

The Tender Anxieties of Ministers for Their People

by Samuel Davies

The sermon emphasizes the importance of genuine concern and tender anxieties for the spiritual well-being of others, highlighting the dangers of formalism and superficial religiosity.

Scripture: Romans 8:9

Topics: "Pastoral Care", "Spiritual Formation"

Description

Samuel Davies preaches about the tender anxieties ministers have for their people, expressing the pain of seeing fellow creatures stray from holiness and the need for genuine concern and fear for their spiritual well-being. He emphasizes the importance of true charity, which involves recognizing and addressing sin and neglect of piety, rather than turning a blind eye. Davies uses the example of Paul's doubts about the Galatians to urge the congregation to self-examination and to consider whether Christ is truly formed in their hearts, highlighting the necessity of being conformed to the image of Christ in both heart and life.

Transcript

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Ministers for Their People

by Samuel Davies, January 8, 1758

"My little children, of whom I travail in birth again until Christ is formed in you, I desire to be present with you now, and to change my voice: for I stand in doubt of you." Galatians 4:19-20

Nothing could be more agreeable to a sincere Christian who loves God and mankind, than to be fully satisfied of the real holiness and happiness of his fellow-creatures: and nothing is more painful than an anxious concern and fear in a matter he has so much at heart. Some profess themselves very easy in this respect, and they glory in this easiness as a high pitch of charity and benevolence. They hope well of all people--except, perhaps, their personal enemies, who, for that very reason, must be very worthless and execrable creatures. Though Scripture and reason do jointly declare, that men of bad lives who habitually indulge themselves in sin, and neglect the known duties of piety and morality, are not true Christians--but must be judged destitute of true piety by all who would judge according to evidence; "Yet, God forbid," say

they, "that they should judge any man. They are not of a censorious spirit--but sincere and benevolent in their hopes of all." Thus they can venture to hope that the tree is good, even when the fruit is corrupt: that is, that a Christian may lead a wicked life.

But this temper ought not to be honored with the noble name of Charity. Let it be called ignorance, gross ignorance of the nature of true religion; or infidelity and avowed disbelief of what the Scripture determines concerning the character of a good man; or let it be called indifference, an indifference whether men are now good or bad, and whether they shall be happy or miserable hereafter. Where there is no true love or affectionate concern, there will be no uneasy jealousy. Or let it be called a mere artifice for self-defense. Men are often cautious for condemning others, not from benevolence to them--but out of mercy to themselves, not being willing to involve themselves in the same condemnation! Since they are conscious they are as bad as others--they must be sparing to others, in order to spare themselves! These are the true names of what passes current under the name of Charity in the world.

Paul, whose heart was capable of the kindest sentiments to mankind, could not enjoy the pleasure of this promiscuous charity. He could not thus conclude well of all--not even of all under the Christian name; not of all whom he once hoped were his spiritual children; no, not of all the members of the once flourishing churches of Galatia, where he met with so friendly a reception, and had so much promising appearance of success. "I stand in doubt of you!" says he.

The state and character of these churches, we may partly learn from this epistle. A considerable number of Galatians had been converted from heathenism to Christianity by Paul's ministry; and in the transports of their first zeal they made a very promising appearance: hence he puts them in mind that they had begun in the Spirit, (ch. 3:3.) that when they first started in the Christian race, they had run well, (ch. 5:7.) that they suffered many things in the cause of the gospel; (ch. 3:4.) and as to their affection to him, it was very extraordinary. "You received me," says he, "as an angel of God, even as Christ Jesus. I bear you record, that if it had been possible, you would have plucked out your own eyes, and have given them to me!" (ch. 4:14, 15.)

But alas! how naturally do the most flourishing churches tend to decay! How frail and fickle is man! How inconstant is popular applause! These promising churches of Galatia soon began to decline, and their favorite, Paul--their apostle and spiritual father, appeared in quite another light, appeared as their enemy, because he told them the truth. There was a spurious set of preachers in that age, who corrupted the pure gospel of Christ with Jewish mixture. The ceremonies of the law of Moses, and the traditions of their elders, they held as of perpetual and universal obligation; and as such they imposed them even upon the Christian converts from among the Gentiles, who never had anything to do with them. Had they been recommended to their observance as indifferences or prudentials, it would not have had such bad influence upon Christianity. But they continued to impose them as absolutely necessary to salvation, and represented the righteousness revealed in the gospel as insufficient without these additions. Thus they labored to corrupt the great doctrine of a sinner's justification by faith alone, through the righteousness of Jesus Christ--that grand article upon which the church stands or falls. These judaizing teachers had artfully insinuated themselves into the Galatian churches, and spread the poison of their legal doctrines. This sunk Paul in the esteem of his converts, and they exchanged his pure gospel for another, more adapted to their taste. In consequence of this, religion was declining fast among them; and Paul is alarmed lest he should have bestowed labor in vain upon them.

This epistle is an affectionate attempt to recover them. It is for the most part argumentative; for its author was not fond of moving their passions without enlightening their understandings. But sometimes he melts into the most pathetic strains, and gives the most affecting touches to the heart. Such a tender, passionate address is this in my text. "My little children, of whom I travail in birth again, until Christ is formed in you, I desire to be present with you now, and to change my voice; for I stand in doubt of you!" What a tender, moving, parental address is this!

"My little children." This is a fond, affectionate appellation; the language of a tender father. It strongly expresses his paternal love and solicitude for the Galatians. The same style he uses to the Thessalonians, "You know how we exhorted and comforted, and charged every one of you, as a father does his children." 1 Thess. 2:11. He may also call them his children, to intimate that he had begotten them by the gospel as spiritual children to God: or rather as the following words suggest, he alludes to the sickness and anxiety of a mother in conception, and the pangs and agonies of child-bearing; and by these he illustrates the pangs and agonies of zeal, and the affectionate solicitude he had felt for them while Christ was forming in them under his ministry, and they were in the critical hour of the new birth. He might well call them his children, because he had suffered all the pains of a mother for them! He adds the epithet little--my little children, because the fond language of a parent affects such diminutives, or perhaps to intimate their small progress in Christianity. They were but little children in grace still.

"My little children, of whom I travail in birth again." I have just observed this is an allusion to the painful disorders and pangs of conception and birth; by which the apostle strongly represents the agonies of affectionate zeal, and tender concerns he felt for the Galatians. But what rendered them doubly painful to him, was, that he was obliged to feel them more than once--I travail of you in birth again. He had cheerful hopes that Christ was indeed formed in them, and that they were born from above, and consequently that he should have no more occasion to feel those agonies and throes he had suffered for them. But alas! he had now reason to fear the contrary, and, therefore, he must again feel the same pangs and agonies--he must travail in birth again.

"Until Christ is formed in you;" that is, until they are made new creatures after the image of Christ; until the sacred fetus is formed in their hearts; until the heavenly embryo grows and ripens for birth, or until they are conformed to Jesus Christ in heart and practice--until then he can never be easy. Though they should retain the Christian name, though they should make great proficiency in other attainments, though they should become as much attached to him as ever--yet he must still feel the pangs of birth for them, until Christ is really formed in them.

"I desire to be present with you now." In his absence they had been corrupted by the judaizing teachers; and he hoped his presence might have some happy influence to recover them. He was impatient of the restraints of a literary correspondence, and longed to pour out all his heart to them in a free address.

"I desire to be present with you now, and to change my voice." When he left them--they were in a flourishing state, and therefore he took his leave of them in the warmest language of affection, approbation, and confidence. "But now" says he, "I wish to be present with you," that I may alter my address; that I may change my voice into more severe and alarming strains; and instead of congratulating you upon your happy state--I must warn you of your danger."

Or his meaning may be, "I find myself obliged to use severe language with you in this epistle, which is by no means agreeable to me. I therefore desire to be present with you, that I may in person use means for

your recovery, that thereupon I may change my tone, and speak to you in a soft, approving strain, which is always most pleasing to me, as it would be to you. It is quite contrary to my inclination to use such chiding language to my dear little children."

Or perhaps he may mean, "I desire to be present with you, that I may know the different characters of your members, and that I may be able to change my tone, and address them accordingly; that I may warn, admonish, exhort, or comfort you, as your respective cases may require. I would willingly speak comfortably to you all promiscuously--but this I cannot now do."

"For I stand in doubt of you." When I parted with you last, I had great confidence in you, and hoped that you would persevere: but now I stand in doubt of you, and therefore must alter my tone to you if I were present with you. While I am thus doubtful of you, I cannot speak comfortably to you all promiscuously; but I must honestly tell you my suspicions of you, and, until there appears a change in you, I cannot change my tone into more pleasing strains.

My dear hearers, this charge is entrusted to me by the great Shepherd, for which I must give an account: you and I are too nearly concerned in this text to consider it merely as a piece of history, referring only to Paul and the Galatians some 1700 years ago. I must bring it nearer home in a particular application. God forbid so vain and proud a thought should ever find a place in my heart, as to set myself upon the footing of equality with Paul, the chief of the apostles. I will not tell you how much and how often I have been mortified, especially of late, at the thoughts of my vast inferiority, not only to him--but to the ordinary ministers of Christ of a lower class. You seldom hear a sermon from me but what fills me with shame and confusion in the review; and I almost cease to wonder that the gospel has so little success among you, while managed by so unskillful a hand. Yet I hope I may truly profess so much sincere affection and concern for you, as to warrant me to borrow the words of the apostle, though in a much lower sense: "My little children, of whom I travail in birth, until Christ is formed in you, I desire to be present with you, and to change my voice," according to the variety of your cases; "for I am in doubt of some of you." And I hope you are disposed to give me a serious hearing, and a serious hearing is justly expected from you; for, remember, the day of death and the day of judgment WILL come, and that you must die--and then you must be judged--and then you must be doomed to your everlasting state.

"I stand in doubt of some of you." I am jealous over you with a godly jealousy. And if there is no ground for it--then you will forgive me; for if it is an error--it is the error of love. Though I was an entire stranger to you all, I might justly harbor this jealousy of some of you, upon this general principle, that there never yet was so pure a church met in one place, as not to have one insincere, hypocritical professor in it. Even the apostles, the most select society that ever was formed, had a Judas among them. And can we expect more than apostolic purity in such a large promiscuous crowd as generally frequents this house? In every church there are, alas! some suspicious characters; and my present design is to describe such characters, and then leave it to yourselves, to judge whether there are not such among you.

Forgive me, if I suppose that some of you live in the greatest neglect of family religion. You lie down and rise up, perhaps, for weeks, months, and years--and yet never call your families together morning and evening to worship the great God who has placed you in families. If this is the character of any of you, then I must plainly tell you, I stand in doubt of you! I really doubt you have any sincere relish for the worship of God; for if you had, how could you, as it were, excommunicate yourselves from the precious privilege of drawing near to God with your dear families, and devoting yourselves and them to him?

I really doubt that you have no deep affecting concern for the salvation of your children, otherwise, how could you neglect a duty that has so direct a natural tendency to make pious impressions upon their minds? Can anything more naturally tend to make them sensible of their obligations, their sins, their needs, and mercies--than to hear you solemnly mention these things everyday, in the presence of the great God?

Your character in this is opposite to that of godly men in all ages. You will find in the history of the patriarchs, particularly of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, that, wherever they had a dwelling for themselves, they had an altar for God. You find David returning from the solemnities of public worship to bless his house, 2 Sam. 6:20, and saying, "Evening, morning, and at noon, will I pray." Psalm 55:17. You find Daniel praying, as he was accustomed, three times a day, even when the penalty was not only the loss of his place at court--but his being thrown as a prey to hungry lions! You find Paul greeting some of the primitive Christians, with the church that was in their house. Romans 16:5; 1 Corinthians 16:19; Coloss. 4:15; Philemon 2. Which is a strong intimation that they made their families little churches by celebrating the worship of God in them; for a church without the worship of God would be an absurd society indeed. I had almost forgotten the example of Joshua, who bravely resolved, that whatever others should do, "he and his house would serve the Lord!" Joshua 24:15.

You see, then, your character in this important instance, is the opposite to that of the saints in all ages. And have I not reason to stand in doubt of you, especially as you cannot now plead ignorance: since you have been so often instructed in your duty on this head. You may plead your incapacity or hurry of business, or that your neighbors would ridicule you as ostentatious Pharisees. But this is so far from clearing you, that it renders you still more suspicious! If these are the reasons of your neglect, I greatly doubt you love your reputation and the world--more than the honor of God, more than his service, and more than the immortal interest of your children and servants. How would it shock you--if God should authoritatively lay that restraint upon you which you voluntarily put upon yourselves? Suppose he should say, "I will allow all the families around you to worship me every day--but I lay your family under an interdict; from them I will receive no worship;" how would this shock you! And will you of your own accord take this curse upon yourselves? Oh! think of it, and this very evening consecrate your houses to God.

Again, I will suppose some of you generally observe the outward duties of religion; you pray in secret and in your families; you attend upon public worship; you receive the sacrament, and you sometimes fast--but generally this is but a dull round of lifeless formalities. Even a judicious Christian may suspect that your whole hearts are not engaged, that the vigor of your spirits is not exerted, and that there is no spiritual life in your devotions. Thus man may suspect; and he who searches the heart may see it so in fact. Now, if this is your character, I must tell you, that I stand in doubt of you. If you are really lukewarm Laodiceans, the case is quite plain: it is not a matter of doubt--but that you are the most odious creatures upon earth to Jesus Christ. He could wish you were cold or hot, or anything rather than what you are. And where the appearances of such formality are found, where there is a dull uniformity in all your devotions, without any signs of those divine changes which the gracious presence of God produces--your case looks very suspicious, even to men. I really stand in doubt of you; and you have great need to look to yourselves, lest the suspicion shall be well-grounded.

Some of you perhaps think you can easily clear yourselves from the suspicion of formality, for you have often had your hearts melted, your passion raised, and you find a great change in your dispositions in devotion; sometimes you are cold and dull--and at other times all zeal and ecstasy: but notwithstanding this, there may be great reason to doubt concerning some of you.

I doubt that these are only warm flights of the passions, under the influence of a heated imagination, and not such rational emotions of the heart as proceed from a well-enlightened mind, which sees the nature, importance, and excellency of divine things. I fear that these warm passions have no effectual tendency to make you more holy--that is, to subdue your favorite sins in heart and life, to make you more watchful against them, and to long and labor after universal holiness. I am afraid they have no tendency to humble you, to degrade you in your own eyes, and make you appear sinful and vile to yourselves--but on the other hand, that they tend to set you off to advantage in your own view, and to make you think highly of yourselves. I am afraid that they are shallow and superficial, and never reach deep enough to transform the settled temper of the whole soul--and give it a prevailing, habitual bent towards God. I am afraid, among your various exercises of heart--that you have none of those humbling, heart-breaking sensations which a poor believer often feels, when lying helpless before God, and casting his guilty soul upon Jesus Christ. I am afraid that your exercises are of a more selfish, haughty, and presumptuous kind. I am afraid of some of you, my dear people, in this respect, because this has been, in fact, the case of multitudes, and therefore it may be yours.

I also stand in doubt of some of you, that your pious impressions have worn off--before they ripened into fruitfulness. This is a very common case in the world, and therefore it may be yours. I am afraid some of you are farther from the kingdom of God today, than you were some months or years ago. Formerly you were serious and thoughtful--but now you are light and vain. Formerly you had some clear, affecting convictions of your sin and danger, which made you pensive and uneasy, set you upon the use of the means of grace with unusual earnestness and diligence, and made you more watchful against sin and temptation. Had you but persevered in this course, your case would have been very hopeful; nay, you might before now have been sincere Christians, happy in the favor of God, and the joyful expectation of a blessed immortality. But, alas! now you have become more thoughtless and carnally secure, more negligent and careless, more worldly-minded, more bold and venturous as to temptation, and particularly ensnaring company; less sensible of your sin and danger, less afraid of the divine displeasure, less solicitous for a Savior, and less affected with eternal things! I stand in doubt of you--that this is the case of some of you! And if it is--then it is very dismal! The last state of that man--has become worse than the first!

Perhaps your pious impressions went so far, that yourselves and others too began to number you in the list of sincere converts. But, alas! you have relapsed, and now your case is dismally dark; it is very doubtful whether ever you had one spark of true piety. Like the Galatians you did once run well; but the corruptions of your own hearts, the cares of the world, the influence of bad company, and the temptations of the devil--have hindered you, and made you turn back, and now you have gotten into the easy, slippery, descending road of apostasy; from whence, as from a precipice, your feet will, before long, slide--and let you fall into the fiery gulf of hell below! You are every day running farther and farther from God and heaven, and so much nearer to the chambers of eternal destruction! Your consciences, by repeated violences, have been stunned into insensibility, your hearts have been hardened more and more, like clay in the sun. Your corruptions have been gaining the victory in repeated conflicts, and grow more strong and insolent, like veteran troops inured to war and conquest. In short, your case every day grows more and more discouraging; and I stand in doubt of you, lest you should never recover your pious impressions, nor enter into the kingdom of God!

I am also in doubt of some of you, that the WORLD has your hearts: your thoughts seem to be engrossed by it, and your affections fixed upon it as your supreme good--and hence your mouth is full of it; for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. Now if any man loves the world--the love of the Father is

not in him. Covetousness is idolatry; and you know that no idolater has eternal life. I fear this is the character of some of you!

Is there not also reason to doubt of some of you, from the discoveries you give of an unchristian spirit towards mankind? You may perhaps make a specious profession of religion, and punctually attend upon divine ordinances; but do you not discover haughty pride, and unchristian resentment, and an unforgiving spirit under injuries, a disposition to defraud and take the advantage in your financial dealings? Such a temper, when predominant, is utterly inconsistent with the spirit of Christianity, and proves you entirely destitute of it; and the appearances of the prevalence of such a temper render your case very suspicious.

Let me add farther: Suppose that in this day of war, blood and slaughter, when the Lord Almighty calls you to weeping and mourning, and girding with sackcloth; when the wounds of your bleeding country, and the streams of blood that are running by sea and land, call for your sorrowful sympathy; when your everlasting state stands in a dreadful suspense--if you should die this night--I am afraid whether heaven or hell will be your eternal residence!

I am afraid for you--when the evidence lies against you, and you have good proof that you are utterly unprepared for eternity in your present condition, when the Spirit of God seems withdrawn from us; and consequently but few are pressing into the kingdom of God, and general languor and inefficacy run through the ministrations of the gospel; when your conduct may encourage others to run into extravagancies, and forget God and their souls, as well as throw yourselves causelessly into the way of temptation, and nourish that levity of mind which directly tends to wear off your pious impressions; when at a time in which you pretend to commemorate the birth of the holy Jesus, who came to destroy the works of the devil and the flesh, and particularly ravelings, and to make you sober and watchful to prayer, and to shun all appearances of evil; when in your transition from the old year to the new, in which you may die, and never see the close of it; and when one would think it would better befit you solemnly to recollect how you have spent the year past, and devote yourselves to God for the future with new vows and resolutions!

Suppose, I say, that at such a time, and in such circumstances, you indulge yourselves in feasting and carousing, that perhaps you prosecute and chase the diversion from house to house, in order to prolong it, and guard against the returns of serious, retired, and thoughtful hours; as if laughing, dancing, and frolicking, were proper expressions of gratitude for the birth of a Savior, and as if there was nothing in time or eternity of sufficient importance to make you serious, and check your growing levity! What shall I say of such a practice? The mildest thing I can say is--that I stand in doubt of you--who promote, or willingly tolerate, or join in such entertainments!

I have no business at present to determine, whether music, dancing, and feasting, are lawful in themselves. Granting them to be as lawful as you could wish, I am sure that, at such a time, and in the circumstances that generally attend them, they are utterly unlawful to every Christian, and have a natural tendency to banish all serious religion from among us. I am no enemy to the lawful pleasures of mankind, nor do I place genuine piety in morose, mopish, melancholy austerities. But after all, I must declare, that I have very little hopes of the success of the gospel among you--if I should have a congregation of dancing, frolicking, worldly professors! Alas! you are likely to dance and frolic yourselves into hell!

It is with great reluctance that I touch upon such a subject, though with a gentle hand; but duty commands, and I must obey! I wish the admonition may be so effectual, as to prevent all occasion to repeat it in time to come.

Thus I have delineated sundry dubious characters, and now I leave you to judge whether there are not many such among you. Examine yourselves thoroughly, that you may have the judgment of God in your favor; for by that you must stand or fall.

Some of you, perhaps, may think it strange that I have omitted so many characters that are frequent among us. I have said nothing of the profane sinner, the drunkard, the swearer, the immoral, the thief, or the knave. I have said nothing of the infidel and scoffer, who boast to disbelieve the religion of Jesus, and relapse into heathenism; and who openly make a mock of sacred things. I have said nothing of the careless creature, who lives in the general neglect of even the forms of religion! I have said nothing of the stupid, thoughtless creature, who lives like a brute, merely for the purposes of the present life! I have said nothing of such as these, because they do not come under the class of doubtful characters. I have no doubt at all about such as these! I am sure they are utterly destitute of all true religion, and must perish forever--if they continue in their present condition!

If you would know how I come to be sure as to them, I answer: Because I believe both my reason and my Bible; for both put the character and the doom of such beyond all doubt. Common sense is sufficient to convince me, that such are unholy, impenitent sinners; and I am sure, both from both reason and revelation, that an unholy, impenitent sinner, while such--can never enter the kingdom of heaven. Let such as harbor a wider charity for them, point out the grounds of it. Indeed there is one thing lamentably doubtful as to such: it is very doubtful whether ever their present condition will be changed for the better! The most promising period of life is over with them, and even in that period they continued impenitent under all the means of grace they enjoyed; and is it not more likely they will continue so in time to come? Oh! that they would take the alarm, and lay their danger to heart in time, that they may use proper means for their deliverance!

Nothing can turn the full evidence against them--into their favor; and nothing can render the doubtful case of the former class, clear and satisfactory, but the formation of Christ within them. This alone can put it beyond all doubt that they are Christians indeed, and prove their sure title to everlasting happiness. This shall be the subject of the remainder of this discourse.

Here you would ask me, I suppose, "What it is to have Christ formed within us?"

I have already told you briefly, that it signifies our being made conformable to him in heart and life, or having his holy image stamped upon our hearts. This is essential to the character of every true Christian. "Christ dwells in the heart of such by faith"; and "if any man has not the Spirit of Christ--he is none of his." Romans 8:9. "He who says he abides in him--ought himself also so to walk even as he walked," says John, 1 John 2:6. "Let this mind be in you," says Paul, "which was also in Christ Jesus." Philippians 2:5. "Whom he foreknew, he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son." Romans 8:29.

The temper of a Christian has such a resemblance to Christ's, that it was called Christ in embryo, spiritually formed within us. It is indeed infinitely short of the all-perfect original--but yet it is a prevailing temper, and habitually the governing principle of the soul. That filial temper towards God; that humble veneration and submission; that ardent devotion; that strict regard to all the duties of religion; that self-denial, humility, meekness, and patience; that heavenly-mindedness and noble superiority to the world; that sincere charity, benevolence, and mercy to mankind; that ardent zeal and diligence to do good; that temperance and sobriety which shone in the blessed Jesus with a divine, incomparable splendor--all these and the like graces and virtues shine, though with feebler rays, in all of his followers! They have their

infirmities indeed, many and great infirmities--but not such as are inconsistent with the habitual prevalency of this Christ-like disposition!

You may make whatever excuses you please--but this is an eternal truth--that unless you have a real resemblance to the holy Jesus--you are not his genuine disciples! Please examine critically into this point. Have you a right to take your name 'Christian' from Christ, by reason of your conformity to him?

Again, if Christ is formed in your hearts, he lives there. The heavenly embryo is not yet complete, not yet ripe for birth into the heavenly world--but it is quickened. I mean, those virtues and graces above mentioned are not dead, inactive principles within you--but they operate, they show themselves alive by action, they are the governing principles of your practice.

You are not like him in heart--unless you are like him in life too; and if your life is conformed to his, it will plainly distinguish you from the world, while it continues so wicked. If you are like to him--you will certainly be very unlike to the generality of mankind; and they will acknowledge the difference, and point you out, and hate you--as not belonging to them. They will stare at you as an odd, unfashionable stranger, and wonder that you do not copy their example. "If you were of the world," says Christ, "the world would love its own: but because you are not of the world--but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hates you." John 15:19.

I hope you now know what it is--to have Christ formed within you. And in what heart among you--is the holy Christ conceived and growing? Where are the followers of Jesus? Surely they are not so like the men of the world--the followers of sin and Satan, as to be indistinguishable. Oh! how many impostors--does this inquiry reveal! How many false pretenders to Christianity, who are the very reverse of its great Founder! And as many of you as continue unlike him now in holiness--must continue unlike to him forever in happiness. All Christ's heavenly companions are Christ-like; they bear his image and superscription!

Before I dismiss this head, I must observe that the production of this divine infant, if I may so call it, in the heart--is entirely the work of the Holy Spirit. It is not the growth of human nature--but a creation of divine power. It is the hand of God--which draws the lineaments of this image upon the heart, though he makes use of the gospel and a variety of means as his pencil.

But you would inquire farther, "In what manner does this divine agent work? Or--how is Christ formed in the hearts of his people?"

I answer, The heart of man has active sensations. Nothing can be done there--without its perceiving it. Much less can Christ be formed there, while it is wholly insensible of the powerful operation. There is indeed a great variety in the individual circumstances--but the substance of the work is the same in all true Christians. Therefore, if ever you have been the subjects of it, you have been sensible of the following particulars.

1. You have been made deeply sensible of your being entirely destitute of this divine image. Your hearts have appeared to you as a huge, shapeless mass of corruption, without one ingredient of true goodness, amidst all the flattering appearances of it! In view of this horrid discovery--your high conceit of yourselves was mortified, your airs of pride and self-importance lowered; and you saw yourselves utterly unfit for heaven, that region of purity; and ready to fall, as it were, by your own weight, into hell--that infernal sink of all the pollutions of the moral world!

This is the first step towards the formation of Christ in the soul. And have you ever gone thus far? If not--then you may be sure you have never gone farther.

2. You have hereupon set yourselves in earnest to the use of the means appointed for the renovation of your nature. Prayer, hearing the gospel, and other divine ordinances, were no more lifeless, customary formalities to you; but you exerted all the vigor of your souls in them. You also guarded against everything that tended to nourish your depraved disposition, and hinder the formation of Christ within you. Then you dared not play with temptation, nor venture within its reach!

This is the second step in the process. And have you ever gone thus far? If not--then you have never gone farther; and if you have never gone farther, you can never reach the kingdom of God in your present lost condition!

3. You have been made sensible of your own weakness; and the inefficacy of all the means you could use to produce the divine image upon your hearts; and that nothing but the divine hand could draw it there. When you first begun your endeavors, you had high hopes that you would do great things; but, after hard strivings and strugglings, after many prayers and tears, after much reading, hearing, and meditation--you found no good effect followed. Nay, the corruption of your hearts appeared more and more, and hence you concluded that you were growing worse and worse. Thus the blessed Spirit convinced you of your own weakness, and the necessity of his influence to work this divine change. He cleared away the rubbish of pride and self-righteousness from your hearts, in order to prepare them, as a clean canvas--to receive the image of Christ.

And have you ever been thus humbled and mortified? Have you ever been reduced into this wholesome self-despair? It is the humble heart alone, which is susceptible of the image of the meek and lowly Jesus. Pride can never receive its lineaments, nor can it be carved on an insensible stone!

4. Hereupon the Holy Spirit enlightened your minds to view the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ--and the method of salvation revealed in the gospel. The bright beams of the divine perfections shining in that way of salvation, the attractive beauties of holiness, and all the wonders of the gospel--struck your minds with delightful astonishment! And you now viewed them in a light unknown before. Hereupon you were enabled to cast your guilty, corrupt, helpless souls upon Jesus Christ--whom you saw to be a glorious, all-sufficient Savior; and with all your hearts you embraced the way of salvation through his mediation!

The view of his glory proved transformative! While you were contemplating the object--you received its likeness; the rays of glory beaming upon you, as it were, rendered your hearts transparent, and the beauties of holiness were stamped upon them! Thus Paul represents the matter, "We all with open face beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord." 2 Corinthians 3:18.

Thus your hearts retained the image of his glory, like the face of Moses after he had been conversing with God in the Mount. You contracted the temper of Jesus Christ, and imbibed his spirit! He was formed in your hearts, and began to live and act there. The life you lived in the flesh--you now lived by faith in the Son of God. Now your minds took a new turn, and your life a new cast; and the difference began to appear even to others in the world. Not knowing the divine original, they knew not whose image you bore. "Therefore the world knows us not," says John, "because it knew him not!" 1 John 3:1. This, however, they knew--that you no longer resembled them! Therefore they looked upon you as an odd sort of creature,

whose tempers and manners were as different from theirs as if you were foreigners! You soon became as speckled birds among them, and they were weary of your society--and you of theirs.

Friends, have you ever been the subjects of divine operation? Has Christ ever been thus formed in your hearts? I stand in doubt of some of you, though blessed be God, there are others who give good grounds for a charitable hope concerning them--by their apparent likeness to Christ!

5. If Christ has ever been formed in you--it is your persevering endeavor to improve and perfect this divine image. You long and labor to be fully conformed to him, and, as it were, to catch his disposition, his manner, and spirit--in every thought, in every word, and in every action. As far as you are unlike to him--just so far you appear deformed and loathsome to yourselves. While you feel an unchristian spirit prevail within you, you seem as if you were possessed with the devil. And it is the labor of your life to subdue such a spirit, and to brighten and finish the features of the divine image within you, by repeated touches and re-touches.

By this short view, my friends, you may be assisted in determining whose image you bear: whether Christ's or Satan's, whether Christ's or the world's, whether Christ's or your own. And let me tell you, if you cannot determine this, you know not but you may be in hell the next hour! For none shall ever find admittance into heaven--who are not formed after the image of Christ. The glorious company upon Mount Zion are all followers of the Lamb! They are like him--for they see him as he is. A soul unlike to him would be a monster there: a native of hell--snuck into heaven; a wolf--among lambs; a devil--among angels. And can you hope for admission there, while you are unlike him?

The two grand apartments of the eternal world are under two opposite heads: the holy Jesus presides in the one--and the prince of devils, the prime offender and father of sin, in the other. Both apartments are settled with colonies from our world; and the inhabitants of both are like their respective heads. Therefore, if you resemble the Prince of Heaven--then with him you shall dwell forever; but if you resemble the tyrant of hell--then you must forever be his miserable vassals. Therefore push home the inquiry: Is Christ formed in my heart, or is he not?

If he is, then rejoice in it, as a sure pledge of the heavenly inheritance. None ever went to hell--who carried the image of Christ upon their hearts; but the heavenly regions are peopled with such. His image is the grand passport into that country, a passport that was never disputed; and, if you bear it, the celestial gates will be flung wide open for your reception, and your human and angelic brethren, who have the same temper, the same manner, the same spirit--will all hail your arrival, and shout your welcome; will own you as their kindred, from your visible resemblance to them; and you will immediately and naturally commence a familiarity with them, from the conformity of your dispositions. The Father of all will also own the dear image of his Son, and the blessed Jesus will acknowledge his own image, and confess the relation. Blessed moment--when you will arrive, when all the followers of the Lamb shall appear upon Mount Zion, in his full likeness, without spot or wrinkle, or any such thing! Blessed moment--when no stranger of another disposition and another spirit shall mingle among them--but be all cast in the same mold, and all be clothed in uniform, with the beauties of holiness and the robes of salvation! Oh! my friends, must not your eager hearts spring forward to meet that day?

But amid all the joy which that transporting prospect affords, it must humble you to think, that though Christ is really formed in your hearts--it is but very imperfectly, as an unfinished embryo. His image as yet is but very faint; you still carry the traces of some infernal features about you. Let this consideration

constrain you to put yourselves daily under the operation of the blessed Spirit, until he finishes the heavenly picture by repeated touches, and diligently attend upon all the means which he is pleased to use as his pencil. Guard against everything that may deform the divine draught, or delay its perfection. Go on in this way, and the glorious picture will daily catch more and more the likeness of the divine original, and soon come to complete perfection.

But I must speak a concluding word to such of you in whom Christ has never yet been formed. Please turn your eyes upon yourselves, and survey your own deformity! Do you not see the image of the devil upon you? Have you not forgotten God, and refused to love him, like a devil? Have you not loved and practiced sin like a devil? Or have you not wallowed in sensual pleasures, and confined all your concern to the present life, like a beast, and thus made yourselves the most horrid monsters--half beast, half devil? And can you love yourselves while this is your character? Can you flatter yourselves that such as you can be admitted into heaven?

Since it is possible your deformed spirits may yet receive the image of Christ, will you not use all possible means for that purpose, while there is hope? This day begin the attempt, resolve and labor to become new men in this new year.

But alas! exhortation is but feeble breath, which vanishes into air between my lips and your ears; something is needed to give it force and efficacy. We have the gospel, we have preaching, we have all the means of salvation; but something is needed to give them life, to make them efficacious, and bear them home upon the hearts of sinners with that almighty energy which they have sometimes had. Something, alas! is needed for this purpose--and what is it? It is You, eternal Spirit. You, the Author of all godliness in the hearts of men: you, the only former of Christ within: you are absent, and without you neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters; they are all nothing together. Come, O life of souls, O spirit of the gospel, O quickener of ordinances, O assistant of poor ministers, O opener of their hearers' hearts! Come visit this congregation. Come today! Oh! come this moment! and Christ shall be formed in us, the hope and the pledge of glory!

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