

Man's Natural Blindness in Things of Religion

by Jonathan Edwards

Man's natural blindness in things of religion is a spiritual disease that naturally possesses the hearts of mankind, causing them to have foolish notions of God and to fall into gross delusions.

Scripture: Ephesians 5:1

Topics: "Imitation Of Christ", "Faith Development"

Description

The preacher, W. Bauder, delves into the concept of imitation, emphasizing the importance of mimicking godly examples, especially that of our Savior. He highlights how imitating God and faithful individuals can lead to inheriting promises and growing in faith. The sermon explores how early civilizations imitated animals and how Christians should imitate Christ and other believers. The message encourages believers to let their actions speak louder than words, imitating the faith and endurance of those who have gone before us.

Transcript

Man's Natural Blindness In Things Of Religion

Dated February 1739/1740. Three sermons

Psalm 94:8-11

Understand, ye brutish among the people: and ye fools, when will ye be wise? He that planted the ear, shall he not hear? he that formed the eye, shall he not see? He that chastiseth the heathen, shall not he correct? he that teacheth man knowledge, shall not he know? The Lord knoweth the thoughts of man, that they are vanity.

Subject: There is an extreme and brutish blindness in things of religion that naturally possesses the hearts of mankind.

SECTION I

Introductory observations.

IN these words the following particulars are to be observed. (1.) A certain spiritual disease charged on some persons, viz. darkness, and blindness of mind, appearing in their ignorance and folly. (2.) The great

degree of this disease; so as to render the subjects of it fools. Ye fools, when will ye be wise? And so as to reduce them to a degree of brutishness. Ye brutish among the people. This ignorance and folly were to such a degree, as to render men like beasts. (3.) The obstinacy of this disease; expressed in that interrogation, When will ye be wise? Their blindness and folly were not only very great; but deeply rooted and established, resisting all manner of cure. (4.) Of what nature this blindness is. It is especially in things pertaining to God. They were strangely ignorant of his perfections, like beasts. And had foolish notions of him, as though he did not see, nor know, and as though he would not execute justice, by chastising and punishing wicked men. (5.) The unreasonableness and sottishness of the notion they had of God, that he did not hear, did not observe their reproaches of him and his people, is shown by observing that he planted the ear. It is very unreasonable to suppose that he, who gave power of perceiving words to others, should not perceive them himself. And the sottishness of their being insensible of God's all-seeing eye, and particularly of his seeing their wicked actions, appears, in that God is the being who formed the eye and gave others a power of seeing. The sottishness of their apprehension of God, as though he did not know what they did, is argued from his being the fountain and original of all knowledge. The unreasonableness of their expecting to escape God's just chastisements and judgments for sin is set forth by his chastising even the heathen, who did not sin against that light, or against so great mercies, as the wicked in Israel did; nor had ever made such a profession as they. (6.) We may observe, that this dreadful disease is ascribed to mankind in general. The Lord knoweth the thoughts of MAN, that they are vanity. The psalmist had been setting forth the vanity and unreasonableness of the thoughts of some of the children of men. And immediately upon it he observes that this vanity and foolishness of thought is common and natural to mankind.

From these particulars we may fairly deduce the following doctrinal observation: THAT THERE IS AN EXTREME AND BRUTISH BLINDNESS IN THINGS OF RELIGION, WHICH NATURALLY POSSESSES THE HEARTS OF MANKIND. -- This doctrine is not to be understood as any reflection on the capacity of the human nature. For God has made man with a noble and excellent capacity. The blindness I speak of is not merely negative ignorance, such as in trees and stones that know nothing. They have no faculties of understanding and perception, whereby they should be capable of any knowledge. And inferior animals, though they have sensitive perception, are not capable of any intellectual views. There is no fault to be found with man's natural faculties. God has given men faculties truly noble and excellent, well capable of true wisdom and divine knowledge. Nor is the blindness I speak of like the ignorance of a new-born infant, which arises from want of necessary opportunity to exert these faculties.

The blindness that is in the heart of man, which is spoken of in the text and doctrine, is neither for want of faculties, nor opportunity to know, but from some positive cause. *2* There is a principle in his heart, of such a blinding and besotting nature, that it hinders the exercises of his faculties about the things of religion, exercises for which God has made him well capable, and for which he gives him abundant opportunity.

In order to make it appear that such an extreme brutish blindness, with respect to the things of religion, does naturally possess the hearts of men, I shall show how this is manifest in those things that appear in men's open profession. And how it is manifest in those things that are found by inward experience, and are visible in men's practice.

SECTION II

Man's natural blindness in religion, manifested by those things which appear in men's open profession.

I WOULD now show, how it is manifest that there is a sottish and brutish blindness in the hearts of men in the things of religion, by those things which appear in men's open profession.

I. It appears in the grossness of that ignorance and those delusions which have appeared among mankind. Man has faculties given him whereby he is well capable of inferring the being of the Creator from the creatures. The invisible things of God are very plainly and clearly to be seen by the things that are made. And the perfections of the Divine Being, his eternal power and Godhead, are very manifest in the works of his hands. And yet grossly absurd notions concerning the Godhead have prevailed in the world. Instead of acknowledging and worshipping the true God, they have fallen off to the worship of idols. Instead of acknowledging the one only true God, they have made a multitude of deities. Instead of worshipping a God, who is an almighty, infinite, all-wise, and holy Spirit, they have worshipped the hosts of heaven, the sun, moon, and stars; and the works of their own hands, images of gold and silver, brass and iron, wood and stone; gods that can neither hear, nor see, nor walk, nor speak, nor do, nor know anything. Some in the shape of men, others in the shape of oxen and calves; some in the shape of serpents, others of fishes, etc.

The sottishness of men in thus worshipping the lifeless images which they themselves have made, is elegantly and forcibly represented by the prophet Isaiah. "The smith with the tongs both worketh in the coals, and fashioneth it with hammers, and worketh it with the strength of his arms. Yea, he is hungry, and his strength faileth; he drinketh no water, and is faint. The carpenter stretcheth out his rule; he marketh it out with a line: he fitteth it with planes, and he marketh it out with the compass, and maketh it after the figure of a man, according to the beauty of a man, that it may remain in the house. He heweth him down cedars, and taketh the cypress and the oak, which he strengtheneth for himself among the trees of the forest; he planteth an ash, and the rain doth nourish it. Then shall it be for a man to burn; for he will take thereof and warm himself; yea, he kindleth it, and baketh bread; yea, he maketh a god, and worshippeth it: he maketh it a graven image, and falleth down thereto. He burneth part thereof in the fire: with part thereof he eateth flesh: he roasteth roast, and is satisfied: yea, he warmeth himself, and saith, Aha, I am warm, I have seen the fire. And the residue thereof he maketh a god, even his graven image: he falleth down unto it, and worshippeth it, and prayeth unto it, and saith, Deliver me, for thou art my god. They have not known, nor understood: for he hath shut their eyes, that they cannot see, and their hearts, that they cannot understand. And none considereth in his heart, neither is there knowledge nor understanding to say, I have burned part of it in the fire, yea, also I have baked bread upon the coals thereof; I have roasted flesh, and eaten it, and shall I make the residue thereof an abomination? shall I fall down to the stock of a tree?" (Isa. 44:12-19).

Many of the images which the heathen worshipped were made in the most monstrous and terrible shapes they could devise. And the more hideous and frightful they appeared, the better they supposed they would serve their turn for gods. Some of their images were made so as to be the most unclean representations; images of men openly exposing their nakedness. These unclean images, they judged, appeared in a god-like manner, and worthy to be worshipped. Many, instead of worshipping a holy and good God, and infinitely perfect Being, ascribed vices to many of the gods which they worshipped. One god they reckoned notorious for drunkenness; others notorious for uncleanness. To others they ascribed lying and stealing; to others cruelty; and yet looked upon them worthy to be worshipped as gods! Many worshipped devils, who appeared to them, and whom they themselves reckoned to be evil spirits. But yet built temples, and offered sacrifices to them because they were afraid of them. Many worshipped beasts and birds and fishes. And the most hateful and loathsome animals were most worshipped. Particularly, serpents were

more commonly worshipped than any other beast. Many worshipped rivers and trees and mountains. They worshipped many diseases. There is scarcely anything of which men have not made gods.

And so far has that principle of blindness prevailed, with respect to the things of religion, that it has in a great measure extinguished all light in the minds of many, even in matters of morality, and things that have but a distant relation to religion. So that many whole nations have professedly approved of many things directly contrary to the light of nature. And the most horrid vices and immoralities have been esteemed harmless, yea, accounted virtues among them, such as revenge, cruelty, and incest. Many nations have openly allowed the practice of sodomy. And with some it has been accounted commendable to marry their nearest relations. Many have even worshipped their gods in their temples with acts of drunkenness and whoredom, and the most abominable lewdness. And the more filthy they were in their uncleanness, they thought their gods the more pleased and delighted with it.

Many nations have been so under the influence of mental blindness that they have been void of all civility, and have been reduced to a state very little above the beasts in their common customs, and ordinary way of living, and in a great many things far below the beasts, being, if I may so speak, much more beastly than the beasts themselves. Now this has not been, because these men, with whom this has been the case, have not had the same faculties that we have. That we are not as ignorant as they, is not because we have better natural understandings, or that our minds are by nature more clear, and our eyes more discerning, or that our hearts are not naturally so inclined to sottishness and delusion as theirs. But only because God has not left us so much to ourselves, as he has them. He has given us more instruction to help us against our delusions. God has so ordered it in his providence that we should have his good word to instruct us. And has caused that we should grow up from our infancy under Christian instruction.

II. The extreme blindness and sottishness in things of religion, which is naturally in the hearts of men, appears not only in embracing and professing those errors that are very great, but also those that are so unnatural. They have not only embraced errors which are very contrary to truth, but very contrary to humanity, not only against the light of nature, but against the more innocent inclinations of nature. Such has been, and still is, the blindness of many nations in the world, that they embrace those errors which do not only exclude all true virtue, all holy dispositions, but those that have swallowed up the more harmless inclinations of human nature.

Thus they have embraced many gross delusions that are as contrary as possible to natural affection. Such as offering up their own children in sacrifice to their idol, which has been a common thing in the heathen world. And the parents have not only offered them up to death, but they have brought them, and offered them up to the most cruel and tormenting deaths: as, to be burnt alive, to be broiled to death in burning brass; which was the way of offering up children to Moloch. The image of the idol being made of brass, in a horrid shape, was heated red hot. And the poor child was laid naked in this burning brass, and so burnt to death. And the parents themselves brought the child to this offering, however sweet and pleasant a child it might be. And thus the innocent child was tormented till it died, without any regard to its piteous cries. And it has been the manner of some nations, to offer in sacrifice the fairest and best beloved child that they had. And thus many thousands of poor babes have been offered up. So strong has been the tendency of the hearts of men to delusion, that it has thus overcome those strong natural affections which men have to the fruit of their own bodies.

And many of these delusions have been against men's natural love of their own ease, and aversion to pain. Many have worshipped their idols, and do so to this day, with such rites as are most painful and

tormenting, cutting, gashing, and mangling their own flesh. Thus they sottishly worshipped Baal of old. "And they cried aloud, and cut themselves after their manner with knives and lancets, till the blood gushed out upon them." (1 Kin. 18:28). And it is still the custom in some nations grievously to torment themselves, to kindle a fire to scorch their own bodies in a most miserable manner, and to put themselves to various and long-continued torments to please their idols. And it is the manner in some countries for persons, on certain occasions, to kill themselves, yea, to put themselves to cruel deaths, to cast themselves into great fires, and there burn themselves to death. How powerful must be the delusions of the human mind, and how strong the tendency of the heart to carry them such a length, and so to overcome the tenderest feelings of human nature!

III. The extreme blindness of the mind of man will appear further, if we consider how general gross ignorance and delusion has been. It has for the most part prevailed through the greater part of the world. For most of the time from Noah's flood to the coming of Christ, all nations, except the children of Israel, were overspread with gross heathenish darkness; being given up to the most vain and ridiculous notions, and all manner of superstitious, barbarous, absurd, and unnatural practices. And, for the greater part of the time since, most nations of the world have been covered with gross darkness.

So it is at this day. Many nations are under popish darkness, and are in such gross delusions that they worship the Virgin Mary, and a great multitude of dead men, whom their church has canonized for saints, some real saints, and others abominably wicked men. So they worship the bread in the sacrament, and account it not only the real body of Christ, but real Christ in body and soul, and divinity. They carry a wafer, a small piece of bread, in procession, fall down before it, adore it, and account it Christ himself, both in his divine and human nature. And yet believe that the body of Christ is in heaven, and in ten thousand different places on earth at the same time. They think they can do works of supererogation; that is, more good works than they are obliged to do, whereby they bring God into debt to them. They whip themselves, and put themselves to other ridiculous penances and sufferings, whereby they think they appease the anger of God for their sins. And they pay money to the priests to buy the pardon of their sins. Yea, they buy indulgences for future crimes, or pardon for sins before they commit them. They think they defend themselves from evil spirits, by sprinkling holy water. They pay money to buy the souls of their departed friends out of purgatory. They worship the relics of dead saints, such as pieces of their bones, their teeth, their hair, pieces of their garments, and the like. And innumerable other such foolish delusions are they under.

A great part of the nations of the world are Mahometans; many of the articles of whose belief are too childish and ridiculous to be publicly mentioned in solemn assembly. -- But the greater part of the inhabitants of the world are to this day gross, barbarous heathens, who have not the knowledge of the true God, but worship idols and devils, with all manner of absurd and foolish rites and ceremonies, and are destitute of even common civility: multitudes of nations being like beasts in human shape. -- Now this barbarous ignorance and gross delusion being of such great extent and continuance, shows that the cause is general, and that the defect is in the corrupted nature of mankind, man's natural blindness and proneness of his heart to delusion.

IV. The sottish blindness and folly of the heart of men appears in their being so prone to fall into such gross delusions, soon after they have been favored with clear light. Were not the minds of men exceeding dark, they never would entertain such absurd notions at all. For they are as contrary as possible to reason. Much less would they fall into them after they had once been instructed in the truth. For, were it not very strange and great sottishness indeed, they would -- when they come to be informed of the truth, and have

opportunity to compare it with those gross errors -- behold such a reasonableness in the truth, and such absurdity in those errors, that they would never be in danger of being deluded by them any more. But yet so it is. Mankind, after they have been fully instructed, and have lived in clear light, have, time after time, presently lost the knowledge of the truth, and have exchanged it for the most barbarous and brutish notions.

So it was early after the flood, whereby the wicked world, those that were visibly so, were destroyed; and none were left but those who professed the true religion. And they had such an eminently holy man as Noah to instruct them. And though the true God had so wonderfully and astonishingly manifested himself in that great work of vengeance against his enemies; yet the posterity of Noah, in great part, presently lost the knowledge of the true God, and fell away to idolatry, and that even while Noah was living. And the ancestors of Abraham were tainted with that idolatry, even Terah his own father. "And Joshua said unto all the people, thus saith the Lord God of Israel, your fathers dwelt on the other side of the flood in old time, even Terah the father of Abraham, and father of Nachor: and they served other gods. And I took your father Abraham from the other side of the flood," etc. (Jos. 24:2, 3, 4). It seems as though Abraham was called away from his father's house, and from his own country, for this reason that the country was overrun with idolatry.

And even many of the posterity of Abraham and Isaac -- Abraham's posterity by Hagar and Keturah, and that part of Isaac's posterity which were of Esau -- though the true religion was so thoroughly taught and practiced in the houses of those holy patriarchs, and God had from time to time so wonderfully and miraculously manifested himself to them, yet -- soon cast off the true God, and fell away to idolatry. For, not very long after, we read of the posterity of Jacob as being the only people of God, that he had in all the earth. -- And so the people of that part of the land of Canaan, who were under that holy king Melchizedeck, soon totally cast off the worship of the one only true God, which he taught and maintained. For before Joshua brought in the children of Israel, the inhabitants of that land were wholly given to idolatry. So the people of the land of Uz, who were under the government of so great and holy a man as Job, soon lost the knowledge of the true God, and all those religious truths which were then known among them, and sunk into gross idolatry.

So the posterity of Jacob, themselves -- though God had manifested himself to them, and had wrought such wonders for them in the time of Jacob and Joseph, yet -- presently fell to worship the gods of Egypt. This appears from the words of Joshua, "Put away the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the flood, and in Egypt." (Jos. 24:14). And how soon did they fall to worship a golden calf in the wilderness, in the midst of the wonderful and miraculous manifestations of the one only true God! And notwithstanding idolatry was so strictly forbidden, and the folly and wickedness of it so clearly manifested, in the law of Moses and in God's providence. Yet, how soon did they fall into idolatry after they were brought into the land of Canaan! And when God raised up eminent men, judges to instruct and govern them, and reclaim them from their idolatrous practices, from time to time. Though they professed to be convinced of their foolish delusion, yet they would soon fall again into the most sottish idolatry. And this they did soon after such great light as they enjoyed in the time of Samuel, David, and Solomon. And so, from time to time, down to the Babylonish captivity.

And in the apostles' times, when such great things were done to rouse the attention of mankind, and such great light was spread over many nations, multitudes, after they had been instructed in the Christian religion by the apostles and others, fell away into the grossest heresies, and embraced the most corrupt and absurd notions. -- After the Roman empire had been converted from heathenism to Christianity, and

the light of the gospel had driven out the sottish ignorance and gross absurdities of pagan idolatry, in which they had continued so long, they soon began to fall away from the truth into antichristian superstition and idolatry, in which are opinions and practices no less absurd than those of the heathen. And a great part of the Christian world fell away to Mahometanism.

And since the reformation, wherein God wonderfully restored gospel light in a great part of the Christian world, which was but about two hundred years ago, many are fallen away again, some to popery, some to gross heresies, and some to atheistical principles. So that the reformed church is greatly diminished. -- And as to our nation in particular, which has been a nation favored with light, since the reformation, above most, if not any in the world; how soon has it in great part fallen away! A great part of it to atheism, deism, and gross infidelity. And others to Arminianism, and to the Socinian and Arian heresies, to believe that Christ is a created dependent God. And to hold other foolish absurdities! And many have of late openly disputed and denied the moral evil of some of the greatest and most heinous vices.

These things show how desperately prone mankind are to blindness and delusion, how addicted they are to darkness. -- God now and then, by his instructions lifts up some nations out of such gross darkness. But then, how do they sink down into it again, as soon as his hand is withdrawn! Like a heavy stone, which, though it may be forced upwards, yet sinks down again. And will continue to sink lower and lower with a swift progress, if there be nothing to restrain it. That is the woeful tendency of the mind of man since the fall, notwithstanding his noble powers and faculties; even to sink down into a kind of brutality, to lose and extinguish all useful light, and to sink lower and lower into darkness.

V. The extreme and brutish blindness that possesses the hearts of men naturally, appears in their being so confident in gross errors and delusions. Some things mentioned already show how confident and assured they are, particularly, their running such great ventures as offering up their children and cutting and mangling themselves. Multitudes live and die in the most foolish and absurd notions and principles, and never seem to make any doubt of their being in the right.

The Mahometans seem to make no doubt but that, when they die, they shall go to such a paradise as Mahomet has promised them. Where they shall live in all manner of sensual pleasures, and shall spend their time in gratifying the lusts of the flesh. Mahomet promised them that all who die in war for the defense of the Mahometan religion, shall go to this paradise. And they make no doubt of it. Therefore, many of them, as it were, willingly rush on upon the point of the sword.

The papists, many of them at least, make no doubt of the truth of those foolish notions of a purgatory, and the power of the priests to deliver them out of it, and give them eternal life. And therefore will not spare vast sums of money to purchase deliverance from those imaginary torments. How confident are many heretics in the grossest heresies! and how bold are many deists in their infidelity!

VI. The desperateness of that blindness which is in the heart of man, appears, in that no nation or people in the world ever have had any remedy or deliverance from such gross ignorance and delusion, from themselves. No instance can be mentioned of any people whatsoever, who have once fallen into heathenish darkness, or any other gross superstitions and ridiculous opinions in religion, that ever had any remedy by any wisdom of their own. Or that have, of themselves, grown wiser by the improvement of their own faculties, and by instructing one another. Or that ever had any remedy at all, by the teaching of any wise men, who did not professedly act as moved and directed of God, and did not declare, that they had their instructions, in the first place, from him.

Thus in the heathen world. Before Christ's time, the whole world, except the Jews, lay in their darkness for a great many hundred years, even beyond all time of which they had any certain history among them. And there was no remedy, nor any appearance of a remedy; they continued, ages after ages, waxing worse and worse, sinking deeper and deeper. Among all the many nations in the world, no one ever bethought themselves, and emerged out of their brutish darkness. There were indeed some nations that emerged out of slavery, cast off the yoke of their enemies, grew great, and conquered great part of the world. But they never conquered the blindness of their own hearts.

There were some nations who excelled in other knowledge, as the Greeks and Romans. They excelled in policy, and in the form of their civil government. They had wise political rulers. They had excellent laws for regulating their civil state, many of which have been imitated, as a pattern, by many Christian nations ever since. They excelled many other nations in arts, government, and civility, almost as much as men in common do beasts. Yet they never could deliver themselves from their heathenism. Though they were so wise in other things, yet in matters of religion they were very absurd and brutish. For even the Greeks and Romans, in their most flourishing state, worshipped innumerable gods. And some to whom they ascribed great vices. And some they worshipped with most obscene and horrid rites. To some they offered human sacrifices. The Romans had a temple dedicated to the furies, which they worshipped. And they had a multitude of childish notions and fables about their gods.

And though there were raised up some wise men and philosophers among the Greeks and Romans, who borrowed some things concerning the true God from the Jews; yet their instructions never were effectual to deliver any one people, or even one city or town, from their barbarous heathenism, or so much as to get any one society, or company of men, to unite in the public worship of the true God. And these philosophers themselves had many grossly absurd opinions, mingled with those scraps of truth which they had gathered up.

And the Jews, when fallen away to idolatry, as they often did, never recovered of themselves. Never any remedy appeared, unless God raised up, and extraordinarily moved, some person to reprove and instruct them. -- And in this age of knowledge, an age wherein learning is carried to a great height, even many learned men seem to be carried away with the gross errors and fooleries of the popish religion.

Europe is a part of the world the most famed for arts and sciences of any. And these things have been carried to a much greater height in this age than in many others. Yet many learned men in Europe at this day, who greatly excel in human arts and literature, are still under popish darkness. A deceived heart has turned them aside. Nor do they seem to have any power to deliver their souls. Nor does it come into their minds that there is a lie in their right hands.

Many men in France and in other countries, who are indeed men of great learning, knowledge, and abilities, yet seem really to think that the church of Rome is the only true church of Christ. And are zealous to uphold and propagate it. And though now, within this hundred years, human learning has been very much promoted, and has risen to a greater height than ever in the world. And has greatly increased not only in our nation, but in France and Italy, and other popish countries. Yet there seems to be no such effect of it, as any considerable turning from popish delusions. But the church of Rome has rather increased of late, than otherwise.

And in England, a land wherein learning flourishes as much as in any in the world, and which is perhaps the most favored with light of any, there are many men of vast learning, and great and strong reason, who

have embraced, and do at this day embrace, the gross errors of the Arians and Deists. Our nation, in all its light and learning, if full of infidels, and those that are further from Christianity than the very Mahometans themselves. Of so little avail is human strength, or human reason and learning, as a remedy against the extreme blindness of the human mind. The blindness of the mind, or an inclination to delusion in things of religion is so strong that it will overcome the greatest learning, and the strongest natural reason.

Men, if let alone, will not help one another. Nor will they help themselves. The disease always proves without remedy, unless God delivers. This was observed of old. "And none considereth in his heart, neither is there knowledge nor understanding to say, I have burnt part of it in the fire; yea, also I have baked bread upon the coals thereof; I have roasted flesh, and eaten it: and shall I make the residue thereof an abomination? shall I fall down to the stock of a tree? He feeds on ashes: a deceived heart has turned him aside, that he cannot deliver his soul, nor say, Is there not a lie in my right hand? (Isa. 44:19, 20).

If God lets men alone, no light arises. But the darkness grows thicker and thicker. How is it now, at this very day, among all the nations where the light of the gospel has not come? Many of whose ancestors, without doubt, have been in the midnight darkness of heathenism for above three thousand years. And not one people have delivered themselves, who have not had the light of the gospel. And this is not owing to their want of as good natural abilities as we have. Nor is it because they have an inclination more to neglect their natural abilities, or make a worse improvement of them than we.

VII. The extreme blindness of man's heart, in matters of religion, appears by men falling into gross delusions, or continuing in them, at the same time that they have been under great means of instruction from God. We have many instances of this; as Rachel in Jacob's family; and the Israelites in the wilderness, etc. These last had great means of instruction. Yet they set up the golden calf, etc. And after Joshua's time, they persisted in their delusions and folly, from time to time, even under the reproofs of the prophets, and even in such horrid delusions, so contrary to natural affection, as offering their children in sacrifice to Moloch, burning them alive, in a most cruel manner.

In the time of Christ and the apostles, the Jews had great means of instruction, and most of the nations of the world were put under great advantages to come to the knowledge of the truth. Yet what was the effect? It would be easy to pursue these remarks respecting the papists in the time of the reformation, and since -- the Arians and Deists in our day, etc. -- but what has been said may be quite sufficient, if the reader will but indulge reflection.

VIII. The exceedingly great blindness of men, in things of religion, appears in the endless disputes and controversies, that there have been, and are, among men, about those things which concern religion. -- Of old, the wise men and philosophers among the heathen, were, so to speak, infinitely divided among themselves. Varro, who was one of them, reckons up several hundred opinions about that one point, Wherein man's happiness consisted? And they were continually in disputes one with another. But the effect of their disputes was not any greater union, or any better agreement in their opinions. They were as much divided after they had disputed many ages, as they were at first. Yea, much more.

So there have long been disputes in the Christian world about opinions and principles in religion. There is a vast variety of sects and opinions. And disputes have been carried on, age after age, with great warmth, and thousands of volumes have been written one against another. And all these disputes have not terminated the differences, but they still subsist as much as ever. Yea, they increase and multiply more

and more. Instead of ending controversies by disputing, one dispute only lays a foundation for another. And thus the world goes on jangling and contending, daily writing and printing. Being as it were deluged with controversial books. And all to no purpose.

The increase of human learning does not bring these controversies to an issue, but does really increase and multiply them. There probably never was a time in our nation wherein there was such a vast variety of opinions in matters of religion, as at this day. Every now and then, a new scheme of things is broached, and various and contrary opinions are mixed and jumbled, divided and subdivided. And every new writer is willing to have the credit of some new notion.

And after this manner does this miserable world go on in endless confusion, like a great multitude of fool-hardy persons, who go on in the dark, stumbling and justling one against another, without perceiving any remedy for their own, or affording any for their neighbor's, calamity. -- Thus I have shown how the extreme blindness that possesses the hearts of men is manifest in what appears in their profession.

SECTION III

Men's extreme blindness manifested by inward experience, and especially in their practices under the gospel.

I COME now to show, how this is manifest in those things that are found by inward experience, and are visible in men's practices under the light of the gospel.

I. This appears in their being so prone to be deceived so many ways, or being liable to such a multiplicity of deceits. There are thousands of delusions in things which concern the affairs of religion, that men commonly are led away with, who yet live under the light of the gospel. -- They are many ways deceived about God. They think him to be an exceeding diverse kind of being from what he is, altogether such an one as themselves (Psa. 50:21). They are deceived about his holiness, they do not realize it, that he is such a holy being as he indeed is, or that he hates sin with such a hatred as he declares he does. They are not convinced of his truth, or that he certainly will fulfill his threatenings or his promises. They are not convinced of his justice in punishing sin, as he does. They have very wrong notions of Christ. They are not convinced of his ability to save them, or of the sufficiency of his sacrifice and righteousness, nor of his willingness to receive them.

Men are commonly subject to a great many errors about their duty. They are ready to bring their principles to agree with their practices, instead of bringing their practices to their principles, as they ought to do. They will put innumerable false glosses on the rules of God's Word, to bend them to a compliance with their lusts. And so they "put darkness for light, and light for darkness; bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter."

They are subject to deceits and delusions about the things of this world. They imagine that there is happiness and satisfaction to be found in the profits, pleasures, and honors, which are to be had here. They believe all the deluding flatteries and promises of a vain world. And they will hold that deceit and grand delusion, that these things are the highest good. And will act accordingly; will choose these things for their portion. And they will hold and practice upon that error, that these things are of long continuance, and are to be depended upon.

They are greatly deceived about the things of another world. They undervalue that heavenly glory, which is promised to the saints. And are not much terrified with what they hear of the damnation of hell. They

cannot realize it, that its torments are so dreadful as they hear, and are very ready to imagine that they are not eternal, but will some time or other have an end.

They are deceived about the state of good men. They think they are not happy, but live a melancholy life. And they are deceived about the wicked. They envy the state of many of them as accounting them well off. "They call the proud happy (Mal. 3:15), and bless the covetous, whom God abhors." (Psa. 10:3). And they strive a great deal more after such enjoyments as these have, than after such as are the portion of the godly.

They are subject to a thousand deceits and delusions about themselves. They think themselves wise, when they are fools. They are deceived about their own hearts. They think them much better than they really are. They think they see many good things in themselves, when indeed there is nothing good there. They appear lovely in their own eyes, when their hearts are like the inside of a grave, full of dead men's bones and rotten flesh, crawling worms, and all uncleanness. Or rather, the inward vault of hell, that is a habitation of devils and every foul spirit. Those things in their hearts are highly esteemed by them, which are an abomination in the sight of God.

Men are very prone to be deceived about their own state, to think themselves something when they are nothing, and to suppose themselves "rich and increased in goods, and to have need of nothing, when they are wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked." They are greatly deceived about the principles they act from. They think they are sincere in that in which there is no sincerity. And that they do those things from love to God, which they do only from love to themselves. They call mere speculative or natural knowledge, spiritual knowledge; and put conscience for grace; a servile, for a childlike fear; and common affections, that are only from natural principles, and have no abiding effect, for high discoveries, and eminent actings of grace. Yea, it is common with men to call their vicious dispositions by the name of some virtue. They call their anger and malice, zeal for a righteous cause, or zeal for the public good. And their covetousness, frugality.

They are vastly deceived about their own righteousness. They think their affections and performances lovely to God, which are indeed hateful to him. They think their tears, reformations, and prayers, sufficient to make atonement for their sins, when indeed if all the angels in heaven should offer themselves in sacrifice to God, it would not be sufficient to atone for one of their sins. They think their prayers and works, and religious doings a sufficient price to purchase God's favor and eternal glory. When, as they perform them, they do nothing but merit hell.

They are greatly deceived about their strength. They think they are able to mend their own hearts, and work some good principles in themselves. When they can do no more towards it, than a dead corpse does towards raising itself to life. They vainly flatter themselves, they are able to come to Christ, when they are not. They are greatly deceived about the stability of their own hearts. They foolishly think their own intentions and resolutions of what good they will do hereafter, to be depended on. When indeed there is no dependence at all to be had on them. They are greatly deceived about their opportunities. They think that the long continuance of their opportunity is to be depended on, and that tomorrow it is to be boasted of. When indeed there is the utmost uncertainty of it. They flatter themselves that they shall have a better opportunity to seek salvation hereafter, than they have now. When there is no probability of it, but a very great improbability.

They are greatly deceived about their own actions and practices. Their own faults are strangely hid from their eyes. They live in ways that are very unbecoming Christians, but yet seem not to be at all sensible of it. Those evil ways of theirs, which are very plain to others, are hid from them. Yea, those very things, which they themselves account great faults in others, they will justify themselves in. Those things for which they will be very angry with others, they at the same time do themselves, and oftentimes in a much higher degree, and never once think of it. While they are zealous to pull the mote out of their brother's eye, they know not that a beam is in their own eye.

Those sins that they commit, which they are sensible are sins, they are woefully deceived about. They call great sins, little ones. And in their own imaginations, find out many excuses, which make the guilt very small, while the many heinous aggravations are hid from their eyes. They are greatly deceived about themselves, when they compare themselves with others. They esteem themselves better than their neighbors, who are indeed much better than themselves. They are greatly deceived about themselves, when they compare themselves with God. They are very insensible of the difference there is between God and them, and act in many things as if they thought themselves his equals. Yea, as if they thought themselves above him. Thus manifold are the deceits and delusions that men fall into.

II. The desperate blindness that is natural to men appears in their being so ignorant and blind in things that are so clear and plain. Thus if we consider how great God is, and how dreadful sin against him must be, and how much sin we are guilty of, and of what importance it is that his infinite Majesty should be vindicated; how plain is it, that man's righteousness is insufficient! And yet how greatly will men confide in it! How will they ascribe more to it, than can be ascribed to the righteousness of the sinless and glorious angels of heaven. What can be more plain in itself, than that eternal things are of infinitely greater importance than temporal things? And yet how hard is it thoroughly to convince men of it! How plain is it, that eternal misery in hell is infinitely to be dreaded! And yet how few appear to be thoroughly convinced of this! How plain is it, that life is uncertain! And yet how much otherwise do most men think! How plain is it, that it is the highest prudence in matters of infinite concern to improve the first opportunity, without trusting to another! But yet how few are convinced of this! How reasonable is it, considering that God is a wise and just being, to suppose that there shall be a future state of rewards and punishments, wherein every man shall receive according to his works! And yet, how does this seem like a dream to most men!

What can be in itself more plain and manifest, and easily to be known by us, if it were not for a strange blindness, than we are to ourselves, who are always with, never absent from ourselves; always in our own view, before our own eyes; who have opportunity to look into our own hearts, and see all that passes there? And yet what is there that men are more ignorant of, than they are of themselves! There are many vicious practices, the unlawfulness of which is very plain, the sins are gross, and contrary not only to the Word of God, but to the light of nature. And yet men will often plead, there is no harm in such sins. Such as, many acts of gross uncleanness; and many acts of fraud, injustice and deceitfulness; and many others that might be mentioned.

There is no one thing whatsoever more plain and manifest, and more demonstrable, than the being of a God. It is manifest in ourselves, in our own bodies and souls, and in everything about us wherever we turn our eye, whether to heaven, or to the earth, the air, or the seas. And yet how prone is the heart of man to call this into question! So inclined is the heart of man to blindness and delusion, that it is prone to even atheism itself.

III. The great blindness of the heart of man appears, in that so little a thing will deceive him, and confound his judgment. A little self-interest, or only the bait of some short gratification of a sensual appetite, or a little stirring of passion, will blind men's eyes, and make them argue and judge most strangely and perversely, and draw the most absurd conclusion, such as, if they were indifferent, they would see to be most unreasonable. The devil finds easy work to deceive them a thousand ways; an argument of the great weakness and blindness of our minds. As a little child, weak in understanding, is very easily deceived.

IV. The woeful blindness that possesses the hearts of men naturally, appears in their being all totally ignorant of that in God, which they had most need to know; viz. the glory and excellency of his nature. Though our faculties, which we have above the beasts, were chiefly given us that we might know this, and though without this knowledge all other will signify nothing to us, and our faculties are as capable of it, as of any other knowledge whatsoever -- and which is as plainly and abundantly manifested as anything whatsoever, innumerable ways, both in the word and works of God -- yet all men naturally are totally ignorant of this. As ignorant as one born blind is of colors. Natural men of the greatest abilities and learning, are as ignorant of it as the weakest and the most unlearned. Yea, as ignorant as the very stocks and stones. For they see, and can see nothing at all of it.

V. It appears, in that they are so blind in those same things in religious matters, which they are sufficiently sensible of in other matters. In temporal things they are very sensible that it is a point of prudence to improve the first opportunity in things of great importance. But in matters of religion, which are of infinitely the greatest importance, they have not this discernment. In temporal matters they are sensible that it is a great folly long to delay and put off, when life is in danger, and all depends upon it. But in the concerns of their souls, they are insensible of this truth. So in the concerns of this world, they are sensible it is prudence to improve times of special advantage, and to embrace a good offer when made them. They are sensible that things of long continuance are of greater importance, than those of short duration. Yet in religious concerns, none of these things are sensibly discerned. In temporal things they are sufficiently sensible, that it is a point of prudence to lay up for hereafter, in summer to lay up for winter, and to lay up for their families, after they are dead. But men do not generally discern the prudence of making a proper provision for a future state. -- In matters of importance in this world, they are sensible of the wisdom of taking thorough care to be on sure grounds. But in their soul's concerns they see nothing of this. Our Savior observed this to be the case with the Jews when he was upon earth. "Ye hypocrites, ye can discern the face of the sky, and of the earth: but how is it that ye do not discern this time?" (Luke 12:56)

VI. The desperate blindness that naturally possesses the hearts of men under the gospel, appears in their remaining so stupidly insensible and deceived, under so great means of instruction and conviction. If they were brought up under heathenish darkness, it would not be so full a demonstration of it. But thus they remain, though under the clearest light, under the glorious light of the gospel, where they enjoy God's own instructions in his word, in a great fullness and plainness, and have the evidence and truth of things set before them from time to time in the plainest manner. They have the arguments of God's being and perfection, and of another world. They are told how eternal things are of greater importance than temporal, and of what importance it is to escape eternal misery. How much it is worth while to take pains for heavenly glory, and how vain their own righteousness is. But yet to what little purpose!

And they have not only great means of instruction in God's Word, but also in providence. They have the evidence of the shortness and uncertainty of life. "He seeth that wise men die, likewise the fool and the brutish person perish, and leave their wealth to others." Yet "their inward thought is, that their houses shall continue for ever, and their dwelling-places to all generations: they call their lands after their own names.

nevertheless man being in honor, abideth not: he is like the beasts that perish. This their way is their folly: yet their posterity approve their sayings." They find the world is vain and unsatisfactory. They find the great instability and treachery of their own hearts, and how their own good intentions and resolutions are not to be depended on. They often find by experience that their attempts to make them better, fail. But, alas! With what small effect!

Such abundant evidence is there, both in what appears in the open profession of men, and also by what is found in their inward experience, and is evident in their practice, of the extreme and brutish ignorance and blindness, which naturally possess their hearts.

SECTION IV

Practical inferences and application of the subject.

HAVING shown how the truth of the doctrine is evident, both by what appears in men's open profession, and by those things which are found by inward experience, and are manifest by what is visible in men's practice, I proceed to improve the subject.

I. By this we may see how manifest are the ruins of the fall of man. It is observable in all the kinds of God's creatures that we behold, that they have those properties and qualities, which are every way proportioned to their end. So that they need no more, they stand in need of no greater degree of perfection, in order well to answer the special use for which they seem to be designed. The brute creatures, birds, beasts, fishes, and insects, though there be innumerable kinds of them, yet all seem to have such a degree of perception and perfection given them, as best suits their place in the creation, their manner of living, and the ends for which they were made. There is no defect visible in them. They are perfect in their kind. There seems to be nothing wanting, in order to their filling up their allotted place in the world. And there can be no reasonable doubt but that it was so at first with mankind. It is not reasonable to suppose, that God would make many thousands of kinds of creatures in this lower world, and one kind the highest of them all, to be the head of the rest, and that all the rest should be complete in their kinds, every way endowed with such qualifications as are proportioned to their use and end. And only this most noble creature of all, left exceeding imperfect, notoriously destitute of what he principally stands in need of to answer the end of his being. The principal faculty by which God has distinguished this noble creature from the rest, is his understanding. But would God so distinguish man in his creation from other creatures, and then seal up that understanding with such an extreme blindness, as to render it useless, as to the principal ends of it, and wholly to disenable him from answering the ends of an intelligent creature, and to make his understanding rather a misery than a blessing to him, and rendering him much more mischievous than useful? Therefore, if the Scripture had not told us so, yet we might safely conclude, that mankind are not now, as they were made at first. But that they are in a fallen state and condition.

II. From what has been said, plainly appears the necessity of divine revelation. The deists deny the Scripture to be the Word of God, and hold that there is no revealed religion, that God has given mankind no other rule but his own reason, who is sufficient, without any word or revelation from heaven, to give man a right understanding of divine things, and of his duty. But how is it proved in fact? How much trial has there been, whether man's reason, without a revelation, would be sufficient or not! The whole world, excepting one nation, had the trial till the coming of Christ. And was not this long enough for trial, whether man's reason alone was sufficient to instruct him? Those nations, who all that time lay in such gross darkness, and in such a deplorable helpless condition, had the same natural reason that the deists have.

And during this time, there was not only one man, or a succession of single persons, that had the trial, whether their own reason would be sufficient to lead them to the knowledge of the truth. But all nations, who all had the same human faculties that we have. If human reason is really sufficient, and there be no need of anything else, why has it never proved so? Why has it never happened, that so much as one nation, or one city or town, or one assembly of men, have been brought to tolerable notions of divine things, unless it be by the revelation contained in the Scriptures? If it were only one nation that had remained in such darkness, the trial might not be thought so great, because one particular people might be under some disadvantages, which were peculiar. But thus it has been with all nations, except those which have been favored with the Scriptures, and in all ages. Where is any people, who to this day have ever delivered themselves by their own reason, or have been delivered without light fetched from the Scriptures, or by means of the gospel of Jesus Christ?

If human reason is sufficient without the Scripture, is it not strange that, in these latter ages -- since navigation has been so improved, and America and many other parts of the world have been discovered, which were before unknown -- no one nation has anywhere been found already enlightened, and possessed of true notions about the Divine Being and his perfections, by virtue of that human reason they have been possessed of so many thousand years? The many poor, barbarous nations here, in America, had the faculty of reason to do what they pleased with, before the Europeans came hither, and brought over the light of the gospel. If human reason alone was sufficient, it is strange, that no one people were found, in any corner of the land, who were helped by it, in the chief concern of man.

There has been a great trial, as to what men's reason can do without divine help, in those endless disputes that have been maintained. If human reason alone could help mankind, it might be expected that these disputes would have helped them, and have put an end to men's darkness. The heathen philosophers had many hundreds of years to try their skill in this way. But all without effect. That divine revelation, which the church of God has been possessed of, has been in the world "as a light shining in a dark place." (2 Peter 1:19) It is the only remedy which God has provided for the miserable, brutish blindness of mankind, a remedy without which this fallen world would have sunk down forever in brutal barbarism without any remedy. It is the only means that the true God has made successful in his providence, to give the nations of the world the knowledge of himself; and to bring them off from the worship of false gods.

If human reason be the only proper means, the means that God has designed for enlightening mankind, is it not very strange, that it has not been sufficient, nor has answered this end in any one instance? All the right speculative knowledge of the true God, which the deists themselves have, has been derived from divine revelation. How vain is it to dispute against fact, and the experience of so many thousand years! And to pretend that human reason is sufficient without divine revelation, when so many thousand years' experience, among so many hundreds of nations of different tempers, circumstances, and interests, has proved the contrary! One would think all should acknowledge, that so long a time is sufficient for a trial, especially considering the miseries that the poor nations of the world have been under all this while, for want of light: the innumerable temporal calamities and miseries -- such as sacrificing children, and many other cruelties to others, and even to themselves -- besides that eternal perdition, which we may reasonably suppose to be the consequence of such darkness.

III. This doctrine should make us sensible, how great a mercy it is to mankind, that God has sent his own Son into the world, to be the light of the world. -- The subject shows what great need we stand in of some teacher to be sent from God. And even some of the wiser men among the heathen saw the need of this.

They saw that they disputed and jangled among themselves without coming to a satisfying discovery of the truth; and hence they saw, and spoke of, the need there was of a teacher sent from heaven. And it is a wonderful instance of divine mercy that God has so beheld us in our low estate, as to provide such a glorious remedy. He has not merely sent some created angel to instruct us, but his own Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, and of the same nature and essence with him. And therefore infinitely better acquainted with him, and more sufficient to teach a blind world. He has sent him to be the light of the world, as he says of himself, "I am come a light into the world." (John 12:46) When he came, he brought glorious light. It was like the day-spring from on high, visiting a dark world, as Zacharias observes (Luke 1:77, 78, 79). After Christ came, then the glorious gospel began to spread abroad, delivering those "that had sitten in darkness, and in the region of the shadow of death."

What reason have we to rejoice, and praise God, that he has made such excellent provision for us, and has set so glorious a sun in our firmament, such a "Sun of righteousness," after we had extinguished the light which at first enlightened us, and had, as it were, brought the world into that state, in which it was when "without form, and void, and darkness was on the face of it." (Jer. 4:22, 23) -- The glory of that light which God has sent into the world is fully answerable to the grossness of that darkness which filled it. For Christ who came to enlighten us is truth and light itself, and the fountain of all light. "He is the light, and in him is no darkness at all." (1 John 1:5)

IV. Hence we may learn, what must be the thing which will bring to pass those glorious days of light, which are spoken of in God's Word. -- Though mankind be fallen into such darkness, and the world be mostly in the kingdom of darkness; yet the Scripture often speaks of a glorious day, wherein light shall fill the earth. "For behold the darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people; but the Lord shall arise upon thee, and his glory shall be seen upon thee. And the Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising." (Isa. 60:2, 3.) "And he will destroy in this mountain, the face of the covering cast over all people, and the veil that is spread over all nations." (Isa. 25:7) "The knowledge of God shall fill the earth, as the waters cover the sea." (Isa. 11:9)

By what we have heard, we may on good grounds conclude, that whenever this is accomplished, it will not be effected by human learning, or by the skill or wisdom of great men. What has been before observed of this learned age, is a presumptive evidence of it, wherein spiritual darkness increases with the increase of learning. God will again make foolish the wisdom of this world. And will, as it were, say in his providence, "Where is the wise? where is the scribe? where is the disputer of this world?"

When this shall be accomplished, it will be by a remarkable pouring out of God's own Spirit, with the plain preaching of the gospel of his Son, the preaching of the spiritual, mysterious doctrines of Christ crucified, which to the learned men of this world are foolishness. Those doctrines, which are the stumbling-block of this learned age. "Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts." It will not be by the enticing words of man's wisdom, but by the demonstration of the Spirit and of power. Not by the wisdom of this world, nor by the princes of this world, that come to nought. But by the gospel, that contains the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which none of the princes of this world, who have nothing to enlighten them but their own learning, know anything of.

The Spirit of God, who searches all things, even the deep things of God, must reveal it. For let natural men be never so worldly wise and learned, they receive not the things of the Spirit. They are foolishness to them. Nor can they know them, because they are spiritually discerned. This great effect, when it is accomplished, will be a glorious effect indeed. And it will be accomplished in such a manner, as most

remarkably to show it to be the work of God, and his only. It will be a more glorious work of God than that which we read of in the beginning of Genesis. "And the earth was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters: and God said, Let there be light, and there was light." (Gen. 1:2, 3)

V. Hence we may learn the misery of all such persons, as are under the power of that darkness which naturally possesses their hearts. There are two degrees of this misery.

First, that of which all who are in a natural condition are the subjects. The doctrine shows that all such as are in a natural condition, are in a miserable condition. For they are in an extremely dark and blind condition. It is uncomfortable living in darkness. What a sorrowful state would we all be in, if the sun should no more rise upon us, and the moon were to withdraw her shining, and stars to be put out, and we were to spend the rest of our time in darkness! The world would soon perish in such darkness. It was a great plague in Egypt, when they had a total darkness for three days. They who are deprived of sight, are deprived of the most noble of the senses. They have no benefit of eternal light, one of the most excellent and needful of all the things which God has made in the visible creation. But they who are without spiritual sight and light, are destitute of that which is far more excellent and necessary.

That natural men are not sensible of their blindness, and the misery they are under by reason of it, is no argument that they are not miserable. For it is very much the nature of this calamity to be hid from itself, or from those who are under it. Fools are not sensible of their folly. Solomon says, "the fool is wiser in his own conceit, than seven men that can render a reason." (Pro. 26:16) The most barbarous and brutish heathens are not sensible of their own darkness, are not sensible but that they enjoy as great light, and have as good understanding of things, as the most enlightened nations in the world.

Second, another degree of this misery is of those who are judicially given up of God, to the blindness of their own minds. The Scripture teaches us that there are some such. "What then; Israel hath not obtained that which he seeketh for, but the election hath obtained it, and the rest were blinded." (Rom. 11:7) "But their minds were blinded; for until this day remaineth the same veil untaken away." (2 Cor. 3:14) "And he said, Go and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, and understand not; and see ye indeed, and perceive not. Make the heart of this people fat, and their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their hearts, and convert and be healed." (Isa. 6:6, 10) This judgment, when inflicted, is commonly for the contempt and abuse of li

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