

Believers' Evidences for Eternal Life

Believers' Evidences for Eternal Life

Francis Roberts



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Believers' Evidences for Eternal Life

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Biographical Preface

Francis Roberts (1609–1675) was an English minister and theologian best known in the seventeenth century for his helpful Bible study guide written for laymen and for his massive exposition of the doctrine of God’s covenants.¹ Born in Yorkshire to a common family, he received university training at Trinity College, Oxford, graduating with a BA in 1629 and an MA in 1632. He served as curate at St. Martin’s parish church in Birmingham and in 1644 was appointed by Parliament to the ministerial commission to examine candidates for ordination. During the civil war, he narrowly escaped with his life when the royalist forces of Prince Rupert of the Rhine assaulted Birmingham.

Roberts immediately moved to London to become the minister of St. Augustine’s on Watling Street. He published a detailed chart of all the branches and topics of systematic theology, *A Synopsis of Theology or Divinity* (1645), for his congregation. The fast sermon that he preached for Parliament in 1646 was published as *A Broken Spirit, God’s Sacrifices*. Though

1. On the biography and writings of Francis Roberts, see *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 47:153–54; Won Taek Lim, *The Covenant Theology of Francis Roberts* (Chungnam, South Korea: King & Kingdom, 2002), 24–29; Joseph Hill, *The Book Makers of Old Birmingham: Authors, Printers and Book Sellers* (Birmingham, England: Cornish Brothers Limited, 1907), 14–17.

serving in the Church of England, he was an advocate for presbyterianism, having subscribed to the Solemn League and Covenant, and was a friend to and correspondent with the Scottish minister Robert Baillie.

In 1648 Roberts also published *Clavis Bibliorum: The Key of the Bible*, a practical guide to studying and understanding the Holy Scriptures, and *Believer's Evidences for Eternal Life*, which is presented in this volume. In typical Puritan fashion, he unpacked John's first epistle and other passages, showing how believers may grow in assurance of their faith by relying on God's promises and reflecting on the marks of grace evident in their life, corroborated by the word-based testimony of the Holy Spirit witnessing with their spirit that they are the sons and daughters of God. I highly recommend this book not only for those who struggle with assurance but also for assured Christians to be strengthened all the more in their most holy faith.

From 1650 to his death, Roberts lived in Somerset and served as the rector of the Church of All Saints in Wrington. He and his wife, Mary, raised their family there at Wrington. At his death he was survived by five daughters, two of whom were married and had families. At Wrington, he published *A Communicant Instructed, or, Practical Directions for Worthy Receiving of the Lord's Supper* (1651). Roberts was appointed in 1654 to serve with the commission to remove scandalous ministers under the Puritan regime of Oliver Cromwell. He also published his magnum opus, the 1,721-page *Mysterium & Medulla Bibliorum: The Mysterie and Marrow of the Bible, viz. God's Covenant with Man* (1657), a magisterial study of God's covenant with Adam and His covenant of grace with Christ. In that year Roberts also preached the funeral sermon for Mary Jackson, wife of Joseph Jackson, alderman of Bristol, which was published as *The Checquer-Work of God's Providences*.

After the restoration of the English monarchy, Roberts conformed to the Church of England rather than be ejected from the pulpit. One historian criticized him for choosing “the comforts of this world” rather than remain consistent with his former commitments; another historian said that he was worn out and disappointed by contentions and rebellions. Whatever his motives may have been, he continued to perform his ministry at All Saints in Wrington. His funeral sermon for Alderman Jackson was published as *The Christian’s Advantage Both by Life and Death Discovered* (1662). He wrote an evangelistic book titled *The True Way to the Tree of Life* (1673), which opens with a letter to his children urging them to trust in Christ alone for salvation. In 1673 he was made chaplain to the First Earl of Essex, Arthur Capell, recently appointed Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, and was awarded a doctor of divinity degree by the University of Dublin. Two years later Roberts passed from this world at the age of sixty-six to enter Immanuel’s sin-free land of glory.

Dedicatory Epistle

To the Right Honorable Henry, Earl of Kent, and to his Right Noble Consort, Amabella, Countess of Kent.

All confluence of blessings both for the life that now is, and for that which is to come, from the Father of mercies, and God of all consolations.

Right Honorable,

Of all people in the world, that's the only happy people whose God is the Lord (Ps. 144:15); the Lord being that supreme good (Matt. 19:16–17), in whom alone are centered all beatific perfections (Gen. 17:1; Matt. 5:48). No people can enjoy the Lord as their God, but by covenant in Christ Jesus, that only way to the Father (John 14:6). Covenant interest in Christ cannot actually be pleaded by any person, but only such as are actually seized of a gracious covenant state (Jer. 31:33–34), the grace of the covenant in us being the surest pledge of God's entering into the covenant of grace with us. So that to be in a gracious state is true happiness. But to know ourselves to be in such a state is true happiness double upon us.

Hereupon, that I might lend some help to true believers, for reading and discerning their own spiritual evidences of the state of grace, I have been persuaded to publish this bundle of believers' evidences for eternal life in the ensuing treatise.

Whereunto I have been the more inclined, that my lines might be of use:

1. To support the weak, and comfort the feebleminded (1 Thess. 5:14), who walk heavily and disconsolately in the paths of grace through want of assurance (Psalm 22, 77, 88). That they hereby coming in some measure to know the things that are freely given to them of God (1 Cor. 2:12), may lift up the hands that hang down, and the feeble knees (Heb. 12:12), and run with enlarged hearts the way of God's commandments (Ps. 119:32).

2. To confute really the enthusiastic fancies, the ignorant anti-scriptural opinions of some, who cry up (I know not what) imaginary raptures, revelations, and other dreams of their own as the only characters of election and justification, decrying as carnal all discoveries of believers' spiritual estates by marks and signs of sanctification. For this sweet epistle of John, the Beloved Disciple (John 13:23; 19:26; 20:2; 21:7, 20), is full of such marks, as in this book is evident. Christ has taught us to judge of the tree by the fruits (Matt. 7:16, 18). And reason directs us to discover the cause by the effect.

3. To divert the distempered minds of men a little (if it be possible) from jejune, empty, perverse disputes (1 Tim. 6:5), vain janglings (1 Tim. 3:6), brainsick notions and speculations (the calamity of these crazy times), to exercise themselves upon that wholesome, necessary, practical business of making their calling and election sure (2 Peter 1:10). We have laid out far too much for that which is not bread, for that which satisfies not (Isa. 55:2).

4. And finally to rouse up myself, and all sorts of Christians in this kingdom, in these slippery days (wherein both lives,

liberties, health, friends, wealth, pleasures, honors, crowns, scepters, and all sublunaries¹ are in such extremity of extraordinary uncertainties), to lay hold and make sure of eternal life (1 Tim. 6:12, 19). That in the midst of all terrestrial concussions and revolutions, we may have a celestial, unshaken foundation of true spiritual peace and consolation.

Your honors' noble respects, and undeserved favors heretofore manifested to me have commanded me to dedicate and present to you this small testimonial of my unfeigned gratitude. And wherein can I be more truly serviceable to your honors than in such sincere endeavors to promote your assurance of eternal salvation? Now the God of all grace (1 Peter 5:10) fill your hearts with all the fruits of His Spirit (Gal. 5:22–23; Col. 2:2) to all riches of the full assurance of understanding, and faith, and hope in this life (Heb. 6:11, 18–19; 10:22), and at last crown you both with ineffable glory in the life to come in the full enjoyment of Himself, who is the Heaven of heaven, and Glory of glory.

So prays your honors' humble and faithful servant in the Lord,

Fran. Roberts

Augustine's, London, October 9, 1648

1. *sublunaries*: things characteristic of or pertinent to this world.

The Preface, Touching the Saints' Assurance:

Succinctly Unfolding the Nature of It, the Trial of It,
the Way of Attaining It, and Inducements to It

No state on earth is so sweet and happy as the state of true grace bestowed on God's elect (Ps. 1:2; 144:15). Such were "darkness" but are "light" (Eph. 5:8); were "lost," are "found" (Luke 15:32); were "dead," are "alive again"; "had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy"; "were not a people, but are now the people" of the living God (1 Peter 2:10). They are newly "created" according to the image of God (Eph. 4:24). They partake of the "divine nature" (2 Peter 1:4). They live the "life of God" (Eph. 4:18). The Father disdains not to count them His "sons and daughters" (2 Cor. 6:18). The Son "is not ashamed to call them brethren" (Heb. 2:11), and the Holy Ghost is pleased to make them His holy temples (1 Cor. 3:16–17; 2 Cor. 6:6). They are "called" effectually, "justified" freely, sanctified graciously, and shall be "glorified" eternally (Rom. 8:29–30). They are servants of God and Christ (John 12:26) to do His work; not only servants, but "friends" to know His secrets (John 15:14–15); not only friends, but "sons," adopted into the household of God (1 John 3:1–2); not only sons, but "heirs of God," to inherit His kingdom; not only heirs, but co-heirs with Christ (Rom. 8:17; Gal. 4:7), to reign together with Him for evermore. No good thing shall be withheld from them (Ps. 34:9–10). "No condemnation" shall befall them (Rom. 8:1). Nothing in the world shall separate them from the love of God in Jesus Christ (Rom. 8:35–39). All things in

the world shall work together for their good (Rom. 8:28). All the surest promises are theirs, all the richest graces are theirs, all the highest privileges are theirs, all the noblest hopes are theirs (1 Tim. 4:8; 2 Peter 1:3; 2 Cor. 1:20). What shall I say? Theirs is Christ, and in Christ all things (1 Cor. 3:22–23; Rom. 8:32). Oh happy, happy is that people, that thus have the Lord to be their God (Ps. 144:15)!

This sweet and blissful state of grace is rendered doubly sweet to the faithful when once they come to know themselves to be in such a state. Assurance of our state of grace is grace doubled. But in evil times (such as are come upon us), when we can promise ourselves no certainty of any sublunary enjoyment—pleasures being quickly drowned in bitterness (Prov. 24:13); riches taking to themselves wings (Prov. 23:5); honor’s wheel suddenly turning upside down; crowns toppling off the heads; and scepters dropping out of the hands of princes; “the pride of all glory” being stained (Isa. 23:9); and the strongest foundations and pillars of kingdoms being shaken; friends, liberties, life, and all we have, exposed to much hazard and jeopardy—in such seasons when we can be sure of nothing on earth, yet then to be sure of grace and glory is grace trebled and in some measure glorified.

To advance this spiritual happiness among the Israel of God, in the midst of our temporal miseries, this small ensuing treatise is published, spiritual certainties being the best antidote against temporal uncertainties. Though the platform of these evidences be confined to the compass of this “sweet epistle” (as Augustine styles it) of the sweetest apostle, yet the amplifications and demonstrations of the several particulars in much variety are borrowed from other Scriptures, and so far extended that they do amount to a large anatomy of the spiritual state of a Christian.

Before the perusal of particulars, be pleased to pause a little to take view of assurance in general, and herein of (1) the nature of it, (2) the trial of it, (3) the way of attaining and retaining of it, and (4) the inducements persuading to it.

Of the Nature of Assurance

Assurance or certainty is twofold, namely,

The Assurance or Certainty of the Object Believed

That God is true (Deut. 32:4; John 17:3), and what He has promised shall certainly and faithfully be performed (Rom. 4:21; 2 Tim. 1:12; 2 Cor. 1:20). This is not the assurance we inquire after, though certainty of the object be the ground and foundation whereupon certainty of the subject is primarily bottomed.

The Assurance or Certainty of the Subject Believing

This is the assurance we are to consider of. This assurance has several denominations in Scripture, namely, (1) *Pepoithēsis* (Rom. 8:38), “a persuasion,” rendered “confidence” (Eph. 3:12). *Pistis* (“faith”) has its name from “persuading,” because thereby the heart is “persuaded.” (2) *Emphanismos* (“a perspicuous manifestation”), namely, when Christ manifests Himself so to the soul who loves Him as not to the world (John 14:21–23). (3) *Eidēsis* (1 John 2:3, 5; 3:2, 14, 19, 24; 5:13, 19), “knowledge,” thus it is often styled. (4) *Parrēsia* (Heb. 4:16; Eph. 3:12), “boldness,” so it is usually translated, importing an undaunted (yet humble and dutiful) looking God in the face, etc. (5) *Plērophoria* (“full assurance”), when faith acts strongly, without staggering through unbelief (Rom. 4:19–21). This is sometimes called “full assurance of understanding” (Col. 2:2), sometimes “full assurance of hope” (Heb. 6:11, 18, 19), and sometimes “full assurance of faith” (Heb. 10:22). For knowledge, faith, and hope do all contribute their influence to the making up of full assurance.

Of this assurance or certainty of the subject there are certain kinds, or rather degrees, principally these three:

1. A certainty of adherence and application, when we certainly apply and adhere to the promise, and to Christ therein, peremptorily devolving and casting ourselves upon Him for salvation, though perhaps without evident and sensible comforts. This is receiving of Christ (John 1:12), cleaving to the Lord with full purpose of heart (Acts 11:23); if we must perish, we will perish believing. "Though he slay me," etc. (Job 13:15). This is the *minimum quod sic*, namely, the lowest step of assurance, and is so of the nature of faith that faith cannot be without it in the weakest believer. Every true believer has this assurance.

2. A certainty of evidence or experience, when by the reflection of conscience and faith upon themselves and their own acts, or by the testimony of the Spirit of God, we evidently see we are in a gracious state, experimentally discerning what God has done for us, and that upon such and such grounds, effects of grace, or other discoveries. As being new creatures (2 Cor. 5:17), walking in the light (1 John 1:7), walking after the Spirit, not after the flesh (Rom. 8:1), loving the brethren, etc. (1 John 3:14). This some call assurance of internal vision. Augustine counts this a clear evidence, saying that "our faith is conspicuous to our own mind" and that "a man holds his faith by certain knowledge and attestation of conscience." And, says Ambrose, "He who has the sense of faith in his heart, knows that Christ is in himself." This assurance is usually attended with much comfort and sweet joy upon the soul that has it. Yet every Christian reaches it not, as the former, though all should contend earnestly for it. It seems to pertain rather to the well-being, than to the mere being of faith and grace.

3. An unstaggering certainty, or a full assurance, as when there's such a full persuasion that overcomes all doubts, fears, staggering of unbelief, as in Abraham the father of the faithful (Rom. 4:17–20). This is the *maximum quod sic*, namely, the highest pinnacle of assurance in this life, next unto celestial enjoyment, and very few attain it.

Of the Trial of Assurance

The trial of the truth of our assurance is of great importance and necessity. For, (1) many Christians have some degree of assurance, who think they have none at all. Let such be convinced of what they have, they are comforted. (2) Many have no true assurance at all, who yet pretend thereto most of all. Carnal men and hypocrites, as Israel (Hos. 8:1–3), Solomon's fool (Prov. 14:16), the self-justifying Pharisee (Luke 18:11–12), and the Laodicean angel (Rev. 3:17). Such should be convinced of what they want that they might be humbled and replenished. All graces, and so assurance, have their counterfeits. We had need try them, lest we take shadows for substances, copper for gold.

Try assurance by the (1) qualifications of the subject assured, (2) grounds or causes of assurance, (3) fruits or effects of assurance.

The Subject of Assurance

The subject of assurance must be duly qualified, ere he can be capable of assurance. Persons are previously and preparatorily qualified for assurance.

1. By kindly humbling of the soul, breaking of the heart, and troubling of the conscience, with fears about their natural condition. The spirit of bondage to fear goes before the Spirit of adoption, witnessing with our spirit our sonship (Rom.

8:15–16 compared with Matt. 11:28; Isa. 61:1–2). More or less, thus God deals with all who come by assurance. Where's your true humbling?

2. By furnishing the humbled broken heart with saving faith. First we believe, then are after sealed with the Spirit of promise (Eph. 1:13). Where's your true faith?

3. By giving them the Spirit. They must first have the Spirit of God, ere by the Spirit they can know the things given them of God (1 Cor. 2:12). Has God truly given you His Spirit?

The Grounds or Causes

The grounds or causes of assurance must not be (1) ignorance of our miserable state (Rom. 7:9; Rev. 3:17), (2) nor carnal confidence upon common things, namely, worldly prosperity (Hos. 12:7, 8), outward acts of religion (Matt. 7:22–23; Luke 18:9–13; Matt. 19:20; Phil. 3), or common inward gifts of the Spirit. Illumination, taste of the good word of God, etc. (Heb. 6:4–5), those and like are the false grounds of hypocrites. But grounds of true assurance, are either:

1. Divine testimony by audible voice. Thus Christ assured the man with palsy (Matt. 9:2, 5, 6; Luke 5:20–23) and the penitent woman (Luke 7:47–48) of pardon, and the converted thief of paradise (Luke 23:42–43). But this vocal testimony was extraordinary. To expect the like now, or else to reject other grounds of assurance, were to tempt God.

2. The lively exercise of faith, reflecting upon its own acts and seeing itself believing. Faith's acts are (1) direct, and these either (a) are receptive of Christ (John 1:12) or (b) operative from and by Christ received (Acts 15:9; Rom. 5:1; Gal. 5:6); (2) reflexive when faith returns upon itself, looks back upon its

own acts, thus receiving Christ, thus working, as Paul knew in whom he had believed (2 Tim. 1:12). Does your faith thus act?

3. The testimony of our own sanctified spiritual heart or conscience, according to the Word of God (Rom. 8:16; 1 John 3:19–21; 2 Cor. 3:12), of our good spiritual estate. The spirit of man is as the candle of the Lord, searching all the inward parts of the belly (Prov. 20:27), and knows what is in him (1 Cor. 2:10–12). This testimony of our sanctified conscience is usually absolved by ratiocination or discourse in a practical experimental syllogism, thus:

The *proposition* being taken out of the Word, namely, some eminent Scripture sign or character of grace (as in 2 Cor. 5:17; Acts 5:9; 1 John 1:7; and 3:14: *He that loves the brethren is passed from death to life*). This is dictated by the *syntērēsis*, namely, “the conservative treasury” of conscience treasuring up such principles.

The *assumption* is drawn from our own known state and experience in the things of Christ, etc., as, *but I love the brethren*. This is made by the *syneidēsis*, namely, “conscience, as conscious of a man’s state,” and frame of heart.

The *conclusion*, containing the heart’s sentence hereupon (*Therefore I am translated from death to life*) is made by the *krisis*, “judgment,” or “judiciary sentence” of conscience upon the premises. Does your conscience thus assure you by the Word?

4. The testimony of the Spirit of God, which is purposely given us to this end that we may know the things that are given us of God (1 John 3:24; 4:13; 1 Cor. 2:12). Now the Spirit becomes the author and ground of our assurance (1) as a seal, sealing us after we believe (Eph. 1:13), by His holy and heavenly impression; (2) as an earnest of our eternal inheritance (Eph.

1:14; Rom. 8:23), firstfruits of the true Canaan, or handse¹ of heaven; (3) as a joint witness with our spirits and consciences (Rom. 8:16), both clearing up our spiritual evidences to our minds (1 Cor. 2:9–12, 14), and opening our minds to discern them as a teaching unction, enabling us to know all things (1 John 2:27). Do you have such a testimony from the Spirit of God?

The Fruits or Effects

The fruits or effects of true assurance, distinguishing it from counterfeit assurance, presumption, are these and such like:

1. True assurance, wherever it be, mightily incites to self-purifying, to accurate sanctification in heart and life. “Now are we the sons of God...but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him.... And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure” (1 John 3:2). See this self-purifying hereafter more fully opened. Presumption encourages in sin and impurity (Deut. 29:18–19).
2. True assurance stirs up fervent desires and longings in such hearts after the gospel of Jesus Christ. They that once have truly tasted the Lord’s graciousness (pleasantness, goodness, etc.), they “as newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word,” that they “may grow thereby” (1 Peter 2:2–3). But presumption or carnal confidence breeds rather disaffection, than true affection to the word (Ps. 50:16–17). Such either desire it not at all, or not the pure sincere word, or not in reference to their growth.
3. True assurance makes the soul incomparably to prize communion with God and Jesus Christ. When the church had

1. *handse*: a first installment or earnest money.

obtained Christ's sweet embracements, and perceived herself lodged in the bosom of her dearest Love, and knew that her Beloved was hers, and she His, how jealous is she lest any should disturb Him, or drive Him from her. So earnest is she to be filled with His fellowship, and upon His withdrawing in any measure from her, how restless is she until His return (Song 2:6–7, 16–17 compared with 3:1–6; 5:2–10; 6:4)? David was a man of much heavenly experience and assurance. When his evidences were dimmed by his fall, how pathetically does he cry, "Make me to hear joy and gladness; that the bones which thou hast broken may rejoice." "Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation; and uphold me with thy free spirit" (Ps. 51:8, 12). Presumption knows not what communion with Christ means.

4. True assurance notably engages those that have it to serve and honor God in their places to the uttermost. God assured Joshua that He would never leave him nor forsake him (Josh. 1:5), and Joshua resolves (whatever others do) that he and his house will serve the Lord (Josh. 24:15). A sense of Christ's love constrained Paul to all zeal in his ministry (2 Cor. 5:14–15). David said, "Thou art my God, and I will praise thee: thou art my God, I will exalt thee" (Ps. 118:28). Presumption provokes and contemns God. "What is the Almighty, that we should serve him?," etc. (Job 21:15).

5. True assurance singularly supports and comforts the heart in deepest tribulations, as is remarkably evident in Job (Job 19:25, etc.) and Paul (2 Cor. 1:12). Carnal confidence in such cases is a miserable comforter.

6. True assurance fills with joy in hope of glory (Rom. 5:1–5) after tribulation has done its worst. They that have no more than carnal confidence have indeed no hope of another world (Eph. 2:12).

Of the Way How to Attain and Retain Assurance

Having thus seen the character of true assurance, next we consider how to compass² and conserve it. To this end faithfully follow these and such like directions, namely,

1. Be much in self-examination, frequent in self-probation, that you may find where your evidence clearly lies. “Examine yourselves...prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?” (2 Cor. 13:5). If a man’s title of land be questioned, how will he search and examine his evidences, and take the best counsel upon them? A merchant who would exactly know his own state, he often examines and casts up³ his books. So should Christians be much in casting up and examining their spiritual evidences, that would obtain assurance of their good estate to God.

2. “Quench not” (1 Thess. 5[:19]), “grieve not the holy Spirit of God” (Eph. 4:30), by any known corruption, but still entertain Him with all holy acceptableness. For the Spirit of God is therefore given us, that we by Him might be assured, and know the things given us of God (1 Cor. 2:10–12, etc.), and He assures us most convincingly, clearly, satisfactorily (Rom. 8:16; Eph. 1:13–14, with 1 John 3:24; 4:13).

3. Cherish and improve all your graces (for every grace has an evidence in it), but peculiarly your special assuring grace, namely, knowledge (Col. 2:2), faith (Heb. 10:22), and hope (Heb. 6:11, 18–19). By knowledge we discern ourselves. By faith we realize and appropriate to ourselves for present the things as yet not seen, and by hope we patiently wait for full enjoyment. All tend to assurance.

2. *compass*: achieve, accomplish.

3. *cast up*: perform arithmetical operations on.

4. Constantly exercise yourselves herein to have a conscience void of offense toward God and man in all the parts of well-doing (Acts 23:1; 24:16). A good conscience (Rom. 8:16; 1 John 3:18–21; 2 Cor. 1:12) and a gracious upright conversation⁴ (Isa. 32:17; Prov. 14:26) are singular grounds and helps to assurance. “To him that ordereth his conversation aright will I shew the salvation of God” (Ps. 50:23). And Christ says, “He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him” (John 14:21).

5. Remember former experiences of assurance: the days of old, the years of God’s right hand. These will support and persuade our hearts against doubtings. God’s people have taken this course in their wants of assurance (Ps. 61:2–3; 71:5–6, 20; 77:7–10; 143:5–6).

6. Labor to get out of those conditions which are prejudicial and obstructive to assurance. These are four, namely, (1) the infancy of grace. Infants in nature, live, move, grow, etc., long before they actually know it. So, babes in grace have not their spiritual senses exercised to discern their condition (Heb. 5:13–14). Labor to be men in growth, both in grace and knowledge (1 Cor. 14:20; 2 Peter 3:18). (2) The spiritual slumber of sleep of security. In natural sleep our senses are so tied up that we discern not our natural or civil state. In the spiritual slumber of security, our assurance is suspended, our evidences sleep with us, as in the church in her spiritual security (Song 3:1–2; 5:2–3, 6). (3) The spiritual swoon of desertions. In a swoon, when our spirits and sense fail us, we discern not our natural life. In spiritual desertions, when God withdraws the light of His countenance

4. *conversation*: manner of living.

and sweet presence, we discern not our spiritual life (Ps. 22:1; 77; 88). Labor to remove desertions. (4) The conflicts of temptations, and other soul distempers. When the body is in deep distempers, has been astonished with dangerous falls, etc., it is not comfortably sensible of its corporal condition. No more is the soul in deep temptations, afflictions, especially relapses, apprehensive⁵ of its good spiritual condition. As in David upon his fall (Ps. 51:8, 12, etc.).

7. Diligently and skillfully improve those notable assuring ordinances, the Word, Lord's Supper, and prayer, to help on all the former directions in reference to assurance. (1) The Word was therefore written that believers might know they have eternal life (1 John 1:4; 5:13; John 15:11). Let it therefore "dwell in you richly in all wisdom" (Col. 3:16). (2) The Lord's Supper particularly and individually seals up remission of sins (Matt. 26:27–28), communion with Christ (1 Cor. 10:16–17), and interest in the new testament (1 Cor. 11:24–25). Be at the Lord's table frequently, but still manage it worthily. And (3) prayer not only spreads open a man's heart to himself, but pierces the heavens, creeps into the bosom of God, and often furnishes the doubting spirit with assurance in the very exercise of it (John 16:24). Therefore, labor to be mighty men in prayer; pray always and faint not. How often do the servants of God begin their prayer doubting and perplexed, but conclude assured and persuaded! David begins, "O LORD, rebuke me not in thine anger, neither chasten me in thy hot displeasure," etc., and he ends, "The LORD hath heard the voice of my weeping. The LORD hath heard my supplication" (Ps. 6:1, 8–9; 31:21–22; 13:1–2, 5–6).

5. *apprehensive*: conscious, cognizant.

By these and such like means, true assurance may be obtained by the people of God when they want it, recovered when they have lost it, and retained when they have got possession of it.

Inducements to Assurance

Non-assurance Is a Manifold Misery

Non-assurance of God's favor in Christ and of our true state of grace in Him is a manifold misery and prejudice to the dear children of God. For,

1. This is a bad sign. (1) Sometimes of the defectiveness and weakness of grace in such, that they are but babes, not grown men in Christ, because their spiritual senses are not as yet exercised (Heb. 5:13–14), so far as to discern the things of God in themselves (1 Cor. 2:10–12), and that they want very much of the anointing of the Spirit to reveal to them the things of the Spirit (1 John 2:27; 1 Cor. 2:11). Now Christians should strive to get out of their infancy and imbecility of grace, not still remaining children and babes in faith and knowledge, but laboring to become men in Christ, growing up to perfection (1 Cor. 14:20; Eph. 4:12–17; 2 Peter 3:18). (2) Sometimes of the strength and prevailing of corruption and temptation. When David had relapsed, he lost the joy of God's salvation (2 Samuel 11 with Ps. 51:8, 12). Great falls astonish and amaze both corporal and spiritual senses. And it much concerns all Christians to wrestle against entangling temptations and recover themselves out of relapses. (3) Sometimes of spiritual desertions, that the Lord has in some measure forsaken the soul, and withdrawn Himself, as in the case of David (Ps. 22:1), Heman (Psalm 88), Asaph (Psalm 77), and the church herself (Song 3:1–2, 5–8). Now spiritual desertions are such overwhelming afflictions to the soul that has once truly tasted

of the sweetness of Christ's presence, that the gracious heart is wholly restless until it be again embraced in the dearest arms of love and favor.

2. This is one great cause of Christians' dejectedness and uncomfortableness, that though they are in a state of grace, yet they cannot discern themselves to be in such a gracious state. To be in the true state of grace is the happiest ground of comfort. But until there be some apprehension and knowledge of that our state, oftentimes we have small sense of comfort. As Hagar (when her bottle of water was spent, and her child ready to die), she sat down full of perplexity, and yet there was a well in the place. The well did not comfort her, although close by her, until the Lord opened her eyes to see it (Gen. 21:16, 19). How pensive and sad were the two disciples going toward Emmaus about Christ's death, though Christ risen from the dead was in their company and talked with them, while their eyes were holden, that they should not know Him (Luke 24:14–15)? How did Mary Magdalene stand weeping by Christ's sepulcher, supposing that His dead body was thence stolen away, though Christ revived and risen stood close by her (John 20:14–15)? And why? Christ was present, but she did not know Him. So, if we be close by the well of grace, if Christ be present with us, indeed in us, if yet we know it not, we are still in our discomforts, our tears and sorrows are still flowing. David was told by the prophet, "The LORD also hath put away thy sin" (2 Sam. 12:13), but because David had not the sense and apprehension hereof, he wanted the joy of God's salvation, and groaned still under his broken bones a good while after (Ps. 51:8, 12).

God Has Charged His People to Contend After Assurance

God has often charged his people to contend after the security and assurance of their spiritual state. "Give diligence to make your calling and election sure" (2 Peter 1:10). "Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith" (2 Cor. 13:5). "Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith" (Heb. 10:22). "We desire that every one of you do shew the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end" (Heb. 6:11).

Assurance Is Possible

It is possible that such as are in a state of grace may (if the fault be not their own) come to know and be assured they are in such a state. For, (1) many scriptures intimate this (John 14:21; Rev. 2:17; 1 Cor. 2:9–13; 1 John 2:3, 5; 3:2, 14, 19; 4:13; 5:13, 19). (2) The nature of saving knowledge, faith, and hope tend to this (Col. 2:2; Heb. 10:22; 6:11). (3) Many gracious persons have sometimes attained to this, though at other times not without their doubting and infirmities, as Job (Job 19:25–27), David (Ps. 22:1; 51:8, 12), Hezekiah (2 Kings 20:3), Thomas (John 20:28), Peter (John 21:15–17), Paul (2 Tim. 1:12), and the church herself (Song 2:16; 7:10).

Assurance Is Worth All Earnest Endeavors After It

Finally, assurance of our gracious state is richly worth all earnest endeavors after it. They that once attain to it (as hereafter is manifested) find a jewel of great price and no stranger shall intermeddle with their joy (Prov. 14:10).

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Sincere loving of God (1 John 5:1–2)

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Loving the brethren peculiarly, as they are begotten of God, etc. (1 John 5:1–2)

When we love them not verbally and complementally,¹ but really and sincerely; opening tender bowels² of compassion to our brother in need; indeed, if the cause requires, hazarding our dearest lives for the children of God (1 John 3:16–19)

1. *complementally*: ceremoniously.

2. *bowels*: the seat of pity or tenderness: heart.

Introduction

John is a Hebrew name and signifies “the Lord has been gracious,” or “the grace of the Lord.” He was son of Zebedee, brother of James, and called by Christ to the apostolic office (Matt. 4:21; 10:2; Mark 1:19; Luke 5:10), which is the highest ecclesiastical office under the new testament (1 Cor. 12:28; Eph. 4:11). John was one of the three whom Christ took up with Him to Mount Tabor to behold His glorious transfiguration (Matthew 17, etc.; Mark 9:2; Luke 9:28, etc.), one of the two whom Christ sent to prepare His last Passover (Luke 22:8), and that disciple whom Jesus peculiarly loved above all the rest (John 13:23; 19:26; 20:2; 21:7, 20), who leaned on Jesus’s breast at supper, to whom Christ by a private token discovered that Judas should betray Him (John 13:23–26), and to whom alone Christ dying on the cross commended His own mother (John 19:25–27). This John, this compound of love and sweetness, wrote this epistle, “an epistle,” says Calvin, “altogether worthy of the spirit of that disciple who was therefore beloved of Christ above the rest, that he might render himself more familiar to us.” “A most sweet epistle,” says Augustine, “most memorable in the church of God, because love is there especially commanded.” An epistle whose principal scope and end is to help the believers to a well-grounded assurance of their actual interest in eternal life. “These things,” says John, “have I

written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life” (1 John 5:13).

To this end the Holy Ghost, by the apostle, has replenished¹ this precious epistle with more variety and plenty of pregnant marks, signs, characters, or evidences of a believer's spiritual estate than any other scripture of like quantity in the whole Book of God, so that it is a rich treasury for Christian assurance.

1. Assurance (if the fault be not our own), is attainable (John 14:21; Rev. 2:17; 1 Cor. 2:9–13; 1 John 2:3, 5; 3:2, 14, 19, 24; 4:13; 5:19).

2. Assurance has been actually attained by divers:² Job (19:25–27), David (Ps. 22:1; 51:8, 12), Thomas (John 20:28), Paul (2 Tim. 1:12; 2 Cor. 5:1; Rom. 8:37–38; Gal. 2:20; 1 Tim. 1:13–15), the church of Christ (Song 2:16; 7:10).

3. The nature of faith and hope tend and lead on to assurance (Col. 2:2; Heb. 6:11, 18–19; 10:23).

4. Hence all Christians ought to contend after assurance (2 Cor. 13:5).

5. Assurance that eternal life is ours, actually attained, brings great glory to God (Rom. 4:20–21), is the glory of faith (Rom. 4:19–20), overcomes greatest difficulties (Rom. 4:17–18), is an approved cordial extraordinarily strengthening believers' hearts in worst times, under saddest afflictions, indeed, in the straits of death (Job 19:25–27; 2 Tim. 4:7–8), and in a word, is a paradise on earth, the suburbs of heaven, and sweetest glimpse of glory.

1. *replenished*: supplied fully.

2. *divers*: various (people).

Come to this place, therefore, all you doubting souls, and drooping Christians, that walk in darkness and have no light of assurance and comfort. This blessed epistle is an epistle for you. Read it and meditate upon it continually, until you be persuaded, settled, established, comforted. And for your further help, peruse these evidences extracted out of it, and familiarly digested by him whose comfort it will be to be a helper of your joy.

CHAPTER 1

Evidences or Signs of God's Love to Us

Christ's Being Sent to Die for Us, That We Might Live by Him

Christ's being sent to lay down His life for us, that we might live by Him may be a first sign of God's love to us. "Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us" (1 John 3:16). "In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins" (1 John 4:9–10). Hence when we actually live through Christ, we actually taste God's free love in Christ.

God's special love acts toward His beloved ones, chiefly three ways, (1) in electing them before all time, "elect of God, holy and beloved" (Col. 3:12), which is more peculiarly ascribed to the Father (1 Peter 1:2); (2) in redeeming them in fullness of time, which is more peculiarly attributed to the Son (John 15:12–13; Gal. 2:20; Rev. 1:5); (3) in immediate applying of Christ to them in due time by sanctification, effectual calling, etc., and this is more peculiarly given to the Holy Ghost (Titus 3:4–5; 1 Peter 1:2). And in every one of these acts of love, God comes nearer and closer to His. The Father's love in electing is love intended and purposed. This is most remote. The

Son's love in redeeming is love actually demonstrated to the world. This is nearer. But the Holy Ghost's love in sanctifying, etc., is love effectually and peculiarly applied to individual persons. This is most near. Would we know our interest in the Father's electing love? Consider what part we have in the Son's redeeming love. Would we discover our share in the Son's redeeming love? Then let us accurately search what right and property we have in the Spirit's sanctifying love. When we spiritually live from the Father through the Son by the Spirit, then God gives us a taste of His love experimentally.

Excellently Salvian (that eminent presbyter of the Massilian church who flourished in the fifth century) discourses of this love of God to us:

This is that which I said before, that God loves us more than a father his son. Verily the thing is evident, that God loves us above the affection of sons, who for our sakes has not spared His Son. And what add I further? And this a just Son, and this an only begotten Son, and this Son God. And what can be said more? And this for us; that is, for evil ones, for most wicked ones, for unrighteous ones. Who can estimate this love of God towards us, but that the justice of God is such that no unjust thing can be incident to Him? For so far as human reason may judge, any man had done an unjust thing, if for the worst servants he should have put to death a good son. So that in this the piety of God is more inestimable, and in this the virtue of God is more admirable, that so the greatness of His justice cannot by man be understood. Inasmuch as to the apprehension of human imbecility, the greatness of His justice seems almost to have a show of injustice.

Adoption

That we should be reckoned among the children of God may be a second sign of God's love to us. "Behold, what manner of

love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God” (1 John 3:1). Well said the apostle, “Behold, what manner of love,” for here is not only love but love to admiration. That we without strength (Rom. 5:6), we lost creatures (Luke 15:32), we sinners (Rom. 5:8), we in the bond of iniquity (Acts 8:13), we dead in trespasses and sins (Eph. 2:1), we enemies to God by wicked works (Col. 1:21), we children of wrath, even as others (Eph. 2:3, etc.)—that we should be thus advanced in heavenly places in Christ, and accounted not only servants, which is much (John 12:26), not only friends, which is more (John 15:15), but also sons, and consequently heirs, and co-heirs with Christ, which is most of all (Rom. 8:16–17; Gal. 4:4–6). Let men behold, let angels behold, let both adore and admire, what manner of love is this love. Show your sonship; this sonship demonstrates infallibly God’s love to you. God takes none into this nearest relationship but whom He first took into His dearest affection. If you are a son of God, then (1) you are born again of the Spirit of God (John 1:12–13 and 3:3–5); (2) you have received Jesus Christ by believing on His name (John 1:12); (3) God has instilled into you a son-like spirit of prayer (Rom. 8:15, 26); (4) you are conformed to Christ the firstborn among many brethren (Rom. 8:29); (5) you are acted, led, and guided by the Spirit of God (Rom. 8:14).

Our Not Loving the World

Our not loving the world, nor the things that are in the world, inordinately, may be a third sign of God’s love to us. “Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever” (1 John 2:15–17).

The love of the Father is in him neither actively nor passively, who immediately loves the world. Not actively, he loves not the Father; not passively, he is not beloved of the Father. For who can be beloved of the Father and not reciprocally love the Father again (1 John 4:19), and who can entertain the true love of the Father in the heart, but withal he must banish the excessive love of the world out of the heart? For, (1) the love of the Father and the love of the world are so repugnant and inconsistent one with another (James 4:4; Matt. 6:24). (2) The love of the Father and of the world do each of them so forcibly exhaust and draw out the whole heart, that it is impossible that these two loves should at one and the same time in intense degrees dwell in one and the same heart. As Cyprian well observed, "The love of God and the world cannot cohabit in one heart together, as the same eye cannot at once look up to heaven and down to the earth together."

But who do inordinately love the world and things in the world?

Answer. (1) They who are wont inordinately to desire and seek it when they want it (1 Tim. 6:9–10; Matt. 6:31–33; 2 Peter 2:1–3; 2 Kings 5:20, 22; 1 Kings 21:4, 9, 10, 16). (2) They who are wont inordinately and immoderately to set their hearts upon it and abuse it while they have it (Ps. 62:10; 1 Tim. 6:17; Luke 12:16–22; Matt. 19:21–24; James 5:1–7). (3) They who are wont excessively to grieve and perplex themselves when they lose it, as Ahithophel who, when he lost this world's honors, went discontentedly and hung himself (2 Sam. 17:23).

Our True Love to God

Our love to God, which is a sweet effect, a resulting ray, a reflexive beam of God's love to us, may be a fourth sign of God's love to us. "We love him, because he first loved us" (1 John 4:19). When God begins to us in this sweet cup of love, we cannot

choose but pledge Him. But should not He love us first, and we also have some apprehension of that His love, we should never love Him at all. For as Bernard says, "Men render not love to God loving them, till the spirit of faith reveals to them God's eternal purpose, about their future salvation." As light breeds light, fire, fire, so God's love to us begets love to God in us.

But how or wherein has God loved us first?

Answer: God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost have eternally loved us in electing us (Col. 1:12; 1 Peter 1:2; Eph. 1:3–7). In a more peculiar sort, God the Father's love first shined forth toward us in giving Jesus Christ His own only Son, that Son of His love (Col. 1:13) for us (Titus 3:4–6; John 3:16). Has God so loved us, as not to spare His own Son (as has before been evidenced) how can this choose but kindle in us reciprocal flames of love again to God, and make us delight in His love? "The more I drink," said Bernard, "of the love of God, the more I am athirst, and cannot be satisfied with it; nor I, nor anyone perfectly loving Christ. This love, the more it is eaten, the more it augments hunger; the more it's drunken, the more it incites thirst; it so inebriates that mind wherein it dwells, that it seeks, or loves nothing, nor possibly can love besides Him, who so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes and loves Him, might not die, but live with Him." And in a more special manner, God the Son's love first prevented¹ us in His giving Himself for us. When Christ stood by Lazarus's grave, and wept for him, the Jews said, "Behold how he loved him!" (John 11:35–36). Much more may we say when Christ did more than weep for us, when He bled for us, when He died for us, behold and admire how He loved us (John 10:11; 15:12–13; Rom. 5:8; Eph.

1. *prevented*: acted before.

5:25; Gal. 2:20; Rev. 1:5)! Can we possibly look upon this love of Christ and not be wholly overcome with it, overpowered with it, ravished with it, and irrefutably constrained with it to love Christ again (2 Cor. 5:14–15). Let us say with Bernard, in his holy rapture of affections to Christ:

Behold how He loved us; He chose to die for us, lest we should be doomed to death eternal; He rose from the dead, that He might render us partakers of His resurrection; He ascended into heaven, that He might advance us into celestial palaces; and He sits at the right hand of the Father, seating, and crowning, gladding² and placing there, such as He hath redeemed with His own blood, such as He hath joined to Himself with the cement of love, at the same right hand of the Father with Himself. Therefore, let us love, adore and affect³ this Christ without measure, beyond measure; without bounds, beyond limits; daily, continually with all the heart, with all the mind, with all our power, with all our graces.

Thus, we shall love Him, that first loved us.

Now then, do you truly love God with all your heart and soul? Or (if that be too high and hard a question) at least do you truly desire to love Him, and love to desire Him? Doubtless this is an evidence that God loves you. For nothing but His infinite flame of love to you kindles this spark of love in you.

Question: But by what signs may I know that I truly love God and Jesus Christ, or at least truly desire to love Him?

Answer: You may know that you truly love Him, or desire to love Him, if you love Him, or desire to love Him, (1) attractively, (2) intensively, (3) sincerely, (4) purely, (5) obediently, (6) invincibly, (7) incessantly.

2. *gladding*: making glad.

3. *affect*: have affection for.

Attractively and Unitingly

When God and Jesus Christ are so endeared to the heart, that the soul restlessly groans and pants after the enjoyment of Them. As in David, "As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God. My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God" (Ps. 42:1-2). As in Moses, "I beseech thee, shew me thy glory" (Ex. 33:18). As in the church, "Make haste, my beloved, and be thou like to a roe or to a young hart upon the mountains of spices" (Song 8:14). Christ says, "Surely I come quickly." The church echoes, "Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus" (Rev. 22:20). There is a principle of motion in bodies naturally, as in earth, that makes it descend to its center; in fire, that makes it ascend to its proper resting place; and (if impediments interpose not) they cannot rest until they be united to them. Thus, that soul that truly loves God has an inward supernatural principle drawing it after God. Nor can it acquiesce, or center itself anywhere, but in God; the most amiable God having scattered some sparks of His love in our hearts, allures us after Him, as fire draws fire, or as the loadstone snatches the iron to itself, by its attractive, magnetic property. Does God's love and loveliness so snatch and steal away your heart after God that you long to enjoy God, to have union to Him and communion with Him? That's true love. Love is a cementing, soldering, magnetic grace.

If yours be such, then, (1) What grief do you have in His absence? (2) What desire of His presence? (3) What delight in His enjoyment? A true uniting love discovers itself in all these.

1. What grief is the absence of God and Christ to your soul? David laments, when God did hide His face (Ps. 22:1, etc.; 13:1, etc.). It was "as with a sword in my bones" when the enemy said, "Where is thy God?" (Ps. 42:10). But God had even broken his

bones to shivers, when He had taken the joy of His salvation from him (Ps. 51:8, 12), and the church is heartsick, sick of love, when Christ had but a little withdrawn Himself from her (Song 5:6, 8). Where is your pain, your sickness, your grief, your tears in God's withdrawals? Love is impatient of divorce or distance. "You love Him but a little, if for His love you do not daily sigh and weep, for His absence is wont to be a flood of tears to the loving spouse when she seeks Him but finds Him not, calls, but He answers not; nothing pleases her but weeping."⁴

2. What desires and groans have you after the presence of God and Jesus Christ? "My soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee.... My soul followeth hard after thee" (Ps. 63:1, 8). Here was David's love. "I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ" (Phil. 3:8). Here was Paul's love. "Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth." "Draw me, we will run after thee." "Turn, my beloved, and be thou like a roe or a young hart upon the mountains of Bether" (Song 1:2, 4; 2:17). Here is the church's love. But where is your love? Where is your desire of the enjoyment of God and Jesus Christ? Do you strive like the diseased "woman to draw near to Christ, that by a salutiferous touch of the hem of His garment you may, as it were, steal spiritual soundness to your miserable soul? Or like Thomas, that man of desires, desire you to see and touch Christ; and not only so, but to approach to the sacred wound of His side (that door of the ark which was made in the side), that you may thrust in, not only your finger, your whole hand, but that your whole self also may enter into the very heart of Jesus, into that holy of holies, into that ark of the testament, into that golden pot, the soul of our humanity,

4. The quotation is from Bernard of Clairvaux.

wherein is the Manna of the Divinity?"⁵ I mean, do you long for most intimate enjoyment of and communion with Jesus Christ, both God and man? This is love indeed.

3. Finally, what delight and contentment do you find in His enjoyment? True love finds most contentment in the enjoyment of the object most beloved. Hence David, preferring the enjoyment of God's face before any sublunary treasure, discovers his true love to God thus: "There be many that say, Who will shew us any good? LORD, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us. Thou hast put gladness in my heart, more than in the time that their corn and their wine increased" (Ps. 4:6–7). And yet of all enjoyments of God and Christ, beloved, that enjoyment is sweetest that succeeds His absence and estrangement. Health is always sweet, but double sweet after sickness; liberty always pleasant, but double pleasant after imprisonment; life is always comfortable, but to have returned from death to life, is a double life. So, to them that love God, His presence is ever delectable, but His presence after His soul-afflicting absence is even ravishing. Hence David, wrestling out of an intricate temptation, and recovering a sweet view of God, cries out, "Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee. My flesh and my heart faileth: but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever" (Ps. 73:25–26). The church, enjoying Christ, says, "I sat down under his shadow with great delight, and his fruit was sweet to my taste" (Song 2:3), but when after estrangement she found him whom her soul loved, how is she transported? "I held him, and would not let him go, until I had brought him into my mother's house, and into the chamber of her that conceived me. I charge you,

5. The quotation is from Bernard of Clairvaux.

O ye daughters of Jerusalem, by the roes, and by the hinds of the field, that ye stir not up, nor awake my love, till he please” (Song 3:4–5), that is, let him have no offense given him, that I should lose him anymore. Can you truly say in your enjoyment of God, of Christ, O let His left hand be under my head, and His right hand embrace me (Song 2:6)? “Lord, let not the left hand of Thy temporal consolation be wanting, but be under my head for use; but let Thy spiritual right hand, Thy consolation about spirituals and eternals, embrace me wholly, for enjoyment; and in the embracement of Thy love, in the kisses of Thy sweetness, my soul shall rest and sleep in peace.... Oh it is good for us to be here; let us build three tabernacles, one for faith, one for hope, and one for love,”⁶ but all for Thee. This is right love to God indeed.

Intensively

God is the highest object of love and challenges⁷ the highest and most intensive acts of love. God is the supreme good, indeed, the only good: “there is none good but one, that is, God” (Matt. 19:17). Therefore, He should have the supreme affections, all the affections, all of the affections, and none but He. “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind” (Luke 10:27; Deut. 6:5; Matt. 22:37), with these four—heart, soul, might, and mind—and with all of every one of these, i.e., with all that is within you. God, if truly loved, is to be beloved of you. Indeed, let God, let Jesus Christ have the preeminence in your soul, above all creatures let Him possess the throne of your heart, and be a diadem on your head, but let all things else sit down below, at your footstool (Prov. 12:1; Ps. 73:25; 4:6–7;

6. The quotation is from Bernard of Clairvaux.

7. *challenges*: asserts a right, title, or claim to.

Matt. 10:37; Luke 14:26). No object is so amiable, no delight so delectable as God to him who loves Him; true love can despise the world, indeed, ten thousand worlds, for Him.

Sincerely and Uprightly

When God is chiefly loved for Himself, for His own incomparable excellency, perfection, beauty, sweetness, loveliness, and love, and other things are loved for Him, and in order to Him; then not so much they are loved, as God is loved in them. "We love him, because he first loved us" (1 John 4:19). The church loved Christ for Himself to the end (Song 5:10). We may love God's gifts, but must more love God the giver, else our love is mercenary, not upright.

Purely and Holily

God is truly loved when purely affected. We love God purely when we cordially hate that which God cannot love, namely, sin. "Ye that love the LORD, hate evil" (Ps. 97:10). "Do you love Him?," says Augustine. "You ought to hate what He hates.... Hence it appears you truly love what is good if you are found to hate what is evil."

Obediently

When we so love God or Jesus Christ as to endeavor really to keep all His commandments. "If ye love me, keep my commandments.... He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me" (John 14:15, 21). "That is," says Augustine, "he who loves them in memory, and keeps them in life, who has them in words and keeps them in works. Who has them in hearing, and keeps them in doing, or who had them in doing, and keeps them in persevering, 'He it is,' says He, 'who loves Me.' Love is to be demonstrated by works, that it be not an unfruitful usurpation of the name of love."

Invincibly

Against all difficulties, oppositions, and persecutions. “For love is strong as death; jealousy is cruel as the grave: the coals thereof are coals of fire, which hath a most vehement flame. Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it” (Song 8:6–7).

Incessantly in Incorruption

True love to Christ will not waste, putrefy, worm-eat or decay, but is incorruptible. “Grace be with all them that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity (*en aptharsia*)” (Eph. 6:24). True love is a long lasting, indeed, an everlasting, affection. “Charity never faileth” (1 Cor. 13:8).

CHAPTER 2

Evidences or Signs of Our Regeneration, New Birth, Adoption, and Sonship

That the World Knows Us Not, if We Be the Children of God

“Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not” (1 John 3:1). By “world” here understand that world of carnal, unregenerate persons that “lieth in wickedness” (1 John 5:19), elsewhere called “the children of this world” in opposition to “the children of light” (Luke 16:8). This world knows not the heavenly Father adopting, nor His spiritual children adopted; indeed, therefore, it knows them not, because they are the children of such a Father. So that the world’s not knowing us in this sense may help us to discover that God knows us and owns us as His children. To “know” implies (1) sometimes a precise act of the mind, understanding, discerning, discovering, apprehending, comprehending things what they are (John 21:15, 17; 1 Cor. 8:4). In this sense the carnal world knows not God, nor Jesus Christ, nor the things of God, because they are spiritually discerned (Jer. 10:25; 1 Cor. 2:8, 11). Nor knows it the children of God, and what privileges, comforts, and happiness belongs to them, and that even in this life, in the state of grace (1 Cor. 2:9). (2) Sometimes an act also of the will; or a joint act of the mind and will, regarding favorably, respecting, loving,

affecting, approving things known (Ps. 101:4). Thus, God is said to “knoweth the way of the righteous” (Ps. 1:6). Christ knows His sheep (John 10:27), and so, not to love, not to approve, is not to know (Acts 7:18; Matt. 7:23; 25:12). In this sense the carnal world knows not God nor Christ, i.e., loves them not, cares not for them, but rather hates them (Ex. 5:2; Jer. 5:4). And thus, also the world knows not the children of God, i.e., loves them not, cares not for them, but hates them, persecutes them, etc., because such (John 15:18–19; 1 John 3:12). So that the more the world hates us for God’s sake, Christ’s sake, as Christians, the more encouragement we may have, that we are not of the world, but chosen out of the world into God’s family (1 Peter 4:16–17).

True Believing That Jesus Is the Christ, Evidences That We Are Born of God

“Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God” (1 John 5:1). For clearing this evidence of regeneration, consider these two questions: (1) What is meant here by “believing that Jesus is the Christ”? (2) From what may it be evinced that whosoever does truly thus believe “is born of God”?

Question: What Is It to “Believe That Jesus Is the Christ”?

Answer: Faith or believing as it relates to Christ has especially two primary and most remarkable acts, namely, assenting and applying.

1. The assenting act of faith is that whereby faith assents to God’s whole Scripture-record touching Jesus Christ as true (1 John 5:10–11), namely, that this Jesus which is revealed so fully to us in the New Testament both in His person and offices is no other than the Christ, the true Messiah, or anointed of God, that was fore-promised, fore-propheesied of, and prefigured under all periods of the Old Testament, from the fall of

the first Adam to the fullness of time for the incarnation of the second Adam, to be the only Mediator between God and man, and Savior of the world. This some call dogmatical faith, some historical faith because it barely and precisely entertains the doctrine and history of Scripture as truth, without any particular appropriation of anything of Christ to them who so believe. Now this bare and naked assenting act of faith cannot be a character of regeneration, nor the faith here intended. For (1) hypocrites may assent to the truth of the record which God has given touching Christ. For we read often of the faith of such, as Luke 8:13 and Acts 8:13, which believing of theirs, was at least an assent. For assent to truth revealed is the least and lowest act of faith. (2) Devils may assent to this truth dogmatically, “that Jesus is the Christ”; indeed, they have assented to it, and known it to be so. See Mark 1:24; Luke 4:34, 41. Yet not hypocrites, nor devils are regenerate.

2. The applying act of faith is that whereby faith, having assented to the truth of all God’s record touching Christ, proceeds to apply and appropriate all particularly to a man’s self, as did Paul, “who loved me, and gave himself for me” (Gal. 2:20), and Thomas, “My LORD and my God” (John 20:28). This appropriating act of faith is sometimes called believing “on the Son of God” (*eis ton huion*, i.e., “into the Son of God”) (1 John 5:10), believing “on His name” (*eis to onoma*, i.e., “into His name”) (1 John 5:13; John 1:12), coming to Him (John 6:35), receiving Him (John 1:11–12), having the Son (1 John 5:12), tasting Him (1 Peter 2:3), eating Him, eating His flesh and drinking His blood (John 6:53–57; compared with v. 47), all which expressions denote faith’s appropriating of Christ to the particular individual believing soul, as his Christ, Priest, Prophet, and King; as his Jesus, his Savior, etc., from whom he expects and looks for redemption, righteousness, pardon, holiness, adoption, peace, comfort, grace, glory, and everything that

is promised, or is to be expected from the Messiah. As Calvin well observes, "To believe that Jesus is Christ is to hope for all those things from Him which were promised of the Messiah." This is true justifying faith (Rom. 5:1). Now this is the faith here meant, this the true believing that Jesus is the Christ.

Discoveries or characters of this true faith are many. Take these seven which gradually depend one upon another.

1. The habit of this faith is infused into the soul by God in regeneration (Eph. 2:1; John 1:12–13).

2. This habit infused is brought into act by the Father drawing the soul to Christ (John 6:44). This drawing is effected (1) by discovering the necessity of Christ to salvation (Acts 4:11–12), (2) by displaying the sufficiency and alluring excellency of Christ for salvation (Heb. 7:25; Song 5:10–16), (3) by manifesting the possibility of obtaining Christ and salvation by Him (1 Tim. 1:16), (4) by propounding the willingness and readiness of God and Christ to entertain poor sinners (Matt. 11:28–29; John 7:37; Isa. 55:1; 1 John 6:37; Luke 15:20–32), (5) by disclosing the invaluable happiness in gaining Christ (1 John 5:12; John 3:16, 18, 36), and (6) by stirring up ardent strong desires in the heart after Christ that the soul is restlessly thirsting until He be obtained (Isa. 55:1; John 7:37).

3. Faith thus infused and acted is persuaded to accept Christ upon His own terms, namely, self-denial, bearing the cross, and following Christ, and actually accepts Him (Luke 9:23; John 1:12).

4. Faith, having received Christ, tastes such sweetness and pleasantness in Him, that Christ is most precious to the soul (1 Peter 2:3, 7), and all things in the world are but loss and dung to him (Phil. 3:8). Oh, how is the soul filled with joy and peace in believing (Rom. 15:13; 5:1), and so it sits down under Christ's shadow with great delight, and His fruit is sweet unto its taste (Song 2:3).

5. Faith, having thus taken and tasted Christ, notably enlivens and quickens the soul, that not so much the believer lives, as Christ by faith lives in the believer (Gal. 2:20; Rom. 1:17; Hab. 2:4). Christ principally knows, wills, loves, prays, and in a word performs all spiritual motions in him. Oh, that's a sweet life indeed, whereof Christ is both Author to give it, and Pilot to guide it.

6. Faith, having enlivened the soul by Christ, it notably puts forth itself in vital operations from Christ. For true living faith is a working and fruit-bearing faith, as James demonstrates in James 2:14–26. Now faith's principal acts are these: (1) Cleansing and purifying the heart from all inward filthiness, so as not to approve it, or mingle with it (Acts 15:9). (2) Calming and pacifying the conscience. As once Christ said to the winds and waves, so faith in Christ says to the troubled and perplexed soul, "Peace" and "be still," and there is a great calm (Rom. 5:1–3; Phil. 4:7). (3) Acting and working by love with a cheerful respect and delightful enlargement¹ to all God's commandments (Gal. 5:6; 1 John 5:3).

7. Finally, faith, having attained to this spiritual strength and activity, contends after a fuller perfection, even after a full assurance (Col. 2:2; Heb. 10:22; 6:11, 18–19), which full assurance is obtained by faith's reflecting upon its own acts, and seeing itself believe. "I know whom I have believed" (2 Tim. 1:12). And though every believer reaches not this full assurance, nor anyone retains it at all times, yet the nature of faith contends and leads all to it most genuinely, for which reason Calvin was not afraid to say that "full assurance can no more be plucked from faith than heat or light can be severed from the sun."

1. *enlargement*: expansion of affection; freedom of action.

Question 2: From What May It Be Evinced That Whosoever Does Hereby Thus Believe “Is Born of God”?

Answer. From many grounds; take a few for all. (1) This believing thus described is a receiving of Christ and a believing on His name, but everyone that receives Christ and believes on His name is born “not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God” (John 1:12–13). What need to be said more punctually? (2) This faith thus described is one of the fruits of the Spirit, enumerated as contradistinct from the works of the flesh (Gal. 5:22). Consequently, they who have this faith have the regenerating Spirit in them, whence this and the other fruits flow, and so are born of God. (3) This faith and believing here described is such as whereby the believer pleases God (Heb. 11:6). Consider well the former particulars. Therefore, they that so believe are regenerate, in the Spirit, and not in the flesh, for “they that are in the flesh cannot please God” (Rom. 8:8). (4) Finally, they that believe in Christ as has been described shall be saved (Mark 16:16; John 3:16). Therefore, they must needs be born of God, for except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God (John 3:3, 5).

The Not Committing of Sin Is the Property of Such as Are Truly Regenerate

“He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil. Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God” (1 John 3:8–9). This note about sinning is for greater clearness, and more emphasis, laid down affirmatively and negatively: by the former, detecting the children of the devil; by the latter, the children of God. Contraries paralleled serve to illustrate one another.

Affirmatively. Verse 8, where consider,

1. The position itself. “He that committeth sin is of the devil,” i.e., he is the child of the devil, and the devil his father, as John 8:44, and “walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience” (Eph. 2:2). For this phrase “is of the devil” is here opposed to that “is born of God” (1 John 3:9).

2. The confirmation of it by a double argument, namely, (1) from the devil’s apostasy “for the devil sinneth from the beginning,” i.e., the devil sinned from the beginning of the world. Compare John 8:44 with Jude 6. He was the very first sinner in the world and the cause of all other sinners in the world. He drew his apostate angels with him. Hence probably that phrase “the devil and his angels” (Matt. 25:41). He deceived our first parents in the serpent and so brought sin upon all the world (Genesis 3). And still, he is “as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour” (1 Peter 5:8). Nor is it said “he sinned,” but *hamartanei* (“he sinneth”) from the beginning, i.e., indefinitely, and with one continued act, as some [commentators] well observe. Sin is the devil’s continual trade, without cessation or intermission. Now the devil being such a sinner from the beginning, they who commit sin (as mere natural men do) must needs be the children of the devil. Thus the first argument. (2) From Christ’s office, or the end of His first coming into the world, namely, to “destroy the works of the devil.” Sin is the proper work of the devil. Christ destroyed both, by the virtue and sufficiency of His merit, for all His elect at once (Rom. 8:3). And by the vigor and efficiency of His Spirit (Rom. 8:2, 13), for every one of His elect respectively when effectually called. So that hence it must needs follow that those persons in whom the dominion and power of sin is not subdued by Christ,

but they still commit sin, they so continuing, do still remain the children of the devil; their present state is damnable.

Negatively. Verse 9, where also note,

1. The position itself containing the character of such as are born of God: “whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin,” which also may thus be converted, “whosoever commits not sin is born of God.”

2. The confirmation of the position by a double argument. (1) *A causa conservante*, from the conserving cause in him that keeps him from sinning, “for his seed remaineth in him.” By “seed” here, first, some understand the traduction² of the divine essence to the saints, whom therefore Beza deservedly brands as most ridiculous fanatic persons for this absurd dream. Second, some understand by “seed” the Spirit of God, by whom we are regenerated, and our corruptions and flesh subdued, so that we walk not after the flesh but after the Spirit. The stream of interpreters runs this way. Third, some finally by “seed” understand the Word and Spirit together—the Word effectually applied and actuated by the operation of the Spirit. And this seems fullest. For the Scripture compares the “word” to “seed” because it is God’s instrumental ordinance for our regeneration “being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever” (1 Peter 1:23). And this Word of God abiding in the heart, written there, is a most prevalent antidote against sin. “Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee” (Ps. 119:11). So that the regenerate sins not, because His seed remains in him, i.e., “God’s Word cast into the heart by the operation of the Spirit, making a man to spring into a new creature,” as that learned Master Perkins has observed. Thus

2. *traduction*: transfer.

of the first argument. (2) *Ab impossibili*, from the impossibility of his so sinning, that is born of God, and that from the state and nature of his regeneration: “and he cannot sin, because he is born of God”; whereby he intimates that a sinful course and a state of grace are wholly incompatible and inconsistent with one another. “Here the apostle rises higher in his expression, clearly pronouncing that the hearts of the godly are so efficaciously governed by His Spirit, that with an inflexible affection, they follow the conduct of the Spirit.... The apostle does not only teach that the regenerate are able not to sin, but that the motion of the Spirit is so effectual that it necessarily retains them in the constant obedience of righteousness,” as Calvin observes. Not unsuitable to this of John is the tenor of the covenant of grace. “I will put my fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from me” (Jer. 32:40).

Thus much for the distribution and explication of this context, wherein not sinning is made a note of regeneration. Now because this is a grand evidence of being born of God, that all such sin not, nor can sin, and because this has much difficulty in it, as seeming to cross not only the experience of all regenerate persons (who feel they sin frequently, to the grief of their souls), but also divers Scriptures (Ps. 19:12–13; Rom. 7:15, 23–24; James 3:2; 1 John 1:8–10). Therefore, this is the principal thing here to be opened and cleared convincingly to the conscience, namely,

*How, or in What Sense, He Who Is Born of God
“Doth Not Commit Sin,” Nor Can Sin*

For more clear resolution herein, consider this thing negatively and affirmatively.

Negatively. When the apostle says he who is born of God doth not commit sin, nor can sin, hereby cannot be meant (as some

have hence imagined), that the regenerate have no sin at all inherent in them, nor committed by them, but are perfectly holy even in this life. As of old the Manicheans and Cathars thought they could not so much as sin in thought. The Pelagians and Familists imagined themselves so free from sin that they needed not to pray “forgive us our trespasses.” The Adamites deemed themselves as pure as Adam and Eve before their fall. And the Carpocratians dreamed that they were as free from sin as Christ Himself. Indeed, even in these our days, some have held: “That, he who believes that Christ has taken away his sin is as clean without sin, as Christ Himself”; “that, it is as possible for Christ Himself to sin, as for a child of God to sin”; “that, if a man by the Spirit knows himself to be in the state of grace, though he be drunk, or commit murder, God sees no sin in him”; “that, as well our works as persons, are perfectly holy and good”; “that, a saint in this life, without any addition hereafter, is perfectly just, perfectly holy, completely glorious in this life, and is not capable of any addition after death in the least degree, but only of manifestation.”³

Against these fond and false imaginations, observe:

1. That Holy Scripture expressly testifies the contrary, namely, that the most holy and regenerate persons in this life have in them sin original, and thence too often fall into sin actual. “Who can understand his errors?” (Ps. 19:12). “Who can say, I have made my heart clean, I am pure from my sin?” (Prov. 20:9). “There is no man that sinneth not” (1 Kings 8:46; 2 Chron. 6:36). “For in many things we offend all” (James 3:2). “For there is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth

3. The quotations are from *A Testimony to the Trueth of Jesus Christ... against the Errours, Heresies and Blasphemies of These Times* (1648).

not" (Eccl. 7:20). "If we say that we have no sin," namely, originally, "we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us" (1 John 1:8). "If we say that we have no sin," namely, actually, "we make him a liar, and his word is not in us" (1 John 1:8–10).

2. The universal experience of the best of God's saints in all ages evidences that none of them all have been without sin in this life, not Abraham (Gen. 12:13, 19; 20:2–5), not Isaac (Gen. 26:7–9), not Jacob (Gen. 27:19, 20, 24), not Moses and Aaron (Ps. 106:33; Deut. 32:50–51; Ex. 32:2, 21), not David (Ps. 51:1–10; 38:3–4), not Peter (Matt. 26:33–35, 70–75; Gal. 2:11, 13), not Paul himself (Rom. 7:18, 20–25).

3. The nature of grace and sanctification in this life is at perfectest but imperfect and growing on to perfection (1 Cor. 13:9–10; Phil. 3:12–13), consequently, mortification is imperfect. Some Canaanites are still in the land, though the kings are destroyed. There is a remnant of flesh, as well as a principle of Spirit (Gal. 5:17). The church is not actually purged, but in purging from all defilements, and at last there shall be no "spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing" (Eph. 5:27). Only the man Christ Jesus in this world was without sin (Heb. 4:15; Isa. 53:9; Heb. 7:26; 2 Cor. 5:21).

4. Complete purity from sin and perfection of holiness is a glory, though to be desired on earth, yet reserved for heaven (Rom. 6:7; Eph. 5:27; Heb. 12:23; Rev. 21:27).

5. Unto all which might be added the plentiful suffrage of ancient writers; take the sense of two or three for all. Lactantius Firmianus says, "None can be without sin so long as he is burdened with the clothing of flesh." Jerome says, "If the outward man does what it would not and acts what it hates, it

shows that the command is good, and that he acts not what is evil, but sin dwelling in his flesh, that is, the vices of the body and desires of pleasure." Augustine says, "Search everyone, though most righteous in this life, though he be worthy of the title of a just man, yet is he not without sin." And a little after, "Whatsoever is sin, is formerly blotted out of us in baptism, but because all iniquity is blotted out, does no infirmity remain? If none remain, we should live here without sin, but who dares say this but a proud man, but one unworthy of the mercy of the pardoner, but he who will deceive himself, and in whom the truth is not?" And in his book *The City of God*, he says, "The words of such a master and our Lord are vigilantly to be considered, for He says not, 'If you forgive men their sins, your father will also forgive you what sins so ever,' but He says, 'your sins.' For He taught a daily prayer and spoke to disciples justified. What is therefore 'your sins' but the sins without which, even you are not, who are justified and sanctified?" Blessed Cyprian also, that valiant confessor and glorious martyr of Jesus Christ, writing upon that petition of the Lord's Prayer "and forgive us our trespasses," says, "How necessarily, how providently and wholesomely are we admonished that we are sinners, who are urged to beg for our sins, that while a pardon is asked of God, our mind may be remembered of its guiltiness. Lest any should please himself as if he were innocent, when there is none innocent, and by extolling himself, should be in more danger of perishing. He is instructed and taught that he sins daily, while he is daily commanded to pray for his sins' pardon."

Affirmatively. They that are born of God do not commit sin, nor can sin as they do, and cannot choose but do, who remain unregenerate, and continue the children of Satan. This position will comprehend the full sense of the apostle (who here plainly opposes the regenerate to the unregenerate, the

children and issue of God to the children and issue of the devil, and this peculiarly in the point of committing or not committing of sin) and take in all the several interpretations which are apposite and pertinent to the clearing of this place. Consider therefore, though both the children of God and the children of the devil sin, yet there is a vast disparity and manifold difference between the sinning of the one and of the other; whereby we may clearly, according to Scripture, distinguish between the regenerate and the unregenerate.

1. They that are regenerate commit not sin, nor can sin against the gospel remedy. Jesus Christ is the gospel remedy (Acts 4:12). The going on in a state of unbelief and impenitency, not accepting of Christ by faith and repentance, as a Savior and Mediator, is sinning against this gospel remedy (Mark 1:15; Acts 2:38 with 16:31; John 1:11–12 with 3:18, 36; 16:9). Now no truly regenerate persons can thus sin against Christ, putting Him away from them by unbelief and impenitence. Because in that they are regenerate, it is inevitably implied that they have believed and repented already. For repentance and faith are ingredients inseparable from regeneration (John 1:12–13).

But every unregenerate man, while such, still sins against the gospel remedy, Jesus Christ, in not accepting Him for salvation (John 1:11–13; 3:18, 36; 16:9; Luke 19:14, 27). And they cannot choose but thus sin against Christ by infidelity, because they are unregenerate (Rom. 8:8).

2. Hence, they that are born of God commit not sin, nor can sin, as persons under the absolute power, reign, and dominion of sin. Sin may often rebel in them, indeed, sometimes tyrannize over them (Rom. 7:23; Gal. 5:17), but it does not reign in them (Rom. 6:6, 11, 18; 8:2). The reign of sin discovers itself chiefly in two respects, as the apostle teaches. (1) When men

willingly “obey it in the lusts thereof” (Rom. 6:12), when the first motions, lustings, and stirrings of sin in them are listened and assented to, approved, delighted in, etc. A king is willingly obeyed by his subjects; a tyrant is obeyed unwillingly. The regenerate sin not willingly, but rather against their wills (Rom. 7:15, 19). (2) When men readily take up arms for sin and fight for sin to fulfill it, namely, when they yield their members (whether inward faculties of soul, or outward parts of their bodies) as arms or weapons of unrighteousness to sin fighting against the motions of the Spirit, commands of the Word, etc. When men thus readily fight sin’s battles, they are sin’s servants, under sin’s reign and dominion, as men under the reign of a king readily take up arms for him, but under the usurpation of a tyrant they are readier to fight against him than for him. Now the regenerate do not fight for sin, nor yield their faculties and members to the service of it, but war and strive against it (Rom. 7:23–24; Gal. 5:17; Rom. 8:13).

But on the contrary, unregenerate men, both (1) readily obey sin’s commands, obey it in the lusts thereof (Rom. 6:19; Eph. 2:2–3; Titus 3:3); and (2) as readily take up arms for sin, yielding their members weapons of unrighteousness to sin, and cannot choose but so do, they “cannot cease from sin” (2 Peter 2:14). They are captived alive (like wild beasts in a trap by the hunter) by Satan at his will (2 Tim. 2:25–26).

3. Hence, they that are born of God commit not sin, nor can sin *voluntate plena, sed semi-plena*—with a whole will, but as it were with a half will, an unwilling willingness. Not with a full consent, but with a dissenting consent, with much renitency and reluctance, not with a total delight of heart, but with an unpleasing delightfulness. “The evil which I would not, that I do” (Rom. 7:19). When the will of a regenerate person has so far consented to sin as to act it, yet even in acting it there

remains in the will an inclination and principle to act against it. For there is in the womb of the believing soul a Jacob and an Esau, a good and bad part; habits of grace infused, and relics of sin unmortified in every regenerate person; and this in every faculty and affection of soul. Some saving light in the mind, and yet some carnal darkness; some holy dispositions in the will, and yet some unholy inclinations, etc. So far as the heart and will is regenerate, so far it hates sin and declines it. So far as it is unregenerate, so far it loves sin, and inclines to it. Hence the apostle said, "That which I do I allow not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I.... Now then it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me" (Rom. 7:15–17). "No more I," namely, not I, so far as regenerate, as spiritual. A regenerate man, as regenerate commits no sin, nor can sin. Grace produces not sin, nor the Spirit flesh. Such as is the cause, such is the effect. Grace acts graciously; Spirit, spiritually; as flesh acts carnally, sinfully. Hence from these two contrary parties within the regenerate arises a constant spiritual combat between the flesh and Spirit. "The flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other" (Gal. 5:17). Now where there is this lusting and combating against corruption, there can be no full and total consent of heart, or compliance of will with corruption.

But unregenerate persons, on the contrary, commit sin with full consent of will, with total inclination of heart, for they have no principle of grace within to withhold them from sin, but only principles of corruption to impel and push them upon sin. The regenerate have sin in them; the unregenerate have nothing else but sin in them. Indeed, they are in the flesh, i.e., wholly plunged, engulfed, swallowed up of the flesh (Rom. 8:5, 8). Indeed, they are nothing but flesh (John 3:6). Now they being mere flesh, no spiritually good thing dwells in them (Rom. 7:18). Indeed, everything in them is evil (Gen.

6:5). Consequently, they cannot choose but commit sin most willingly, having nothing in them to bridle, cross, or contradict their corruptions.

4. Hence, they that are born of God commit not sin, nor can sin, presumptuously and with willful obstinacy. If they sin not with a complete willingness, much less do they sin with an obstinate willfulness. Indeed, they are afraid of sinning, proudly, and presumptuously, with insolence, contempt, and contumacy against God, and therefore pray against it, as David, "Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me" (Ps. 19:13). Their sins are rather sins of infirmities than of insolence, sins of weakness rather than of willfulness. They do not so much overtake faults as faults overtake them. "If a man be overtaken in a fault" (Gal. 6:1). *Prolēmphthēi* here properly signifies, "If a man be anticipated, prevented, or surprised unawares" by sin, namely, before he considered his danger, or sin's deceit, or how to fortify himself against the temptation. God's children may sometimes fall into pride and into gross sins, but it is not their manner to sin contumaciously and contemptuously against God.

But unregenerate persons are wont to sin presumptuously. Presumption, or sinning presumptuously, seems to imply (1) a man's vain self-confidence of his own safe and good estate, present and future, upon occasion of God's patience and providential blessings abused, whereupon he encourages himself to go on in ways of sin; (2) securely; (3) willfully; (4) haughtily; and (5) contemptuously against God, His Word, and judgments. It seems to be made up principally of these five ingredients, which lively also describe to us the way of sin which unregenerate men usually walk in.

(1) Self-confidence of a man's safe and good estate, present or future. The wicked "flattereth himself in his own eyes" (Ps.

36:2). "Certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others.... God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are" (Luke 18:9, 11). "And it came to pass, when he heareth the words of this curse, that he bless himself in his heart, saying, I shall have peace, though I walk in the imagination of mine heart, to add drunkenness to thirst" (Deut. 29:19). This vain self-confidence usually arises from abuse of God's patience and providential goodness and blessings. "Because they have no changes, therefore they fear not God" (Ps. 55:19). "And Ephraim said, Yet I am become rich, I have found me out substance: in all my labours they shall find none iniquity in me that were sin" (Hos. 12:8). "Wherefore do the wicked live, become old, yea, are mighty in power? Their seed is established in their sight with them.... Therefore they say unto God, Depart from us; for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways. What is the Almighty, that we should serve him? and what profit should we have, if we pray unto him?" (Job 21:7-15). See also Psalm 73:7-9, 12; Luke 12:16-21.

(2) Security. From self-confidence it is that they go on securely without remorse or fear in ways of sin. "Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry" (Luke 12:19). "The transgression of the wicked saith within my heart, that there is no fear of God before his eyes" (Ps. 36:1). "Come ye, say they, I will fetch wine, and we will fill ourselves with strong drink; and to morrow shall be as this day, and much more abundant" (Isa. 56:12). "Let us eat and drink; for to morrow we die" (1 Cor. 15:32). Thus, they who sin presumptuously, sin securely.

(3) Willfulness, obstinacy, resolvedness in sin, is another poison wherewith presumption of wicked men is tempered. "They that will be rich" (1 Tim. 6:9). "We will not have this man to reign over us" (Luke 19:14, 27). "As for the word that thou hast spoken unto us in the name of the LORD, we will not

hearken unto thee. But we will certainly do whatsoever thing goeth forth out of our own mouth" (Jer. 44:16–17).

(4) Pride and haughtiness also is entwisted in presumption. Wicked men sin proudly, disdainfully, with a high hand and much insolence. "And Pharaoh said, Who is the LORD?" (Ex. 5:2). "What is the Almighty, that we should serve him?," said those wretches (Job 21:15). "The tongue that speaketh proud things: Who have said, With our tongue will we prevail; our lips are our own: who is lord over us?" (Ps. 12:3–4). "They... speak wickedly concerning oppression: they speak loftily. They set their mouth against the heavens, and their tongue walketh through the earth.... Behold, these are the ungodly, who prosper in the world" (Ps. 73:8–12).

(5) Finally, contempt and contumacy against God, His Word, and judgments is found in wicked men's presumption. "Wherefore doth the wicked contemn God?" (Ps. 10:13). "Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us" (Ps. 2:3). "But unto the wicked God saith, What hast thou to do to declare my statutes...? Seeing thou hatest instruction, and casteth my words behind thee" (Ps. 50:16–17). Thus, the unregenerate sin presumptuously, namely, self-confidently, securely, willfully, haughtily, and contumaciously against God. Yet these evils discover themselves more palpably and remarkably in some unregenerate persons than in others. Whereas they that are born of God do not thus commit sin, nor can sin.

5. They that are born of God do not commit sin, nor can sin habitually, customarily. Sin is not their ordinary, usual, and common course, not their practice, trade, or business, etc. It is one thing *hamartanein*, i.e., "to sin," another thing *poiein tēn hamartian*, i.e., "to do, or practice, sin." The former may proceed from inevitable, invincible infirmity, and is incident to the best of saints. The latter flows from sin's dominion and

reigning prevalence and is peculiar to unregenerate persons. And in this sense the current of interpreters do understand this phrase of John: *hamartian ou poiei* (1 John 3:9), *peccatum non facit*, “acts not sin” (Vulgate and Calvin); *peccato non dat operum*, “gives not diligence to sin” (Beza and Piscator); “sinneth not” (Geneva Bible). But better our last English translation:⁴ “Doth not commit sin.” And Beza well observes upon this chapter that “‘to commit sin’ and ‘to purify ourselves’ are opposed against one another (1 John 3:3, 4), and therefore it denotes not such a sinning as falls out through imbecility of the Spirit’s strength in us, nor every sinning against knowledge, but such sinning as is both against checks of others, and their own consciences, wherein they are plainly delighted, and in whom consequently sin reigns.” In this sense the regenerate commits not sin (*ou poiei hamartian, paschei mallon*). He is rather a patient than an agent in sin. Sin is rather a stranger, a traveler who occasionally comes to him (2 Sam. 12:4) than a familiar associate in whom he habitually delights.

Now he that is truly born of God cannot sin habitually, habitual sinning being so inconsistent with a regenerate condition. For,

(1) Habitual sinning flows from the inward dominion of sin in the soul, as habitual keeping God’s commandments from the inward dominion of grace. “They that are after the flesh do mind,” namely, habitually, “the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit” (Rom. 8:5). Sinning habitually flows from the reign of sin, the state of sin. Sinning out of frailty or infirmity, from the relics of indwelling sin, of rebelling sin. Now sin, though it do dwell (*habitare*) in the regenerate, as Augustine notes, yet it does not reign (*regnare*) over the regenerate. See Romans 6:14 and 8:2.

4. That is, the King James Version.

(2) They that sin habitually, they make sin their trade, their common course and practice. They are “workers of iniquity” (Matt. 7:23; Luke 13:27), “an heart they have exercised with covetous practices” (2 Peter 2:14); here is their exercise. But regenerate persons are opposed to workers of iniquity, being workers of righteousness, doing the will of their Father which is in heaven (Matt. 7:21). Herein they exercise themselves, “to have always a conscience void to offence toward God, and toward men” (Acts 24:16). Their *politeuma*, their business, their conversation is in heaven (Phil. 3:20).

(3) They that sin habitually sin easily, readily, smoothly, etc., without difficulty. Habits facilitate anything, make it easy. He that has the habit of writing, the habit of wrestling, the habit of any manufacture, etc., can write, wrestle, work, etc., with ease. It is no trouble nor difficulty to him. So they that are habituated to sin, sin easily; they run to all excess (1 Peter 4:4). “Their feet are swift to shed blood” (Rom. 3:15). They run a full career, without stop, like a ship under sail with a full wind. Now the regenerate, when they are overtaken with sin, they do it *aegre*;⁵ sin is difficult, grievous, and hateful in their eyes. “What I hate, that do I” (Rom. 7:15). There is much reluctance, renitency, and holy struggling of the regenerate part against it (Gal. 5:17). It goes against the hair,⁶ against the stream with them; therefore they sin not habitually.

(4) They that sin habitually sin with pleasure and delight. “They have chosen their own ways”—ways imply habitualness—“and their soul delighteth in their abominations” (Isa. 66:3). “Scorners”—implies the habit—“delight in their scorning” (Prov. 1:22). They are apt to take pleasure in doing that which they can do easily, smoothly; have small pleasure in that which

5. *aegre* (Latin): painfully.

6. *against the hair*: contrary to the normal tendency: against the grain.

is harsh and difficult; indeed, they glory in sin (Phil. 3:19). Now the regenerate delight not in sin, nor take pleasure in it, etc., but hate it (Rom. 7:15; Ps. 119:104), abhor it (Ps. 119:163), bewail it, and bitterly mourn for it (Psalm 6; 38). But they delight in God, in His laws, in His ways (Ps. 37:4; 40:8; 119:16, 35; Song 2:3; Rom. 7:22).

(5) They that sin habitually have contracted to themselves a kind of cursed necessity of sinning, that they cannot cease their sinning. Sin is by custom become as another nature, which cannot be laid aside. They may as soon cease living, or cease being, as cease sinning. Hence Peter describes the heretical seducers of which he prophesies as “having eyes full of adultery” (or Greek, “full of the whore”), “and that cannot cease from sin [*kai akatapaustous hamartias*]” (2 Peter 2:14), i.e., “which know not how to cease from sinning” (Beza); “restless to sinning,” who are intemperately carried on to sinning with a restless motion (Calvin); “unceasing in sin” (Jacobus Laurentius), i.e., quite unable to cease sinning. Notably Solomon describes the way of the wicked: “They sleep not, except they have done mischief; and their sleep is taken away, unless they cause some to fall” (Prov. 4:16), as if mischief were more natural to them than their necessary sleep. Carnal men are so captivated⁷ by Satan (2 Tim. 2:26; Eph. 2:2–3), in such thralldom and bondage to iniquity (Acts 8:13; Rom. 6:16–17), and this thralldom is so strengthened and aggravated by the deceits and gradual growth of sin. First, suggestion winning consent. Second, consent procuring acts. Third, many acts breeding a habit. Fourth, habits growing to custom. And, fifth, custom becoming an inevitable necessity, that how can it be possible that carnal men should cease from sin? Now no such cursed necessity of sinning lies upon them that are born of God, for they can cease to sin. The thief

7. *captivated*: seized, captured.

converted ceased to revile and blaspheme Christ, and instead thereof justifies Him, confesses Him, prays to Him, trusts in Him (Luke 23:40–42). Saul converted ceased to make havoc of the church and to persecute Christ in His members, and instead thereof built up the church by preaching Christ crucified (Acts 9:19–20). Indeed, they can keep themselves (by grace received) from their iniquity, to which they are most inclined or tempted or wherein they have been most ensnared (Ps. 18:23). Indeed, they can combat with the flesh (Gal. 5:17), and do “hate every false way” (Ps. 119:104).

6. They that are born of God do not sin, nor can sin so as to allow, approve, or cherish themselves wittingly and knowingly in any one darling sin, bosom sin, or beloved corruption predominating in the soul above all the rest. God requires the denial of all “ungodliness and worldly lusts” (Titus 2:12). And they “hate every false way” (Ps. 119:104). This was to David an evidence of his integrity before God. “I was also upright before him, and I kept myself from mine iniquity” (Ps. 18:23), namely, I kept myself from that sin which I might more especially call mine, as being naturally more inclined to it; or being occasionally by reason of my calling, adversaries, afflictions, or temptations more solicited, seduced, provoked to it, as Saul with others often provoked him to revenge, etc.

The regenerate have in them the root of all sin, original corruption, and (1) may thence be inclined to one sin more than to another; (2) may fall into invincible infirmities daily; indeed, (3) may sometimes fall into gross sins, as Noah, Lot, David; indeed, perhaps (4) may have divers relapses (which yet is very sad and dangerous) into the same offense, as Peter thrice denied Christ. But notwithstanding all this, they dare not allow themselves in any one known sin, though as dear as right hand or right eye.

But unregenerate men and hypocrites have still reserves in their seeming repentance. Though they forgo many sins, yet still they retain some secret bosom beloved sin or other, which they cannot endure to deny. As the young man his inordinate love to the world (Matt. 19:22); the Pharisees, their covetousness (Luke 16:14; Matt. 23:14); Herod, his incestuous course with Herodias (Mark 6:17–20). One devil or other remains uncast out, keeps profession, and exercises dominion over the unregenerate soul.

7. They that are born of God sin not, nor can sin totally and finally. Not totally (1) either in respect of the subject sinning, for they sin not with a total and full consent of heart and will, but with an incomplete consent, as was evidenced before (see point 3 above); or (2) in respect of the object, rule, or law against which they sin. They sin not totally against the whole law of faith, though they have many fears, doubts, jealousies, and infirmities in believing; yet they believe and have received Christ by believing, being born of God (John 1:12–13). And they can truly say with him, “Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief” (Mark 9:24). Nor do they totally sin against the whole law of obedience, for though they may offend against this or that precept—indeed, against every one of them in some sort, in respect of the legal exactness and accurateness required (Gal. 3:13), which no mere man since the fall of Adam could ever attain to (Gal. 3:21–22; Rom. 8:3)—yet in respect of the evangelical acceptance, in all the commandments of God blameless (Luke 1:6). “That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us”—through Christ—“who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit” (Rom. 8:4). The law is written in their heart (Ps. 40:8; Jer. 31:33). And from that principle within, they delight to do the whole law; the frame and disposition of their soul respects the whole (Rom. 7:22; Ps. 119:6). So that as

a wicked man in respect of the disposition of his heart may be truly said to break the whole law, even while in outward act he seems to keep it, so the regenerate man may be said in respect of the habit and disposition of his heart to keep the whole law, even then when in outward act he seems to break it.

Nor finally. Such as are born of God may fall, and foully fall, but not finally fall away. They always sooner or later rise again by repenting. David fell (2 Samuel 11). But David rose again (2 Sam. 12:13; Ps. 51). Peter fell (Matt. 26:70–75). But Peter recovered himself, remembered the words of Christ, went out and wept bitterly (Matt. 26:75), and afterwards stuck so faithfully to Christ that he thrice confessed Him (John 21:15–17), and at last by a bloody martyrdom glorified God (John 21:18–19).

Nor is it possible that the truly regenerate should finally fall. For (1) the nature of grace in them is for the substance of it incorruptible and unperishable, called “seed” remaining in them (1 John 3:9); and “eternal life” (John 6:54; 17:3; 1 John 5:13), called “eternal” *a parte post*,⁸ because though it had beginning, yet it never shall have end. (2) They are founded upon a sure rock that cannot be shaken by tribulations or all the powers of darkness (Matt. 7:24–25; 16:18). (3) They are preserved and “kept by the power of God” to salvation (kept as in a garrison, for so here the military term *phrouroumenous* properly signifies, as is evident in 2 Corinthians 11:32), and they are engarrisoned, not by men, angels, or creatures, but by the power of God (1 Peter 1:5). Hence, they are invincible and impregnable. “My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father’s hand” (John 10:29). (4) Finally, the promises of God are sure and cannot fail (2 Cor. 1:20). And these promises assure the regenerate of perseverance. “My sheep hear my voice... And I give unto them eternal

8. *a parte post* (Latin): with respect to the future.

life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand” (John 10:27–28). “All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise [*ou mē*] cast out”—a double negative, for greater emphasis (John 6:37). “I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee” (Heb. 13:5). In Greek here are five negatives to the word. It might be rendered thus: “I will not not leave thee, neither will I not not forsake thee,” namely, I am peremptorily⁹ and absolutely resolved never to cast thee off or forsake thee.

But on the contrary, unregenerate men so remaining, sin totally and finally. Totally with their whole heart and full consent of will, they being totally carnal, as was shown before. And against the whole rule or law of both faith and obedience. Of faith, by not believing in Christ, and receiving Him (John 1:11; 16:9). And of obedience, being children of disobedience, fulfilling the wiles of the flesh, etc. (Eph. 2:2–3). Indeed, the “carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be” (Rom. 8:7). So that they have a disposition of heart to sin against the whole law, and do accordingly put this disposition into act and execution, where they have opportunity and are not restrained, running to all “excess of riot” (1 Peter 4:4).

Finally, also they sin without sincere repentance or reformation. Formally, they may seem to repent, as Ahab (1 Kings 21:27, 29), Judas (Matt. 27:3–5). But they only seem to repent. For really, they would (if it were possible) sin ever and repent never. But after their “hardness and impenitent heart” treasure up to themselves “wrath against the day of wrath” (Rom. 2:5). They hate instruction and cast God’s words behind them (Ps. 50:17).

9. *peremptorily*: finally, absolutely.

8. Finally, they that are born of God do not sin, nor can sin only and do nothing else but sin. For, as they have a principle of sin in them, namely, the relics of the old man, whence they too often offend (Rom. 7:17–20, 23, 24), so they have a principle of grace in them, the law of their mind, the inner man, whence they delight in the law of God, and withstand sinning (Rom. 7:15, 20, 22). Whence the apostle concludes of his own person, as every regenerate man may of his, “So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin” (Rom. 7:25).

But it is far otherwise with the unregenerate. They only sin and can do nothing else but sin. This is evident. For,

(1) The Scriptures plainly testify thus much. “So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God” (Rom. 8:8). Why, therefore, they are without faith, and “without faith it is impossible to please” God (Heb. 11:6). “For whatsoever is not of faith is sin” (Rom. 14:23). All their works, words, and thoughts are sin, whether in civil or religious affairs. “The plowing of the wicked, is sin” (Prov. 21:4), indeed, their whole course. “The way of the wicked is an abomination unto the LORD” (Prov. 15:9). See Isaiah 1:11–16 and 66:3. Indeed, the very “thoughts of the wicked are an abomination to the LORD” (Prov. 15:26). Indeed, “every imagination of the thoughts” of his heart are “only evil continually” (Gen. 6:5). How emphatically! (a) Not the thought, but *thoughts*; (b) not only the thoughts, but (if there be any thing before or beyond the thoughts) the imagination of the thoughts of his heart; (c) not only some, or many, but every imagination of the thoughts; (d) is not evil in the concrete, but *malice*, or *evilness* itself in the abstract, as the Hebrew *r'* may import; (e) nor evilness in some respect, as if there were some mixture or relic of goodness remaining, but *only evil*, mere malice; (f) nor all this only for some season, in fit of temptation, etc., but *continually*, all day long, and every

day, so that carnal men so remaining can do nothing but sin, in all they act, speak, or think.

(2) Their persons and all their inward principles are merely carnal, corrupt, and odious to God. Not only sinners, but “dead in trespasses and sins” (Eph. 2:1); not only dark, but darkness itself (Eph. 5:8); not only carnal or fleshly but flesh itself (John 3:6). And in the flesh “dwelleth no good thing” (Rom. 7:18). Now such as are the persons of carnal men, such are all their actions, merely carnal and sinful. “So is this people...and so is every work of their hands; and that which they offer there is unclean” (Hag. 2:14). A corrupt tree cannot bring forth good fruit. “How can ye, being evil, speak good things?... An evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth evil things” (Matt. 12:34–35). “But unto them that are defiled and unbelieving is nothing pure; but even their mind and conscience is defiled... being abominable, and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate” (Titus 1:15–16).

Thus far of the difference between the sinning of the regenerate and unregenerate, and how they that are born of God sin not, nor can sin. Whereof I have treated the more largely, that in this note, which is of no small consequence, the conscience of the regenerate may be satisfied the more fully.¹⁰

Thus far of the third evidence or sign of regeneration, namely, the not committing of sin. They that are born of God do not commit sin, nor can sin, in that sense and those respects as have been explained.

10. Roberts’s excursus on the sin against the Holy Spirit, which appears here in the original text, has been moved to the appendix.

Overcoming of Erroneous and Heretical Spirits and Their Seducements May Be a Fourth Sign or Evidence of Regeneration

“Believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world.... Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world” (1 John 4:1–4). In these four verses the apostle’s scope is to caution and encourage the faithful against all the seducements of erroneous and heretical spirits then abounding. To this end (1) he warns them of their danger, “many false prophets are gone out into the world” (v. 1). (2) He directs them how to prevent harm by them, negatively: “believe not every spirit” (v. 1); positively: “but try the spirits” (v. 1). (3) He gives them one eminent character of a true and false spirit, namely, the confessing or not confessing of Jesus Christ (vv. 2, 3). For as Calvin has well noted, “Christ is the scope at which faith aims, and also Christ is the rock against which all heretics dash,” either in respect of His person, offices, or ordinances. (4) He comforts and encourages them in their victory over these heretical seducers and false prophets. Though they have many sharp conflicts with them, yet they have conquered them, got the day: “ye...have overcome them” (v. 4).

This their victory is amplified (1) by the evidence that it gives them of their own regenerate condition: “Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them” (v. 4). As if he had said, This is a pregnant token or pledge to you, that you are born of God (John 1:13), that you are in a godly, gracious, regenerate condition; that you have overcome these heretics, these false prophets; you have not been corrupted by, nor carried away with, their errors. (2) By the true cause or ground of this their victory; it was not from their own skill or strength. In his own strength who can prevail against the

depths and subtleties of Satan and his instruments? But only from the power of God in them, for greater is He that is in you, than he that is in the world. Satan is in the world, in the wicked, especially in false prophets and heretical seducers (who are therefore called his ministers, 2 Cor. 11:15), blinding and deceiving them, instigating and instructing them to deceive others. But God, Christ, the Spirit, is in the people of God, anointing them to understand all things (1 John 2:27), discovering to them the depths of Satan and his agents (2 Cor. 2:11), and preserving them so in the truth, as they shall not be poisoned with the error of the wicked. Thus, God in them is stronger than Satan in the world against them. In God's strength, not their own, they overcome seducements to error and heresy. And this their victory discovers they are of God.

Objection: But overcoming of error, heresy, and seducements thereunto, seems not to be a sure sign of regeneration. For, (1) sometimes even God's own children are overcome with erroneous opinions. One whom God had received into favor, and should be held up, yet might erroneously hold himself bound in conscience to the legal difference of days and meats, under the gospel (Rom. 14:1-7). The apostles themselves erroneously deemed Christ should be a worldly king (Mark 10:37-41). And this error was not cured in them, though they were eyewitnesses of His passion and resurrection (Acts 1:6). And the church of Galatia erred grossly in the point of justification, mingling Moses with Christ, the works of the law with faith in justification (Galatians 3-5). Therefore, all who are born of God do not overcome such errors and heretical seducements. And (2) sometimes even carnal unregenerate persons may hold, confess, and maintain the truth. Doubtless Judas truly preached Christ. Indeed the devils themselves believe there is one God (James 2:19), indeed, confessed Christ to be the Son

of God (Mark 1:24). Therefore, others overcome error as well as God's people, and therefore overcoming erroneous heretical seducements is no sure note of regeneration.

Answer. For resolution in this material objection, consider briefly these following positions, namely,

A Gracious Regenerate Person May Sometimes Be Overtaken with an Error of Opinion in Lesser Matters of Faith

As there are more weighty matters of the law (Matt. 23:23) and less weighty, also there are more or less weighty matters of faith, fundamentals, and built upon the foundations. Proportionately there may be error against fundamentals "not holding the Head," etc. (Col. 2:19), and there may be errors only against lesser matters. These lesser errors may possibly befall godly, regenerate persons, as the error about legal days and meats in the times of the gospel, incident to a dear child of God (Rom. 14:1-6). And no wonder. For, (1) God has nowhere promised to the dearest of His servants a universal exemption from lesser or greater errors. (2) The best and most perfect of God's people in this life have remaining in themselves the foundation of error and heresy, many relics of darkness, weakness, instability, etc. "We know in part...we see through a glass, darkly" (1 Cor. 13:9-12). All men are liars (Rom. 3:4). (3) "Unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God," or oneness of judgment in all points, is not to be expected among all the members of Christ's mystical body, "till," as the apostle intimates, "we all come in the unity of the faith...unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ" (Eph. 4:13). And where there is not unity of faith and knowledge, there will be some diversity in opinions, and diverse opinions must inevitably some of them be erroneous. So that lesser errors (though they are part of the misery and reproach of the saints in this

life, and diseases which they ought to labor against) may attend upon God's own people.

Regenerate Persons May Perhaps For a Time Be Ensnared in Some Errors That Are More Gross and Dangerous, and That against Fundamentals of Faith

Christ and His offices are fundamentals (1 Cor. 3:11; Eph. 2:20), yet the apostles, until the sending of the Holy Ghost upon them, were in an error about Christ's kingly office, taking it to be temporal rather than spiritual (Mark 10:37–41 compared with Acts 1:6). Justification by faith alone, a fundamental (Rom. 3:28; Gal. 5:4–6), yet for a season the Galatians labored under that gross error of the necessity of legal worth with faith to justification. So that to be drawn into some gross errors for a season does not presently conclude a nullity of grace, as also may appear by the three former reasons. Though it must needs be confessed that it is a very sad, uncomfortable, and dangerous thing for any of God's people to fall into such gross errors. For, (1) hereby their minds that should be treasuries of truth, are "darkened" (Eph. 4:18), "corrupted" (2 Cor. 11:3), "bewitched" (Gal. 3:1). Now how grievous is it to have a man's mind corrupted! The leprosy in the head was the worst of all leprosies (Lev. 13:44). If the mind, the light be darkness, how great is that darkness (Matt. 6:23)? It was God's heavy plague upon the gentiles to be given up *eis noun adokiman* (to a mind void of judgment) (Rom. 1:28). (2) Hereby their souls, which Christ has bought with His precious blood, shall be endangered. For heresies are works of the flesh, destructive, damnable, and shutting out of God's kingdom, if not repented of (Gal. 5:19–21 with 2 Peter 2:1–2). (3) Hereby many weak ones are endangered to be carried with them into the same errors, out of that good opinion they have of their piety. Error spreads and frets like a gangrene (2 Tim. 2:17). And it is no small sin to be guilty of seducing God's servants,

actively, exemplarily, or but permissively (see Rev. 2:20–23).
 (4) Hereby in a word, the name of God will be blasphemed, and the way of truth evil-spoken of (2 Peter 2:1–2).

Though God's People May Fall into Lesser, Indeed, Sometimes into More Gross Errors for a Time, Yet There Is a Great Deal of Difference between the Elect and the Children of God, and Unregenerate, Carnal, or Hypocritical Persons in Reference to Erroneous Opinions, and the Embracing of Them

For,

1. The true children of God are not so facile and apt to be carried aside into error in opinion, especially against fundamentals, as carnal men and hypocrites are apt to be. They are not so unstable, fickle, wavering, mutable, unsettled in matters of faith and religion as carnal men are; not so easily tainted and “carried about with every wind of doctrine” (Eph. 4:14). “There shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect” (Matt. 24:24). That comfortable parenthesis “if it were possible” intimates a possibility of deceiving others, yet an impossibility of deceiving the elect. It is the property of Christ’s sheep to follow Christ, “for they know his voice. And a stranger,” namely, one who brings strange and false doctrine, “will they not follow, but will flee from him: for they know not the voice of strangers” (John 10:4–5). It is observable, that when the Holy Ghost tells us that “all that dwell upon the earth shall worship” the beast, yet the elect are exempted. “All...shall worship him, whose names are not written in the book of life of the Lamb slain” (Rev. 13:8). And elsewhere John testifies clearly, “They went out from us,” namely, by embracing anti-Christian doctrines (v. 18), “but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest

that they were not all of us” (1 John 2:19). And Paul, testifying to the Corinthians that “there must be” not only divisions, but “also heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you” (1 Cor. 11:19), implies notably that even in times and places wherein heresies abound, yet God’s approved ones will withstand and reject heresies, when others will embrace them. And so, the approved, of sound judgments, shall be manifested among all the rest.

Nor need this seem strange that God’s elect children are not so apt to be carried away with every wind of error, as carnal hypocritical persons, for they are better ballasted than these are; they have many protections and preservations from error, which carnal men have not. As, (1) God’s election is their sure foundation to keep them from dashing upon the rocks of error on which others split themselves. Compare and consider well these two places: Matthew 24:24 and 2 Timothy 2:17–19. (2) God’s power through faith keeps them unto salvation (1 Peter 1:5), not their own, nor any mere created power, but God’s power keeps them as in garrison (as the Greek imports), and this through faith apprehending and applying that divine power. Faith embarks the soul in the arms of God omnipotent, and so makes weakness strong. And as God’s power through faith keeps them from other enemies and impediments to salvation, so from pernicious and damnable heresies. (3) The spiritual anointing of the Holy Ghost given them teaches them all things (1 John 2:27). The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. So that through the Spirit they judge all things and have the mind of Christ (1 Cor. 2:15–16). So that hereby they are enabled to discern truth, to detect and avoid errors in judgment as well as in practice, which carnal men cannot do, wanting this anointing and spiritual discerning. (4) Finally, the love of truth in God’s people is much; they are the children of truth (1 John 3:19). They “can do nothing against the truth, but

for the truth" (2 Cor. 13:8). Their "loins girt about with truth" (Eph. 6:14), and therefore they are hereby notably fenced against error. Whereas carnal and hypocritical men are either (1) "men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth" (1 Tim. 6:5), resisting the truth (2 Tim. 3:8), turning "away their ears from the truth" (2 Tim. 4:4); or (2) they "hold the truth in unrighteousness" (Rom. 1:18); or (3) they are "never able to come to the knowledge of the truth" (2 Tim. 3:7); or (4) they love not the truth (2 Thess. 2:9–10). And no wonder such persons are unstable, wavering, and apt to embrace lies and fables.

2. The true children of God do not so fully close with errors in opinion, but rather they are surprised and overtaken with them through infirmity (Rom. 14:1). The remains of darkness in their mind sometimes dazzling and prevailing against the principle of light. So that as in practice they sin *non voluntate plena, sed semi-plena*, i.e., not with a whole, but with a half-will. So in judgment they err not with a whole, but with a half-mind, the light of the mind being against the error which the prevalent darkness entertains. But carnal persons, whose whole minds are "darkness" (Eph. 5:8) and "enmity against God" (Rom. 8:7), having no spark of sanctified illumination in them at all, must needs embrace error with more full compli-ance and approbation.

3. The true children of God do not tenaciously and obstinately persist in errors, especially not in fundamental errors. They may err through invincible frailty, but they will not willfully and pertinaciously persevere in their error, as the property of heretical dispositions. Such have the amounting in them to teach them all things, which consequently will in due time convince and recover them out of error (1 John 2:27). A gracious heart is very ingenuous; convince him but clearly of

his error, he is ready to acknowledge it and reform it. Solomon not only miscarried in his practice but seems also to have erred grossly in his judgment, thinking that happiness, satisfaction, or contentment was to be found in the empty bubble of the creature. But when his own large experience confutes his opinion, how fitly does he publish his recantation to all ages in Ecclesiastes? David, beholding the prosperity of the wicked, while the rod was tied to his own back—"all the day long have I been plagued, and chastened every morning" (Ps. 73:14)—began to harbor an erroneous opinion of his own and their state: "Verily I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocency" (v. 13). Thus, he was ready even to condemn the generation of God's children (v. 15). But when he came into God's sanctuary and had his eyes there opened, how ingenuously does he fool himself, indeed, beast himself¹¹ for it? "So foolish was I, and ignorant: I was as a beast before thee" (Ps. 73:22). Augustine deserved highly of the church of God for many excellent books which he wrote, but especially for his two books of *Retractions* and his thirteen books of *Confessions*. For in his *Confessions* he laments the errors of his practice, which he had acted, so in his *Retractions* he condemns the errors of his judgment, which he had written. In both discovering a gracious self-denying spirit, far from obstinacy in error. That truth may be honored, he treads his own honor in the dust, and says, "None but an imprudent man will blame me for blaming mine own errors; for if I ought to have said them, I ought not have blamed them. But he that could not at first be wise, should yet afterwards be modest, that not being able to say only things not to be repented of, may at least repent of what he knows ought not to have been said." Indeed, afterwards he cautions his reader not to imitate

11. *fool himself...beast himself*: treat himself as a fool...as a beast.

him in erring, but in reclaiming his error. But contrarywise, a graceless heart is wont to be obstinate in error, will not yield, though oft admonished, though self-condemned (Titus 3:10–11). As Augustine noted in his time, “a heretical spirit is an incurable spirit,” so may we observe in all ages, and especially in this of our own, touching carnal men becoming heretical. How impenitently, stubbornly, hopelessly do they persist in their errors and heresies? How few, if any, reclaimed? This is a wicked disposition. “If they feared God,” says Augustine, “they would say, ‘To err is human, but through animosity to persist in error is diabolical. It were best if we never erred. It were next to that that we amended our error.’”

Though Carnal Men, Indeed, Perhaps Devils Themselves, May (Contrary to Some Errors) Hold and Confess Some Truths, Yet They Neither Oppose Errors, Nor Hold and Confess Truth, as Those Do That Are the Children of God

And, therefore, this hinders not, but that the overcoming of erroneous heretical spirits is a sign or evidence of such as are born of God. For,

1. Carnal men oppose not error, embrace not truth, from any supernatural illumination or spirit of discerning, but merely from carnal light, natural or acquired. For all that is in and from carnal men is, as themselves, merely carnal. They are “in the flesh” (Rom. 8:8); they are nothing but flesh. “That which is born of the flesh is flesh” (John 3:6). They are very “darkness” (Eph. 5:8). Hence therefore, “the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned” (1 Cor. 2:14). But the children of God oppose error and heresy, and embrace the contrary truths, from principles supernatural, namely, from the Spirit of God revealing the

things of God unto them (1 Cor. 2:10–16) and enabling them to understand them so revealed (1 John 2:27).

2. Carnal men hold not, confess not the truth from sincere love to it, for the “carnal mind is enmity against God” (Rom. 8:7), and where the mind itself is enmity against God, can there be in the heart any sincere love to God’s truth? Of carnal heathens it is said, “They did not like to retain God in their knowledge” (Rom. 1:28). And of carnal gospelers it is said, “Because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion” (2 Thess. 2:10–11). But the children of God sincerely embrace and profess the truth in love; they are *alētheuontes en agapēi*, i.e., “truthing it in love” (Eph. 4:15). Indeed, they so love the truth, that they have not loved their liberties and lives that they might defend and maintain it (Rev. 2:13). This difference Augustine notably observed: “Behold you have heard in the gospel what Peter said, ‘Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.’ Read and you shall find the devils said, ‘We know Thee who Thou art, the Son of God.’ But Peter is commended, the devils curbed; the same voice, divers deeds. Where are these two confessions differenced? Love is commended, fear is condemned. For the devils said not this out of love, ‘Thou art the Son of God.’ They said it in fear, not in love.” And the same author elsewhere says, “This said Peter, this the devils also; the same words, but not the same mind. But whence was it? Because Peter spoke this with love; for the faith of a Christian is with love. But the devils’ faith is without love. How without love? Peter said this that he might embrace Christ. The devils said it that Christ might depart from them,” etc.

3. Carnal men, though they confess God’s truth in words, yet they deny it in deeds, living contrary to the Lord and His truth

(Titus 1:15–16). But the children of God not only believe the truth (2 Thess. 2:13), and profess or confess the truth, but they also act for the truth (2 Cor. 13:8), and walk in the truth (2 John 4; 3 John 3–4).

Overcoming the World by Faith May Be a Fifth Sign or Evidence of Regeneration

“Whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith. Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?” (1 John 5:4–5). Here we have two adversaries, the victory, and the means of victory.

1. Two adversaries: The regenerate, them that are born of God, on one part, who are chiefly defensive, as the whole armor of God is chiefly defensive (Eph. 6:14–19). And the world, on the other part, which is principally offensive (John 15:18–20). And what is this world? (1) Partly the “men of the world, which have their portion in this life” (Ps. 17:14). These lie in wickedness (1 John 5:19); these hate the saints because they are not of the world but chosen out of the world by Christ (John 15:19). Understand then wicked worldlings, with all their persecutions of the righteous. (2) Partly the world’s lusts, “the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life” (1 John 2:16). The “lust of the flesh,” i.e., not only carnal corruptions, but all the pleasures, delights, and contentment that the flesh or body desires. The “lust of the eyes,” i.e., not only libidinous lustful looks, but also all that vanity of the eye about the vain pomp, beauty, honors, glory, riches, and glittering splendor of the world. And “pride of life,” i.e., all that ambition, ostentation, bragging, self-admiring, contempt of others, carnal confidence arising from confluence or worldly enjoyments. These now are the two adversaries, namely, the regenerate and the world: the

world with all its wicked and their oppositions, with all its lusts and their ensnaring insinuations.

2. The victory: not on the world's side, but on the regenerate's side. "Whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world."

3. The means of this victory: faith in Christ the Son of God. All this is wonderful in our eyes. (1) What inequality in the adversaries? The whole world with all its vassals, with all its furies and persecutions, with all its lusts, with all its snares of honors, riches, pleasures, etc., and all this against the regenerate. Alas, how few, how contemptible, how feeble are they! A "little flock" (Luke 12:32); "worm Jacob" (Isa. 41:14). (2) What imbecility of the means of the saints' safety against the world. Faith? Faith, a self-emptying grace, a poor beggarly hand, only rich or strong in receiving from another, and perhaps a weak, palsy, trembling hand. But the battle is not to the strong. Remember David and Goliath. How weak and naked David; how strong, how harnessed was Goliath? (3) What successful prevalence, notwithstanding, of the regenerate against the world? Not only their deliverance from, but defense against the world; not only defense against, but victory over the world. Not only victory, but universal victory: "whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world." Happy saints! Puissant faith! Triumphant victory! Do you overcome the world by faith in Christ? Then you, doubtless, are born of God.

Case: But how may I know whether I overcome the world by faith or no?

Resolution: Hereby you may discover whether you conquer the world by faith or no, namely, (1) Do you have true faith in Christ Jesus? (2) Do you act this faith in Christ victoriously against the world?

Do You Have True Faith in Christ?

Victory over the world is an act of faith in Christ. Faith cannot thus act in you until first faith be in you. You must first have the faith in Christ before you can use it. Make it clear, therefore, in the first place, whether you have the habit of true faith in Jesus Christ the Son of God.

How shall I know that?

Answer: Look back to those evidences of true faith in Christ (evidence 2 above).

Do You Now Act This True Faith Victoriously against the World?

Everyone who is born of God has so much skill and dexterity in the wielding of faith, as in some measure more or less to overcome the world. All true believers are conquerors, though not equal conquerors of the world. Now they act their faith against the world victoriously, in two respects especially, namely, (1) against the smiles of the world and (2) against the frowns of the world. The world's frowns are dangerous; but the world's smiles are doubly dangerous. In those, the world professes itself an enemy. In these, pretends itself to be a friend. By those, we are alarmed to the battle; by these, we are enchanted into security, that we may be surprised. To conquer the world's frowns is a mighty victory, but to conquer its smiles is a double victory. True faith acts and prevails victoriously against both.

1. True faith acts vigorously and victoriously against the smiles of the world. The world fights against us with its smiles, fawning, flatteries, etc., of temporal prosperity. Siren-like it sings to us and sinks us. Judas-like it kisses us and betrays us. Joab-like it kisses us and smites us under the fifth rib. The honors, high rooms, pomp, splendor, wealth, pleasures, delights, and all the glory of this world are but sweet poisons that delight and destroy us, at least endanger us. "Remember Lot's wife" (Luke

17:32), the young man (Matt. 19:16–23), Demas (2 Tim. 4:10), Judas (Matt. 26:14–16); indeed, Solomon himself had almost forfeited of these sweet baits, and like the bee was almost drowned in his own honey.

Now faith victoriously acts against and prevails over all these subtle smiles, enchantments, and insinuations of the world, divers ways.

(1) By valuing all the prosperity, pomp, and splendor of the world meanly and abjectly in comparison of Christ, and of spirituals. The world prevails upon us when we set too high an estimate or account of sublunaries. We prevail over the world when we have mean, low, debasing thoughts of it (as it indeed deserves). Thus by faith Paul conquered the world, counting not only his Pharisical perfections and accomplishments, but absolutely “all things” (namely, all carnal and worldly excellencies whatsoever) *zēmian kai skybala*, i.e., “loss and dung,” for the winning of Jesus Christ (Phil. 3:8). Thus Moses, though a great courtier in Pharaoh’s house, indeed, the reputed son of Pharaoh’s daughter (a great worldly honor), by faith overcame the world. For “by faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter; choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt” (Heb. 11:24–26). What? Refuse to be called the son of a princess? Prefer the saints’ affliction before sin’s pleasures? And esteem Christ’s reproaches riches, great riches, indeed, greater riches than Egypt’s treasures? How would he have valued Christ’s renown, Christ’s righteousness, Christ’s graces, Christ’s comforts, Christ’s glory, that can thus esteem Christ’s reproaches? Here was a champion indeed, who could thus trample the world’s honors, riches, pleasures, all under his feet. When will the courtiers of this world imitate Moses?

Excellently said Galeacius, the noble Marquess of Vico, being tempted with gold to forsake Christ, and return to popery: "Their money perishes with them that think all the gold in the world worth one day's society with Jesus Christ."

(2) By holding, possessing, and using the world and the things of the world self-denyingly. Thus Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, by faith overcame the world, while they "sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles" (Heb. 11:9). They by faith dwelt in their own land (it was their own by promise), as if it had been a stranger's land. Faith weans and loosens the heart from the world. Makes them "that have wives be as though they had none," as the apostle exhorts, "and they that rejoice, as though they rejoiced not; and they that buy, as though they possessed not; and they that use this world, as not abusing it" (1 Cor. 7:29–31). And this was that gracious disposition of Paul whereby he conquered the world, namely, by Christ crucified. The world was crucified to him, and he crucified to the world (Gal. 6:14), i.e., Paul and the world had no more pleasure, comfort, contentment, or satisfaction in one another than two crucified persons can have in one another. When a man is crucified and dead, all his affections to the world or things of the world are dead with him; all the delights, treasures, advancements of the world are dead to him. He is not moved or troubled who have them, etc. This was Paul's self-denying victory over the world.

(3) By parting with any, even the dearest worldly treasures or comforts readily for God, and at His command or appointment. Then a man overcomes the world, when he can at God's pleasure lay it aside, actually shake it off, and that without pain or difficulty. That is a sign he is not enthralled to the world, does not over-prize it, over-love it. Such a man has the world, not for his master, but his servant. Thus Abraham by faith overcame the world, in parting with his native country (sweet

to all), and that cheerfully. “By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went” (Heb. 11:8). A great victory, but behold a greater. Abraham readily can sacrifice his Isaac, his chief delight in the world. “By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac: and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, of whom it was said, That in Isaac shall thy seed be called” (Heb. 11:17–18). Behold and consider this victorious act of faith. In this text are these seven amplifications: (1) His Isaac, i.e., in Hebrew, his “laughter”; his joy, his delight. (2) His son, not his sheep, or oxen, or servant, but his son. (3) His begotten son, not an adopted son. (4) His only begotten son, not one son among many, but his only son by Sarah the freewoman, by whom he had no more. (5) This the son of the promise in whom his seed should be called, and all the nations of the earth be blessed. (6) This son sacrificed (intentionally, though not actually) as a burnt offering. (7) And all this by Abraham his own father. O glorious faith that can make such a man as Abraham so part with, as to sacrifice, such a treasure as Isaac! Can you thus part with, thus conquer the world as Abraham? Excellently to this purpose said George Carpenter of Emering, Martyr in Bavaria, “My wife and my children are so dearly beloved unto me that they cannot be bought from me for all the riches and possessions of the Duke of Bavaria, but for the love of my Lord God I will willingly forsake them.”

(4) Finally, by resting on God alone, as the only rock and foundation of our true joy and comfort, both while the world is with us, and when the world shall leave us. (1) While the world is with us, we conquer it by faith, if we fetch our comforts from a higher and richer spring than the world, namely, God. David, in the midst of his royal enjoyments, said, “Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I

desire beside thee. My flesh and my heart faileth: but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever" (Ps. 73:25–26). And elsewhere, "There be many that say, Who will shew us any good? LORD, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us. Thou hast put gladness in my heart, more than in the time that their corn and their wine increased" (Ps. 4:6–7). (2) When the world shall leave us, yet our joy and comforts leave us not, because our God forsakes us not. Thus, we overcome the world, when though the world be down, our hearts are up. As Habakkuk: "Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat: the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls: yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will joy in the God of my salvation" (Hab. 3:17–18).

Thus faith overcomes the world's smiling and fawning.

2. True faith vigorously and victoriously acts against the frowns of the world. The world frowns against the regenerate in all its common tribulations, or special persecutions, either by hating, reproaching, spoiling, imprisoning, tormenting, or murdering them. Thus it frowned upon righteous Abel (Gen. 4:8–10), upon Isaac (Gal. 4:29), upon Israel (Ex. 1 and 2), upon Joseph (Ps. 105:17–18), upon Job (Job 1), upon David (Ps. 73:14), upon all the prophets (Acts 7:52), upon all the apostles (1 Cor. 4:9), upon all who will live godly in Christ Jesus (2 Tim. 3:12), indeed, upon Jesus Christ himself (Isa. 53; Phil. 2:7–8; Heb. 12:2–3). Yet regenerate persons by faith in Christ overcome the world in all its frowns and storms, and this many ways, namely,

(1) By encouraging them against base carnal fears. Fears oftentimes more annoy the saints than feelings of distresses. Faith steals the gracious heart against these servile fears and makes it exceedingly magnanimous. As in Moses's parents: "By

faith Moses, when he was born, was hid three months of his parents, because they saw he was a proper child; and they were not afraid of the king's commandment" (Heb. 11:23). In Moses himself: "By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king: for he endured, as seeing him who is invisible" (Heb. 11:27). And also in those valiant champions "who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens" (Heb. 11:33-34). "We are not only," said Cyprian, "not afraid of the enemies of the truth, but we provoke them."

(2) By enabling to undergo varieties of cruel trials and torments, which without faith would be to flesh and blood most terrible and intolerable. "And others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment: they were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented; (of whom the world was not worthy:) they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth. And these all, having obtained a good report through faith" (Heb. 11:36-39).

Cyprian has strange expressions of the martyrs' victorious faith in his days:

The multitude present beheld with admiration the heavenly combat, the combat of God, the spiritual conflict, the war of Christ; His servants standing with a free voice, incorrupt mind, divine strength, armed not with secular weapons, but with weapons of faith. The tormented stood, stronger than the tormentors. The beaten and butchered members overcame the hands that did beat and butcher them. Cruel stripes oft repeated, long continued, could not overcome their impregnable faith; no, not though their

bowels were digged out, and not so much the members as the wounds of the servants of God were tormented. Their blood gushed out, which even quenched the burning of persecution, indeed, extinguished the flames and fire of hell with a glorious stream.

(3) By extenuating and assuaging the extremity of afflictions and persecutions. Faith so sustains and refreshes the inwards of the soul under distresses that they are rather seeming, than real distresses, shadows rather than substances. As it were poverty, as it were imprisonment, etc., rather than poverty, imprisonment indeed. As in the apostles: "We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken, cast down, but not destroyed" (2 Cor. 4:8–9). And elsewhere more emphatically: "As unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and, behold, we live; as chastened, and not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things" (2 Cor. 6:9–10). Whereas contrariwise through unbelief men are as rich, yet really poor, as in liberty, and yet in greatest bondage; as rejoicing, and yet in midst of mirth the heart is heavy, etc. Unbelief turns the rod into a serpent; faith turns the serpent into a rod.

(4) By persuading the hearts of the faithful that it is their great privilege, honor, and happiness to suffer for Christ and righteousness' sake, according to those intimations of Scripture. "For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake" (Phil. 1:29). "Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake," etc. (Matt. 5:10–12). "But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings.... If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye," etc. (1 Peter 4:13–14). Upon this consideration when the apostles were beaten by the council for preaching Christ, "they departed from the presence of

the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name” (Acts 5:41). And what but faith can read privilege, happiness, and matter of joy in sufferings for Christ? How happy did Cyprian judge their church, that it was made illustrious in his time with the glorious blood of martyrs! “It was,” he says, “formerly white with the brethren’s works, but now it is purple with the martyrs’ blood. Among its flowers are wanting neither lilies nor roses. Let all now strive for the ample dignity of this double honor, that they may receive either white crowns for well-doing, or purple crowns for well-suffering.”

(5) By suggesting to the soul the spiritual benefit of distresses. Faith makes the heart not only overcome them, but even glory in them. “Therefore being justified by faith...we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; and patience, experience; and experience, hope: and hope maketh not ashamed,” etc. (Rom. 5:1–5). “For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory” (2 Cor. 4:16–17). Faith says, Let me be reproached, poor, imprisoned, or any way afflicted; so I may be weaned from the world, purged from sin, increased in grace, or any way spiritually advantaged. And this is very victorious. Ignatius said, “I am God’s wheat; let me be ground by the teeth of wild beasts, that I may be found the pure bread of God.”

(6) By acting love invincibly. Faith acts or works by love (Gal. 5:6). And love truly and lively acted toward Christ by faith proves an arm invincible, flame unquenchable. You may kill the lover of Christ, but cannot kill the love of Christ. “Set me as a seal upon thine heart, as a seal upon thine arm,” says the church to Christ, “for love is strong as death; jealousy is cruel as the grave: the coals thereof are coals of fire, which hath a most vehement flame. Many waters cannot quench love, neither

can the floods drown it" (Song 8:6–7). No waters of affliction, no floods of persecution can drown it; like oil it swims above the top of deepest waters. Such "loved not their lives unto the death" (Rev. 12:11). Here's the victory of the saints.

(7) By eying the invisible and invincible God. "The world's punishment," said Cyprian, "cannot more cast down than God's protection lift up." Faith meets with many difficulties and rubs in the way to heaven. But fixing upon the omnipotent God and casting the soul in greatest straits and plunges with a sweet recumbency upon the power of God, overcomes them and triumphs over them all. Thus Moses by faith overcame the wrath of Pharaoh, "for he endured, as seeing him who is invisible" (Heb. 11:27). Thus the three renowned Jews by faith overcame the fury, threats, and fiery furnace of King Nebuchadnezzar, heated seven times hotter than usual. How victoriously do they express themselves! "O Nebuchadnezzar, we are not careful to answer thee in this matter. If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of thine hand, O king. But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up" (Dan. 3:16–18).

(8) By improving Christ's strength and assistance. All Samson's strength lay in his head. So all a Christian's strength is in his head, Christ. Christ is so potent and victorious that He has already overcome the world (John 16:33). He has overcome the world in His own person, that He might overcome it in His members. Now faith makes out to Christ, engages His strength, as the vine makes itself strong by embracing the elm, the ivy by clasping the oak. Christ's strength being engaged, what cannot a Christian do or endure? He can in every state be content. Contentment is a mighty victory over the world. Let the world do its worst, nothing can come amiss to a contented man. "I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: every

where and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me” (Phil. 4:12–13). And elsewhere Paul hangs out the flag of defiance against all the terrors of the world. “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us?” (Rom. 8:35–37). When in Christ’s might, Christians go out against the world, they go but to encounter with a conquered adversary; they go not so much to fight as to triumph and take the spoil.

(9) Finally, faith in the regenerate wonderfully conquers the frowns of the world, by fixing a steady eye upon that eternal joy set before them, upon that great recompense of reward, reckoning “that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us” (Rom. 8:18). The heaviest affliction is but light, the longest affliction here is but for a moment. And what’s that to glory, to the weight of glory, to the eternal weight of glory, to the far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory (2 Cor. 4:17)?

Faith, therefore, having respect to the recompense of reward, behaves itself exceeding victoriously against all the tribulations of the world. For,

1. Hence, faith under deepest sorrows keeps up the heart and spirit of God’s children from fainting (2 Cor. 4:16–18).
2. Hence, faith enables to undergo, not ordinary troubles, but extraordinary tortures, and yet not to accept deliverance (Heb. 11:35).

3. Hence, faith instructs them to judge Christ's reproaches greater riches than any earthly treasures, and the afflictions of Christians far sweeter than the pleasures of sin, which can but be for a season (Heb. 11:25). Whereupon notably Ignatius: "The confines of the world and kingdoms of the earth delight not me at all. It is better for me to die for Jesus Christ than to reign over the ends of the earth.... For Jesus is the life of believers. Be not unwilling to have me die. It is a death to live without Christ," etc. Upon like ground blessed Cyprian, writing to certain valiant and faithful witnesses of Christ that had endured great variety of sufferings, thus comforts them against their bonds, fetters, etc.: "These are not bonds but ornaments. They tie not Christians' feet to infamy, but fit them for the crown. O feet happily bound, which not the smith, but the Lord shall unbind! O feet happily bound, which are directed by a saving journey to paradise! O feet bound for present in this world, that they may be at liberty with the Lord forevermore!... All this deformity ugly and detestable to the gentiles, with what splendor shall it be recompensed! This short and secular pain, how shall it be changed for the reward of bright eternal honor!"

4. Hence faith prevails with them to rejoice in their sufferings, and take with joy the spoiling of their goods, knowing in themselves that they have in heaven a better and more enduring substance (Heb. 10:34). Hence that cruel Bishop Bonner (observing how comfortably the martyrs suffered), oft-times speaking to John Willes, he would say, "They call me Bloody Bonner. A vengeance on you all. I would fain be rid of you, but you have a delight in burning. But if I might have my will, I would sew your mouths, and put you in sacks, and drown you."

5. Hence, in a word, faith so elevates their spirits above their troubles, that having "hope of the glory of God" they even

glory in tribulation (Rom. 5:2, 3). Hence Alice Driver, martyr, having at the stake the iron chain put about her neck, said, "Oh here is a goodly neckerchief, blessed be God for it." Hence Dr. Taylor, martyr, drawing toward the place of execution, leapt as men do in dancing, whereupon being asked by the sheriff how he did now, he answered, "Well, God be praised, good Mr. Sheriff. Never better; for now I know I am almost at home. I lack not past two stiles to go over, and I am even at my Father's house." Hence Cicely Ormes, martyr, when she was brought to the stake, laid her hand on it, and said, "Welcome the cross of Christ." Then after she had touched it with her hand, she came and kissed it, and said, "Welcome the sweet cross of Christ"; and when the fire was kindled to her, she said, "My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior." Hence Mr. John Bradford at the stake took up a faggot and kissed it, and turning his head to the young man that suffered with him, said, "Be of good comfort, brother, for we shall have a merry supper with the Lord this night." And embracing the reeds said, "Straight is the way, and narrow is the gate that leadeth to eternal salvation, and few there be that find it." Hence also that blessed Ignatius, for gaining Christ in glory, which is the highest reward, thus expresses himself to the Romans: "Oh that I were with the wild beasts prepared for me, which I wish may be a compendium to me. And I would allure them speedily to eat me up (and not as with others be terrified, so as not to touch them), and if they would not, I would provoke them. Pardon me, I know what is expedient for me. I now begin to be a disciple. I am solicitous for neither visibles nor invisibles so I may obtain Jesus Christ. Let fire, cross, and the concourse of wild beasts, the cutting, separating, and breaking of my bones, the dissipation of my members, the destruction of my whole body, and the torments of the devil come upon me, only that I may obtain Jesus Christ."

Thus they who are born of God overcome the world, fawning and frowning, and their victory is faith in Jesus Christ. Christian, can you thus conquer the world? Can you deny the world? Though perhaps you cannot dispute for Christ, yet can you die for Christ?

Doing, or Practicing of Righteousness, May Be a Sixth Evidence of Regeneration

“If ye know that he is righteous, ye know that every one that doeth righteousness is born of him” (1 John 2:29). And in another chapter, “In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God” (1 John 3:10). In these two places consider: (1) The evidence or sign of regeneration laid down. Positively: he that “doth righteousness” is born of God. Negatively: he that “doth not righteousness” is not of God. (2) The amplification of this evidence: First, by the universality of it: “every one that doth righteousness”; “whosoever doth not righteousness.” Second, by the perspicuity of it: “in this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil.” Third, by the ground of it: God regenerating “is righteous,” therefore, they who are regenerated of God must needs be righteous—the child like the father. Newly created according to His image, in righteousness, etc. (Eph. 4:24). Now, in this 1 John 3:10 compared with verse 9. “Righteousness,” as Calvin well observes, “is opposed to sin; and doing or practicing of righteousness, to committing of sin. And therefore in this place, to do righteousness is nothing else but from the heart to fear God, and (so far as human frailty will permit) to walk in His precepts,” not in a legal exactness, which man cannot reach unto, but in an evangelical uprightness, which God will accept.

So that everyone who leads a truly godly and righteous life is born of God, he who lives contrary is the child of the devil.

For, (1) God's children are predestinate to be conformed to the image of Christ (Rom. 8:29–30), being elect through sanctification of the Spirit to obedience (1 Peter 1:2). (2) God's children are redeemed from their vain conversation by the precious blood of Christ, that they might glorify God both in their body and spirit, which are God's (1 Peter 1:18–19; 1 Cor. 6:19–20; Luke 1:74–75). (3) They are called to holiness (1 Thess. 4:7; 2 Tim. 1:9) and created in Christ Jesus unto good works (Eph. 2:10). (4) Such as are men's persons, good or bad, such will be their works and conversations. Like tree, like fruit. Carnal men will walk carnal; spiritual, spiritually (Matt. 7:16–20; 12:33–35; Rom. 8:1–5). (5) All pretenses of faith, without good works, are vain; and such faith, dead (James 2:20, 26). All such men's religion is but abominable hypocrisy (Titus 1:16).

But how may I know that I truly practice righteousness, as becomes one who is born of God?

Answer. They act or practice righteousness truly who walk in paths of piety and righteousness for (1) matter, (2) ground, (3) form, and (4) end, as Scripture requires of them.

Who Act or Practice Things for Substance and Matter Righteous

Possibly the matter may be sometimes good, when the manner and circumstances are naught, but nothing can be good if the matter be naught. Matters practiced are in their own nature either (1) good, as things prescribed (Exodus 20); (2) evil, as things prohibited (Exodus 20); (3) indifferent, as things left at liberty (Rom. 14:2–3). For matter, they practice righteousness who practice things good or indifferent. But they practice unrighteousness who practice things evil. "Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do" (John 8:44).

Who Do That Which Is Materially Righteous from a Right Ground and Principle

Such as are men's principles within, such are their practices without (Matt. 12:33–34). Jehu did for matter that which God required, but not from a right ground (2 Kings 10:30–31). The right ground and principle from which all holy and righteous acts should flow is threefold, namely, (1) a pure heart, (2) a good conscience, and (3) faith unfeigned (1 Tim. 1:5).

1. A pure heart, namely, not absolutely and completely purified from all sin, which in this life is impossible (1 John 1:8). Thus, “who can say, I have made my heart clean?” (Prov. 20:9). But comparatively and respectively purified. So purified as no carnal man's heart in the world is purified. (1) Purified by the blood of Christ sprinkled upon the heart by way of justification (Zech. 13:1; Ps. 51:7; Acts 15:9). (2) Purified by the Spirit of Christ; His gracious habits, as principles of purity, being infused. This is by way of sanctification (1 Cor. 6:11). So faith is a principle of purity (Acts 15:9). He that has such a pure heart mingles not with sin, but works it out and separates from it, as honey works out the wax, wine the lees, metal in the furnace the dross. Such regard not iniquity in their heart (Ps. 66:18). Here's a right ground of righteous practices. Do you have such a pure heart?

2. A good conscience, namely, not metaphysically or naturally good (so every man's conscience is good), but spiritually and supernaturally good. Conscience is supernaturally good (1) when it is by Christ's blood purged “from dead works to serve the living God” (Heb. 9:14); (2) when it is habitually exercised to inoffensiveness to God and man (Acts 24:16 compared with 23:1); (3) when conscience endeavors to be completely, universally good—“in all good conscience” (Acts 23:1); (4) when conscience approves itself good even in the

sight of God (Acts 23:1; 1 Peter 3:21); (5) when upon all this, conscience gives a comfortable testimony of the heart's simplicity and godly sincerity, able to support under greatest distresses and afflictions (2 Cor. 1:8–12). Do you act now from such a good conscience?

3. Faith unfeigned, without hypocrisy. "Without faith it is impossible to please him" (Heb. 11:6). Faith washes all our duties and acts of obedience in the blood of the Lamb, and so renders them acceptable to God (1 Peter 2:5). Faith is then unfeigned (1) when it has the true nature of faith in it, namely, assenting to God's truths revealed (1 John 5:10–11) and applying particularly those truths assented to (John 1:11–12; Gal. 2:20); (2) when it produces effects of a living faith, namely, good works, without which fruits, whatsoever faith is pretended, it is but feigned faith, a dead faith (James 2:20, 26). Do you have such a faith from where all your righteous actions spring?

Who for Form and Manner Do Righteousness in Such Sort as God Requires

Not only doing *bona*, "good things," but doing them *bene*, "well." "God loves," as some note, "to be served with adverbs rather than with nouns or verbs." Now, religious and righteous acts are then well performed when they are done,

1. Spiritually and heartily, with heart and spirit, not with body only. This God requires (Prov. 23:26; John 4:24; 1 Cor. 6:20). This the godly perform (Rom. 1:9; Ps. 25:1; Phil. 3:20). The carnal, mere corporal service God condemns (Ezek. 33:31–32; Matt. 15:7–8).

2. Sincerely and uprightly, as in the sight of God, and approving our hearts to Him (Gen. 17:1), as David (Ps. 18:22; 66:18), Paul (2 Cor. 2:17), Peter (John 21:15–17).

3. Obediently, because God commands the duty; therefore, in conscience¹² and love to the command obedience is performed, as in Noah (Heb. 11:7), Abraham (Heb. 11:8, 17), David (Ps. 40:8; 119:143), and Paul (Rom. 7:22).

4. Universally, fully, without reservations and exceptions. Hypocrites may do many things, as Jehu (2 Kings 10:30–31), Herod (Mark 6:20). But the gracious spirit has respect to all things required, as in David (Ps. 119:6), Caleb (Num. 14:24), Zechariah and Elizabeth (Luke 1:6).

5. Constantly. Perseverance in well-doing crowns well-doing. True zeal, like the fire in the sanctuary, never goes out (Ps. 1:2–3; 92:13–14; 119:20). Hypocrisy does not last; like paint or varnish it will wash off (Job 27:10; Matt. 13:20–21; 1 John 2:19).

Do you practice righteousness now spiritually, sincerely, obediently, universally, constantly?

Finally, Who Practice Righteousness for Right Ends

Namely, God's glory primarily (1 Cor. 10:31), their own and others' spiritual or eternal good secondarily (Matt. 5:16; 1 Peter 4:2–4; Rom. 2:7). Low base ends spoil the highest undertakings, as in Jehu (2 Kings 10), Pharisees (Matt. 6:2, 5, 16), King Saul (1 Sam. 15:30).

True Love of the Brethren May Be a Seventh Sign or Evidence of Our Regeneration

“In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother” (1 John 3:10). Again he says, “Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and

12. *conscience*: conscientious observance; reverence.

every one that loveth is born of God” (1 John 4:7). And further he adds, “We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death” (1 John 3:14).

This evidence of brotherly love will be more judiciously and comfortably improved if we consider (1) the general clearness of it, (2) what brethren are here intended, (3) some under-notes or discoveries of this brotherly love.

The General Clearness of This Evidence

Experience tells us that usually the weakest and most timorous Christians, who can find small or no comfort in other evidences of their gracious state, yet can discern some glimmerings here in the love of the brethren. And this one discovery has supported many, because they evidently and experimentally feel in their own hearts that they cordially love the brethren. “He that loves his brother,” said Augustine, “better knows his love with which he loves, than his brother whom he loves.”

What “Brethren” Are Here Intended?

Answer. There are (1) brethren by nation (Acts 7:23, 25; Rom. 9:3); (2) brethren by nature, descended of the same natural parents or parent (Matt. 1:2); (3) brethren by office (2 Peter 3:15; 2 Cor. 1:1; Col. 1:1; Philemon 1); (4) brethren by grace and supernatural regeneration (Philemon 16). Here understand “brethren” in the last sense, for brethren by grace; (1) partly, inasmuch as this same apostle speaking of this love of these brethren elsewhere calls them “the children of God” (1 John 5:2) and “begotten of him” (1 John 5:1); (2) partly, because love to any other brethren by nation, nature, office, etc. (which are relations common to persons unregenerate with the regenerate) may be incident to carnal persons and hypocrites, and

so can be no distinctive character between them that are born of God and them that are not.

Some Undernotes or Discoveries of True Brotherly Love, or Love of the Children of God, Begotten of Him

We may discover whether we love the brethren negatively and affirmatively; as in the former places the apostle speaks of it both ways.

Negatively: We love not the brethren, the children of God,

1. While we continue the seed of the serpent and are of the world. For there is natural enmity between the seed of the serpent and of the woman (Gen. 3:15), between them that are of the world, and them that are chosen out of the world (John 15:19).

2. While we retain our carnal mind and heart, which is enmity against God, His laws and ways (Rom. 8:7), and cannot choose but from this antipathy to hate righteousness and supernatural goodness in the brethren (1 John 3:12).

3. While we manifest any fruits of hatred against the brethren by reproaching them, spoiling them in their goods, imprisoning them, tormenting them, murdering them, or any way persecuting them (Gal. 4:29) or consenting thereunto (Acts 8:1; 26:10).

Affirmatively: We truly love the brethren, the true children of God,

1. When we love them as such: the brethren for their spiritual brotherhood (1 Peter 2:17); the godly for godliness' sake, for God in them; Christians, for Christianity, for Christ in them; the saints for their saintship, for their sanctity of person and

conversation; the spiritual children begotten, for their heavenly Father's sake begetting them (1 John 5:1–2). When grace is the principal loadstone of our affection, when for this we love them more than for beauty, sweetness of disposition, birth, breeding, learning, wit, parts, gifts, wealth, honor, or any carnal worldly accomplishments whatsoever, then we love the brethren aright.

2. Hence, when we love and delight in them above all sorts of people on earth, as the most excellent people. David says, “Thou art my Lord: my goodness extendeth not to thee; but to the saints that are in the earth, and to the excellent, in whom is all my delight” (Ps. 16:2–3). Christ Himself preferred them who heard the Word of God and kept it, as such, before His natural brethren according to the flesh, indeed, before His own mother who bore Him and gave Him suck, as such (Matt. 12:47–50; Mark 3:32–35; Luke 8:20–21; 11:27–28). And the saints have more intimate, endearing, continuing relations to one another in Christ than to all nearest, natural allies whatsoever, and are wont accordingly to esteem them. Paul loved Onesimus converted, as his son (Philemon 10), as himself (v. 17), indeed, as his own bowels (v. 12).

3. Hence, when we love all such as we apprehend to be the children of God. For he who loves one child of God as a child of God consequently loves every child of God, whether noble or ignoble, rich or poor, bond or free, male or female, etc. For the same God, the same Christ, the same grace, is as truly amiable in one as in another (Col. 1:4; Philemon 5). They who only can love rich saints in gay¹³ clothes with gold rings, etc., but despise the poor saints, are partial in their love, and have the faith of

13. *gay*: fine, excellent.

God with respect of persons (James 2:2–4). They love not the person for his graces, but rather graces for the person.

4. Hence, when we love them most who are most gracious (other things being alike). For where grace allures the affection, the more grace, the stronger motive and allurements. Jesus loved all His disciples (John 13:1), but John eminently gracious He loved peculiarly above all the rest (John 21:20). Indeed, as grace grows in the same person, true love toward him will grow proportionably.

5. When we love the brethren sincerely, unfeignedly, really, not only in word and tongue, but in deed and truth (1 Peter 1:22; 1 John 3:16–17), being ready to express all amicable respects and acts of love toward them (Acts 4:32).

6. When we peculiarly love their society, taking most intimate, contenting delight in their communion, above all other. Society is hardly dissembled. The heart loving delights most in fellowship with the companion beloved. “I am,” said David, “a companion of all them that fear thee, and of them that keep thy precepts” (Ps. 119:63), “in whom is all my delight” (Ps. 16:3; 101:6). Regenerate persons have no contenting fellowship with the ungodly (Ps. 1:1–2; 26:4–5; 101:7; 119:115).

7. Finally, we love the brethren aright when we love them constantly. Christ loves them to the end (John 13:1). So should they love one another to the end. The ground of their love still continues, namely, God’s command, their spiritual relation, their true grace. So should their love still continue.

Hope and Assured Apprehension in Some Measure That We Shall Be Conformed to God and to Christ in His Glorious Appearing, May Be an Eighth Sign of Regeneration

“Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is” (1 John 3:2). Here are (1) the gracious relation of the regenerate to God for present. “Now” they are “sons of God.” (2) The glorious perfections reserved for them for future. For particular, “not yet” appearing to us exactly, completely. For general, it “shall be” a blessed conformity to Him, in that full transforming beatifical vision of Him at His appearance, which “vision,” as Augustine has noted, “excels all earthly beauty of gold, silver, woods, fields, sea, air, sun, moon, stars, or angels; surpassing all because all things have their beauty from it.” (3) The precognition, or knowledge, which the regenerate have of this even in this life. “We know”—knowledge implies some measure of certainty or assurance hereof in God’s children in this life. As there are degrees of faith (2 Thess. 1:3), so of assurance; the highest is full assurance (Col. 2:2; Heb. 6:11; 10:22). All the regenerate arrive not at full assurance who yet attain certainty. All reach the certainty of the object believed, namely, that the glory promised shall certainly be performed is sure. All reach the certainty or assurance of the subject believing, in some sort, namely, some full assurance; many, assurance of sense and evidence. But all reach assurance of adherence whereby they certainly cleave to and rest upon the promises and the happiness promised. This is so of the essence of faith that faith cannot be without it. Do we thus know, or hope for conformity to God in glory?

Sigms of this knowledge or hope in us of our conformity to God in glory:

1. Peace with God, and joy in hope of this glory (Rom. 5:1–2).
2. Conformity to God in grace, purifying themselves, as God is pure (1 John 3:2–3).
3. A cheerful disposition to part with any earthly enjoyments for Christ, or to endure any afflictions or persecutions for Him (Heb. 10:34; 11:26, 35–40).
4. Leading on earth a heavenly conversation (Phil. 3:20; Col. 3:1).
5. Frequent and fervent desires, breathings, groanings, longings after Christ's appearing, and full enjoyment of Him face-to-face (2 Cor. 5:1–4, 8; Song 8:14; Rev. 22:20).

In Hope of Glory Purifying Ourselves as God Is Pure May Be a Ninth or Last Evidence of Regeneration

“Now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be.... And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure” (1 John 3:2–3). So that every child of God having the hope of glory, and of conformity to God and to Christ therein, thereupon from that hope purifies himself as He is pure. In this evidence of self-purifying, note (1) the act performed: “purifieth” (*hagnizei*), a metaphor either from goldsmiths purifying metals from dross, or from the ceremonial purifications in time of the law, denotes regenerate persons cleansing themselves more and more from corruption. (2) The object about which this act is to be exercised: themselves, namely, not only their outsides or only their minds, etc., but their whole man, soul and body, and consequently their whole conversation. They would be clean throughout. (3) The rule or pattern of this act, according to which, in some imperfect resemblance, he purifieth himself, namely, God's purity, “as he

is pure” (1 John 3:3, etc.). Augustine has well observed that the word “as” here “is not a note of parity or equality, but of resemblance and similitude, of quality rather than of equality. As there is a similitude between the face itself and the image of the face in the glass, but no equality.” (4) The ground or motive inciting the regenerate to this self-purifying, namely, hope of glory. Presumption, security, etc., purifies not (Deut. 29:19; Luke 17:26–37). Hope does. No unclean thing can enter into the heavenly Jerusalem (Rev. 21:27), therefore, they that hope for heaven cleanse themselves that they may be fit to enter. Augustine says well, “The vessel must be cleansed of vinegar, that God may fill it with honey. If you are full of vinegar, where will you put the honey?” Hope in Christ excites to purity, because “it conducts us straight to Christ, the perfect pattern of all purity,” says Calvin.

Now in the regenerate that have hope of glory, consider these ensuing signs of self-purifying, as God is pure, namely,

1. Frequent washing themselves in the fountain opened for sin and uncleanness, namely, in the purifying blood of Christ by faith and hope as instruments applying Christ crucified (Zech. 13:1; Heb. 9:14; Ps. 51:7). “Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood” (Rom. 3:25).

2. Maintaining a constant spiritual combat by faith, hope, and other graces of the Spirit, against the flesh; and so by the Spirit mortifying the deeds of the flesh daily, crucifying the flesh with the affections and lusts (Gal. 5:17 compared with Rom. 8:13; Gal. 5:24–25). Thus, hope as an inward principle works out pollution and corruption, as being repugnant thereunto. As good honey separates and works out the dross, a pure heart mingles not with corruption (Ps. 66:18).

3. True endeavors to purify both soul and body, person and conversation from all corruption universally both in kind and degree. "Let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit" (2 Cor. 7:1). Hypocrites can wash the outside of the cup or platter, but inwardly they are full of extortion and excess (Matt. 23:25–26), can forsake some, not all corruptions.

4. Conscientious improvement of the Word for self-purifying. The Word has a purifying faculty in it. "Ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you" (John 15:3). The Word purifies (1) as an antidote against sin (Ps. 119:11); (2) as a lamp discovering the spot (Rom. 7:7); (3) as a star, conducting to Christ the fountain of purifying (1 John 2:1–2; Zech. 13:1); (4) as a rule according to which we are heedfully to order our conversation (Ps. 119:9); and (5) as a motive, especially in the promises of it, unto self-purifying (2 Cor. 7:1).

5. Contented bearing of heaviest afflictions, so that sin may be purged out (Ps. 119:67, 71). Such can say, "Lord humble me, break me, bruise me, do anything with me, that I may be more holy, less sinful."

6. Fervent desires and prayers for thorough purity. "Cleanse thou me from secret faults" (Ps. 19:12). "Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow" (Ps. 51:7). Hence, how often do the regenerate long to be dissolved and be with Christ, that they might never sin more, but have all spots and wrinkles wiped away forevermore.

CHAPTER 3

Evidences or Signs That We Are of the Truth and of the Number of God's Own People

Having an Unction from the Holy One, Teaching Us All Things

“They went out from us, but they were not of us.... But ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things.... But the anointing which ye have received of him abideth in you” (1 John 2:19, 20, 27). For clearing this evidence, consider herein: (1) How the apostle brands some for their hypocrisy, discovering itself in their apostasy. They fell away, namely, to anti-Christian doctrine (1 John 2:18). “Went out from us,” therefore, they were not of us, no more than chaff mingled with the wheat is wheat; when the fan comes, the chaff flies away. (2) How the apostle commends those to whom he wrote, opposing them to these hypocritical apostates, as having the anointing of the Spirit from Christ abiding in them, and teaching them all things. These then having this unction from the Holy One teaching them all things are of the number of God’s people, inasmuch as they here stand opposed to them who were not of God’s people, though once they lived among them.

Now in this evidence further observe (1) the distinctive character: an unction, namely, the Holy Spirit. This the gladdening oil wherewith Christ was anointed above all His fellows,

kings, priests, prophets, members (Ps. 45:7 with Acts 4:27; 10:38), his fellows then had some of this anointing (John 1:14, 16). (2) The fountain from which this unction flows to them, namely, from the Holy One, i.e., Christ. An allusion (thinks Calvin) to the sanctuary, from where the oil was fetched to anoint the priests. And Daniel describes Christ's coming to be the proper time "to anoint the most Holy" (Dan. 9:24). (3) The receptacle of this unction from Christ in whom it should abide: "ye have an unction." (4) The effect of this unction upon them, "teaching them all things," namely, all things necessary to salvation. If now we have this unction from Christ, teaching us all things, we are of the people of God.

Signs that we have the unction of the Spirit from Christ, teaching us all things:

1. When this unction of the Spirit teaches us with a Scripture knowledge, not with enthusiasms or other byways. Thus He taught David (Ps. 119:99, 104); thus Timothy (2 Tim. 3:14–15). Hence, called the Spirit of truth, because He acts upon us by and according to Scripture truth (John 14:17).

2. The Spirit's teaching is clear and certain in necessities to salvation (Prov. 22:20–21; John 6:69; 1 Cor. 2:15).

3. The Spirit's teaching is of a growing nature. The more He instructs us, the more we desire to be instructed of Him (Prov. 1:5; 15:14; 18:15). David, though he knew so much, yet wondrously thirsted to know more (Ps. 119:27, 73, 125, 144).

4. The Spirit's teaching weakens and humbles a man's spirit (James 3:13; Ps. 25:9), for it manifests still more and more ignorance and sin (Eph. 5:13). Carnal knowledge swells, puffs up (1 Cor. 8:1).

5. The Spirit's teaching floats not only in the head, but kindly¹ soaks into the heart and forcibly² works upon the affections (Josh. 23:14; Ps. 34:8), stirring up the heart to truth, love, joy, etc. in spirituals (Ps. 9:10; 1 John 4:8; 1 Peter 1:8).

6. The Spirit's teaching is practical, brings not only to knowing, but to doing. It is very effective, alters and changes a man wonderfully, and diverts his course from sin to sanctity (see Eph. 4:20–23; 2 Cor. 3:18; Job 28:28; Ps. 119:104; Prov. 15:21; Ps. 111:10; James 3:17; Jer. 22:16).

7. The Spirit's teaching makes men come to Christ and believe in Him (John 6:44–45). Make it evident you come to Christ, believe in Him, you are taught most effectually.

8. Finally, the true teaching of God's Spirit wonderfully strengthens and preserves against temptations and snares (Prov. 24:5; 2:10–11 compared with vv. 12, 15, 16).

Search and consider: has this teaching unction thus illuminated and instructed you? Doubtless you are of the number of God's church taught of God.

The Testimony of an Upright Heart or Conscience Touching Our Real and True Love of the Brethren

“My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth. And hereby we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before him. For if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things. Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God” (1 John 3:18–21). Here are (1) an exhortation to real and true brotherly love (v. 18); (2) a

1. *kindly*: readily, naturally.

2. *forcibly*: powerfully.

demonstration hereby that “we are of the truth,” namely, born of God who is truth; or, having the truth of God in us (v. 19); (3) the confirmation of this evidence by the testimony of our conscience concerning it, in the sight of God, “and shall assure our hearts before him” (v. 19). This further strengthened by arguing from the double act of a well-guided conscience, namely, (1) accusing. If conscience condemns us for not loving the brethren truly, or for any other thing, much more will God condemn us (v. 20). (2) Excusing. If a conscience clears us, we have confidence toward God, namely, that we are of the truth.

The testimony of our heart and conscience for us, or against us, is most comforting, or corroding. How was Judas tortured with an accusing conscience (Matt. 27:3–5)! How was Paul in deepest trials supported with an excusing conscience (2 Cor. 1:12)! The heathen could say, “A clear conscience is as a wall of brass.” The proverb says, “A good conscience is a continual feast.” With this Augustine comforted himself against Secundinus the Manichean, who aspersed him, saying, “Think of Augustine what you please, so conscience only accuse me not in the sight of God.” Can you now in your conscience appeal to God about your love of the brethren, as sometimes Peter about his love of Christ: “Lord, Thou knowest all things, Thou art greater than my conscience, Thou knowest that in deed and in truth I love Thy children.” Hereby you may know that you are of the truth.

Signs of true brotherly love, see in chapter 2, sign 7.

Finally, Perseverance with the Faithful in Christ and in the Truth

“They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us” (1 John 2:19). He speaks of Ebion, Cerinthus, and

such like anti-Christian heretics, who apostatizing from Christ and His truth, departed from the church. They were once in the church, but never truly of the church, for then they would have persevered. Their apostasy therefore evidenced their hypocrisy. Whereas contrariwise, perseverance is a sure argument of our sincerity, and that we are indeed anointed with the Spirit of truth. "The anointing which ye have received of him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you: but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in him" (1 John 2:27). In which words as the apostle testifies, that they shall persevere in Christ who are truly taught by the anointing, which is truth and no lie. So he declares that they were never of the true number of God's people, that through heresy and schism depart from the communion of the Church and the faithful. As Jude intimates, "These be they who separate themselves, sensual, having not the Spirit" (Jude 19). False, rotten professors will thus apostatize, but true, sound members will persevere in the truth with the faithful, for reasons formerly alleged.³

Do you now backslide and separate through heresy or schism from communion with the true church of Christ? How can you think yourself to be of the true number of God's people? Notably, Cyprian: "Whosoever separated from the church, is joined to an adulterous church, is separated from the promises of the church. Nor shall he come to the rewards of Christ, that leaves the church of Christ. He is an alien, he is profane, he is an enemy. *He cannot have God for his Father, who has not the church for his mother.* If any could escape that was without Noah's ark, then maybe escape that is without the church." And afterwards he adds, "Let no man think that the good can depart from the

3. *alleged*: presented.

church. Wind blows not away the wheat, nor does the tempest subvert the well-rooted tree; vain chaff is blown away with the wind, invalid trees are torn up with the whirlwind. These John the apostle execrates and smites, saying, 'They went out from us,' etc. Hence heresies have often been, and are, while a perverse mind has not peace, while a discording perfidiousness holds not unity."

CHAPTER 4

Evidences or Signs of Being in Light, Not in Darkness; in Life, Not in Death

Actual Interest in and Enjoyment of Jesus Christ Is an Evidence We Are Partakers of Supernatural and Eternal Life

“This is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life” (1 John 5:11–12). Life is the sweetest of enjoyments; eternal life, the best of lives that creatures can possess. Of this eternal life here are laid down, (1) the primary fountain of it, namely, God and His free grace; (2) the mediatory receptacle or treasury, wherein God has seated this eternal life for us, namely, His Son; (3) the way of conveyance of this life from Christ to us, namely, by having the Son, they have Christ, who believe in Him (John 1:12–13). They have Him not that believe not in Him. So, they that believe in Christ have Christ. They that have Christ and actual interest in Him have eternal life from Him, indeed, and saving light in Him. For, (1) Christ is light (John 1:4, 9), “light of the world” (John 8:12). Christ also is life (John 5:25; 11:25; 14:6), “the Prince of life” (Acts 3:15). (2) Men in their natural Christless condition are dark, indeed, darkness itself (Acts 26:18; Eph. 5:8), indeed, dead in sin (Eph. 2:1). Consequently, from both these, they that have the Son, which is light and life,

must needs have light and life. Now they have the Son that believe in Him.

Signs of true believing in Christ, see chapter 2, evidence 2.

Evidences of having the Son (that we may come more closely to the expression here in the text); having the Son implies:

*A True Inward Covenant Right, Claim, or Title to Him,
by Spiritual Union to Him*

Covenant and promises tender Christ, and that upon conditions evangelical (John 3:16; Luke 9:23). Faith receives Christ tendered upon His own terms (John 1:12). As Saul converted, for Christ denied Himself, and all things (Phil. 3:7–8); took up his cross daily (2 Cor. 11:23), to the end, and followed Christ (1 Cor. 11:1). Now Christ being thus received, Christ and the soul are thus united. Faith eats Christ and assimilates the believer into His nature. Faith unites to Christ, so that he who is joined to the Lord is one Spirit (1 Cor. 6:17). Do you have such a covenant right to Christ and spiritual union to Christ?

*Hence a Happy Spiritual Fruition or Enjoyment of Him by Holy
Communion with Him, in His Person, Offices, and Benefits*

In Himself and all His (Song 2:16; John 20:28; 2 Peter 1:3–4; 2 Cor. 1:20; Rom. 8:32; 1 Cor. 3:20–21). Among other blessings communicated from Christ, life is one. Christ lives in us by faith (Gal. 2:20).

Further, they that have Christ have these things in and with Christ:

1. They have the Spirit of Christ (1 John 4:13; Rom. 8:9).
2. They are become new creatures, old things are passed away, all things become new (2 Cor. 5:17).

3. They have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts (Gal. 5:24).
4. They walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit (Rom. 8:1–2).
5. They are most obedient to Christ and His commands (Heb. 5:9). “How can he say that he has Christ, that he believes in Christ,” says Cyprian, “who does not what Christ commanded to be done? Or how shall he come to the reward of faith who keeps not the faith of the command?”

Finally, a Sweet Conformity to Him in His Sonship

They that have the Son are “conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren” (Rom. 8:29). Conformity to Christ is either (1) in His gracious image, namely, in righteousness and true holiness (Eph. 4:24); (2) in His glorious image, namely, when we shall be like Him in glory (Phil. 3:20; 1 John 3:2–3); (3) in His afflicted image, namely, when we suffer with Him, and for Him (Rom. 8:17; John 15:18–22), and when we suffer for righteousness with patience, meekness, etc., as He suffered (1 Peter 2:21) to the end. Are we thus conformed indeed to the Son? Then we have the Son, Jesus Christ, and live by Him.

Loving and Not Hating of Our Brother Is Another Sign We Are in Light, Not in Darkness; in Life, Not in Death

“He that saith he is in the light, and hateth his brother, is in darkness even until now. He that loveth his brother abideth in the light, and there is none occasion of stumbling in him. But he that hateth his brother is in darkness, and walketh in darkness, and knoweth not whither he goeth, because that darkness hath blinded his eyes” (1 John 2:9–11). And elsewhere, “We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love

the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death. Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer: and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him" (1 John 3:14–15).

In these passages the love of the brethren is made a most clear note of our abiding in the light (namely, spiritual or true illumination and grace), and that we have already passed from death in sin to life supernatural in Christ, "we know that we have passed," etc. And contrariwise the not loving, or hating our brother, an evident sign that we remain still under the state and dominion of carnal sinful darkness and death. Make sure of true brotherly love, you are in true light and life indeed.

Signs of true love of the brethren, see chapter 2, sign 7, and chapter 8 throughout.

*Evidences or Signs of Our True Knowledge
of God and of Jesus Christ, the Knowledge
of Whom Is Life Eternal (John 17:3)*

**First, the Real and Sincere Keeping of God's Commandments
Evidences That We Know God and Jesus Christ Aright**

“Hereby we do know that know him, if we keep his commandments. He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him” (1 John 2:3–4). This note is laid down (1) affirmatively and (2) negatively. He that keeps His commandments knows Him, indeed, knows that he knows Him. He that keeps not His commandments knows Him not, indeed, he lies if he says he knows Him. David concluded he had more knowledge than his enemies, than the ancients, than his teachers, and all because he kept God's commandments (Ps. 119:98–100). They that truly know God cannot choose but to keep His commandments. For they know (1) the authority of God commanding to be supreme (James 4:12); (2) the holiness, justness, and goodness of God's laws commanded (Rom. 7:12); (3) the greatness of God's rewards in keeping of them (Ps. 119:11; Deut. 28:1–15); (4) the severity of God's wrath against the willful breakers of them (Deut. 28:15–68).

For clearing this evidence, consider (1) what is meant by knowledge of God, (2) what by keeping His commandments, (3) signs of this keeping God's commandments.

Knowledge of God and of Christ

Knowledge of God and of Christ is either,

1. Both true and perfect, whereby God is clearly known; thus, none know God in this life but Christ the Son (Matt. 11:27). In the life to come all the elect shall thus know God (1 John 3:2).
2. Nor true nor perfect (in reference to him that knows), but dubious, uncertain, hypocritical, and common to reprobates, which is rather an opinion than a knowledge of God (1 Cor. 2:14).
3. True but imperfect, whereby all regenerate persons do truly, though weakly, know God in this life (Jer. 31:34; John 6:45; 1 Cor 13:9, 12).

Here understand the last sort of knowledge.

Keeping of God's Commandments

Keeping of God's commandments flows originally from the true knowledge of God. For we so far act as we affect or love; we so far love as we know. Hence from this threefold knowledge arises a threefold obedience, namely,

1. Both true and perfect. Only by Christ on earth, by saints and angels in heaven (Phil. 2:8; Matt. 6:10).
2. Nor true nor perfect, as the obedience of hypocrites and carnal men, who if they fail not in the matter of obedience, yet they still fail in the ground, manner, and end of obedience (Rom. 8:8; Heb. 11:6).
3. True and sincere, but imperfect, by saints on earth, who for matter, ground, manner, and end of obedience are sincere, the bent and main disposition of their hearts upright and unfeigned (notwithstanding there be some gradual infirmities

and imperfections), as Zechariah and Elizabeth walked in all the commandments of God blameless (Luke 1:6).

Here understand this third sort of keeping God's commandments to be a sign of true knowledge of God.

Signs of True Keeping God's Commandments, From Which We May Know That We Truly Know God

1. The law and commandments of God are written in the heart of that person who truly keeps them (Jer. 31:33; Ps. 40:7-8). The heart within answers to the commandments without, as a book written answers to his mind that writes it, as the impression on the wax answers to the character engraved on the seal, etc.

2. The inward man, namely, the sanctified mind and will, and the fixed disposition of them, delight in the law and commandments of God (though that other law in the members rebel against it) (Rom. 7:18, 21-23, 25). How did David delight in God's laws (Ps. 119:97)! Delightful loving, cordial obedience is the truest keeping of God's commandments. They are far from keeping God's commandments whose minds are enmity against God's law (Rom. 8:7).

3. Turning from every evil way, for the keeping of God's word (Ps. 119:101).

4. Obeying God's commandments evangelically, for substance and circumstance, as He requires; for matter, what He requires (John 15:14); for ground, and root of obedience (1 Tim. 1:5); for manner, how He requires (John 4:24); for end, which we should aim at in all obedience (1 Cor. 10:32).

5. Universal unlimited respect to all God's commandments, one as well as another (Ps. 119:6; James 2:10-11), as Caleb (Num. 14:24), as Zechariah and Elizabeth kept all (Luke 1:6).

6. Constancy and perseverance in keeping God's commandments (Ps. 1:2–3; 119:20). "I have inclined mine heart to perform thy statutes alway, even unto the end" (Ps. 119:112).

Secondly, Not Sinning or Denial, Renouncing of Sin Aright, Evidences We Know God Aright

They that commit sin are grossly ignorant of God. "Whosoever sinneth hath not seen him, neither known him" (1 John 3:6).

This particular of not sinning as the property of the regenerate, together with the distinctive differences between the sinning of the regenerate and of unregenerate persons, see fully opened, chapter 2, evidence 3.

Thirdly, a Right Entertaining and Harkening to the True Apostolic Doctrine Is a Notable Evidence of the True Knowledge of God in Us

As the listening to false teachers and doctrines rejecting the truth is a sign of ignorance of God and of a carnal state. "They," namely, anti-Christian teachers (v. 3), "are of the world: therefore speak they of the world, and the world heareth them. We are of God: he that knoweth God heareth us; he that is not of God heareth not us. Hereby know we the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error" (1 John 4:5–6).

Signs of right entertaining and hearkening to true apostolic doctrine:

1. When we entertain their doctrine discerningly, distinguishing and discriminating by help of Scriptures, their sound doctrine from all unsound opinions, diverse and strange doctrines of false teachers (Heb. 5:14; 1 John 4:1; Acts 7:11; Rev. 2:2).

2. When discerning their doctrine, we entertain it believingly, the word being mingled, contempered, or united with faith in the hearers (Heb. 4:2).
3. When we entertain it readily, with all readiness of mind (Acts 17:11).
4. When we entertain it reverentially, with awful trembling at it as the word of God (Isa. 66:2; 1 Thess. 2:13).
5. When we entertain it with a singular love, affectionateness, and estimation (Gal. 4:13–15, contrary is that in 2 Thess. 2:10–11).
6. When we entertain it obediently, obeying from the heart that form of doctrine to which we are delivered (Rom. 6:17), being conformed, indeed, transformed by the doctrine received, yielding “professed subjection unto the gospel” (2 Cor. 9:13).
7. When we so receive it as to retain it firmly, not leaking, or letting it slip (Heb. 2:1; 1 Thess. 5:20–21).

**Finally, Mutual, Reciprocal, Brotherly Love Evinces
That We Know God Aright**

“Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love” (1 John 4:7–8).

He must needs know God that truly loves his brother, the child of God. For, (1) he that loves his brother is born of God (1 John 4:7; 3:10, 14), and he that is born of God, among other graces infused, has illumination whereby he knows God. (2) He that loves his brother truly, knows God’s image in his brother, how lovely it is in him, and therefore loves him (1 John 5:1). (3) He that loves his brother knows God’s authority in His

command. “And this commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also” (1 John 4:21).

Signs of true brotherly love, see in chapter 2, evidence 7, and chapter 8, throughout.

CHAPTER 6

Evidences or Signs of Our True Love to God and to Jesus Christ

First, Our True Love to God Flows from God's Love to Us

Love breeds love as naturally as light breeds light and fire breeds fire. "We love him, because he first loved us" (1 John 4:19). "All equity," says Bernard, "dictates, that the beloved should love the lover." Had not God first loved us, we should never have loved Him, being naturally God-haters (Rom. 1:30; 8:7). But when once God pleases to shed abroad His love in our hearts (Rom. 5:5), giving us some sense or taste of His love to us, namely, of His electing love (Rom. 9:13; Col. 3:12), of His redeeming love (Gal. 2:20; Rev. 1:5), of His regenerating love (Titus 3:4–6), of His adopting love (1 John 3:1–2, etc.), how can we choose but to love Him again, and love Him much (Luke 7:47)? "I desire to love Thee," said Bernard, "and love to desire Thee, O amiable Lord, most worthy to be beloved. And thus, I run to apprehend that wherein I am apprehended, namely, that I may perfectly love Thee at last, who hast loved us first." But how or wherein did God love us first, he expresses thus, saying, "Whatsoever He did, whatsoever He spoke on earth to reproaches, spittings, buffetings, cross and the grave, was nothing but God's language to us in His Son, by His love provoking and stirring up our love."

Would you know now whether you love God? Search diligently whether God loves you in Christ, what application has

He made of His love to you, what true effect do you find of the special love of God or Christ upon you.

Signs of God's special love, of Christ's peculiar love actually applied to us:

1. Is this love of God shed abroad in your heart by the Holy Ghost, that you have an inward cordial experimental taste of God's love (Rom. 5:5)?
2. Has this love of God effectually regenerated and renewed you by the Spirit (Titus 3:4-6)?
3. Has this love of God adopted you, that you are numbered among the sons of God (1 John 3:1-2)?
4. Has this love of God sanctified you and made you holy (Col. 3:12)?
5. Has this love of God brought you to live the life of faith, indeed, rather to have Christ living in you (Gal. 2:20)?
6. Does this love of God and Christ sweetly overpower, constrain, and even compel you to be cheerfully serviceable to Him in your place and calling (2 Cor. 5:13-16)?

Secondly, the Ejecting or Casting Out of Base, Sinful, Servile Fear Evidences Our True Love to God and Jesus Christ

“There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love” (1 John 4:18).

Question: But what fear is it now, which is thus inconsistent with love, which love casts out?

Answer: Fear may be considered either,

1. Objectively, as it is the object feared, so it denotes (1) God (Ps. 76:11), called “the fear of Isaac,” either because Isaac yielded fear to God, or because God struck Isaac with fear when He would have blessed Esau (Gen. 31:42, 53); (2) God’s Word, the rule of fear (Ps. 19:9). True love casts out neither of these but keeps and cherishes them in the soul.

2. Subjectively, as fear is subjected in us. Thus fear denotes (1) the natural affection, or passion of fear, arising upon some apprehension of some evil as imminent and hardly to be avoided. This fear is in itself neither morally good nor bad, but as sanctified or mixed with diffidence,¹ etc. Mere human fear was in Christ, yet without sin (Heb. 5:7). Love cast not out this fear, for that were to put off human nature. (2) Fear the sanctified affection, whereby the saints are afraid to offend God, their heavenly Father, for His mercy, goodness, etc., through the love and reverence they bear to Him for His eminency, and to true piety (Ps. 130:4), and this fear springs from love. (3) A sinful, servile, slavish fear, whereby we inordinately, slavishly fear either God (Rom. 8:15), as the Samaritans for His lions (2 Kings 17:25, 32–34), or the creature (Matt. 10:28). This is the fear that love casts out. Love has boldness and confidence in it; fear is full of diffidence and cowardliness. Has your love to God cast out this base fear? That is love indeed.

Signs that Hagar is ejected, that slavish fear is cast out:

1. The Spirit of adoption, son-like spirit removing base fear (Rom. 8:15).
2. The Spirit of supplication, crying with filial boldness and confidence, “Abba, Father” (Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:6).

1. *diffidence*: distrust.

3. The soul's pacification by justifying faith. This allays tumultuous fears. That diffusion of the love of God in the heart, and quieting of conscience by faith, are companions, are twins in the same soul (Rom. 5:1, 5).
4. True, awful, religious fear of God, swallowing up base fears of the creature (Matt. 10:28; Isa. 8:12–13).
5. Magnanimous courage and resolutions from and zeal to Christ and His cause, against sharpest sufferings and persecutions (Song 8:6–7; Acts 20:23–24; 21:13; Rev. 12:11). Such has been the love of saints and martyrs to Christ that they have not feared to own and confess Christ in the worst of times, not feared to go with Christ both into prisons and to death. “Who will flee persecution,” said Tertullian, “but he that fears? Who fears but he that doth not love?” And elsewhere, “He that fears to suffer cannot be His that suffered, but he that fears not to suffer, he is perfect in God's love.”

Thirdly, Not Loving the World, Nor the Things That Are in the World, Excessively, Inordinately, Discovers the Love of God Planted in Our Hearts

“Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him” (namely, neither passively, he is not beloved of the Father, nor actively, he loves not the Father) (1 John 2:15). For, (1) God and the world are two such contrary matters, and each of them are so able to take up the whole man that they cannot be intensively loved both at once, but the love of the one will prove the hatred of the other (Matt. 6:24; James 4:4). (2) God requires our whole love to Himself (Luke 10:27), and He is so jealous a God that He can endure no corrival with Himself in our hearts and affections. Excellently Bernard said,

“The Spirit of Christ hates the lover of the world, flies from him whom He knows to love any thing besides Him. He will be so loved, as nothing should be loved besides Him. He will be perfectly loved that will be alone loved. He will have no sharer in His love that has no equal in the reward of love. He will be so loved that all things also may be loved with Him. And yet He will so be loved that nothing be beloved besides Him. The creature should be loved for the Creator that made it, the Creator in the creature for Himself.”

Would you know whether you love God truly? Search then whether you love not the world inordinately.

Signs of inordinate love to the world and the things of the world:

1. Over-desiring the world and things of the world; craving, asking, etc. when we want them (Prov. 30:15; Matt. 6:25, 31; 1 Tim. 6:9–10). This overeagerness of our hearts after them when we want them discovers itself in (1) discontentedness at our present condition (Heb. 13:5). (2) Enviousness at others’ prosperity and enjoyments, as in Ahab (1 Kings 21:4); David tempted to this (Ps. 73:3). (3) Excessive running out of the heart and mind about them (Ezek. 33:31; Luke 12:17–18, 29). (4) A resolvedness or fixed will to be rich (1 Tim. 6:9). (5) Pursuing after worldly shadows, more than after the kingdom of God and His righteousness (Matt. 6:33). (6) Unconscionableness in getting the world, by bribery, extortion, oppression, theft, fraud, etc. (Amos 8:4; 1 Thess. 4:6).

2. Over-loving and doting upon the world and things of the world while we have them, setting our heart on them (Ps. 62:10), evidenced by (1) over-highly esteeming them, above their worth, making gods of them (Col. 3:5; Eph. 5:5; Phil. 3:19). (2) Relying and trusting in them (Prov. 18:11; 1 Tim.

6:17). (3) Boasting, glorying in them (Ps. 49:6; Jer. 9:23). (4) Applauding ourselves as happy men by reason of them (Luke 12:19; Ps. 17:14). (5) Sordid detainings, not being willing to part with worldly things, though upon most just occasions of piety, charity, or necessity, as in Nabal (1 Sam. 25:10–11), the rich glutton (Luke 16:19; Eccl. 6:1–2); such a man parts with his pence as if they were so many drops of blood from his heart.

3. Over-grieving and vexing when we lose the things of the world, as Ahithophel losing his honor and in discontent hangs himself (2 Sam. 17:23).

Fourthly, Keeping of the Commandments of God, and That Cheerfully, Notably Discovers Our True Love to God and to Jesus Christ

“But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected” (1 John 2:5). And elsewhere, “This is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous” (1 John 5:3). To this purpose said Clement Romanus (the apostle’s companion, Phil. 4:3), “He that has love in Christ will keep the commands of Christ.” And Bernard sweetly seconds him: “By this may be known the love of Christ, if a man keeps the commands of Christ. ‘He that has My commandments and keeps them, he it is that loves Me’—who has them in memory, and keeps them in life; who has them in doing, and keeps them in persevering; or, who has them in words, and keeps them in manners; or who has them in hearing, and keeps them in doing: ‘he it is that loves Me.’ For many have the Lord’s commandments but keep them not; many have them in their book, but keep them not in their breast. Many have them in word, keep them not in work. Many

have them in memory, keep them not in life, etc. Truly these are not of the lovers of Christ.”

And no wonder, for (1) Christ requires our keeping of His commandments as the singular touchstone of our love to Him. “Exhibition of work is the probation of love”² (John 14:15, 21). Therefore, if we keep not His commandments, He will accept no love from us. (2) Love is obedient. The nature of true love to God carries it spontaneously to the keeping of the commands of God (Rom. 13:8–9). (3) Love is a lively, cheerful principle. What love acts is acted without grievousness. It delights in doing anything for the object beloved and stands not upon difficulties (Gen. 29:20). Therefore, true love to God thinks no duty too much for God, none enough for God. (4) True love can cheerfully endure for Christ, much more do for Christ (Song 8:6–7; Acts 20:23–24; 21:13).

Search now, do you keep His word? Or are His commandments grievous to you?

Signs of true keeping God’s word and commandments, see chapter 5, sign 1.

Signs that His commandments are not grievous to us:

1. When we have a dear and precious account of God’s word and commandments, esteeming them more than our necessary food (Job 23:12), sweeter than honey and honeycomb (Ps. 19:9; 119:103), beyond great spoil (Ps. 119:162), thousands of gold and silver (Ps. 119:72), and all riches (Ps. 119:14).

2. When our hearts and affections are strongly set upon them. “O how love I thy law!” (Ps. 119:97). “I opened my mouth, and panted: for I longed for thy commandments” (Ps. 119:131). “My soul breaketh for the longing that it hath unto thy judgments

2. The quotation is from Bernard of Clairvaux.

at all times" (Ps. 119:20; Rom. 7:22). "I delight to do thy will, O my God: yea, thy law is within my heart" (Ps. 40:8).

3. When it cuts and wounds our spirits that others break God's laws (Ps. 119:53, 135, 139).

4. When we observe and keep the word and commandments of God (1) willingly. "I will freely," with voluntariness, "sacrifice unto thee" (Ps. 54:6; 110:2). (2) Simply, not disputing the command of God, as Abraham (Heb. 11:8, 17–19). (3) Cheerfully, with delight (Ps. 40:8; Rom. 7:22). (4) Speedily (Ps. 119:32). "I made haste, and delayed not to keep thy commandments" (Ps. 119:60). (5) Constantly (Ps. 119:20). "I have inclined mine heart to perform thy statutes alway, even unto the end" (Ps. 119:112). "Many begin, few persevere."³ They that thus behave themselves to God's word and commandments count not His commandments grievous, but joyous.

Lastly, Our True Love to the Brethren, the Children of God, for the Heavenly Father's Sake Who Begat Them, Evidences Our True Love to God

"Every one that loveth him that begat loveth him also that is begotten of him" (1 John 5:1). "Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another. No man hath seen God at any time. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us" (1 John 4:11–12). "If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen? And this commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also" (1 John 4:20–21). "But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from

3. The quotation is from Bernard of Clairvaux.

him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?” (1 John 3:17). In these passages are remarkable:

1. The evidencing of true brotherly love by our true love to God in many expressions.

2. The grounds, why they that love God should love their brethren. (1) God has commanded both these loves. (2) It is easier to love our brother, whom we have seen, than God whom we have not seen. Therefore, he cannot be truly imagined to love God who loves not his brother. (3) God’s exemplary love. God hath so loved us! Shall we not then love one another? (4) God’s image is engraved upon His children. Therefore, if we truly love the Father, we cannot choose but love the Father’s image in His children. Hence, Bernard calls the love of God and of our brethren the “two wings” whereby the soul flies up to heaven: “Love has two wings. The right wing is the love of God. The left wing is the love of our neighbor. No man can fly to heaven with one wing. Why? Because the love of God alone, without the love of our neighbor, or of our neighbor alone, without the love of God, avails not for attaining eternal happiness. Take both these wings, the love of God and of your neighbor, that you may fly freely in well-doing, and come to the country of the heavenly kingdom.”

Signs of true brotherly love, see in chapter 2, sign 7, and chapter 8 throughout.

*Evidences or Signs of Our Fellowship and
Communion with God and with Jesus Christ*

**First, the Holy Spirit of God and of Jesus Christ Given to Us
Is a Clear Evidence of Our Communion with Him**

“Hereby we know that he abideth in us, by the Spirit which he hath given us” (1 John 3:24). And again, “Hereby know we that we dwell in him, and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit” (1 John 4:13). His abiding in us, His dwelling in us, and we in Him, are metaphorical expressions, denoting the sweet spiritual communion between God and us. For they that abide and dwell with one another have fellowship together, but they that abide and dwell in one another, they have a more immediate and intimate communion with one another. And, thus, it is between God and His people.

How do we know and discover this our communion with God by His Spirit given us?

Answer. His Spirit given us makes us know this many ways:

1. As the inward, immediate, efficient cause of this divine communion with us. For, (1) God dwells in us by His Spirit (Eph. 2:22); (2) Christ supplies His corporal absence from His church by His Spirit (John 14:16–17, 25–26; 16:7–8).

2. As an anointing teaching us all things (1 John 2:27), revealing to us the things given us of God (1 Cor. 2:12) and illuminating us with light to receive them. Sometimes the Spirit evidences our fellowship with God by such a clear, bright, and immediate ray that it wonderfully assures us hereof (John 14:21–23).
3. As a witness with our spirits (Rom. 8:15–16). “And when the Spirit testifies,” says Chrysostom, “what ambiguity remains?”
4. As a seal upon our hearts (Eph. 1:13).
5. As the earnest, firstfruits, and handsel of our adoption and endless communion with God in glory (Eph. 1:14; Rom. 8:23).
6. Finally, as the original cause and root of all these spiritual fruits, which are only found in them that have communion with God (Gal. 5:22–23).

But by what signs or evidences may we know that the Spirit of God and Christ (which is one and the same, Rom. 8:9) is given to us?

Answer: Hereof there are many discoveries. For if the Spirit of God be given us, then:

1. We are or have been effectually convinced by the Spirit of our own natural misery and of Christ’s supernatural all-sufficiency to remove it (John 16:7–12).
2. We are washed and sanctified by the Spirit (1 Cor. 6:11) mortifying the old man, vivifying the new man in us (Rom. 8:11, 13).
3. We are acted, guided, led by the Spirit of God (Rom. 8:14). That is to say, “We make Him the guide and governor of our whole life,” as Oecumenius has well interpreted it.

4. We mind the things of the Spirit (Rom. 8:5). Our thoughts, projects, contrivements, ponderings, etc. do habitually fix here.

5. We bring forth the fruits of the Spirit. The Spirit cannot be barren, nor bring forth bad fruit (Eph. 5:9; Gal. 5:22–23).

6. We combat by the Spirit against the flesh (Gal. 5:17).

7. We are strengthened for every good word and work with might in the inner man by the Spirit (Eph. 3:16; Col. 1:10–11). And, in particular, by the Spirit we are notably enabled unto prayer against all our infirmities (Rom. 8:15, 26–27).

Secondly, the True Abiding of the Ancient Primitive Truth and Doctrine of Christ in Us, So That We Are Not Carried Aside to Unsound Newfangled Opinions, Notably Discovers Our Communion with God

“Let that therefore abide in you, which ye have heard from the beginning. If that which ye have heard from the beginning shall remain in you, ye also shall continue in the Son, and in the Father” (1 John 2:24). “That which ye have heard,” namely, that doctrine, that truth that has been preached to you. “From the beginning,” namely, from the beginning of the doctrine of the gospel by Christ, His prophets, and apostles. “We are not to heed what others have done or believed before us, but what Christ has commanded us to do and believe who is before all.”¹ All novelties in doctrine are to be censured by primitive truth and brought to the ancient standard “from the beginning it was not so”² for their regulation.

1. The quotation is from Cyprian.

2. Matt. 19:8.

Now the abiding of the primitive doctrine of Christ in us evidences our continuance in Father and Son, and so our communion with Them. For, God is truth (Deut. 32:4); Christ is truth (John 14:6); the Spirit is truth (1 John 5:6). Indeed, God is absolutely the first truth, cause of all truth in the world. Therefore, he that abides in truth, which was from the beginning, truly and sincerely has communion with God (2 John 9).

Signs of sincere abiding in the truth:

1. A cordial love of the truth (2 Thess. 2:10; contrary those, 2 Tim. 4:3–4).
2. A conscientious care to do nothing against the truth, but anything for the truth (2 Cor. 13:8; 2 John 10–11).
3. An earnest contending for the faith once delivered to the saints (Jude 3), not for new upstart doctrines and new-coined opinions.
4. A bearing witness to the truth both verbally and really in worst of times, and against greatest of dangers. As did Paul (Phil. 1:17); the angel of Pergamum (Rev. 2:13); indeed, Jesus Christ Himself bore witness to the truth to the death (John 18:37).

Thirdly, True Confessing That Jesus Is the Son of God Is an Evidence That Such Have Communion with God

“Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God” (1 John 4:15).

Doubt. But how can this be? Devils confessed Christ to be the Son of God (Mark 1:24; Luke 4:34, 41), indeed, hypocrites

may confess Christ (Matt. 7:22–23), yet neither hypocrites nor devils have, nor can have, communion with God.

Answer. There is a double confessing that Jesus is the Son of God, namely,

1. Dogmatical, arising merely from the assenting act of faith, that believes the truth of God's record, or revealed word touching Jesus Christ, that Scripture is true, and that Jesus is the Son of God, the true Messiah promised in the Scripture. Thus, devils and hypocrites may confess Christ formally, dogmatically, in words (Titus 1:16); in opinion, they know Him (Luke 4:41). But this assenting, knowing, or confessing of Christ may be without all communion with God and Christ.
2. Fiducial, arising not only from the assenting, but also from the applying act of faith. Confessing Christ with confidence and trust in Him for salvation, thus, hypocrites and devils cannot confess Him. This is here meant.

He that fiducially thus confesses Jesus Christ:

1. He assents to the truth of all God's record touching Christ (1 John 5:10–11).
2. He applies Christ to himself, rests and lives upon Him according to that record (John 1:11–12; Gal. 2:20). "Peter," as was formerly noted out of Augustine, "confessed Christ that he might embrace Him. The devils confessed Him that He might depart from them. It is one thing to confess Christ to retain Him, another to repel Him." Notes of true applying faith, see in chapter 2, sign 2.
3. He confesses Christ thus applied, not only verbally in words, but really in deeds also (Titus 1:16; Matt. 7:21), observes His commandments. "This is," says Cyprian, "to be a true confessor

of the Lord, this is to be a martyr of Christ, to keep the solid firmness of His truth inviolate in all things; not to be a martyr for the Lord, and endeavor to destroy the precepts of the Lord.”

4. He confesses Christ even unto sufferings and unto death (Acts 20:23–24; 21:13; Rev. 2:13). In this regard Cyprian applauds the courage and constancy of the saints and confessors of Christ in his time: “That among the various and exquisite torments of the secular power, the body being tortured, tormented, and butchered, yet they confessed Christ with a free, though a departing spirit.”

Fourthly, Not Doing or Practicing of Sin Is a Sign of Communion with God

“Whosoever abideth in him” (there’s communion with God) “sinneth not: whosoever sinneth hath not seen him, neither known him.... He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning” (1 John 3:6, 8). Consider now whether you are a practitioner in sin.

Signs of doing or practicing of sin, as also what a vast difference there is between the sinning of the regenerate and the unregenerate, see in chapter 2, sign 3.

Fifthly, Unfeigned Love to God, and Dwelling Therein, Discovers to Us Our True Communion with God

“And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him” (1 John 4:16). “God is love.” What more precious! “He that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God.” What more gracious! “And God in him.” What more glorious! Love to God is a sign not only of God’s cohabitation with us, but of His and our mutual inhabitation in one another. There is communion. Habitual dwelling in the love of God must needs be an

indication of our communion with God. For, (1) our true love to God denotes a reciprocation of mutual affections between God and us: "We love him, because he first loved us" (1 John 4:19). (2) Our true love to God implies, consequently, a reciprocation of the genuine fruits and effects of love mutually. God loves us and redeems, calls, adopts, sanctifies, justifies, glorifies us. We love God and trust in Him, fear Him, obey Him, etc.; both these import spiritual communion with God.

Bernard speaks admirably of this love and this communion: "Love makes you the house of the Lord, and the Lord your house. Love is a happy artificer, which can make such a house for its maker. This house consists not of lime and brick, nor stone, nor wood, nor gold, nor silver, nor precious stone. It surpasses all gold and silver. Honey is but wormwood to its sweetness.... In this house the blind have sight, the lame walk, the crooked are made straight, the infirm have health, the dead have resurrection, and all enterers happiness."

But how may we know that we truly dwell in God's love?

Answer. By these ensuing signs:

1. When we love God with an intensive love, namely, with all that is within us (Luke 10:27).
2. When we love God with a predominant love that supereminently overcomes our love to all other objects besides God (Ps. 97:10; Matt. 10:37; compared with Luke 14:26; Rev. 12:11).
3. When we love Him obediently, so willingly to do anything at His command (John 14:15, 23; 1 John 5:3; 2 Cor. 5:14).
4. When we love Him invincibly, so that our love cannot be quenched or conquered, but we are ready to endure anything for His glory (Song 8:6-7; Acts 20:23-24; 21:13).

5. When we love Him continually, “in incorruption” (as the original signifies) (Eph. 6:24), when our love is like heart of oak or cedar, will not worm-eat, rot, or putrefy, but constantly perseveres incorruptible.

Sixthly, Walking in Light and Not in Darkness

Evidences Our Communion with God

“God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: but if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another,” namely, God with us, and we with God, “and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin” (1 John 1:5–7).

There is (1) a darkness of gross ignorance and error (Eph. 4:18); (2) a darkness of sinfulness, or sinful misery (Eph. 5:8; Acts 26:18). Habitually to walk on in these argues the want of communion with God, who is purest light without all darkness whatsoever. In vain for such to pretend they have communion with God.

Signs of walking in light, not in darkness:

1. When we are effectually translated from darkness to light. This is presupposed, for until a man be brought from natural state of darkness to a supernatural state of light there can be no walking in light (Acts 26:18; Col. 1:13; Eph. 5:8).

2. When we cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light (Rom. 13:12–14). When we bring forth the “fruit of light” (as some original Greek copies read it) (Eph. 5:9).

3. When we shun all fellowship with works of darkness in others (Eph. 5:11).

4. When we hate not the light, as evil doers, but love it and come to it, that it may be manifest our deeds are wrought in God (John 3:20–21).

**Seventhly, Walking as Christ (Our Chief “Captain,”
Heb. 2:10) Walked Is a Further Discovery of Our
Fellowship with God and Christ**

“He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked” (1 John 2:6). To walk as Christ walked, is to imitate Christ, to follow Christ, or as Oecumenius well expresses it, “so to live and behave ourselves in our life as Christ did. To rectify our life according to Christ’s course.”

Christ’s actions were either (1) acts of divine power, as His miracles, turning water into wine (John 2:7), walking on the sea (Mark 6:48–49), raising the dead (John 12:1; Matt. 11:5; Luke 7:21); (2) acts of divine prerogative (Matt. 21:2); (3) acts mediatory, as dying for His sheep (John 10:15), giving of the Spirit (John 20:22; Acts 2), appointing His own officers in the church (Eph. 4:7, 10–11); (4) moral acts appertaining to the common nature of sanctification (Matt. 11:29; Eph. 5:2–3, 25), or at least bottomed upon a moral consideration and ground, as in John 13:14–15. According to these moral acts of Christ, we are to follow Christ, to walk as Christ walked.

How did Christ walk, that we may know whether we walk like Him?

1. Christ walked most purely, holy, inoffensively, before both God and man (Heb. 4:15; 7:26; Isa. 53:9). Many took offense at Christ (Matt. 15:12; Mark 6:3), but Christ gave them no offense. Thus should we walk (1 Cor. 10:32–33; Acts 23:1; 24:16; 1 Thess. 2:10–12).

2. Christ walked most humbly and meekly (Matt. 11:28; Phil. 2:5–7).

3. Christ walked most self-denyingly. “Though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor” (2 Cor. 8:9). “Take away this cup from me: nevertheless not what I will, but what thou wilt” (Mark 14:36).

4. Christ walked most zealously (John 2:15–17).

5. Christ walked most obediently to His heavenly Father (Rom. 5:19; John 4:34; Heb. 5:8–9). He “became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross” (Phil. 2:8). He was so obedient that He lost His life that He might not lose His obedience (*ut vitam perdidit, ne obedientiam perderet*). “Our Savior,” said Bernard, “preferred this virtue of obedience before His life, choosing rather to lay down His life, than not to fulfill His obedience.”

6. Christ walked most profitably, “went about doing good” (Acts 10:38).

7. Walked most lovingly, tenderly, and compassionately toward poor sinners to win them and save them (Luke 4:18–21; Matt. 12:19–20; 11:28–30; Luke 7:37–50).

8. Christ walked most spiritually and heavenly. He lived on earth as if He had been still in heaven, extracted heavenly contemplations and spiritual lessons from all sorts of earthly objects and occasions presented before Him (John 4:10; 31:32; 6:26–27; 15:1).

Do you thus walk as Christ walked? Then you have communion with God in Christ.

**Keeping His Word and Commandments Discovers
Our Communion with God**

“Whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in him” (1 John 2:5). “And this is his commandment, That we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as he gave us commandment. And he that keepeth his commandments dwelleth in him, and he in him” (1 John 3:23–24).

Signs of true keeping His commandments, see in chapter 2, sign 6, and chapter 6, sign 4.

Signs of true believing in Christ, see in chapter 2, sign 2.

Signs of the brethren’s true love to one another, see in chapter 2, sign 7, and chapter 8 throughout.

**Lastly, True Brotherly Love Is a Sign of Our
Communion with God**

For we love our brethren for God in them, that begat them (1 John 5:1). We love God, because He first loved us (1 John 4:19). And where there is mutual love between God and us, we have sweet communion with Him. “If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us” (1 John 4:12).

Evidences of the truth of our brotherly love to one another, see in chapter 2, sign 7, and chapter 8 throughout.

CHAPTER 8

Evidences or Signs of the Unfeigned Love of the Brethren

The brethren are, namely, the true children of God, begotten of Him. Compare 1 John 4:20–21 with 1 John 5:1–2.

First, True Spiritual Knowing of God

“Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love” (1 John 4:7–8).

Evidences of true knowledge of God, see in chapter 5 throughout.

Secondly, Sincere Loving of God

“Every one that loveth him that begat loveth him also that is begotten of him. By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God” (1 John 5:1–2).

Evidences of our true love to God, see in chapter 6 throughout.

Thirdly, Right Keeping of God’s Commandments

“By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep his commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous” (1 John 5:2–3).

Evidences of keeping Gods commandments, see in chapter 2, sign 6, and chapter 6, sign 4.

Fourthly, Loving the Brethren Peculiarly and Especially in This Notion or Respect, as They Are Begotten of God, and as They Are Thereby the Children of God

“Every one that loveth him that begat loveth him also that is begotten of him. By this we know that we love the children of God” (1 John 5:1–2).

See this further cleared, chapter 2, sign 7.

Finally, When We Love Them, Not Verbally and Complementally, but Really and Sincerely, Opening Tender Bowels of Compassion to Our Brother in Need; Indeed, If the Cause Require, Hazarding Our Dearest Lives for the Children of God

“Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoso hath this world’s good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him? My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth. And hereby we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before him” (1 John 3:16–19).

Formal, verbal, complemental love to the brethren is vain (James 2:15–16), indeed, abominable hypocrisy. Christ loved us really when He so loved us as to die for us. And Christ’s real love to us instructs us to like reality in our love to one another. Here are three real demonstrations of our true brotherly love mentioned: (1) communication¹ to the brethren’s necessities;

1. *communication*: an act of giving or delivering (something material or tangible).

(2) laying down our lives for them; (3) approving our hearts sincerely to God in both. In the first, as Augustine notes, we have the “inchoation”; in the second, the “perfection”; in the third, the “probation” of our love to the brethren.

Examine now your heart. Do you with this reality love the brethren?

Do You Communicate to the Saints' Necessities?

They are in wants, straits, plunges, prisons, sicknesses, dangers, death. You have this world's goods, with which you might relieve them. Are the bowels of your compassion now shut against them or open to them? If shut, how dwells either the true love of God, or of your brother, in your heart? What do you withhold from or impart to Christ's members? Christ takes as done to Himself (Matt. 25:35–46). “If you will not do anything for your brother's sake, yet do it,” as Cyprian urges, “for Christ's sake; give Christ earthly garments, that you may receive heavenly. Give Christ temporal meat and drink, that with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob you may be admitted to the eternal banquet.”

Are You Willing, if Need Be, to Lay Down Your Life for Your Brother?

He will hardly shed his blood for his brother who begrudges to part with this world's goods for his brother. “This,” said Augustine, “is the perfection of love, and greater than this cannot be found.” “Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends,” said Christ (John 15:13; Rom. 5:7), and yet “we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren” (1 John 3:16).

Question: But in what cases may we hazard or lay down our lives for the brethren?

Answer: To comprehend all such cases is difficult. Some seem obvious:

1. A man may warrantably adventure his life, if need require, for a multitude of brethren, a church, that they may be preserved from destruction or edified to salvation (Ex. 32:31–32; Rom. 9:1–3; Phil. 2:17–18).

2. A private Christian may adventure his life for preservation of public persons, church officers, ministers of the gospel, of great and necessary use to the church of God. Thus Priscilla and Aquila for Paul's sake even laid down their necks, namely, hazarded their lives to the uttermost, and thereby did great service to all the churches of the gentiles (Rom. 16:3–4).

3. One public officer may hazard his life for another of more important concernment in the church. As Epaphroditus, a pastor of the Philippians, for Paul, an apostle (Phil. 2:30).

4. One private Christian may hazard his life for the spiritual and eternal good of another, as Augustine has observed, for defense of his innocency and righteousness, for encouragement and confirmation of his faith and grace, etc. "This," Tertullian notes, "is not so much to hazard life for the brethren for themselves as for the brethren for Christ."

Finally, Can You in All This Love, in Giving to, or Dying for Your Brethren Approve Your Heart Sincerely unto God, That You Do or Endure Thus for Them, from Entire Love to Them, and Not from Vainglory or Ostentation?

As Augustine cautions, "Possibly a man may give much, indeed, give his body to death, and yet want love" (1 Corinthians 13), but can you appeal to the heart-searching God, and say, "Lord, Thou knowest I truly love Thee, and all Thine for Thee, and therefore I do, or endure this, for Thee or them"? Oh, if thus you can assure your heart before Him, then you have confidence toward God (1 John 3:18–21).

APPENDIX

A Case of Conscience Touching the Sin against the Holy Ghost

What It Is and Whether They That
Are Born of God Fall into It¹

But before we pass from this character of them that are born of God (namely, that they do not commit sin, nor can sin) to another, it may be very useful to lend a little help to the weak, timorous, and trembling Christian, against that perplexing temptation that would persuade him that he has sinned against the Holy Ghost.

“Alas,” says he, “if they that are born of God commit not sin as the unregenerate do, if this be a sign of regeneration, what may I think of myself? I am greatly afraid that I have sinned that very unpardonable sin against the Holy Ghost. For, (1) I have sinned against my light, and the checks of my conscience; (2) I have sinned against the experimental tasks of spiritual things; (3) I have crucified Christ afresh; (4) I have had many blasphemous thoughts in my heart; (5) I have fearfully fallen away from my first love; and (which kills my soul) (6) under all this I find my heart as hard and obdurate as an adamant, without all repentance or remorse for all this. Have

1. In the original text, this appendix appears as an excursus in chapter 2 at the end of the section “Not Committing of Sin.”

not I just cause to conclude that doubtless I am an unregenerate person?"

Answer. Poor soul, forbear a little your hard conceits of yourself, and suspend your censures. They that have worst thoughts of themselves are not always in the worst condition toward God. Everyone that fears he has sinned against the Holy Ghost must not presently be concluded to have committed that horrid sin of sins. All this may arise, (1) partly from your weakness, not knowing either your own spiritual estate, or the nature of this sin, truly and distinctly, and (2) partly from Satan's wickedness abusing your weakness, to make you believe this of yourself, that so (if it were possible) he might drive you to despair. But credit neither your own weakness, nor Satan's wickedness, to the ruin of your precious soul.

For a more clear and satisfactory resolution in this case, consider these particulars. (1) Who or what kind of persons are they that are in danger of sinning this sin against the Holy Ghost. (2) What this sin against the Holy Ghost is, and wherein it consists. (3) What a vast difference there is between the sins or falls of a regenerate person—indeed, though against knowledge—and their sins that sin against the Holy Ghost. Take this in three several sections.

SECTION I

Who, or what kind of persons they are that are in danger of sinning this sin against the Holy Ghost.

Answer. This may be resolved negatively and affirmatively.

Negatively

Who they are not, so we shall more distinctly see who they are. Take this in these few positions.

Doubtless Those Persons Who Are Truly Regenerate and Born of God, They Never Any of Them Sin the Sin against the Holy Ghost, Nor Can So Sin

True, (1) they may commit such sins against light of mind and checks of conscience sometimes (Rom. 7:15, 19). They may possibly have such blasphemous and wicked suggestions darted and injected into their thoughts (Matt. 4:3, 6, 9). They may perhaps fall from their first love (Rev. 2:4), indeed, fall so fearfully, as David and Peter did. Indeed, it may be they may perceive such hard-heartedness and impenitency upon their souls notwithstanding all this, for a season, that from all these (Satan also subtly taking advantage thereby) they may have sad apprehensions and fears that they have fallen into the very sin against the Holy Ghost. (2) They also that are born of God, as they have the root of all actual sin still in them, namely, original corruption dwelling in them (Ps. 51:5; Rom. 7:17–18, 21–24), so they have the very root of this sin against the Holy Ghost in particular in them, original sin being the proper seed, spawn, and fountain of this sin as well as of any other whatsoever. How humbly, vigilantly, and cautiously therefore should all God’s people walk before God, seeing this dangerous principle of original corruption still sticks in their hearts!

Yet notwithstanding, persons truly born of God never actually fall into this sin against the Holy Ghost, nor (all things well considered) can do. For,

1. The Holy Ghost Himself in Scripture plainly testifies that the regenerate sin not this great sin. “There is a sin unto death: I do not say that he shall pray for it. All unrighteousness is sin: and there is a sin not unto death. We know that whosoever is born of God sinneth not” (namely, as Tertullian notes, not this sin unto death); “but he that is begotten of God keepeth himself, and that wicked one toucheth him not” (1 John

5:16–18). In these and the two preceding verses the apostle asserts more generally the privilege of believers in the point of prayer, namely, confidence in Christ, that they shall have whatsoever they ask according to God’s will (vv. 14–15). This done, he more particularly accommodates this their privilege, declaring how prevalent their prayer shall be in particular for a lapsed brother, to obtain life and pardon for him (v. 16).

This particular case of praying for a lapsed brother, is further amplified in three ways, namely, by a distinction, a caution, and a confirmation of it.

(1) By a distinction between sin and sin, that a believer may know what sin he may pray for pardon of, according to God’s will, so as to speed. Sin is here distinguished into sin unto death, and sin not unto death (vv. 16, 17). Sin unto death, as Tertullian has observed, is irremissible, or unpardonable. Sin not unto death is remissible or pardonable, and for this sort of sin we are to pray. Yet here the apostle’s meaning is not to intimate that any sin is in its own nature not mortal (as Papists fondly distinguish of mortal and venial sin), for according to the merit and proper nature of every sin, there can be no sin so small but in itself it is mortal and deserves death, even death eternal (Rom. 6:23). For every sin is a “transgression of the law” (1 John 3:4), and the least transgression of the law, though but once admitted, in its own nature exposes to the curse (Gal. 3:10). But though all sins are mortal meritoriously, yet some sins are not mortal eventually, namely, God is pleased not to inflict the punishment of eternal death for every sin that deserves it (and this the apostle’s sense here, as Calvin has judiciously observed), though there is one kind of sin, which is mortal not only meritoriously in its own nature, but eventually, God always so plaguing it. And what sin can this be but that sin against the Holy Ghost of which Matthew 12:31–32, Hebrews 6:4–7, and 10:26–31 seem plainly to speak.

(2) By a caution, not to pray for the pardon of that sin unto death (1 John 5:16). For that we are not to pray according to God's will, inasmuch as God has declared that of all sin, He will not pardon that sin (Matt. 12:31–32). So that we ought not to pray for the pardon of the sin against the Holy Ghost abstractly considered, nor yet as considered concretely in this or that person, whom we can clearly and infallibly discover to have fallen into it.

(3) By confirmation, the apostle gives a reason why we should pray for pardon of the sin of a lapsed brother, of any regenerate person, in that he that is born of God never commits this sin unto death, this unpardonable sin. Why? “He that is begotten of God keepeth himself, and that wicked one toucheth him not” (1 John 5:18). It is not said he “*tempteth* him not,” but he “*toucheth* him not.” How does Satan, that wicked one, not touch him? Not with a qualitative touch, says Cajetan, but Calvin much more judiciously, “he toucheth him not lethally, mortally.” The regenerate is not quite exempt from Satan's wounding touch, but by the shield of faith he guards himself from the mortal killing touch, that he is not stabbed to the heart. Whence is it that he is thus preserved? He keepeth himself—no, God keeps him, as Christ prayed (John 17:11; 1 Peter 1:5). Else woe, woe, to every Christian, were he his own keeper. He keeps himself from this sin while God keeps him, for he acts merely in God's strength and no further. Thus, the Holy Ghost plainly testifies that they that are born of God sin not this sin to death. Make but sure to your conscience that you are born of God, and this may encourage you against your trembling apprehensions that you have sinned against the Holy Ghost.

2. Should it come to pass that the regenerate might sin against the Holy Ghost, then they might totally and finally fall away from God. But that any regenerate person should totally and

finally fall away is as impossible as that God's covenant promises and faithfulness should fail, or that God's Spirit, grace, and power preserving them should be overcome (as was before cleared), or that God's immutable decree for their salvation should be shaken or overthrown (2 Tim. 2:19; Rom. 8:29–30).

3. They that are regenerate shall never come into condemnation. "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death" (Rom. 8:1–2). Therefore, they shall never fall into the sin against the Holy Ghost. For they that fall into that sin cannot possibly escape condemnation.

Questionless Those Persons Have Not Sinned the Sin against the Holy Ghost Who Are Perplexed, Troubled, and Afraid That They Have Fallen into It

That very jealousy,² fear, solicitousness, and trouble of conscience, lest you should have already so sinned, is an undoubted proof and evidence that you never did commit that sin in all your life. For no person that indeed ever sinned against the Holy Ghost either was or could be afraid, perplexed, or troubled in spirit about it; such trouble being inconsistent with the nature of that sin, which leaves no place for any religious fear, suspicion, jealousy, or trouble of heart about it. They that so sin, sinning willfully, obstinately, maliciously, and blasphemously against the Spirit of grace, without all color, shadow, or possibility of remorse or repentance (Matt. 12:31–32; Heb. 6:4–7; 10:26–31). These fears and tremblings of poor souls in this case are signs indeed that they are very weak, and Satan

2. *jealousy*: suspicion.

very busy with them, abusing their weakness. But they are no signs of this sin committed by them, but rather of the contrary.

Those Persons Who Are Without the Visible Church and Without the Gospel Ordinances

Turks, pagans, etc. (though some of the ancients think even such may sin against the Holy Ghost), as also those persons within the visible church who have yet received little or no illumination by means of the ordinances, or spiritual taste and power of them, are not for present in immediate capacity of falling into this dreadful sin against the Holy Ghost (though the root of it, being original corruption, be in them wholly unmortified). For as much as it is not immediately and actually incident but to such as are within the church, and those therein who, wanting true grace, have yet received some common grace of illumination, and taste of spiritual things (Hebrews 6).

Affirmatively

False-hearted, hypocritical professors of Christ and Christianity, living in the bosom of the church, who were never thoroughly renewed (Col. 3:10; Titus 3:5), not partakers of the true life of God (Eph. 4:18) and power of godliness, but only attained the form of godliness (2 Tim. 3:5), a name that they live (Rev. 3:1), and some formal accomplishments of hypocrites and temporary believers (who to human apprehensions may go very far), these are the persons who of all other in the world are most in danger of falling into this unpardonable sin against the Holy Ghost. For such the Scripture describes them to be, who are particularly declared to be liable to this sin. Compare well these Scriptures together: Matthew 12:24, 31–32; Mark 3:28–30; Hebrews 6:4–7; 10:26–31; and Luke 12:10. In all which places hypocrites, especially the formal hypocrites (who usually go furthest in their saint-like appearances), seem

to be evidently characterized and intended. For Christ speaks plainly of the Pharisees, which were in the Jewish church, but blasphemous hypocrites. And the apostle Paul speaks of temporary professors, which were in the Christian church, but apostatic hypocrites.

More particularly, take the Holy Ghost's own character³ of these persons, which are in more near capacity and hazard of sinning this great sin against the Holy Ghost, as they are laid down in these Scriptures, namely,

They Are Such as Have Attained to Much Knowledge of Christ, of the Truth, and of the Way of Righteousness

“Those who were once enlightened” (Heb. 6:4), i.e., enlightened with the knowledge of divine truths and fundamental principles of Christian religion, immediately fore-recited (vv. 1–2). “For if we sin willfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth” (Heb. 10:26).

Which passages presuppose them that fall into this sin of sins to be knowing men in mysteries of Christianity, and notably illuminated, for this sin is a sin against light, great light. There is a threefold light or illumination of men. (1) General and natural, namely, the light of reason. Thus, the eternal Word, the Son of God, is “the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world” (John 1:9). (2) Special and supernatural, namely, that light of the faith and grace from the sanctifying Spirit, which is part of the image of God in the regenerate (of which see John 17:3; 1 John 2:27; Col. 3:10). (3) There is a kind of middle illumination between these, more than mere natural, but less than true supernatural illumination, a common gift of the Spirit even to hypocrites and temporary believers who have no true grace, whereby men may be able

3. *character*: description.

even to prophecy, etc. Of this the apostle speaks, “Though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge...and have not charity, I am nothing” (1 Cor. 13:2). Judas was thus enlightened, and those hypocrites (Matt. 7:22–23). Here we are to understand not the two first, but this last illumination.

They Are Such as by Means of This Knowledge Have Attained to Much Reformation in Their Lives and Ways

“They have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 2:20). Here they were outwardly reformed in the sight of men, not inwardly renewed in the sight of God. Sin was chained up, and restrained, not cast out and mortified, as in Judas who walked so unblameably, as none of the apostles could suspect him more than themselves to be the betrayer of Christ. This seems to be that which our Savior calls “the unclean spirit is gone out of a man” (Matt. 12:43). Seemingly, though not really and in truth, or in some degree, but not thoroughly. An allusion to the ejection of the devil out of the demoniac, about which the Pharisees so blasphemed the Holy Ghost.

They Are Such as “Have Tasted of the Heavenly Gift” (Heb. 6:4)

By “heavenly gift,” Ambrose understands the remission of sins. Oecumenius, the remission of sins, which is in baptism, “for this,” he says, “is a heavenly gift.” Pareus, faith, which is a gift bestowed from heaven upon them that are illuminated. Calvin understands the things of Christ, which are above nature and above the world. And of all other, Christ by way of peculiar emphasis is called “the gift of God” (John 4:10) and may here principally be intended by “the heavenly gift,” for He came down from heaven for us (John 6:38, 50), under which also faith and remission of sins may be implied and included.

Remission of sins and such like benefits, being tasted in Christ, and faith being the organ whereby we taste them. And note, it is not said, “have eaten,” or “drunk,” but only “tasted,” i.e., have had some kind of relish or small sense by a temporary faith of the excellency of Christ and the things of Christ.

They Are Such as “Were Made Partakers of the Holy Ghost”
(*Heb. 6:4*)

By “Holy Ghost” here interpreters unanimously understand not the special sanctifying graces of the Spirit, but the common gifts of the Holy Ghost, as common illumination, tongues, temporary faith, faith of miracles, etc. Of which gifts the apostle makes an enumeration in 1 Corinthians 12:3–12. Judas, Simon Magus, many hypocrites had such gifts in the primitive times (Matt. 7:22–23; Acts 8:13). In after times, and even in our days, public church officers (though hypocrites) may have the gift of formal preaching, expounding Scriptures, and praying in public. Indeed, private professors may share in such gifts as to be able formally to pray, to resolve doubts, to comfort the feeble-minded, to strengthen and encourage the timorous, to instruct the ignorant, and by profitable discourse to edify many, and all these by the common assistance of the Holy Ghost. See Ambrose, Oecumenius, Piscator, Calvin, Pareus, thus interpreting.

They Are Such as “Have Tasted the Good Word of God” (*Heb. 6:5*)

That is, the doctrine of the gospel, says Ambrose; the doctrine of Christ, says Oecumenius; the word of the gospel styled good, i.e., pleasant, says Piscator; the Holy Scriptures, says Pareus (all come much to one); and Calvin thinks that the gospel is here peculiarly intended, that being the good, the sweet word, testifying the sweetness of God’s love to poor sinners, when the law bitterly thunders out nothing but death and curses. Now

even hypocrites and castaways, hearing the gospel powerfully and sweetly preached, the matchless love of God in Christ to sinners displayed, the worth and excellency of Jesus Christ and His benefits unfolded—oh, how are they sometimes moved, pleased, and for present affected with some pangs and moods of joy! Herod heard John the Baptist gladly (Mark 6:20). The hearers resembled to the stony ground, “heareth the word, and anon with joy receiveth it” (Matt. 13:20; Ezek. 33:31–32). But all this is but an imperfect taste.

Finally, They Are Such as “Have Tasted... the Powers of the World to Come” (Heb. 6:5)

Most by “world to come” here understand the life to come in heaven, and by “powers of the world to come,” the resurrection of the saints’ bodies, their blessed separation from the goats, and sentence of salvation from Jesus Christ, together with all that bliss, joy, glory, vision of God, and benefits of eternal life which they shall possess in heaven. All which may be well called “powers of the world to come,” partly (1) because then they shall appear to be glorious effects of God’s powers, partly (2) because Christ the mighty God (Isa. 9:6) has made it a powerful kingdom which cannot be shaken, partly (3) because now the very apprehensions and hopes of them work powerful effects of comfort, joy, delight, etc. in the hearts of them that expect them (Rom. 5:1–2). These powers of the world to come formal professors may taste by contemplation of them with some delight, and by application to themselves (though falsely) by a temporary faith (Luke 8:13), which for present may leave some tincture and relish of sweetness upon their spirits. Hence Balaam wished, “Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his!” (Num. 23:10). But some by “world to come” understand these last times of the new testament in opposition to the world past under the old testament, and

in that sense, in this very epistle, speaking of the times of the gospel, he phrases it “the world to come.” “For unto the angels hath he not put in subjection the world to come, whereof we speak” (Heb. 2:5). By “powers of the world to come” in this sense they understand the signs, wonders, and miracles with which God did powerfully bear witness to the apostles and their doctrine (Heb. 2:4; Matt. 16:26), as Christ promised (Mark 16:17–18). And those that had the gifts of working miracles in the primitive church are called *dunameis*, i.e., “powers” (1 Cor. 12:28, 29), which is the self-same word here used in Hebrews 6:5. Now it is evident that even hypocrites had a taste of such powers of miracles, etc. (Matt. 7:22–23). And doubtless Judas wanted not this gift else the rest of the apostles might have suspected him rather than themselves to betray Christ, which they did not. Now though this latter interpretation be plausible, and the expressions here used may well bear this sense, being elsewhere used to like purpose, yet the former exposition seems rather to be preferred (1) partly because so the sense will rise in this particular of tasting “the powers of the world to come” above all the other forementioned, which according to the latter exposition, rather falls, (2) partly because so a tautology will be prevented in these particular qualifications enumerated, which according to this latter interpretation cannot be avoided, understanding powers of miracles, which evidently come under the former particular of “partakers of the Holy Ghost.”

Thus much for the first thing to be opened, namely, who they are that have a more immediate habitude to, and are more nearly in danger of, the sin against the Holy Ghost.

SECTION 2

Next we consider what the sin against the Holy Ghost is, and wherein it consists. And here I may ingenuously confess with

Augustine writing upon the blasphemy of the Holy Ghost, what it should be, that happily “in the whole sacred Scripture there is scarcely found a greater and a harder question” than this is. And were it not (1) the Scripture has revealed something concerning it; and (2) that it is necessary to endeavor the satisfaction of the weak, scrupling consciences of some trembling Christians about it, that they have not fallen into it, and by the grace of God never shall; (3) as also that it is a thing desirable that all truly regenerate persons may more clearly see the riches of God’s grace in His undoubted persevering all and every one of them forever from committing it, that so they may walk the more thankfully, humbly, and watchfully before the Lord—I say were it not for these considerations, I should most willingly have been silent herein. But these afford both warrant and encouragement to speak, so it be soberly, and according to Scripture.

For more clearness herein, consider (1) the name, (2) the nature, and (3) the grievousness of this sin against the Holy Ghost.

The Name or Names Given to This Sin in Holy Scripture

Names, properly given, do much notify or make known the things intended by them. The more remarkable names given to it are these, namely,

Blasphemy against the Holy Ghost, or Blasphemy against the Spirit

“But the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men,” which is after expounded by “speaketh against the Holy Ghost” (Matt. 12:31–32; see also Mark 3:31–32 and Luke 12:10). “Blasphemy” is originally a Greek word, derived as some think from *blax* and *phēmē*, i.e., “a bad fame,” “a useless fame,” etc., or as others, *bleptein tēn phēmēn*, from “hurting the fame,” good name, or reputation of any, God or

man. Thus, it signifies in the general notation of the word, but used more strictly (as here) it denotes a more grievous and heinous reproaching, slandering, or reviling of the Holy Spirit, and this purposely and maliciously against knowledge. This the apostle elsewhere calls “despite unto the Spirit of grace” (Heb. 10:29), *hybrizontes*, which properly notes a petulance and forwardness of reproaching. Now this sin is peculiarly called blasphemy of the Spirit, or against the Holy Ghost, rather than blasphemy against the Father or the Son.

Not in respect of the divine essence, or personal substance of the Holy Ghost, for he who sins against any one person of the blessed Trinity, sins against every person, for They are all one in unity of essence (1 John 5:7). He that blasphemes the Holy Ghost, blasphemes also both the Father and Son, inasmuch as all three are coessential, and therefore coequal and coeternal in majesty, glory, and all divine perfections, as Ambrose has well noted.

But in respect of the ministry and office of the Holy Ghost. (1) The ministry of the Spirit is the gospel, and the glorious truth therein contained (2 Cor. 3:8), from which truth hypocrites fall away, and against which truth they maliciously and blasphemously oppose and set themselves who sin against the Holy Ghost, as after will appear. (2) The office of the Spirit is to convince (John 16:9), to illuminate and furnish with variety of gifts and spiritual endowments (Acts 8:13; Luke 8:13; 1 Cor. 12), and to suggest many good motions and inclinations into men’s hearts, in use of ordinances and otherwise (Matt. 13:20; Mark 6:20). They had some motions of joy. Agrippa: “almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian” (Acts 26:28). Against which light, gifts, and motions of the Spirit they directly and willfully sin, that sin against the Holy Ghost.

An Apostasy or Falling Away

“If they shall fall away” (Heb. 6:6). It is the highest and worst apostasy of all other, as after we shall further see. This presupposes some entertainment of Christian religion from which they make defection, namely, in the form and profession of it. As for them that have embraced it in truth and power, they shall never fall (John 10:28).

The Sin unto Death

“There is a sin unto death...and there is a sin not unto death” (1 John 5:16–17). Why thus called was formerly explained. Thus of some of the principal names.

The Nature of This Sin

The nature of this sin, and wherein it properly and especially consists, comes next to consideration. Here lies the *cardo controversiae*, the very knot and stress of the case. Both ancient and modern writers herein manifest much discrepancy and disagreement with one another, and among divers of them is to be found small satisfaction in this point. Augustine much hesitates about it, but at last conceives it to be a “final impenitency.” Ambrose sometimes intimates it to be “a blasphemous denial of the Holy Ghost,” sometimes interprets it to be an “impious, heretical, and schismatic separation from the church of Christ.” Gregory thinks it is the “not believing remission of sins.” Thomas thinks, “He sins against the Holy Ghost that not only speaks against the majesty of God, and the person of the Holy Ghost, but also that obstinately and maliciously persists in his sins, impenitent to the point of death, rejecting all the Holy Ghost’s provisions for suppression of his sins.” And he with other of the schoolmen usually reckons up six sorts or kinds of this sin against the Holy Ghost, namely, (1) despair, (2) presumption, (3) an obstinate purpose of continuing in sin, (4) a firm

and fixed will never to repent, (5) an impugning or opposing of the known truth, and (6) an envying of our brothers' graces. All which (they say) may be forgiven but that final obstinacy in sinning. Estius is of the opinion that "the sin against the Holy Ghost generally taken is whatsoever is purposely, maliciously, and blasphemously committed against God in thought, word, or deed."

In the midst of all this variety of opinions, especially in so difficult a subject as this, where shall we pitch? I like Augustine's item⁴ well in this very case: "Let us beg light for exposition of this matter from the Lord." For more distinct resolution consider (1) by way of remotion, or negation of what it is not; (2) by way of position, or affirmation of what it is, and both very briefly.

By Way of Remotion, or Negation of What It Is Not

The sin against the Holy Ghost strictly and properly taken, seems not to be any of these particular sins following, namely,

1. It is not every blasphemous temptation injected and darted by Satan into the thoughts against God Father, Son, or Holy Ghost. For, (1) the dearest saints and servants of God may be buffeted and sifted with such sad temptations and horrid injections of the devil. Frequent experience tells us this much. How many gracious souls come to ministers lamenting the many horrid suggestions of blasphemy cast into their imaginations! One of singular experience in soul distresses says, "I have known him, who did bite in and keep close in his bosom, this temptation of blasphemy, the space of about twenty years, all which while the devil did tyrannize extremely and keep him almost in continual terror. He thought there was

4. *item*: admonition.

never man had such vile and prodigious thoughts as he," etc.⁵ (2) Blasphemous suggestions were injected into the imagination of Jesus Christ Himself (who was so far from sinning against the Holy Ghost that He never sinned at all, nor could sin, Isa. 53:9; Heb. 7:25–26; 2 Cor. 5:21), namely, that He who was the spotless Son of God, in whom "dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily" (Col. 2:9); "who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person" (Heb. 1:3); "who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God" (Phil. 2:6)—that He should fall down and worship the devil in person (Matt. 4:9). Never Christian had, nor could have more black and hideous blasphemy cast into his thoughts. Yet Christ in the least degree yielded not to this blasphemous suggestion, but conquered it, that His members hereby might be more than conquerors, even triumphers, over like temptations, through Christ that loves them. (3) Blasphemous suggestions injected into our hearts, yet not consented to by us, but rather trembled at, execrated and abhorred, are the devil's sins, not ours. They are our sorrows, our afflictions, and miseries, but not our sins. "A pious soul is no more guilty of them," says one, "than Benjamin of Joseph's cup put into his sack."⁶ "Blasphemous thoughts," says Mr. Perkins, "not consented to by us, are not our sins but the devil's. Men must not fear those kinds of thoughts overmuch...because though indeed they be their crosses, yet are they not their personal sins, for which they shall incur the wrath and displeasure of God." And says Mr. Dyke, "Satan must answer for this himself." Hereto subscribe both ancient and modern writers.

5. The quotation is from Robert Bolton (1572–1631).

6. The quotation is from Richard Sibbes (1577–1635).

2. It is not every sinning against the deity or personality of the Holy Ghost, as Augustine observes, that the Sadducees denied the Holy Ghost; that the Arians, Eunomians, and Macedonians contended that the Holy Ghost was a creature, not a creator; that the Sabellians (called also Patripassians, because they held that the Father suffered) deny the Trinity, assert only the Father, that He is sometimes called the Son, sometimes the Holy Ghost; that the Photinians, denying the Trinity, say the Father only is God, the Son only man, but deny the Holy Ghost altogether. These are hideous blasphemous and damnable heresies, but it would be somewhat hard to prove that these are the sin against the Holy Ghost, because this sin properly is not so much against the essence or subsistence of the Holy Ghost, as against the ministry and office of the Holy Ghost.

3. Not every sin against knowledge is that sin against the Holy Ghost. For though knowledge adds an aggravating circumstance to sin (John 9:41; Luke 12:47), yet (1) the best of God's people in a gust of temptation without and violence of corruption within, may sometimes so far be born down as to do those things which they know they should not do, as in Paul (Rom. 7:15, 19, 20, 23). In Peter, he knew he ought not to deny his Lord and Master Jesus Christ, and resolved peremptorily the contrary, but sudden fear prevailed over him (Matt. 26:69–75). In David, he knew he should not commit adultery, nor kill, yet strength of corruption and temptation pushed him upon both. Yet none of these sinned the sin against the Holy Ghost. (2) Sins against knowledge admit both of repentance and pardon, as in all these three cases mentioned. David pardoned (2 Sam. 12:13). Peter restored after his bitter tears; by a threefold fear he denied Christ, by a threefold love he confessed Christ (Matt. 26:75; John 21:15, etc.). Paul delivered from

his body of death by Jesus Christ his Lord (Rom. 7:24–25). (3) Besides sinning against knowledge and illumination, divers other sinful poisons are complicated⁷ and contained in the sin against the Holy Ghost (Heb. 6:4–6; 10:26–29; Matt. 12:31).

4. Not every sinning against the truth of Christ and the gospel is the sin against the Holy Ghost. For, (1) those that know most of the truth of Christ in this world “know in part,” “see through a glass, darkly” (1 Cor. 13:9, 12), and therefore they may possibly err from the truth in some things. (2) Divers have sinned against the truth, indeed, sometimes against fundamentals, and yet are not challenged⁸ to have sinned against the Holy Ghost, but were accounted as of the visible church, as those in the church of Corinth that denied the resurrection (1 Cor. 15:12). And those in the church of Pergamum, that held the doctrine of Balaam and the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, yet are not counted hopeless, but invited to repent of these damnable opinions (Rev. 2:14–16). The churches of Galatia were fearfully tainted with that dangerous error of the necessity of the works of the law to justification, as well as of faith, which gave occasion to Paul of writing that excellent epistle to the Galatians (see Gal. 1:6, etc.; 2:16, etc.; 3:1, etc.). Indeed, the very apostles themselves had an erroneous opinion about Christ’s temporal kingdom, and that until after His resurrection (Acts 1:6). (3) Erroneous persons are called to repentance (Rev. 2:16), and ministers are directed to instruct with meekness these who oppose themselves, if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth (2 Tim. 2:24–26).

7. *complicated*: combined.

8. *challenged*: accused.

5. Not every sinning against the gracious motions, strivings, and operations of the Holy Ghost is this peculiar sin against the Holy Ghost here spoken of. For, (1) it is possible that men may thus sin and sometimes with a high hand, and yet not be charged by the Scripture with sinning against the Holy Ghost. The proto-martyr Stephen thus challenges his hearers, “Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye. Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted?” (Acts 7:51–52). They are charged with always resisting the Holy Ghost, a heavy charge, a heinous sin doubtless. But yet are not charged with that sin against the Holy Ghost. (2) All carnal men in the visible church, while carnal, still resist the Holy Ghost in His gospel ministry, often quenching His convictions, motions, and holy suggestions to their souls. Yet it would be a hard and false sentence to say all such sin the sin against the Holy Ghost here intended. Possibly they may do it in ignorance, and afterwards come to repentance. Saul, while a carnal Pharisee, was a blasphemer (1 Tim. 1:13), and compelled the saints to blaspheme, and being exceedingly mad against them, persecuted them to strange cities (Acts 26:10–11). He so far withstood the Spirit’s ministry and tenders of grace, that he persecuted it to the death. Yet all this he did ignorantly, repented of it, and obtained mercy (1 Tim. 1:13, 16), which could not have been, if in this height of his wickedness he had sinned this grand sin against the Holy Ghost. (3) Who knows not, but even the dear children of God are in danger in some measure of sinning against the Spirit of God, by grieving Him, and quenching Him. Hence the apostle so cautions them, “Quench not the Spirit” (1 Thess. 5:19), “and grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption” (Eph. 4:30). Indeed, actually some have quenched the Spirit in some measure, as the angel of Ephesus had “left thy first love” (Rev.

2:4). As David, who therefore prays, “Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation; and uphold me with thy free spirit” (Ps. 51:12).

6. Not every sinning against grace received is presently the sin against the Holy Ghost. For, (1) the most heavenly and gracious souls are daily perplexed with inseparable and invincible infirmities, as doubts, fears, distracting thoughts, distempered passions, etc. (2) They may too often quench the Spirit (1 Thess. 5:19) and grieve Him (Eph. 4:29–30) by suppressing His good motions, sacred stirrings, and strivings in their hearts. (3) They may gradually decay and decline in their graces and gracious affections to God and Jesus Christ (though this be very sad and dangerous) (Rev. 2:5), and yet not be utterly cast out of Christ’s affection. The angel of Ephesus had left his first love, and first works, though otherwise much commended and approved by Christ (Rev. 2:1–8). (4) They may grossly fall, and even break their bones by falling (which is much to be lamented), yet not quite fall away. As Noah to drunkenness (Gen. 9:21), Lot to incest (Gen. 19:33, etc.), David to murder and uncleanness (2 Samuel 11 with Psalm 51). Augustine intimates some were of opinion that such falls were the sin against the Holy Ghost, which opinion he justly rejects because in such cases the door of repentance is not quite shut. (5) Indeed, it is possible that those who are born of God and are kept from sinning this sin unto death may yet relapse again and again. Lapses are dangerous, relapses double dangerous. To break a bone is hazardous, but to break it again in the same place is extremely perilous. Yet even repeated and reiterated sins may find pardon upon repentance. Jacob twice told a lie for compassing of the blessing (Gen. 27:19, 21). Lot, twice made drunken, committed incest with both his daughters (Genesis 19). Peter thrice denied his Master, and every time worse than the other (Matthew 26). These are recorded to caution them

that stand, that they fall not, and to comfort them that have relapsed, that they despair not.

7. Not every malicious opposing and persecuting of the church and ways of Christ (though this be a high pitch of wickedness) is the sin against the Holy Ghost. For, (1) we have two eminent instances in the New Testament to the contrary. Saul consented to Stephen's death (Acts 8:1), breathed out "threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord" (Acts 9:1, etc.). When they were put to death, he gave his voice against them, and punished them oft in every synagogue, and compelled them to blaspheme, and being exceedingly mad against them, persecuted them even unto strange cities (Acts 26:10–11), and yet the Lord had mercy on him (1 Tim. 1:13, 16). Indeed, He had such mercy on him as to convert and save him when he was in his course of subverting and destroying His church (Acts 9:1–3; 26:12–13). Behold here a wonder of mercy. And yet here is a greater wonder, the persecutors and murderers of Jesus Christ Himself find mercy and are converted (Acts 2:36, etc.). Let heaven and earth, men and angels adore this mercy. He pitied him that was cruel to His saints, indeed, He pardoned them that crucified Himself. Who would despair when Christ opens to such a door of hope? Who would presume to sin and spurn against such bowels of commiserations? (2) Such sins may be committed by them that have not been evangelically illuminated. Paul obtained mercy because he did it ignorantly (1 Tim. 1:13), and "had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory" (1 Cor. 2:8). And properly the sin against the Holy Ghost is not committed until after the gospel illumination (Hebrews 6). (3) Such delinquents sometimes find mercy, that Christ may make them "for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting" (1 Tim. 1:16).

None of all these are this sin against the Holy Ghost, which we seek after, yet are we not therefore to embolden ourselves in them. Though treason bring the most shameful and cruel death, yet felony is capital, and the easiest death is a heavy punishment; and though none of these sins be that sin of sins, which excludes all hope of salvation, yet every one, even the least of them, are such sins as in their own nature deserve damnation (Rom. 6:23). Consider this, you trembling Christian, you think you have sinned against the Holy Ghost; no stay, the Lord has thus far kept you from many of these recited evils, and questionless the sin against the Holy Ghost is far beyond them all. But what is it, seeing thus far we see what it is not?

By Way of Position or Affirmation, Consider Now What It Is

The sin against the Holy Ghost is not a single, but a compounded wickedness, tempered and made up of many deadly poisons, whereby it becomes extremely damnable. There is a concurrence and complication of many pernicious diseases in it, which make it out of measure deadly.

There are some special Scriptures that peculiarly delineate the nature of this horrid sin unto us, namely, these that follow. "For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, if they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame" (Heb. 6:4–6).

And afterwards in the same epistle it is said, "Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching. For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth

no more sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries. He that despised Moses' law died without mercy under two or three witnesses: Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden underfoot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace?" (Heb. 10:25–29).

The apostle John also said, "If any man see his brother sin a sin which is not unto death, he shall ask, and he shall give him life for them who sin not unto death. There is a sin unto death: I do not say that he shall pray for it. All unrighteousness is sin: and there is a sin not unto death. We know that whosoever is born of God sinneth not; but he that is begotten of God keepeth himself, and that wicked one toucheth him not" (1 John 5:16–18).

Our blessed Savior having healed one possessed of a devil, blind, and dumb, the Pharisees maliciously reviled Him and said, "This fellow doth not cast out devils, but by Beelzebub the prince of the devils. And Jesus knew their thoughts, and said unto them, Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation.... Wherefore I say unto you, All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men: but the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men. And whosoever speaketh a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him: but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the world to come" (Matt. 12:22–32). Compare here with Mark 3:22, 28, 29, who adds this as an express reason, "Because they said, He hath an unclean spirit" (v. 30), and Luke 12:10.

The sin against which our Savior thus severely speaks in these three Evangelists is without doubt that notorious sin against the Holy Ghost *kat' exochēn*, most strictly and properly

so called. For, (1) it is denominated blasphemy against the Holy Ghost, and (2) is by Christ declared to be that one only unpardonable sin. That sin also against which the author of the epistle to the Hebrews, and John, in the three fore-cited texts speak, must needs be granted to be the same sin against the Holy Ghost, inasmuch as it is in all the three places laid down as a dreadful and unpardonable sin, of which it is impossible to repent (Heb. 6:4–6), for which there remains no more sacrifice (Heb. 10:25–26), and for pardon whereof we must not pray (1 John 5:16). So that all these texts speaking so fully and evidently of the sin against the Holy Ghost, we may from them all, considered together, draw this description of that horrid sin against the Holy Ghost, most properly and strictly so called, namely,

The sin against the Holy Ghost is a universal, final, and willful falling away of hypocritical professors from the truth and common graces of the Holy Ghost once received and possessed to the blasphemous despiting⁹ of the Spirit of grace, horrid contempt, and malice against the Son of God, and violent persecution of the way of Christianity.

This description of the sin against the Holy Ghost, is so clearly grounded upon the former Scriptures that much need not be said for evincing thereof. Only for unfolding the nature of this sin, consider in this description these ensuing, namely,

- I. The General Nature of It: A Falling Away
- II. The More Special Nature of It, Whereby It Is Differenced or Distinguished from Other Sins, Namely, by,
 - A. The Peculiar Subject of It: Hypocritical Professors

9. *despiting*: treating with contempt.

B. The Properties of This Falling Away, Which Are Three.

It Is

1. Universal
2. Final
3. Willful

C. The *Termini*, or Terms of This Apostasy of Falling Away, Which Are, Namely,

1. *Terminus a quo*. The Term from Which or the Good from Which He Falls, Namely,
 - i. Truth
 - ii. Common Graces of the Holy Ghost, Once Received and Professed
2. *Terminus ad quem*. The Term to Which, or the Evil to Which He Backslides, Which Is Threefold, Namely, to
 - i. Blasphemous Despiting of the Spirit of Grace
 - ii. Horrid Contempt and Malice against the Son of God
 - iii. Violent Persecution of the Way of Christianity

These are the particulars in this description. Let us briefly consider how clearly they are grounded on Scripture, and then we shall see that in Scripture sense, this is the true nature of the sin against the Holy Ghost.

I. The General Nature of This Sin against the Holy Ghost, Namely, a Falling Away, or an Apostasy

There is a manifold falling away, as (1) from truth to error and heresy (Gal. 1:6–7; 3:1; 2 Thess. 2:10–11; 1 Tim. 1:19–20). (2) From purity of worship to superstition and idolatry, as Israel often fell in the days of Aaron (Exodus 32), of the judges, of the kings, etc. (see Acts 7:39–44). (3) From some holy degrees and heroic perfections of first love, to carnal sluggishness, remissness, and negligence, as the angel of Ephesus

(Rev. 2:4, etc.), the church herself (Song 5:2–4), or into some erroneous offenses, as sometimes the dear servants of God fell, as David, Peter, etc. (4) From temporary faith and professions to looseness and profaneness, worldliness, etc., as the hearers compared to the stony ground (Matt. 13:20–21; Luke 8:6, 13). Indeed, all the ground, (save the good ground) fell away. (5) From all truth, common graces, and all profession of them, to a malicious, obstinate, and incurable opposition thereof. And this is that notorious apostasy and sin against the Holy Ghost. Now there being many sorts of falling away. This sin is ranked among apostasies for the general nature of it, for herein it agrees with them.

That the sin against the Holy Ghost is an apostasy or falling away is plain in Scriptures that speak particularly of this sin. Such as commit this sin are said to “sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth” (Heb. 10:26). There is a falling away intimated, namely, after truth known and professed, a willful sinning against that truth, indeed, a forsaking of public assemblies (v. 25). So dangerous it is to make separations from the church of Christ and to fall off from communion with true church assemblies, that it fearfully prepares and disposes to this great sin, indeed, they that commit this sin are expressly said to fall away, “for it is impossible for those who were once enlightened...if they shall fall away,” etc. (Heb. 6:4–6). So that the general nature of this sin is apostasy or falling away. Apostates and backsliders they are in the highest degree, that sin this sin. How dreadful is the sin of apostasy!—(1) sharply threatened of God (Prov. 14:14; Heb. 10:38–39) and (2) severely plagued (Matt. 12:43–45 compared with 2 Peter 2:20–22).

II. The More Special Nature of This Sin against the Holy Ghost, Whereby It Is Distinguished from Other Sins, Is Considerable in the (A) Subject, (B) Properties, and (C) Terms of This Apostasy

A. The Peculiar Subject

The peculiar subject of apostatizing, or falling away, is hypocritical professors, namely, hypocritical false-hearted professors of Christianity in the bosom of the Church, who have received some large measure of illumination and common gifts or graces of the Holy Ghost.

These are the men (who not having a true foundation of grace) are in greatest and nearest hazard of any other of falling into the sin against the Holy Ghost by their apostasy. For, (1) no other sort of persons are in this hazard and danger, as was evidenced before; (2) Scripture plainly teaches us that hypocritical professors, especially those that have attained the highest formal perfections and temporary accomplishments from the Holy Ghost, are the very persons who commit this sin. Who were they that our Savior so warns of their blaspheming of the Holy Ghost but the Pharisees (Matt. 12:24–25, 31–32) and the scribes (Mark 3:22, 28–29)? And what were the scribes and Pharisees but notorious hypocrites (Matt. 5:20; 23:13–15, 23, 25, 27, 29)? Who were those whom the apostle intimates to be likely to sin this sin but such as were “once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come” (Heb. 6:4–6)? Who also, forsaking the public church assemblies, “sin wilfully” after they have “received the knowledge of the truth,” and after they have been “sanctified” with the blood of the covenant (Heb. 10:25–26, 29). How “sanctified”? Not inwardly, truly, and savingly sanctified (as interpreters observe), but only externally, seemingly,

and in appearance, consisting in external profession of faith and participation of the sacraments, whereby they were visibly severed from pagans and heathens and reputed in the judgment of charity, Christians. Now all these qualifications raise a man no higher than to the pitch of formal hypocrites, or hypocritical professors. And yet these are the very men who sin against the Holy Ghost. Not that all such hypocrites run into this sin, but that none but such hypocrites thus sin. *Convenit soli, sed non omni: proprie secundo modo.* This is the subject sinning, or falling away.

B. The Properties of This Falling Away

The properties of this falling away, which render it the most dangerous and pernicious apostasy in the world, are these three. It is (1) universal, (2) final, and (3) willful or malicious.

1. A Universal Apostasy or Falling Away

This is a first property of this sin against the Holy Ghost. This the height of apostasy, that it is universal. Partial, particular fallings away from some truths only to some errors, from some degrees of profession, of grace, of obedience, only to some gradual defects or decays therein, etc., may befall a David, a Peter, or the most excellent saint unglorified, and yet be pardonable. But this unpardonable sin is a total, absolute, universal falling away. Universal both in respect of the (1) truth, and (2) graces of the Holy Ghost. They that sin against the Holy Ghost, they fall away both from the (1) profession and (2) approbation of all (1) truth and (2) grace, once received and professed.

Possibly there may remain in them some principle of truth, as that God is, that Jesus Christ is, that there shall be a judgment, that there shall be another life after this, etc. Some relics also of common grace may remain in them unobliterated, irritating and aggravating their malice and wickedness

so much the more, as some beams of illumination and conviction, which they would fain totally extinguish, being full of vexation and madness at themselves that they know so much. But it is one thing to have these remaining in them, another thing to profess them and approve them. Now that this their falling away is so universal is notably hinted to us in Hebrews 6:1–7. For first, here the principles of Christianity or the fundamental doctrines of Christ are summarily enumerated, namely, (1) repentance from dead works, (2) faith toward God, (3) the doctrine of baptism, (4) and of laying on of hands, (5) and of the resurrection of the dead, and (6) and of eternal judgment (vv. 1–2). These are very comprehensive principles, in which all other evangelical truths may be well comprised. These seem to be the heads of the Apostles' Catechism in the primitive church. Secondly, here are also reckoned up many common gifts and graces of the Holy Ghost, and that so comprehensively also, that all the common graces of the Spirit may be easily included therein, namely, (1) enlightening, (2) tasting the heavenly gift, (3) partaking of the Holy Ghost, (4) tasting the good word of God, and (5) the powers of the world to come (vv. 4–5). Thirdly, here is intimated a possibility of falling away both from all these truths, and all these common graces of the Holy Ghost, to that unpardonable sin (vv. 4–6). This falling away is afterwards by this same apostle called sinning willfully after the receiving of the knowledge of the truth (Heb. 10:26), which may well imply falling from both truth and grace.

Thus, that judicious Calvin understands the apostle here, not of some particular, but of a universal defection: the faith of Christ and grace of Christ being wholly cast off. And elsewhere he says,

It is to be noted there is a double falling away, particular and universal. He that in any kind, or several ways offends, he falls from the state of a Christian man, therefore all

sins are so many falls. But the apostle does not here dispute of theft, or perjury, or murder, or drunkenness, or adultery. But he notes a universal defection from the gospel, when a sinner offends not God in some one respect, but withdraws himself from His grace altogether. And that this may be the better understood, the antithesis between the graces reckoned up and this falling away is to be observed. For he falls away that makes defection from the word of the Lord, that extinguishes the light of it, that deprives himself of the taste of the heavenly gift, that forsakes the participation of the Spirit. And this is to renounce God totally. Now we see whom he secludes from hope of pardon, namely, apostates who withdraw themselves from the grace of God and the gospel of Christ which they had formerly embraced, which befalls no man, but he sins against the Holy Ghost.

Thus also those learned interpreters, Beza and D. Pareus, understand here a universal apostasy. Let the reader consult their words. Thus also Master Dering, in his excellent lectures on the Hebrews, counts this a universal apostasy, of which here the apostle speaks. Because his book is scarce, I have here annexed his words:

Now let us see the manner of rebellion, how far they fall away. First, we must observe what points the apostle has before named. In the beginning of the chapter he mentions repentance from dead works, faith towards God, the doctrine of baptism, and laying on of hands, and resurrection from the dead, and eternal judgment, which here he calls the beginning and foundation of Christianity. Then, he speaks of an apostasy or falling away from all these points here named, even from the foundation and first beginnings of the Christian faith, so that all the former light is quite put out, and the first understanding is all taken away. They laugh now at repentance, and the first faith they account it foolishness. They esteem not of our

baptism, no more than of the washing of their hands. And for any confirmation or solemn receiving them into the church of God, they are not for it. The resurrection of the dead does but feed them with merry conceits. They think pleasantly¹⁰ with themselves what manner of bodies they shall have. The eternal judgment, though it make them sometimes afraid, yet they encourage themselves again and say, "Tush, it is a great way off." Thus have they turned light into darkness, knowledge into ignorance, hope into error, faith into infidelity, glory into shame, and life into death. Speak to them of the Son of God, they make a jest with the man of Galilee. Tell them of the Savior of the world, they will call him the carpenter's son. Such a general apostasy the apostle speaks of, and this he calls the fall, from which men cannot rise again by repentance.

2. A Final Apostasy

A departure from God, Christ, grace, the church, without return, a ruin without repair, an apostasy to the end of a man's life without recovery, a backsliding forever. David fell, but David rose again. Peter fell and that fearfully, but it was but for a while, for a few hours. "And he went out, and wept bitterly" (Matt. 26:75). But this falling away so as to sin against the Holy Ghost is not only universal, but also final. For, (1) it is impossible to renew them again unto repentance (Heb. 6:4–6). And they that so fall, as to fall beyond the possibility of rising again by repentance, must needs fall finally. (2) There remains no possibility of pardon to such. "He that shall blaspheme against the Holy Ghost hath never forgiveness, but is in danger of eternal damnation" (Mark 3:29; Luke 12:10). "If we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins" (Heb. 10:26). And where

10. *pleasantly*: laughingly.

there's no place for pardon, that's a final offense. (3) Death eternal is the certain and inevitable reward and event of this sin. See 1 John 5:16, Mark 3:29, Hebrews 10:27. Thus this falling away is not only universal, but final.

3. A Willful and Malicious Apostasy

Namely, not an apostasy or falling away through mere ignorance, inconsiderateness, or infirmity, against the deliberate resolution and habitual disposition of heart and will, or through violent push of temptation, which may be incident, even to the best of saints, but an obstinate falling away out of a man's own free, spontaneous election, against knowledge and conscience, out of a malicious willfulness of spirit, fixedly and peremptorily resolved to cast off the truth and ways of God, whatever God or man shall say or do to the contrary. Such is their apostasy that sin against the Holy Ghost, as these words intimate: "For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins" (Heb. 10:26). The words *hekousiōs hamartanontōn*, translated "sinning willfully," imply thus much in the judgment of learned men. "Here," says Pareus, "he understands not every sin, but secession from the church, nor every secession out of infirmity, fear, or ignorance, but that which is done willfully. And philosophers tell us those things are done willfully which are done neither through violence nor ignorance, but by the spontaneous motion of the will. He understands therefore a defection, not extorted by tyrants through violence, or admitted through fear or ignorance (because he presently adds, 'after we have received the knowledge of the truth'), but willfully, i.e., maliciously committed by deliberate will and counsel."

To the like purpose also that learned Beza expounds this word. "This word *hekousiōs*, 'ultroneously,' is said of them who do anything without any cause or show of cause. Therefore, it

agrees¹¹ to them, not who simply sin knowingly (for then farewell David and Peter, and by this reason who should not be a hundred thousand times mancipated¹² to eternal death?), but to them who professedly and universally departed from Christ, are delighted in impiety, and make war against the known truth, as did Saul, Julian the Apostate, Arius, and others of execrable memory.” Thus, their falling away is willful, i.e., not only committed with knowledge, but also with free consent, obstinacy, indeed, and maliciousness of will. And this interpretation is the more confirmed by the apostle’s subsequent expressions of treading under foot the Son of God, of counting the blood of the covenant an unholy thing, and of doing despite to the Spirit of grace (Heb. 10:29), in the forehead of which actions “malice” is engraved in capital letters. Thus, this falling away is not only universal and final, but also willful and malicious.

These three properties of this grand apostasy, namely, (1) universalness, (2) finality, and (3) maliciousness must be taken *conjunctim non divisim*, jointly altogether, not disjointly or severally one from another, if by them we would describe the sin against the Holy Ghost, and rightly understand the Scripture about it. For it is possible that men may fall totally and finally and yet not commit this sin against the Holy Ghost, unless also they fall maliciously. Excellently that learned D. Pareus expressed himself to this point, wherewith I shall close up this branch.

We must note that there are diverse degrees of falling, and as it were four kinds. (1) Partial falls into some error or some sin, as many fathers, Irenaeus, Lactantius, etc. fell into the heresy of the Chiliasts. David fell into murder and adultery. Of these the apostle speaks not;

11. *agrees*: corresponds.

12. *mancipated*: bound.

it is not impossible to repent of these. (2) A total fall, or renouncing of the whole Christian faith, but through infirmity, and therefore not final. As Peter by denying Christ seems to fall totally, but he repented with tears. So Marcellinus fell through infirmity to idolatry, and many other Christians under persecution, but afterwards repented. And when Novatian understood this saying of such (namely, Heb. 6:4–6), he erred, and the event evidenced that it was ill-wrested against them. Nor was it impossible for Peter, Marcellinus, and others lapsed truly to repent. As Cyprian's *On the Lapsed* and histories do testify. (3) A total and final fall, but not malicious, i.e., not done of purposed malice, but from other causes, which Christ adumbrated in His parable of the seed falling on rocky and thorny ground (Matthew 13). Some are determined by persecutions, others are withdrawn from religion by hopes of honors, pleasures, and the cares of this life, and that finally, yet without blasphemy and persecution, rather through a kind of security and sluggishness. So divers departed from Christ and walked no more with Him, being offended at His sermon about eating His flesh (John 6). Properly the apostle does not speak of these, because though these be not renewed by repentance, yet is it not impossible for them to be renewed. And sometimes God gives these grace, to return into the way. (4) A total, final, and malicious falling away. A defection from the truth certainly acknowledged, not through fear of infirmity, but of purposed malice and counsel, joined with the final hatred, blasphemy, and persecution thereof. As we read Julian the Apostate, Lucian, and Porphyry to have fallen, and as many other apostates to this day have fallen. This falling is that which Christ calls the sin against the Holy Ghost; John, the sin to death, for which we are not to pray, because it is irremissible.

And thus much touching the three properties of this sin against the Holy Ghost, this dreadful apostasy, which is (1) universal, (2) final, and (3) malicious.

C. The *Termini*, i.e., the Terms of This Apostasy or Falling Away [The terms] laid down in this description are of two sorts, namely, (1) the term from which they fall, and (2) the term to which they fall. The former denotes what good they forsake. The latter what evil they embrace.

1. The *Terminus a quo*

The *terminus a quo*, or term from which they fall, denoting the good they cast off, namely, the truth and common graces once received and professed. They fall both from the profession and approbation of the whole truth and all grace received (Heb. 6:1–7 compared with 10:26). This has been sufficiently cleared before, especially in opening the first property of the apostasy, namely, the universality of it.

2. The *Terminus ad quem*

The *terminus ad quem*, or the term to which they fall, containing the evil which they embrace and practice, who sin against the Holy Ghost, which is chiefly threefold, and all extremely wicked and desperate: (i) blasphemous despiting of the Spirit of grace, (ii) horrid contempt and malice against the Son of God, (iii) violent persecution of the way of Christianity.

i. Blasphemous Despiting of the Spirit of Grace

This is one extremity to which such apostates fall. Hence our blessed Savior calls it a speaking against the Holy Ghost and the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost (Matt. 12:31, 32). The apostle calls it doing “despite unto the Spirit of grace” (Heb. 10:29). Blaspheming and despiting for substance come much

to one (see these terms formerly opened in the names given to this sin) so that I put them both together. It is a blasphemous despiting, or a despiting blasphemy of the Spirit of grace. Oh, how much malice and rankling venom is couched in this sin! To blaspheme man is sinful. What is it then to blaspheme the great God of heaven and earth? What to despise that Holy Spirit by whom (if ever) we must be illuminated clearly, sanctified graciously, and comforted sweetly?

ii. Horrid Contempt and Malice against the Son of God

The Spirit of grace is the Spirit of Christ, communicated from Christ the head, to His whole mystical body, and all His true members (Rom. 8:2, 9; 2 Cor. 3:17–18). Therefore, this sweet Spirit of grace cannot be thus villainously blasphemed and reproachfully vilified, but therein also Jesus Christ, who sends forth this Spirit of grace, must needs be blasphemed and most intolerably debased. Now this grand contempt and indignity, which they that sin against the Holy Ghost cast upon Jesus Christ, is set forth in four most pathetic expressions in Scripture, namely,

1. “They crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh” (Heb. 6:6). What is it to crucify the Son of God afresh? *Answer:* To commit such a sin as did Judas, Pilate, the Jews, the soldiers in betraying and murdering of Jesus Christ the Lord of glory, and this by a painful, shameful, and cursed kind of death. To murder a son of man is so dreadful a sin that it cries to God for vengeance (Gen. 4:10). What is it then to murder the Son of God, what to crucify Him, which is a double murder? Yet this do all apostates who sin against the Holy Ghost by denying the Son of God, who was once crucified for our sins. They will not be saved by His death; they count it invalid, insufficient, accept it not, but reject it, and therefore for them Christ must

be crucified a second time (which is impossible, for Christ dies no more) if ever they be saved, there being no salvation or redemption but by Him and His blood (Acts 4:1–2; Heb. 9:22). But what is it to crucify the Son of God to themselves? *Answer: Crucifigunt in ipsis, i.e., quantum in ipsis est.* That is, “as much as in them lies.” Though they do not actually crucify Christ, as once the Jews and soldiers did, yet they would, were it possible, even dethrone Him, and pluck Him from His Father’s right hand, and destroy Him, as once the Jews did for an imposter, a seducer, a blasphemer, and seditious person. Their malice is such against Him that were it possible they would do all this to Him. According to that known maxim: “Every apostate is a hater and persecutor of his own order.”

2. They “put him to an open shame” (Heb. 6:6). The Greek word here, *paradeigmatizein*, properly signifies to defame, or to expose to ignominy, or to make one a public example, or infamous example. Thus, it is said of Joseph in reference to Mary, he would not *paradeigmatizein*, i.e., make her “a public example” (Matt. 1:19). Thus they that crucified Jesus Christ did put Him to an open shame by scorns, scoffs, taunts, jeers, revilings, etc. while He hanged upon the cross. “Thou that destroyest the temple, and buildest it in three days, save thyself. If thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross.... He saved others; himself he cannot save. If he be the King of Israel, let him now come down from the cross, and we will believe him” (Matt. 27:40–42). Much like to them do base apostates by vile scorns, reproaches, and blasphemies put Christ to an open shame, wickedly counting Him not a Savior, but an imposter; not freely paying a price for our sins, but duly sustaining the deserved punishment of His own sins, etc. and horrid blasphemies! Thus, Julian the Apostate in scorn called Him Galilean, the Carpenter,

the Carpenter's Son, etc. Shall not the just God that avenges the injuries of His saints avenge the blasphemies of His Son?

3. They tread "under foot the Son of God" (Heb. 10:29). This is a higher degree of insolence and contempt of the Lord Christ than both the former. The villainous Jews and soldiers did crucify Christ and put Him to an open shame, yet we do not read that they trod underfoot the Son of God. The pride, impudence, and malice of these apostates against Christ far transcends theirs; for they tread the Son of God under foot; they trample upon Him, i.e., the account of Him, and deal with Him most vilely, abjectly, contemptibly, despicably, as the filth and offscouring of the world; not prizing Him as a Savior, nor fearing Him as a Judge, not accepting and believing in Him as Mediator. For as Ambrose observes, "They are things of basest and vilest account, which we tread under foot." We tread not gold, pearls, or jewels, but mire and dirt under foot. What? Shall dust and ashes, sinful worms, lift up themselves so desperately as to tread under foot the ever-blessed Son of God? Hear, O heavens!—yet this is the fruit of this cursed apostasy.

4. Finally, they count "the blood of the covenant" wherewith they were "sanctified, an unholy thing" (Heb. 10:29). (1) The blood of Christ is called the blood of the covenant because the new covenant, or new testament, was ratified and confirmed by the blood and death of Christ the Testator (Heb. 9:15–17). Hence, sacramentally the cup in the Lord's Supper is called the new testament in His blood, or His blood of the new testament (Matt. 26:28; 1 Cor. 11:25), because it signifies, seals, and exhibits to the believer Christ's blood whereby the new testament was established. (2) Apostates are said to be sanctified by this blood of the covenant, not really and indeed, but formally and in appearance in respect of their visible profession, from

which in judgment of charity men took them to be sanctified.

(3) To count this blood of the covenant *haima koinon*, i.e., “common blood,” is to count it not pure, sacred, meritorious blood, but profane, impure, and unholy (compare Acts 10:15).

(4) Apostates thus vilify Christ’s invaluable blood shed for our redemption, accounting it but as the blood of a common man, or as of a delinquent, or as the blood of the thieves crucified with Him. This blood of Christ they practically profane “while they return after a holy profession of Christ, with the dog to the vomit and the sow to the wallowing in the mire,” as Ambrose interprets it, “not willing to cleanse themselves by repenting.”

Thus they that sin against the Holy Ghost (1) crucify the Son of God afresh, (2) put Him to an open shame, (3) tread Him underfoot, and (4) count His blood an unholy thing. Oh what horrid contempt and malice is this against the Son of God!

iii. Violent Persecution of the Way of Christianity

Such and so extreme is the madness and malice of these backsliders against both the Spirit of grace and the Son of God, that they break off from profession to persecution of Christianity, and to a deadly hatred of the church and members of Jesus Christ. And hence some think the apostle stiles these apostates *tous hypenantiouis*, “the adversaries” (Heb. 10:27), because they are the sworn enemies of Christ, the gospel, and all Christians, and (if it were possible) would destroy them. As Julian the Apostate, who (as the Centuriators observe out of Eutropius) was from his childhood trained up in piety, and when he came to the empire, he carried himself with much clemency toward Christians. He called home such as Constantius had banished for religion, caused their goods to be restored to them, commanded it to be proclaimed to his people that they should not hurt the Christians, nay nor reproach them. But afterwards, as is noted out of Jerome, he denied Christ in France

and turned a most bloody and barbarous butcher to the poor Christians, of which the Centuriators record divers dreadful instances. Afterwards going to war against the Persians, he swore he would make war against the Christians if he returned conqueror. But there his army was first distressed through want of corn, and afterwards himself by a Persian's subtlety being led into a desert, was deadly wounded either by a blow from the devil (as some think) or by a spear, or by an arrow shot from heaven; whereupon, taking a handful of his own blood, he flung it up into the air, and burst out into that wicked contemptuous expression against Christ, "*Vicisti Galilæe*," i.e., "Thou man of Galilee, thou hast overcome me"; and so miserably died.

And thus much for opening the nature of this sin against the Holy Ghost, that we might see wherein it properly consists.

The Grievousness of This Sin against the Holy Ghost

And surely this is such a sin of sins, such a centaur of transcendent malice and wickedness, such an extract of deadly poison that no pen, nor tongue, nor thought of man can fully reach it. My present scope in this small tractate will not permit me to expatiate, and therefore let me succinctly propound only these few aggravations of this horrid sin.

This Is the Highest Sin against the Saving Remedy

The lapsed state of man in the first Adam is of all other in this world our deepest and most desperate malady (Eph. 2:1–3). Jesus Christ, and the Spirit of grace, are of all other the most effectual and only sufficient remedy; Jesus Christ by meritorious working out of complete redemption and salvation for us (Heb. 7:25; 9:12–14; 10:12–14; Acts 4:12); the Spirit of grace by immediate and effectual application of Christ and all His grace unto us (John 16:9, etc.; Gal. 4:4–6; Rom. 8:2, 15–16, 26–27). Without these all the world cannot afford us

redemption, adoption, justification, sanctification, true consolation, or eternal salvation, but by Christ and His Spirit we have all. Now they that sin this sin, they sin against the remedy, and that willfully, maliciously, incurably. As for Jesus Christ, (1) they crucify Him afresh, (2) they put Him to an open shame, (3) they tread Him under foot, and (4) count His blood of the covenant an unholy thing (Heb. 6:6; 10:29). As for the Spirit of grace, (1) they depart from His truth, (2) they fall away from His grace, (3) they despise Him, (4) they blaspheme Him (Heb 6:1–7; 10:29; Matt. 12). How should such sinners ever be redeemed, called, justified, sanctified, or saved, that thus sin against the very remedy? Unbelief and impenitency are sins against the gospel remedy, but not aggravated with that obstinacy and maliciousness, as this sin is. That patient that is so far from applying that he hates and abhors the remedy that should cure him, flings the physic¹³ to the ground, curses and reviles the physician, indeed, and treads him under foot, is he ever likely to be cured? So in this case spiritually.

Hence, This Sin Never Is, Never Can Possibly Be Repented of

So the apostle tells us, “For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened...if they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance” (Heb. 6:4–6). As if he should say, it is impossible for such apostates to repent. Note, he says not “it is improbable, unlikely, or difficult for them to repent,” but “it is impossible to renew them to repentance.” To whom is it impossible? (1) Impossible to themselves, to renew themselves. For if carnal men who never thus relapsed cannot renew themselves, no more than a blackamoor¹⁴ can change his skin, and the

13. *physic*: medical treatment.

14. *blackamoor*: a person belonging to any of various population groups having dark pigmentation of the skin. The term is now often considered offensive.

leopard his spots, it being impossible a bad tree should bring forth good fruit, how much less can such apostates renew themselves by repentance? (2) Impossible to their teachers to renew them to repentance with all their exhortations, promises, threats, prayers, or ministerial administrations. They are but instruments planting and watering; only God gives the increase (1 Cor. 3:6–7). Only God gives repentance (2 Tim. 2:25). Indeed, (3) impossible (in some sense) to God Himself, as some think, not through any impotency in God, but in respect of His infinite justice, which cannot choose but take vengeance of such heinous and malicious offenders.

And the apostle gives two great reasons of the impossibility of such backslider's repentance. (1) From the atrocity and grievousness of the sin committed, namely, a sin of extreme malice against Jesus Christ, seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put Him to an open shame, which words have been formerly explained. (2) From the just judgment of God inflicted upon them, set forth under the metaphor of good and bad ground. "For the earth which drinketh in the rain that cometh oft upon it, and bringeth forth herbs meet for them by whom it is dressed, receiveth blessing from God: but that which beareth thorns and briers is rejected, and is nigh unto cursing; whose end is to be burned" (Heb. 6:7–8). As a husbandman that tills, manures, waters, plants, bestows much cost and pains upon ground, and after all it brings forth nothing but briers, thorns, nettles, weeds, etc., he will never bestow more cost upon it. It is worthy to be cursed and burned up. So after God has by His gospel ordinances bestowed much husbandry upon men, and afforded them also many heavenly influences, namely, common gifts and graces of His Spirit, and they notwithstanding bring forth nothing but thorns and briers of this cursed apostasy, God will give them up to final impenitence and hardness of heart to their own destruction.

Hence, This Sin against the Holy Ghost Is Unpardonable

So Christ tells us, the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost “shall not be forgiven . . . neither in this world, neither in the world to come” (Matt. 12:32). This sin is unpardonable, not as if it were in its own nature beyond God’s pardoning mercy, or beyond Christ’s purging merit, both which are infinite, but because it is always accompanied with final impenitence, and therefore God will not bestow His pardon, Christ will not apply His merit. To like effect the apostle says, “If we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins” (Heb. 10:26). This sin’s unpardonableness heightens this sin’s grievousness above all other sins in the world. What other sin but has been repented of, and upon repentance pardoned? This beyond all Manasseh’s sins. They were repented of, and pardoned. Beyond all Saul’s sins (1 Tim. 1:13, 15; Acts 26:9–12). They were repented of, and pardoned. Beyond their sins that murdered Christ through ignorance, for they repented and were forgiven (Acts 2:36–38, 41), but this shall never be forgiven.

Hence, This Sin Is Inevitably Damnable

If this sin be never repented of, never pardoned, it must needs always be punished with damnation and eternal death, and that unavoidably. “He that shall blaspheme against the Holy Ghost hath never forgiveness, but is in danger of eternal damnation” (Mark 3:29). “If we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries. He that despised Moses’ law died without mercy under two or three witnesses: of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God,” etc. (Heb. 10:26–29). Here is (1) judgment, fiery

indignation, and that devouring, indeed, much sorer punishment than death without mercy. What can this be but eternal damnation? (2) Here is the certainty of it, and that without hopes or place remaining for any more sacrifice for sin. What is this but inevitable damnation? Hence such as sin against the Holy Ghost are resembled¹⁵ to ground “nigh unto cursing; whose end is to be burned” (Heb. 6:8). Think now sadly of the inevitableness of eternal damnation ever attending upon this sin, and then consider how grievous it must needs be.

Hence, This Sin Is Usually a Most Intolerable Torture to the Conscience

This plainly flows from all the former. For this being (1) the highest sin against the saving remedy, (2) never repented of, (3) unpardonable, and (4) inevitably damnable, how can the conscience, reflecting upon all this, choose but be unspeakably tortured in this present world with horror, terror, despair, and self-confusion? Which the apostle calls “a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries” (Heb. 10:27). Oh what a torment, what a rack, what a hell aforehand is this to the conscience to think that hell is inevitable, and yet intolerable? The furious horror hereof made Judas restless until he had hanged himself (Matt. 27:1–7). Indeed, sometimes the anguish and sting of conscience is so intolerable that they desperately wish themselves in hell, that they might not be so overwhelmed with torturing fears but feel the worst. But alas, when they shall come into hell, their worm of conscience will never die, but fret and gnaw the heartstrings of the soul forevermore.

15. *resembled*: likened.

*Finally, This Sin Is So Heinous That the Pardon of It
Is Not to Be Prayed for*

“There is a sin unto death,” says John, “I do not say that he shall pray for it” (1 John 5:16). And that sin which may not be prayed for is counted desperate and past remedy. For prayer is one remedy; now the more remediless, the more grievous.

Thus far of the second thing to be evidenced, namely, what the sin against the Holy Ghost is and wherein it consists, namely, of (1) the names, (2) nature, and (3) grievousness of it.

SECTION 3

Now briefly to the third and last thing propounded for the clearing this case of conscience, namely, to show what a vast difference there is between the sinning of regenerate persons, and their sinning that sin against the Holy Ghost. And this results by way of corollary from all that has been already spoken. To hint some particulars may be sufficient, as,

1. They that sin against the Holy Ghost are such as are under the reign and dominion of sin, namely, hypocrites who never had in them any power of godliness, but only a form, remaining still in their carnal condition. But regenerate persons (though sometimes they may fall grievously, yet) are delivered from the dominion and reign of sin, as has been shown.
2. They that sin against the Holy Ghost were never advanced beyond the degree of hypocrites, as has been evidenced. But regenerate persons are sincere and upright (Ps. 18:22; 2 Cor. 1:12). They partake of the truth of grace, power of godliness, life of God.
3. They that sin against the Holy Ghost universally fall away from both profession and approbation of truth and grace, as

has been proved. But the regenerate never fall away thus universally, but only partially, and in some particular respects only.

4. They that sin against the Holy Ghost apostatize and fall away finally. But though regenerate persons sometimes fall woefully, yet never finally; they always rise again.

5. They that sin against the Holy Ghost sin willfully and maliciously. But (as has been cleared) regenerate persons sin out of weakness and infirmity, not of malice or willful obstinacy. They hate the evil which they do (Rom. 7:15).

6. They that sin against the Holy Ghost sin desperately against the saving remedy, namely, both against the ministry and grace of the Holy Ghost, and also against the blood and merit of the Son of God, as was declared. But they that are regenerate sin not thus against the saving remedy.

7. They that sin against the Holy Ghost are not in fear or trouble lest they have sinned that sin, but are wickedly hardened. Regenerate persons are oft perplexed and afraid lest they should have sinned it.

8. They that sin against the Holy Ghost so sin that it is impossible to renew them again unto repentance. But they that are regenerate repent of every sin which they fall into, before they die, in the general or particular.

9. They that sin against the Holy Ghost sin unpardonably. But all the sins of regenerate persons are pardonable, and actually pardoned to them.

10. They that sin against the Holy Ghost are tortured with a "certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation," which shall devour them (Heb. 10:27). But they that

are regenerate are justified (Rom. 8:29–30), and being justified by faith, they have peace with God, and joy in hope of the glory of God; and not only so, but even glory in tribulation (Rom. 5:1–3).

11. They that sin against the Holy Ghost must not be prayed for (1 John 5:16). But we ought to pray for regenerate persons, notwithstanding their sins and frailties, which they are subject to (James 5:16; 1 John 5:16).

12. Finally, they that sin against the Holy Ghost shall certainly and inevitably be damned, as was proved. But regenerate persons, notwithstanding their actual or original sins, shall certainly and infallibly be saved (Rom. 8:29–30). “There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit” (Rom. 8:1).

These and divers such like differences are very remarkable between the sinning of regenerate persons, and their sinning who sin against the Holy Ghost. Whereby truly regenerate persons may discern how far they are from sinning that great sin, notwithstanding all their fears and perplexities about it, for whose satisfaction I have the more largely insisted upon this weighty case.