of Caleb, "who followed the Lord fully;" and of David, who had "respect to all his commands."

Thirdly, It is a continual obedience, a putting the hand to God's plough, without looking back, "I have inclined my heart to perform your statutes always, even to the end." He who thus obeys the command of God, is a Christian indeed; a friend of Christ indeed. But all obedience to the commands of God, is not this obedience. For,

1. There is a partial obedience—a piece-meal religion, when a man obeys God in one command, and not in another; owns him in one duty, and not in another; when a man seems to make conscience of the duties of one table, and not of the duties of another. This is the religion of most people. Now this obedience is no true obedience; for as he who does not love God above all, does not love God at all; so he who does not obey all the commands universally, cannot be said to obey any command truly.

It is said of those in Samaria that they "feared the Lord—and served their own gods after their own manner." And yet in the very next verse it is said, "They feared not the Lord;" so that their fear of the Lord was no fear. In like manner, that obedience to God is no obedience, which is but a partial and piecemeal obedience.

2. A man may obey much—and yet be in his old nature; and if so, then all his obedience in that estate is but a painted sin, "He who offers an oblation, is as if he offered swine's blood; and he who burns incense, as if he blessed an idol." The nature must be renewed, before the command can be rightly obeyed; for "a corrupt tree cannot bring forth good fruit." Whatever a man's performances are, they cannot be called obedience, while the heart remains unregenerate, because the principle is false and unsound. Every duty done by a believer, is accepted of God, as part of his obedience to the will of God, though it be done in much weakness; because, though the believer's hand is weak, yet "his heart is right." The hypocrite may have the most active hand—but the believer has the most faithful and sincere heart.

3. A man may obey the law—and yet have no love to the Lawgiver. A carnal heart may do the command of God—but he cannot love God, and therefore cannot do it aright; for love to God is the foundation and spring of all true obedience. Every command of God is to be done in love: this is the "fulfilling of the law." The apostle says, "Though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, (these seem to be acts of the highest obedience), yet if I have not love, it profits me nothing."

4. I might add, that a man may be much in obedience from sinister and base selfish ends: as the Pharisees prayed much, gave much alms, fasted much. But our Lord Christ tells us, that it was "that they might be seen of men, and have glory of men." Most of the hypocrite's piety empties itself into vain-glory; and therefore he is but an empty vine in all he does, because "he brings forth fruit to himself."

It is the end which justifies the action: indeed, a good end cannot make a bad action good—but yet the lack of a good end makes a good action bad.

Now then, if a man may obey the commands of God partially, and by halves; if he may do it—and yet be in his natural state; if he may obey the commands of God—and yet not love God; if the ends of his obedience may be sinful and unwarrantable—then a man may be much in obeying the commands of God—and yet be but almost a Christian.

Section XIX. A man may be SANCTIFIED—and yet be but almost a Christian. Every kind of sanctification does not make a man a new creature; for many are sanctified that are never renewed. You read of those who "count the blood of the covenant, with which they were sanctified, an unholy thing."

Objection. But does not the Scripture tell us, that "both he who sanctifies, and those who are sanctified, are all one: for which cause, he is not ashamed to call them brethren." And can a man be one with Christ—and yet be but almost a Christian?

Answer. To this I answer—You must know there is a twofold work of sanctification spoken of in Scripture. The one, common and ineffectual. The other, special and effectual. That work of sanctification which is true and effectual, is the working of the Spirit of God in the soul, enabling it to the mortifying of all sin, to the obeying of every command, to "walking with God in all well-pleasing." Now, whoever is thus sanctified, is one with him who sanctifies. Christ will not be ashamed to call such brethren; for they are "flesh of his flesh, and bone of his bone." But then there is a more common work of sanctification which is ineffectual as to the two great works of dying to sin, and living to God. This kind of sanctification may help to restrain sin—but not to mortify sin; it may lop off the boughs—but it lays not the axe to the root of the tree; it sweeps and garnishes the room with common virtues—but does not adorn it with saving graces; so that a man is but almost a Christian, notwithstanding this common type of sanctification. Or thus, there is an inward and outward sanctification. Inward sanctification is that which deals with the soul and its faculties, understanding, conscience, will, memory, and affections. Outward sanctification is that which deals with the life and conversation. Both these must concur to make a man a Christian indeed. Therefore the apostle puts them together in his prayer for the Thessalonians, "May the God of peace sanctify you wholly; and, I pray God, your whole spirit, and soul, and body, be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." A man is then sanctified wholly when he is sanctified both inwardly and outwardly—both in heart and affections, and in life and conversation. Outward sanctification is not enough without inward, nor inward without outward: we must have both "clean hands, and a pure heart." The heart must be pure, that we may not incur blame from within; and the hands must be clean, that we may not incur shame from without. We must have hearts "sprinkled from an evil conscience, and bodies washed with pure water." "We must cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit." Inward purity is the most excellent—but, without the outward, it is not sufficient; the true Christian is made up of both.

Now many have clean hands—but unclean hearts. They wash the outside of the cup and platter, when all is filthy within. Now, the former without the latter, profits a man no more than it profited Pilate, who condemned Christ, to wash his hands in the presence of the people: he washed his hands of the blood of Christ—and yet had a hand in the death of Christ. The Egyptian temples were beautiful on the outside—but within you shall find nothing but serpents or reptiles. "He is not

a Jew which is one outwardly." Judas was a saint without—but a sinner within; openly he was a disciple—but secretly, he was a devil.

Some pretend to inward sanctity without outward. This is the pretense of the open sinner, "Though I sometimes drop an idle, foolish word," says he, "or though I sometimes swear an oath, yet I think no hurt—I thank God my heart is as good as the best!" Such are like the sinner Moses mentions, that "blessed himself in his heart, saying, I shall have peace, though I walk in the imagination of my own heart, to add drunkenness to thirst."

Some pretend to outward sanctity without inward. Such are like the Scribes and Pharisees, "who outwardly appear righteous unto men—but within are full of hypocrisy and iniquity." They are fair professors—but foul sinners. Inward sanctity without outward, is impossible; for true sanctity will reform the life. Outward sanctity without inward, is unprofitable; for true sanctity will reform the heart. A man is not a true Christian without both. The body does not make a man without the soul, nor the soul without the body; both are essential to the being of man. Just so—the sanctification of both the outward and the inward, are essential to the being of the new man. True sanctification begins at the heart—but works out into the life and conversation; and if so, then man may attain to an outward sanctification—and yet, for lack of an inward, be no better than almost a Christian. And so I shall end this long pursuit of the almost Christian, in his progress heavenward, with this one general conclusion:

Section XX. A man may do all, as to external duties and worship, that a true Christian can; and, when he has done all, be but almost a Christian. You must know, all the commands of God have both internal and the external—both the body and the soul of the command. And accordingly, there is an internal and an external worship of God.

Now the internal acts of worshiping of God, are—to love God, to fear God, to delight in God, to trust in God, etc. The external acts of worshiping of God, are by praying, teaching, hearing, etc. Now there is a vast difference between these internal and external acts of worship; and such a difference there is, that they distinguish the altogether Christian, from the almost Christian; the sincere believer from the unsound professor. And, indeed, in this very thing the main difference between them does lie.

1. Internal acts of worship are good—the goodness does adhere intrinsically to the thing done. A man cannot love God, nor fear God—but it will be imputed to him for a gracious act, and a great part of his holiness. But, external acts of worship are not denominated good, so much from the matter done—as from the manner of doing them. A man cannot sin in loving and delighting in God—but he may sin in praying and hearing, etc., for lack of a due manner.

2. Internal acts of worship put a goodness into external acts of worship. It is our faith, our love, our fear of God—which makes our duties good.

3. Internal acts of worship better the heart, and magnify the degrees of a man's holiness. External duties do not always do this. A man may pray—and yet his heart never the holier; he may hear the Word, and yet his heart never the softer. But now, the more a man fears God, the wiser he is. The more a man loves God, the holier he is. Love is the perfection of holiness: we shall never be perfect in holiness, until we come to be perfect in love.

4. There is such an excellency in this internal worship, that he who mixes it with his external duties, is a true Christian when he does least; but without this mixture, he is but almost a Christian who does most. Internal acts of worship, joined with outward, sanctify them, and make them accepted of God, though few. External acts of worship, without inward, make them abhorred of God, though they are ever so many. So that, although the almost Christian may do all those duties in hypocrisy, which a true Christian does in sincerity; nay, though in doing external duties, he may out-do the true Christian, as the comet makes a greater blaze than the true star: if Elijah fasts and mourns, Baal's priests will cut their flesh; yet he cannot do those internal duties, which the lowest true Christian can. The almost Christian can pray—but he cannot love God; he can teach or hear, etc.—but he cannot take delight in God. Mark Job's query concerning the hypocrite, "Will he delight himself in the Almighty?" He will pray to the Almighty—but will he delight himself in the Almighty? Will he take pleasure in God? Ah, no! he will not—he cannot! Delight in God arises from a suitableness between the faculty, and the object; now, none are more unsuitable, than God and a carnal heart! Delight arises from the having what we desire, and from enjoying what we have. How then can he delight in God, who neither enjoys God, nor has, nor truly desires God? Delight in God is one of the highest exercises of grace: and therefore, how can he delight in God, who has no grace?

Why, then, should any saint of God be discouraged, when he hears how far the almost Christian may go in the way to heaven? Whereas, he who is the weakest true believer, who has the least true grace, goes farther than he; for he delights in, and loves God. Should the almost Christian do less, as to matter of external duties, yet, if he had but the least true faith, the least sincerity of love to Christ, he would surely be saved; and should the true Christian do ten times more duties than he does, yet, had he not faith in Christ, and love to Christ, he would surely be rejected. O, therefore, let not any weak believer be discouraged, though hypocrites may out-do them, and go beyond them in duty; for all their duties are done in hypocrisy—but your faith and love to God in duties, is a proof of your sincerity.

1. I do not speak this to discourage any soul in the doing of duties, or to beat down outward performances—but to rectify the soul in the doing of them. As the apostle says, "Covet earnestly the best gifts: but yet I show you a more excellent way." So I say, covet the best gifts; covet much to be in duties, much in prayer, much in hearing, etc. "But I will show you a more excellent way;" and that is, the way of faith and love. Pray much—but then believe much too. Hear much; read much; but then love God much too. Delight in the Word and ordinances of God much—but then delight in the God of ordinances more. And when you are most in duties, as to your use of them, O then be sure to be above duties, as to your resting and dependence upon them. Would you be Christians, indeed—altogether Christians? O then, be much in the use and exercise of ordinances—but be much more in faith and dependence upon Christ and his righteousness. When your obedience is most to the command, then let your faith be most upon the promise. The mere professor rests in duties, and so is but almost a Christian; but you must be sure to rest upon the Lord Christ. This is the way to be altogether Christians; for, if you believe, then are you Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise. And thus I have answered the first query; to wit, how far a man may go in the way to heaven—and yet be but almost a Christian.

1. He may have much knowledge.

2. He may have great gifts.
3. He may have a high profession.
4. He may do much against sin.
5. He may desire grace.
6. He may tremble at the Word.
7. He may delight in the Word.
8. He may be a member of a Christian church.
9. He may have great hopes of heaven.
10. He may be under great and visible changes.
11. He may be very zealous in the matters of religion.
12. He may be much in prayer.
13. He may suffer for Christ.
14. He may be called by God.
15. He may, in some sense, have the Spirit of God.
16. He may have some kind of faith.
17. He may love the people of God.
18. He may go far in obeying the commands of God.
19. He may be, in some sense, sanctified.
20. He may do all, as to external duties, that a true Christian can—and yet be no better than almost a Christian.

Almost Christian Discovered; Part 3

The Almost Christian Discovered;

Or, The False Professor Tried By Matthew Mead, 1661 "You almost persuade me to be a Christian."

Acts 26:28 QUESTION II. Why is it, that many men go so far, as that they come to be but almost Christians?

First, It may be to answer the call of CONSCIENCE. Though few men have grace, yet all men have conscience. Now do but observe, and, you shall see how far conscience may go in this work.

1. Conscience owns a God, and that this God must be worshiped and served by the creature. Atheists in practice, we have many; such as the apostle speaks of, "They profess to know God—but in works they deny him." But atheists in judgment none can be. Now there being such a light in conscience, as to discover that there is a God, and that he must be worshiped by the help of farther light—the light of the Word—a man may be enabled to do much in the ways of God—and yet his heart without a grain of grace.

2. Know this—that natural conscience is capable of great improvements from the means of grace. Sitting under the ordinances may exceedingly heighten the endowments of conscience. It may be much regulated, though it be not at all renewed. It may be enlightened, convinced—and yet never savingly converted and changed. You read in Hebrews 6:4, of some that were "once enlightened, and tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Spirit." What work shall we call this? It could not be a saving work, a true change and conversion of state; for, notwithstanding this enlightening, and tasting, and partaking, yet they are here said to fall away, verse 6. Had it been a true work of grace—they could never have fallen away from that. A believer may fall—but he cannot fall away. He may fall foully—but he cannot fall finally; for, "underneath are the everlasting arms." His faith is established in the strength of that prayer of Christ, that our faith fail not. Nay, he tells us expressly, that it is eternal life which he gives—from which we shall never perish. This work, then, here spoken of, cannot be any saving work, because it is not an abiding work; for those who are under it, are said to fall away from it. But though it be not a saving work—yet it is a supernatural work. It is an improvement made by the Word upon the consciences of men, through the power of the Spirit; and therefore they are said to "taste the good Word of God," and to be made "partakers of the Holy Spirit." They have not the Spirit abiding in them savingly—but striving with them, and working upon them convincingly, to the awakening and setting conscience on work. And conscience, thus stirred, may carry a man very far in religion, and in the duties of the gospel—and yet be but a natural conscience. A common work of the Spirit, may stead a man very much in the duties of religion, though it must be a special work of the Spirit which gives a man salvation. A man may have the assisting presence of the Spirit, enabling him to preach and pray—and yet he may perish for lack of the renewing presence of the Spirit, enabling him to believe. Judas had the former—and yet perished for lack of the latter. He had the Spirit

assisting him to cast out devils; but yet he had not the Spirit renewing him; for he was cast out himself. Thus a man may have an improved conscience—and yet be a stranger to a renewed conscience; and conscience, thus improved, may put a man very much upon duty. I pray God, none of us mistake a conscience, thus improved by the Word, for a conscience renewed by the Spirit. The mistake is very easy, especially when a life of duties is the fruit of it.

3. The conscience of a natural man is subject to distress and trouble. Though a natural conscience is not sanctified with grace, yet it is often troubled at sin. Trouble of conscience is not incident to believers only—but sometimes to unbelievers also. A believer's conscience is sometimes troubled, when his sin is truly pardoned; and a natural man's conscience is troubled for sin—though it is never freed from sin. God sometimes sets the Word home upon the sinner's conscience, and applies the terrors of the law to it; and this fills the soul with fear and horror of death and hell. Now, in this case, the soul usually betakes itself to a life of duties, merely to fence trouble out of conscience. When Absalom sets on fire Joab's cornfields, then Joab runs to him, though he refused before. Just so, when God lets a spark of hell, as it were, fall upon the sinner's conscience in applying the terrors of the Word, this drives the sinner to a life of duties which he never minded before. The ground of many a man's engaging in religion, is the trouble of his conscience; and the end of his continuing in religion, is the quieting of conscience. If conscience would never check him, God would never hear from him. Natural conscience has a voice, and speaks aloud many times in the sinner's ears, and tells him, "This ought not to be done! God must not be forgotten. The commands of God ought not to be slighted; living in sin will be the ruin of the soul!" And hence it is, that a natural man runs to duties, and takes up a lifeless and graceless profession, that he may thereby silence conscience. As a man sick with a stomach, whatever sweet morsel he has eaten, he vomits it all up; and although it was sweet in the eating, yet it is bitter in the vomiting; so it fares with the sinner, when he is sermon-sick, or conscience-sick. Though his sin was sweet in the practice, yet the thought of it rises bitter upon the conscience: and then his profession of religion is the pill he rolls about in his mouth, to take away the bitterness of sin's taste!

4. Natural conscience, enlightened by the Word—may discover to a man much of the misery of a natural state; though not effectually to bring him out of it; yet so as to make him restless and weary in it. It may show a sinner his nakedness; and hereupon, the soul runs to a life of duties; thinking hereby to halt the misery of his case, and to make a covering for his nakedness. It is said, "that when Adam and Eve saw they were naked, they sewed fig-leaves together, and made themselves a covering." So when once the sinner sees his nakedness and vileness by reason of sin, whereas he should run to Christ, and close with him, and beg his righteousness for a covering, "that the shame of his nakedness does not appear;" he rather runs to a life of duties and performances, and thus makes himself a covering with the fig-leaves of a profession, without Christ truly embraced, and conscience at all renewed.

Natural man would gladly be his own Savior; and supposes a change of state to be a thing within his own power; and that the true work of grace lies in leaving off the practice of sin, and taking up a life of religious duties: and, therefore, upon this principle, does many a graceless professor outstrip a sound believer; for he rests on his own performances, and hopes these will commend him to God.

Question III. If a natural conscience may go thus far, then what difference is there between this natural conscience in hypocrites, and a renewed conscience in believers? Or, how may I know whether the working of my conscience is the working of nature only, or else of grace wrought in it?

Answer. I grant that it is difficult to distinguish between the one and the other; and the difficulty has a twofold cause.

1. It arises from that hypocrisy that is in the best saints. The weakest believer is no hypocrite—but yet there is some hypocrisy in the strongest believer. Where there is most grace, there is some sin; and where there is most sincerity, yet there is some hypocrisy. Now it is very incident to a tender conscience to misgive and mistrust its state, upon the sight of any sin. When he sees hypocrisy break out in any duty or performance, then he complains, "Surely my aims are not sincere! my conscience is not renewed—it is but natural conscience enlightened, not by grace purged and changed." Pygmalion made an image so life-like that he deceived himself; and, taking the picture for a person, he fell in love with the picture!

2. It arises from that resemblance which there is between grace and hypocrisy; for hypocrisy is a resemblance of grace, without the substance. Hypocrisy is the likeness of grace, without the life of grace. There is no grace but a hypocrite may have something like it; and there is no duty done by a Christian—but a hypocrite may outstrip him in it. Now, when one who has not true grace shall go further than one who has, this may well make the believer question whether his grace is true or not; or whether the workings of his conscience are not the workings of nature only, rather than of grace wrought in it. But to answer the question—You may make a judgment of this in these seven particulars:

1. If a natural man's conscience puts him upon duty, he does usually limit himself in the work of God. His duties are limited; his obedience is a limited obedience. He does one duty—and neglects another. He picks and chooses among the commands of God; obeys one—and slights another. Thus much is enough; what need any more? If I do thus and thus, I shall go to heaven at last. But where conscience is renewed by grace, there it is otherwise. Though there may be many weaknesses which accompany its duties, yet that soul never bounds itself in working after God: it never loves God so much—but still it would love him more; nor seeks him so much—but still it would seek him more; nor does it serve God so well at any time—but it still makes conscience of serving him better. A renewed conscience is a spring of universal obedience: for it sees an infinite excellency, and goodness, and holiness in God; and therefore would gladly have its service rise up towards some proportionableness to the object. "A God of infinite excellency and goodness, should have infinite love," says conscience. "A holy God should have service from a holy heart," says conscience.

Now then, if I set bounds to my love to God, or to my service to God; if I limit myself in my obedience to the holy God; love one command, and slight another; obey in one point—and yet ignore another; then is all I do but the workings of a natural conscience. But on the other hand, if I love the Lord with my whole heart, and whole soul, and serve him with all my might and strength; if "I esteem all God's precepts concerning all things to be right, and have respect to all his commands," then is my love and service from a renewed conscience.

2. If a natural man's conscience checks or accuses for sin—then he seeks to stop the mouth of it—but not to satisfy it. Most of the natural man's duties are to still and stifle conscience. But, the believer chooses rather to let conscience cry, than to stop the mouth of it, until he can do it upon good terms, and until he can fetch in satisfaction to it from the blood of Jesus Christ, by fresh acts of faith apprehended and applied. The natural man seeks to still the noise of conscience, rather than to remove the guilt. The believer seeks the removal of guilt by the application of Christ's blood; and then conscience is quiet of itself. As a foolish man, having a mote fallen into his eye, and making it water, he wipes away the water, and labors to keep it dry—but never searches his eye to get out the mote; but a wise man minds not so much the wiping, as the searching his eye; something has got into the eye, and that causes the watering, and therefore the cause must be removed. Now then, if when conscience accuses for sin, I take up a life of duties, a form of godliness, to stop the mouth of conscience; and if hereupon conscience be still and quiet; then is this but a natural conscience. But if, when conscience checks, it will not be satisfied with anything but the blood of Christ, and therefore I use duties to bring me to Christ; and if I beg the sprinkling of his blood upon conscience, and labor not so much to stop the mouth of it, as to remove guilt from it—then is this a renewed conscience.

3. There is no natural man, let him go ever so far, let him do ever so much in the matters of religion—but still he has his Delilah, his bosom-lust. Judas went far—but he carried his covetousness along with him. Herod went far; he did many things under the force of John's ministry; but yet there was one thing he did not; he did not put away his brother's wife—his Herodias lay in his bosom still. Nay, commonly, all the natural man's duties are to hide some sin; his profession is only made use of for a cover shame. But the renewed conscience hates all sin, as David did, "I hate every false way!" He regards no iniquity in his heart: he uses duties, not to cover sin—but to help work down, and work out sin. Now then, if I profess religion; if I make mention of the name of the Lord, and make my "boast of the law—and yet through breaking the law dishonor God;" if I live in the love of any sin, and make use of my profession to cover it—then am I a hypocrite, and my duties flow but from a natural conscience. But, on the other hand, if I "name the name of the Lord Jesus, and withal depart from iniquity;" if I use duties, not to cover sin—but to discover and mortify sin—then am I upright before God, and my duties flow from a renewed conscience.

4. A natural man prides himself in his duties. If he is much in duty, then he is much lifted up in pride, under duty. So did the Pharisee, "God, I thank you that I am not as other men are;" and why? where lay the difference? why, "I fast twice in the week: I give tithes of all," etc. But take a gracious heart, a renewed conscience, and when his duties are at highest, then is his heart at lowest. Thus it was with the apostle Paul; he was much in service, "in season, and out of season;" preaching up the Lord Jesus with all boldness and earnestness—and yet very humble, in a sense of his own unworthiness, under all, "I am not worthy to be called an apostle. To me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ." And again, "Of sinners, I am chief."

Thus a believer, when he is highest in duties, then is he lowest in Humility. Duty puffs up the hypocrite—but a believer comes away humbled; and why? because the hypocrite has had no visions of God: he has seen only his own gifts and abilities—and this exalts him. But the believer has seen God, and enjoyed communion with God—and this humbles him. Communion with God,

though it be very refreshing, yet it is also very abasing and humbling to the creature. From the Word of the Lord, comes a sight of greatness of the Lord; and from a sight of the greatness of the Lord, comes humility. Now then, if I pride myself in any duty, and am puffed up under any performances; then have I not seen nor met with God in any duty. But on the other hand, if when my gifts are at highest—my heart is at lowest; if when my spirit is most raised—my heart is the most humbled; if, in the midst of all my services—I can maintain a sense of my own unworthiness; then have I seen and had communion with God in duty, and my performances are from a renewed conscience.

5. Look what that is, to which the heart does secretly render the glory of a duty—and that is the principle of the duty. In Habakkuk 1:16, we read of those who sacrifice to their net, and burn incense to their dragnet." Where the glory of an action is rendered to a man's self—the principle of that action is self. When all a man's duties terminate in self, then is self the principle of all. Now all the natural man's duties run into himself. He was never, by a thorough work of grace, truly cast out of himself, and brought to deny himself; and therefore he can rise no higher than himself in all he does. He was never brought to be poor in spirit, and so to live upon Christ; to be carried out of all duties to Jesus Christ. But the true believer gives the glory of all his services to God; whatever strength or life there is in duty, God has all the glory; for he is by grace, humbled out of himself, and therefore sees no excellence or worthiness in self. "I labored more abundantly than they all," says the apostle; but to whom does he ascribe the glory of this? to self? No! "Yet not I," says he, "but the grace of God which was with me." Whenever the grace of Christ is wrought in the heart as a principle of duty, you shall find the soul when it is most carried out, with a "Yet not I," in the mouth of it. "I live—yet not I; I labored more abundantly than all—yet not I." Self is disclaimed, and Christ most advanced, when it is from grace, that the heart is quickened. The twenty-four elders cast their crowns at Christ's feet. There are two very hard things: one is, to take the shame of our sins to ourselves; the other is, to give the glory of our services to Christ. Now then, if I sacrifice to my own net: if I aim at my own credit or profit, and give the glory of all I do to self; then do I "sow to the flesh," and was never yet cast out of self—but act only from a natural conscience. But if I give the glory of all my strength and life in duty only to God; if I magnify grace in all, and can truly say in all I do, "Yet not I," then am I truly cast out of self, and do what I do with a renewed conscience.

6. Though a natural conscience may put a man much upon service, yet it never presses to the attainment of holiness. So that he carries an unsanctified heart under all. How long was Judas a professor—and yet not one grain of grace had he. The foolish virgins, you know, "took their lamps—but took no oil in their vessels;" that is, they looked more after a profession, than after a sanctification. But, when a renewed conscience puts a man upon duty—it is followed with the growth of holiness. As grace helps to the doing of duty, so duty helps to the growing of grace; a believer is the more holy and the more heavenly, by his being much in duties.

Now then, if I am much in a life of duties—and yet a stranger to a life of holiness; if I maintain a high profession—and yet have not a true work of sanctification; if, like children in the rickets, I grow big in the head—but weak in the feet; then have I gifts and abilities—but no grace; and though I am much in service—yet have I but a natural conscience. But, on the other hand, if the holiness of my life carries a proportion to my profession; if I am not "a hearer of the Word only—but a doer of it;" if grace grows in seasons of duty, then do I act in the things of God, from a renewed conscience.

7. And lastly, If a natural conscience is the spring of duty—then this spring runs fastest at first, and so abates, and at last dries up. But if a renewed conscience, a sanctified heart, is the spring of duty, then this spring will never dry up. It will run always, from first to last, and run quicker at last than first, "I know your works, and the last to be more than the first." "The righteous shall hold on his way; and he who has clean hands shall be stronger and stronger."

Question. But you will say—Why does that man abate and languish in his duties, who does them from a natural conscience, more than he who does them from a renewed conscience?

Answer. The reason is, because they grow upon a fallible root, a decaying root, and that is nature. Nature is a fading root, and so are all its fruits fading; but the duties done by a renewed conscience, are fruits that grow upon a lasting root; and that is Christ. "Gifts have their root in nature—but grace has its root in Christ!" And therefore the weakest grace shall outlive the greatest gifts and abilities; because there is life in the root of the one, and not in that of the other.

Gifts and grace differ like the leather of your shoe, and the skin of your foot. Make a pair of shoes that have the thickest soles, and if you go much in them, the leather wears out, and in a little time a man's foot comes to the ground. But a man who goes barefoot all his days, the skin of his feet does not wear out. Why should not the sole of his foot sooner wear out than the sole of his shoe; for the leather is much thicker than the skin? The reason is, because there is life in the one, and not in the other; there is life in the skin of the foot, and therefore that holds out, and grows thicker and thicker, harder and harder; but there is no life in the sole of his shoe, and therefore that wears out, and waxes thinner and thinner. So it is with gifts and grace.

Now then, if I decay and abate, and grow weary of a profession, and fall away at last; if I begin in the spirit, and end in the flesh—then was all I did from a natural conscience. But if I grow and hold out, if I persevere to the end, and my "last works are more than my first," then I act from a renewed conscience. And thus I have, in seven things, answered that question, namely, If conscience may go thus far in putting a man upon duties, then what difference is there between this natural conscience in hypocrites and sinners, and renewed conscience in believers? And that is the first answer to the main query, namely, "Whence is it that many men go so far—as those who come to be almost Christians?" It is to answer the call of conscience.

Secondly, It is from the power of the WORD under which they live. Though the Word does not work effectually upon all, yet it has a great power upon the hearts of sinners to reform them, though not to renew them.

1. It has a discerning, discovering power. "The Word of God is living and powerful, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow; and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart." The Word is the looking-glass wherein everyone may see what he really is. As the light of the sun reveals the little motes, so the light of the Word, shining into conscience, discovers little sins.

2. The Word has the power of a law. It gives law to the whole soul; and binds conscience. Scripture, therefore, is frequently called the law, "Unless your law had been my delight," etc. "To the law and to the testimony." This is spoken of the whole Word of God, which is therefore called a law, because of its binding power upon the conscience.

3. The Word has a judging power. "The Word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him at the last day." The sentence that God will pass upon unconverted sinners hereafter, is no other than what the Word passes upon him here. The judgment of God, is not a day wherein God will pass any new sentence; but it is such a day wherein God will make a solemn, public ratification of the judgment passed by the ministry of the Word upon souls here. This I gather clearly from Matthew 18:18, "Whatever you shall bind on earth, shall be bound in heaven; and whatever you shall loose on earth, shall be loosed in heaven." So that, by bringing a man's heart to the word, and trying it by that, he may quickly know what that sentence is that God will pass upon his soul in the last day—for as the judgment of the Word is now, such will the judgment of God be concerning him in the last day.

Indeed, there is a twofold power, farther than this, in the Word. It has a begetting and saving power. But this is put forth only upon some. But the other is more extensive, and has a great causality upon a profession of goodness, even among those who have no grace. A man who is under this threefold power of discerning, law and judgment, who has his heart ransacked and unveiled, his conscience awakened and awed, his state and sinful condition judged and condemned; may take up a resolution of a new life, and convert himself to great profession of religion.

Thirdly, A man may go far in this course of profession—from a desire for applause and honor, and to get a name in the world. As it is said of the Pharisees, they "love to pray in the marketplaces, and in the corners of the streets—to be seen of men." Many a man does that for credit—which he will not do for conscience; and owns religion more for the sake of the lust for honor—than for the sake of Christ: thus making God's stream to turn the devil's mill.

Fourthly, It is from a desire of salvation. There is in all men a desire of salvation: it is natural to every being—to love and seek its own preservation. "Who will show us any good?" This is the language of nature, seeking happiness to itself. Many a man may be carried so far out in the desires of salvation, as to do many things to obtain it. So did the young man, "Good Master, what good things shall I do, that I may inherit eternal life?" He went far, and did much, obeying many commands—and all out of a desire of salvation.

So, then, put these together, and there is an answer to that question. "The call of conscience—the power of the word—the affectation of credit—and the desire of salvation." These may carry a man so far—as to be almost a Christian.

QUESTION IV. Why is it that many are but almost Christians when they have gone thus far? What is the cause of this?

Answer. I might multiply answers to this question—but I shall instance in two only, which I judge the most material.

First, It is for lack of right and sound conviction. If a man is not thoroughly convinced of sin, and his heart truly broken, whatever his profession of godliness may be—yet he will be sure to miscarry. Every work of conviction is not a thorough work. There are convictions which are not only natural and rational—but not from the powerful work of the Spirit of God. Rational conviction is "that which proceeds from the working of a natural conscience, charging guilt from the light of nature, by the help of those common principles of reason which are in all men." This is the conviction you read of,

Romans 2:14-15. It is said that the Gentiles who had not the law, yet had their consciences bearing witness, and accusing or excusing one another. Though they had not the light of Scripture, yet they had convictions from the light of nature. Now, by the help of the Gospel light, these convictions may be much improved—and yet the heart not renewed. But then there is a spiritual conviction; and this is that work of the Spirit of God upon the sinner's heart by the Word, whereby the guilt and filth of sin is fully discovered, and the woe and misery of a natural state distinctly set home upon the conscience, to the dread and terror of the sinner while he abides in that state and condition! And this is the conviction that is a sound and thorough work. Many have their convictions—but not this spiritual conviction.

Query. Now you will say, "Suppose I am at any time under conviction, how shall I know whether my convictions are only from a natural conscience, or whether they are from the Spirit of God?"

Answer. I would digress too much to draw out the solution of this question to its just length. I shall, therefore, in five things only, lay down the most considerable difference between the one and the other.

1. Natural convictions reach chiefly to open and scandalous sins. Sins against the light of nature; for natural conviction can reach no farther than natural light. But spiritual conviction reaches to secret, inward, and hidden sins; such as hypocrisy, formality, lukewarmness, deadness, and hardness of heart, etc. Observe, then, whether your trouble for sin looks inward as well as outward, and reaches not only to open sins—but to secret lusts, to inward and spiritual sins. If so, this is a sure sign of the work of the Spirit, because the trouble occasioned by these sins, bears a more immediate relation to the holiness of God, who alone is offended by them; they being such sins, as no one else can see or know.

2. Natural convictions deals only with a man's outward life—not with his state and condition. Natural convictions deal with actual sins—not original sin. But spiritual conviction reaches to all sins; to sins of heart—as well as sins of life; to the sin of our nature—as well as the sins of practice; to the sin that is born in us—as well as the sin which is done by us. Where the Spirit of the Lord comes to work effectually in any soul, he holds the looking-glass of the law before the sinner's eyes, and opens his eyes to look into the looking-glass, and to see all that deformity and filthiness which is in his heart and nature! The apostle Paul said, "I would not have known what sin was except through the law." Romans 7:7. How can this be true—that he had not known sin but by the law—if the light of nature reveals sin? It is said of the Gentiles, that having not the law, they had a law to themselves. This sin, therefore, that the apostle speaks of, is not to be understood of actual sin—but of original sin, "I had not known the pollution of nature, that fountain of sin that is within—this I would not have known but by the law." And, indeed, this is a discovery that natural light cannot make.

It is true, the philosopher could say, "That lust is the first and chief of all sins." But I cannot think he meant it of original sin—but of the inordinacy of appetite and desire, at most; for I find that the wisest of the philosophers understood nothing of original sin. Hear Seneca, "Sin is not born with you—but brought in since." Quintilian says, "It is more marvel that any one man sins, than that all men should live honestly; sin is so against the nature of men." How blind were they in this point! And so was Paul—until the Spirit of the Lord revealed it to him by the Word; and indeed, this is a discovery proper to the Spirit. It is he who makes the sinner see all the deformity and filthiness

which is within! It is he who pulls off all the sinner's rags, and makes him see his naked and wretched condition! It is he who shows us the blindness of the mind, the stubbornness of the will, the disorderedness of the affections, the searedness of the conscience, the plague of our hearts, and the sin of our natures—and therein the desperateness of our state. "When He comes, He will convict the world about sin." John 16:8

3. Natural convictions carry the soul out to look more on the evil which comes as a result of sin, than on the evil which is in sin. So that the soul under this conviction is more troubled at the dread of hell, and wrath, and damnation—than at the vileness and heinous nature of sin! But spiritual convictions work the soul into a greater sensibleness of the evil which is in sin, than of the evil which comes as a result of sin. The dishonor done to God by walking contrary to His will; the wounds which are made in the heart of Christ; the grief which the Holy Spirit is put to—this wounds the soul more than a thousand hells!

4. Natural convictions are not durable, they quickly die out. They are like a slight cut in the skin, which bleeds a little, and is sore for the present—but is soon healed again, and in a few days not so much as a scar to be seen. But spiritual convictions are durable, they cannot be worn out, they abide in the soul until they have reached their end, which is the change of the sinner. The convictions of the Spirit are like a deep wound in the flesh, which goes to the vital organs, and seems to endanger the life of the patient, and is only healed with great skill, and when it is healed leaves a scar behind it, that when the patient is well, yet he can say, "Here is the mark of my wound, which will never wear out." So a soul that is under spiritual conviction—his wound is deep, and not to be healed, but by the great skill of the heavenly Physician: and when it is healed, there are the tokens of it remaining in the soul, which can never be worn out! So that the soul may say, "Here are the marks and signs of my conviction still in my soul."

5. Natural convictions make the soul shy of God. Guilt works fear, and fear causes estrangement from God. Thus it was with Adam, when he saw his nakedness, he ran away and hid himself from God. Now spiritual convictions do not drive the soul from God—but unto God. Ephraim's conviction was spiritual, and he runs to God, "Turn me, and I shall be turned." So that there is, you see, a great difference between natural conviction and conversion: between that which is natural and that which is spiritual; that which is common, and that which is saving. Yes, such is the difference, that though a man has ever so much of the former, yet if he be without the latter, he is but almost a Christian, and therefore we have great reason to inquire more after this spiritual conviction. For,

1. Spiritual conviction is an essential part of sound conversion. Conversion begins here; true conversion begins in convictions, and true convictions end in conversion. Until the sinner is convinced of sin—he can never be converted from sin. Christ's coming was as a Savior to die for sinners. The Spirit's coming is to convince us of sin—that we may close with Christ as our Savior. Until sin is thoroughly revealed to us, interest in the blood of Christ cannot rightly be claimed by us; nay, so long as sin is unseen, Christ will be unsought. "Those who are whole need not the physician—but those who are sick."

2. Slight and common convictions, when they are but skin-deep, are the cause of much hypocrisy. Slight convictions may bring the soul to clasp about Christ—but not to close with Christ; and this is the guise of a hypocrite. I know no other rise and spring of hypocrisy, like this of slight convictions:

this has filled the church of Christ with hypocrites. Nay, it is not only the spring of hypocrisy—but it is also the spring of apostasy. What was the cause that the seed was said to wither away? It was because it had no deepness of earth. Where there is thorough conviction, there is a depth of earth in the heart, and there the seed of the Word grows. But where convictions are slight and common, there the seed withers for lack of depth! So that you see clearly, in this one instance, whence it is that many are but almost Christians, when they have gone so far in religion, to wit, for lack of sound convictions.

Secondly, and this has a near relation to the former: It is for lack of a thorough work of grace, first wrought in the heart. Where this is not, all a man's following profession comes to nothing. That person is never likely to read well, who never masters his Primer. Cloth which is not wrought well in the loom, will never wear well, nor wear long—it will do little service. Just so, that professor who does not come well off the loom, who has not a thorough work of grace in his heart—will never wear well; he will shrink in the wetting, and never do much service for God. It is not the pruning of a bad tree which will make it bring forth good fruit; but the tree must be made good, before the fruit can be good.

He who takes up a profession of religion with an unbroken heart, will never serve Christ in that profession with his whole heart. A man may not have this true and deep change in his heart—and yet he may go far, and do much in the ways of God—but he will be sure to either die a hypocrite or an apostate. Look! if a man is born crooked or misshapen in the birth—he will remain crooked as long as he lives! You may bolster or stuff out his clothes to conceal it—but the crookedness, the deformity remains still; you may hide it—but you cannot help it; it may be covered—but it cannot be cured. So it is in this case. If a man come into a profession of religion—but is not rightly born; if he be not "begotten of God, and born of the Spirit;" if there is not a thorough work of grace in his heart—all his profession of religion will never mend him! He may be bolstered out by a life of duties—but he will be but a hypocrite at last, for lack of a thorough work at first! A form of godliness may cover his crookedness—but will never cure it! A man can never be a true Christian, nor accepted by God, though in the highest profession of religion, without a work of grace in the heart! For,

. Those duties which find acceptance with God, must have an answerableness in the frame of that man's heart—to the duties done by him. The affections within, must bear a proportion to his profession without. God abhors prayer without faith; and obedience without fear and holy reverence of the lawgiver! Acts of internal worship must answer the duties of external worship. Now where there is no grace wrought in the heart, there can never be any proportion or answerableness in the frame of that man's heart, to the duties done by him.

2. Those duties which find acceptance with God, must be done in sincerity. God does not receive our duties because of their volume, nor judge of us according to the frequency of our performances—but according to the sincerity of our hearts in the performance. It is this which commends both the doer and the duty to God. With sincerity of heart, God accepts the least we do. Without sincerity, God rejects all we do. This is that temper of spirit which God highly delights in, "Fear the Lord and worship Him in sincerity and truth." The apostle gives it a great epithet; he calls it, in 2 Corinthians 1:12, the sincerity of God; that is, such a sincerity as is his special work upon the soul, setting the heart right and upright before him in all his ways.

Sincerity is the crown of all our graces; lack of sincerity is the condemnation of all our duties. Thousands perish, and go to hell in the midst of all their performances and duties, merely for lack of sincerity of heart to God! "Let us draw near to God with a sincere heart." Hebrews 10:22

Now where there is not a change of state, a work of grace in the heart, there can be no sincerity to God. Sincerity of heart, is not a herb which grows in nature's garden, "The heart of man is naturally deceitful and desperately wicked," more opposite to sincerity than to anything; as things corrupted carry a greater dissimilitude to what they were than to anything else which they never were. "God made man upright." Now man voluntarily losing this, has become more unlike himself than anything below himself; he is more like a lion, a wolf, a bear, a serpent, a toad—than to a man in innocency. So that it is impossible to find sincerity in any soul, until there is a work of grace wrought there by the Spirit of God; and hence it is, that a man is but almost a Christian, because none of his religious duties are done sincerely.

QUESTION V. What is the reason why many go no farther in the profession of religion, than to be almost Christians?

Reason 1. One reason why many go no farther in the profession of religion—is because they deceive themselves, as to the truth of their own condition. They mistake their state, and think it good and safe, when it is bad and dangerous. A man may look upon himself as a child of God—and yet God may look upon him as a vessel of wrath. A true child of God—by looking more upon his sins than his graces, more upon his failings than his faith, more upon indwelling lusts than renewing grace—may think his case very bad when yet it is very good! "I am black!" says the spouse; "and yet," says Christ, "O you fairest among women!" So the sinner, by looking more upon his duties than his sins, may think that his name is written in the book of life—and yet in the account of God—be a very reprobate! There is nothing more common than for a man to "think himself something when he is nothing," and so he "deceives himself." Many a man blesses himself in his interest in Christ, when he is indeed a stranger to him. Many a man thinks his sin pardoned, when alas! "he is still in the gall of bitterness, and bondage of iniquity!"

Many a man thinks he has grace, when he has none, "There is," says Solomon, "one who pretends to be rich, yet has nothing." This was the very temper of Laodicea, "You say, 'I am rich. I have everything I want. I don't need a thing!' And you don't realize that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked!" Revelation 3:17. "You don't realize!" As bad as she was, she thought her state good. As poor as she was in grace, she thought she was rich! As wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked as she was—yet she thought she had need of nothing.

Now there are several grounds of this mistake. I will name five to you.

First, The desperate deceitfulness of the heart of every natural man. "The heart is deceitful above all things." The Hebrew word is the same with Jacob's name. He was a deceiver of his brother Esau, "He is rightly called Jacob," says he, "for he has deceived me these two times." The word signifies, to be fraudulent, subtle, deceitful, and supplanting. Thus is the heart of every natural man "deceitful above all things." You read of the deceitfulness of the tongue. And of the deceitfulness of riches. And of the deceitfulness of beauty. And of the deceitfulness of friends. But yet the heart is deceitful above them all. Nay, you read of the deceitfulness of Satan, yet truly a man's heart is a

greater deceiver than he; for Satan could never deceive a man, if his own heart did not deceive him.

Now it is from the desperate treachery of his own heart—that a man presumes upon the goodness of his case! How common is it for men to boast of the goodness of their hearts! "I thank God, though I do not make such a show and pretense as some do, yet I have as good a heart as the best!" O do but hear Solomon in this case, "He who trusts in his own heart is a fool." Proverbs 28:26. Will any wise man commit his money to a thief? Will he trust a cheat? It was Augustine who said, "That man who trusts to his own heart, shall be sure to find himself deceived at last!"

Secondly, This mistake arises from the pride of a man's heart! There is a proud heart in every natural man. There was much of this pride in Adam's sin, and there is much of it in all Adam's sons. It is a radical sin, and from hence arises this over inflated opinion of a man's state and condition. Solomon says, "Be not righteous overmuch." Augustine, speaking occasionally of these words, says, it is "not meant of the righteousness of the wise man—but the pride of the presumptuous man." Now in this sense every carnal man is righteous overmuch; though he has none of that righteousness which commends him to God, namely, the righteousness of Christ—yet he has too much of that righteousness which commends him to himself, and that is self-righteousness. A proud man has an eye to see his beauty—but not his deformity; his abilities—but not his spots; his seeming righteousness—but not his real wretchedness. "It must be a work of grace that must show a man the lack of grace." The haughty eye looks upward—but the humble eye looks downward, and therefore this is the believer's motto, "I am the least of saints—and the greatest of sinners!" "The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself: God, I thank you that I am not like other men--robbers, evildoers, adulterers." Luke 18:11. This is the unsaved man's motto.

Thirdly, Many deceive themselves with common grace instead of saving grace; through that resemblance which is between them. As many take counterfeit money for current coin—so do too many take common grace for true grace. Saul took the devil for Samuel, because he appeared in the mantle of Samuel: so many take common grace for saving, because it is like saving grace. A man may be under a supernatural work—and yet fall short of a saving work; the first raises nature, the second only renews nature: though every saving work of the Spirit is supernatural, yet every supernatural work of the Spirit is not saving; and hence many deceive their own souls, by taking a supernatural work for a saving work.

Fourthly, Many mistake a profession of religion for a work of conversion; and outside reformation for a sure sign of inward regeneration. If the outside of the cup is washed, then they think all is clean, though it is ever so foul within. This is the common rock that so many souls split upon, to their eternal hazard—taking up a form of godliness—but denying the power thereof.

Fifthly, Lack of a home application of the law of God to the heart and conscience, to discover to a man the true state and condition he is in. Where this is lacking, a man will sit down short of a true work of grace, and will reckon his case better than it is. That is a notable passage which the apostle hints concerning himself, "I was alive without the law once; but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died." Here you have an account of the different apprehensions Paul had of his condition with and without the Word.

1. Here is his apprehension of his condition without the Word, "I was alive," says he, "without the law." Paul had the law—for he was a Pharisee; and they had the "form of knowledge, and of the truth of the law;" therefore, when he says he was "without the law," you must not take him literally—but spiritually; he was without the power and efficacy of it upon his heart and conscience, convincing, and awakening, and discovering sin; and so long as this was the case, he doubted not of his state—he was confident of the goodness of his condition. This he hinted when he says, "I was alive," but then,

2. Here is his apprehension of his condition with the word, and that is quite contrary to what it was before, "when the commandment came," says he, "then sin revived—and I died." When the Word of the Lord came with power upon his soul, when the Spirit of God set it home effectually upon his conscience, that is meant by the coming of the commandment. "Then sin revived—and I died;" that is, I saw the desperateness of my case, and the filthiness of all my self-righteousness. Then, my hope ceased, and my confidence failed; and, as before, I thought myself alive, and my sin dead; so when God had awakened conscience by the Word—then I saw my sin alive and powerful, and myself dead and miserable. So that this is the first reason why men go no further in the profession of religion, than to be almost Christians. It is because they mistake their state, and think it good when it is not; which mistake is five-fold.

1. A deceitful heart.

2. A proud spirit.

3. Taking common grace for saving grace.

4. Taking outward reformation, for true regeneration.

5. Lack of home application of the law of God to the heart and conscience.

Reason 2. Another reason why many go no farther in the profession of religion—is from Satan's cunning, who, if he cannot keep sinners in their open profaneness, then he labors to persuade them to take up with a form of godliness. If he cannot entice them on in their lusts, with a total neglect of heaven—then he entices them into such a profession as is sure to fall short of heaven. He will consent to the leaving some sin—just so long as we do but keep the rest; and to the doing of some duties—just so long as we neglect the rest. Nay, rather than part with his interest in the soul, he will yield far to our profession of religion, and consent to anything but our conversion, and closing with Christ for salvation. Satan does not care which way we come to hell—so as he gets us but there at last!

Reason 3. Another reason why many go no farther in the profession of religion—is from worldly and carnal policy. This is a great hindrance to many; policy many times enters caveats against piety. Jehu will not part with his calves lest he hazard his kingdom. Among many men there would be more zeal and honesty, were there less design and policy. There is an honest policy which helps religion—but carnal policy hinders it. We are commanded "to be wise as serpents;" now, "the serpent is the subtlest of creatures." But then we must be as "innocent as doves." If piety is without policy, it lacks security; if policy is without piety, it lacks integrity. Piety without policy is too simple to be safe; and policy without piety is too subtle to be good. Let men be as wise, as prudent, as subtle, as watchful as they will—but then let it be in the way of God; let it be joined with

holiness and integrity. That is a cursed wisdom which forbids a man to launch any further out in the depths of religion, than he can see the land, lest he be taken in a storm before he can make safe to shore again.

Reason 4. Another reason why many go no farther in the profession of religion—is because there are some lusts espoused in the heart, which hinder a hearty close with Christ. Though they bid fair—yet they come not to God's terms. The rich young ruler would have eternal life—and he bid fair for it. He had a willing obedience to every command but one—but only one; and will not God abate him one? Is God so severe? Will he not come down a little in his terms, when man rises so high? Must man yield all? Will God yield nothing? No, my brethren, he who underbids for heaven, shall as surely lose it—just as he who will give nothing for it. He who will not give all he has—part with all for that "pearl of great price"—shall as surely go without it, as much as he who has no interest in Christ. The not coming up to God's terms is the ruin of thousands of souls; nay, it is that upon which all who perish, do perish. A naked sinner to a naked Christ; a bleeding, broken sinner, to a bleeding, broken Christ—these are God's terms.

Most professors are like iron between two equal loadstones. God draws—and they incline towards God; and the world draws—and they incline to the world. They are between both. They would not leave God for the world—if they must leave the world for God. If they must part with all—with every lust, every darling sin, every beloved sin—why, then, the spirit of Demas possesses them, and God is forsaken by them. My brethren, this is the great reason why many who come to be almost Christians, go no farther. Some one beloved lust or other hinders them, and after a long and high profession, parts them and Christ forever! They did run well—but here it is that they give out, and after all fall short, and perish to all eternity!

I have thus answered these four questions—

1. How far a man may go in the way to heaven—and yet be but almost a Christian?
2. Why it is that a man goes so far, as to be almost a Christian?
3. When it is that a man is but almost a Christian, when he has gone thus far?
4. What is the reason men go no farther in religion, than to be almost Christians?

I proceed now to the APPLICATION.

Inference 1. Salvation is not so easy a thing as it is imagined to be. This is attested by our Lord Jesus Christ himself, "Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way which leads to life, and few there are who find it." The gate of conversion is a very narrow gate—and yet every man who would be saved eternally, must enter in at this narrow gate; for salvation is impossible without it. "Except a man is born again," born from above, "he cannot see the kingdom of God." Not that this gate is narrow simply, and in respect of itself. No; for converting grace is free. The gate of mercy stands open all the day long. In the offers of gospel grace, none are excluded, unless they exclude themselves. Christ does not say, "If such and such will come to me, I will not cast them out;" but "whoever comes unto me," be he who or what he will, if he has a heart to close with me, "I will never cast him out." He says not, "If this or that man will come—here is water of life for him;" but, "If any man will, let him take the water of life freely."

Christ grudges mercy to none; though salvation was dearly purchased for us, yet it is freely offered to us. So that the gate which leads to life is not narrow on Christ's part, or in respect of itself—but it is narrow in respect of us, because of our lusts and corruptions, which make the entrance difficult. A needle's eye is big enough for a thread to pass through—but it is a narrow passage for a rope: either the needle's eye must be enlarged, or the rope must be untwisted, or the entrance is impossible. So it is in this case—the gate of conversion is a very narrow passage for a carnal, corrupt sinner to go in at. The soul can never pass through with any one lust beloved and espoused; and, therefore, the sinner must be untwisted from every lust—he must lay aside the love of every sin, or he can never enter in at this gate, for it is a narrow gate. And when he is in at this narrow gate, he meets with a narrow way to walk in—so our Lord Christ says, "Narrow is the way which leads to life." And what way is this—but the way of sanctification? "For without holiness, no man shall ever see the Lord." Now this way of sanctification is a very narrow way, for it lies over the neck of every lust, and in the exercise of every grace, subduing the one, and improving the other; dying daily—and yet living daily; dying to sin and living to God. This is the way of sanctification! And O, how few are there who walk in this way! The broad way has many travelers in it—but this narrow way is like the ways of Canaan in the days of Shamgar. It is said, "In the days of Shamgar, the travelers walked through by-ways." In the Hebrew, it is, "through crooked ways." The way of holiness is for the most part, an unoccupied way—so says the prophet. "A way shall there be, and it shall be called the way of holiness, the unclean shall not pass over it; no lion shall be there, nor any ravenous beasts shall go up thereon; but the redeemed shall walk there." The unclean, and the lion, and the ravenous beast, they are in the crooked ways: none but the redeemed of the Lord walk in the way of the Lord. It is no wonder, then, that our Lord Christ says of life, that "few there are who find it," when the gate is strait, and the way narrow, which leads to it. Many pretend to walk in the narrow way—but they never entered in at the narrow gate; and many pretend to have entered in at the narrow gate—but they walk not in the narrow way.

It is a very common thing for a man to perish upon a mistake of his way. They go on in those paths which lead to hell—and yet hope to find heaven at last! Those twenty parts, fore-mentioned, run into destruction—and yet many choose them, and walk in them—yet think to arrive in heaven! As many profane and open sinners perish by choosing the way of death, so many formal professors perish by mistaking the way of life. This I gather from what our Lord Christ says, "Few there are who find it;" which does clearly imply what in Luke 12:24, he does plainly express, namely, that many seek it; many seek to enter in—and yet are not able; many run far—and yet do not "so run as to obtain." Many bid fair for the Pearl of great price—and yet go without it. Hell is had with ease—but the "kingdom of heaven suffers violence."

Inference 2. If many go thus far in the way to heaven—and yet miscarry—O then, what shall be the end of those who fall short of these! If he shall perish who is almost a Christian, what shall he do who is not at all a Christian! If he who owns Christ, and professes Christ, and leaves many sins for Christ, may be damned notwithstanding; what then shall his doom be that disowns Christ, and refuses to part with one sin, one lust, for Christ; nay, who openly blasphemes the precious name of Christ! If he who is outwardly sanctified shall yet be eternally rejected, what will the case be of such as are openly unsanctified, who have not only the plague of a hard heart within—but also the plague-sore of a profane life without? If the formal professor must be shut out—surely then the filthy adulterer, swinish drunkard, the foul-mouthed scoffer, yes, and every carnal sinner much

more! If there is a woe to him who falls short of heaven, then how sad is the woe to him who falls short of those who fall short of heaven! Ah, that God would make this an awakening word to sinners who are asleep in sin, without the least fear of death, or dread of damnation!

Use of EXAMINATION. Are there many in the world who are almost, and yet but almost Christians? Why, then, "it is time for us to call our condition into question, and to make a more narrow scrutiny into the truth of our spiritual estate;" what it is, whether it be right or not; whether we are sound and sincere in our profession of religion, or not. When our Lord Christ told his disciples, "One of you shall betray me," everyone began presently to reflect upon himself; "Master, is it I? Master, is it I?" So should we do, when the Lord reveals to us from his Word, how many there are under the profession of religion, who are but almost Christians, we should straightway reflect upon our hearts, "Lord, is it I? Is my heart unsound. Am I but almost a Christian? Am I one of those who shall miscarry at last? Am I a hypocrite under the profession of religion? Have I a form of godliness without the power?"

There are two questions of very great importance, which everyone of us should often put to ourselves: What am I? Where am I?

1. What am I? Am I a child of God or not? Am I sincere in religion, or am I only a hypocrite under a profession?

2. Where am I? Am I yet in a natural state, or a state of grace? Am I yet in the old root, in old Adam; or am I in the root Christ Jesus? Am I in the covenant of works, which ministers only wrath and death? or am I in the covenant of grace, which ministers life and peace?

Indeed, this is the first thing a man should look at. There must be a change of state, before there can be a change of heart. We must come under a change of covenant, before we can be under a change of condition; for the new heart and the new spirit is promised in the new covenant. There is nothing of that to be heard of in the old covenant: now a man must be under the new covenant, before he can receive the blessing promised in the new covenant; he must be in a new covenant state, before he can receive a new covenant heart. No mercy, no pardon, no change, no conversion, no grace—is dispensed out of covenant. Therefore this should be our great inquiry; for if we know not where we are, we cannot know what we are; and if we know not what we are, we cannot be what we should be; namely, altogether Christians.

Let me then, I beseech you, press this duty upon you who are professors. Try your own hearts; "examine yourselves whether you are in the faith; prove your own selves." I urge this upon most cogent arguments.

1. Because many rest in a notion of godliness and outward shows of religion—and yet remain in their natural condition. Many "are hearers of the Word," but "not doers of it," "and so deceive their own souls." James 1:22 Some neither hear nor do—these are profane sinners. Some both hear and do—these are true believers. Some hear, but they do not do—these are hypocritical professors. He who slights the ordinances cannot be a true Christian; but yet it is possible a man may own them, and profess them—and yet be no true Christian. Who would trust to a mere profession, that shall see Judas a disciple, an apostle, a preacher of the gospel, one who cast out devils, to be cast out himself? "He is not a Jew who is one outwardly, neither is that circumcision which is outward in the flesh. But he is a Jew who is one inwardly, and circumcision is that of the

heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men—but of God."

2. Because errors in the foundation are very dangerous. If we are not right in the main, in the fundamental work; if the foundation is not laid in grace in the heart—all our following profession comes to nothing. The house is built upon a sandy foundation, and though it may stand for awhile, yet "when the floods come, and the winds blow and beat upon it—great will be the fall of it."

3. Because many are the deceits that our souls are liable to in this case. There are many things like grace—which are not grace. It is the likeness and similitude of things, which deceives—and makes one thing to be taken for another. Many take gifts for grace; and common knowledge for saving knowledge. But a man may have great gifts—and yet no grace. He may have great knowledge—and yet not Jesus Christ. Some take common grace for saving grace; whereas, a man may believe all the truths of the gospel, all the promises, all the threatenings, all the articles of the creed, to be true—and yet perish for lack of saving grace!

Some take morality and restraining grace—for piety and renewing grace; whereas it is common to have sin much restrained, where the heart is not renewed. Some are deceived with a half-work, taking conviction for conversion, and reformation for regeneration; we have many mermaid-Christians. They are like Nebuchadnezzar's image—with a head of gold, and feet of clay. The devil cheats most men by a synecdoche, putting a part for the whole. They put partial obedience to some commands, for universal obedience to all commands.

Endless are the delusions that Satan fastens upon souls, for lack of this self-search. It is necessary, therefore, that we try our state, lest we take the shadow for the substance.

4. Satan will try us at one time or other. He will winnow us and sift us to the bottom; and if we now rest in a groundless confidence, it will then end in a comfortless despair. Nay, God himself will search and try us at the day of judgment especially; and who can abide that trial, that never tries his own heart?

5. Whatever a man's state be, whether he is altogether a Christian or not, whether his principle is sound or not—yet it is good to examine his own heart. If he finds his heart good, his principles right and sound—this will be matter of rejoicing. If he finds his heart rotten, his principles false and unsound—the discovery is in order to a renewing. If a man has a disease upon him, and knows it, he may send to the physician in time; but what a sad vexation will it be, not to see a disease until it is past cure? So for a man to be graceless, and not see it until it is too late—to think himself a Christian when he is not, and that he is in the right way to heaven, when he is in the ready way to hell—and yet not know it, until the judgment-day confounds his confidence—this is the most irrecoverable misery!

These are the grounds upon which I press this duty, of examining our state. O that God would help us in the doing this necessary duty!

Question. You say, "But how shall I come to know whether I am almost, or altogether, a Christian? If a man may go so far—and yet miscarry, how shall I know when my foundation is right—when I am a Christian indeed?"

Answer 1. The altogether Christian closes with, and accepts of Christ upon Gospel terms. True union makes a true Christian. Many close with Christ—but it is upon their own terms; they take him

and own him—but not as God offers him. The terms upon which God in the gospel offers Christ, are, that we shall accept of a broken Christ with a broken heart—and yet a whole Christ with the whole heart. A broken Christ with a broken heart—as a witness of our humility. A whole Christ with a whole heart—as a witness of our sincerity. A broken Christ respects his suffering for sin; a broken heart respects our sense of sin. A whole Christ includes all his offices. A whole heart includes all our faculties. Christ is a King, Priest, and Prophet, and all as Mediator. Without any one of these offices, the work of salvation could not have been completed. As a Priest—he redeems us. As a Prophet—he instructs us. As a King—he sanctifies and saves us. Therefore, the apostle says, "He is made to us a God of wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption." Righteousness and redemption flow from him—as a Priest. Wisdom flows from him—as a Prophet. Sanctification flows from him—as a King.

Many embrace Christ as a Priest—but yet they own him not as a King and Prophet. They like to share in his righteousness—but not to partake of his holiness. They would be redeemed by him—but they would not submit to him. They would be saved by his blood—but not submit to his power. Many love the privileges of the gospel—but not the duties of the gospel. Now these are but almost Christians, notwithstanding their close with Christ; for it is upon their own terms—but not upon God's. The offices of Christ may be distinguished—but they can never be divided. But the true Christian owns Christ in all his offices: he does not only close with him as Jesus—but as Lord Jesus. He says with Thomas, "My Lord, and my God." He does not only believe in the merit of his death—but also conforms to the manner of his life. As he believes in him, so he lives to him. He takes him for his wisdom, as well as for his righteousness; for his sanctification, as well as his redemption.

Answer 2. The altogether Christian has a thorough work of grace and sanctification wrought in the heart, as a spring of duties. Regeneration is a whole change; "all old things are done away, and all things become new." It is a perfect work, as to parts, though not as to degrees. Carnal men do duties—but they are from an unsanctified heart, and that spoils all. A new piece of cloth never does well in an old garment, for the rip is but made worse. When a man's heart is thoroughly renewed by grace, the mind savingly enlightened, the conscience thoroughly convinced, the will truly humbled and subdued, the affections spiritually raised and sanctified; and when mind, and will, and conscience, and affections, all join issue to help on with the performance of the duties commanded; then is a man altogether a Christian!

Answer 3. He who is altogether a Christian, looks to the manner, as well as to the matter of his duties. Not only that they are done—but how they are done. He knows the Christian's privileges lie in pronouns—but his duty in adverbs. It must not be only good—but that good must be rightly done. Here the almost Christian fails, he does the same duties that others do for the matter—but he does them not in the same manner; while he minds the substance, he regards not the circumstance. If he prays—he regards not faith and fervency in prayer. If he hears—he does not mind Christ's rule, "Take heed how you hear." If he obeys—he looks not to the frame of his heart in obeying, and therefore miscarries in all he does. Any of these defects spoil the good of every duty.

Answer 4. The altogether Christian is known by his sincerity in all his performances. Whatever a man does in the duties of the gospel, he cannot be a Christian without sincerity. Now, the almost

Christian fails in this; for though he does much, prays much, hears much, obeys much—yet he is a hypocrite under all.

Answer 5. He who is altogether a Christian, has an "answerableness within to the law without." There is an affinity between the Word of God—and the will of the Christian. His heart is, as it were—the transcript of the Word. The same holiness that is commanded in his Word—is implanted in the heart. The same conformity to Christ, that is enjoined by the Word of God—is wrought in the soul by the Spirit of God. The same obedience which the Word requires of him, the Lord enables him to perform, by his grace bestowed on him. This is that which is promised in the new covenant, "I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts." Now the writing his law in us, is nothing else but his working that grace and holiness in us, which the law commands and requires of us. In the old-covenant administration, God wrote his laws only upon tables of stone—but not upon the heart; and therefore, though God wrote them, yet they broke them. But in the new-covenant administration, God provides new tables: not tables of stone—but "the fleshly tables of the heart," and writes his laws there, that there might be a law within, answerable to the law without. And this every true Christian has. So that he may say in his measure, as our Lord Christ did, "I delight to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart."

Every believer has a light within him, not guiding him to despise and slight the Word—but to prize and walk by the light of the Word—which commands him to walk in the light, and the light directs him to walk according to the Word. Moreover, from this impression of the law upon the heart, obedience and conformity to God becomes the choice and delight of the soul; for holiness is the very nature of the new creature. So that if there were no Scripture, no Bible to guide him—yet he would be holy, for he has received "grace for grace;" there is grace within—to answer to the Word of grace without. Now, the almost Christian is a stranger to this law of God within; he may have some conformity to the Word in outward life—but he cannot have this answerableness to the Word in inward constitution.

Answer 6. The altogether Christian is much in duty—and yet much above duty. Much in duty, in regard of performances; much above duty, in regard of dependence. Much in duty by obeying; but much above duty by believing. He lives in his obedience—but he does not live upon his obedience—but upon Christ and his righteousness. The almost Christian fails in this. He is much in duty—but not above it—but rests in it; he works for rest, and he rests in his works. He cannot come to believe and obey too. If he believes, then he thinks there is no need of obedience, and so casts off that. If he is much in obedience, then he casts off believing, and thinks there is no need of that. He cannot say with David, "I have hoped for your salvation, and obeyed your commandments." The more a man is in duty, and the more above it; the more in doing, and more in believing—the more a Christian.

Answer 7. He who is altogether a Christian is universal in his obedience. He does not obey one command and neglect another. He does not do one duty and cast off another. He has respect to all the commands—he endeavors to leave every sin, and love every duty. The almost Christian fails in this, his obedience is partial and piece-meal. If he obeys one command, he breaks another. The duties which least cross his lusts—he is much in. But those duties which do cross his lusts—he lays aside. The Pharisees "fasted, prayed, paid tithes," etc.—but they did not lay aside their covetousness, their oppression; they "devoured widows' houses," they were unnatural to

parents.

Answer 8. The altogether Christian makes God's glory the chief end of all his performances. If he prays, or hears, or gives, or fasts, or repents, or obeys, etc., God's glory is the main end of all. It is true, he may have somewhat else at the back end of his work—but God is at the front end. As Moses' rod swallowed up the magicians' rods, so God's glory is the ultimate end, which swallows up all his other ends. Now the almost Christian fails in this, his ends are corrupt and selfish. God may possibly be at the back end of his work—but self is at the front end. For he who was never truly cast out of himself, can have no higher end than himself.

Now then, examine yourself by these characters, put the question to your own soul. Do you close with Christ upon gospel terms? Is grace in the heart, the principle of your performances? Do you look to the manner, as well as the matter of your duties? Do you do all in sincerity? Is there an answerableness within, to the Word without? Are you much above duty, when much in duty? Is your obedience universal? Lastly, is God's glory the end of all? If so, then you are not only almost—but altogether a Christian!

Second Use—of CAUTION. O take heed of being almost—and yet but almost a Christian! It is a great complaint of God against Ephraim, that "he is a cake not turned;" that is, half-baked, neither raw nor roasted, neither cold nor hot, as Laodicea, "Because you are neither hot nor cold, therefore I will spue you out of my mouth." This is a condition that of all others, is greatly unprofitable, exceedingly uncomfortable, and desperately dangerous!

First, It is greatly unprofitable to be but almost a Christian—for failing in any one point, will ruin us as surely as if we had never made any attempts for heaven. It is no advantage to the soul to be almost converted; for the little that we lack, spoils the good of all our attainments. There is no profit in leaving this or that sin, unless we leave all sin. Herod heard John gladly, and did many things—but he kept his Herodias, and that ruined him! Judas did many things, prayed much, preached much, professed much—but yet his covetousness spoiled all! One sin ruined the rich young ruler—who had kept all the commands but one. Thus "the person who keeps all of the laws except one is as guilty as the person who has broken all of God's laws." That is, he who lives willfully and allowedly in any one sin, brings the guilt of the violation of the whole law of God upon his soul, and that upon a twofold account.

1. Because he manifests the same contempt of the authority of God, in the wilful breach of one, as of all.

2. By allowing himself in the breach of any one command, he shows he kept none in obedience and conscience to God; for he who hates sin as sin, hates all sin, and he who obeys the command as the express will of God, obeys every command. And for this cause the least sin, willfully, and with allowance lived in, spoils the good of all our obedience, and lays the soul under the whole wrath of God!

One leak in a ship will sink it. "Gideon had seventy sons," and but one bastard son—and yet that one bastard destroyed all his other sons! Just so, may one sin spoil all our services; one lust beloved may spoil all our profession—as that one bastard slew all the sons of Gideon.

Secondly, It is exceedingly uncomfortable to be but almost a Christian. This appears in three ways.

1. In that such a one is hated both by God and men. The world hates him because of his profession; and God abhors him because of his dissimulation! The world hates him because he seems to be pious, and God hates him because he is not really pious. There is no person which God hates more, than the almost Christian! "I would that you were either cold or hot;" either all a Christian, or not at all a Christian. "Because you are neither cold nor hot, therefore I will spew you out of my mouth!" What a loathsome expression does God here use, to show what an utter abhorrency there is in him, against lukewarm Christians! How uncomfortable then must that condition needs be, wherein a man is abhorred both by God and man?

2. It is uncomfortable in regard of sufferings. For being almost a Christian, will bring us into suffering. But being but almost a Christian, will never carry us through suffering. In Matthew 13:20-21, it is said, "The one who received the seed that fell on rocky places is the man who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. But since he has no root, he lasts only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, he quickly falls away." There are four things observable in these words.

1. That the stony ground may receive the Word with joy.
2. That it may for some time abide in a profession of it—he lasts only a short time.
3. That his profession will expose to suffering; for, mark, persecution is said to arise because of the Word.
4. This suffering will cause an apostatizing from profession.

I gather hence, that a profession may expose a man as much to suffering, as the power of godliness. But without the power of godliness, there is no holding out in a profession under suffering. The world hates the show of godliness, and therefore persecutes it; the almost Christian lacks the substance, and therefore cannot hold out in it. Now this must needs be very uncomfortable; if I profess religion, I am likely to suffer persecution. But if I do but profess it, I will never endure persecution.

3. It is uncomfortable, in regard of that deceit it lays our hopes under. To be deceived of our hopes, causes sorrow as well as shame. He who is but almost a Christian, hopes for heaven; but unless he is altogether a Christian, he shall never come there! Now to perish with hopes of heaven—to go to hell by the gates of glory—to come to the very door, and then be shut out, as the five virgins were—to die in the wilderness, within the sight of the promised land, at the very brinks of Jordan; this must needs be sad! To come within a stride of the goal—and yet miss it; to sink within sight of harbor; O how uncomfortable is this!

Thirdly, It is desperately dangerous to be but almost a Christian. For,

1. This hinders the true work. A man lies in a fairer capacity for conversion, who lies in open enmity and rebellion, than he who soothes up himself in the formalities of religion. This I gather from the parable of the two sons, which our Lord Christ urged to the professing Scribes and Pharisees. "There was a man who had two sons. He went to the first and said, 'Son, go and work today in the vineyard.' 'I will not,' he answered, but later he changed his mind and went. Then the father went to the other son and said the same thing. He answered, 'I will, sir,' but he did not go." The first son represents the carnal, open sinner, who is called by the word, but refuses—yet

afterwards repents, and believes. The second represents the hypocritical professor, who pretends much—but performs little. Now mark how Christ applies this parable, "Truly I say unto you, that the publicans and harlots go into the kingdom of God before you!" And upon this account—it is better not to be at all, than to be almost a Christian; for the almost hinders the altogether. It is better, in this regard, to be a sinner without a profession, than to be a professor without conversion—for the one lies fairer for an inward change, when the other rests in an outward. Our Lord Christ tells the Scribe, "You are not far from the kingdom of God," yet never likely to come there. None are farther from the kingdom of God—than such as are not far from the kingdom of God. As for instance, when there lies but one lust, one sin between a soul and Christ—that soul is not far from Christ. But now, when the soul rests in this nearness to Christ—and yet will not part with that one lust for Christ—but thinks his condition secured, though that lust be not subdued; who is farther from the kingdom of God than he! So our Lord Christ tells the rich young ruler, "One thing you lack!" He was very near heaven, near being a Christian altogether, he was very near being saved; he tells Christ he had kept all the commands. He lacked but one thing; I say—but one thing. But it was a great thing. That one thing he lacked was more than all things he had, for it was the one thing necessary; it was a new heart, a work of grace in his soul, a change of state, a heart weaned from the world. This was the one thing, and he who lacks this one thing perishes, notwithstanding all his other things besides.

2. This condition is so like a state of grace, that to mistake of it for grace is easy and common. And it is very dangerous to mistake anything for grace—which is not grace; for in that a man contents himself—as if it were grace. Formality does often dwell next door to sincerity, and one sign serves both; and so the house may be easily mistaken, and by that means a man may take up his lodging there, and never find the way out again. Many a formal professor might have been a sincere believer, had he not mistook his profession for conversion, his duties for grace—and so rested in that for sincerity which is but hypocrisy.

3. It is a degree of blasphemy to pretend to grace—and yet have no grace. I gather this from Revelation 2:9, "I know the blasphemy of those who say they are Jews—and are not." A Jew here, is not to be taken literally and strictly only, for one of the lineage of Abraham—but it is to be taken metonymically for a true believer, one of the spiritual seed of Abraham, "He is a Jew who is one inwardly;" so that for a man to say he is a Jew when he is not, to profess an interest in Christ when he has none, to say he has grace when he has none—this Christ calls blasphemy. But why should Christ call this blasphemy? This is hypocrisy; but how may it be said to be blasphemy? Why, he blasphemes the great attribute of God's omniscience—he implicitly denies that God sees and knows our hearts and thoughts. For if a man did believe the omniscience of God, that he searches the heart and sees and knows all within—he would not dare to rest in a graceless profession of godliness. This, therefore, is blasphemy in the account of Christ.

4. It is dangerous to be almost a Christian, in that this stills and serves to quiet conscience. Now it is very dangerous to quiet conscience with anything but the blood of Christ. It is bad being at peace—until Christ speak peace. Nothing can truly pacify conscience, less than that which pacifies God—and that is the blood of the Lord Christ. Now the almost Christian quiets conscience—but not with the blood of Christ—it is not a peace flowing from Christ's propitiation—but a peace rising from a formal profession; not a peace of Christ's giving—but a peace of his own making. He silences and bridles conscience with a form of godliness, and so

makes it give way to an undoing, soul-destroying peace! He rocks his conscience asleep in the cradle of duties, and then it is a thousand to one, that it never awakens until judgment! Ah, my brethren, it is better to have conscience never quiet, than quieted any way but by "the blood of sprinkling." A good conscience unquiet—is the greatest affliction to saints! An evil conscience quiet—is the greatest judgment to unconverted sinners!

5. It is dangerous to be almost a Christian, in respect of the unpardonable sin. The sin which the Scripture says, "can never be forgiven, neither in this world nor in the world to come;" I mean the sin against the Holy Spirit. Now such are only capable of sinning that sin—as are but almost Christians. A true believer cannot; the work of grace in his heart, that seed of God which abides in him, secures him against it. The profane, ignorant, open sinner cannot; though he lives daily and hourly in sin, yet he cannot commit this sin, for it must be from an enlightened mind. Every sinner, under the gospel, especially sins sadly against the Holy Spirit, against the strivings and motions of the Spirit—he "always resists the Holy Spirit;" but yet this is not the sin against the Holy Spirit. There must be three ingredients to make up that sin.

1st, It must be willful—"If we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remains no more sacrifice for sin."

2nd, It must be against light and conviction—"after we have received the knowledge of the truth."

3rd, It must be in resolved malice.

Now you shall find all these ingredients in the sin of the Pharisees, Matthew 12:22. Christ heals one who was "possessed of the devil;" a great work, which amazed all the people, verse 23. But what say the Pharisees? see verse 24. "This man casts out devils—by the prince of devils!" Now that this was the sin against the Holy Spirit, is clear; for it was both willful and malicious, and against clear convictions. They could not but see that he was the Son of God, and that this work was a special work of the Spirit of God in him; and yet they say, that he wrought this miracle by the devil! Whereupon Christ charges them with this "sin against the Holy Spirit," verse 31, 32, 33. Now the Pharisees were a sort of great religious professors; whence I gather this conclusion, that it is the professor of religion, who is the subject of this unpardonable sin; not the open carnal sinner, not the true believer—but the formal professor. Not the profane sinner—for he has neither light nor grace. Not the believer—for he has both light and grace. Therefore the formal professor, for he has light but no grace.

Here, then, is the great danger of being almost a Christian—he is liable to this dreadful unpardonable sin.

6. The being but almost a Christian, subjects us to apostasy. He who gets no good by walking in the ways of God, will quickly leave them and walk no more in them. This I gather from Hosea 14:9. "Who is wise? He will realize these things. Who is discerning? He will understand them. The ways of the Lord are right; the righteous walk in them, but the rebellious stumble in them." "The righteous walk in them." He whose heart is renewed and made right with God, he shall keep close to God in his ways. "But the rebellious stumble in them." The word in the Hebrew signifies to prevaricate; so that we may read the words thus, "The ways of the Lord are right; the righteous walk in them, but he who prevaricates (that is, a hypocrite,) in the ways of God, he shall stumble in them." An unsound heart will never hold out long in the ways of God, "He was a burning and a

shining light, and you were willing for a season to rejoice in that light." "For a season;" For a short space—and then they left him.

It is a notable question Job puts concerning the hypocrite, "For what is the hope of the hypocrite, when God takes away his soul? Will he delight himself in the Almighty? will he always call upon God?" Job 27:8, Job 27:10. He may do much—but those two things he cannot do:

1. He cannot make God his delight.

2. He cannot persevere in duties at all times, and in all conditions. He will be an apostate at last. The scab of hypocrisy usually breaks out in the plague-sore of apostasy. Conversion ground is standing ground; it is terra firma; but a graceless profession of religion is a slippery ground, and falling ground. Julian the apostate, was first Julian the professor. I know it is possible that a believer may fall—but yet "he rises again, the everlasting arms are underneath him." But when the hypocrite falls, who shall help him up? Solomon says, "Woe to him who is alone when he falls!" that is without interest in Christ. Why woe to him? "For he has none to help him up." If Jesus Christ does not recover him, who can? David fell and was restored—for he had one to help him up. But Judas fell and perished—for he was alone.

7. This being but almost a Christian, provokes God to bring dreadful spiritual judgments upon a man. Barrenness is a spiritual judgment: now this provokes God to give us up to barrenness. When Christ found the fig-tree which had leaves but no fruit, he pronounces the curse of barrenness upon it, "Fruit will never grow on you again." And so Ezekiel 47:11, "The miry places thereof, and the marshy places thereof, shall not be healed; they shall be given to salt." A spirit of delusion is a sad judgment. Why, this is the almost Christian's judgment—that receives the truth—but not in the love of it, "Because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved; for this cause God shall send them strong delusions." To lose either light or sight, either ordinances or eyes—is a great spiritual judgment. Why, this is the almost Christian's judgment—he who profits not under the means of God, provokes God to take away either light or sight; either the ordinances from before his eyes, or else to blind his eyes under the ordinances. To have a hard heart, is a dreadful judgment, and there is no hypocrite, but he has a hard heart. My brethren, it is a dreadful thing for God to give a man up to spiritual judgments! Now this being almost a Christian, provokes God to give a man up to spiritual judgments: surely, therefore, it is a very dangerous thing to be almost a Christian!

8. Being almost and but almost Christians—will exceedingly aggravate our damnation. The higher a man rises under the means, the lower he falls if he miscarries. He who falls but a little short of heaven—will fall deepest into hell! He who has been nearest to conversion, yet remain unconverted—shall have the deepest damnation when he is judged. Capernaum's sentence shall exceed Sodom's for severity; because she exceeded Sodom in the enjoyment of mercy—she received more from God, she knew more of God, she professed much for God—and yet was not right with God; therefore, she shall be punished more by God! The higher the rise—the greater the fall; the higher the profession—the greater the damnation. He miscarries with a light in his hand; he perishes under many convictions. Convictions never end but in a sound conversion, as in all saints; or in a sad damnation, as in all hypocrites. Praying-ground, hearing-ground, professing-ground, and conviction-ground, is, of all, the worst ground to perish upon!

Now, then, to sum up all under this head. If to be almost a Christian hinders the true work of conversion; if it is easily mistaken for conversion; if it is a degree of blasphemy; if this is that which quiets conscience; if this subjects a man to commit the unpardonable sin; if it lays us liable to apostasy; if it provokes God to give us up to spiritual judgments; and if it is that which exceedingly aggravates our damnation; surely then it is a very dangerous thing to be almost and but almost a Christian!

O labor to be altogether Christians, to go farther than they who have gone farthest—and yet fall short! This is the great counsel of the Holy Spirit, "So run that you may obtain." "Give diligence to make your calling and election sure."

Use—of EXHORTATION. Do you need any MOTIVES to quicken you up to this important duty?

Consideration 1. This is that which is not only commanded by God—but that whereunto all the commands of God tend. A perfect conformity of heart and life to God—is the sum and substance of all the commands both of the Old and the New Testament. As the harlot was for the dividing of the child, so Satan is for dividing the heart. He would have our love and affections shared between Christ and our lusts; for he knows that Christ reckons we love him not at all, unless we love him above all. But God will have all or none, "My son, give me your heart!" "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your might!"

Look into the Scripture, and see what foundation that salvation stands upon—and you shall find that God has fixed it upon those great duties which alone tend to the perfection of your state as Christians. God has fixed your all upon believing; only believe. God has fixed your all upon obedience, "You shall worship the Lord your God, and him only shall you serve." "Only let your life be such as befits the gospel of Christ." So that your all is fixed by God upon these two great duties of believing and obeying; both which tend to the perfection of your state as Christians. Now, shall God command—and shall not we obey? Can there be a higher motive to duty than the authority of the great God, whose will is the eternal rule of righteousness? "O let us fear God, and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man!"

Consideration 2. The Lord Christ is a thorough Savior—a perfect and complete Mediator. He has not shed his blood by halves, nor satisfied the justice of God, and redeemed sinners by halves. No—but he went through with his undertaking; he bore all our sins, and shed all his blood! He died to the utmost, satisfied the justice of God to the utmost, redeemed sinners to the utmost, and now that he is in heaven he intercedes to the utmost, and saves to the utmost. It is observed, that our Lord Christ, when he was upon the earth, in the days of his flesh, he wrought no half-cures; but whoever they brought to him for healing—he healed them thoroughly. "People brought all their sick to him and begged him to let the sick just touch the edge of his cloak, and all who touched him were healed." Matthew 14:35-36.

O what an excellent physician is here! There is none like him! He cures infallibly, immediately, and perfectly! He cures infallibly. None ever came to him for healing—who went away without it. He never practiced upon any who miscarried under his hand. He cures immediately. No sooner is his garment touched—but his patient is healed! The leper, Matthew 8:3, is no sooner touched—but immediately cured! The two blind men, Matthew 20:34, are no sooner touched—but their eyes were immediately opened! He cures perfectly, "As many as were touched—were made perfectly

whole." Now all this was to show what a perfect and complete Savior Jesus Christ would be, to all sinners who would come to him. They would find healing in his blood, virtue in his righteousness, and pardon for all their sins—whatever they were. Look! as Christ healed all the diseases of all who came to him, when he was on earth—so he pardons all the sins, and heals all the wounds of all those souls that come to him, now that he is in heaven. He is a complete Savior—and shall not we be complete saints? Shall he be altogether a Redeemer; and shall not we be altogether believers? O, what a shame is this!

Consideration 3. There is enough in true religion to engage us to be altogether Christians; and that whether we respect profit or comfort, for grace brings both.

First, Godliness is a GAINFUL thing; and this is a compelling motive that becomes effectual upon all. Gain is the god which the world worships. What will not men do—what will they not suffer—for gain? What journeys do men take by land, what voyages by sea, through hot and cold, through fair and foul, through storm and shine, through day and night—and all for gain! Now there is no calling so gainful as godliness; it is the most profitable employment we can take up. "Godliness is profitable unto all things." 1 Timothy 4:8. "Godliness with contentment is great gain." 1 Timothy 6:6. It is a great revenue. If it is closely followed, it brings in the greatest income.

Indeed, some men are religious for the world's sake; such shall be sure not to gain. But those who are religious for piety's sake, shall be sure not to lose, if heaven and earth can recompense them; for "godliness has the promise both of the life that now is, and of that which is to come." Ah, who would not be a Christian, when the gain of godliness is so great! Many gain much in their worldly calling—but the profit which the true believer has from one hour's communion with God in Christ, weighs down all the gain of the world. "Cursed is that man who counts all the gain of the world worth one hour's communion with Jesus Christ," says that noble Marquis, Galeaceus Caracciola.

It is nowhere said in Scripture, "Happy is the man who finds silver, and the man who gets fine gold." These are of no weight in the balance of the sanctuary; but it is said, "Happy is the person who finds wisdom and gains understanding. For the profit of wisdom is better than silver, and her wages are better than gold. Wisdom is more precious than rubies; nothing you desire can compare with her. She offers you life in her right hand, and riches and honor in her left. She will guide you down delightful paths; all her ways are satisfying." Proverbs 3:13-17. By wisdom and understanding here, we are to understand the grace of Christ; and so the spirit of God interprets it. "Behold the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding." Now of all merchants, he who trades in this wisdom and understanding will prove the richest man—one grain of godliness outweighs all the gold of Ophir. There are no riches like being rich in grace. For,

1. Godliness is the most necessary gain. The things of this world are not so. Silver and gold are not so—we may be happy without them. There is but one thing necessary, and that is the grace of Jesus Christ in the heart. Have this—and have all. Lack this—and lack all.

2. Godliness is the most substantial gain. The things of this world are more shadow than substance. Pleasure, honor, and profit comprehend all things in this world, and therefore are the carnal man's trinity. The apostle John calls them, "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life." This, (says he,) is all that is in the world: and truly, if this be all, all is nothing. For what is pleasure—but a dream and conceit? What is honor—but fancy and opinion? And what is

profit—but a thing of naught? "Why will you set your eyes upon that which is not?" The things of the world have in them no sound substance, though foolish, carnal men call them substance. But grace is a substantial good; so our Lord Christ calls it, "That I may cause those who love me to inherit substance," to inherit that which is. Grace is a reality: other things are but show and fancy.

3. Godliness is the safest gain. The gain of worldly things is always with difficulty—but seldom with safety. The soul is often hazarded in the over-eager pursuit of worldly things. Nay, thousands do pawn, and lose, and damn their precious souls eternally—for a little silver and gold, which are but the guts and garbage of the earth! "For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" Mark 8:36. But the gain of godliness is ever with safety to the soul; nay, the soul is lost and undone without it, and not saved but by the attainment of it. A soul without grace is in a lost and perishing condition. The hazard of eternity is never over with us—until the grace of Christ Jesus is sought by us, and wrought in us.

4. Godliness is the surest gain. As it is safe—so it is sure. Men make great ventures for the world—but all runs upon uncertainty. Many venture much, and wait long—and yet find no return—but only disappointment. They sow much—and yet reap nothing. But the gain of godliness is sure; "to him who sows righteousness, shall be a sure reward." And as the things of this world are uncertain in the getting, so they are uncertain in the keeping. If men do not undo us, moths may; if robbery does not, rust may; if rust does not, fire may; to which all earthly treasures are incident, as our Lord Christ teaches us, "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal." Matthew 6:19. Solomon pictures the world with wings, "Do not wear yourself out to get rich; have the wisdom to show restraint. Cast but a glance at riches, and they are gone, for they will surely sprout wings and fly off to the sky like an eagle!" Proverbs 23:4-5. A man may be rich as Dives today—and yet poor as Lazarus tomorrow. O how uncertain are all worldly things! But the true treasure of grace is in the heart—that can never be lost. It is out of the reach both of rust and robber. He who gets the world—gets a good he can never keep! He who gets grace—gets a good he shall never lose!

5. The profit of godliness lies not only in this world—but in the world to come. All other profit, lies in this world only. Riches and honor, etc., are called this world's goods. But the riches of godliness are chiefly in heaven—in the enjoyment of God, and Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit, among saints and angels in glory. Lo, this is the gain of godliness; "such honor have all his saints!"

6. The gain of godliness is a durable and eternal gain. All this world's goods are perishing; perishing pleasures, perishing honors, perishing profits, and perishing comforts. "Riches are not forever!" Says Job, "Have you entered into the treasures of the snow?" Gregory upon these words observes, that earthly treasures are treasures of snow. What pains do children take to scrape and roll the snow together to make a snow-ball, which is no sooner done but the heat of the sun dissolves it, and it comes to nothing. Why, the treasures of worldly men are but treasures of snow. When death and judgment come, they melt away, and come to nothing. "Riches profit not in the day of wrath—but righteousness delivers from death." You see here the great advantage of godliness; so that if we look at profit, we shall find enough in godliness, to engage us to be altogether Christians.

Second, Godliness is the most COMFORTABLE profession. There are no comforts which can compare to the comforts of grace and godliness.

1. Worldly comfort is only external. It is but skin-deep, "In the midst of laughter the heart is sorrowful." But the comfort which flows from godliness is an inward comfort, a spiritual joy; therefore it is called gladness of heart. "You have put gladness in my heart;" other joy smooths the brow—but this fills the heart.

2. Worldly comfort is always mixed. The spring of worldly comfort is in the creature, in some earthly enjoyment; and, therefore, the comfort of worldly men must needs be mixed and muddy, "an unclean fountain cannot send forth pure water." But spiritual comfort has an upper spring. The comfort which accompanies godliness, flows from the manifestations of the love of God in Christ, from the workings of the blessed Spirit in the heart—who is first a Counselor, and then a comforter. Therefore the comforts of the saints must needs be pure and unmixed comforts; for they flow from a pure spring.

3. Worldly comfort is very fading and transitory. "The triumphing of the wicked is but short, and the joy of the hypocrite is but for a moment." Solomon compares it to the "crackling of thorns under a pot," which is but a blaze, and soon out. So is the comfort of carnal hearts. But the comfort of godliness is a durable and abiding comfort; "your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man shall take from you." The comfort of godliness is lasting—yes everlasting; it abides by us in life, in death, and after death.

First, "It abides by us in LIFE." Grace and peace go together. Godliness naturally brings forth comfort and peace: "The effect of righteousness, shall be peace." It is said of the primitive Christians, "They walked in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit." Acts 9:31. Every duty done in uprightness and sincerity, reflects some comfort upon the soul. "In keeping the commands, there is great reward;" not only for keeping of them—but in keeping of them. As every flower, so every duty carries sweetness and refreshing with it.

Objection. "But who more dejected and disconsolate than believers? Whose lives are more uncomfortable? Whose mouths are more filled with complaints, than theirs? If a condition of godliness and Christianity is a condition of so much comfort—then why are they thus?"

Solution. That the people of God are oftentimes without comfort, I grant, "They may walk in the dark—and have no light." But this is not the products of godliness; grace brings forth no such fruit as this. There is a threefold rise and spring of it: Sin within, Desertion and Temptation without.

1. SIN within. The saints of God are not all spirit, and no flesh; all grace, and no sin. They are made up of contrary principles. There is light and darkness in the same mind; sin and grace in the same will; carnal and spiritual in the same affections; there is "the flesh lusting against the Spirit." In all these, and too oft the Lord knows, is the believer led away captive by these warring lusts. So was the holy apostle himself, "I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me. I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin." This was that which broke his spiritual peace, and filled his soul with trouble and complaints, as you see, "O wretched man who I am! who shall deliver me from this body of death?" So that it is sin which interrupts the peace of God's people. Indwelling lust, stirring and breaking forth, must needs cause trouble and grief in the soul of a believer; for it is as natural for sin to bring forth trouble, as it is for grace to bring forth peace. Every sin contracts a new guilt upon the soul, and guilt provokes God; and where there is a sense of guilt contracted, and God

provoked—there can be no peace, no quiet in that soul, until faith procures fresh sprinklings of the blood of Jesus Christ upon the conscience.

2. Another spring of the believer's trouble and disconsolateness of spirit, is the DESERTIONS of God. his follows upon the former. God sometimes disappears, and hides himself from his people, "Truly, you are a God who hides yourself." But the cause of God's hiding himself, is the believer's sinning, "Your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you." In heaven, where there is no sinning, there is no losing the light of God's countenance for a moment; and if saints here could serve God without corruption, they would enjoy God without desertion; but this cannot be. While we are in this state, remaining lusts will stir and break forth, and then God will hide his face, and this must needs be trouble, "You did hide your face—and I was troubled." The light of God's countenance, shining upon the soul, is the Christian's heaven on this side heaven; and therefore it is no wonder if the hiding of his face is looked upon by the soul, as one of the days of hell. So it was by David, "The sorrows of death compassed me, the pains of hell got hold upon me; I found trouble and sorrow."

3. A third spring of the believer's trouble and disconsolateness of spirit, is the TEMPTATIONS of Satan. He is the great enemy of saints, and he envies the quiet and comfort that their hearts are filled with—when his own conscience is brimmed with horror and terror. Therefore, though he knows that he cannot destroy their peace, yet he labors to disturb their peace. As the blessed Spirit of God is first a sanctifier, and then a comforter, working grace in order to peace; so this cursed spirit of hell is first a tempter, and then a troubler; first persuading to act sin, and then accusing for sin. This is his constant practice upon the spirits of God's people. He cannot endure that they should live in the light of God's countenance, when himself is doomed to eternal, intolerable darkness! And thus you see whence it is that the people of God are often under trouble and complaint. All arises from these three springs of Sin within, Desertions and Temptations without. If the saints could serve God without sinning, and enjoy God without withdrawing, and resist Satan without yielding—they would enjoy peace and comfort without sorrowing. This must be endeavored constantly here—but it will never be attained fully but in heaven. But yet so far as grace is the prevailing principle in the heart, and so far as the power of godliness is exercised in this life—so far the condition of a child of God is a condition of peace. For it is an undoubted truth, that the fruit of righteousness shall be peace. But suppose the people of God experience little of this comfort in this life, yet,

Secondly, They find it in the day of DEATH. Grace and holiness will minister unto us then, and that ministration will be peace. A believer has a twofold spring of comfort, each one emptying itself into his soul in a dying season; one is from above him, the other is from within him. The spring which runs comfort from above him, is the blood of Christ sprinkled upon the conscience; the spring that runs comfort from within him, is the sincerity of his heart in God's service. When we lie upon a death-bed, and can reflect upon our principles and performances in the service of God, and there find uprightness and sincerity of heart running through all—this must needs be comfort. It was so to Hezekiah, "Remember, O Lord, how I have walked before you in truth, and with a perfect heart; and have done what is good in your sight." Nothing makes a death-bed so uneasy and hard—as a life spent in the service of sin and lust. Nothing makes a death-bed so soft and sweet—as a life spent in the service of God and Christ. Or perhaps the people of God should not meet with this comfort at the time of death; yet,

Thirdly, They shall be sure to find it AFTER DEATH. If time brings none of this fruit to ripeness, yet eternity shall! Grace in time—will be glory in eternity! Holiness now—will be happiness then! "Whatever a man sows he will also reap; because the one who sows to his flesh will reap corruption from the flesh, but the one who sows to the Spirit will reap eternal life from the Spirit." When sin shall end in sorrow and misery—holiness shall end in joy and glory! "Well done, good and faithful servant, enter you into the joy of your Lord!" Whoever shares in the grace of Christ in this world, shall share in the joys of Christ in the world to come; which is "joy unspeakable, and full of glory!"

Lo, here is the fruit of godliness. Say now, if there is not enough in true religion, whether we respect profit or comfort, to engage us to be Christians throughout?

Consideration 4. What an entire resignation wicked men make of themselves to their lusts—and shall not we do so to the Lord Christ! They give up themselves without reserve to the pleasures of sin; and shall we have our reserves in the service of God! They are altogether sinners; and shall not we be altogether saints! They run, and faint not, in the service of their lusts; and shall we faint, and not run, in the service of Christ! Shall the servants of corruption have their ears bored to the door-posts of sin, in token of an entire and perpetual service, and shall we not give up ourselves to the Lord Christ, to be his forever! Shall others make a "covenant with hell and death," and shall not we "join ourselves to God in an everlasting covenant that cannot be forgotten!" Shall they take more pains to damn their souls—than we do to save ours! Shall they make more speed to a place of punishment, than we do to a crown of righteousness! Which do you judge best, to be saved everlastingly, or to perish everlastingly? Which do you count the best master—God or the devil? Christ or your lusts? I know you will determine it on Christ's side.

O then! when others serve their lusts with all their hearts—you must serve Christ with all your hearts. If the hearts of others are fully set to do evil—then much more let the hearts of believers be fully set to do good.

Consideration 5. If you are not altogether Christians, you will never be able to appear with comfort before God, nor to stand in the judgment of the last and great day. For this sad dilemma will silence every hypocrite: "If my commands were not holy, just, and good—why do you not obey them? If Jesus Christ was not worth the having—why did you profess him? If he was, then why did you not cleave to him, and close with him? If my ordinances were not appointed to convert and save souls—why did you sit under them, and rest in the performance of them? Or if they were—then why did you not submit to the power of them? If religion is not good—why did you profess it? If it is good—why do you not practice it?"

"Friend, how did you get in here, without having on a wedding-garment?" If it was not a wedding-feast, why did you come at the invitation? If it was, then why did you come without a wedding-garment? I would but ask a hypocritical professor of the Gospel, what he will answer in that day? Truly you deprive yourselves of all possibility of an answer in "the day of the righteous judgment of God." It is said of the man who had no wedding-garment on, that when Christ came and examined him, he was speechless. He who is graceless in a day of grace, will be speechless in a day of judgment! Professing Christ without a heart to close with Christ, will leave our souls inexcusable, and make our damnation unavoidable and more intolerable.

These are the motives to enforce the duty; and O that God would set them home upon your hearts and consciences, that you might not dare to rest a moment longer in a half-work, or in being almost Christians—but that you might be altogether Christians!

Question. But you will say possibly, "How shall I do this? What means shall I use, that I may attain to a thorough work in my heart; that I may be no longer almost—but altogether a Christian?"

Answer. Now I shall lay down three rules of direction—to further and help you in this important duty.

Direction 1. Break off all false peace of conscience. This is the devil's bond to hold the soul from seeking after Christ. As there is the peace of God—so there is the peace of Satan; but they are easily known, for they are as contrary as heaven and hell, as light and darkness. The peace of God, flows from a work of grace in the soul, and is the peace of a regenerate state; but the peace of Satan is the peace of an unregenerate state, it is the peace of death. In the grave Job says there is peace, "There the wicked cease from troubling;" so a soul dead in sin is full of peace, the wicked one troubles him not. The peace of God in the soul is a peace flowing from removal of guilt, by justifying grace, "Being justified by faith in his blood, we have peace with God." But the peace of Satan in the soul arises and is maintained by a stupidity of spirit, and insensibility of guilt upon the conscience. The peace of God is a peace from sin that fortifies the heart against it, "The peace of God which passes all men's understanding, shall, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus." The more of this peace there is in the soul, the more is the soul fortified against sin. But the peace of Satan—is peace in sin, "The strong man armed keeps the house, and there is all at peace." The saint's peace is a peace with God—but not with sin. The sinner's peace is a peace with sin—but not with God. This is a peace better broken than kept. It is a false, a dangerous, an undoing peace. My brethren, death and judgment will break all peace of conscience—but not that which is wrought by Christ in the soul, and is the fruit of the "blood of sprinkling." "When he gives quietness, who can make trouble?" Now that peace which death will break—why should you keep? Who would be fond of that peace—which the flames of hell will burn up! And yet how many travel to hell through the fool's paradise of a false peace? O break off this peace! for we can have no peace with God in Christ, while this peace remains in our hearts! The Lord Christ gives no peace to those who will not seek it; and that man will never seek it, who does not see his need of it—he who is at peace in his lusts, sees no need of the peace of Christ. The sinner must be wounded for sin, and troubled under it, before Christ will heal his wounds, and give him peace from it.

Direction 2. Labor after a thorough work of conviction. Every conviction will not do it. The almost Christian has his convictions, as well as the true Christian, or else he had never gone so far; but they are not sound and right convictions, or else he would have gone farther. God will have the soul truly sensible of the bitterness of sin, before it shall taste the sweetness of mercy. The plough of conviction must go deep, and make deep furrows in the heart, before God will sow the precious seed of grace and comfort there—that so it may have depth of earth to grow in. This is the constant method of God: first to show man his sin—then his Savior; first his danger—then his Redeemer; first his wound—then his cure; first his own vileness—then Christ's righteousness. We must see the leprosy of our sinfulness, and be brought to cry out, "Unclean, unclean!" We must mourn for Him whom we have pierced—and then he sets open for us a "fountain to cleanse them

from all sin and impurity." The sinner must see the vileness and unprofitableness of his unrighteousness, before he profit by Christ's righteousness. The Israelites are first stung with the fiery serpents—and then the brazen serpent is set up to heal them. Ephraim is first thoroughly convinced, and then God's affections of mercy worked toward him. Thus it was with Paul, Manasseh, the jailer, etc. So that this is the unchangeable method of God in bestowing grace—to begin with conviction of sin. O therefore labor for thorough conviction! There are three things we should especially be convinced of.

First, be convinced of the evil of sin—the filthy and heinous nature of it. Sin is the greatest evil in the world—it wrongs God; it wounds Christ; it grieves the Holy Spirit; it damns a precious soul. All other evils cannot be compared with this. Though to DO sin is the worst work—yet to SEE sin is the best sight! Sin discovered in its vileness—makes Christ to be desired in his fullness. But above all, labor to be convinced of the mischief of an unsound heart; what an abhorrence it is to God, what certain ruin it brings upon the soul. O think often upon the hypocrite's hell. "For the hearts of these people are hardened, and their ears cannot hear, and they have closed their eyes—so their eyes cannot see, and their ears cannot hear, and their hearts cannot understand, and they cannot turn to me and let me heal them."

Secondly, be convinced of the misery and desperate danger of a natural condition. Until we see the plague of our hearts and the misery of our state by nature—we shall never be brought off ourselves to seek help in another.

Thirdly, be convinced of the utter insufficiency and inability of anything below Christ Jesus to minister relief to your soul in this case. All things besides Jesus Christ are "physicians of no value." Religious duties, performances, prayers, tears, self-righteousness, avail nothing in this case. They make us like the troops of Tema, to return "ashamed at our disappointment" from such "failing brooks." Alas! it is Christ's infinite righteousness which must atone for our sins--for it is an infinite God whom we have sinned against! If ever your sin is pardoned--it is Christ's infinite mercy which must pardon it! If ever you are reconciled to God--it is Christ's infinite merit which must do it! If ever your heart is changed--it is Christ's infinite power which must effect it! If ever your soul escapes hell, and is saved at last--it is Christ's infinite grace which must save it! In these three things, right and sound conviction lies. Wherever the Spirit of God works these thorough convictions, it is in order to a true and sound conversion: for by this means the soul is brought under a right qualification for the receiving of Christ. A sinner can never come to Christ—for he is dead in sin, in enmity against Christ, an enemy to God and the grace of God. But there are certain qualifications which come between the soul dead state in sin, and the work of conversion and closing with Christ—whereby the soul is put into a capacity of receiving the Lord Jesus Christ. No man is brought immediately out of his dead state and made to believe in Jesus Christ; there are some qualifications coming in between. Sound convictions are the right qualifications for the sinner's receiving Christ.

"I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." Luke 5:32. That is, such as see themselves sinners, and thereby in a lost condition. So Luke exemplifies it, "The Son of Man has come to seek and to save those who are lost." "He is anointed, and sent to bind up the brokenhearted, to comfort all who mourn." O therefore, if you would be sound Christians, get sound convictions. Ask those who are believers indeed, and they will tell you, had it not been for

their convictions, they would have never sought after Christ for sanctification and salvation! They will tell you they would have perished—if they had not perished; they would have been in eternal bondage—but for their spiritual bondage!

Direction 3. Never rest in convictions—until they end in conversion. This is that wherein most men miscarry. They rest in their convictions, and take them for conversion—as if sin seen were therefore sin forgiven—as if a sight of the lack of grace were the truth of the work of grace. That is a notable place in Hosea 13:12-13, "Ephraim's guilt is preserved; his sin is stored up. Labor pains come on him. When the time comes, he will not be born." As the child comes out of the womb, so is conversion born out of the womb of conviction. Now when the child sticks between the womb and the world, it is dangerous, it hazards the life both of mother and child. So when a sinner rests in conviction, and goes no farther—but sticks in the womb—this is very dangerous, and hazards the life of the soul. You who are at any time under convictions, O take heed of resting in them—do not stick in the womb!

Though it is true, that conviction is the first step to conversion—yet it is not conversion. A man may carry his convictions along with him into hell. What is that which troubles poor creatures, when they come to die, but this—I have not improved my convictions; at such a time I was convinced of sin—but yet I went on in sin in the face of my convictions; in such a sermon I was convinced of such a duty—but I slighted the conviction; I was convinced of my lack of Christ, and of the readiness of Christ to pardon and save; but alas! I followed not the conviction.

Remember this; slighted convictions are the worst death-bed companions. There are two things especially, which above all others make a death-bed very uncomfortable:

1. Purposes and promises not performed.
2. Convictions slighted and not improved. When a man takes up purposes to close with Christ—and yet puts them not into execution; and when he is convinced of sin and duty—and yet improves not his convictions—O this will sting and wound at last! Now therefore, has the Spirit of the Lord been at work in your souls? Have you ever been convinced of the evil of sin, of the misery of a natural state, of the insufficiency of all things under heaven to help, of the fullness and righteousness of Jesus Christ, of the necessity of resting upon him for pardon and peace, for sanctification and salvation? Have you ever been really convinced of these things? O then, as you love your own souls, as ever you hope to be saved at last, and enjoy God forever—improve these convictions, and be sure that you do not rest in them until they rise up to a thorough close with the Lord Jesus Christ, and so end in a sound and perfect conversion! Thus shall you be not only almost—but altogether a Christian!

Power of Grace in Weaning

The Power of Grace in Weaning

the Heart from the World by Matthew Mead

"Lord, my heart is not haughty, nor my eyes lofty: neither do I exercise myself in great matters, or in things too high for me. Surely I have behaved and quieted myself, as a child that is weaned of his mother. My soul is even as a weaned child." Psalms 131:1-2

Chrysostom, in commending the grace of humility, says, "Humility is the foundation of Christian virtue." Indeed, humility is the ornament of all the graces of God's Spirit. Grace is the beauty of the soul, and humility is the beauty of grace.

Now David, being about to commend this grace to the saints, does propound himself as an example of it in this Psalm: "My heart is not proud, O Lord, my eyes are not haughty; I do not concern myself with great matters or things too wonderful for me." Psalms 131:1. But what was it, which thus humbled David's heart, and took him off from doting upon the world's grandeur, and from delighting himself in present enjoyments?

Why God had, by the power of his grace, taken his heart off from all things here below, by showing him the vanity and emptiness of them; so that he was wholly weaned from them. So he says, Psalms 131:2, "I have behaved and quieted myself, as a child that is weaned of his mother: my soul is even as a weaned child."

Doctrine: "Where the grace of God takes hold of the soul—it makes it as a weaned child, to all worldly things."

I. In the discussing this doctrine, I shall show you what it is to be "as a weaned child."

II. I shall show you that there is a great resemblance between a weaned child and a gracious soul.

III. I shall show you how grace weans the heart from all worldly things.

IV. Application I. What is it to be "as a weaned child?" This I shall show, both negatively and affirmatively.

A. Negatively first, and that in two things:

1. It is not to be without the comforts and contentments of the world. It is possible to have much of the world—and yet be weaned from the world—as David did here. He had riches in abundance, honor in abundance, for he was advanced to the throne, he was the greatest man in the kingdom—and yet his soul was as a weaned child.

Many may have little of the world—and yet their hearts are not weaned. And many may have much of the world—and yet be weaned from the world.

2. It is not to slight and undervalue our enjoyments; for they are a real mercy from God. They are gifts from above, the noble effects of the bounty of providence.

B. Affirmatively, This being as a weaned child, carries three things in it:

1. Contentment.
2. Humility.
3. Teachableness.

1st, CONTENTMENT. To be as a weaned child, is to be content in every condition of life. Whatever you give a child, it is content—be the bread whiter or browner, be the food hot or cold, be the clothes finer or coarser. So that to be as a weaned child, is to have a contented spirit in every condition, under every providence. So had David, 2 Samuel 15:25-26. "If the Lord sees fit—He will bring me back to see the Ark and the Tabernacle again. But if He is through with me, then let Him do what seems best to Him." So had Paul, Php 4:11-12, "I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am. I know both how to have a little, and I know how to have a lot. In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret [of being content] —whether well-fed or hungry, whether in abundance or in need." A contented spirit in every condition of life, is a great mercy.

2ndly, To be as a weaned child, is to be HUMBLE. None are so humble as little children, they do not aim at or aspire after great things. Therefore our Lord Christ propounds children to his own disciples—as patterns of humility. "He called a child to Him and had him stand among them," and tells them, "Whoever humbles himself like this child—this one is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven." Matthew 18:2, Matthew 18:4 So that to be a weaned child, is to be "of an humble and lowly spirit." So was David here, "Lord, my heart is not haughty, nor mine eyes lofty: neither do I exercise myself in great matters, or in things too high for me. Surely I have behaved and quieted myself, as a child that is weaned of his mother. My soul is even as a weaned child." Psalms 131:1-2.

O, what an excellent spirit is this! Solomon tells us, Proverbs 16:19, "It is better to live humbly with the poor, than to share plunder with the proud." And in Proverbs 29:23, he says, "A person's pride will humble him, but a humble spirit will gain honor."

3rdly, To be as a weaned child, is to be TEACHABLE. None so responsive, none so teachable as children. Isaiah 28:9, "Who is it he is trying to teach? To whom is he explaining his message? To children weaned from their milk, to those just taken from the breast." To be as a weaned child—is to be teachable.

Naturally we are the most unteachable creatures in the world. How will you teach one that can neither see, nor hear, nor understand? This is the very case of every natural man.

1. Every natural man is blind and cannot see spiritual truths. 2 Corinthians 4:4, "The god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers so they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God."

2. Every natural man is deaf and cannot hear spiritual truths. Psalms 58:3-4, "Even from birth the wicked go astray; they are like cobras that refuse to listen, ignoring the tunes of the snake charmers, no matter how skillfully they play."

3. Every natural man is foolish, and cannot understand spiritual truths. Romans 3:11, "There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, there is no one who seeks God. All have turned away, together they have become useless; there is no one who does good, there is not even one."

Therefore, a teachable frame of mind is a special mercy of God, it is one of the greatest blessings of the new covenant. "They shall all be taught of God!" John 6:45. "They shall all know Me—from the least to the greatest," Jeremiah 31:34. An unteachable heart is a great judgment from God. This was Pharaoh's judgment; no counsel, no message, no reproof, no warning, no plague could soften him! When the Lord designs to bring judgment upon a soul, then he gives it up to an unteachable heart! "Tell my people this: 'You will hear my Words, but you will not understand. You will see what I do, but you will not perceive its meaning. Harden the hearts of these people. Close their ears, and shut their eyes. That way, they will not see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts, and turn to me for healing!' Then I said, 'Lord, how long must I do this?' And he replied, 'Until their cities are destroyed, with no one left in them. Until their houses are deserted and the whole country is an utter wasteland!'" Isaiah 6:9-11 When the Lord intends good to a soul, he gives a pliable and teachable frame of mind—a seeing eye, a hearing ear, and an understanding heart. This is what it is to be as a weaned child. It is to be content, to be humble, to be teachable.

II. I will show you that there is a great resemblance between a weaned child—and a gracious soul. You may consider a weaned child three ways:

1. In regard to its infirmities.
2. In regard to its manner of weaning.
3. In regard to its disposition.

A. In regard to its INFIRMITIES. What is <http://what.isweaker> than a weaned child? what creature more helpless, more feeble?

It cannot feed itself.

It cannot defend itself.

It cannot govern itself.

1. A weaned child cannot FEED itself. If it be not nursed, it must be fed—it must have the spoon—it cannot feed itself without the hand of the mother. It is the same, in a spiritual sense, with the gracious soul—if it is weaned, yet it must be fed. If it be weaned from the earth—it must be fed from heaven. If it be weaned from the creature—it must be nourished from the promises.

Every believer depends upon God for feeding, yes, for natural bread; and therefore we pray, "Give us this day, our daily bread!" Much more do we depend upon God for spiritual supports, for soul refreshments; for it is he who "fills the hungry with good things," Luke 1:53.

There are three things which are the peculiar privileges of believers:

1. To be born of God.
2. To be taught of God.
3. To be fed of God.

They are born of God—by the power of the Word.

They are taught of God—by the precepts of the Word.

They are fed of God—by the promises of the Word.

2. A weaned child cannot DEFEND itself. The security of an infant lies in the care of the parent. Though the breast does feed it, yet the arms must guard it. It is liable to many harms—set it down, and leave it alone, and what will become of it? it falls into the fire, or into the water; into one mischief or another.

It is so with a child of God—he cannot preserve himself, no not for a moment! The greatest measure of grace attainable, will not do it. If God should set up a believer with a stock of grace, and then leave him to trade for himself, how quickly would he prove bankrupt, and perish! This is why a believer falls gradually away—when God withdraws himself; and he would fall finally away—if God should leave him to himself.

It is not from anything in us—that we stand and are preserved, but from above us, even from the power of God! So says the apostle, 1 Peter 1:5 "We are kept by the power of God, through faith, to salvation." Faith lays hold on God's power to be kept, and we are kept by the power of God through faith. It is, you see, God's power and grace, which enables us to persevere. A Christian has the stream of grace flowing in him, but God is the spring of grace ever flowing for him, and overflowing to him—and if the spring should be shut up, the stream would soon fail. "All my springs are in you!" Psalms 87:7.

It is renewing grace which saves us—or else we could never be saved. It is supporting grace which keeps us—or else we would quickly fall. This David avers to, in Psalms 66:9, "Our lives are in his hands—he keeps our feet from stumbling."

Consider but two things, and you will see that it is impossible that a believer can preserve himself:

1st. Consider the power of indwelling lust and corruption. There is not only much of the presence of sin in every believer, but much of the power of sin also.

Though where grace is wrought, there the power of sin is much abated—yet it is not utterly removed. Though the reigning power of sin is destroyed, yet sin has a raging power still. This too often captivates the best of saints. Paul himself will find this out, notwithstanding all his grace. "When I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God's law; but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members. What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?" Romans 7:21-24.

Now if so holy a saint as Paul was, complains thus—what complaints may we make, whose corruptions are many and strong, and whose grace is little and weak?

Suppose you should put a spark of fire into the sea, would it not quickly be quenched? Why our grace is but like a spark of fire in the midst of a sea of corruption, and therefore would quickly be quenched—if God did not preserve it alive!

2ndly, Consider the frequency and strength of temptation. The greatest degree of grace will give us no immunity from temptation. The Lord Jesus Christ had no sin, and yet was assaulted by Satan; and therefore the servant must not look to be above his Lord.

Satan's great design is to destroy the believer's grace—yes, and he would do it, if the Lord did not hem him in, and hold him up.

There is a great strength in every temptation. Partly as being managed by so potent and subtle an enemy; partly as being suited to our remaining corruptions. When the Devil came to Christ, he found no sin for temptation to work upon; yet when he comes to Christians, he finds much in them for temptation to work upon—much pride, much worldly love, much lust, much carnality, much unbelief, much deadness of heart, much unprofitableness, etc. All this, is the material which he works upon. When Satan surrounds us on the outside—sin is ever ready to surprize us within! When Satan tempts us—sin is ready to betray us! Therefore if the Lord does not put his everlasting arms underneath us—we cannot stand. So that you see the gracious soul is unable, like the weaned child, to defend itself. "The Lord is his defense." Isaiah 4:5.

3. A weaned child is not able to GOVERN itself. It is destitute both of strength and wisdom. And so it is with every believer—he is not able to direct his own actions—he cannot govern his own thoughts—he has not the least self-sufficiency. So says Agur of himself, Proverbs 30:2-3, "Surely I am more brutish than any man, and have not the understanding of a man." And therefore David seeing this, betakes himself to the Lord for counsel and guidance, "In you, O Lord, I have taken refuge; let me never be put to shame; deliver me in your righteousness. Turn your ear to me, come quickly to my rescue; be my rock of refuge, a strong fortress to save me. Since you are my rock and my fortress, for the sake of your name lead and guide me. Free me from the trap that is set for me, for you are my refuge!" Psalms 31:1-4. And God promises to guide them, Isaiah 42:16, "I will lead the blind by ways they have not known, along unfamiliar paths I will guide them; I will turn the darkness into light before them and make the rough places smooth. These are the things I will do; I will not forsake them."

Now there are two ways especially, whereby the Lord directs and guides his people:

A. The Lord directs and guides his people, by the counsels of his WORD, "I was senseless and ignorant; I was a brute beast before you. Yet I am always with you; you hold me by my right hand. You guide me with your counsel, and afterward you will take me into glory. Psalms 73:22-24. The Word of God is the best Counselor; and therefore David betakes himself to it for guidance and direction, Psalms 119:24, "Your statutes are my delight and my counselors." In the Hebrew it is, "The men of my councils." David was a king, and therefore no doubt had the wisest men of the nation, to be of his council. We read of Hushai, and others, men of great abilities and prudence, who were his council; but yet he hearkened more to the Word of God, than to all his council besides, "Your statutes are my counselors."

We should follow the councils of the Word in all things, and make it the guide of our way—as holy David did: "Your Word is a light to my feet—and a lamp to my paths," Psalms 119:105. For,

1st, The Word is the SAFEST counsel. We may, and too often do, err in following the counsels of others; for man's wisdom is short-sighted; "the blind lead the blind—and both fall into the ditch." But we can never err or miscarry in following the counsels of the Scripture. Solomon says, "For wisdom will enter your mind, and knowledge will delight your heart. Discretion will watch over you, and understanding will guard you, rescuing you from the way of evil." Proverbs 2:10-12. And speaking of the commandment in the sixth chapter, he says, "Always bind them to your heart; tie them around your neck. When you walk here and there, they will guide you; when you lie down, they will watch over you; when you wake up, they will talk to you. For a commandment is a lamp, teaching is a light, and corrective instructions are the way to life." Proverbs

2dly, The Word is the most PROFITABLE counsel. It helps the soul in all concerns of life. Yes, the happiness and salvation of the soul is the sure outcome of following the counsels of the Word. See what an account David gives of the Word, "The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul. The statutes of the Lord are trustworthy, making wise the simple. The precepts of the Lord are right, giving joy to the heart. The commands of the Lord are radiant, giving light to the eyes. The fear of the Lord is pure, enduring forever. The ordinances of the Lord are sure and altogether righteous. They are more precious than gold, than much pure gold; they are sweeter than honey, than honey from the comb. By them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward." Psalms 19:7-11.

O what, a mercy it is—to be under the guidance of the Word of God!

B. The Lord directs and guides his people by the counsels of his SPIRIT. John 16:13, "When the Spirit of truth has come, he will guide you into all truth." "The Spirit of the Lord will rest on him--the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of power, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord." Isaiah 11:2.

How happy is the condition of God's people—who have the Word and the Spirit to guide them! The Word without the Spirit—cannot guide us. The Spirit without the Word—will not guide us. The Word is a light without us—the Spirit is a light within us. The Word propounds the way to walk in—Spirit enables the soul to walk in that way. Blessed are those whom God thus guides!

Thus I have showed you how the state of a believer resembles that of a weaned child—in regard of its infirmities.

B. There is a resemblance also, in regard to its MANNER of weaning; and that in three particular circumstances:

1st, Many when they wean a child from the breast, will rub some bitter or unpleasant thing upon the breast which it is so fond of—to create a loathing in the child. And so the bitterness of the taste makes the child forsake the breast.

Now in this, the soul of a believer is as a weaned child. The breast of the creature is that which natural man lies at; for natural man fetches all his comfort from sensual things, and savors only earthly things.

Now, when the Lord designs to work grace in the heart, and redeem a soul to himself—he always weans it first from the world. Psalms 45:10-11. "Listen to me, O royal daughter; take to heart what I say. Forget your people and your homeland far away—and the king will desire your beauty."

Now, the difficulty of conversion lies here—in taking the heart from the creature, and placing it upon God! In the fall, we turned from God to the creature—and in conversion-work the heart is turned from the creature, back to God again.

Now because, I say, this is difficult, for the creature is opposed to leave the breast of carnal enjoyments where it has sucked in such sensual delights so long. Therefore the Lord, when he would wean the soul from earthly things—He rubs wormwood upon the breasts of all our comforts, and embitters all our enjoyments; so that though we seek for satisfaction, yet we shall find none. This was the way of God's dealing with the prodigal son. The parable of the prodigal is to represent to us the state of every natural man. Now, it is said, Luke 15:14, that "when he had spent all—there arose a famine in the land;" and this brought him home to his father's house.

God is never better to us—than when the creature is most bitter to us! "The Lord will famish all the gods of the earth; and men shall worship him."

Thus God dealt with Israel, Hosea 2:6-8. "She said, 'I will go after my lovers, who give me my food and my water, my wool and my linen, my oil and my drink.' Therefore I will hedge up her path with thorns; I will wall her in—so that she cannot find her way. She will chase after her lovers but not catch them; she will look for them but not find them. Then she will say, 'I will go back to my husband as at first, for then I was better off than now.'"

God has two hedges which the Scripture takes notice of:

1. The hedge of his protection, which you read of Job 1:10, "Haven't You placed a hedge around him, his household, and everything he owns?"
2. The hedge of affliction, which you read of here: "I will hedge up her path with thorns!"

Now the Lord make use of both these hedges. The hedge of God's protection—that is to keep his people from danger. The hedge of affliction—that is to stop them from wandering. The hedge of protection—is to keep them in God's way. The hedge of affliction—is to keep them out of sin's way. The hedge of protection—is to keep them from suffering. The hedge of affliction is to keep them from sinning, and to put them upon returning to God. So it was with Israel here, when God had hedged up her way, that she could not find her paths, nor overtake her lovers, then she cries out, "I will go back to my husband as at first, for then I was better off than now!"

It is a great mercy, for God to wean a soul from the world; for it never suffers greater—than when it forsakes God to live upon the creature! "Those who cling to lying vanities--turn their backs on all God's mercies!" Jonah 2:8. It is forsaking the living fountain--to quench our thirst from a broken cistern! Jeremiah 2:13. By our excesses in creature-enjoyments, reason is commonly drowned in sense, and judgment extinguished in appetite. The excessive letting out ourselves to sensual fruitions—is both a sin and a punishment. Because thereby, we lose both God and the creature, and ourselves at once. When the Lord weans a soul from the world—He embitters the world to the soul; either by some affliction, or by some disappointment in the creature, which makes the soul look out for more pure and lasting satisfactions in Christ. In a time of outward prosperities, we are

all Martha's children, carried away too much with the world. But when God embitters our cup, then, with Mary, we look more after the one thing necessary, and mind the choosing the better part. So long as we are full of the world—the Lord Christ can find no room in our hearts—present comforts have gotten possession, and thrust him out. As it was when he was born—there was no room for him in the inn. That was taken up with other guests; therefore Christ, must be laid in the feeding trough in the stable.

Truly thus it fares with the Lord Jesus Christ in the world still—the most of us lay him in the feeding trough in the stable, to this very day.

Deal plainly with God and your own souls, and tell me, "What entertainment do you give to the Lord Jesus when he comes to your souls in an ordinance, and tells you he will make his abode with you, for so he does. "Behold! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and dine with him, and he with me. Revelation 3:20.

Now how do you treat the blessed Jesus? where do you lay him? in the inn, or in the stable? I mean thus do you receive him into your hearts and affections—or, do you take him only into the stable of an empty profession?

Truly a lifeless, graceless profession of Christ, is only a laying him in the stable; but a hearty embracing of, and a holy affection to Christ, this is taking him into the inn!

Now when God, by any providence, embitters the creature to us, then this makes us remove Christ out of the stable into the inn; out of a lifeless profession into our hearts and affections.

2rdly, When a child is weaned, the mother is many times hidden, or put away, or removed—that the sight of her may not make the child to cry for the breast. So the Lord many times strips a man of the world, takes from him his enjoyments, all his comforts—merely to wean his heart from the world.

3rdly, When a child is weaned, the nature and kind of its food is changed; he is fed with stronger food.

Now in this also, the resemblance holds—the soul of a believer is as a weaned child—he has another kind of nourishment, and lives upon other kind of comforts than he did before. As Christ says, "I have food to eat that you know nothing about." John 4:32. Just so, every believer has comforts to live upon—which the world knows nothing of. "A stranger does not share in his joy," Proverbs 14:10. As,

1. He has the comforts of the PROMISES. When God brings a soul into a state of grace, he brings him from living upon the creature—to live upon the promises. And which is best—to live upon the creature, or to live upon the promise? The creature dies—but the promise lives. The creature is yes and no—but the promise is yes and amen. The creature is deceitful—but the promise is sure and faithful. The creature feeds but sense—but the promise fills the soul. The creature is but a scanty good—but the promise travails with all good.

He who lives upon the promise lives by faith, and the life of faith is the best life.

1st, It is the only safe and secure life. As the weak ivy secures itself by twisting about the great oak—so the weak Christian secures himself by cleaving to the great God. "These are the ones who will dwell on high. The rocks of the mountains will be their fortress of safety. Food will be supplied to them, and they will have water in abundance." Isaiah 33:16 The life of sense is full of disappointments, "like a deceitful brook," Job 6:15.

Sisera runs to Jael to save him—and she destroys him! He lays his head in her lap—and she nails it to the ground! Judges 4:21.

2ndly, It is the only quiet and peaceful life. The life of sense is full of distracting cares and vexations. The soul is never quiet, until it draws off from sense to live by faith; until it cries out with David, "Return to your rest, O my soul!" Psalms 116:7. The philosopher tells us, if we could live in the upper region, there we should enjoy a perpetual calm; there are no storms, no winds, no tempests; these are only found in this lower region—nearer the sun it is not so. Sense is as the lower region, where there is nothing but storms, and shakings, and vexations. Could we, by faith, live in the upper region, and have the moon under our feet; could we live above the world, by faith in God, resting in the Lord Jesus Christ—we would enjoy a perpetual calm there! "In Me you may have peace. In this world you will have many trials and sorrows." John 16:33.

3rdly, It is the only sweet and comfortable life. The life of sense, like a smoking chimney, causes many a wet eye. When we live by faith, then the fire burns clear; but when we live by sense, then the chimney smokes. Is it not a sweet life, to fetch all our sweet waters from the fountain? Thus faith does. Sense drinks out of the muddy stream—but faith goes to the fountain-head. "All my springs are in you!" Psalms 87:7. Is it not a comfortable life to be fixed—among all the changes and fluctuations which are in the world? Faith fixes the soul upon God—and in that fixation it is safe. "He will not fear bad news; his heart is confident, trusting in the Lord." Psalms 112:7. Is it not a comfortable life to live free from all burdens in the world? There are but two sorts of burdens: The burden of sin and guilt. The burden of care and trouble.

Now faith takes off both of these, and frees the soul from the one and the other.

It takes off the burden of guilt—by resting upon Christ and his righteousness. And it takes off the burden of care and trouble—by resting upon God and his providence.

Ah, my beloved, there is no comfort to be compared to the comfort of believing! There is no life to be compared to the life of faith. We may talk of comfort, but until we come to live by faith—we shall never taste of comfort.

4thly, It is the only truly Christian life. Sense makes a beast, reason makes a man, but faith makes a Christian. We are no farther Christians, than as we can live upon Christ in all conditions.

5thly, It is the only honorable life. The world's honor is but an imaginary thing, a mere bubble, compared with the honor which faith leads the soul into. Is it not an honor to have the king's ear at our pleasure? Why, the believer, as I may speak it with reverence, has the command of God's ear! "Concerning the work of my hands, command me," Isaiah 45:11. Is it not an honor to be of the blood-royal, to be born of God? We are very apt to value ourselves upon the nobleness of our descent and birth. Why, the believer is born of God! John 1:11-12. They are of the blood-royal, the children of God! Is it not an honor to live with God? Why, believers live with God, and walk with

God, and have fellowship with God here—and shall have an eternal fellowship with God in heaven hereafter! "Such honor have all his saints."

6thly, It is the only lasting life. The stability of all sorts of lives, is according to their principles and causes. The life which depends upon a failing cause—is a fading life. The life which depends upon a constant cause—is an abiding life. Now the life of faith, proceeds from a living principle; the grounds of it are in God and Christ, and the promise—no change reaches to these. Our comforts may change—but Christ never changes! "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever!" Hebrews 13:8. The creature may change—but God never changes! "I am the Lord—I do not change!" Malachi 3:6. The promises are unchangeable. They are not yes and no—but "Yes and amen in Christ," 2 Corinthians 1:20.

Now faith must needs be a lasting life, which has such lasting grounds and principles. The life of sense is a fading decaying life—as it lives upon fading objects. A man has friends and delightful relations, and these cheer and refresh his spirits; but momentarily, they die, and drop into the dust, and then his spirits sink. They go down to the pit—and his heart breaks for lack of comfort. But the soul that lives by faith can never be at a loss. What can he lack—who has him who is all, and has all? What can he lose—who has him who knows no change at all? The mariner, when he puts forth to sea, quickly loses the sight of land—but though he sails ever so far—he never loses the sight of heaven.

Thus the soul of a believer is as a weaned child in this sense also—it lives upon other kind of comforts than it did before, namely—the comforts of the promises.

2. I might add, that the believer lives upon the comforts of the ordinances. "I delight to sit in his shade, and his fruit is sweet to my taste." Song of Solomon 2:3.

3. He lives upon the comfort of gracious experiences: Psalms 74:14. "You crushed the head of Leviathan in pieces, and gave him to be food to the people inhabiting the wilderness." Leviathan here, is meant of Pharaoh and all his army: when God drowned all the army of the Egyptians in the Red Sea, then he broke Leviathan's head. And God is said to give him to be food for his people in the wilderness, in that the experience they had had at the Red Sea, of the wonderful care and miraculous doings of God for them, and their deliverance, was intended to be food for their faith, that by this experience they might learn to live upon God in wilderness-straits.

4. He lives upon the comfort of the divine presence: "You shall make me glad with the light of your countenance." This is the food that the weaned soul has to feed on:

Promises.

Ordinances.

Experiences. The divine presence.

C. There is a resemblance between a weaned child and a believer—in regard of its disposition and desires. As for instance, take a weaned child, and lay it to the fullest and fairest breast—and it will suck no more; it turns from it, and loathes it as much as heretofore it loved and delighted in it.

Now in this the gracious heart is as the weaned child—the fullest breast of creature-comforts and sensual delights, cannot allure it! And why? Because it has chosen God for its chief good, and therefore cannot be more satisfied. "Whom do I have in heaven but You? And I desire nothing on earth but You. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart, my portion forever!" Psalms 73:25-26. The soul sees a greater beauty in God, than in all worldly comforts. The soul tastes a greater sweetness in communion with the Lord Christ—than in all worldly friendships and fellowships. So did David; and therefore he cries out, "One day in your courts is better than a thousand elsewhere!" Psalms 74:10. So did Jacob; and therefore tells his brother, "God has dealt graciously with me, and I have enough!" Genesis 33:11. In the Hebrew it is, "I have all!" He who has a saving interest in God, has all—all that the soul can want, or the heart can wish!

III. I will show you briefly—HOW grace weans the heart from all worldly things. By a threefold working.

1. Grace sets up a light in the soul, which discovers the true nature of things. Every natural man is in darkness. A graceless state is a state of darkness. Now in darkness—the vanity, emptiness, insufficiency, and unsatisfactoriness of worldly things to the soul—cannot be discovered.

Grace is light in the understanding, as well as holiness in the will; and by this light the soul is able to pass a right judgment of things—to distinguish between seen and unseen good, between perishing and durable comforts; to discern between things which differ. "The spiritual man judges all things," says the apostle, 1 Corinthians 2:15.

2. Grace has a farther work upon the heart—it extinguishes and removes out of the soul, that which makes the things of the world to be our chief good.

There is that in every carnal man—which propounds to the soul something below God, as its chief good. And that is, the sensual mind—and by this, the will is misled, and the affections misplaced, and the world is preferred, and God left out!

Now by a work of grace in the heart, the sensual mind is extinguished, the old man is put off, and that which savors only the things of the world, is abated and removed.

3. Grace elevates the soul above sensual objects, to live upon more real, more suitable comforts. Grace elevates the soul, to live upon God, to lay up treasure in heaven, to fetch its refreshments from the fountain of divine fullness. How easily is that soul weaned from all earthly enjoyments, which has learned to fetch all its comforts from heaven!

IV. APPLICATION.

Use 1. Of trial. We should be serious in this matter, and call our hearts to a strict account of what we experience of the power of God upon our souls—in weaning them from things below! There are great reasons which move me to urge this duty upon you. For,

First, There is no greater duty incumbent upon a Christian, than frequent trials of himself and his state, by the measure of present truths. When the Word of the Lord is spoken, and truth discovered, then to bring it home to the heart, and try our spirits and condition by it; this is a great duty. This is the meaning of Paul in 2 Corinthians 13:5. "Examine yourselves, whether you are in the faith; prove your own selves."

Galatians 6:3-4, "For if anyone considers himself to be something when he is nothing, he is deceiving himself. But each person should examine his own work."

Secondly, Herein does the vitality and power of godliness consist. It is not what we profess outwardly, but what we are inwardly, which God looks at. Romans 2:29. "He is a Jew, who is one inwardly." Many profess much, pretend to great measures of mortifiedness, and weanedness from worldly things; but look upon them in their lives, follow them into the world, and none are more carnal, more vain than they!

Thirdly, We can never be able to validate our claim to a work of grace, unless we are able to satisfy ourselves in this point. There is no greater, no surer evidence of a work of grace in the heart, than weanedness of soul from worldly things.

Fourthly, If we be not brought into this weaned state by the power of grace here, we shall be shut out of heaven hereafter. Will you hear what our Lord Christ says in the case? Then see Matthew 18:3. "Truly, unless you are converted, and become as little children, you shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven."

"Unless you are converted," is that all? no, but you must become as little children—in meekness, humility, self-denial, weanedness. So says the next verse "Whoever shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven." We must be wrought into a child-like disposition. This is the true qualification, the proper fitness of the soul for glory—no weanedness, no blessedness! Is there not then, great reason for my urging you to this self-examination?

Let us come therefore to the touchstone: that is not true grace—which will not endure trial. Put the question to yourself—Is my soul as a weaned child? am I under the weanings of God—or am I not?

Question. Now you will say, "How may I know whether my soul is under the weanings of God? How may I know whether I am weaned from the world or not?"

Answer. In answer to this, I shall lay down some rules to try yourselves by:

1. To have heavenly affections amidst earthly possessions—this is a sign of a weaned heart.
2. To reckon our happiness, our riches, rather from divine comforts than from any worldly comfort; this is a sign of an heart under the weanings of God. David was a king, a great man; but he does not reckon this his happiness. No, but from his interest in God. Psalms 16:5, "Lord, you alone are my portion, and my cup of blessing." And what then? "The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places; indeed, I have a beautiful inheritance."
3. What do you most desire? What do you most hunger after? this shows whether we are weaned from the world, or not. No matter what you offer it, or put into its hand, the unweaned child cries for the breast! Nothing can quiet it until it is laid to the breast. Now, what is it—which quiets our minds, which satisfies our desires best? If it is worldly pleasures, worldly comforts, worldly honors, etc. then our hearts are not weaned.
4. To bear worldly evils, worldly troubles, worldly losses—with a holy quietness and satisfaction of spirit; this is a sign of a weaned heart. Hebrews 10:34. "When all you owned was taken from you,

you accepted it with joy. You knew you had better things waiting for you in eternity."

5. To choose holiness with affliction and loss—rather than sin with pleasure and preferment; this is a sign of a weaned heart. Thus did Moses, "By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh's daughter. He chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a short time. He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking ahead to his reward." Hebrews 11:24-26

6. To be able by faith to overcome all the smiles and frowns of the world—this is another sign of a weaned heart. Now can you do this? When the world smiles upon us with its splendors, honors, riches, pleasures, delights and glories—can you then look upon all these as base and abject things—in comparison of Christ? Can you look through all this—to the righteousness of Christ? as that noble Marquis did; "May their money perish with them—who count all the gold in the world, worth one day's communion with Jesus Christ."

Or, when the world frowns upon us with crosses, losses, sufferings, reproaches, etc. Can we then overcome it by laying aside carnal fear, by patience in tribulation, by looking upon afflictions and sufferings for Christ—as our honor and happiness; by eyeing the invisible God in all, as Moses did? "He endured, as seeing him who is invisible."

Use 2. Are your souls under the weanings of God? Then there is a double duty incumbent upon you from this doctrine.

Duty 1. Bless the Lord, and magnify the riches of his mercy—in calling and taking your hearts off from the world!

It is said in Genesis 21:8 that, "On the day that Isaac was weaned, Abraham held a great feast." It is not said, that the child was born—and Abraham made a feast. Indeed that was not so proper a time, because then the mother was in weakness and grief. Nor is it said the child was circumcised, and Abraham made a feast; nor was that so proper a time because then the child was sore and in pain. But "On the day that Isaac was weaned, Abraham held a great feast." This seems the proper time, because now father, and mother, and child, might all rejoice together.

There was, no doubt, a mystery enrap't up in this feast of Abraham: and what was that? Why the mystery is this—Believers, who are the seed of Abraham, should rejoice in the Lord when the soul is become spiritual, and weaned from carnal desires! To have the world—and yet to be weaned from the world; to possess it—and yet not to be possessed by it; this is a great mercy!

It is an easy matter to profess weanedness from the world, where but little of the world is enjoyed. It is a common thing for those who are poor, to declaim against riches and wealth: "I would not be in their condition—I would not be under their temptations—for all that they enjoy!" Says another, "I would not have that to answer for, as they have! For as they are great, so they are proud, high minded, and covetous." Thus it is usual for the poor to envy the rich. But to live above all, amidst the enjoyment of all—this is the greatest mercy in the world! To see no greatness in anything but in the great God—to see no beauty in anything but holiness—to see no glory in anything but Christ—to see no goodness in anything but true religion; O what a mercy is this! How few can look through worldly greatness—to this prospect! "Brothers, think of what you were when you were

called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth." 1 Corinthians 1:26

Duty 2. Labor to wean others from the world; as Christ said to Peter, "When you are converted, strengthen your brethren," Luke 22:32. So when converting grace has taken hold of your heart—labor to convert others. When the Lord has showed you the vanity of things below—endeavor to lead others into this view. Is your soul weaned? Strive that others may be weaned. O what honor might you bring to God upon this account!

We preach of the vanity and emptiness of the world; but alas! few believe our report. They say—we know nothing of the grandeur, honor, and glory of it ourselves. God placed us below it, and laid our lot in a narrow compass; and therefore we envy it to those who enjoy it, because we lack it. But when such whom God has advanced to greatness in the world, shall yet live above it, and prefer the interest of true religion, and the honoring of God, before all worldly grandeur—this will carry a strong conviction with it to the consciences of others.

Therefore endeavor to be instrumental to wean others, especially relatives. Labor that those who are near to us—may not be far from God. And chiefly labor for our children, whose souls God will more immediately require at our hands. A second branch of the exhortation is to those who are not yet as a weaned child—whose souls are not as yet taken off from present things. Is not this our case? May we not fear it is? For if we are weaned from the world—why do we doat upon it? Why are we so fond of worldly things? Why do we conform so much to the world, and study the foolish fashions of the world? If we are weaned from the world—why is our joy and grief so great, and proportioned to present comforts, or present losses? Surely therefore we have cause enough to fear—that our hearts are not yet under the weanings of God.

Also, let me tell you—that it is possible to be a true believer, a true Christian—and yet not to be weaned from the world. It is one thing to be born of God, as every believer is; it is another thing to have a weaned heart—this every believer is not. This child is a living child—as soon as it is born. But it is not weaned from the breast until it has gotten strength to live without it. And therefore it is said of Isaac, "The child grew and was weaned." Weaning follows growth and strength. So a man is a believer as soon as he is born of God, so soon as he is wrought upon by grace. But he is not weaned from the world, but by a superadded strength, and growth of grace.

Truth of grace proves a man a child of God; but it is growth of grace that makes the soul as a weaned child.

Indeed, this weanedness is begun in conversion, for that is the seed-time of all inherent grace; but it is only perfected in the growth of sanctification.

You read in scripture of a twofold redemption:

One is a redemption by the blood and death of Christ—from hell and damnation. The other is a redemption by the Spirit of Christ—from carnal affections. This follows conversion. In Revelation 14:3, you read of some who were said to be "Redeemed from the earth." Many are redeemed from hell—who are not yet redeemed from the earth. They are redeemed through grace from damnation; yet they are not redeemed from a carnal life.

Well then—are we born of God, and yet not weaned from the breast of worldly comforts? O then go away, and beg of God for this mercy of a weaned soul; that you may no longer fetch in your satisfactions and comforts from the creature, but from God in Christ. And lastly, let us do that which is our duty--in order to obtain weanedness of heart.

1. While we satiate ourselves, and surfeit our spirits in the fullness and excesses of worldly enjoyments—we are not likely to learn this lesson. One way to put out the fire, is by removing of matter—take away the wood, and the fire will die, and go out by itself.

2. Be much in mortifying carnal appetites and inordinate desires. And let this be our daily work; for the sooner it is done—the easier it is done. A child is easier weaned at one year old than at two; affections are not yet so strong, nor habit so prevailing.

It is in like manner with the soul—the longer it lives upon the comforts of the world, and fetches its contentments from the creature—the harder it will be to draw off the affection, and wean the soul from them!

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