

Thirty Devotional Meditations

THE
POWER
OF THE
PURITANS



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THE POWER OF THE PURITANS

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

1 // Seek His Eternal Rest	1
2 // The Daily Pursuit of Holiness	6
3 // Our Greatest Gospel Duty.	11
4 // The Most Effective Way to Pray.	16
5 // Holding Steadfast Through Anxiety.	23
6 // Hindrances to the Fear of God	28
7 // Your Unfamiliarity With a Majestic God.	36
8 // Knowing True Spiritual Delight.	42
9 // Gospel-Motivated Holiness.	48
10 // The Source of Christian Strength.	52
11 // Prayer Against a Relentless Enemy	58
12 // The Rules to Read Scripture Effectively.	64
13 // The Way of Contentment.	69
14 // A Prayer for the Power of the Church	74
15 // The Calling of Every Christian	78
16 // Beholding the Glory of God	86
17 // Afflicted for Good	93
18 // Freedom from Vain Affections.	96
19 // Fishers of Men.	102
20 // Five Instructions for the Christian Soldier.	106
21 // Blessed for Divine Usefulness	113
22 // True Sanctification	121
23 // Eight Remedies Against Fruitlessness	125

24 // The Place and Posture of Prayer	131
25 // Kindling Your Love for God	135
26 // Serving an Infinitely Happy God	141
27 // Returning to Christ	145
28 // All Things for Your Good	149
29 // The Primacy of Love	154
30 // Awaiting Glorification	158

1

SEEK HIS ETERNAL REST

Richard Baxter

The Saints Everlasting Rest

If there be so certain and glorious a rest for the saints, why is there no more earnest seeking after it? One would think, if a man did but once hear of such unspeakable glory to be obtained, and believed what he heard, he would be transported with the vehemency of his desire after it, and would almost forget to eat and drink, and would care for nothing else, and speak of and inquire after nothing else, but how to get this treasure.

And yet people who hear of it daily, and profess to believe it as a fundamental article of their faith, as little mind it, or labor for it, as if they had never heard of any such thing, or did not believe one word they hear. This reproof is applicable to the worldly-minded, to the profane multitude, to formal professors, and even to the godly themselves. The worldly-minded are so taken up in seeking

the things below, that they have neither heart nor time to seek this rest. O foolish sinners, “who hath bewitched you?”

The world bewitches men into brute beasts, and draws them even to madness. See what riding and running, what scrambling and catching for a thing of nought, while eternal rest lies neglected! What contriving and caring to get a step higher in the world than their brethren, while they neglect the kingly dignity of the saints! What insatiable pursuit of fleshly pleasures, while they regard the praises of God, the joy of angels, as a tiresome burden! What unwearyed diligence in raising their posterity, enlarging their possessions, (perhaps for a poor living from hand to mouth,) while judgment is drawing near! but how it shall go with them then, never brings them to one hour’s consideration! What rising early and sitting up late, and laboring from year to year, to maintain themselves and children in credit till they die! but what shall follow after they never think!

Yet these men cry, “May we not be saved without so much ado?” How early do they rouse up their servants to their labor! but how seldom do they call them to prayer, or reading the Scriptures! What hath this world done for its lovers and friends, that it is so eagerly followed and painfully sought after, while Christ and heaven are neglected? or what will the world do for them for the time to come? The common entrance into it is through anguish and sorrow. The passage through it is with continual care and labor. The passage out of it is the sharpest of all. O unreasonable, deluded men! will mirth and pleasure stay by you? will gold and worldly glory prove

fast friends to you in the time of your greatest need? Will they hear your cries in the day of your calamity? At the hour of your death will they either answer or relieve you? Will they go along with you to the other world, and bribe the Judge and bring you off clear, or purchase you a place among the blessed?

Why then did the rich man want “a drop of water to cool his tongue?” Or are the sweet morsels of present delight and honor of more worth than eternal rest? And will they recompense the loss of that enduring treasure? Can there be the least hope of any of these? Ah, vile, deceitful world! how oft have we heard thy most faithful servants at last complaining, “O, the world hath deceived me, and undone me! It flattered me in my prosperity, but now it turns me off in my necessity. If I had as faithfully served Christ as I have served it, he would not have left me thus comfortless and hopeless.” Thus, they complain; and yet succeeding sinners will take no warning.

Reader, look but to thyself and resolve the question. Ask conscience, and suffer it to tell thee truly. Hast thou set thy eternal rest before thine eyes, as the great business thou hast to do in this world? Hast thou watched and labored with all thy might, “that no man take thy crown?” Hast thou made haste, lest thou should come too late, and die before thy work be done? Hast thou pressed on, through crowds of opposition, “toward the mark, for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus,” till “reaching forth unto those things which are before?”

Can conscience witness your secret cries, and groans, and tears? Can your family witness that you taught them the fear of the Lord,

and warned them not to “go to that place of torment?” Can your minister witness that he has heard you cry out, “What shall I do to be saved?” and that you have followed him with complaints against your corruptions, and with earnest inquiries after the Lord? Can your neighbors about you witness that you reprove the ungodly, and take pains to save the souls of your brethren? Let all these witnesses judge this day between God and you, whether you are in earnest about eternal rest.

You can tell by his work whether your servant has loitered, though you did not see him; so you may, by looking at your own work. Is your love to Christ, your faith, your zeal, and other graces, strong or weak? What are your joys? What is your assurance? Is all in order with you? Are you ready to die, if this should be the day? Do the souls among whom you have conversed bless you? Judge by this, and it will quickly appear whether you have been laborers or loiterers.

O blessed rest, how unworthily art thou neglected! O glorious kingdom, how art thou undervalued! Little know the careless sons of men what a state they so neglect. If they once knew it, they would surely be of another mind. I hope thou, reader, art sensible what a desperate thing it is to trifle about eternal rest, and how deeply thou hast been guilty of this thyself. And I hope, also, thou wilt not suffer this conviction to die. Should the physician tell thee, “If you will observe but one thing, I doubt not to cure your disease,” wouldst thou not observe it?

So I tell thee, if thou wilt observe but this one thing for thy

soul, I make no doubt of thy salvation; shake off thy sloth, and put to all thy strength, and be a Christian indeed: I know not then what can hinder thy happiness. As far as thou art gone from God, seek him with all thy heart, and no doubt thou shalt find him. As unkind as thou hast been to Jesus Christ, seek him heartily, obey him unreservedly, and thy salvation is as sure as if thou hadst it already. But, full as Christ's satisfaction is, free as the promise is, large as the mercy of God is, if thou only talk of these when thou shouldst eagerly entertain them, thou wilt be never the better for them: and if thou loiter when thou shouldst labor, thou wilt lose the crown. Fall to work, then, speedily and seriously, and bless God that thou hast yet time to do it.

2

THE DAILY PURSUIT OF HOLINESS

Thomas Brooks

Holiness the Only Way to Happiness

This progress in holiness is that main thing that the apostle presses upon the believing Corinthians in that 2 Cor. 7:1, “Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.”

The apostle having in the former chapter armed the believing Corinthians with many strong arguments against all communion and fellowship with idolaters, he comes at last to touch upon those great and glorious promises which, upon the account of their high and holy calling, they were interested in, verse 16–18. He presents them as singular motives, and as choice and precious encouragements, to move them to perfect holiness in the fear of God. There is no work on earth that so well befits the heirs of such precious

promises as that of cleansing themselves from all filthiness on the one hand, and that of perfecting holiness in the fear of God on the other hand.

As that Job 17:9, “The righteous shall hold on his way, and he who has clean hands shall be stronger and stronger;” or as the Hebrew has it, “he shall add strength,” that is, he shall go on from one degree of spiritual strength to another, he shall go on from a lesser degree to a greater degree of spiritual strength, and from a lower degree to a higher degree of spiritual strength.

A holy man shall not only have his spiritual strength maintained—but increased; he shall not only retain that spiritual strength he has—but he shall be still a-adding of strength to strength, Psalm 84:7. They go from strength to strength, or from power to power; or as the word may be read, from company to company, or from troop to troop—in allusion to the custom of the Jews, when all the males went up thrice a year to Jerusalem; now when they went up to Jerusalem, they went up with their flocks, and in troops.

Now those who were lively, active, and strong—they overtook this company and that, and this troop and that—and so they went on, their power and strength increasing daily more and more, until they appeared before God in Zion. Look! as the bee goes from flower to flower to gather honey—just so, those who had a principle of grace and holiness in them, they went from one good company to another, from one troop of Christians to another—still gathering up heavenly honey as they went.

O sirs, there is no such way to perfect holiness, as to be still

a-going on from duty to duty, and from ordinance to ordinance; from praying to hearing, and from hearing to praying; from reading to meditating, and from meditating to reading; from public duties to closet duties, and from closet duties to public duties, etc. Psalm 92:12–14, “But the godly will flourish like palm trees and grow strong like the cedars of Lebanon. For they are transplanted into the Lord’s own house. They flourish in the courts of our God. Even in old age they will still produce fruit; they will remain vital and green.” The promise of flourishing is repeated in these verses—to note the more than ordinary flourishing estate of the saints, even in their old age. I have read of an old Christian, who being asked whether he grew in goodness or not, answered, “I believe I do, because the Lord has promised that his people shall bring forth fruit in old age.”

Pliny, writing of the crocodile, tells us that she grows to her dying day—just so, Christians who are rooted in Christ, and planted in the house of the Lord, they will be still growing up in grace and holiness even to their dying day. It is with real Christians as it is with wine—the older the better; or as it is with the sun—which shines most gloriously and amiably when it is near setting. Gracious souls are like an evergreen tree, whose leaves are always green, not only in the summer of youth—but also in the winter of old age. The palm-tree is always green, it never loses its leaves or fruit, and the more it is loaded the deeper it is rooted; and so it shall be with throughout Christians.

Just so, in Isaiah 46:3–4, God has promised to carry us on to old age, “Listen to me, all you who are left in Israel. I created you

and I have cared for you since before you were born. I will be your God throughout your lifetime—until your hair is white with age. I made you, and I will care for you. I will carry you along and save you.” That God who begins a work of grace and holiness in his people’s hearts—that God will perfect and carry on that work. Mothers express their tender care, love, and delight, by carrying their babes in their arms until they can walk alone.

But God surpasses them in his love, care, tenderness, and divine fondness—for he will carry them even to old age. This word “I,” which is six times repeated in the fourth verse, is doubtless of very great importance, and signifies not only God’s eternal essence, and that he will be ever like himself—but also his unchangeableness in regard of us; for whatever our thoughts may be concerning God—yet we shall always find him one and the same; he will be as good to his people at last as he was at first, even to old age he will carry them. Just so, in Proverbs 4:18, “The path of the righteous is like the first gleam of dawn, shining ever brighter until the full light of day.” A holy man proceeds from grace to grace, from virtue to virtue; he goes from faith to faith, and from strength to strength—until at length he shines as the sun in his strength! Just so, in Hosea 14:5–7, “I will be to Israel like a refreshing dew from heaven. It will blossom like the lily; it will send roots deep into the soil like the cedars in Lebanon. Its branches will spread out like those of beautiful olive trees, as fragrant as the cedar forests of Lebanon. My people will return again to the safety of their land. They will flourish like grain and blossom like grapevines. They will be as fragrant as the wines of Lebanon.”

The growth, the fruitfulness, and the flourishing estate of the saints in grace and holiness, is set forth by a sevenfold metaphor in these words. The similes are all plain and easy, and you may easily dilate upon them in your own thoughts; and therefore I shall pass them. I shall conclude with that precious promise, John 4:14, “But whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him, shall never thirst: but the water that I shall give him, shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life.”

The Spirit in its gracious operations shall be a constant spring in believers’ hearts, and it shall every day rise higher and higher, like the water in Ezekiel, until grace is swallowed up in glory!

3

OUR GREATEST GOSPEL DUTY

Isaac Ambrose
Looking Unto Jesus

The most excellent subject to discourse or write of is Jesus Christ. Augustin having read Cicero's works, commended them for their eloquence but he passed this sentence upon them, "They are not sweet because the name of Jesus is not in them."

Indeed, all we say is but unsavory, if it be not seasoned with this salt. I determined not to know anything among you, saith Paul, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified. He resolved with Himself, before he preached among the Corinthians, that this should be the only point of knowledge that he would profess himself to have skill in, and that in the course of his ministry he would labor to bring them to.

This he made the breadth, and length, and depth, and height,

of his knowledge. Yea, doubtless, saith he, I count all things but loss, for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord. In this knowledge of Christ there is an excellency above all other knowledge in the world. There is nothing more pleasing and comfortable, more animating and enlivening. Christ is the sun and center of all divine and revealed truths: we can preach nothing else as the object of our faith, which doth not some way or other either meet in Christ, or refer to Christ.

Only Christ is the whole of man's happiness; the sun to enlighten him, the physician to heal him, the wall of fire to defend him, the friend to comfort him, the pearl to enrich him, the ark to support him, the rock to sustain him under the heaviest pressures; As a hiding-place from the wind, and a cover from the tempest, as rivers of waters in a dry place, and as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land. Only Christ is that ladder between earth and heaven, the Mediator between God and man; a mystery which the angels of heaven desire to pry into.

This is life eternal, to know God, and Jesus Christ whom he hath sent. Come then! Let us look on this Son of righteousness; we cannot receive harm, but good, by such a look. Indeed, by looking long on the natural sun we may have our eyes dazzled, and our faces blackened; but by looking unto Jesus, we shall have our eyes clearer, and our faces fairer. If the light of the eye rejoices the heart, how much more when we have such a blessed object to look upon! As Christ is more excellent than all the world, so this sight transcends all other sights. Looking unto Jesus, is the

epitome of a Christian's happiness, the quintessence of evangelical duties

Looking unto Jesus, is that great ordinance appointed by God for our most especial good. How many souls have blessed themselves in the use of other means, and though in them Christ hath communicated some virtue to them, yet because they did not trade more with them, they had little in comparison? Such a one as deals immediately with Christ, will do more in a day than another in a year; and therefore I call it a choice, a complete, an high gospel-ordinance.

Christ at his coming will be glorified in his saints; not only in himself, but in his saints also; whose glory, as it comes from him, so it will redound to him. O let him now be glorified in us, let us now in some high way conform to the image of his glory, let us look unto Christ till we are like Christ, not only in grace, but in glory; and this glory, as it comes from him, so let it redound to him. Let us so behold the glory of the Lord in the glass of the gospel, as that I've may be changed into the same image from glory to glory from a lesser measure to a higher measure of glory.

O that something of the glory of Christ might rest upon us! O that having this glory in our thoughts, we could now feel a change from glory to glory! Is it so, that the Lord Jesus will be glorified in all his saints? And shall we have inglorious souls? Base and unworthy affections and conversations? Or shall we content ourselves with a little measure of grace? O be we holy, even as he is holy; let our conversation be heavenly, let us purify ourselves even as he is pure; let us resemble him in some high measure of grace.

And, lastly, let us glorify him in “bodies and spirits; all our glory is from him; and therefore let all our glory redound to him; let us now begin that gospel tune of the eternal song of free grace, which one day we shall more perfectly chant in glory; Alleluia! and Alleluia! and Amen, Alleluia! salvation, and glory, and power, and praise, and thanksgiving, and obedience be unto him that sits on the throne, the Lamb blessed for ever and ever. Amen.

Now all is done, shall I speak a word for Christ, or rather for ourselves in relation to Christ; if I had but one word more to speak in the world, it should be this. O let all our spirits be taken up with Christ! Surely Christ is enough to fill all our thoughts, desires, hopes, loves, joys, or whatever is within us, or without us. Christ alone comprehends all the circumference of all our happiness. O the worth of Christ! Compare we other things with him, and they will bear no weight at all; cast into the balance with him angels, they are wise, but he is wisdom; cast in two worlds, and add to the weight millions of heavens of heavens, and the balance cannot down, the scales are unequal; Christ outweighs all.

Shall I yet come nearer home? What is heaven, but to be with Christ? What is life eternal, but to believe in God, and in his Son Jesus Christ? Where may we find peace with God, and reconciliation with God, but only in Christ? All the goodness of God comes out of God through this golden pipe, the Lord Jesus Christ. It is true, those essential attributes of love, grace, mercy, and goodness, are only in God, and they abide in God, yet the mediatory manifestation of love, grace, mercy, and goodness, is only in Christ. Christ

alone is the treasury, storehouse, magazine, of the free goodness and mercy of the Godhead.

In him we are justified, sanctified, saved. He is the way, the truth, and the life; he is honour, riches, beauty, health, peace, and salvation; all the spiritual blessings wherewith we are enriched, are in and by Christ. God hears our prayers by Christ; God forgives our iniquities through Christ; all we have, and all we expect to have, hangs only on Christ; he is the golden hinge, upon which all our salvation turns. O how should all hearts be taken with this Christ!

Christians, turn your eyes upon the Lord. Look, and look again unto Jesus. Shall I speak one word more to thee that believes? Remember how he came out of his Father's bosom for thee, wept for thee, bled for thee, poured out his life for thee, is now risen for thee, gone to heaven for thee, sits at God's right-hand, and rules all the world for thee, makes intercession for thee, and at the end of the world will come again for thee, and receive thee to himself, to live with him for ever and ever.

4
THE MOST EFFECTIVE WAY TO
PRAY

Henry Bullinger
The Decades

I have told you who is to be prayed to or called upon by the godly worshippers of God, and by whom: namely, to God alone, through the only Son of God, our Lord Jesus Christ. Let us now see, what should stir up man to call upon God. Surely, the Spirit of our God principally; for prayer is rightly counted among the gifts of grace. For we could neither earnestly nor heartily call upon our God, unless we are stirred up and provoked to it by the Spirit of God. For even though the commandment of God wills us to pray, and present necessity and danger drive us to pray, and the example of others allure us to pray; yet all these things would do nothing, unless the Spirit forces our minds to His will, and guides and keeps us in prayer.

Therefore, though there are many concurring causes which

move men to prayer, yet the chief origin of prayer is the Holy Ghost. Whoever prays with any fruit, begs with a holy preface at the entrance of all prayers, for His motion and government. To this pertain these words of the holy apostle: “The Spirit also helps our infirmities; for we do not know what to pray as we should; but the Spirit itself makes requests for us with sighs which cannot be expressed. But he who searches the hearts knows what the meaning of the Spirit is; for He makes requests for the saints according to the will of God.” Rom 8.26–27. Indeed, the Spirit of God is said to make intercession; not that he indeed prays and groans; but because he stirs up our minds to pray and to sigh. And he brings to pass, according to the pleasure of God, that we should make intercession or pray for the saints; that is to say, for ourselves. But let us consider with what abilities someone must be furnished, who comes to purposefully pray to God.

First, it is necessary that he lay aside all opinions of his own worthiness and righteousness; that he acknowledge himself to be a sinner, and to stand in need of all good things; and so let him yield himself to the mere mercy of God, desiring by His mercy to be filled with all things that are good.

For that great prophet of God, Daniel, says this: “We do not present our prayers before you in our own righteousness, but in your manifold mercies.” Also, you read a similar prayer offered to God in Psalm 79. For the people of the Lord cry out: “Help us, O Lord of our salvation, for the glory of your name: deliver us, and be merciful to our sins, for your name’s sake. Do not remember

our sins of old; make haste, and let your mercy deliver us.” Psalm 79.8–10.

In the new Testament, the Pharisee in Luke, trusting in his own righteousness, is put aside and cast off from the Lord; but the publican, freely confessing his sins and craving mercy from God, is heard and justified. Luke 18.10. For unless we acknowledge our nakedness, weakness, and poverty, who, I ask you, would pray to God? “For it is not those who are strong, but those who are sick, that need the physician.” Matthew 9.12 And the Lord in the gospel says: “Ask, and you shall receive; knock, and it shall be opened to you; seek, and you shall find.” Mathew 7.7–8 Therefore, he that is commanded to ask so that he may receive, does not yet have what he asks for; he that knocks, by knocking, signifies that he stands outside the door; and he which seeks, has lost what he yet seeks.

Therefore, being shut out from the joys of paradise, we seek and ask by prayer for what we have lost and do not have. Therefore, though David and Hezekiah and other saints of God, allege in prayer their own righteousness, for which they seem to worthily demand to be heard—truly, they do not regard their own worthiness, but rather the truth of God. He has promised that he will hear those who worship him. Therefore, the godly say, Behold, we are your worshippers: Therefore, it is fitting that you not neglect us, but deliver us.

Meanwhile, in other places they speak in such a way about their righteousness, that we cannot doubt that in their prayers they

mention their righteousness with a certain measure and limitation. “Do not enter into judgment with your servant,” says David; “for in your sight no man living shall be justified,” etc.

Furthermore, and what is chief of all, it is needful that those who pray must have a true and fervent faith. Let the doctrine of faith, therefore, in the matter of prayer, show us light as the morning-star; and with an assured hope to obtain from God the thing which is asked, let him that prays make his petition.

“Let him ask in faith,” says St. James, “nothing wavering: for he that wavers is like a wave of the sea, tossed by the wind, and carried with violence. Nor let that man think that he will receive anything from the Lord.” Jas 1.6–7 And Paul also says: “How shall they call upon him, on whom they have not believed?” Rom 10.14 I have spoken of faith in the fourth sermon of the first decade. But to the end that faith may increase in just measure, and flourish and continue stable, we must labour in the promises and examples from every place gathered together. We will recite a few. In the book of Psalms we read: “Offer to God thanksgiving, and pay your vows to the most High.” Psalm 50.14. And: “Call upon me in the day of trouble, and I will deliver you, and you shall glorify me.” Psalm 50.15. Again: “The Lord is near to all who call upon him, to all those who call upon him in truth (or faithfully). He will fulfil the desire of those who fear him: he will also hear their cry, and will save them.” Psalm 145.18–19. Again, in Isaiah the Lord says: “And it shall come to pass, that before they call, I will answer them; and while they are still thinking how to speak, I will hear them.” Isa 65.24.

In Matthew, the Lord says: “Ask, and it shall be given to you; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened to you. For whoever asks receives, and whoever seeks finds, and to him that knocks it shall be opened,” etc. Mathew 7.7–8.

In the same gospel, the Lord says: “And whatever you ask in prayer, believing, you shall receive it.” Mathew 21.22. In the 11th chapter of Mark, the same sentence is put this way: “Whatever you desire when you pray, believe that you have it, and it shall be done for you.” Mark 11.24. Again, in the gospel of St. John the Lord says: “Whatever you ask in my name, that I will do.” John 14.13. Again: “Truly, truly, I say to you, whatever you shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it to you. Ask, and you shall receive.” John 14.13–14.

David frames an argument from the example of the fathers, and says: “Our fathers hoped in you, they trusted in you, and you delivered them; they called upon you, and they were helped; they put their trust in you, and were not confounded.” Psa 22.4–5.

From this, David gathers that he also will not be forsaken by the Lord. In the history of the gospel, there are very many examples to be seen, which exceedingly confirm and establish the faith of the godly.

But since faith is not a vain imagination, but an effectual power, working by the Holy Ghost all kinds of good works (though they neither trust to these, nor think they will be heard in consideration of them), yet nevertheless, those sinners who are faithful do not impudently, and without repentance, trust to their own wits,

dealing only in words with the Lord; but they join a holy life to their prayers.

For Solomon says: “He that turns his ear from hearing the law, his prayer will be abominable.” Proverbs 28.9. And the Lord says in Isaiah: “Though you make many prayers, yet will I hear nothing at all, seeing your hands are full of blood.” Isaiah 1.15. About such impenitent persons, we understand that in the gospel: “God does not hear sinners.” But what is more, the saints will obtain nothing if they continue in prayer for them.

For Jeremiah, praying earnestly for his people who were otherwise being obstinately wicked, hears this: “You shall not pray for this people; you shall neither give thanks nor bid prayer for them; make no intercession for them; for in no way will I hear you. Do you not see what they do in the cities of Judah? The children gather sticks, the fathers kindle the fire, the women knead the dough to make cakes for the queen of heaven. They pour out drink-offerings to strange gods, to provoke me to wrath.” Jeremiah 7.18.

In the same manner, the Lord says in Ezekiel: “If I send a pestilence into this land, and if Noah, Job, and Daniel, were in it,” (or in the midst of it,) “as truly as I live, says the Lord God, they shall deliver neither son nor daughter, but save their own souls in their righteousness.” Ezekiel 14.19–20 v.178.

Therefore, it follows that the supplications of unrepentant men, impudently persevering in their sins, even though they cry without ceasing, “Help us, O God, our Savior; deliver us, Lord; we beseech you to hear us,” these are altogether fruitless; for they desire to

be preserved, so that they might take their further pleasure and commit wickedness. And though God gives us freely those things which we ask, yet it is necessary that an affection or desire to live well accompanies such great benefits received from the hands of God. For here we should most diligently to take heed, that we not think we will be heard for our virtues' sake, but for the mere mercy of God in Christ Jesus.

5
HOLDING STEADFAST THROUGH
ANXIETY

John Flavel
Keeping the Heart

When Providence frowns upon you, and blasts your outward comforts, then look to your heart; keep it with all diligence from repining against God, or fainting under his hand; for troubles, though sanctified, are troubles still. Jonah was a good man, and yet how fretful was his heart under affliction! Job was the mirror of patience, yet how was his heart discomposed by trouble! You will find it hard to get a composed spirit under great afflictions. O the hurries and tumults which they occasion even in the best hearts—Let me show you, then, how a Christian under great afflictions may keep his heart from repining or desponding, under the hand of God.

I will here offer several helps to keep the heart in this condition.

FIRST. By these cross providences God is faithfully pursuing

the great design of electing love upon the souls of his people, and orders all these afflictions as means sanctified to that end. Afflictions come not by casualty, but by counsel. By this counsel of God they are ordained as means of much spiritual good to saints. "By this shall the iniquity of Jacob be purged," and "But he for our profit," and "All things work together for good,".

They are God's workmen upon our hearts, to pull down the pride and carnal security of them; and being so, their nature is changed; they are turned into blessings and benefits. "It is good for me that I have been afflicted," says David. Surely then thou hast no reason to quarrel with God, but rather to wonder that he should concern himself so much in thy good as to use any means for accomplishing it. Paul could bless God if by any means he might attain the resurrection of the dead. "My brethren," says James, "count it all joy when you fall into diverse temptations." 'My Father is about a design of love upon my soul, and do I well to be angry with him? All that he does is in pursuance of, and in reference to some eternal, glorious ends upon my soul. It is my ignorance of God's design that makes me quarrel with him.' He says to thee in this case, as he did to Peter, "What *I* do, thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter."

SECOND. Though God has reserved to himself a liberty of afflicting his people, yet he has tied up his own hands by promise never to take away his loving kindness from them. Can I contemplate this scripture with a repining, discontented spirit: "*I* will be his Father, and he shall be my son: if he commit iniquity, I will

chasten him with the rod of man, and with the stripes of the children of men nevertheless my mercy shall not depart away from him.”

O my heart, my haughty heart! dost thou well to be discontent, when God has given thee the whole tree, with all the clusters of comfort growing on it, because he suffers the wind to blow down a few leaves? Christians have two kinds of goods, the goods of the throne and the goods of the footstool; immoveables and moveables. If God has secured those, never let my heart be troubled at the loss of these: indeed, if he had cut off his love or dis-covenanted my soul; I had reason to be cast down; but this he hath not done, nor can he do it.

THIRD. It is of great efficacy to keep the heart from sinking under afflictions, to call to mind that thine own Father has the ordering of them. Not a creature moves hand or tongue against thee but by his permission. Suppose the cup be bitter, yet it is the cup which thy Father hath given thee; and canst thou suspect poison to be in it? Foolish man, put home the case to thine own heart; canst thou give thy child that which would ruin him? No! thou wouldst as soon hurt thyself as him. “If thou then, being evil, knowest how to give good gifts to thy children,” how much more does God!

The very consideration of his nature as a God of love, pity, and tender mercies; or of his relation to thee as a father, husband, friend, may be security enough, if he had not spoken a word to quiet thee in this case; and yet you have his word too, by the

prophet Jeremiah: "I will do you no hurt." You lie too near his heart for him to hurt you; nothing grieves him more than your groundless and unworthy suspicions of his designs. Would it not grieve a faithful, tender-hearted physician, when he had studied the case of his patient, and prepared the most excellent medicines to save his life, to hear him cry out, 'O he has undone me! he has poisoned me!' because it pains him in the operation? O when will you be ingenuous?

FOURTH. God respects you as much in a low as in a high condition; and therefore it need not so much trouble you to be made low; nay, he manifests more of his love, grace and tenderness in the time of affliction than in the time of prosperity. As God did not at first choose you because you were high, he will not now forsake you because you are low. Men may look shy upon you, and alter their respects as your condition is altered; when Providence has blasted your estate, your summer-friends may grow strange, fearing you may be troublesome to them; but will God do so?

No, no: "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee." says he. If adversity and poverty could bar you from access to God, it were indeed a deplorable condition: but, so far from this, you may go to him as freely as ever. "My God will hear me," says the church. Poor David, when stripped of all earthly comforts, could encourage himself in the Lord his God; and why cannot you? Suppose your husband or son had lost all at sea, and should come to you in rags; could you deny the relation, or refuse to entertain him? If you would not, much less will God. Why then are you so

troubled? Though your condition be changed, your Father's love is not changed.

6

HINDRANCES TO THE FEAR OF GOD

John Bunyan
Treatise on the Fear of God

And that I may yet be helpful to thee, reader, I shall now give thee caution of those things that will, if way be given to them, hinder thy growth in this fear of God, the which, because they are very hurtful to the people of God, I would have thee be warned by them. And they are these which follow:

First. If thou wouldest grow in this grace of fear, take heed of A HARD HEART, for that will hinder thy growth in this grace. “Why hast thou hardened our heart from thy fear?” was a bitter complaint of the church heretofore; for it is not only the judgment that in itself is dreadful and sore to God’s people, but that which greatly hindereth the growth of this grace in the soul (Isa 63:17). A hard heart is but barren ground for any grace to grow in, especially

for the grace of fear: there is but little of this fear where the heart is indeed hard; neither will there ever be much therein.

1. Take heed of the beginnings of sin. Take heed, I say, of that, though it should be never so small; “A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump.” There is more in a little sin to harden, than in a great deal of grace to soften.

David’s look upon Bathsheba was, one would think, but a small matter; yet that beginning of sin contracted such hardness of heart in him, that it carried him almost beyond all fear of God. It did carry him to commit lewdness with her, murder upon the body of Uriah, and to abundance of wicked dissimulation; which are things, I say, that have direct tendency to quench and destroy all fear of God in the soul.

2. If thou hast sinned, lie not down without repentance; for the want of repentance, after one has sinned, makes the heart yet harder and harder. Indeed, a hard heart is impenitent, and impenitence also makes the heart harder and harder. So that if impenitence be added to hardness of heart, or to the beginning of sin which makes it so, it will quickly be with that soul, as is said of the house of Israel, it will have a whore’s forehead, it will hardly be brought to shame (Jer 3:3).

3. If thou wouldest be rid of a hard heart, that great enemy to the growth of the grace of fear, be much with Christ upon the cross in thy meditations; for that is an excellent remedy against hardness of heart: a right sight of him, as he hanged there for thy sins, will dissolve thy heart into tears, and make it soft and tender. “They

shall look upon me whom they have pierced, - and mourn” (Zech 12:10). Now a soft, a tender, and a broken heart, is a fit place for the grace of fear to thrive in.

But, **second**. If thou wouldest have the grace of fear to grow in thy soul, take heed also of a prayerless heart, for that is not a place for this grace of fear to grow in. Hence he that restraineth prayer is said to cast off fear. “Thou castest off fear,” said one of his friends to Job. But how must he do that? Why the next words show, “Thou restrainest prayer before God” (Job 15:4). Seek thou a professor that prayeth not? that man thrusteth the fear of God away from him. Seest thou a man that prays but little, that man feareth God but little; for it is the praying soul, the man that is mighty in praying, that has a heart for the fear of God to grow in.

Take heed, therefore, of a prayerless heart, if you would grow in this grace of the fear of God. Prayer is as the pitcher that fetcheth water from the brook, therewith to water the herbs; break the pitcher, and it will fetch no water, and for want of water the garden withers.

Third. Wouldest thou grow in this grace of fear? Then take heed of a light and wanton, for neither is such a heart good ground for the fear of God to grow in. Wherefore it is said of Israel, “She feared not, but went and played the harlot also.” She was given to wantonness, and to be light and vain, and so her fear of God decayed (Jer 3:8). Had Joseph been as wanton as his mistress, he had been as void of the fear of God as she; but he was of a sober, tender, godly, considerate spirit, therefore he grew in the fear of God.

Fourth. Wouldest thou grow in this grace of fear? Then take heed of a covetous heart, for neither is that which is such an one good ground for this grace of fear to grow in. Therefore this covetousness and the fear of God are as enemies, set the one in opposition to the other: one that feareth God and hateth covetousness (Exo 18:21). And the reason why covetousness is such an obstruction to the growth of this grace of fear, is because covetousness casteth those things out of the heart which alone can nourish this fear. It casteth out the Word and love of God, without which no grace can grow in the soul; how then should the fear of God grow in a covetous heart? (Eze 33:30–32; 1 John 2:15).

Fifth. Wouldest thou grow in this grace of fear? Then take heed of an unbelieving heart, for an unbelieving heart is not good ground for this grace of fear to grow in. An unbelieving heart is called “an evil heart,” because from it flows all the wickedness that is committed in the world (Heb 3:12). Now it is faith, or a believing heart, that nourisheth this fear of God, and not the other; and the reason is, for that faith brings God, heaven, and hell, to the soul, and maketh it duly consider of them all (Heb 11:7). This is therefore the means of fear, and that which will make it grow in the soul; but unbelief is a bane thereto.

Sixth. Wouldest thou grow in this grace of fear? Then take heed of a forgetful heart. Such a heart is not a heart where the grace of fear will flourish, “when I remember, I am afraid.” Therefore take heed of forgetfulness; do not forget but remember God, and his kindness, patience, and mercy, to those that yet neither have grace,

nor special favour from him, and that will beget and nourish his fear in thy heart, but forgetfulness of this, or of any other of his judgments, is a great wound and weakening to this fear (Job 21:6).

When a man well remembers that God's judgments are so great a deep and mystery, as indeed they are, that remembrance puts a man upon such considerations of God and of his judgments as to make him fear—"Therefore," said Job, "I am afraid of him." See the place, Job 23:15. "Therefore am I troubled at his presence; when I consider, I am afraid of him"—when I remember and consider of the wonderful depths of his judgments towards man.

Seventh. Wouldest thou grow in this grace of fear? Then take heed of a murmuring heart, for that is not a heart for this grace of fear to grow in. As for instance, when men murmur and repine at God's hand, at his dispensations, and at the judgments that overtake them, in their persons, estates, families, or relations, that their murmuring tendeth to destroy fear; for a murmuring spirit is such a one as seems to correct God, and to find fault with his dispensations, and where there is that, the heart is far from fear. A murmuring spirit either comes from that wisdom that pretends to understand that there is a failure in the nature and execution of things, or from an envy and spite at the execution of them. Now if murmurings arise from this pretended wisdom of the flesh, then instead of fearing of God, his actions are judged to be either rigid or ridiculous, which yet are done in judgment, truth, and righteousness. So that a murmuring heart cannot be a good one for the fear of God to grow in.

Alas! the heart where that grows must be a soft one; as you have it in Job 23:15, 16; and a heart that will stoop and be silent at the most abstruse of all his judgments—"I was dumb, because THOU didst it." The heart in which this fear of God doth flourish is such, that it bows and is mute, if it can but espy the hand, wisdom, justice, or holiness of God in this or the other of his dispensations, and so stirs up the soul to fear before him. But if this murmuring ariseth from envy and spite, that looketh so like to the spirit of the devil, that nothing need be said to give conviction of the horrible wickedness of it.

Eighth. Wouldest thou grow in this grace of fear? Then take heed of a high and captious spirit, for that is not good ground for the fear of God to grow in. A meek and quiet spirit is the best, and there the fear of God will flourish most; therefore, Peter puts meekness and fear together, as being most suited in their nature and natural tendency one to another (1 Peter 3:15). Meekness of spirit is like that heart that hath depth of earth in it in which things may take root and grow; but a high and captious spirit is like to the stony ground, where there is not depth of earth, and consequently, where this grace of fear cannot grow; therefore, take heed of this kind of spirit, if thou wouldest that the fear of God should grow in thy soul.

Ninth. Wouldest thou grow in this grace of fear? then take heed of an envious heart, for that is not a good heart for the fear of God to grow in. "Let not thine heart envy sinners; but be thou in the fear of the Lord all the day long" (Prov 23:17). To envy any is a

sign of a bad spirit, and that man takes upon him, as I have already hinted, to be a controller and a judge, yea, and a malicious executioner too, and that of that fury that ariseth from his own lusts and revengeful spirit, upon (perhaps) the man that is more righteous than himself. But suppose he is a sinner that is the object of thine envy, why, the text sets that envy in direct opposition to the fear of God; "Envy not sinners, but be thou in the fear of God."

These two, therefore, to wit, envy to sinners and fearing of God, are opposites. Thou canst not fear God, and envy sinners too. And the reason is, because he that envieth a sinner, hath forgotten himself, that he is as bad; and how can he then fear God? He that envies sinners rejects his duty of blessing of them that curse, and praying for them that despitefully use us; and how can he that hath rejected this, fear God? He that envieth sinners, therefore, cannot be of a good spirit, nor can the fear of God grow in his heart.

Tenth. Lastly, Wouldest thou grow in this grace of fear? then take heed of hardening thy heart at any time against convictions to particular duties, as to prayer, alms, self-denial, or the like. Take heed also of hardening thy heart, when thou art under any judgment of God, as sickness, losses, crosses, or the like. I bid you before to beware of a hard heart, but now I bid you beware of hardening your soft ones. For to harden the heart is to make it worse than it is; harder, more desperate, and bold against God, than at the present it is.

Now, I say, if thou wouldest grow in this grace of fear, take heed of hardening thy heart, and especially of hardening of it against

convictions to good; for those convictions are sent of God like seasonable showers of rain, to keep the tillage of thy heart in good order, that the grace of fear may grow therein; but this stifling of convictions makes the heart as hard as a piece of the nether millstone. Therefore happy is he that receiveth conviction, for so he doth keep in the fear of God, and that fear thereby nourished in his soul; but cursed is he that doth otherwise—"Happy is the man that feareth alway; but he that hardeneth his heart shall fall into mischief" (Prov 28:14).

7

YOUR UNFAMILIARITY WITH A MAJESTIC GOD

John Owen

The Mortification of Sin

Though you know enough to keep you low and humble, that is such a small part of knowing him! Contemplating his own ignorance is what threw Solomon into such a fearful understanding of God. “Surely I am as stupid as a cow, and have not the understanding of a man. I neither learned wisdom, nor do I know holiness. What man has mounted the skies, or climbed down from them? Who has gathered the wind in his fists? Who has enclosed the seas in a mantle? Who has defined the ends of the earth? What is his name, and what is his Son’s name, if you can tell me?”

Wrestle with this to knock down the pride of your heart. What do you know of God? How little it is! How immense God is in his nature! Can you look without terror into the abyss of eternity? You

cannot bear the light of his glorious being. Because I consider this very useful in our walk with God, I will continue emphasizing it. I want it to leave a lasting impression on those who desire to walk humbly with God.

Keep in mind, it must be offset with that brotherly boldness we have been given in Jesus Christ to approach the throne of grace. Consider, then, keeping your heart in continual awe of the majesty of God. Appreciate the fact that people of extraordinary accomplishment, those who know the most about communion with God, still know very little of him, and very little of his glory while they are in this life.

God reveals his name to Moses, and reveals the most glorious qualities of the covenant of grace.

1. Yet all of these are only the “back” of God.
2. All that Moses knows is miniscule compared to the perfection of God’s glory. For this reason, with specific reference to Moses and in contrast to Christ, it is said,
3. “No man has ever seen God.” Not even Moses, the most eminent among us.

We speak a lot about God. We can talk about him all day long: his ways, his works, his guidance; the truth is, we know very little of him. Our thoughts, our meditations, the way we speak about him, are unworthy of his glory; none of them truly reflects his perfection.

You may say that Moses was under the law when God wrapped

himself in darkness, cloaking his mind in clouds of smoke and hidden practices. But through the glory of the gospel, which brought life and immortality to light, God candidly revealed himself. We now know him much more clearly and accurately. We now see his face, and not just his back, as Moses did.

To which I reply,

1. I acknowledge there is a vast difference between the acquaintance we now have with God after speaking to us through his Son, and the acquaintance the saints had under the law. Their eyes were as good, sharp, and clear as ours, and their faith and spiritual understanding were equal to our own. The object of their affection was as glorious to them as he is to us. And yet things are indeed clearer to us today. The clouds are blown away and scattered. The shadows of the night are gone and fled away. The sun is risen, and the means of sight are better and clearer than before. Even so,

2. The unique image that Moses had of God in Exodus 34 was a gospel-image, a sight of God in his “graciousness,” etc.; and yet what he saw is called God’s “back.” That is, it was inferior to the full extent of God’s excellence and perfection.

3. The apostle extols this glory of light above that of the law. He demonstrates that now the “veil” which caused the darkness has been taken away. With “open” (or uncovered) “face we behold the glory of the Lord.”

How do we behold? “As in a glass.” And how do we see in a glass? Clearly? Perfectly? Unfortunately, not! He tells us how “we see through a glass, darkly.” He is not speaking of a telescope that helps us see things far away. We are still far short of the truth of things, even with the help of such instruments! It is a tarnished mirror he alludes to. There are only obscure images of things in its reflection, not the things themselves.

This is the kind of sight he compares our knowledge to. It is dark and obscure. And speaking of himself, someone much more clear-sighted than any of us, he tells us that he saw “in part”. He saw only the back of heavenly things. He compares all the knowledge that he accumulated of God to a child’s understanding. It is an interest that comes short of knowing it well. In any event, “it shall be destroyed,” or done away.

We know the limited comprehension and the uneasiness children have with things that are difficult to understand. We know that as children grow up those conceptions vanish, and they are ashamed of them. We instruct a child to love, honor, believe, and obey his father; because of the child’s limited grasp of science and other notions, his father accepts his childishness and folly. Despite all our confidence in our accomplishments, all our notions about

God are childish compared to his infinite perfection. We lisp and babble like a child. In what we say, we show our ignorance in our conceptions and notions about God. We love, honor, believe, and obey our Father; and because of that he accepts our childish thoughts, for that is what they are. We see only his back, and we know very little of him.

For this reason, we are often comforted in our distress by the promise that, “we will see him as he is.” We will see him “face to face.” We will “know him as we are known, comprehend that for which we are comprehended.”¹ But for now, “we see him not.” We see only his back. We see him not as he is, not in his perfect glory, but in a dark, obscure representation. The queen of Sheba heard a lot about Solomon, and fantasized about his magnificence. But when she actually came and saw his glory, she was forced to confess she heard only half the story. We can assume we have great knowledge, clear and high thoughts of God. But when he finally brings us into his presence we will cry out, “We never knew him as he actually is; one thousandth of his glory, perfection, and blessedness never entered our hearts.”

Let us review the purpose of considering how little we know of God. An appropriate understanding of the inconceivable greatness of God, and the infinite distance we stand from him, should fill the soul with a holy and awe-filled fear of him. If it does, the soul will be put in a frame completely unsuited for any lust to thrive or flourish. If we keep the soul continually accustomed to reverential thoughts of God’s greatness and omnipresence, then it will

be on its guard for any inappropriate behavior. Consider the One with whom you have to deal. “Our God is a consuming fire.”¹ In your greatest shame in his presence and sight, know that your very nature is too limited to comprehend his essential glory.

8

KNOWING TRUE SPIRITUAL DELIGHT

Thomas Watson
The Saint's Spiritual Delight

Let this put us on a holy scrutiny and trial: whether we have this delight in religion? It is life or death as we answer this. Question. How may this spiritual delight be known?

Answer 1. He that delights in God's law, is often thinking of it; what a man delights in, his thoughts are still running upon it; he that delights in money, his mind is taken up with it—therefore the covetous man is said to mind earthly things, Phil. 3.19. Thus, if there is a delight in the things of God, the mind will be still musing upon them. O what a rare treasure is the word of God! It is the field where the pearl of great price is hidden; how precious are the promises? They are the conduit that holds the water of life; they are like those two olive branches “through which the two golden pipes empty the golden oil out of themselves,” Zech. 4.12.

These seal up pardon, adoption, glory: “O Lord, by these things men live,” Isa. 38.16. Where there is a delight in the law of God, the mind is wholly busied about it.

Answer 2. If we delight in religion, there is nothing that can keep us from it, but we will be conversant in word, prayer, sacraments. He that loves gold will trade for it. The merchant will traverse sea and land to make money his proselyte. Men will not be kept from their fairs. If there is a delight in holy things, we will not be detained from an ordinance, for there we are trafficking for salvation. If a man were hungry, he would not stay away from the market for aching of his finger. The ordinances are a gospel market, and those that hunger and thirst after righteousness, will not for every slight occasion stay away. “I was glad when they said, come let us go up to the house of the Lord,” Psalm 122.1. You who are glad when the devil helps you with an excuse to absent yourself from the house of the Lord, are far from this holy delight.

Answer 3. Those that delight in religion are often speaking of it; “Then those who feared the Lord spoke often one to another,” Mal. 3.16. Where there is grace infused, it will be diffused. “The words of a wise man’s mouth are gracious,” Eccl. 10.12. David, delighting in God’s testimonies, “would speak of them before kings,” Psalm 119.46. The spouse delighting in her beloved, could not conceal her love, but breaks forth into most emotional, and no less elegant expressions: “My beloved is white and ruddy, the chiefest among ten thousand, his head is like the finest gold,” etc.

Song 5.10 The disciples whose hearts were upon Christ, made him the whole subject of their discourse as they were going to Emmaus, Luke 24.19.

The primitive Christians who were enflamed with love to God, spoke so much of heaven, and the kingdom prepared, that the emperor suspected they meant to take his kingdom from him: words are the looking-glass of the mind, they show what is in the heart. Where there is spiritual delight, like new wine, it will have its vent; grace is poured into your lips, Psalm 45.2. A man that is of the earth speaks of the earth, John 3.31. He can hardly speak three words, without two of them being about earth. His mouth, like the fish in the gospel, is full of gold, Mat. 17.27. So, where there is a delight in God, "our tongues will be like the pen of a ready writer." Psalm 45. This is a scripture touch-stone to try men's hearts by. Alas, it shows how little they delight in God, because they are possessed with a mute devil; they do not speak the language of Canaan.

Answer 4. He that delights in God, will give him the best in every service. The one whom we love best, shall have of the best. The spouse delighting in Christ, will give him of her pleasant fruits, Song 7.13. And if she has a cup of spiced wine, full of the juice of the pomegranate, he must drink of it, Song 8.2. He that delights in God, gives him the strength of his affections, the cream of his duties; if he has anything better to offer, God will have it: hypocrites do not care what they put God off with; they offer to the Lord that which costs them nothing, 2 Sam. 24.24; a

prayer that costs them no wrestling, no pouring out of the soul, 1Sam 1.15. They put no cost in their services.

Cain brought of the fruit of the ground, Gen. 4.3. It is observable, the Holy Spirit does not mention anything that might commend or set off Cain's sacrifice. When he comes to speak of Abel's, he sets an emphasis upon it, "Abel brought of the firstlings of his flock, and of the fat of it," verse 4. But when he speaks of Cain, he only says, "he brought of the fruit of the ground,"—some sorry thing, perhaps, pulled out of a ditch. God who is best, will be served with the best. Domitian would not have his statue carved in wood or iron, but in gold. God will have the best of our best things, golden services.

He who delights in God, gives him the fat of the offering; the purest of his love, the hottest of his zeal—and when he has done all, he grieves that he can do no more; he blushes to see such an infinite disproportion between Deity and duty.

Answer 5. He that delights in God, does not much delight in anything else. The world appears in an eclipse; Paul delighted in the law of God, in the inner man, and how he was crucified to the world! Gal. 6.14. It is not absolutely unlawful to delight in the things of the world, "You shall rejoice in every good thing which the Lord your God has given you." Deu. 26.11. None may better take the comfort of these things than believers; for they have the best right to them, they hold all in capite;¹ and they have the dew of a blessing distilled. "Take two talents," Naaman said to Gehazi, 2 Kings 5.23.

So says God to a believer: take two talents, take your outward comforts, and take my love with them. But the children of God, though they are thankful for outward mercies, which is the yearly rent they sit at, yet they are not much taken with these things. They use them only as a convenience for their passage; they know they need them as a staff to walk with. But when they sit down in the kingdom of heaven, and rest themselves, they will have no use of this Jacob's staff. Believers do not long much for these things which are still passing, 1 Joh 2.17.2 Their delight is chiefly in God and his law; and is it thus? Do we have this low opinion of all undermoon³ comforts? Has their price fallen? The astronomer says, if it were possible for a man to be lifted up as high as the moon, the earth would seem to him like a little point.

If we could be lifted up to heaven in our affections, all earthly delights would seem like nothing. When the woman of Samaria had met with Christ, down goes the pitcher—she leaves that behind. He who delights in God, having tasted the sweetness in him, does not mind the pitcher much; he leaves the world behind.

Answer 6. True delight is constant. Hypocrites have their pangs of desire, and flashes of joy, which are soon over. The Jews rejoiced in John's light for a season, John 5.35. Unsound hearts may delight in the law of the Lord for a season; but they will quickly change their note: "What a weariness it is to serve the Lord!" The Chrysolite, which has a golden colour, is very bright to look at in the morning; but towards noon it grows dull, and has lost its splendour—such are the glittering shows of hypocrites. True delight, like the fire of

the altar, never goes out; affliction cannot extirpate it. “Trouble and anguish have taken hold on me, yet your commandments are my delight,” Psalm 119.143.

9

GOSPEL-MOTIVATED HOLINESS

Walter Marshall

The Gospel Mystery of Sanctification

Stir up and strengthen yourself to perform the duties of holiness by a firm persuasion of your enjoyment of Jesus Christ, and all spiritual and everlasting benefits through Him. Set not yourselves on the performance of the law with any prevailing thoughts or apprehensions that you are yet without an interest in Christ, and the love of God through Him; and the curse of the law, the power of sin and Satan, having no better portion than this present world; no better strength, than that which is in the purposes and resolutions of your own free will.

While such thoughts as these prevail and influence your actings, it is evident that you walk according to the principles and practices of your old natural state, and you will be moved thereby to yield to the dominion of sin and Satan, to withdraw yourselves from

God and godliness, as Adam was moved, from the sight of his own nakedness, to hide himself from God (Gen. 3:10). Therefore, your way to a holy practice is first to conquer and expel such unbelieving thoughts by trusting confidently on Christ, and persuading yourselves by faith that His righteousness, Spirit, glory and all His spiritual benefits are yours, and that He dwells in you, and you in Him.

In the might of this confidence, you shall go forth to the performance of the law; and you will be strong against sin and Satan, and able to do all things through Christ that strengthens you. This confident persuasion is of great necessity to the right framing and disposing our hearts to walk according to our new state in Christ. The life of faith principally consists in it. And herein it eminently appears that faith is a hand, not only to receive Christ, but also to work by Him, and that it cannot be effectual for our sanctification except it contain in it some assurance of our interest in Christ, as has been shown.

Thus, we act as those that are above the sphere of nature, advanced to union and fellowship with Christ. The apostle maintained in his heart a persuasion that Christ had loved him, and given Him for him; and hereby he was enabled to live to God in holiness, through Christ living in him by faith. He teaches us also that we must maintain the like persuasion, if we would walk holily in Christ. We must know that our old man is crucified with Him, and we must reckon ourselves 'dead indeed to sin, and alive to God, through Jesus Christ our Lord' (Rom. 6:6, 11). This is the means

by which we may be ‘filled with the Spirit, strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might’, which God would not require of us, if He had not appointed the means (Eph. 6:20).

Christ Himself walked in a constant persuasion of His excellent state; He ‘set the Lord always before Him,’ and was persuaded that because ‘God was at His right hand He should not be moved’ (Ps. 16:8). How should it be rationally expected that a man should act according to his new state, without assurance that he is in it? It is a rule in common prudence, in worldly callings and conditions, that every man must know and well consider his own state, lest he should act proudly above it, or sordidly below it. And it is a hard thing to bring some to a right estimate of their own worldly condition.

If the same rule were observed in spiritual things, doubtless the knowledge and persuasion of the glory and excellency of our new state in Christ would more elevate the hearts of believers above all sordid slavery to their lusts, and enlarge them to ‘run cheerfully in the way of God’s commandments’.

If Christians knew their own strength better, they would enterprise greater things for the glory of God. But this knowledge is difficulty attained: it is only by faith and spiritual illumination. The best know but in part; and hence it is, that the conversation of believers falls so much below their holy and heavenly calling. 12.2.6. Consider what endowments, privileges or properties of your new state are most meet and forcible to incline and strengthen your heart to love God above all, and to renounce all sin, and to give

up yourself to universal obedience to His commands; and strive to walk in the persuasion of them, that you may attain to the practice of these great duties. I may well join these together, because 'to love the Lord with all our heart, might, and soul', is the first and great commandment, which influences us to all obedience, with a hatred and detestation of all sin, as it is contrary and hateful to God. The same effectual means that produces the one will also produce the other; and holiness chiefly consists in these.

So, the chief blessings of our holy state are most meet and forcible to enable us for the immediate performance of them, and are to be made use of to this end by faith. Particularly, you must believe steadfastly that all your sins are blotted out, and that you are reconciled to God, and have access to His favor by the blood of Christ; and that He is your God and Father, and altogether love to you, and your all sufficient everlasting portion and happiness through Christ.

10
THE SOURCE OF CHRISTIAN
STRENGTH

William Gurnall
The Christian in Complete Armour

The Christian's strength lies in the Lord, not in himself. The strength of the general in other hosts lies in his troops. He flies, as a great commander once said to his soldiers, upon their wings; if their feathers be clipped, their power broken, he is lost; but in the army of saints, the strength of every saint, yea, of the whole host of saints, lies in the Lord of hosts. God can overcome his enemies without their hands, but they cannot so much as defend themselves without his arm. It is one of God's names, 'the Strength of Israel,' I Sam. 15:29.

He was the strength of David's heart; without him this valiant worthy (that could, when held up in his arms, defy him that defied a whole army) behaves himself strangely for fear, at a word or two that dropped from the Philistine's mouth. He was the strength of

his hands, 'He taught his fingers to fight,' and so is the strength of all his saints in their war against sin and Satan. Some propound a question, whether there be a sin committed in the world in which Satan hath not a part?

But if the question were, whether there be any holy action performed without the special assistance of God concurring, that is resolved, 'Without me ye can do nothing,' John 15:5. Thinking strength of God, 'Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God,' II Cor. 3:5. We apostles, we saints that have habitual grace, yet this lies like water at the bottom of a well, which will not ascend with all our pumping till God pour in his exciting grace, and then it comes. To will is more than to think, to exert our will into action more than both. These are of God: 'For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure,' Php. 2:13.

He makes the heart new, and having made it fit for heavenly motion, setting every wheel, as it were, in its right place, then he winds it up by his actuating grace, and sets it on going, the thoughts to stir, the will to move and make towards the holy object presented; yet here the chariot is set, and cannot ascend the hill of action till God puts his shoulder to the wheel: 'to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not,' Rom. 7:18. God is at the bottom of the ladder, and at the top also, the Author and Finisher, yea, helping and lifting the soul at every round, in his ascent to any holy action.

Well, now the Christian is set on work, how long will he keep

close to it? Alas, poor soul, no longer than he is held up by the same hand that empowered him at first. He hath soon wrought out the strength received, and therefore to maintain the tenure of a holy course, there must be renewing strength from heaven every moment, which David knew, and therefore when his heart was in as holy a frame as ever he felt it, and his people by their free-will offering declared the same, yet even then he prays, that God would 'keep this for ever in the imagination of the thoughts of the heart of his people, and prepare their heart unto him,' I Chron. 29:18. He adored the mercy that made them willing, and then he implores his further grace to strengthen them, and tie a knot, that these precious pearls newly strung on hearts might not slip off.

The Christian, when fullest of divine communications, is but a glass without a foot, he cannot stand, or hold what he hath received, any longer than God holds him in his strong hand. Therefore, Christ, when bound for heaven, and ready to take his leave of his children, bespeaks his Father's care of them in his absence. 'Father, keep them,' John 17:11; as if he had said, they must not be left alone, they are poor shiftless children, that can neither stand nor go without help; they will lose the grace I have given them, and fall into those temptations which I kept them from while I was with them, if they be out of thy eye or arms but one moment; and therefore, 'Father, keep them.'

Again, consider the Christian as addressing himself to any duty of God's worship, still his strength is in the Lord.

PRAYER

Would he pray? Where will he find materials for his prayer? Alas, he 'knows not what he should pray for as we ought,' Rom. 8:26. Let him alone, and he will soon pray himself into some temptations or other, and cry for that which [it] were cruelty in God to give; and therefore, God puts words in our mouths: 'Take with you words and say,' Hosea 14:2. Well, now he hath words put into his mouth. Alas, they will freeze in his very lips, if he hath not some heart-heating affections to thaw the tap. And where shall this fire be had? Not a spark to found on his own hearth, except it be some strange fire of natural desires, which will not serve. Whence then must the fire come to thaw the iciness of the heart, but from heaven?

The Spirit, he must stretch himself upon the soul, as the prophet on the child, and then the soul will come to some kindly warmth and heavenly heat in its affections. The Spirit must groan, and then the soul will groan. He helps us to these sighs and groans which turn the sails of prayer. He dissolves the heart and then it [i.e. prayer] bursts out of the heart by groans of the lips by heavenly rhetoric, out of the eyes as from a flood-gate with tears. Yet further, now the creature is enabled to wrestle with God in prayer, what will he get by all this? Suppose he be weak in grace, is he able to pray himself strong, or corruption weak? No, this is not to be found in prayer, as an act of the creature; this drops from heaven also: 'In the day when I cried thou answeredst me, and strengthenedst me with strength in my soul,' Ps. 138:3.

David received it in duty, but had it not from his duty, but from his God. He did not pray himself strong, but God strengthened him in his prayer.

HEARING THE WORD

Well, cast your eyes once more upon the Christian, as engaging in another ordinance of hearing the word preached. The soul's strength to hear the Word is from God. He opens the heart to attend, Acts 16:14, yea, he opens the understanding of the saint to receive the Word, so as to conceive what it means. It is like Samson's riddle, which we cannot unfold without his heifer. He opens the womb of the soul to conceive by it, as the understanding to conceive of it, that the barren soul becomes a 'joyful mother of children.'

David sat for half a year under the public lectures of the law, and the womb of his heart shut up, till Nathan comes, and God with him, and now is the time of life. He conceives presently, yea, and brings forth the same day, falls presently into the bitter pangs of sorrow for his sins, which went not over till he had cast them forth in that sweet 51st Psalm. Why should this one word work more than all the former, but that now God struck in with his word, which he did not before? He is therefore said to 'teach his people to profit,' Isa. 48:17. He sits in heaven that teacheth hearts. When God's Spirit, who is the headmaster, shall call a soul from his usher to himself, and say,—Soul, you have not gone the way to receive by hearing the word.

Thus, and thus conceive of such a truth, improve such a

promise—presently the eyes of his understanding open, and his heart burns within him while he speaks to him. Thus, you see the truth of this point, ‘That the Christian’s strength is in the Lord.’

11

PRAYER AGAINST A RELENTLESS ENEMY

Thomas Brooks

Precious Remedies Against Satan's Devices

If you would not be taken in any of Satan's snares, then be much in prayer. Prayer is a shelter to the soul, a sacrifice to God and a scourge to the devil. David's heart was often more out of tune than his harp. He prays, and then, in spite of the devil, cries, 'Return unto your rest, O my soul.' Prayer is the gate of heaven, a key to let us into paradise.

There is nothing that renders Satan's plots fruitless like prayer; therefore, says Christ: 'Watch and pray that you enter not into temptation' (Matt. 26:41). You must watch and pray, and pray and watch, if you would not enter into temptation.' When Sennacherib and Haman had laid plots and snares to have destroyed the Jews, they prayed, and their souls were delivered, and Sennacherib and Haman destroyed. David had many snares laid for him, and this

puts him upon prayer. “But my eyes are fixed on you, O Sovereign Lord; in you I take refuge—do not give me over to death. Keep me from the snares they have laid for me, from the traps set by evildoers. Let the wicked fall into their own nets, while I pass by in safety.” (Psalm 141:8–10). “Keep me, O Lord, from the hands of the wicked; protect me from men of violence who plan to trip my feet. Proud men have hidden a snare for me; they have spread out the cords of their net and have set traps for me along my path. O Lord, I say to you, ‘You are my God.’ Hear, O Lord, my cry for mercy.” (Psalm 140:4–6). Saul and many others had laid snares for David, and this puts him upon prayer, and so the snares are broken and he is delivered.

Ah, souls! take words to yourselves, and tell God that Satan has spread his snares in all places and in all companies! Tell God that he digs deep, and that he has plot upon plot, and device upon device—and all to undo you! Tell God that you have neither skill nor power to escape his snares! Tell God that it is a work too high and too hard for any created creature to work your deliverance, unless he puts under his own everlasting arms! Tell God how his honor is engaged to stand by you, and to bring you off a victor, that you be not ruined by Satan’s plots! Tell God how the wicked would triumph, if you should fall into Satan’s snares! Tell God of the love of Christ, of the blood of Christ, and of the intercession of Christ for you, that a way may be found for your escape! Tell God that if he will make it his honor to save you from falling into Satan’s snares, you will make it your glory to speak of his goodness

and to live out his kindness. Christians must do as Daedalus, that when he could not escape by a way upon earth, went by a way of heaven—and that is, the way of prayer, which is the only way left to escape Satan’s snares.

The next use is a use of thankfulness to those who escape Satan’s snares—that they have not been taken by him at his will. Ah! Christians, it stands upon you with that princely prophet David, to call upon your souls, and say, ‘Bless the Lord, O our souls; and all that is within us, bless his holy name! Bless the Lord, O our souls, and do not forget all his benefits!’ (Psalm 103:1, 2). God has not given us to be a prey to Satan, and to be ensnared by those snares that he has laid for our souls!

The sense of this great favor did work up David’s heart to praises: “Praise be to the Lord, who has not let us be torn by their teeth. We have escaped like a bird out of the fowler’s snare; the snare has been broken, and we have escaped. Our help is in the name of the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth.” (Psalm 124:6–8). Ah! Christians, remember that the greatest part of the world, yes, the greatest part of professors, are taken in Satan’s snares. Can you think seriously of this, and not blush to be unthankful? What are you better than others? and what have you deserved of God, or done for God more than others—that you should by the help of a divine hand escape the snares, when others are taken and held in the snares of the devil to their eternal overthrow? Will you be thankful for the escaping the snares that men spread for your lives or estates, and will you not be much

more thankful for escaping those snares that Satan has laid for your precious souls?

“But as for me, I will always have hope; I will praise you more and more. My mouth will tell of your righteousness, of your salvation all day long, though I know not its measure. I will come and proclaim your mighty acts, O Sovereign Lord; I will proclaim your righteousness, yours alone. Since my youth, O God, you have taught me, and to this day I declare your marvelous deeds.” (Psalm 71:14–17). Remember this, that deliverance from Satan’s snares does carry with it the clearest and the greatest evidence, that the soul and heart of God to are towards us. Many a man by a common hand of providence escapes many a snare that another has laid for him—but yet escapes not the snares that Satan has laid for him. Saul, and Judas, and Demas, doubtless escaped many snares that men had laid for them—but none of them escaped the snares that the devil had laid for them. Many men are lifted up above the snares of men by a common hand of providence, that are left to fall into the snares of the devil by a hand of justice. Your deliverance from Satan’s snares is a fruit of special love. Can you thus look upon it and not be thankful, O precious soul? I judge not.

The last use of this point is to encourage Christians to long to be at home with Jesus Oh! long to be in the bosom of Christ! long to be in the land of Canaan! For this world, this wilderness, is full of snares; and all our employments are full of snares; and all our enjoyments are full of snares. In civil things, Satan has his snares to entrap us; and in all spiritual things, Satan has his snares

to catch us. All places are full of snares, city and country, shop and closet, sea and land. Even our mercies are all surrounded with snares! There are snares about our tables and snares about our beds! Yes, Satan is so powerful and subtle that he will oftentimes make our greatest, nearest, and dearest mercies to become our greatest snares! Sometimes he will make the wife that lies in the bosom to be a snare to a man, as Samson's was, and as Job's was. Sometimes he will make the child to be a snare, as Absalom was and Eli's sons were. And sometimes he will make the servant to be a snare, as Joseph was to his mistress.

Ah! souls, Satan is so cunning and artful, that he can turn your bread into snares, and your clothes into snares, and your houses into snares, and your gardens into snares, and all your recreations into snares. And oh! how should the consideration of these things work all your souls to say with the church and to love, and look, and long for the coming of Christ (Cant. 8:14). Shall the espoused maid long for the marriage day? Shall the servant long for his freedom? Shall the captive long for his ransom? Shall the traveler for long his inn, and the mariner for his harbor? And shall not the people of the Lord long much more to be in the bosom of Christ? there being nothing below the bosom of Christ that is not surrounded with Satan's snares (Phil. 1:23, and 2 Cor. 5:2, 4).

Augustine wished that he might have seen three things: Rome flourishing, Paul preaching, and Christ conversing with men upon the earth. Bede comes after, and, correcting this last wish, says, Yes—but let me see the King in his beauty, Christ is his heavenly

kingdom. What Paul once spoke of bonds and afflictions, that they attended him in every place (Acts 20:23), that may all the saints say of Satan's snares—that they attend them in every place; which should cause them to cry out, "Let us go hence, let us go hence!" Ah! souls, until you are taken up into the bosom of Christ, your comforts will not be full, pure, and constant. Until then, Satan will still be thumping on you, and spreading snares to entangle you!

Therefore, you should always be crying out with the church, 'Come, Lord Jesus!' (Rev. 22:20). Is not Christ the star of Jacob, that 'gives light to those who are in darkness'? Is not Christ that Prince of peace who brings the olive branch to souls that are perplexed? Is not the greatest worth and wealth in him? Are not the petty excellencies and perfections of all created creatures epitomized in him? Is not he the crown of crowns, the glory of glories, and the heaven of heavens? Oh then, be still a-longing after a full, clear, and constant enjoyment of Christ in heaven; for until then, Satan will still have plots and designs upon you. He acts by an untiring power, and will never let you rest until you are taken up to an everlasting rest in the bosom of Christ! It is as easy to contain the sea in a nutshell—as to relate fully Christ's excellencies, or heaven's happiness!

12

TEN RULES TO READ SCRIPTURE EFFECTIVELY

Richard Baxter

Directions for Profitably Hearing and Reading

The diversity of men's tempers and understandings is so exceedingly great that it is impossible that anything should be pleasing and suitable to some which shall not be disliked and quarreled with by others. Also in the Scriptures there are many things hard to be understood, which the unlearned and unstable wrest to their own destruction (2Pe 3:16); and the word is to some the savor of death unto death (Mar 4:24; 2Co 2:16). You have therefore need to be careful in reading it. As Christ saith, "Take heed therefore how ye hear" (Luk 8:18), so I say, Take heed how you read.

DIRECTION 1

Bring not an evil heart of unbelief. Open the Bible with holy

reverence as the book of God, written by the Holy Ghost. Remember that the doctrine of the New Testament was revealed by the Son of God, Who was purposely sent from heaven to be the light of the world and to make known to men the will of God and the matters of their salvation. Reflect you well, if God should but send a book or letter to you by an angel, how reverently would you receive it? How carefully you would peruse it and regard it above all the books in the world? And how much rather should you do so, by that book which is written by the Holy Ghost and recordeth the doctrine of Christ Himself, Whose authority is greater than all the angels? Read it not therefore as a common book, with a common and unreverent heart; but in the dread and love of God the author.

DIRECTION 2

Remember that it is the very Law of God which you must live by and be judged by at last. And therefore, read with a full resolution to obey whatever it commandeth, though flesh, and men, and devils contradict it. Let there be no secret exceptions in your heart to balk at any of its precepts and shift off that part of obedience which the flesh accounteth difficult or costly.

DIRECTION 3

Remember that it is the will and testament of your Lord and the covenant of most full and gracious promises, which all your comforts and all your hopes of pardon and everlasting life are built

upon. Read it therefore with love and great delight. Value it a thousand-fold more than you would do the letters of your dearest friend or the deeds by which you hold your lands, or anything else of low concernment. If the Law was sweeter to David than honey, and better than thousands of gold and silver, and was his delight and meditation all the day, O what should the sweet and precious gospel be to us!

DIRECTION 4

Remember that it is a doctrine of unseen things and of the greatest mysteries; and therefore come not to it with arrogance as a judge, but with humility as a learner or disciple. And if anything seems difficult or improbable to you, suspect your own unfurnished understanding and not the sacred Word of God. If a learner in any art or science will suspect his teacher and his books whenever he is stalled or meeteth with that which seemeth unlikely to him, his pride would preserve his ignorance, and his folly were like to be incurable.

DIRECTION 5

Remember that it is a universal law and doctrine, written for the most ignorant as well as for the curious; and therefore, must be suited in plainness to the capacity of the In inspiring human authors of Scripture the Holy Spirit presents God's infinitely glorious truth in the forms of finite human expression, but without error or compromise. Therefore, be not offended or troubled when

the style doth seem less refined than you might think beseeemed the Holy Ghost; nor [be troubled] at the plainness of some parts or the mysteriousness of others, but adore the wisdom and tender condescension of God to His poor creatures.

DIRECTION 6

Bring not a carnal mind, which savoreth only fleshly things and is enslaved to those sins which the Scripture doth condemn. For the carnal mind is enmity against God, and neither is, nor can be subject to His Law (Rom 8:7–8). And the things of God are not discerned by the mere natural man, for they are foolishness to him, and they must be spiritually discerned (2Co 2:14); and enmity is an ill expositor. It will be quarrelling with all and making faults in the Word which findeth so many faults in you. It will hate that Word which cometh to deprive you of your most sweet and dearly beloved sin. Or, if you have such a carnal mind and enmity, believe it not, any more than a partial and wicked enemy should be believed against God Himself, Who better understandeth what He hath written, than any of His foolish enemies.

DIRECTION 7

Compare one place of Scripture with another, and expound the darkest by the help of the plainest, and the fewer expressions by the more frequent and ordinary, and the more doubtful points by those which are most certain; and not on the contrary.

DIRECTION 8

Presume not on the strength of your own understanding, but humbly pray to God for light. Before and after you read the Scripture, pray earnestly that the Spirit which did write it may expound it to you and keep you from unbelief and error and lead you into the truth (1Co 2:10, 12; 12:8–10).

DIRECTION 9

Read some of the best commentaries or expositors, who being better acquainted with the phrase of Scripture than yourselves, may help to clear your understanding. When Philip asked the eunuch that read Isaiah 53, “Understandest thou what thou readest? And he said, How can I, except some man should guide me?” (Act 8:30–31). Make use of your guides, if you would not err.

DIRECTION 10

When you are stalled by any difficulty which is beyond your comprehension you, note it down, and propound it to your pastor and crave his help, or (if the minister of the place be ignorant and unable) go to someone that God hath furnished for such work.

13

THE WAY OF CONTENTMENT

Jeremiah Burroughs
The Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment

The consideration that God is beforehand with us with his mercies should content us. I spoke of this as an aggravation of our discontent, but now I shall use it as a consideration to help us to contentment. You lack many comforts now, but has not God been beforehand with you heretofore? Oh, you have had mercy enough already to make you spend all the strength you have and time you shall live, to bless God for what you have had already.

I remember reading of a good man who had lived to fifty years of age and enjoyed his health for eight and forty years exceedingly well, and lived in prosperity, but the last two years his body was exceedingly diseased, he had the strangury, and was in great pain. But he reasoned the case with himself thus: ‘Oh, Lord, you might

have made all my life a life of torment and pain, but you have left me have eight and forty years in health. I will praise your mercies for what I have had, and will praise your justice for what now I feel.’

Oh, it is a good consideration for us, to think that God is beforehand with us, in the way of mercy. Suppose God should now take away your wealth from some of you who have lived comfortably a great while; you will say, ‘That aggravates our misery, that we have had wealth.’ But it is through your unthankfulness that it does so. We should bless God for what we have had, and not think that we are worse because we have had thus and thus. We might always have been miserable who has no other great aggravation of his misery, but that once he was happy. If there is nothing else to make you miserable, then that is no aggravation that you may not bear, for there is much mercy in that you had it once. Therefore let that content you.

Consider the condition that others have been in, who have been our betters. We made some use of this before to show the evil of discontent. But, further, it is a mighty argument to work on our hearts a contentedness in any condition. You many times consider who are above you; but consider who are under you. Jacob, who was the heir of both Abraham and Isaac, for the blessing was on him and the promise ran in him, yet was in a poor, mean condition. Abraham, his grandfather, was able to make a kind of army of his own household, three hundred, to fight with a king, yet Jacob his grandchild goes over Jordan with a staff, and lives in a very poor

and mean condition for a long time. Moses might have had all the treasure in Egypt, and some historians say of him, Pharaoh's daughter adopted him for her son, because Pharaoh had no heir for the crown, and so he was likely to have come to the crown. Yet what a low condition he lived in, when he went to live with Jethro his father-in-law forty years on end! Afterwards when he returned to Egypt, with his wife and children, and all that he had, he had only one beast to carry him; he went back to Egypt from his father-in-law in a mean condition.

And we know how Elijah was fed with ravens, and how he had to shift for his life from time to time, and run into the wilderness up and down; and so did Elisha: he was many times in a low condition; the prophets of God were hid in a cave by Obadiah, and there fed with bread and water; and the prophet Jeremiah put into a dungeon, and oh, how he was used! And it would be endless to name the particulars of the great sufferings of the people of God.

In former time, we have sometimes made use of this argument in other ways: the great instruments of God in the first Reformation lived in great straits, in a very low condition. Even Luther himself, when he was about to die, though he was a man of such public use, and was a great man in the courts of princes, said, 'Lord, I have neither house nor lands, nor estate, to leave anything to wife or children, but I commit them to thee.' And so Musculus who was a very choice instrument of God in his time, though he was a man who was worth even a kingdom for the excellence of his spirit, and learning, for he was one of the most learned men of

his time, yet sometimes was forced to dig in the common ditch to get bread for his family. What would we do, if we were in such a condition as these men were?

But, above all, set Christ before us, who professes that the birds of the air had nests, and the foxes had holes, yet the Son of man had no place to hide his head, such a low condition was he in. The consideration of such things as these is very useful. It is likewise useful for men and women of wealth to go to poor people's houses and see how they live, to go to hospitals, and to see the wounds of soldiers and others, and to see the lamentable condition that people live in who live in some alms-houses, and what poor fare they have, and what straits they are put to. You hear sometimes of them, but if you went to see them it would not only stir up charity in yourselves towards them, but stir up thankfulness in your hearts towards God, it would be a special means to help you against any discontent. You would go away and see cause to bless God and say, 'If I were in such a condition as they are in what should I do? How could I bear it? And yet what reason is there that God so orders and disposes of things that they should be so low in their conditions and I so high? I know no reason but free grace: God will have mercy upon whom he will have mercy.' These are good considerations for the furtherance of contentment.

Finally, consider all the experience that you have had of God's doing good to you in the want of many comforts. When God crosses you, have you never had experience of abundance of good in afflictions? It is true, when ministers only tell men that God will

work good out of their afflictions, they hear them speak, and think they speak like good men, but they feel little or no good; they feel nothing but pain. But when we cannot only say to you that God has said he will work good out of your afflictions, but we can say to you, that you yourselves have found it so by experience, that God has made former afflictions to be great benefits to you, and that you would not have been without them, or without the good that came by them for a world, such experiences will exceedingly quiet the heart and bring it to contentment. Therefore, think thus with yourself: Lord, why may not this affliction work as great a good upon me as afflictions have done before?

14

A PRAYER FOR THE POWER OF THE CHURCH

Matthew Henry
A Method for Prayer

Our heart's desire and prayer to God for the gospel Israel, is that it may be saved. Romans 10:1. Do good in thy good pleasure unto Zion, build thou the walls of Jerusalem. Peace be within her walls, and prosperity within her palaces; For our brethren and companions' sake we will now say, Peace be within her. Psalm 51:18. Psalm 122:7, 8.

O that we may see the good of the gospel Jerusalem, all the days of our life, and peace upon Israel. And that thus we may have reason to answer the messengers of the nations, that the Lord hath founded Zion, and the poor of his people shall trust to that. Psalm 128:5, 6. Isaiah 14:32.

Save thy people, O Lord, and bless thine heritage: Feed them also, and lift them up for ever. Give strength unto thy people, and

blest thy people with peace; with thy favour do thou compass them as with a shield. Psalm 28 (v. 9). Psalm 29 (v. 11). Psalm 5 (v. 12).

Grace be with all them that love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity; for thou knowest them that are thine; and give to all that name the name of Christ to depart from iniquity. Ephesians 6:24. 2 Timothy 2:19.

We pray for all that believe in Christ, that they all may be one; And since there is one body, and one Spirit, and one hope of our calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one God and Father of all, give to all Christians to be of one heart, and one way. John 17:20, 21. Ephesians 4:4, 5, 6. Jeremiah 32:39.

Let the word of the Lord in all places, have a free course, and let it be glorified. 2 Thessalonians 3:1.

LORD, let thy spirit be poured out upon thy churches from on high, and then the wilderness shall become a fruitful field, then judgment shall return unto righteousness, and all the upright in heart shall follow it. Isaiah 32:15. Psalm 94:15.

Let what is wanting be set in order, and let every plant that is not of our heavenly Father's planting, be plucked up. Titus 1:5. Matthew 15:13.

Let the Lord whom we seek come to his temple like a refiner's fire, and fuller's soap, and let him purify the sons of Levi, and all the seed of Israel, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness, pleasant to the Lord, as in the days of old, as in former years. Malachi 3:1–4.

Let pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father,

flourish and prevail everywhere, that kingdom of God among men, which is not meat and drink, but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost. O revive this work in the midst of the years, in the midst of the years make known, and let our times be times of reformation. James 1 (v. 27). Romans 14:17. Habakkuk 3:2. Hebrews 9:10.

Let all that set themselves, and take counsel together against the Lord, and against his anointed, that would break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from them, imagine a vain thing. Let him that sits in heaven laugh at them, and have them in derision; speak unto them in thy wrath, and vex them in thy sore displeasure. Give them, O Lord: what wilt thou give them? give them a miscarrying womb, and dry breasts. Psalm 2:1–5. Hosea 9:14.

O our God, make them like a wheel, and as stubble before the wind; Fill their faces with shame, that they may seek thy name, O Lord, and that men may know, that thou whose name is JEHOVAH, art the most high over all the earth. Psalm 83:13, 16, 18. Put them in fear, O Lord, that the nations may know themselves to be but men, and wherein the proud enemies of thy church deal proudly, make it to appear that thou art above them. Psalm 9:20. Exodus 18:11.

Let them be confounded and turned back that hate Zion, and be as the grass upon the house-tops, which withereth before it groweth up. Psalm 129:5, 6. Let no weapon formed against thy church prosper, and let every tongue that riseth against it in judgment be condemned. Isaiah 54:17.

Make Jerusalem a burdensome stone for all people, and let all that burden themselves with it be cut in pieces, though all the people of the earth should be gathered together against it; so let all thine enemies perish, O Lord, but let them that love thee be as the sun when he goes forth in his strength. Zechariah 12:3. Judges 5 (v. 31).

Lord, let the man of sin be consumed with the spirit of thy mouth, and destroyed with the brightness of thy coming: And let those be undeceived that have been long under the power of strong delusions to believe a lie, and let them receive the truth in the love of it. 2 Thessalonians 2:3, 8, 11, 10.

Let Babylon fall, and sink like a mill-stone into the sea; And let the kings of the earth, that have given their power and honour to the beast, be wrought upon at length to bring it into the new Jerusalem. Revelation 18:2, 21. Revelation 17:17. Revelation 21:24. Amen.

15

THE CALLING OF EVERY CHRISTIAN

William Perkins

A Treatise of Vocations

The GENERAL CALLING is that calling whereby a man is called out of the world to be a child of God, a member of Christ, and an heir of the kingdom of heaven. This calling belongs to everyone within the compass of the Church, not any one excepted.

The **first general duty** is the invocation of the name of God in Christ. When Saul got letters from the high Priests to persecute the Church, it is said by Luke that he received authority to bind all that call upon the name of God (Act 9.14). Paul, writing to the Church of Corinth, calls the members of it saints, and those who call on the name of the Lord Jesus (1Cor 1.2). By both of these places, the Holy Spirit would give us to understand that invocation is a main duty which every Christian man is to perform

continually; and it contains both prayer and thanksgiving in the name and mediation of Jesus Christ. And indeed, by this action a Christian is distinguished and severed from all other sorts of men in the world who pretend devotion or religion.

By this it appears that, however all men may desire to bear this name and take to themselves this general calling, very few are indeed true and sound Christians; for not one of a hundred can rightly invoke the name of God. Though they can indeed repeat the words of prayer, they lack the spirit of grace and supplication whereby they should ask for grace in Christ's name, and give thanks for benefits received.

Thus, many who bear the name of Christ only for show, lack the power of that name. No, what is more, not to call on the name of God is made by the Prophet David, the note and mark of an Atheist, who says in his heart there is no God (Psa 14.1).

The **second general duty** is, as much as we possibly can, to further the good estate of the true Church of God. It is indeed principally the duty of the Minister, and yet generally it pertains to all. For in man's body, the eye by seeing, the ear by hearing, the tongue by speaking, and every part by its proper office, furthers the good of the whole body. Even so, all that are called to be members of Christ must, as much as it lies in them, procure the good of the whole mystical body of Christ.

David, in the name of the whole Church, says I will procure your wealth, and Pray for the peace of Jerusalem; they shall prosper who love you (GNV Psa 122.9, 6). And after he had humbled

himself for the two grievous sins of adultery and murder, in the end he prays to God to build the walls of Jerusalem. For the building of the tabernacle, the Jews brought free-will offerings according to their ability. Some brought gold and precious stones; others silver and silk; and those who had no better thing, brought rams' skins, and badgers' skins. Even so, in the building of God's Church, His spiritual tabernacle, every Christian must bring a free-will offering; he must do something even to the utmost of his power to the building of God's Church, even though his service is but lowly.

Though men (as I have said) fondly imagine that this duty is proper to the ministers of the word, yet the truth is, it belongs not only to them, but to everyone that professes himself to be a member of the body of Christ; in this respect, he must, so much as he can, procure and further the good of the whole. Here then we are to consider the means by which this duty may be done. They are especially three.

The first means is prayer, not only for ourselves, but for the good estate of the whole Church of God on earth. To this effect, Christ spoke to his disciples when he saw the Jews like scattered sheep without a shepherd: Pray to the Lord of the harvest, that he would 'thrust forth' laborers into the harvest (Mat 9.38). And in that prayer which is commonly called the Lord's Prayer, we are taught to say, Let your kingdom come: Mat 6.10 where "kingdom" not only means the kingdom of glory in heaven, but the kingdom of grace, which is the happy and blessed condition of God's Church on earth. And therefore, Paul bids the

Thessalonians to pray that God's word may have free passage and be glorified (2Th 3.1)

The second means is the work of edification, to which Paul enjoins the Thessalonians: Edify one another (1Th 5.11). And Jude in v. 20, Edify yourselves upon your most holy faith. The Church of God is a Temple made without hands; Mar 14.58 the foundation is Christ; 1Cor 3.11 and every member of Christ, with all that pertains to God's election, are living stones. 1Pet 2.5.

The builders of this temple principally are Pastors and Teachers; and not only them, but all Christian persons generally. The case stands here as it did in the building of the material temple, the builders of which were those who cut and laid stones, and wrought elaborate works.

Besides these, there were many others who, though they could neither cut nor frame, they furthered the building either by carrying burdens, or making mortar. Even so, in the building of God's spiritual Church, though all cannot square stones like Masons, nor build as the Minister does, yet all without exception pertaining to the Church of God, must put their helping hands to further this building. And this may be done two ways: first, by using all good means by which we may draw our kindred, friends, and neighbors to the love and obedience of true religion. Paul propounds this duty to the Corinthians in his own example, saying he pleased all men in all things, not seeking his own profit, but the profit of many, that they might be saved (1Cor 10.33). Secondly, this thing is done by confirming those who are called, by often giving admonitions,

exhortations, consolations, and all other like duties that serve this end. And by these duties, the least person in the Church of God, may build or edify.

Here I may justly complain of the neglect of this duty. For the case stands thus in the barren and fruitless age of the world: men are so far from the duties of edification, that they use all means to pull down rather than to build. For he that gives himself only to learn the duties of religion, and in some way to live accordingly, is made a sign and a byword among the common people, and also a wonder. And this shows that the practice of this duty of edification lies dead, to which nevertheless we are bound by virtue of our general calling.

The third means of furthering the good of God's Church, is to confer the temporal blessings that God has bestowed on us according to our ability, to the good of it. Honor God with your riches, says Solomon (Pro 3.9). And that is done especially when they are employed to maintain and further true religion, and the worship of God. There are other ends for which God has given riches, but this is the principal end of all. Yet alas, this duty is but slenderly practiced by those who carry the name of Christ. For many of the richer sort spend a great part of their increase on hawks, bulls, bears, dogs, or they riotously misspend it in some sort of sporting or gaming; and thus, they disable themselves from doing that good which they should to the Church of God. And the baser sort nowadays spend what they get in fine apparel and good cheer: and by this means the house of God is less regarded.

For every common man nowadays must be a gentleman, and it is very hard sometimes for a stranger to discern the master from the servant. And there is such excess in all degrees, that now for daily attire, the noblest are the plainest. To this duty I may also add that every Christian parent, by virtue of his general calling, is to dedicate some of his male children, as much as possible, to the service of the ministry, if they have gifts and inclinations of nature fit for that calling. And in this case, the example of Anna may be a good direction for us to follow, who beforehand consecrated Samuel, her firstborn, to the Lord. By this means the ministry shall be continued, God's Church and religion maintained, and His Gospel published from age to age to the end of the world.

The third general duty of Christianity is that every man should become a servant to his brother in all the duties of love. A Christian is the freest of all men in the world. For in that respect he is the child of God in Christ; he is truly freed from hell, death, and condemnation; indeed, and in part he is freed from sin and Satan, and that is in this life. And yet, for all this, he must be a servant to every man.¹ But how? By all the duties of love as occasion is offered, and that is for the common good of all men. Mark well the words of Paul, Though I am free from all men, yet I have made myself servant to all, that I might win the more (1Cor 9.19). If it is said that this duty pertains only to an Apostle, I answer that Paul enjoins it indifferently to every man: Serve one another in love (Gal 5.13). And for this cause, the servants of God are said to be trees of righteousness Isa 61.3 whose leaves serve as

medicine and their fruit for food, Eze 47.12 not for themselves but for others.

Let us therefore, in the fear of God, be careful to learn this duty; for the practice of it is the special ornament of Christ's holy Gospel. The last general duty is set down by Paul: Walk worthy of that calling to which God has called you (Eph 4.1). Again, in Titus, he bids servants to so carry themselves toward their masters, that they may adorn the Gospel of God in all things (2.10). And he then sets down in the words following, how men may adorn religion by their profession; namely, by denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, by living soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world (2.12).

In a word, this calling of Christianity is the most excellent calling in the world, and he walks worthy of it, who keeps a good conscience before God, Act 23.1 and is unblameable before all men. 1 Pet 2.12. This duty I commend to the meditation and practice of all men whatsoever; we were once baptized, and in this we surrendered our names to God and Christ; and we are content to hear the word, and to receive the Supper of the Lord as a pledge of His mercy and love.

We must therefore walk as those to whom the mercy and love of God pertain. Christ pronounces a woe to those that give offense (Mat 18.7).² And indeed it would be better for any man to be as far under the earth as he is above it, than by a bad and loose conversation, to slander the name of God, whose professed servant he is. As Christ says, It would be better if a millstone were hung about

his neck, and he were thrown into the bottom of the sea. Mat 18.6
As David prays, Lord take from me rebuke and shame, which I
fear, because Your judgments are good (Psa 119.39).

So, must we pray, Lord take from me rebuke and shame, for
Your Gospel is good. And that we may evermore walk worthy of
this calling, we must, first of all, depend by faith on the provi-
dence and mercy of God at all times. Secondly, we must turn to
Him daily by a continual renewing of our repentance. Thirdly,
we must endeavor to perform new obedience in respect of all his
commandments.

16

BEHOLDING THE GLORY OF GOD

Hugh Binning

The Common Principles of the Christian Religion

To glorify God is in our souls to conceive of him, and meditate on his name, till they receive the impression and stamp of all the letters of his glorious name; and then to express this in our words and actions, in commending of him, and obeying of him. Our souls should be as wax to express the seal of his glorious attributes of justice, power, goodness, holiness, and mercy: and as the water that receives the beams of the sun reflects them back again, so should our spirits receive the sweet warming beams of his love and glorious excellency, and then reflect them towards his Majesty, with the desires and affections of our souls.

All our thoughts of him, all our affections towards him, should have the stamp of singularity, such as may declare there is none like him, none besides him; our love, our meditation, our

acknowledgment should have this character on their front,—’There is none besides thee: thou art, and none else.’ And then a soul should, by the cords of affection to him and admiration of him, be bound to serve him.

Creation puts on the obligation to glorify him in our body and spirits which are his; but affection only puts that to exercise. All other bonds leave our natures at liberty, but this constrains, 2 Cor. 5.14; it binds on all bonds, it ties on us all divine obligations. Then a soul will glorify God, when love so unites it to God, and makes it one spirit with him, that his glory becomes its honour, and becomes the principle of all our inward affections and outward actions.

It is not always possible to have and express particular thoughts of God and his glory, in every action and meditation; but, for the most part it ought to be so: And if souls were accustomed to meditation on God, it would become their very nature,—*altera natura*,—pleasant and delightsome. However, if there be not always an express intention of God’s glory, yet there ought to be kept always such a disposition and temper of spirit as it may be construed to proceed from the intention of God’s glory; and then it remains in the seed and fruit, if not in itself.

Now when we are speaking of the great end and purpose of our creation, we call to mind our lamentable and tragical fall from that blessed station we were constitute into. ‘All men have sinned and come short of the glory of God,’ Rom. 3.23.

His being in the world was for that glory, and he is come short of that glory. O strange shortcoming! Short of all that he was

ordained for! What is he now meet for? For what purpose is that chief of the works of God now! The salt, if it lose its saltness, is meet for nothing, for wherewithal shall it be seasoned? Mark 9.50.

Even so, when man is rendered unfit for his proper end, he is meet for nothing, but to be cast out and trode upon; he is like a withered branch that must be cast into the fire, John 15.6. Some things, if they fail in one use, they are good for another; but the best things are not so,—*Corruptio optimi, pessima*. As the Lord speaks to the house of Israel, ‘Shall wood be taken of the vine tree to do any work?’ Even so the inhabitants of Jerusalem, Ezek. 15.2–6. If it yield not wine, it is good for nothing. So, if man do not glorify God,—if he fall from that,—he is meet for nothing, but to be cast into the fire of hell, and burnt for ever; he is for no use in the creation, but to be fuel to the fire of the Lord’s indignation.

But behold! the goodness of the Lord and his kindness and love hath ‘appeared toward man. Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us,’ ‘through Jesus Christ,’ Tit. 3.4–6. Our Lord Jesus, by whom all things were created, and for whom, would not let this excellent workmanship perish so, therefore he goes about the work of redemption,—a second creation more laborious and also more glorious than the first, that so he might glorify his Father and our Father.

Thus, the breach is made up; thus the unsavoury salt is seasoned; thus the withered branch is quickened again for that same fruit of praises and glorifying of God. This is the end of his second creation, as it was of the first: ‘We are his workmanship created to

good works in Christ Jesus,' Eph. 2.10. 'This is the work of God, to believe on him whom he hath sent;' 'to set to our seal,' and to give our testimony to all his attributes, John 6.29, and 3.33. We are 'bought with a price,' and therefore we ought to glorify him with our souls and bodies. He made us with a word, and that bound us; but now he has made us again, and paid a price for us, and so we are twice bound not to be our own but his, 'and so to glorify him in our bodies and spirits,' 1 Cor. 6.20.

I beseech you, gather your spirits, call them home about the business. We once came short of our end,—God's glory and our happiness; but know, that it is attainable again. We lost both; but both are found in Christ. Awake then and stir up your spirits, else it shall be double condemnation—when we have the offer of being restored to our former blessed condition—to love our present misery better. Once establish this point within your souls, and therefore ask, Why came I hither? To what purpose am I come into the world? If you do not ask it, what will you answer, when he asks you at your appearance before his tribunal? I beseech you, what will many of you say in that day when the Master returns and takes an account of your dispensation?

You are sent into the world only for this business,—to serve the Lord. Now what will many of you answer? If you speak the truth (as then you must do it,—you cannot lie then!) you must say, "Lord, I spent my time in serving my own lusts; I was taken up with other businesses, and had no leisure; I was occupied in my calling," &c. Even as if an ambassador of a king should return

him this account of his negotiation: "I was busy at cards and dice; I spent my money, and did wear my clothes." Though you think your plowing and borrowing and trafficking and reaping very necessary, yet certainly these are but as trifles and toys to the main business.

O what a dreadful account will souls make! They come here for no purpose but to serve their bodies and senses, to be slaves to all the creatures which were once put under man's feet: Now man is under the feet of all, and he has put himself so. If you were of these creatures, then you might be for them. You seek them as if you were created for them, and not they for you; and you seek yourselves, as if you were of yourselves, and had not your descent of God. Know, my beloved, that you were not made for that purpose, nor yet redeemed either to serve yourselves, or other creatures, but that other creatures might serve you, and ye serve God, Luke 1.74,75.

And this is really the best way to serve ourselves, and to save ourselves,—to serve God. Self-seeking is self-destroying; self-denying is self-saving, soul-saving. 'He that seeketh to save his life shall lose it, and he that loseth his life shall find it, and he that denies himself and follows me, is my disciple.' Will ye once sit down in good earnest about this business? 'Tis lamentable to be yet to begin to learn to live, when ye must die! Ye will be out of the world almost, ere ye bethink yourself, Why came I into the world? *Quidam tunc vivere incipiunt, cum desinendum est; imo quidam ante vivere desierunt quam inciperent;* this is of all most lamentable,—many souls end their life, before they begin to live. For what is our life, but a living death, while we do not live to God, and while

we live not in relation to the great end of our life and being,—the glory of God?

It were better, says Christ, that such ‘had never been born.’ You who are created again in Jesus Christ, it most of all concerns you to ask, Why am I made? And why am I redeemed? And to what purpose? It is certainly that ye may glorify your heavenly Father, Mat. 5.16; Psalm. 56.13. And you shall glorify him if you bring forth much fruit, and continue in his love, John 15.8,9. And this you are chosen and ordained unto, ver. 16; and therefore abide in him, that ye may bring forth fruit, ver. 4. And if you abide in him by believing, you do indeed honour him; and he that honoureth the Son honoureth the Father, John 5.23.

Here is a compendious way to glorify God. Receive salvation of him free]y, righteousness and eternal life; this sets to a seal to God’s truth and grace and mercy: and whoso counts the Son worthy to be a Saviour to them, and sets to their seal of approbation to him whom God the Father hath sent and sealed, he also honours the Father; and then he that honoureth the Father, hath it not for nothing, ‘for them that honour me I will honour,’ 1 Sam. 2.30, says the Lord; and ‘he that serves me, him will my Father honour,’ John 12.26. As the believing soul cares for no other, and respects no other but God, so he respects no other but such a soul. ‘I will dwell in the humble, and look unto the contrite;’ there are mutual respects and honours.

God is the delight of such a soul, and such a soul is God’s delight. That soul sets God in a high place, in a throne in its heart;

and God sets that soul in a heavenly place with Christ, Eph. 2.6; yea he comes down to sit with us, and dwells in us, off his throne of majesty, Isa. 66.1,2; and 57.15.

17

AFFLICTED FOR GOD

Thomas Watson
A Divine Cordial

It is one heart-quieting consideration in all the afflictions that befall us, that God has a special hand in them: “The Almighty hath addicted me” (Ruth i. 21). Instruments can no more stir till God gives them a commission, than the axe can cut of itself without a hand. Job eyed God in his affliction: therefore, as Augustine observes, he does not say, “The Lord gave, and the devil took away,” but, “The Lord hath taken away.”

Whoever brings an affliction to us, it is God that sends it. Another heart quieting consideration is, that afflictions work for good. “ Like these good pips, so will I acknowledge them that are carried away captive of Judah, whom I have sent out of this place into the land of the Chaldeans, for their good”

(Jer. xxiv. 5). Judah's captivity in Babylon was for their good. "It is good for me that I have been afflicted" (Psalm cxix. 71).

This text, like Moses' tree cast into the bitter waters of affliction, may make them sweet and wholesome to drink. Afflictions to the godly are medicinal. Out of the most poisonous drugs God extracts our salvation. Afflictions are as needful as ordinances (I Peter i. 6). No vessel can be made of gold without fire; so it is impossible that we should be made vessels of honour, unless we are melted and refined in the furnace of affliction. "All the paths of the Lord are mercy and truth" (Psalm xxv. 10).

As the painter intermixes bright colours with dark shadows; so the wise God mixes mercy with judgment. Those afflictive providences which seem to be prejudicial, are beneficial. Let us take some instances in Scripture. Joseph's brethren throw him into a pit; afterwards they sell him; then he is cast into prison; yet all this did work for his good. His abasement made way for his advancement, he was made the second man in the kingdom. "Ye thought evil against me, but God meant it for good" (Gen. i. 20). Jacob wrestled with the angel, and the hollow of Jacob's thigh was out of joint. This was sad; but God turned it to good, for there he saw God's face, and there the Lord blessed him. "Jacob called the name of the place Peniel, for I have seen God face to face" (Gen. xxxii. 30). Who would not be willing to have a bone out of joint, so that he might have a sight of God?

King Manasseh was bound in chains. This was sad to see—a crown of gold changed into fetters; but it wrought for his good, for,

“When he was in affliction he besought the Lord, and humbled himself greatly, and the Lord was entreated of him” (2 Chron. xxxiii. 11, 12). He was more beholden to his iron chain, than to his golden crown; the one made him proud, the other made him humble. Job was a spectacle of misery; he lost all that ever he had; he abounded only in boils and ulcers. This was sad; but it wrought for his good, his grace was proved and improved. God gave a testimony from heaven of his integrity, and did compensate his loss by giving him twice as much as ever he had before (Job xiii. 10). Paul was smitten with blindness. This was uncomfortable, but it turned to his good. God did by that blindness make way for the light of grace to shine into his soul; it was the beginning of a happy conversion (Acts ix. 6). As the hard frosts in winter bring on the flowers in the spring, as the night ushers in the morning star: so the evils of affliction produce much good to those that love God.

FREEDOM FROM VAIN AFFECTIONS

Henry Scougal

The Life of God in the Soul of Man

Our next essay must be, to wean our affections from created things, and all the delights and entertainments of the lower life, which sink and depress the souls of men, and retard their motions towards God and heaven; and this we must do by possessing our minds with a deep persuasion of the vanity and emptiness of worldly enjoyments.

This is an ordinary theme, and everybody can make declamations upon it; but, alas! how few understand or believe what they say? These notions float in our brains, and come sliding off our tongues, but we have no deep impression of them on our spirits; we feel not the truth which we pretend to believe. We can tell, that all the glory and splendour, all the pleasures and enjoyments of the world are vanity and nothing; and yet these nothings take up all

our thoughts, and engross all our affections; they stifle the better inclinations of our soul, and inveigle us into many a sin. It may be in a sober mood we give them the slight, and resolve to be no longer deluded with them; but those thoughts seldom outlive the next temptation; the vanities which we have shut out at the doors get in at a postern: there are still some pretensions, some hopes that flatter us; and after we have been frustrated a thousand times, we must be continually repeating the experiment: the least difference of circumstances is enough to delude us, and make us expect that satisfaction in one thing which we have missed in another; but could we once get clearly off, and come to a serious and real contempt of worldly things, this were a very considerable advancement in our way.

The soul of man is of a vigorous and active nature, and hath in it a raging and inextinguishable thirst, an immaterial kind of fire, always catching at some object or other, in conjunction wherewith it thinks to be happy; and were it once rent from the world, and all the bewitching enjoyments under the sun, it would quickly search after some higher and more excellent object, to satisfy its ardent and importunate cravings; and, being no longer dazzled with glittering vanities, would fix on that supreme and all-sufficient Good, where it would discover such beauty and sweetness as would charm and overpower all its affections.

The love of the world, and the love of God, are like the scales of a balance; as the one falleth, the other doth rise: when our natural inclinations prosper, and the creature is exalted in our soul, religion

is faint, and doth languish; but when earthly objects wither away, and lose their beauty, and the soul begins to cool and flag in its prosecution of them, then the seeds of grace take root, and the divine life begins to flourish and prevail. It doth, therefore, nearly concern us, to convince ourselves of the emptiness and vanity of creature-enjoyments, and reason our heart out of love with them: let us seriously consider all that our reason or our faith, our own experience or the observation of others, can suggest to this effect: let us ponder the matter over and over, and fix our thoughts on this truth, till we become really persuaded of it.

Amidst all our pursuits and designs, let us stop and ask ourselves, For what end is all this? At what do I aim? Can the gross and muddy pleasures of sense, or a heap of white and yellow earth, or the esteem and affection of silly creatures like myself, satisfy a rational and immortal soul? Have I not tried these things already? Will they have a higher relish, and yield me more contentment tomorrow than yesterday, or the next year than they did the last?

There may be some little difference betwixt that which I am now pursuing, and that which I enjoyed before; but sure, my former enjoyments did show as pleasant and promise as fair, before I attained them; like the rainbow, they looked very glorious at a distance, but when I approached I found nothing but emptiness and vapour. O what a poor thing would the life of man be, if it were capable of no higher enjoyments! I cannot insist on this subject; and there is the less need when I remember to whom I am writing.

Yes, my dear friend, you have had as great experience of the emptiness and vanity of human things, and have, at present, as few worldly engagements as any that I know. I have sometimes reflected on those passages of your life wherewith you have been pleased to acquaint me; and, methinks, through all, I can discern a design of the divine Providence to wean your affections from every thing here below. The trials you have had of those things which the world dotes upon, have taught you to despise them; and you have found by experience, that neither the endowments of nature, nor the advantages of fortune, are sufficient for happiness; that every rose hath its thorn, and there may be a worm at the foot of the fairest gourd; some secret and undiscerned grief, which may make a person deserve the pity of those who, perhaps, do admire or envy their supposed felicity.

If any earthly comforts have got too much of your heart, I think they have been your relations and friends; and the dearest of these are removed out of the world, so that you must raise your mind towards heaven when you would think upon them.

Thus, God hath provided that your heart may be loosed from the world, and that he may not have any rival in your affection, which I have always observed to be so large and unbounded, so noble and disinterested, that no inferior object can answer or deserve it. When we have got our corruptions restrained, and our natural appetites and inclinations towards worldly things in some measure subdued, we must proceed to take such exercises as have a more immediate tendency to excite and awaken the divine life;

and, first, let us endeavour conscientiously to perform those duties which religion doth require, and whereunto it would incline us, if it did prevail in our souls.

If we cannot get our inward disposition presently charged, let us study at least to regulate our outward deportment: if our hearts be not yet inflamed with divine love, let us, however, own our allegiance to that infinite Majesty, by attending his service and listening to his word, by speaking reverently of his name and praising his goodness, and exhorting others to serve and obey him.

If we want that charity, and those bowels of compassion which we ought to have towards our neighbours, yet must we not omit any occasion of doing them good: if our hearts be haughty and proud, we must, nevertheless study a modest and humble deportment. These external performances are of little value in themselves, yet they may help us forward to better things. The apostle indeed telleth us, "that bodily exercise profiteth little:" but he seems not to affirm that it is altogether useless; it is always good to be doing what we can, for then God is wont to pity our weakness, and assist our feeble endeavours; and when true charity and humility, and other graces of the divine Spirit, come to take root in our souls, they will exert themselves more freely, and with less difficulty, if we have before been accustomed to express them in our outward conversations.

Nor need we fear the imputation of hypocrisy; though our actions do thus somewhat outrun our affections, seeing they do still proceed from a sense of our duty; and our design is not to appear better than we are, but that we may really become so. But as

inward acts have a more immediate influence on the soul, to mould it to a right temper and frame, so ought we to be most frequent and sedulous in the exercise of them.

Let us be often lifting up our hearts toward God; and if we do not say that we love him above all things, let us at least acknowledge, that it is our duty, and would be our happiness, so to do: let us lament the dishonour done to him by foolish and sinful men, and applaud the praises and adorations that are given him by that blessed and glorious company above: let us resign and yield ourselves up unto him a thousand times, to be governed by his laws, and disposed of at his pleasure; and though our stubborn hearts should start back and refuse, yet let us tell him we are convinced that his will is always just and good; and, therefore, desire him to do with us whatsoever he pleaseth, whether we will or not.

And so, for begetting in us a universal charity towards men, we must be frequently putting up wishes for their happiness, and blessing every person that we see; and when we have done anything for the relief of the miserable, we may second it with earnest desires, that God would take care of them, and deliver them out of all their distresses.

Thus, should we exercise ourselves unto godliness, and when we are employing the powers that we have, the Spirit of God is wont to strike in and elevate these acts of our soul beyond the pitch of nature, and give them a divine impression; and, after the frequent reiteration of these, we shall find ourselves more inclined unto them, they flowing with greater freedom and ease.

19

FISHERS OF MEN

Thomas Boston
The Art of Man-Fishing

How does Christ make fishers of men? In answer to this question, consider spiritual fishing two ways: first, as to the office and work itself; and second, as to the success of it. First, he makes them fishers as to their office, by his call, which is twofold, outward and inward, by setting them apart to the office of the ministry; and it is thy business, O my soul, to know whether thou hast it or not. But of this more afterwards.

Second, he makes them fishers as to success; that is, he makes them catch men to himself by the power of his Spirit accompanying the word they preach, and the discipline they administer: The preaching of the cross - unto us which are saved, is the power of God (1 Cor. 1:18). Our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance

(1 Thess. 1:5). He it is that brings sinners into the net which ministers spread; and if he be not with them to drive the fish into the net, they may toil all the night, and day too, and catch nothing.

O my soul, then see that gifts will not do the business. A man may preach as an angel, and yet be useless. If Christ withdraw his presence, all will be to no purpose. If the Master of the house be away, the household will loath their food though it be dropping down about their tent doors. Why shouldst thou then, on the one hand, as sometimes thou art, be lifted up when thou preachest a good and solid discourse, wherein gifts do appear, and thou gettest the applause of men? Why, thou mayst do all this, and yet be no fisher of men. The fish may see the bait, and play about it as pleasant, but this is not enough to catch them. On the other hand, why shouldst thou be so much discouraged (as many times is the case), because thy gifts are so small, and thou art but as a child in comparison of others? Why, if Christ will, he can make thee a fisher of men, as well as the most learned rabbi in the church: Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings hast thou ordained strength (Ps. 8:2).

Yea, hast thou not observed how God owned a man very weak in gifts and made him more successful than others that were far beyond him in parts? Has not God put this treasure in earthen vessels, that the power might be seen to be of him? Lift up thyself then, O my soul, Christ can make thee a fisher of men, however weak thou art. Follow thou him. My soul desires to follow hard after thee, O God! Be concerned then, in the first place, O my soul,

for the presence of God in ordinances, and for his power that will make a change among people (Ps. 110:3).

When thy discourse, though ever so elaborate, shall be but as a lovely song, O set thyself most for this. When thou studiest, send up ejaculations to thy Lord for it. When thou writest a sermon, or dost ruminare on it, then say to God, 'Lord, this will be altogether weak without thy power accompanying it.' O power and life from God in ordinances is sweet. Seek it for thyself, and seek it for thy hearers.

Acknowledge thine own weakness and uselessness without it, and so cry incessantly for it, that the Lord may drive the fish into the net, when thou art spreading it out. Have an eye to this power, when thou art preaching; and think not thou to convert men by the force of reason: if thou do, thou wilt be beguiled.

What an honorable thing is it to be fishers of men! How great an honor shouldst thou esteem it, to be a catcher of souls! We are workers together with God, says the apostle. If God has ever so honored thee, O that thou knewest it that thou mightst bless his holy name, that ever made such a poor fool as thee to be a co-worker with him. God has owned thee to do good to those who were before caught. O my soul, bless thou the Lord. Lord, what am I, or what is my father's house, that thou hast brought me to this? Then seest thou not here what is the reason thou toilest so long, and catchest nothing? The power comes not along.

Men are like Samuel, who when God was calling him, thought it had been Eli. So when thou speakest many times, they do not

discern God's voice, but thine; and therefore the word goest out as it comes in. Then, O my soul, despair not of the conversion of any, be they ever so profligate. For it is the power of the Spirit that drives any person into the net; and this cannot be resisted. Mockers of religion, yea, blasphemers may be brought into the net; and many times the wind of God's Spirit in the word lays the tall cedars in sin down upon the ground, when they that seem to be as low shrubs in respect of them, stand fast upon their root. Publicans and harlots shall enter the kingdom of heaven before selfrighteous Pharisees.

What thinkest thou, O my soul, of that doctrine that lays aside this power of the Spirit, and makes moral suasion all that is requisite to the fishing of men? That doctrine is hateful to thee. My soul loaths it, as attributing too much to the preacher, and too much to corrupt nature in taking away its natural impotency to good, and as against the work of God's Spirit, contrary to experience; and is to me a sign of the rottenness of the heart that embraces it.

Alas! that it should be owned by any among us, where so much of the Spirit's power has been felt.

20

FIVE INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE CHRISTIAN SOLDIER

William Gurnall

The Christian in Complete Armour

First. The Christian is to proclaim and prosecute an irrec-
oncilable war against his bosom sins; those sins which have
lain nearest his heart, must now be trampled under his feet.
So David, 'I have kept myself from my iniquity.'

Now what courage and resolution does this require? You think Abraham was tried to purpose, when called to take his 'son, his son Isaac, his only son whom he loved,' Gen. 22:2, and offer him up with his own hands, and no other; yet what was that to this? Soul, take thy lust, thy only lust, which is the child of thy dearest love, thy Isaac, the sin which has caused the most joy and laughter, from which thou hast promised thyself the greatest return of pleasure or profit; as ever thou lookest to see my face with comfort, lay hands on it and offer it up: pour out the blood of it before me; run the

sacrificing knife of mortification into the very heart of it; and this freely, joyfully, for it is no pleasing sacrifice that is offered with a countenance cast down—and all this now, before thou hast one embrace more from it.

Truly this is a hard chapter, flesh and blood cannot bear this saying; our lust will not lie so patiently on the altar, as Isaac, or as a 'Lamb that is brought to the slaughter which was dumb,' but will roar and shriek; yea, even shake and rend the heart with its hideous outcries. Who is able to express the conflicts, the wrestlings, the convulsions of spirit the Christian feels, before he can bring his heart to this work? Or who can fully set forth the art, the rhetorical insinuations, with which such a lust will plead for itself? One while Satan will extenuate and mince the matter: It is but a little one, O spare it, and thy soul shall live for all that. Another while he flatters the soul with the secrecy of it: Thou mayest keep me and thy credit also; I will not be seen abroad in thy company to shame thee among thy neighbours; shut me up in the most retired room thou hast in thy heart, from the hearing of others, if thou wilt only let me now and then have the wanton embraces of thy thoughts and affections in secret.

If that cannot be granted, then Satan will seem only to desire execution may be stayed awhile, as Jephthah's daughter of her father: 'let me alone a month or two, and then do to me according to that which hath proceeded out of thy mouth,' Judges 11:36, 37, well knowing few such reprieved lusts but at last obtain their full pardon; yea, recover their favour with the soul.

Now what resolution doth it require to break through such

violence and importunity, and notwithstanding all this to do present execution? Here the valiant swordsmen of the world have showed themselves mere cowards, who have come out of the field with victorious banners, and then lived, yea, died slaves to a base lust at home. As one could say of a great Roman captain who, as he rode in his triumphant chariot through Rome, had his eye never off a courtesan that walked along the street: Behold, how this goodly captain, that had conquered such potent armies, is himself conquered by one silly woman.

Second. The Christian is to walk singularly, not after the world's guise, Rom. 12:2. We are commanded not to be conformed to this world, that is, not to accommodate ourselves to the corrupt customs of the world. The Christian must not be of such a complying nature as to cut the coat of his profession according to the fashion of the times, or the humor of the company he falls into; like that courtier, who being asked how he could keep his preferment in such changing times, which one while had a prince for Popery, another while against Popery, answered, he was *e salice, non ex quercu ortus*—he was not a stubborn oak, but bending osier, that could yield to the wind.

No, the Christian must stand fixed to his principles, and not change his habit; but freely show what countryman he is by his holy constancy in the truth. Now what an odium, what snares, what dangers doth this singularity expose the Christian to? Some will hoot and mock him, as one in a Spanish fashion would be laughed at in your streets. Thus, Michal flouted David. Indeed, the

world counts the Christian for his singularity of life the only fool; which I have thought gave the first occasion to that nickname, whereby men commonly express a silly man or a fool. Such a one, say they, is a mere Abraham; that is, in the world's account, a fool.

But why an Abraham? Because Abraham did that which carnal reason, the world's idol, laugh's at as mere folly; he left a present estate in his father's house to go he knew not whither, to receive an inheritance he knew not when. And truly such fools all the saints are branded for by the wise world. 'You know the man and his communication,' said Jehu to his companions, asking what that mad fellow came for, who was no other than a prophet, II Kings 9:11.

Now it requires courage to despise the shame which the Christian must expect to meet withal for his singularity. Shame is that which proud nature most disdains, to avoid which many durst not 'confess Christ openly,' John 7:13. Many lose heaven because they are ashamed to go in a fool's coat thither. Again, as some will mock, so others will persecute to death, merely for this nonconformity in the Christian's principles and practices to them. This was the trap laid for the three children; they must dance before Nebuchadnezzar's pipe, or burn. This was the plot laid to ensnare Daniel, who walked so unblameably, that his very enemies gave him this testimony, that he had no fault but his singularity in his religion, Dan. 6:5.

It is a great honour to a Christian, yea, to religion itself, when all their enemies can say is, they are precise, and will not do as we do. Now in such a case as this, when the Christian must turn or

burn, leave praying, or become a prey to the cruel teeth of bloody men; how many politic retreats and self-preserving distinctions would a cowardly unresolved heart invent? The Christian that hath so great opposition had need be well locked into the saddle of his profession, or else he will soon be dismounted.

Third. The Christian must keep on his way to heaven in the midst of all the scandals that are cast upon the ways of God by the apostasy and foul falls of false professors. There were ever such in the church, who by their sad miscarriages in judgement and practice have laid a stone of offence in the way of profession, at which weak Christians are ready to make a stand, as they at the bloody body of Asahel, II Sam. 2:22, not knowing whether they may venture any further in their profession, seeing such, whose gifts they so much admired, lie before them, wallowing in the blood of their slain profession: [from being] zealous professors, to prove perhaps fiery persecutors; [from being] strict performers of religious duties, [to prove] irreligious atheists: no more like the men they were some years past, than the vale of Sodom (now a bog and a quagmire) is, to what it was, when for fruitfulness compared to the garden of the Lord.

We had need of a holy resolution to bear up against such discouragements, and not to faint; as Joshua, who lived to see the whole camp of Israel, a very few excepted, revolting, and in their hearts turning back to Egypt, and yet with an undaunted spirit maintained his integrity, yea, resolved though not a man beside would bear him company, yet he would serve the Lord.

Fourth. The Christian must trust in a withdrawing God, Isa. 50:10. Let him that walks in darkness, and sees no light, trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God. This requires a holy boldness of faith indeed, to venture into God's presence, as Esther into Ahasuerus', when no smile is to be seen on his face, no golden sceptre of the promise perceived by the soul, as held forth to embolden it to come near, then to press in with this noble resolution, 'If I perish, I perish,' Est. 4:16. Nay, more, to trust not only in a withdrawing but a 'killing God,' Job 13:15; not when his love is hid, but when his wrath breaks forth.

Now for a soul to make its approaches to God by a recumbency of faith, while God seems to fire upon it, and shoot his frowns like envenomed arrows into it, is hard work, and will try the Christian's mettle to purpose. Yet such a masculine spirit we find in the poor woman of Canaan, who takes up the bullets of Christ shot at her, and with a humble boldness of faith sends them back again in her prayer.

Fifth. The believer is to persevere in his Christian course to the end of his life: his work and his life must go off the stage together. This adds weight to every other difficulty of the Christian's calling. We have known many who have gone into the field, and liked the work of a soldier for a battle or two, but soon have had enough, and come running home again, but few can bear it as a constant trade.

Many are soon engaged in holy duties, easily persuaded to take up a profession of religion, and as easily persuaded to lay it down, like the new moon, which shines a little in the first part of

the night, but is down before half the night is gone—lightsome professors in their youth, whose old age is wrapped up in thick darkness of sin and wickedness.

O, this persevering is a hard word! this taking up the cross daily, this praying always, this watching night and day, and never laying aside our clothes and armour, I mean indulging ourselves, to remit and unbend in our holy waiting on God, and walking with God. This sends many sorrowful away from Christ, yet this is a saint's duty, to make religion his every-day work, without any vacation from one end of the year to the other.

21

BLESSED FOR DIVINE USEFULNESS

Philip Doddridge

The Rise and Progress of Religion in the Soul

If faith be sincere, it will not spend itself in words alone, but will discover itself in actions, and will produce, as its genuine fruit, an unfeigned love to your fellow-creatures, and an unwearied desire and labor to do them good continually.

“Has the great Father of mercies,” will you say, “looked upon me with so gracious an eye? has he not only forgiven me ten thousand offences, but enriched me with such a variety of benefits? O what shall render to him for them all? Instruct me, O ye oracles of eternal truth! Instruct me, ye elder brethren in the family of my heavenly Father! Instruct me, above all, O thou Spirit of wisdom and love! what I may be able to do, to express my love to the great eternal fountain of love, and to approve my fidelity to him who has already done so much to engage it, and who will take so much pleasure in owning and rewarding it!”

This, O Christian! is the command which we have heard from the beginning, and it will ever continue in unimpaired force, “that he who loveth God,” should “love his brother also,” (I John, 4:21) and should express that love, “not in word and profession alone, but in deed and in truth.” (1 John 3: 18) You are to love your neighbor as yourself; to love the whole creation of God; and, so far as your influence can extend, must endeavor to make it happy.

“Yes,” will you not say, and “I do love it. I feel the golden chain of divine love encircling us all, and binding us close to each other, joining us in one body, and diffusing as it were, one soul through all. May happiness, true and sublime, perpetual and ever-growing happiness, reign through the whole world of God’s rational and obedient creatures in heaven and on earth! And may every revolted creature, that is capable of being recovered and restored, be made obedient! Yea, may the necessary punishment of those who are irrecoverable, be overruled by infinite wisdom and love to the good of the whole!”

These are right sentiments, and if they are indeed the sentiments of your heart, O reader! and not an empty form of vain words, they will be attended with a serious concern to act in subordination to this great scheme of divine Providence, according to your abilities in their utmost extent. And to this purpose, they will put you on surveying the peculiar circumstances of your life and being, that you may discover what opportunities of usefulness they now afford, and how those opportunities and capacities may be improved. Enter therefore into such a survey, not that

you may pride yourself in the distinctions of divine Providence or grace towards you, or, “having received, may glory as if you had not received;” (I Cor. 4:7) but that you may deal faithfully with the great Proprietor, whose steward you are, and by whom you are entrusted with every talent, which, with respect to any claim from your fellow-creatures, you may call your own.

And here, “having gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us,” (Rom. 12:6) let us hold the balance with an impartial hand, that so we may determine what it is that God requires of us; which is nothing less than doing the most we can invent, contrive, and effect, for the general good. But, oh! how seldom is this estimate faithfully made! And how much does the world around us, and how much do our own souls suffer for want of that fidelity!

Hath God given you genius and learning? It was not that you might amuse or deck yourself with it, and kindle a blaze which should only serve to attract and dazzle the eyes of men. It was intended to be the means of heading both yourself and them to the Father of lights. And it will be your duty, according to the peculiar turn of that genius and capacity, either to endeavor to improve and adorn human life, or, by a more direct application of it to divine subjects, to plead the cause of religion, to defend its truths, to enforce and recommend its practice to deter men from courses which would be dishonorable to God and fatal to themselves, and to try the utmost efforts of all the solemnity and tenderness with which you can clothe your addresses, to lead them into the paths of virtue and happiness.

Has God invested you with power, whether it be in a larger or smaller society? Remember that this power was given you that God might be honored, and those placed under your government, whether domestic or public, might be made happy. Be concerned, therefore, that, whether you be entrusted with the rod, or the sword, it may “not be” borne in vain. (Rom. 13:4) Are you a magistrate? Have you any share in the great and tremendous charge of enacting laws?

Reverence the authority of the supreme Legislator, the great Guardian of society: promote none, consent to none, which you do not in your own conscience esteem, in present circumstances, an intimation of his will, and in the establishment of which you do not firmly believe you shalt be “his minister for good.” (Rom. 13:4) Have you the charge of executing laws? Put life into them by a vigorous and strenuous execution, according to the nature of the particular office you bear. Retain not an empty name of authority. Permit not yourself, as it were, to fall asleep on the tribunal. Be active, be wakeful, be observant of what passes around you. Protect the upright and the innocent. Break in pieces the power of the oppressor. Unveil every dishonest heart. Disgrace as well as defeat the wretch that makes his distinguished abilities the disguise or protection of the wickedness which he ought rather to endeavor to expose, and to drive out of the world with abhorrence.

Are you placed only at the head of a private family? Rule it for God. Administer the concerns of that little kingdom with the same views, and on the same principles, which I have been inculcating

oil the powerful and the great, if, by any unexpected accident, any of them should suffer their eyes to glance upon the passage above.

Your children and servants are your natural subjects. Let good order be established among them, and keep them under a regular discipline. Let them be instructed in the principles of religion, that they may know how reasonable such a discipline is; and let them be accustomed to act accordingly. You cannot indeed change their hearts, but you may very much influence their conduct, and by that means may preserve them from many snares, may do a great deal to make them good members of society, and may set them, as it were, “in the way of God’s steps,” (Psa. 85:13) if peradventure passing by he may bless them with the riches of his grace. And fail not to do your utmost to convince them of their need of those blessings; labor to engage them to a high esteem of them, and to an earnest desire of them, as incomparably more valuable than any thing else.

Again, has God been pleased to raise you to esteem among your fellow-creatures, which is not always in proportion to a man’s rank or possession in human life? Are your counsels heard with attention? Is your company sought? Does God give you good acceptance in the eyes of men, so that they do not only put the fairest constructions on your words, but overlook faults of which you are conscious to yourself, and consider your actions and performances in the most indulgent and favorable light? You ought to regard this, not only as a favor of Providence, and as an encouragement to you cheerfully to pursue your duty, in the several branches of it, for the time to come, but also, as giving you much greater

opportunities of usefulness than in your present station you could otherwise have had.

If your character has any weight in the world, throw it into the right scale. Endeavor to keep virtue and goodness in countenance. Affectionately give your hand to modest worth, where it seems to be depressed or overlooked; though shining, when viewed in its proper light, with a luster which you may think much superior to your own.

Be an advocate for truth; be a counsellor for peace; be an example of candor; and do all you can to reconcile the hearts of men, especially of good men, to each other, however they may differ in their opinions about matters which it is impossible for good men to dispute. And let the caution and humility of your behavior, in circumstances of such superior eminence, and amidst so many tokens of general esteem, silently reprove the rashness and haughtiness of those who perhaps are remarkable for little else; or who, if their abilities were indeed considerable, must be despised, and whose talents must be in a great measure lost to the public, till that rashness and haughtiness of spirit be subdued. Nor suffer yourself to be interrupted in this generous and worthy course, by the little attacks or envy and calumny which you may meet.

Be still attentive to the general good, and steadily resolute in your efforts to promote it; and leave it to Providence to guard or to rescue your character from the base assaults of malice and falsehood, which will often, without your labor, confute themselves, and heap upon the authors greater shame, or (if they are inaccessible

to that} greater infamy, than your humanity will allow you to wish them.

Once more, Has God blessed you with riches? Has he placed you in such circumstances that you have more than you absolutely need for the subsistence of yourself and your family? Remember your approaching account. Remember what an incumbrance these things often prove to men in the way of their salvation, and how often, according to our Lord's express declaration, they render it "as difficult to enter into the kingdom of God, as it is for a camel to go through the eye of a needle." (Matt. 19:24) Let it therefore be your immediate, your earnest, and your daily prayer, that riches may not be a snare and a shame to you, as they are to by far the greater part of their possessors.

Appropriate, I beseech you, some certain part and proportion of your estate and revenue to charitable uses; with a provisional increase, as God shall prosper you in any extraordinary instance. By this means you will always have a fund of charity at hand; and you will probably be more ready to communicate, when you look upon what is so deposited as not in any sense your own, but as already actually given away to those uses, though not yet affixed to particular objects. It is not for me to say what that proportion ought to be.

To those who have large revenues, and no children, perhaps a third or one half may be too little; to those whose incomes are small, and their charge considerable, though they have something more than is absolutely necessary, it is possible a tenth may be too

much. But pray that God would guide your mind; make a trial for one year, on such terms as in your conscience you think will be most pleasing to him; and let your observations on that teach you to fix your proportion for the next always remembering, that he requires justice in the first place, and alms-deeds only so far as may consist with that.

Yet, at the same time, take heed of that treacherous, delusive, and, in many instances, destructive imagination, “that justice to your own family requires that you should leave your children very rich; which has perhaps cost some parsimonious parents the lives of those darlings for whom they laid up the portion of the poor; and what fatal consequences of divine displeasure may attend it to those that yet survive, God Only knows; and I heartily pray that you or yours may never learn by experience.

TRUE SANCTIFICATION

Matthew Mead

The Christian Treasury Vol. 1

That work of sanctification which is true and effectual, is the working of the Spirit of God in the soul, enabling it to the mortifying of all sin, to the obeying of every command, to “walking with God in all well-pleasing.” Now, whoever is thus sanctified, is one with him that sanctifieth. Christ will not be ashamed to call such brethren; for they are “flesh of his flesh, and bone of his bone.”

But then there is a more common work of sanctification which is ineffectual as to the two great works of dying to sin, and living to God. This kind of sanctification may help to restrain sin, but not to mortify sin; it may lop off the boughs, but it layeth not the axe to the root of the tree; it sweeps and garnishes the room with common virtues, but doth not adorn it with saving graces;

so that a man is but almost a Christian, notwithstanding this sanctification.

Or thus, there is an inward and outward sanctification. Inward sanctification is that which deals with the soul and its faculties, understanding, conscience, will, memory, and affections. Outward sanctification is that which deals with the life and conversation.

Both these must concur to make a man a Christian indeed: therefore, the apostle puts them together in his prayer for the Thessalonians: "The God of peace sanctify you wholly; and, I pray God, your whole spirit, and soul, and body, be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." A man is then sanctified wholly when he is sanctified both inwardly and outwardly—both in heart and affections, and in life and conversation.

Outward sanctification is not enough without inward, nor inward without outward: we must have both "clean hands, and a pure heart." The heart must be pure, that we may not incur blame from within; and the hands must be clean, that we may not incur shame from without. We must have hearts "sprinkled from an evil conscience, and bodies washed with pure water." "We must cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit."

Inward purity is the most excellent, but, without the outward, it is not sufficient; the true Christian is made up of both. Now many have clean hands, but unclean hearts. They wash the outside of the cup and platter, when all is filthy within. Now, the former without the latter, profiteth a man no more than it profited Pilate, who condemned Christ, to wash his hands in the presence of the

people: he washed his hands of the blood of Christ, and yet had a hand in the death of Christ.

The Egyptian temples were beautiful on the outside, but within you shall find nothing but some serpent or crocodile. "He is not a Jew which is one outwardly." Judas was a saint without, but a sinner within; openly a disciple, but secretly, a devil. Some pretend to inward sanctity without outward. This is the pretense of the open sinner: "Though I sometimes drop an idle, foolish word," saith he, "or though I sometimes swear an oath, yet I think no hurt:—I thank God my heart is as good as the best!"

Such are like the sinner Moses mentions; that "blessed himself in his heart, saying, I shall have peace, though I walk in the imagination of mine own heart, to add drunkenness to thirst." Some pretend to outward sanctity without inward. Such are like the Scribes and Pharisees, "who outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within are full of hypocrisy and iniquity;" fair professors, but foul sinners.

Inward sanctity without outward, is impossible; for it will not reform the life. Outward sanctity without inward, is unprofitable; for it will not reform the heart: a man is not a true Christian without both. The body doth not make a man without the soul, nor the soul without the body; both are essential to the being of man: so the sanctification of both, are essential to the being of the new man.

True sanctification begins at the heart, but works out into the life and conversation; and if so, then man may attain to an

outward sanctification, and yet, for want of an inward, be no better than almost a Christian.

EIGHT REMEDIES AGAINST FRUITLESSNESS

Thomas Goodwin
The Vanity of Thoughts

Remedies 1. First you must get your heart furnished and enriched with a good stock of sanctified, heavenly knowledge in spiritual and God-given truths. A “good man” has a “good treasure” in his heart (Mat 12:35). That is, a good man has all graces, so many precious truths, which are as gold in the ore. And his thoughts, as the mint, coins this gold, which then is brought forth into words. “A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things.” But if there are no mines of precious truths hidden in our hearts, it is no wonder if our thoughts do not coin anything more than dross, frothy and vain thoughts.

We are then lacking the materials from which the mind is to be fed. A wicked man, says Solomon, is always forging, minting,

hammering out wickedness and evil (Pro 6:14). If a man has a store of natural knowledge, but lacks useful spiritual knowledge, he may bring forth some very good speeches in company with others, but when he is alone his thoughts will not run on good things. Take a place in Scripture, Deuteronomy 6:6–7, which shows that laying up the Word in the heart, and being made conversant in it, and getting knowledge out of it, is an effectual means to keep our thoughts well-exercised when we are alone. For it is said that the reason why those of the Law are to be laid up in the heart, is that we might teach them to others (Deu 11:18–20).

But note this also, that it is so that we might have them with us when we are retired and alone, “these my words” shall be with you “when thou walkest by the way, when thou liest down, and when thou risest up.” When a man is riding, or walking, or lying down, or rising up (which are often and usually our most retired times for thoughts and are wholly spent in them), yet then, He says, you shall talk of the word.

And since he that is alone cannot be said to talk, therefore the talking there meant is not an outward conference with others (though intended as occasion of talking with others is given, as with your bedfellow, your companion, etc.). But if you have no companion with you, then talk of the word to yourself, for the thoughts are the talking of the mind. So, comparing Proverbs 6:22 with this place, it appears that Solomon exhorts us to the same duty of binding the word to the heart with this motive, which is the fruit of it, that when you awake, it will talk with you—that is,

by your thinking of it, it will talk with you when you and it are alone. You shall not need a better companion; it will be putting in and suggesting something to you all the time.

Remedy 2. Endeavor to preserve and keep up lively, holy and spiritual affections in your heart. Do not let them cool. Do not fall from your first love, fear, or joy in God. Or if you have grown remiss, endeavor to recover those affections again. For as your affections are, so your thoughts will be, and they incline the mind to think of such or such objects that will please them. That is why David says, “O how I love Thy law! It is my meditation all the day” (Psa 119:97). It was his love which made him think of it so frequently. So those who “feared the Lord, and that thought upon his name” are joined together (Mal 3:16). For what we fear, we often think and speak of. It is added, they spoke “often one to another,” because fear made them think much of His name, and thinking of it made them speak of it. It is true that thoughts and affections are the mutual causes of each other, as it is written, “While I was musing, the fire burned” (Psa 39:3)—the thoughts are the bellows that kindle and inflame the affections. And then when they are inflamed, they cause thoughts to boil. Men newly converted to God, having new and strong affections, can with more pleasure think of God than any.

Remedy 3. Get your heart possessed with deep, strong and powerful apprehensions and impressions of God’s holiness, majesty, omnipresence, and omniscience. If any of our thoughts have the power to fix and draw in our minds, they are the thoughts

which we have of Him. Why do the saints and angels in Heaven never have a vain thought, no, not in all eternity? His presence fixes them; their eye is never off Him.

Even wanton, loose-spirited men will often be held in the presence of a feared superior. Job was careful not to look awry, because, he said, “Does not he see my ways, and count all my steps?” (Job 31:4). This drew in and fastened David’s thoughts (Psa 139:1–17). That is why we have found by experience that we can avoid distractions in prayer by enlarging our thoughts beforehand, by considering God’s attributes and relations to us. It will and it does make us serious.

Remedy 4. Especially determine to speak with God when you first awake, as David did, “When I awake, I am still with thee” (Psa 139:18). To prevent vain, windy, frothy thoughts from taking possession of your heart when you first awake, first fill your heart with thoughts of God. Observe it, if you will, when you first open your eyes in the morning, many suitors will be attending upon you. Like clients waiting at lawyer’s doors, many vanities and businesses will be seeking to rush into your thoughts. But you must speak with God first; He will say something to your heart that will settle it for all that day. Do this before the crowd of businesses come in upon you. Some heathen, it is said, worship as their god that which they first see in the morning. So it is with the idols of men’s hearts. Let God be first in your thoughts!

Remedy 5. Have a watchful eye. Guard your heart all day long. Though they crowd in, yet observe them; let them know that they do not pass unseen. If a man wants to pray aright, he must watch

who comes in and who goes out. Where a strict watch is kept, where the officers are diligent to examine every vagrant person, you will have few vagrants there. So it is with the swarms of vagrant thoughts which will come upon him who does not keep a strict watch against them. Then if they pass through anyhow, yet you should complain of them, whip them, etc.

Remedy 6. Be careful not to please your fancy too much with vanities and curious sights. This engenders vain and worthless thoughts. That is why Job said that he “made a covenant with mine eyes; why then should I think upon a maid?” (Job 31:1).

Remedy 7. Be diligent in your calling. “Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might” (Ecc 9:10). Put to it all the intention and strength of your mind. Let all the stream run about your mill; the keeping of your thoughts to that channel will keep them from overflowing into vanity and folly. Those that do not labor are apt to be busybodies (2Th 3:11). Those that are called idle and wandering in 1 Timothy 5:13, are not only called idle because they were not busy about the things that they should do, but they are also called idle because they are busy about the things they should not do. If you let ground lie fallow, what weeds will there soon be growing on it!

God has given us our callings to entertain our thoughts, and to find work for them in the interims between the duties of His worship—because the spirit and thoughts of men are restless and must be busy some way. Kings keep those men with active spirits in continual employment, lest their heads should be working and

plotting amiss. And God appointed (even in Paradise) that man should have something to keep him busy.

God hedges in a man's thoughts in this way, sets them in a narrow lane, knowing that if they are unconfined they will be like wild asses snuffing up the wind (Jer 14:6). But be careful not to encumber your mind with too much business, more than you can grasp. It made Martha forget that "one 13 thing ... needful" (Luk 10:42). This breeds cares which distract the mind, divides it, causes wandering thoughts, so that the mind is not itself. This weakens it, enervates it—you will be as Jethro said to Moses, You will fade away like a leaf (Exo 18:18). Even the juice which should be left for good duties will be exhausted. As dreams come through multitudes of business (Ecc 5:3), so do a multitude of thoughts come from a cumber6 of business.

Remedy 8. In your calling and in all your ways, commit your ways to God. "Commit thy works [ways] unto the Lord, and thy thoughts shall be established [or, ordered]" (Pro 16:3). Keep back from that confusion and disorder, those swarms of cares, which others are annoyed with. A few thoughts of faith would save us many thoughts of cares and fears as we go about our business. And such thoughts are vain, for they do not forward the business we intend. When such thoughts toss the heart and stir it up into turmoil, when the winds of passion are up, then a few thoughts of faith will calm the heart and fix it upon the Anchor of the soul once more.

24
THE PLACE AND POSTURE OF
PRAYER

Henry Bullinger
The Decades

For the true prayer of holy men is not tied to any place, nor is it judged better in one place than in another; for the goodness or worthiness of the prayer is not esteemed by the place, but by the mind of the one who prays. For the Lord says in the gospel: “The hour will come, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit to pray in and in truth,” etc. Joh 4.23 But those who are persuaded that the godly may pray in no other place than at home in their chamber, are in no way passed over in this passage.

In confirmation of this, they twist these words of our Saviour: “But when you pray, enter into your chamber; and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father, who is in secret; and your Father, who sees in secret, will reward you openly.” Mat 6.6 But

these words are an antithesis, or a contrary sentence, to that which goes before it; and this is what goes before it: "And when you pray, you shall not be as the hypocrites are; for they love to stand praying in the synagogues, and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen by men." Mat 6.5 Against this he immediately opposes: "But you, when you pray, enter into your chamber."

In reproving the abuse of prayer, he did not condemn the place properly, but rather he spoke figuratively in this manner: The Pharisees, with their prayers which they make in the streets, hunt for praise and commendation by the people; so on the contrary part, by mentioning a chamber, he did not mean that the place itself makes the prayer either better or worse; but he taught by figurative speech, that we should pray with an upright mind, and be most free of hunting for the praise of men.

For he that prays with a mind not troubled with affections, having regard only to God, "prays in his chamber," whether he prays in the church or in the street. For otherwise, the Lord prayed with his disciples in the temple, in the city, in the field, and wherever occasion was offered. It also follows: "And the Father, who sees you in secret, will reward you openly;" that is to say, the Father, who allows a mind that is not proud, but humble and free from ambition, will reward you openly.

But public prayers are used in the church or assembly of saints. If any man despises them, saying prayer should not to be tied to any place, I cannot think he is worthy of the name of a Christian, since he shamefully abuses Christian liberty. Finally, I have spoken

before about assemblies; 1 and we will perhaps say more in the last sermon of this decade.

Here, the posture of those who pray also comes to be handled. But let all riot, all pride, all immoderate trimming of the body, be far from those who come into the church of Christ to pray. Someone would seem to filthily scorn the godly magistrate, who in coming to crave pardon for his fault, would lay aside his mourning clothes; and putting on white apparel, proudly appear before the assembly of grave and godly senators. Such a person might be judged worthy, not only to be denied his request, but also to be cast into prison. And who would deny that they more shamefully mock God, who coming into the church to ask His pardon, and being oppressed with the burden of their sins, yet in that place are so far from being humble, that they rather appear before the presence of God and his saints having their bodies so attired, as they thereby both provoke anew the wrath of God against them, and grievously offend the most godly who are in the church?

Therefore, Paul teaches at large that modesty, proper and humble behaviour, is to be used in the church. This is seen in the eleventh chapter of first Corinthians. Notwithstanding, what we must chiefly remember is the doctrine of our Saviour in the gospel, saying: "When you pray, you shall not be as the hypocrites are; for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, so that they may be seen by men. Truly, I say to you, they have their reward." Mat 6.5

For above all things, we must beware that we neither pray privately nor publicly to this end; nor should we fashion the posture of our body in order to get the vain praise of the people, so that we may seem to be renowned and considered holy before men. It suffices that we please God, and are allowed by his judgment.

25

KINDLING YOUR LOVE FOR GOD

Thomas Watson
A Divine Cordial

Let me earnestly persuade all who bear the name of Christians to become lovers of God. “O love the Lord, all ye his saints” (Psalm xxxi. 23). There are but few that love God: many give Him hypocritical kisses, but few love Him. It is not so easy to love God as most imagine. The affection of love is natural, but the grace is not. Men are by nature haters of God (Rom. i. 30). The wicked would flee from God; they would neither be under His rules, nor within His reach. They fear God, but do not love Him. All the strength in men or angels cannot make the heart love God. Ordinances will not do it of themselves, nor judgments; it is only the almighty and invincible power of the Spirit of God can infuse love into the soul. This being so hard a work, it calls upon us for the more earnest prayer and endeavour after this angelic grace of love

(1). Without this, all our religion is vain. It is not duty, but love to duty, God looks at. It is not how much we do, but how much we love. If a servant does not do his work willingly, and out of love, it is not acceptable. Duties not mingled with love, are as burdensome to God as they are to us. David therefore counsels his son Solomon to serve God with a willing mind (I Chron. xxviii. 9). To do duty without love, is not sacrifice, but penance.

(2). Love is the most noble and excellent grace. It is a pure flame kindled from heaven; by it we resemble God, who is love. Believing and obeying do not make us like God, but by love we grow like Him (1 John iv. 16). Love is a grace which most delights in God, and is most delightful to Him. That disciple who was most full of love, lay in Christ's bosom. Love puts a verdure and lustre upon all the graces: the graces seem to be eclipsed, unless love shine and sparkle in them. Faith is not true, unless it works by love. The waters of repentance are not pure, unless they flow from the spring of love. Love is the incense which makes all our services fragrant and acceptable to God.

(3). Is that unreasonable which God requires? It is but our love. If He should ask our estate, or the fruit of our bodies, could we deny Him? But He asks only our love: He would only pick this flower. Is this a hard request? Was there ever any debt so easily paid as this? We do not at all impoverish ourselves by paying it. Love is no burden. Is it any labour for the bride to love her husband? Love is delightful.

(4). God is the most adequate and complete object of our love.

All the excellencies that lie scattered in the creatures, are united in Him. He is wisdom, beauty, love, yea, the very essence of goodness. There is nothing in God can cause a loathing; the creature sooner surfeits than satisfies, but there are fresh beauties sparkling forth in God. The more we enjoy of Him, the more we are ravished with delight.

There is nothing in God to deaden our affections or quench our love; no infirmity, no deformity, such as usually weaken and cool love. There is that excellence in God, which may not only invite, but command our love. If there were more angels in heaven than there are, and all those glorious seraphim had an immense flame of love burning in their breasts to eternity, yet could they not love God equivalently to that infinite perfection and transcendence of goodness which is in Him. Surely then here is enough to induce us to love God—we cannot spend our love upon a better object.

(5). Love facilitates religion. It oils the wheels of the affections, and makes them more lively and cheerful in God's service. Love takes off the tediousness of duty. Jacob thought seven years but little, for the love he bore to Rachel. Love makes duty a pleasure. Why are the angels so swift and winged in God's service? It is because they love Him. Love is never weary. He that loves God, is never weary of telling it. He that loves God, is never weary of serving Him.

(6). God desires our love. We have lost our beauty, and stained our blood, yet the King of heaven is a suitor to us. What is there in our love, that God should seek it? What is God the better for

our love? He does not need it, He is infinitely blessed in Himself. If we deny Him our love, He has more sublime creatures who pay the cheerful tribute of love to Him. God does not need our love, yet He seeks it.

(7). God has deserved our love; how has He loved us! Our affections should be kindled at the fire of God's love. What a miracle of love is it, that God should love us, when there was nothing lovely in us. "When thou wast in thy blood, I said unto thee, Live" (Ezek. xvi. 6).

The time of our loathing was the time of God's loving. We had something in us to provoke fury, but nothing to excite love. What love, passing understanding, was it, to give Christ to us! That Christ should die for sinners! God has set all the angels in heaven wondering at this love. Augustine says, "The cross is a pulpit, and the lesson Christ preached on it is love." Oh the living love of a dying Saviour! I think I see Christ upon the cross bleeding all over! I think I hear Him say to us, "Reach hither your hands. Put them into My sides. Feel My bleeding heart. See if I do not love you. And will you not bestow your love upon me? Will you love the world more than me? Did the world appease the wrath of God for you? Have I not done all this? And will you not love me?"

It is natural to love where we are loved. Christ having set us a copy of love, and written it with His blood, let us labour to write after so fair a copy, and to imitate Him in love.

(8). Love to God is the best self-love. It is self-love to get the

soul saved; by loving God, we forward our own salvation. “He that dwelleth in love, dwelleth in God, and God in him” (I John iv. 16). And he is sure to dwell with God in heaven, that has God dwelling in his heart. So that to love God is the truest self-love; he that does not love God, does not love himself.

(9). Love to God evidences sincerity. “The upright love thee” (Cant. i. 4). Many a child of God fears he is a hypocrite. Do you love God? When Peter was dejected with the sense of his sin, he thought himself unworthy that ever Christ should take notice of him, or employ him more in the work of his apostleship; see how Christ goes about to comfort him. “Peter, lovest thou me?” (John xxi. 15).

As if Christ had said, “Though thou hast denied me through fear, yet if thou canst say from thy heart thou lovest me, thou art sincere and upright.” To love God is a better sign of sincerity than to fear Him. The Israelites feared God’s justice. “When he slew them, they sought him, and inquired early after God” (Psalm lxxviii. 34). But what did all this come to? “Nevertheless, they did but flatter him with their mouth, and lied to him with their tongue; for their heart was not right with him” (verses 36, 37). That repentance is no better than flattery, which arises only from fear of God’s judgments, and has no love mixed with it. Loving God evidences that God has the heart; and if the heart be His, that will command all the rest.

(10). By our love to God, we may conclude God’s love to us. “We love him, because he first loved us” (I John iv. 19). Oh, says the

soul, if I knew God loved me, I could rejoice! Do you love God? Then you may be sure of God's love to you. As it is with burning glasses; if the glass burn, it is because the sun has first shined upon it, else it could not burn; so if our hearts burn in love to God, it is because God's love has first shined upon us, else we could not burn in love. Our love is nothing but the reflection of God's love.

26
SERVING AN INFINITELY HAPPY
GOD

William Beveridge
Thoughts

Now let us not think it sufficient that we know how to serve God, unless we serve him according to our Knowledge. Let us remember our Saviour's Words: If ye know these things, happy are ye if you do them, Joh. 13. 17.

Which Happiness, that all who read this, may attain unto, let me advise them, in the Name of the Eternal God that made them, to renounce and forsake their former Masters, Sin, Satan and the World, whoever may have hitherto been enslaved to them, and now dedicate themselves wholly to the service of him, that made them for that very purpose, that they might serve him; yea, and who hath composed our natures so, that the highest happiness that we are capable of, consists in our serving him.

And therefore, let us not think that he calls upon us to serve

him, because he wants our service; no, be it known unto all, that he is infinitely happy in the enjoyment of his own Perfections, and needs not the services of such poor silly mortals as we are, who have nothing but what we receive from him: And therefore, he doth not call upon us to serve him, because he cannot be happy without us, but because we cannot be happy without him: Not because he wants our Service, but because we want it; it being impossible for us to be Happy, unless we be Holy; or to enjoy God, unless we serve him.

Wherefore all ye that desire to go to Heaven, to have him that made you reconciled unto you, and smile upon you; or that desire to be really and truly happy, set upon the work which God sent you into the World about, put it not off any longer, make no more vain excuses, but from this day forward, let the service of God be your daily, your continual employment and pleasure: Study and contrive each day how to advance his Glory and interest in the world, and how you may walk more strictly, more circumspectly, more conformably to his laws than ever.

But whatsoever service you perform unto him, be sure to do it with a perfect heart, and with a willing mind. Think not to put him off with fancy instead of faith, or with outward performances instead of real duties: But remember that he searcheth the hearts, and tryeth the reins of the sons of men, and observes the inward motions of the Soul, as well as the outward actions of the life.

And therefore, wheresoever you are, whatsoever you bethink your selves, that he that made you, still looks upon you; taking

notice, not only of the matter of the actions which you do perform, but also of the manner of your performing them; and therefore be sure to have a special care in all your services for, or unto God, that your hearts be sincere before him, and your Minds inclined to him, that so you may serve him with a perfect heart and a willing mind.

But to conclude; Whoever ye are that read this discourse, I have here shewn you the things that belong unto your everlasting peace, having acquainted you with the method and manner of your serving God in time, in order to your enjoyment of him to eternity; how you are affected with what you have read, and whether you be resolved to practice it, yea, or no, 'tis only the Eternal God that knows.

But this I know, that if you will not be persuaded to serve God, yea, and to serve him too with a perfect heart, and a willing mind, you will one day wish you had, but then it will be too late. And therefore, if you will put it to the venture, go on still, and with the unprofitable servant, hide your talents in a napkin, or lavish them out in the revels of sin and vanity; let thy belly be still thy God, and the world thy Lord, serve thy self or Satan, instead of the living God.

But know that for all this, God will bring thee into Judgment; after which, expect nothing else but to be overwhelmed with horror and confusion to eternity. Whereas on the other side, such amongst you as shall sincerely endeavour from henceforth to serve God with a perfect heart, and with a willing mind, I dare, I do assure them, in the name of God, their labour shall not be in vain in the Lord.

For God suffers not his enemies to go unpunished, nor his servants unrewarded. And therefore, go on with joy and triumph in the service of so great and so good a Master, and devote your selves wholly to his service, and employ your talents faithfully for his Glory. Remember the time is but short and Christ himself will receive you into eternal glory, saying, “Well done, good and faithful servant.”

RETURNING TO CHRIST

Thomas Shepard
The Sound Believer

Is there any believer's heart so knit unto Christ but that there is a heart also after other vanities? Do they find such rest in him as that they find no disquietness? Is there not an unregenerate part and much unbelief remaining? Is any man's faith made perfect that the whole soul must come, or else there is no true faith?

It is true, there is an unregenerate and a regenerate part in a godly man, but not a heart and a heart. There are disquietings in the hearts of saints, after that they be in Christ; even Solomon himself may sometimes seek out of Christ for rest in his orchards and gardens, knowledge and wisdom; yet there is a great difference between these that are in the saints, arising from the unregenerate part, and those that be in the wicked, arising from a heart and a heart, or a double heart; and this difference is chiefly seen in two things.

A double-minded man, who hath a double heart, makes not a daily war against that heart which carries him away from resting only in Christ; for Christ quiets his conscience, and the world comforts his heart; Christ gives him some rest; and because this is not full, his heart runs out to the creature and to his lusts for more; and so between them both he hath rest, and he is quieted with this, because he feels what he sought for; and therefore he must needs have Christ, else his conscience cannot be quiet; and he must needs have his lusts, his ease, and this world too, else his heart is most unquiet; but let him have both, he is now quiet.

The priests teach for hire, (there the world quiets them,) yet they will lean upon the Lord too, because this also comforts them; what do they do? do they make war against this woeful frame? No, no, but bless themselves in it, saying, "No evil shall come to us."

But a poor believer, whose heart is upright, it is true there are many runnings out of his heart after other vanities, and much unquietness of spirit, yet the regenerate part makes war against these, as God's enemies and the disturbers of the peace of Christ's kingdom. David professeth his tears were his meat day and night, and his heart was woefully sunk and fallen; yet what doth he?

First, he chides himself: "Why art thou cast down, O my soul?" And then, secondly, he makes his moan to the Lord of it, "Lord, my soul is cast down; O Lord, pity me." You shall see, also, his eyes were dazzled with the glory of the world and the wicked in it, that he had almost forsaken God; yet within a little while after he gets into the sanctuary of God, and then loathes himself for such

brutish and foolish thoughts, and loseth with God again, saying, "Whom have I in heaven or earth but thee"?

All the outrunnings of the hearts of the faithful, and their disquietness of spirit thereby, make them to return to their rest again, and give them the more rest in the conclusion. David was a bird out of his nest for a time, and therefore when he considered how the Lord had saved his eyes from tears, his soul from hell, returns again, and saith, "Return to thy rest, O my soul."

It is said, "his soul shall dwell at ease," or (as the word signifies) "shall lodge in goodness": some hard work, full of trouble, some strong lust, or sad temptation, desertion, affliction, the Lord exerciseth the soul withal for some time; and so long as the soul is in heaviness and much weariness of spirit, as it is, yet when this day's work is done, when the sin is subdued, and the temptation hath humbled him, then a believer's soul shall lodge in goodness; he shall have an easy bed and soft pillow to rest on at night.

When have the faithful sweeter naps in Christ's bosom than after sorest troubles, longest eclipses of God's pleased face? when do their souls cleave closer to the Lord than when they are ready to forsake the Lord, and the Lord them? Certainly fire is wholly carried upward, when that which suppresseth it makes it at last break out into greater flame.

Peter falls from Christ; yet he is Peter, a stone cleaving most close unto Christ, above all other the apostles, because, his fall being greater, his faith clave the closer to the Lord Christ forever after it. Solomon's heart certainly never clave so inseparably unto

the Lord as after his fall, wherein he did more experimentally find and feel the emptiness and vanity of those things wherein he did imagine before something was to be found; but he that hath a double heart never enters into rest, but the longer he lives, the more common Christ, his truth, and promises grow; they are but fading flowers, whose beauty and sweetness affect him for a time; but they wither before the sunset.

And, therefore, the longer he lives, the less favor he finds in these things, and therefore takes less contentment therein; the Lord Jesus and all his ordinances grow more flat and dry things to him; and therefore, though at first he might rejoice in these burning and shining lights, yet it is but for a season; at last he discovers himself—not by a renewed returning to his rest, but by a wearyish forsaking of it.

The raven never returned to the ark again, because it could live upon the floating carrion on the waters; whereas the dove, finding no rest there, returns again.

ALL THINGS FOR YOUR GOOD

Thomas Watson
A Divine Cordial

God's attributes work for good to the godly. It is a glorious power and it is engaged for the good of the elect. God's power works for good, in supporting us in trouble. "Underneath are the everlasting arms". What upheld Daniel in the lion's den? Jonah in the whale's belly? The three Hebrews in the furnace? Only the power of God. Is it not strange to see a bruised reed grow and flourish? How is a weak Christian able, not only to endure affliction, but to rejoice in it? He is upheld by the arms of the Almighty. "My strength is made perfect in weakness" (2 Cor. 12. 9).

The power of God works for us by supplying our wants. God creates comforts when means fail. He that brought food to the prophet Elijah by ravens, will bring sustenance to His people.

God can preserve the “oil in the cruse”. The Lord made the sun on Ahaz’s dial go ten degrees backward: so when our outward comforts are declining, and the sun is almost setting, God often causes a revival, and brings the sun many degrees backward. The power of God subdues our corruptions. “He will subdue our iniquities”.

Is your sin strong? God is powerful, He will break the head of this leviathan. Is your heart hard? God will dissolve that stone in Christ’s blood. “The Almighty maketh my heart soft”. When we say as Jehoshaphat, “We have no might against this great army”; the Lord goes up with us, and helps us to fight our battles. He strikes off the heads of those goliath lusts which are too strong for us.

The power of God conquers our enemies. He stains the pride, and breaks the confidence of adversaries. “Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron”. There is rage in the enemy, malice in the devil, but power in God. How easily can He rout all the forces of the wicked! “It is nothing for thee, Lord, to help”. God’s power is on the side of His church. “Happy art thou, O Israel, O people saved by the Lord, who is the shield of thy help, and the sword of thy excellency”.

The wisdom of God works for good. God’s wisdom is our oracle to instruct us. As He is the mighty God, so also the Counsellor. We are oftentimes in the dark, and, in matters intricate and doubtful know not which way to take; here God comes in with light “I will guide thee with mine eye” (Psa. xxxii. 8). “Eye,” there, is put for God’s wisdom. Why is it the saints can see further than the most

quick-sighted politicians? They foresee the evil, and hide themselves; they see Satan's sophisms. God's wisdom is the pillar of fire to go before, and guide them.

The goodness of God works for good to the godly. God's goodness is a means to make us good. "The goodness of God leadeth to repentance". The goodness of God is a spiritual sunbeam to melt the heart into tears. Oh, says the soul, has God been so good to me? Has He reprieved me so long from hell, and shall I grieve His Spirit anymore? Shall I sin against goodness? The goodness of God works for good, as it ushers in all blessings. The favours we receive, are the silver streams which flow from the fountain of God's goodness. This divine attribute of goodness brings in two sorts of blessings. Common blessings: all partake of these, the bad as well as the good; this sweet dew falls upon the thistle as well as the rose. Crowning blessings: these only the godly partake of. "Who crowneth us with loving-kindness".

Thus, the blessed attributes of God work for good to the saints. The promises of God work for good to the godly. The promises are notes of God's hand; is it not good to have security? The promises are the milk of the gospel; and is not the milk for the good of the infant? They are called "precious promises". They are as cordials to a soul that is ready to faint. The promises are full of virtue. Are we under the guilt of sin? There is a promise, "The Lord merciful and gracious", where God as it were puts on His glorious embroidery, and holds out the golden sceptre, to encourage poor trembling sinners to come to Him. "The Lord, merciful."

God is more willing to pardon than to punish. Mercy does more multiply in Him than sin in us. Mercy is His nature. The bee naturally gives honey; it stings only when it is provoked. "But," says the guilty sinner, "I cannot deserve mercy." Yet He is gracious: He shows mercy, not because we deserve mercy, but because He delights in mercy. But what is that to me? Perhaps my name is not in the pardon. "He keeps mercy for thousands": the exchequer of mercy is not exhausted. God has treasures lying by, and why should not you come in for a child's part? Are we under the defilement of sin? There is a promise working for good. "I will heal their backslidings".

God will not only bestow mercy, but grace. And He has made a promise of sending His Spirit, which for its sanctifying nature, is in Scripture compared sometimes to water, which cleanses the vessel; sometimes to the fan, which winnows corn, and purifies the air; sometimes to fire, which refines metals. Thus, the Spirit of God shall cleanse and consecrate the soul, making it partake of the divine nature. Are we in great trouble? There is a promise works for our good, "I will be with him in trouble". God does not bring His people into troubles, and leave them there. He will stand by them; He will hold their heads and hearts when they are fainting. And there is another promise, "He is their strength in the time of trouble". "Oh," says the soul, "I shall faint in the day of trial."

But God will be the strength of our hearts; He will join His forces with us. Either He will make His hand lighter, or our faith stronger. Do we fear outward wants? There is a promise. "They that

seek the Lord shall not want any good thing". If it is good for us, we shall have it; if it is not good for us, then the withholding of it is good. "I will bless thy bread and thy water". This blessing falls as the honey dew upon the leaf; it sweetens that little we possess. Let me want the venison, so I may have the blessing. But I fear I shall not get a livelihood? Peruse that Scripture, "I have been young, and now am old, yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread".

How must we understand this? David speaks it as his own observation; he never beheld such an eclipse, he never saw a godly man brought so low that he had not a bit of bread to put in his mouth. David never saw the righteous and their seed lacking.

Though the Lord might try godly parents a while by want, yet not their seed too; the seed of the godly shall be provided for. David never saw the righteous begging bread, and forsaken. Though he might be reduced to great straits, yet not forsaken; still he is an heir of heaven, and God loves him.

Question: How do the promises work for good?

Answer: They are food for faith; and that which strengthens faith works for good. The promises are the milk of faith; faith sucks nourishment from them, as the child from the breast.

29

THE PRIMACY OF LOVE

Henry Scougal

The Life of God in the Soul of Man

Let us consider that love and affection wherewith holy souls are united to God, that we may see what excellency and felicity is involved in it. Love is that powerful and prevalent passion, by which all the faculties and inclinations of the soul are determined, and on which both its perfection and happiness depend.

The worth and excellency of a soul is to be measured by the object of its love. He who loveth mean and sordid things doth thereby become base and vile, but a noble and well-placed affection doth advance and improve the spirit into a conformity with the perfections which it loves. The images of these do frequently present themselves unto the mind, and, by a secret force and energy, insinuate into the very constitution of the soul, and mould and fashion it unto their own likeness.

Hence, we may see how easily lovers or friends do slide into the imitation of the persons whom they affect; and how, even before they are aware, they begin to resemble them, not only in the more considerable instances of their deportment, but also in their voice and gesture, and that which we call their mien or air; and certainly we should as well transcribe the virtues and inward beauties of the soul, if they were the object and motive of our love. But now, as all the creatures we converse with have their mixture and alloy, we are always in hazard to be sullied and corrupted by placing our affections on them. Passion doth easily blind our eyes, so that we first approve, and then imitate the things that are blameable in them.

The true way to improve and ennoble our souls is, by fixing our love on the divine perfections, that we may have them always before us, and derive an impression of them on ourselves; and, “beholding with open face, as in a glass, the glory of the Lord, we may be changed into the same image, from glory to glory.” He who, with a generous and holy ambition, hath raised his eyes towards that uncreated beauty and goodness, and fixed his affection there, is quite of another spirit, of a more excellent and heroic temper, than the rest of the world, and cannot but infinitely disdain all mean and unworthy things; will not entertain any low or base thoughts which might disparage his high and noble pretensions.

Love is the greatest and most excellent thing we are masters of and therefore it is folly and baseness to bestow it unworthily. It is indeed the only thing we can call our own: other things may be taken from us by violence, but none can ravish our love. If anything

else be counted ours by giving our love, we give all, so far as we make over our hearts and wills, by which we possess our other enjoyments.

It is not possible to refuse him anything, to whom by love we have given ourselves; nay, since it is the privilege of gifts to receive their value from the mind of the giver, and not to be measured by the event, but by the desire, he who loveth may, in some sense, be said not only to bestow all that he hath, but all things else which may make the beloved person happy; since he doth heartily wish them, and would really give them if they were in his power: in which sense it is that one makes to say, "That divine love doth, in a manner, give God unto himself, by the complacency it takes in the happiness and perfection of his nature." But though this may seem too strained an expression, certainly love is the worthiest present we can offer unto God, and it is extremely debased when we bestow it another way.

When this affection is misplaced, it doth often vent itself in such expressions as point at its genuine and proper object, and insinuate where it ought to be placed. The flattering and blasphemous terms of adoration, wherein men do sometimes express their passion, are the language of that affection which was made and designed for God; as he who is accustomed to speak to some great person, doth perhaps, unawares, accost another with those titles he was wont to give him; but certainly, that passion which accounteth its object a deity, ought to be bestowed on him who really is so.

Those unlimited submissions, which would debase the soul if directed to any other, will exalt and ennoble it when placed here.

Those chains and cords of love are infinitely more glorious than liberty itself; this slavery is more noble than all the empires in the world.

Again, as divine love doth advance and elevate the soul, so it is that alone which can make it happy. The highest and most ravishing pleasures, the most solid and substantial delights that human nature is capable of, are those which arise from the endearments of a well-placed and successful affection. That which imbitters love, and makes it ordinarily a very troublesome and hurtful passion, is the placing it on those who have not worth enough to deserve it, or affection and gratitude to requite it, or whose absence may deprive us of the pleasure of their converse, or their miseries occasion our trouble. To all these evils are they exposed, whose chief and supreme affection is placed on creatures like themselves; but the love of God delivers us from them all

30
AWAITING GLORIFICATION

Thomas Manton
The Complete Works

Our chiefest care and affection should be carried out to the glory of God when we pray. We should rather forget ourselves than forget God. God must be remembered in the first place. There is nothing more precious than God himself, therefore nothing should be more dear to us than his glory.

This is the great difference between the upright and the hypocrite: the hypocrite never seeks God but when his necessities do require it, not in and for himself; but when the upright come to seek God, it is for God in the first place—their main care is about God's concernments rather than their own. Though they seek their own happiness in him, and they are allowed so to do; yet it is mainly God's glory which they seek, not their own interests and concernments.

‘Not unto us, not unto us, O Lord, but unto thy name give glory, for thy mercy, and for thy truth’s sake.’ It is not a doxology, or form of thanksgiving, but a prayer; not for our safety and welfare, so much as thy glory; not to wreak and satisfy our revenge upon our adversaries; not for the establishment of our interest; but for the glory of thy grace and truth, that God may be known to be a God keeping covenant; for mercy and truth are the two pillars of the covenant. It is a great dishonouring of God when anything is sought from him “more than himself, or not for himself. Now there are several sorts of self; there is carnal self, natural self, spiritual self, and glorified self. Above all these God must have the pre-eminence.

Carnal self. By a foolish mistake we take our lusts to be ourselves. ‘Mortify your members here upon earth.’ And these members he makes to be fornication, uncleanness, and the like. Our sins are as dear to us as any essential or integral part of the body; they are our members. Now, these should have no room in our prayers at all, though usually they have the first place: ‘Ye ask and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts.’ Our prayers should be the breathings of the spirit, and usually they are but the belches and eructations of the flesh. And for these it is we are so instant and earnest with God.

We would have God bless us in some revengeful and carnal enterprise. We deal with God as the thief that lighted his candle at the lamps of the altar. So many would make God a party in their carnal designs: “The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination;

how much more when he bringeth it with a wicked mind?’ It is an abomination when it is at the best; but when he hath an ill aim, then it is an abomination with a witness. Foolish creatures vainly imagine to entice heaven to their lure.

Balaam builded altars and sacrificed, out of hope that God would curse his own people, and engage in Moab’s quarrel; like the man in the Gospel that would make no other use of Christ than to compose his civil difference: He comes to him as a man of authority, ‘Master, speak to my brother, that he divide the inheritance with me.’ We all look upon God, *tanquam aliquem magnum*, as Austin said he did in his infancy, as some great power that would serve all our carnal turns. In this sense we make God to serve our sins when we would have God to contribute to our lusts, to our pride, wantonness, revenge.

This is such a foolish request, as if a wife should beg of her husband to give her leave to go on with her adulteries. Survey all the petitions which are in this present platform of prayer, there is not one that is calculated for such an evil purpose as our revenge, pomp, pride, pleasure. Carnal self surely must give way to God.

There is a **natural self**, when we seek our own temporal felicity. Christ hath allowed these natural desires a room in our prayers; but they must keep their order and their place: first, God’s glory; and then, our safety. The obtaining of natural good is put in the last place. And, therefore, when our thoughts only run upon temporal felicity and outward supplies, it is not prayer, but a brutish cry: ‘They howl upon their beds for corn, wine, and oil.’ Beasts are

sensible of their pain, and are carried by natural instinct to seek their own welfare, as well as men. And, therefore, when this is our first and only request, it is a perversion of that order which Christ hath set down in this perfect form of prayer.

There is **spiritual self**, which is valuable either in point of justification or acceptance with God, or in point of sanctification and conformity to him. Now, as these blessings cannot be severed from God's glory where they are really enjoyed, so they must not be severed in our prayers, nor preferred before it. To ask pardon as a separate benefit as it concerns our ease and quiet, not as it concerns God's glory, is a perversion and a diversion of our prayers. The main thing which God intends should be the main thing in our requests, is, 'the praise of his glorious grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved,' Eph. 1. 6. And, therefore, this is the main thing which the soul intends: 'Help us, God of our salvation, for the glory of thy name; and deliver us, and purge away our sins, for thy name's sake.' The argument is not taken from themselves merely, or from their own misery, but from God's glory.

If God could not be more glorified in our pardon and acceptance with him than in our death and damnation, it were an evil thing to desire pardon. But now when God hath abundantly cleared up this to us, that he is no loser by acts of mercy; that this conduceth more to the exalting of his great name, to accept poor sinners to mercy; the soul goeth with the more confidence to beg it of God, that he would purge us from our filthiness for

his name's sake. But now men's thoughts are wholly taken up with their own peace and safety, and take no care for God's honour. This is but a selfish request, or an offer of nature after ease.

For the other part, to ask for grace and conformity to God's will, merely as it is a perfection of our nature abstractly from God's glory, it is not a right request. It is contrary to the very nature of grace, whose tendency is to God in the first place, that his name may be glorified, that we should be to the praise of his glorious grace. Grace wrought in us is but a creature, and not to be preferred before the Creator.

See how the apostle prays: 'We pray always for you, that our God would count you worthy of this calling, and fulfil all the good pleasure of his goodness, and the work of faith with power: that the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you, and ye in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.' That is a regular prayer, when all our spiritual interests are swallowed up in God, and we beg that his name may be glorified in us and upon us.

There is **glorified self**, which standeth in the eternal fruition of God. Man was made for two ends—to glorify God, and to enjoy him. Now our crown of glory must be laid at God's feet; as the elders, 'Saying, Thou art worthy, Lord, to receive glory, and honour, and power.' All our desires must give place to this, that he may be glorified in our eternal happiness; and we are to beg it no further than as it may stand with his honour. Man's chief end, and so his chief request, in respect of himself, is, to enjoy God; but

with respect to God, so it is the highest only of subordinate ends; for the highest, chiefly and absolutely, is the glorifying of God.

