

THE CASE AND CURE OF A DESERTED SOUL

A TREATISE CONCERNING THE NATURE,
KINDS, DEGREES, SYMPTOMS, CAUSES,
CURES OF, AND MISTAKES ABOUT
SPIRITUAL DESERTIONS



Joseph Symonds



Have you ever felt like God is far from you? Although God does not abandon any of His children, there are times when believers experience spiritual coldness and distance from God. Acutely aware of this crisis of faith, physician of souls Joseph Symonds helps us understand the nature and reasons for this condition and compassionately delivers the prescription for recovery and prevention of relapse. See for yourself why Symonds's work is considered the classic Puritan treatment of spiritual depression. It is a resource well worth having.



“With great care and pastoral sensitivity, Symonds explores reasons why someone may be experiencing an overwhelming and unrelenting sense of God’s absence. Reading, thinking through, and applying Symonds’s counsel will not only help us fight spiritual loneliness in our life, but it will also assist in counseling others who long for the light of God’s countenance.”

— Randall J. Pederson, managing editor, *Westminster Theological Journal*;
and coauthor of *Meet the Puritans*

JOSEPH SYMONDS (d. 1652) became an Independent, fled to the Netherlands to escape persecution, and pastored an English-speaking congregation in Rotterdam with William Bridge and Jeremiah Burroughs. He returned to England to become the vice-president and fellow of Eton College.



SOLI DEO GLORIA PUBLICATIONS
An imprint of Reformation Heritage Books

The Case and Cure of a Deserted Soul

*A Treatise concerning the Nature, Kinds,
Degrees, Symptoms, Causes, Cures of, and
Mistakes about Spiritual Desertions*

Joseph Symonds

Edited by Don Kistler



Soli Deo Gloria Publications
An imprint of Reformation Heritage Books
Grand Rapids, Michigan

The Case and Cure of a Deserted Soul

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Soli Deo Gloria Publications

An imprint of Reformation Heritage Books

3070 29th St. SE

Grand Rapids, MI 49512

616-977-0889

orders@heritagebooks.org

www.heritagebooks.org

The Case and Cure of a Deserted Soul was first published in 1671.

Paperback edition published 2024

ISBN 979-8-88686-154-9

Printed in the United States of America

24 25 26 27 28 29 / 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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The Preface

Accesses and recesses are not proper to Him who, by His immense presence, fills all and cannot be where He is not, nor cease to be where He is. True motion is found in such things only as are subject to local circumscription. God is said to come or go, to be present or absent, 1. in respect of manifestation, as the Father speaks; He comes when He is manifested and goes when He is hidden; and 2. in respect of operation —so God is said to be where He works, as we say the sun comes into a house where it shines into it. Time was when God was with all men, both by gracious manifestation and operation, and this was man's happiness; but sin has separated God and man, and they are departed from each other.

The division began from man, yet the divine goodness tenders reconciliation; but man will not. In this, man has become unhappy that he has lost his God and does not know it. Yea, he counts his loss gain and his gain loss. He would be happy, but he errs in his choice. He is ever moving, never at rest. He is willingly absent from the greatest good, unwillingly laboring with the greatest evil. Though other things are quiet in their place and rest in their end, yet the place where man is pitched is strange to him and his end vexes him. All his life is labor and his motion is but a shifting from vanity to vanity, from evil to evil, from bad to worse. The sore cries for healing, and that which he thinks to find a soothing medicine becomes a corrosive. While he

thinks to cure the wound, he makes it deep and is his own tormenter.

The heathen blundered in confused guesses how to redress the state of man. They saw an unhappiness, but neither knew the cause nor the cure. Yet they assayed something when they propounded those two rules to repair the breach:

1. To reduce things to the first principles of nature.
2. To live according to nature.

These rules are useful if rectified and rightly used. First, reduce things to their primitive originals and lay them again in the womb from whence they sprang. This experiment would profit much. Look into the world and you shall see a confused mixture of good and evil, but you must divide them wisely and pursue them to their beginnings. Ascend by the scattered beams of happiness in the world to the Sun of Righteousness from whence they flow, and descend by the black and bitter streams of misery to the poisoned spring that sends them forth, and you will see two originals of both: God, the Fountain of life, and sin, the root of death. In this way of reduction of things to their causes, a man may see (as in a glass) what he was and what he should be, what made him miserable and what would make him happy. It is men's unhappiness to choose the worse of two guides, brutishly declining reason to be led by sense; seeing, enjoying, and suffering things without inquisition into their parentage. This is true folly, to dwell on the surface of things, not penetrating into their inmost nature, utmost end, and foremost rise.

A wise man sees things quite through from first to last. He asks three questions of the things he meets

with. What are you? Where do you go? From where have you come? He does not live like a subject to the world, but as a lord. He examines and judges all things. He suffers no vagrants, but keeps all in order. He has the genealogies of all things and reduces them to their several tribes. There is a certain voice in things inviting home and proclaiming the cause to which they owe their being. They carry a tie in which they are linked to their principles and, by this line, men might have conduct through the labyrinth of the universe to the first cause.

Second, another rule is given: "Live according to nature." This sounds harsh, but it is because it is in the mother language of those who never heard of Christ. But a good interpreter will easily help the business. There is in all men an implanted inclination to happiness and an inborn pilot to carry this in a right course; but it is true, though the former is not hurt, yet the latter is. A man is another thing than he was. The soul is quick of foot, but dull of scent. Her sails are strong, but her compass is marred. The practical judgment, the soul's steersman, is dim-sighted and takes rocks for harbors, sea for land, west for east, and earth for heaven. But herein is man's great happiness: God has opened a way to renew those blurred characters of knowledge which yet remains the light in the air after sunset. But man regards it not.

The Scriptures are given by inspiration of God to make wise unto salvation, but men are so far from duly seeking to lighten that glimmering snuff of natural understanding at this fountain of light that they are in love with their own darkness. They hate the light because their deeds are evil. Finding the power of con-

science a check to their lusts, they resist it, whereas they should rectify conscience by the Word and affections by conscience. They perversely cast off conscience to give way to sin; yea, from a grave counselor, they turn it into a base flatterer to applaud their greatest folly and wickedness.

But what will the end be? Shall God come again with offers of mercy and a new league of friendship, and shall man hang off? Let those especially consider this to whom God has come with many gracious visits and potent workings, yet they do not come in. I purposed and promised in the beginning of this preface to speak of God's leaving such, but I lack opportunity at present. I say no more now to them but this: it is dangerous to despise grace and resisit the Spirit. If He departs, woe unto you. Your latter end will pay for your folly and stoutness.

The day is coming in which God will follow after foolish man no more. Wonder at His patience that has waited on the world some thousands of years already, but this long-lasting patience has fixed its period. Then blessed are they that enjoy Him. As for all the rest, adieu forever. Then God will depart fully and eternally. It shall no more be said, "Come," but then "Go, ye accursed, into everlasting fire."

You now have your choice. Here is God and the world. But this is folly. Men take that in a disjunctive sense which is offered in a conjunctive. It is not said "God *or* the world," but "God *and* the world." In some consideration, indeed, they are divided; but most make the worse choice. Here begins that vast distance between the saints and the wicked. They set out at first from one point, but follow more diverse, yea, adverse

ways, according to the difference of their ends.

When first a godly man chooses God, he becomes a happy man, for his choice is his guide, which sets all the wheels in a right motion. Love is as the wing to the fowl or as the oars to the boat which move and order it. When this is done, God and man are brought together. This sweet meeting and amiable conjunction is a great part of the plot of that eternal love of God who chose us that we might be made happy by answering His choice of us with our choice of Him—that He may dwell in us and we in Him.

I think this world is like the king's court. Children here are taken with pictures and feed their eyes and fancies with hangings and fine things, but the wise and grave statesmen pass by these. Their business is with the king. Most men stay in the out-rooms and low things of the world, and so are mean; but blessed is the generation whose eye, desire, and way are unto God.

The creature is not capable of a higher blessedness than to have God for his God. They who dwell in God have a true dwelling. Men who live upon the creature do not truly dwell, but roll as ships at sea or travel as wandering vagrants. In God, there is quiet abode and perfect rest, for here is no evil nor lack of God. Here is enough and such as may fit at all times, all conditions, all occasions, soul and body fully. Here in these depths are wonders for the mind to feed on. Here also is a sea-room of goodness for the appetite of man to float in, and the satiety of the appetite breeds all repose and joy. Oh, the delectableness of this condition! In this is a depth of riches, deep riches that cannot be sounded and rich depths that cannot be exhausted.

The man Christ is the blessed channel between the

fountain and the cistern through which life, peace, strength, and glory come by a gracious and a glorious convoy. Every vessel shall have its fullness to all eternity. Sometimes, indeed (while this life lasts), the streams come fuller and sometimes slower. Sometimes Christ stays the current that we may thirst, so that, after thirsting, we may drink again with double pleasure.

This is the main part of a godly man's unhappiness, that he neither has a full nor fixed state of comfortable communion with God in the world. After sweet meetings come sad partings. Nothing is fixed. There are floods and ebbs as well on land as in the sea, and as well in things spiritual as in things natural. Even those that are strongest knit have a time of parting. Nothing in nature is more conjunct than its own frame, yet this compacted composition admits a dissolution. Man, the epitome of the world, is in this case. Soul and body one day will shake hands; yea, and the body will fall asunder from itself. Those four elements that came in, in a vital league, will go out again with a deadly war. The tie between God and the soul is the firmest thing in the world. The bond of grace is stronger than the bond of nature, yet even here is a kind of parting also; but, as the conjunction is stronger, so the separation is less. But sometimes it is so great that the saints, by enforcement of sorrow, cry out, "My God has forsaken me, my God has forsaken me!"

This sad condition is the subject of this little treatise, concerning which I would have put here some advertisements, but my pen has deceived me and has led me out into a larger and other way than I intended in this preface. Nothing more is now to be done but to leave this small help in the hands of such who souls

long after the return of God with quickening and comforting influences upon them.

Joseph Symonds

Chapter 1

The godly are sometimes deserted

Though most men, since God and man parted in Adam, live without God in the world, Ephesians 2:12–13, and are so far from Him that they neither enjoy Him or know Him, yet there is a generation of men whom God has made nigh by the blood of Christ, with whom He has renewed that old acquaintance and amity which at first He had with them and they with Him; which blessed estate, as it is not here perfected, so it is often interrupted. Their comforts are always sweet, but often short. There are but few (if any) whose joys in a comfortable communion with God are not sometimes clouded with sorrows in a doleful separation from Him, so that if you lay your ear to the door of their closets you shall often hear the daughters of Zion (as heirs of their mother’s miseries) complaining in their mother’s language: “The Lord hath forsaken me, and my God hath forgotten me,” Isaiah 49:14. If you fix your eyes upon them, you shall see Zion’s tears in their eyes, her paleness in their faces, and her sorrows in their souls. In consideration of, and compassion to, these mourners, I spent some thoughts upon this sad subject.

Desertions are either common or special. These which I call common are such as all men share in by nature, God having forsaken and withdrawn Himself

from Adam and all his posterity, as well as apostate angels. The special I shall handle as they concern the godly or hypocrites.

Desertions, as they concern men truly regenerate, are God's withdrawing Himself in respect of quickening, quieting, or comforting the soul.

Desertions, concerning men who seem to be regenerate, are God's withholding those special influences by which they had a kind of life and spiritual comfort.

To begin, then, with desertions as they concern the godly, I shall first speak something in general of them, and then descend to the more specific. That which I shall say in general will comprise two things:

1. That there is such an evil as spiritual desertion.
2. How they are deserted.

It is almost lost labor to prove that there is such a state; yet because as all in Christians is hidden and secret, so nothing is hidden and secret more than their comforts and discomforts. I will make it good by calling in two witnesses to give evidence of the truth.

The first is the experience of the saints. Ask Zion, you have her verdict in Isaiah 49:14: "And Zion said, The Lord hath forsaken me, and my God hath forgotten me." You see here the Church clad all in black, bewailing her widowhood as one bereft of her dearest husband. Every word of her speech is bedewed with tears and bears a drop from her bleeding soul. The Lord Jehovah, He whose power and fidelity have been to me as the pillars of the earth, has forsaken me; He has cast me off. My Lord, who was mine in covenant, mine in communion, who was the joy of my life, the life of my joy, the strength, the stay, the spring of my life, has forgotten me. He has cast me not only out of

His arms, but out of His heart. I am quite out of His love, not only forsaken but forgotten.

And, in this, Zion is not alone. Ask David and you shall hear him, as soon as you come near him, sighing, sobbing, crying, and roaring; but what does he say, what ails him? He tells you in Psalm 22:1: "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?" See how well their testimony agrees. How can a man look upon David and not count him as a poor orphan that is left in a woeful state, friendless, helpless, and comfortless? But yet we will hear a greater than David, that is, the Captain of our salvation, the first and Head of the whole order. And what does He say? We will go no further to ask others. David was here a type of Christ and, as he was but the shadow of Christ's person, so his sorrow was but a shadow of Christ's sorrow. David merely tasted the cup which Christ afterward drank more deeply from when, in the anguish of His soul upon the cross, He cried out, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" Matthew 27:46.

And this cup has gone round ever since, so that few have ever tasted of the waters of life but they have drunk also of these waters of Marah. The experience of almost all the saints contributes to the evidence of this truth. Where shall we find a man who has not met with these rocks and sands, and has not seen some gloomy days and winter storms, who has not passed through many changes, sometimes rejoicing like the plants in the spring, in the sight and sense of God's gracious presence, sometimes mourning again for his loss of God, sometimes lifting his soul up to heaven and mounting, as it were, on eagles' wings, sometimes again depressed to the depths of hell and held as with

chains of brass or iron; now quickened but growing dull again? Few can say they have once found God who do not also say that they have often lost Him.

Add to the experience of the saints the witness of God Himself. David, Heman [the writer of Psalm 88], Job, and Zion might speak much out of distrust, impatience, and passion; but, when God Himself shall come in and confirm their evidence, it is past doubt that God does so. For does Zion bewail herself as a widow forlorn without a husband? God said it was so. "The Lord hath called thee as a woman forsaken and grieved in spirit, and a wife of youth, when thou wast refused, saith thy God," Isaiah 54:6. God said He had, in a sense, divorced her from Him; yea, and whereas Zion complained that God forsook her, it is no more than God said Himself, verse 7: "For a small moment have I forsaken thee." So that this is, sometimes, the sad portion of the saints: to be deserted.

And this I have spoken that the mourners in Zion may see that this uncomfortable state may consist with grace. It is a comfort to know that your depths are passable and your case curable. Others have walked in this heavy way and are now in heaven. Others have been in these storms, yet have safely arrived at the land of promise. No other affliction has befallen you than that which is common to men. Therefore, do not be overwhelmed in grief. Do not give yourself up as lost. Disquietness will hurt, but it cannot help. Rather, stir up yourself to take hold of God. Repent, pray, believe, wait, for "God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that you are able, but will, with the temptation also, make a way to escape that ye may be able to bear it," 1 Corinthians 10:13.

Chapter 2

*How, or in what sense, the godly
are said to be deserted*

The second thing follows: How, or in what sense, they are said to be deserted.

First, sometimes only in appearance, not in truth. Men are deceived in nothing as much as in themselves. Man's heart and ways, yea, his judgment and thoughts, are subject to many variations; and frequent mistakes are found in men's opinions about these great questions. Am I truly changed or am I a hypocrite? Do I believe or not? Is God my God or not? And the errors of men's judgments arise from ignorance, unbelief, passion, and false rules of judgment, of which principles or errors I shall speak hereafter; but through such impediments men are often puzzled and think they are evil when they are good, and worst when best, and furthest from God when nearest to Him.

But, as desertions are sometimes in appearance only, so sometimes they are real, God truly withdrawing Himself and denying that fullness and communion which His people were wont to have with Him. But, though He deserts them really, yet not totally. "The Lord will not forsake His people, for His great name's sake," 1 Samuel 12:22. His truth is engaged in it: "For He hath said, I will never leave thee nor forsake thee," Hebrews 13:5. The words are in the emphatic. Here we

observe a duplication of the subject of the promise: "I will not leave, I will not forsake." And there is a multiplication of negatives. There are five negatives in the promise, by which He intimates that He will not, yea, He will not, surely, He will not forsake His servants. He will never wholly reject them or utterly leave them.

To clear this point a little, I will lay down three limitations or distinctions by which we may better understand in what sense this is a truth that the godly are sometimes forsaken of God.

God leaves them for a season, not forever. If He goes from them, it is but as one who goes from home to return again. "I will not leave you comfortless," or "as orphans," but "I will come again," John 14:18. When Zion was in this uncomfortable case, God said unto her, "For a small moment have I forsaken thee, but with great mercies will I gather thee; in a little wrath have I hid My face from thee, for a moment, but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee, saith the Lord thy Redeemer," Isaiah 54:7-8.

He may frown, but He will smile again; though His compassions may be restrained, yet they cannot be extinguished. His anger endures for a moment, but in His favor is life. Weeping may endure for a night, but in the morning, joy comes, Psalm 30:5. In His favor is life. Weeping may endure or lodge as a passenger to be gone in the morning, but joy comes in the morning as an inhabitant and enjoys his habitation to himself. As the sun sets to rise again, and as the tender mother lays down her child to take it up again, so desertions are but short interruptions of a Christian's comfort. God will not tarry long when His people cry unto Him. He will return and change their doleful winter into a joyful

spring. Though the river has her ebbings, yet it has her flowings. The tide of comfort will come in again.

There shall be a day of their joyful meeting with their beloved. They shall see their God, enjoy His presence, and be embraced in the arms of His love; and, when this day shall come, there will be more joy in meeting than there was grief in parting. God will pour in comforts upon them as they have poured out tears for Him. He will recompense their love with kindness, their desires with fullness, their mourning with gladness, and their short heaviness with everlasting consolations.

Desertions are not the interruptions of God's love, but the acts of His love. His affection is the same, but the expression is varied. Note that there is a twofold love of God, or a twofold consideration of the same love.

There is the love of benevolence and the love of beneficence; or, as some call it, the love of intention and the love of execution. The former is to the faithful from eternity to eternity and is immutable and incapable of any intensifying, remission, augmentation, diminution, or alteration. It is like God Himself, unchangeable. But the latter, the love of beneficence, or of execution, which is His love as it expresses itself in doing good to us, may be in a degree suspended and restrained for a season. In the summer, there is a light inherent in the sun and light flowing from it that is ever perfect and permanent; but this may suffer changes. It may be obscured and lessened, yea, extinguished and quite cut off, as in the night it falls out.

A father may have a dear affection to his child, yet show but little in his carriage. David shut in his love

from Absalom, not ceasing to love him but forbearing the usual acts and expressions of his love. A fountain may have her streams cut off or damned up, though it may have the same fullness and aptness to pour itself out as before. The root does not always give so much sap as to make branches bud and blossom at all times, yet, when she is most sparing in her beneficence, her good will is the same. She sticks as close to them as ever.

We often keep back mercies from ourselves, and God would more abundantly pour Himself in but we do not open to Him. And so, as that blind woman complained the house was dark when she was blind, so we often complain as if God restrained mercy when we ourselves restrain it. It is equally true that, sometimes, God is provoked by our sins and keeps His mercy in, that He does not come with such gracious visits as before, yet His love is not shortened, though the fruits of it are. "Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened that it cannot save, nor His ear heavy that it cannot hear; but your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid His face from you, that He will not hear," Isaiah 59:1-2.

Though God may vary in the operations of His love, yet His love is, in itself, ever the same, and shall be the same forever. It is an everlasting love, Jeremiah 31:3. "The hills may be removed and the mountains may depart, but My kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of My peace be removed, saith the Lord, that hath mercy on thee," Isaiah 54:10. This was spoken to the Church in the day of her sorrow. He tells them that He loved them though He afflicted them. And that speech of God to David is full

for this purpose: "I will visit their transgressions with rods, and their iniquities with stripes; nevertheless, My lovingkindness will I not utterly take from him, nor suffer My faithfulness to fail; My covenant will I not break," Psalm 89:32-34.

When God deserts His people, He withholds those acts of love only that are for our well-being, not those that are for our being. Though a Christian may lack that without which he cannot have peace, yet not that without which he cannot live. Whatever is necessary to his constitution, life, completeness, and stability is never denied. No good thing will God withhold from those who walk uprightly, Psalm 84:11. He will ever hold their souls in life, not leaving them in weak beginnings, but continually leading onto perfection. As He is the Author, so He is the Finisher of our faith, Hebrews 12:2. "We are confident of this very thing, that He that hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ," Philippians 1:6. The saints shall have of Him whatever is so necessary that, without it, they cannot hold their state or attain their end. But that which is rather for their ornament than their support, for the sweetness of their way than the sureness of their end, for comfort rather than necessity, may be, and often is, in great measure cut off and delayed.

This, then, is the thing. When God leaves His people, He does not leave them to the will of the flesh, the temptations and snares of the world, the power and tyranny of the prince of darkness, as never, or not at all, to look after them; but His care is over them in these times, and He is with them by a secret maintenance, both guiding and upholding them, and is often

most in power when least in appearance. The metals that lie deep underground do not see the heavens in their light, yet partake of their influence. Yea, ordinarily, the most precious operations of God's gracious power are there where there is the least sense and feeling of them, and they have most of God when they see Him least. As when God covered Moses' face in the cleft of the rock, Exodus 33:22, He then passed by and enabled Moses to see His glory, so the clouds and veils that cover our eyes are often forerunners of the clearest light and sweetest sight of God.

And, when God seems to be turning a man into a desolate and ruinous heap, yet even then He is building and preparing him to be a more excellent structure. The gardener digs up his garden, pulls up his fences, takes up his plants and, to the eye, seems to make a pleasant place a waste. But we know he is about to mend it, not to mar it; to plant it better, not to destroy it.

So, God is present even in desertions and, though He seems to annihilate or reduce His new creation into a confused chaos, yet it is to repair its ruins and to make it more beautiful and strong. "The glory of the second temple was greater than the glory of the first," Haggai 2:9. In the repairing of a house, we see how they pull down part after part, as if they intended to demolish it, but the end is to make it better. It may be that some posts and pillars are removed, but it is to put in stronger ones. It may be that some lights are stopped up, but it is to make fairer lights. So, though God takes away our props, it is not that we may fall, but that He may settle us in greater strength. He batters down the life of sense to put us upon a life of faith;

and, when He darkens our light so that we cannot see, it is but to bring in fuller light. When the stars do not shine, the sun appears, repairing our loss of an obscure light with her clear, bright, shining beams. So, then, we see that, though God forsakes His people, it is not totally or forever; not ceasing the affection of love, but the acts, and not those which concern our being, but such as concern our well-being, namely, abundant quickenings and aid of grace, victorious and triumphant power over sin, the clear and satisfying testimony of His Spirit.

Chapter 3

Four other considerations about desertions

Having premised these things in general, I shall now come to the specifics of these desertions in their several kinds. I will speak, first, as they befall the godly.

Desertions, as they befall the godly, are of two sorts: the withdrawing of the influence of grace and the withdrawing of comfort; and that is either inward or outward, for all the complaints the saints make of God's hiding and withdrawing Himself arise from one or all of these three grounds:

God does not carry on their spiritual life as He was wont to do. He does not give that peace, joy, comfort, or assurance as He was wont to do. He brings them into outward straits and does not deliver them.

Before I come to speak directly and particularly of these, I will propose four brief observations:

1. A man may miss much of God's external presence in the sweet and comfortable way of His providence, providing, protecting, and ordering all occurrences to contentment, yet may enjoy inward communion with Him. His soul may be most abundantly animated and quickened with the Spirit when he has the most discouragements without. Yea, God is wont, when He gives least in the world, to give most of Himself, and His people seldom have much of the fatness below and the springs above at once, just as the sun and the

stars do not appear together. But, when He shuts up all doors of hope and help in the world, then He sets open the doors of heaven. So, when Stephen saw nothing but death in the world, then he saw heaven opened and Christ sitting at the right hand of God, Acts 7. Such mercy Jacob found when he was a poor pilgrim in a strange land. Then he saw that heavenly ladder and the angels ascending and descending as a pledge of God's care and their readiness for his good, Genesis 28:12. The abundance of the Spirit both of grace and peace is usually poured forth in a day of sorrow. When the dough which the Israelites brought from Egypt was spent, God gave them bread from heaven.

And there are reasons for it. The first is God's tender love, which is such that He will not add affliction to His people's sorrow. When, therefore, He is pleased in His wisdom to put a cup of affliction into their hands, He is wont to give them also the cup of consolation. When He casts them into outward straits, He recompenses it with inward enlargements. The Church never had such full predictions of Christ, and precious promises of great mercy, as when the most dreadful evils hung over her head, as appears in the prophecies of all the prophets. And the faithful usually find their worst days to be their best days; and, when they meet with troubles, they find most peace. This the Apostle witnesses: "As the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ," 2 Corinthians 1:4. "And though our outward man perish, yet our inward man is renewed day by day," 2 Corinthians 4:16.

The second reason is that the capacity of the soul is widened and enlarged in affliction. Heavenly communion with God is sweetest in an evil day, and the soul

longs after God so that, in Him, it may find all supplied which it lacks in the world. Now, the more God stirs up desires of Himself, the more the soul is prepared for communion with Him, and the more it has of Him. The hungry person eats most, and he that is most thirsty drinks most. When the life of nature and sense is cut off, the soul seeks a life in God and is much in all endeavors of enjoying God. Now she seeks Him in prayer. She inquires for Him in the Word and, by all means, reaches hard after Him. So David, when he was in the wilderness, panted and breathed after God. He prayed, he cried. His thoughts were with God all the day; yea, in the night he meditated upon Him and said, "My soul followeth hard after Thee," Psalm 63:8.

2. One may lack inward comfort, yet not be deserted with respect to the influence of grace. The tenor of grace and peace is not the same. A man may lose the sense of grace and yet retain the life of it, though he may be as holy who has grace without peace, Yea, and as the clouded summer's sun yields more comfort to the earth than a bright shining winter's sun, so, when the soul is most clouded, it may be most quickened. When the light of God's favor is hidden, the quickening heat of the Spirit may most abound.

3. He who loses God's quickening presence also loses His comforting presence. Though a man may have grace living and stirring without peace, yet he cannot have peace without the life of grace. Peace and comfort are fruits of the sanctifying Spirit and, as there may be a root without fruit but there cannot be fruit without the root, so, though there may be the Spirit quickening and sanctifying without comfort, there cannot be true comfort without the quickening Spirit.

One of the following two evils befalls a man from whom God is departed, and to whom the workings of the power of God are denied.

First, he may fall into a spiritual lethargy, being as one asleep whose spirits and senses are bound up so that he is in a shadow of death, neither hearing, nor seeing, nor tasting the things of God, and so is bereft of all spiritual joy and comfort. When a man is in a state of deadness, he is dead to all things that are spiritual and they, also, are as dead things to him. The promises that are fountains of life to a living man are as dry and empty cisterns unto him. Yea, Christ, heaven, and the love of God, though they are the food, the strength, the life of a man in a healthful state, are to the languishing soul as meat to a sick stomach. The glorious things of the gospel are to him as a withered flower or as a sealed book. He has no use of them.

The other evil is to fall into a spiritual frenzy. In the day of estrangedness from God, a man is often quite disquieted. Now, the remembrance of his former blessed days torments his soul with grief, and the fears of utter apostasy and irrecoverable declining from God vex the soul with fears and horrors. Yea, conscience may pronounce sad judgment upon him and he may conclude that he is a hypocrite, an apostate, and one under wrath. So that either through insensibleness or unquietness of spirit, he who does not have his former vivacity and vigor of grace cannot have comfort in such a state.

4. All these may possibly befall a man at once. He may have outward straits and inward troubles at the same time, and this is the lowest pitch of misery that a believer can fall into.

Chapter 4

Of the first sort of desertions: the withholding of assisting grace

The first sort of desertion is with regard to spiritual life and grace; and it is either real or in appearance only.

Concerning this malady and sickness of the soul as it is real, I will treat it in this order: 1. the state; 2. the symptoms and consequences; 3. the causes; and 4. the cure.

1. The state may be thus described: We are deserted by God when He suspends or withholds the arbitrary and wonted influence of the Spirit of grace.

That I may more perspicuously express the thing, I will take this description in pieces and explain it in the parts of it. In the description are two things that require opening, the act and the object.

The act is God's suspending. It is a negative act, a not giving or putting forth that which was wont to be. It is not the taking of anything from a man which was inherent, but a denying of something that was assistant. It is not a taking out, but a not putting in. When a faucet is stopped or turned, there is no diminution of water in the vessel under it, but only no addition; the vessel is not emptied, but simply not filled. When a child is set down out of his father's arms, he is weaker, yet not by any loss of his personal strength, but by the

withdrawing of his father's help. The father does not take away any of his child's ability, but denies his own aid. So when God deserts His servants, He withdraws Himself and His Spirit; yet we must conceive it not to be a spoiling of what He had planted in them, but a not conferring of that assisting grace which He was wont to give. This will be a little more clear in the next point.

The next point is the description is the object, or the thing which is withheld from a man in this case, which is the arbitrary or wonted influence of the Spirit of grace. Here are three things in the object to be observed:

(1) It is the influence of the Spirit of grace. The presence of the Spirit is one thing and the influence is another; there may be the former without the latter. The influence may be abated, but the presence never fails, just as the soul in the body is ever equal in her habitation, but not in operation; her power not acting, yet her presence continuing.

(2) It is the *arbitrary* influence of the Spirit which is suspended. There is a twofold influence of the Spirit: first, necessary and constant; second, arbitrary and inconstant.

The necessary influence of the Spirit is never denied, and it is that which God affords His people for life and growth. God is ever present to uphold His saints in life so that, though diseases may molest them, yet their feet shall not be moved; they shall not sink, Psalm 66:9. As that hand of power which wrought the creation works still in the preservation of all things, John 5:17, so the Spirit still works and, by a divine power, supports the new creature so that it shall not

fall back into its first nothing. David found this hand of God staying him in the midst of all his weaknesses. "Nevertheless, I am continually with Thee, Thou hast holden me by my right hand," Psalm 73:23.

So that life, being wrought by the Spirit of life, never dies; and, as the Spirit works always to the conservation of spiritual life, so He ever works to the growth of grace. A Christian is ever growing. He grows while he seems, to himself and others, to stand still, yea, to decline. He grows always in reality, though not apparently or equally. As there are seasons in nature, so there are seasons in grace. Grace has her springs and autumns; but, as nature is ever tending to perfection, so grace is ever ripening and increasing; yea, even in temptations and desertions. When God seems to leave His people, He is about this work, perfecting the new man. As in the lopping of a tree there seems to be a kind of diminution and destruction, yet the end and issue of it is better growth; and, as the weakening of the body by medicine seems to tend to death, yet it produces better health and more strength; and as the ball, by falling downward, rises upward, and water in pipes descends to ascend; so, when the new man seems to decay, he is still carried on by the hidden methods of God to increase. The plants are as well profited by the nipping blasts of winter, which cause not only the fruits but the leaves also to fall, as they are by the warm beams of the sun in summer.

A Christian is a member of a thriving body in which there is no atrophy, but a continual issuing of spirits from the Head, Ephesians 4:16 and Colossians 2:19. Every part is supplied by the effectual working of the Spirit of Christ so that the influence that tends to life

and growth is necessary and certain.

But there is another influence of the Spirit which I call arbitrary, which is given and withheld according to the pleasure of God. This is assisting grace, or God's gracious concurrence with that habitual grace which He has wrought in His people. I call it arbitrary because, though all grace depends upon and flows from His good pleasure, yet, in this, God is free. He has more absolutely promised to conserve and increase holiness than to quicken, actuate, and excite that principle of life. This He does with great variations, according to His good pleasure, being more mightily present by the working and actual aid of His Spirit to some than to others; yea, more to the same man, at some times and in some conditions, than to others. Sometimes the same Christian is as a burning and shining light, sometimes as a smoking flax. "The Spirit bloweth where it listeth," John 3:8. Sometimes, He fills the soul with fuller gales; sometimes, again, she is calmed. A man has more at one time than at another.

This assisting grace is to actuate, regulate, and corroborate. Actuating assistance is that by which God carries His people to action and fruitfulness, causing that inward seed which He has sown to bud and bear. This God works, first, by exciting and blowing up that latent spark of grace in the heart. Grace is an active thing, yet it needs to be excited because of the indisposedness of the subject in which it is. Though fire is apt to burn and be very active, yet, when it is in wet wood, it needs blowing upon because it meets with strong opposition in the subject, the wetness of the wood, which gives check unto the active spirit of the fire. Besides this contrariety in us in whom the flesh

lusts against the Spirit, so that without assistance we cannot do the good that we would, Galatians 5:17, there is an external impediment, Satan assaulting with all possible quenching coals so that he may cast a damp upon the soul.

Therefore, we need to be quickened by a continual influence, and this God is pleased to give to His servants. Jeremiah found this working of the Spirit to quicken and stir up his graces which began to flag. Impatience and passion began to stifle his zeal and readiness in his ministry, but God came in to help him and blew up that spark so that he said, "It was in mine heart as a burning fire shut up on my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay," Jeremiah 20:9. When this is denied, there is much deadness, dullness, and slumber in the soul, so that a man shall see it is not with him as in former days when the Lord was more graciously present and assistant to him.

Second, God works by enabling us to act. It is not enough that God has given habitual grace, or that we are excited and come to the bud and blossom of holy desires, holy dispositions, and holy resolutions, but we still need the help of His power that these blossoms do not fail, but that we may bring forth the fruit of action. There is a seminal virtue of bearing in a tree, yet, unless it is helped by the influence of the heavens, it cannot bring forth fruit.

It is God that gives not only to will, but to do, Philippians 2:13. There is a power of God that works in those that believe, Ephesians 1:19 and Colossians 1:18, and, according to the working of this power is a Christian's fruitfulness. When God is pleased to put forth His hand to take hold of him, to draw and enable

him, he runs with joy and speed in the ways of God. His affections are enflamed, his heart is prepared, and he is apt to do good and receive good, and walks with delight with God. But, when God shuts in His wonted mercy, then he walks heavily and his soul is now full of complaints. "I would, but I cannot." There are desires and good inclinations, but they do not come to perfection. The soul conceives and travails with purposes and says, "I will look to my ways that I do not offend. I will pray more, mourn more, and and do more," but it lacks the strength to bring forth. Therefore, the godly cry for help, which they would not need if they had a sufficiency in themselves.

Assistance is to regulate and order a man in doing good. This is necessary, for often there is much readiness, life, and aptness to do good, but yet much failing in the manner of it. The same Spirit, therefore, that directs us to *what* we should do teaches *how* to do it. How often are the godly in that case, that they would fain humble their souls and afflict themselves, yet they do not know how to do it? How often are they bent to other duties, yet they do not know how to do them in a spiritual manner? What the Apostle said of one duty is true of all: "We know not how to pray as we ought," Romans 8:2. Therefore, the Spirit helps our infirmities and, by gracious conduct, leads us that we walk aright. As the master guides the hand of a young writer to write according to his copy, and as the father in leading his child draws him because he is unwilling, helps him because he is weak, and guides him because he is apt to lose his way, so God is said not only to draw, Song of Solomon 1:4, John 6:44, and to help, Romans 8:26, but to order and direct His people, Psalm 37:23,

Psalm 119:133, and 2 Thessalonians 3:5. A ship may be rigged and have a fitness to sail, yet lacks a wind to move it and a pilot to guide it.

Assistance is to corroborate and fortify in some eminent difficulty. Suppose a man was mightily assaulted by some strong lust, and was armed with occasion, opportunity, and Satan's strong power. In such a case, God is wont to underprop and shore up the soul with strong aid. How could a bruised reed stand against such a blast? When a father sees his child likely to be devoured by some ravenous creatures, he makes supply of the child's weakness by his own strength.

The Apostle Paul was in some great temptation. Satan had shot some arrows at him, but God did not allow him to fall. He held him up; His grace was sufficient for him, 2 Corinthians 12:9. At another time, Satan took up other weapons, assaulting him with the terrors of troubles and death. He brought in an emperor against him whose power and majesty he thought would daunt Paul, but God was a pillar of strength to him so that he was not moved. All men left him, but God did not leave him. "The Lord stood by me and strengthened me," 1 Timothy 4:17. In afflictions and hard seasons, also, this assistance is wont to be afforded.

The same Apostle also found God when he was put to many a hard shift for his living. He passed through nakedness, hunger, thirst, and want which would have broken the heart of most men, but, said the Apostle, "I can do all things through Christ that strengtheneth me," Philippians 4:13. Thus, God is wont to stand by His servants in hard times, but when He does not come with supplies and aid, they fail and faint. Temptations

overcome them, distresses overwhelm them, and difficulties daunt them. Thus, we see what that arbitrary influence of the Spirit is.

But there is another thing to be observed. Desertion is a suspension of the arbitrary influence which we were wont to enjoy. For note, there is a twofold influence or assistance—extraordinary and ordinary.

The extraordinary is when, in some unusual case, God moves in with more abundant help, leading the soul in triumph over all assaults, mightily corroborating not only valiantly to withstand them, but also gloriously to conquer them. As this comes upon extraordinary occasions, so it ceases usually with the occasion, and the ceasing of it is not desertion.

The ordinary assistance is that which a man usually has in the course of his life. When this is abated and withdrawn, then a man is deserted; when a man is not what he wont, not so cheerful, ready, or constant in doing good; when he does not, nor can do, as he was accustomed to doing. Time has been when he lived more with God, but now his heart is fallen from that heavenly communion with Him. He could formerly mourn bitterly in the remembrance of his sins, but now the heart is frozen and cannot relent. He could have prayed with much affection and holy boldness, but now the heart is cooled, weakened, straitened, and indisposed. When it fares thus with a man, he is deserted.

But here I will add a few advertisements to guide the judgment in this point of God's withdrawing His assistance.

First, God never denies it wholly to a faithful soul. Though some degrees of divine help are denied so that the soul languishes in a way and sinks into a state

of deadness and dullness, yet there is life both habitual and actual. God's clock never stands still. There is no such delinquency of grace, no such swoon of the new man in which all acts of God cease. It may be so ill with a Christian that he may fall from his first love in a great measure, Revelation 2:4-5. He may be much impaired so that there may seem to be only the remains of what was there before, and these remains may be ready to die, Revelation 3:1-2, but God will not quite depart. He will keep the root, and the seed of God shall remain in him, 1 John 3:9. Yea, and the husbandman is ever, in some measure, dressing, pruning, and watering the branches of his vine, John 15:2, Isaiah 27:3. So, though they may bear less fruit sometimes, yet, at all times, they bear some. A Christian may do less, but still he does something; for, though he may lose *some* help from God, yet not all.

If he cannot believe with that fullness of assurance and joy as before, yet he can pray; or, if he cannot pray as he has done, yet he can sigh, groan, and mourn. Take a spring under the ground; if it is stopped in one place, it breaks through in another. So it is with the Spirit of grace. If it is stopped in some parts, yet it shows itself in others. Though the sun does not yield an equal comfort to the plants, yet it yields a constant comfort. It retires sometimes in part, but never wholly. Yea, God often withholds His quickening virtue from some one grace for the quickening and perfecting of another. He sometimes leaves faith in a poor estate, so that it may be very darkened and clouded with unbelief and atheism, to raise up fear, to awaken to watchfulness, and to enrich with spiritual poverty so that the soul may mourn more seriously and seek more

earnestly after God. Sometimes, He takes off His hand that held down some present lust and allows it to show itself in monstrous shape and rage to pull down pride, advance humility, and put the soul more to seek to be strong in God.

It is not every degree of suspension of assisting grace that lays a man in this forlorn estate as one forsaken of God, but desertion is an eminent abatement of it. So that there is an eminent decay of affection and fruitfulness, and an eminent increase of darkness and lust. A child cannot be said to be forsaken of his father when the father abates something of the height and fullness of his maintenance, but when he keeps from him necessary things. The child is forsaken when the father allows him to wander up and down, to go ragged and torn, pinched and wasted with hunger and cold, and does not relieve him, though the son sues and entreats his father to pity him. You may say that God has deserted you when He leaves you under the pressures of unbelief and the power of corruption, and when, though you cry and call, supplies are restrained and you are allowed to walk in the valley of the shadow of death.

Desertion is not to be judged by a partial indisposition and deadness, but a universal one. Not all suspension of grace makes this mournful state; for, as I have shown, sometimes God hides Himself from one part for the quickening of another, and may be most abundantly present where He seems, in great measure, departed, as I shall show hereafter. But when a man is overgrown with deadness, which spreads over the whole man, so that a man is now less in affection, less in action, yea, unmeet, unwilling, unapt to do all good

and use the means of good, being abated in all his former life and luster, then he is deserted. There may be indisposedness to some duties from sundry causes, but when a man is less disposed in all then he is in this woeful state.

Not every interruption of communion with God, not every present distemper and indisposedness, argues that God has withdrawn Himself. There may be cold blasts, stormy weather, troubled air, or dark clouds in the spring, yea, in the summer season. A man cannot conclude from some present chill, or a numbness of spirit, or from some storms of impetuous lusts that he is deserted. The deadness of a deserted soul is not a transient, but an abiding deadness; not a slumber, but a sleep; not a fit, but a state of spiritual numbness. As a mother who goes away and returns quickly is not said to forsake her child, so desertion is not a present, short abatement of God's quickening presence, but a continued cessation for some space of time. It may be long.

Chapter 5

*That a man may be deserted and not know it,
with the causes and evil of it*

I have done with the state of a deserted soul. The next things are the symptoms and consequences of it, which will give some help to a man to know whether he is in this state or not. And it is needful to declare the signs of it, for often men are in this lamentable case and do not know it. When Samson awoke from that sleep in which he lost his hair, it is said that "he wist not that the Lord was departed from him," Judges 16:20. So it is true of many. God is departed from them and they do not miss Him until they awake out of their sleep.

QUESTION. But is it possible that man should be so besotted that, falling from a blessed course of sweet communion with God into so grievous an estrangement from Him, he should not perceive it? Can a man fall from such a height into such a depth and not know it?

ANSWER. Yea, certainly; and there are diverse causes of it:

1. There may be a great flush of spirit, and much activity from false principles, so that a man may seem to be the same and enjoy God as he once did. If it is observed that he has lost much, and the greatest part of his life stands upon other pillars, like vigor of na-

ture, strength of parts, enforcement of conscience, respects to men, false joys, fanatical dreams, superstitious rules, even these winds often fill the sails. These weights move the wheels even when there is little of God.

2. God's departure is gradual. As He does not come all at once, but by degrees, so He does not depart suddenly but gradually. As the sun rises and sets by degrees, and as night creeps upon men before they are aware, so God, by degrees, estranges Himself and leaves the soul to wither by degrees. In a body languishing in a consumption, there is not such an apprehension of the going out of life and the coming in of death as in him who receives a sudden mortal hurt. He who wastes his estate little by little is not as sensible of his decay as he that loses everything at once. So, if a man should fall from a heavenly walk with God, and from a flourishing spiritual state into a lifeless and barren condition all of a sudden, he would be more affected with it; but now his fall is gradual, therefore it is less seen.

A hill is sometimes drawn out into such a length that the descent of it scarcely appears. In God's way, a man may descend daily yet, because his decay is, as it were, broken into so many small parts, he hardly sees it. Old age and gray hairs come slowly and surely; they come by stealth, one gray hair creeping after another, "and here and there upon them they know it not," Hosea 7:9. A decrepit, weak state steals upon men, their souls being like draining cisterns which empty themselves by drops, and so emptiness overtakes them before they see it. While they think they are rich, they become poor, Revelation 3:17.

3. Men lose much of God and do not know it because they rest too much upon other things that deceive them. Some things outside them cause them to err:

(1) A pride and conceit raised by comparing themselves with others worse than themselves.

(2) The testimony and applause which others give them, especially if by many, the godly, or the wise. Praise blinds and holds them in a sweet dream of an imaginary excellency.

(3) Transient and fleeting gales. God, now and then, breaks in with potent workings, so that people may exercise gifts for Him and for others' sakes. As a result, they may be built up when they indeed wither.

4. They do not consider, neither do they examine their estate. They lay down their watch and do not hold continual sessions for judgment of themselves; therefore, changes befall them and they do not know it. When men do not review their estates, they may grow poor and not see it. Conscience is the soul's watchman, yea, her judge. Now, if there is a vacation and the judge does not sit, a man may be despoiled of much of his estate and not be righted. Unless we judge ourselves frequently, we cannot know ourselves fully, but may lose and not see it.

You see, then, that one may be deserted and not know it. But it greatly concerns a man to be vigilant that he may discern God's accesses to him and recesses from him; for:

(1) Otherwise, though he enjoys God, he cannot be thankful. It is not the presence but the evidence and sense of mercies that raises thankfulness. He who does not receive and he who does not know that he re-

ceives are equally unthankful. When a man lies long out of the balance of judgment, he does not know whether he is better or worse. God may be present in many gracious counsels, checks, incitements, impulses, and yet receive little thanks for His precious mercies unless they are observed.

If a prince comes in favor to visit you, and stands knocking and is not known, you cannot acknowledge that high favor with thankfulness. And, though Christ stands at the door and knocks that you may open, that He may come in and sup with you and you with Him, if you do not know this day of salvation and this season of grace, it cannot affect you. What sin this is! God is with you by secret workings of His Spirit; He is with you in your way, and in the means of grace, and you do not observe it. But it is with you as with Jacob, in another case, who, sleeping, did not know what had befallen him; but, when he was awakened, said, "God was in this place and I knew it not," Genesis 28:16.

(2) Unless you know how it fares with you, if God is departed, you will lie still and not inquire after Him. He who is sick and does not know it does not seek a cure. The whole, that is, such as think they are well, do not need the physician, only the sick; such as feel their sickness and pain, Matthew 9:12. They who are rich in their own opinion do not seek for supplies but say that they lack nothing, Revelation 3:17. He who is full will neither beg nor work for bread. He who thinks all is well, and seems to be something when he is nothing, Galatians 6:3, is at rest just like one who needs nothing.

It is said that the Pharisees needed no repentance, Luke 15:7; that is, they knew no need because they did

not see their sin. No man seeks that which he thinks he has; therefore, look well to yourself lest you are deceived. A man may go on with an opinion of a good estate and be mistaken. "As the hungry man dreameth, and behold he eateth; but when he awaketh his soul is empty; and as the thirsty man dreameth, and behold he drinketh; but when he awaketh, behold he is faint," Isaiah 29:8. So, you may be in a beggarly condition while you think you are rich. Unless you search yourselves, and until you awaken out of your dream and behold your misery, you will not seek for remedy. What brings the beast to the river but thirst and heat? That man will not seek for the well of life who feels no lack. Necessity is the mother of industry, and indigence breeds diligence.

(3) It is a contempt of God not to observe what interest you have in Him and what communion with Him. If a friend (much more if a king) came to your house and you took no notice of his coming in or going out, would he not take it ill and count it a great neglect of him? Is it not a sign his company is not valued whose presence is not accepted, and whose absence is not regarded? Things that you prize, you keep with care, possess with joy, and lose with grief. A small matter may be lost and not missed, but if a jewel is lost, it is soon missed.

Consider, if a husband had occasion of departure for a season, and the wife were not loath to part with him, nor grieved to have him gone, would not all say that she did not love him? When you make a feast, you do not sit down until the chief guest comes; and, when he comes, you meet him with all fit respect and kind entertainment. If, then, you sit down to make merry

with the creatures when God is not come in to sup with you, Revelation 3:20, or if you entertain your pleasures, delights, profits, and other wordly contentments, and give but slender heed and respect to God so that His presence or absence is not much to you, it is a sign that He is not your Chief, but that you despise Him. Therefore, be careful to observe diligently how God is with you that you may not lose Him and not see it; for this is to condemn Him. Add this, that God's withholding Himself is a sign of His displeasure and it is a great provocation to slight it.

Chapter 6

Rules to judge when one is deserted. The first is the consideration of his graces

Since men may be deserted and not know it, and since it so much concerns all to know how it fares with them in this case, I will propound some rules for their helps in judgment of themselves in this point.

These rules are three considerations, or the view of three things: their graces, their corruptions, and the means of grace.

RULE 1. Consider the graces which you have received; for when there is a variation of divine influence, there will be a change in the new man. As you may read in the very face and countenance of the earth what her receipts are from the heavens, whether the heat and rain are liberally or sparingly afforded, so, when the Sun of Righteousness shuts in Himself, it will soon appear in the change of your spirits.

In times of desertion, there will be a change in your spirits in respect of activity, light and sight, and affection.

That decay of spiritual activity appears and shows itself in two things: unfruitfulness *in* good and indisposedness *to* good.

There is less done; there are fewer fruits. You are not so frequent and so abundant. Duties are cut short and clipped. God does not have His services in that

number and measure as before. You do not do so much good by counsels, persuasions, reprehensions, and such other offices of Christian love but are become more useless and fruitless.

In this abatement of action, there are three considerable things:

First, it is voluntary. There is an abatement sometimes (for a season) out of necessity, as in the case of bodily infirmity or other inevitable occasions. But this is not sinful, where the affection and desire to perform duties is not quenched but held up in strength. But, when men voluntarily lay down their strength of holy endeavors in the ways of God and move more slowly and negligently, either omitting or slightly performing the duties of godliness, it is a sign that it is not with them as it has been, Revelation 2:4–5.

Second, it is an abatement especially of such acts of grace as are internal and most proper to a godly man like mourning for sin, rejoicing in God, self-judging, heavenly improvement of the promises and providence of God, and desire for Christ's appearing. There may possibly be a holding up of external duties such as hearing and prayer, but, if these inward actions and motions of the new man cease, it is a certain argument that a man is upon the losing hand. External duties may be upheld by the power of conscience and other causes, but those inward acts cannot spring from an inward root. Here, grace inherent is the womb and grace assistant is the midwife; the one gives disposition, the other action, so that when a man is less in these, he has less of God.

Third, in the abatement of external acts. There will be less done in personal and secret duties than in

more public duties which are with and before others. Pride and other civil respects may kindle a false fire in a frozen heart. The breath of applause may fill the sails and move the ship which, otherwise, would lie still or move another way. A pharisaical spirit will be greatly quickened with praise and glory, and a servile spirit will be greatly provoked by fears. Men are content to do more than they would, sometimes through hope of the favor of men, sometimes through fear of disfavor. But such are moved not by the Spirit that is from above, but by the spirit that is in the world. Therefore, judge yourselves by secret acts. Follow yourselves into your closets and retiring places and observe your diligence, endeavor, and spirit in your hidden ways and secret duties, for what you are in them, that you are indeed. As you may, then, best take your height when you remove all advantages, so, if you stand upon anything, you will seem higher than you are. So you may best see the temper of your spirits when all external enforcements are absent; when you are yourselves without the ingredients of respect to men to intermingle with your spirits.

As there will be less done in a time of desertion and an abatement of fruitfulness, so you may discern an indisposedness and unmeetness to duties.

There will be less willingness. You may do good, but it is rather as a task than a delight; and you are not carried to it so much out of liking and contentment as by a compulsory judgment which lays a necessity on you so that you do it as a debt and due which the Law exacts upon pain of imprisonment, but not as a freewill offering and eucharistic sacrifice. When the heart is filled with God, its delight is with Him and he yields

obedience in love and counts his work as wages. An evil heart is hardly drawn to good. It quarrels with the rule and is loath to be bound. When David was in distemper and left in the rage of his corruption, he was unwilling to be limited by the Law of God. But when he was himself, then he loved it, Psalm 119:129. Gold and silver were not so precious; he chose God's Law, Psalm 119:127. He took it as his portion, verse 57: "I said, O Lord, this is my portion, I will keep Thy Word."

When a man enjoys God, his walking with God is his life. He is greatly affected with conversation with Him, partly through love and suitableness to God in respect of which He is the center to which he tends and in which he rests; partly through respect for the recompense which he has in hope; and partly for the sense of sweetness which he has in his conversation. God meets His servants with satisfying comforts, sweet embraces, blessed flashes of light, and beams of mercy and loving-kindness so that they say in their hearts with David, "It is good for me to draw near to God," Psalm 73:28.

Yea, love mightily commands and inclines the heart to duties; but when a man is in greater distance from God, then the pleasant ways of holiness which were to the soul as a delightful paradise become as the way of a desert, a way of thorns and briars, a wearisome and unpleasant path.

That zeal and fervency which you had will be greatly weakened. When God is with a man by powerful and plentiful supplies of the Spirit, he musters up all the powers of his soul and calls in all his abilities to wait on God and do Him service. So said David in Psalm 103:1: "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is

within me, bless His holy name.” Observe with what contention and strength you were wont to do what you did, for if you now put less to it and go on in a way of spiritual laziness and sloth, it’s sure there is a diminution of heavenly influence. This seems to be the case of the greatest part of the Church, which caused the Prophet to complain in Isaiah 64:7: “There is none that calleth upon Thy name, or stirreth up himself to take hold of Thee.”

Chapter 7

When a man is deserted, his light is darkened

The second change you may discern in yourselves is in your light and sight. The eye of the soul, that gate of spiritual life and death, suffers, and, this being weakened, a man is like Samson: when his eyes were put out he was brought into great misery and bondage.

There is a fourfold evil when God hides Himself: obscurity, inefficacy, vacuity, and incredulity.

The first evil is obscurity. God does not shine into the soul with such abundant light as before, but withdraws Himself from the intellectual part, and this causes a withering and dying in the whole man. For as our light is, so is our life, Psalm 119:144. Here is the root of the main difference between true and false Christians, between strong and weak. One sees things and another sees them not. A wicked man who is learned, though he seems to have light, yet is in darkness; for his light is not the same light as that of the saints. And as for the saints, though they see by a true light, yet, because it is weaker in some than in others, therefore, there is such difference in themselves and in their lives. Yes, in the same man there is there is great difference according as his light varies. It is light that makes men to be what they are.

This light in the saints is twofold. As the moon has a light in herself and a light from the sun, so the godly have a light fixed and set up in them by the Spirit as

dwelling in them, and a light which flows from the Spirit of light as from an external cause, as He pleases and when He is pleased to confer it. As the moon is very obscure if the streams of the sun's light are cut off from her, so their habitual light is dim and dusky if the light communicated from heaven ceases. As the godly are made light, and are taught of God by receiving opened understandings, so they are still learning, the Spirit revealing more and more the mysteries of godliness.

By the way, I will, in a few words, explain a little of this enlightening work of the Spirit. There are four things in it: removing impediments from the eye; manifestation of the object; an application of the eye to the object; and holding to the object.

Removing impediments from the eye. There may be light outside, yet a house may be dark inside because the light may be kept out by shutters. The sun may shine brightly and make all things clear, yet the eye, through the impediment of some disease or film oppressing it, may see but darkly. If either external light is dammed or cut off in the medium, or internal light is hindered in the organ, there can be no clear sight. Now, as he that draws aside the shutters from the window is said to make the house light, and he that removes the film from the eye is said to give sight, so it is in the case we have in hand. When the saints are first translated out of the state and kingdom of darkness into a state of light, they receive a mind to know God, 1 John 5:20, and they that were blind receive a seeing eye. But many films of lusts and mists of sinful distempers are wont to darken their light. Therefore, God is graciously pleased to help their infirmities, and by His power to

cure their distempers as by a precious eye salve, Revelation 3:18.

Manifestation of the object, showing Himself to the soul. As the best eye cannot see unless things show themselves forth, so, unless Jesus Christ presents Himself and the things of His kingdom, we cannot know them.

There are three ways, or media, of spiritual sight: the creatures, the Word, and the Sacraments. Now, does not experience show that you see more of God in these at one time than at another? And one main cause of this difference and inequality in apprehending God is the different manifestation of Himself. The same sermon is a clear vision unto one; unto another it is a riddle, God shining to one in His ordinance and not unto another. Unto some, the gospel is hidden and the light of it does not shine unto them, 2 Corinthians 4:3. But unto others, in the preaching of the gospel, "God that commands light to shine out of darkness shines in their hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ," verse 6. Yea, and as He manifests Himself by a habitual light, so also by an actual light, by which His people see all things more clearly at one time than at another. It is sometimes day with them, and sometimes it is night.

In this enlightening, there is an application of the eye to the object. The Spirit, as in other parts of the new man so in this, gives both habitual principles and inward dispositions, and also draws those dispositions into the act; both a seeing eye and the seeing of the eye. Both the power and the act are from the Spirit. In the body, the eye has a fitness in itself to see, but yet the faculty or power and the act of seeing are from the soul, for

the soul actuates every part. All our conceptions and apprehensions of spiritual things are formally the acts of the renewed mind, but originally they are from the Spirit, which stirs up and strengthens the mind to work and directs it in working.

Holding the eye to the object that it may not slip and wander from it. Naturally, our thoughts are very vain and scattered, and they are never more unsettled than when they are pitched on that which is good. This giddiness and instability of our minds is a great impediment to our full comprehension and understanding of spiritual things, as I shall have occasion to declare later. Now, the Spirit comes with assistance to the tottering and straying spirit of His people and holds their eye and stays their thoughts upon their objects that the soul may drink down knowledge more fully. Transient views let in but little light.

Thus you see what this influence of the Spirit is upon the mind of the godly, and by this you may better conceive how darkness and dimness befall the saints in the time of desertion. There must be an abatement of brightness of understanding where the mind is left clogged with fogs and mists of lusts. Lusts darken the mind as mud does water and dust does air. The dirtier a glass is, the less light it has in it. "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God"; not only hereafter, but here in the world, Matthew 5:8. "The secret of God is with them that fear Him," Psalm 25:14, Proverbs 3:32. "A good understanding have all they that do His commandments," Psalm 111:10. But when the heart is infected with pernicious lusts, they corrupt the mind—seducing, deceiving, and diverting also from all serious study of, and inquiry into, spiritual things.

In like manner, when God does not present Himself and spiritual things, how can it be but a man should be in much darkness? Nothing can reveal God but God Himself. The sun is not seen but by her own light, and when God hides Himself all things are hidden. A man sees less in sin, in grace, in Christ, in the gospel, in all things, who sees less of God. When the sun is clouded, all things are proportionately clouded and obscured.

Again, if God does not actuate and stir up the mind to inquire after and behold Him, it will be but as the eye of the body in time of sleep which sees nothing until it is awakened.

Lastly, unless God fastens and fixes the mind upon Himself and other spiritual objects, it will be wandering. And he who goes from the sun goes into darkness. This is the first of those evils aforementioned which befall the mind in a time of desertion. It is darkened; though it still has light, yet not as much. Though it sees as much as it did extensively, yet not intensively. A weak eye may see as many things as a better eye, yet it does not see as fully or clearly.

You may know all things that you have known, but not in that clear and spiritual manner. Yet, note that habitual light is not impaired, but those beams of light which God is wont to cast into the soul are lessened. And when it is thus with you, that you have declined in your acquaintance with God, and in your apprehension of the sinfulness of sin, the beauty of holiness, the excellency of Christ, and the preciousness of the covenant, you have cause to sit down and weep, for you do not have as much of God in you as you have had.

Chapter 8

*The light and notions of a deserted man do not
have the former efficacy to affect, impel,
repel, and humble the heart*

The second evil that befalls the mind is inefficacy. The understanding, by its light, should be as the compass in a ship to guide and order men; like the sails and winds to set all in motion; and as the anchor, to hold up in all stresses. But, when God leaves a man to himself, how weak is this light, how unable to discharge its office! It does not have those effectual operations that it had upon the soul.

1. A man is not so affected with the things that he knows as in former days. Time was when the apprehensions of God's love worked mightily, melting to repentance, quickening to obedience, encouraging to confidence, filling the heart with gladness and glorying and the mouth with praises and songs of rejoicing; but now the thoughts of divine love do not raise the heart so. Time was when the sight of sin was a wound to the soul, casting shame into the face and causing grief in the heart; but now you can behold your sins and cannot say, as in days of old, "Mine eye hath wounded my heart," Lamentations 3:51. This weakness and inefficacy of knowledge is a sign that you are in an ill case.

2. A man is not so impelled to duty. Where God is present with much assistance and abundant judgments

of His Spirit, there He rules and holds His subjects in a strict obedience. The scepter by which He rules is the Word, but not the Word as it is written with ink and lies in the letter, but as it is engraved in the heart and as it is in the throne, seated in the understanding; yea, as it is swayed by that invisible hand which works mightily in those who believe, Ephesians 1:9. When God holds back the working of this power, spiritual truths lie bound hand and foot and do not put themselves in their former regal power which they exercised as God's vice-regents and viceroys to command and govern. But the heart enjoys a woeful liberty and toleration in a barren and unfruitful conversation. The majesty and mercy of the great and gracious God do not constrain as they do in those who enjoy God, 2 Corinthians 5:14; but, as if the heart had none to fear and nothing to hope for, or none to judge it, it is dull, careless, and heedless.

In former days, the mind, which is God's statute book, and the monitor in a man, was often suggesting counsels and persuasions, crying as that voice in Isaiah 30:21: "This is the way, walk in it, when ye turn to the right hand and to the left." That is, in all your ways; but now it is silent and has become like those idol-shepherds who had eyes and saw not, and tongues but spoke not. It was as a law, having an obligatory and binding power, Romans 7:23, so that there was no peace but in holy walking; but now that light has become weak and the whole man is out of order.

3. A man is not as restrained as he was. This is one office of an enlightened mind, to be as a bridle to corruptions and a check to impetuous lusts. There is a great power in the natural man's conscience when God

awakens it and sets it on the task of limiting the boundless spirits of unregenerate man, as we see in Balaam, who thought he had a good mind to please Balak in hope of profit. Yet he dared not; the light within him curbed him and held him back, so strongly that a house full of silver and gold could not draw him. But when God, for the hardness of men's hearts, ceases to quicken this light, it becomes weak and men are let loose to all evil as those in Romans 1:26. Because they imprisoned the truth which would have ruled in them, therefore God gave them up to a reprobate mind.

So, in the godly, there is a renewed conscience, an understanding enlightened with saving light which, while God, by continual pulsations and motions, keeps it awake, becomes a strong bank to preserve the soul from the overflowing rage of sin. But when God ceases to work in it, then the heart is left like a ship in a storm when her cables break or fail. David, in his grievous defeat which he suffered, knew that adultery was a sin, yet God not adding His influence to this light, it became too weak to raise up sufficient resolutions to chain up that monster in his soul, 2 Samuel 11.

Asa had enough light to convince him what a sin it was to rob God's treasury, in order to make a present to send to the King of Syria that he might gain favor with him, yet he ventured upon this sacrilege. His knowledge could not hold his hands from doing evil; no, not from imprisoning the prophet who did his duty, 2 Chronicles 16. So, if you are less restrained by your knowledge, it is a sign that the power of God is not as much put forth in you as before.

4. A man is not so humbled. The practical understanding being renewed is the Count Palatine next to

God in the palace of the soul; the power of judgment is in its hands. It has power to send out writs to summon men to its bar and to examine cases and pass sentence. And, when God is with it, it will afflict and chastise the soul for sin so it is said that David's heart smote him, 2 Samuel 24:10. But, when conscience grows careless and men do not judge themselves; when they do not condemn and afflict themselves for sin, but the sword lies still in the scabbard; when execution is not done, but crimes are winked at and the offender is justified or spared, it is a sign of a sleep fallen upon them and that God has withdrawn Himself.

If you are judged by the light, yet are not humbled; if you can shift and ward off the blows of conscience so that it cannot wound you, the efficacy of it is weakened and God is departed. David was in this position. His conscience was too dallying and indulgent. It did not arrest him nor seize upon him with its wonted majesty because God suffered him to lie for a time as He permitted him to fall; but when the Spirit came in the ministry of Nathan, then conscience was armed with a stronger power and laid hands on him, bound him in chains, and laid him up in prison. Then David humbled himself, confessed his sin, wept and sighed, mourned day and night, and had no quiet until he had his pardon and was reconciled to God, Psalm 32.

Chapter 9

*When a man is deserted, the mind is more vain
and abated in frequency, complacency, and
consistency in holy things*

The third evil that befalls the mind is vacuity and emptiness. When God withdraws Himself, it becomes like an empty house without inhabitants. When the cloud of divine presence fills His tabernacle and the soul receives oracles from His mouth, then a man has sweet conversation with Him and walks with Him as a man with his friend, as it is said of Noah, Genesis 6:9, and Enoch, Genesis 5:22. God is his center and he is much in pursuit of Him. "My soul thirsteth after Thee, and I will remember Thee upon my bed, and meditate on Thee in the night watches; my soul followeth hard after Thee," Psalm 63. David was much in the thoughts of God. God was with him and he with God. When he went to sleep, yea, when he awakened, his heart was towards Him. "When I awake, I am still with Thee," Psalm 139:18. Yea, "I am continually with Thee"; and what was the cause of it? "Thine hand upholdeth me," Psalm 73:23. An awakened heart has God ever in sight. "I have set the Lord always before me," Psalm 16:8.

As water strives to ascend as high as the headspring from whence it comes, so a heavenly Christian, as he springs from above, is ever streaming there. But there are times when the mind becomes vain and empty of

God and full of vanity; either being like a watch that stands still, or like a conduit faucet that runs wastefully, either sleeping and not acting, or pouring out and spending itself upon things that do not profit.

In this state, the soul has lost much of a threefold excellency which it had: complacency, frequency, and consistency in holy thoughts.

Complacency. Time was when the thoughts of God's glory, mercy, works, and Word, and of Christ and other spiritual things were as honey, feeding and delighting the soul. Meditations were great refreshments and recreations. They were wont to fill the heart with sweet contentedness and comfort, adding much to all spiritual life, both of grace and peace. "How precious are Thy thoughts to me," Psalm 139:17. David reckoned his recourse to, and conversation with, God among his chief treasures. And, indeed, what is better for a man in a right temper than from the Nebo of a spiritual meditation to behold Canaan? And, by a heavenly-mindedness, to walk with Christ and angels and saints in heaven, to have that in a kind of presence, by this perspective, which is yet so distant?

This, I say, peradventure, was your happiness; but now you are changed and fallen from this glory. Your souls creep on the dust and do not savor the sweetness of the things above. They do not hunger so much after that bread of eternal life, but feed upon vanities and worldly things. You are not as delighted in slipping out of the world and removing yourselves so that you might be with God; nay, perhaps, it has become a burden to fix your thoughts on that which was your food and life before. Your minds have become heavy; the earth has gotten into your hearts and weighed them

down so that you find it hard and tedious to pulley and wind them up to such spiritual and settled meditations in which, formerly, you had delight. If it is thus, it is a sign that God has greatly withdrawn Himself from you.

Frequency. It may be that it has been the daily course of your soul to visit heaven, soaring on the wings of a heavenly mind and taking flight to God and Christ as the eagles that fly to the dead bodies, Matthew 24:28. You were wont to find in every place a passage to your God, and were often improving that quickness of your mind which is able to step from the deepest dungeon to the highest heavens in a moment. The mind is so quick of foot that it is swifter than the sun and can move farther in a moment than the sun does in a day. And you were wont to send this winged messenger, and it returned unto you like Noah's dove, with olive branches of peace and comfort in its mouth. Indeed, a Christian drives two trades in the world. One is seen, the other is secret; and, in this latter one, he is busy when he seems to be vacant, and is least alone when most alone. When he is walled up within his chamber, or walking in a solitary way, he is conversing with such companions as the world is not acquainted with. He is speaking with God, and hearing God speak to him words of wisdom, making him wiser than the ancients; words of reproof, piercing like a sword, yet not to hurt, but heal; words of comfort, stronger than death and sweeter than life.

Yea, when he seems to be in the depths of affliction, he is mounted above all sorrows and his soul is above the clouds. When he seems to be frightened with terrors, he is drinking in the waters of life. "In the multitudes of my thoughts within me, Thy comforts delight

my soul," Psalm 94:19. Consider this: have you been thus filled with God, so conversant in heavenly thoughts that you were never far from heaven, but often looking up to the God of your life? And how is it with you now? Have you become a stranger to these ways in which God and your soul had so many blessed meetings formerly? Have you grown mindless and forgetful of Him? It may be that you draw near in some heartless approach to Him in the morning, but then live without Him throughout the day. Many guests come in, but God is shut out. There is room for profits, for pleasures, yea, for sinful thoughts and evil suggestions, but none for God.

If it is thus, your case is more miserable and you are deserted. For, if God were so present by His Spirit as He was, He would be your Remembrancer, and bring such things still to your mind as before, John 14:26. He would be jogging and provoking you to heavenly-mindedness.

Consistency. When our delights are not with God, as the remembrance of Him is not so pleasing, not so frequent or consistent, I say, there will not be that stability of a heavenly mind that has been. Thoughts now are but passing and fleeting, not fixed and abiding. Yea, though conscience spurs the dull mind to this heavenly work, yet, like an unwilling servant, it does not stay at it but is soon gone.

Chapter 10

*Great incredulity in a deserted soul,
with the causes of it*

The fourth evil that befalls the mind in time of desertion is incredulity. When God withdraws Himself, the woeful fruits of unbelief spring up—doubts, disputes, objections, strange reasonings about spiritual truths—insomuch that the soul is greatly perplexed and snared in the diversity, crossness, subtlety, and ambiguity of her own reasonings. Now it questions the authority and veracity of the Scriptures, doubting whether they are the Word of God or not, or whether they are not the invention of men; yea, it is full of suspicions and doubts of divine providence, whether all things are ordered by a hand of infinite power and wisdom; yea, the foundation and first stone is often shaken in such a time, the soul calling into question whether there is a God or not.

Who is able to reckon the strange thoughts and reasonings of the soul when it walks in darkness? And who can utter the dreadful effects of such an evil? What mazes of confusion, what floods of fears, what thickets and labyrinths of sore perplexities is a man led into by this unbelief! Yea, what deadness and barrenness break in upon him! How exposed to violent assaults of Satan, not having the use of the shield of faith! This unbelief and atheism is a rock which the

saints (the most part of them) strike upon at one time or other; but it's a dreadful evil. Like a torrent, it tears down, in a great measure, the props and pillars of Christian hope, joy, patience, and obedience; yea, it is of that destroying nature, where it comes with such strength, as it does in many of the saints, that it annihilates, in a manner, all spiritual things in their eyes so that they cannot see God, Christ, promise, heaven, or anything. Or, if they see them, it is with so much obscurity and uncertainty that the life which these things were wont to yield is much impaired. And, as it is pernicious, so it's hard to cure. A man would never, without the conduct of a divine hand, find the way to get out of these perplexities. Unbelief has a great strength in all, and were it not checked it would more appear.

QUESTION. What is the cause that unbelief so quickly and strongly, upon God's withdrawing of Himself, puts forth itself in the godly?

ANSWER. First, the lack of evidence of the object of faith. It is evidence in anything that settles and sways the judgment; and when things lay hidden in darkness, and carry no convincing and satisfying evidence of reason, the mind will not receive them with a full assent. Yea, it proportions her credit which she gives according to the strength of reason which she discerns for it, so that in some things she fully embraces them, and acquiesces and rests in her assent, being fully answered in point of reason. In other things she goes no further than to one opinion, which is an imperfect assent founded on arguments that are only probable. In other things she does not go even this far, but stands doubting and in suspense, being equally charged with reasons both ways; having arguments why she should

believe this way and why she should not, by which encounter of contrary reasonings she is like the river which, by the meeting of two contrary streams, becomes a still water, or like the scales in the balance which, having equal weights in them, stand in equipoise.

This we find in men in matters of religion and godliness: all believe not alike because there is not the like evidence of spiritual truths to all. Some believe fully; others believe, but not with a settled assent; others doubt. The former are like the scales whereby, on one side the weight prevailing, things are settled. The second group is like the scales wavering and turning, sometimes this way and sometimes that way. The third is like the scales standing; still waiting for the evidence in the object which begets faith, yea, commands it.

Now the lack of evidence of the object of faith, by which unbelief stands fast, is in respect of the object itself or in the subject of faith.

The object is in itself sometimes hidden and strange to reason, and therefore hard to be believed. Such objects are all those supernatural truths as the unity in trinity, and trinity in unity, the resurrection of the body, the incarnation of the Son of God, redemption by the satisfaction of Christ and justification by faith. These truths, and the like, are above reason, such as the mind of itself cannot believe. Even if they are revealed and made so conspicuous, in a sense, by the Word, yet (if there is nothing but the testimony and authority of the Word), unless the power of the Spirit sets in, there will be no faith.

Alternatively, the invidence is sometimes in respect of the subject, and that is when things are clearly

brought to the understanding, but through its weakness it is not able to see the reason for them. The object is clear, but the mind is dark. Though the sun shines and makes all things evident in themselves, yet if the eye is blind it sees not. Things are hidden, but this veil is not on the things but on the eye.

Suppose a man came with a fair and full testimonial of his worth, yet if he to whom it is brought cannot read it, he will not believe or accept him. Now God has revealed Himself by the creation, Romans 1:19–20. All the creatures are as so many witnesses to reason itself that there is a God which made all; but reason is deaf and hears not that sound that is gone through all the world, Psalm 19. Or else it hears it so weakly that it cannot settle and quiet itself in the truth that God is, and that He made the worlds. So our faith even in these things is not only from the light of nature, but also, and especially, from the light of the Spirit. And according as this light is afforded more or less, so our faith varies in its operation by the weakness and blindness that remains upon the understanding, even though it is renewed. The mind is unable to answer these various and snarling objections which are conceived in this fruitful womb.

How many reasonings and strange disputes does the carnal mind, when it is left to itself, forge against the truth, which so cloud and puzzle the soul that it is often strangely soiled! As those Gentiles, being left of God, “became vain in their imaginations,” Romans 1:21, so the saints themselves, when God shuts in the light of His Spirit, are full of dangerous reasoning and entangling thoughts. The Psalmist, beholding the manner of God’s dealing with the wicked and with the

godly, that the former prospered while the latter were afflicted, from hence writes that in meditating on this he was almost soiled; but God guided him with His counsel and upheld him by His right hand, Psalm 73.

So Moses, though God had told him what he would do for the provision of His people, consulting with reason, had this answer from it: "Can God prepare a table in the wilderness?" Numbers 11. I need not insist upon instances of this nature. The mind is very active and quick in working, and is able to lose itself in doubts and perplexing reasonings; but it is not so able, without divine assistance, to untie her knots and free herself.

Satan, whose work it is to molest the saints, is full of all knowledge, so that he knows how to weave the most subtle nets to foil the soul. And he has a way into a man by fantasy whereby he is able both to keep the thoughts working upon some strong imagination and ensnaring reasoning, and to suggest new ones. Hence it comes about that a man is so mightily and incessantly pursued with doubts and strong workings of unbelief that there is scarcely an article of his faith so rooted in him but by these blustering and tempestuous winds it is at one time or another much shaken.

These then are the causes of the new and strong workings of incredulity and atheism, which, as it seemed by former force and power of supernatural light to have been buried, in a time of desertion rises up again to the great frightening and disturbing of the heart.

Chapter 11

*Of the change and alteration of affections in case of
desertion, where is spoken of love, hope, hatred,
with their sad abatements*

The third change which a man deserted may find in himself, with respect to his graces, is in the affections. These are the pulses of the soul by which judgments may be made of its state and temper. The affections are but several acts and motions of the will according to the quality, distance, or absence of objects presented to it. And the will is the principal subject of holiness. Herein the graces are most situated and planted. This is the throne wherein they reign and rule, so that the affections much reveal the state of a man. Grace has its birth in the understanding, but her seat, with respect to the greater part, is in the will. It is seminally in the mind, actually and formally in the will especially. Therefore, as I said, the will is much to be observed in its tempers and inclinations and motions, which are the affections of the soul, as we call them.

Now these affections I will describe more particularly under two heads, according to the principal objects of them: God and things spiritual, and sin and things carnal.

As the heavens are moved upon her two poles, so the affections are conversant about these two objects. First, let us consider the affections which look upward

and have God and Christ and heavenly things for their object. These affections are all comprised in love, as among the disliking affections hatred virtually contains the rest, such as grief, fear, and anger. So in the liking affections, love comprehends the rest of that kind, such as desire, delight, joy, and hope, these being but the children of love or various acts of love. Now the acts of love towards God and things above are principally three: desire, hope, and delight.

By desire and hope, love extends itself towards God as absent. By delight, she enjoys Him as present. Desire is love in motion; delight is love at rest; hope is love having motion in her rest and rest in her motion. And in expectation, there is neither perfect rest nor perfect motion.

1. *Desire*. There will be a great change in this when God denies His wonted influence, for what is desire but the soul's following after God? And there is a decay in this proportional to the abatement of God's drawing. For so far only as God draws do we follow, Song of Solomon 1:4 and John 6:44. The abatement of desires will show itself in two things:

First, there will be less prayer and endeavor to enjoy God. Prayer is the presenting of our desires to God, and he who is full of desires is full of prayers. The soul that longs after God breathes out many sighs and prayers and tears unto the throne of grace, and is ever reaching after Him that it may apprehend Him, Philippians 3:13–14. If God is present, it hangs upon Him with humble entreaties not to depart from him; if absent, it flies after Him with mournful complaints and cries that He would return to him. He cannot be answered or quieted if he finds not his losses and ruins to

be repaired. But where the heart is still and silent in her evils, overrun with darkness, deadness, earthliness, and other like doleful evils, and yet puts not up her prayers—or, if prayers, yet not cries, being either no suitor or, at least, no beggar—but quietly contents herself in her way, her desires after God are then very low.

The like may be said of all endeavors: desires are active. If you have become more slack and slight in the use of ordinances, in which you were wont to find the Lord, doubtless you have fallen from your first love, with backsliding Ephesus, Revelation 2:4. And it is time to consider whence you are fallen and to repent, lest God come against you with terror to awaken you.

Second, God is less intended in all endeavors. When God is the end of a man in hearing and praying, it is a sign that he desires Him in truth; and the more He is intended, the more He is desired. God may be the *object* of his action who loves Him not, but He is the *end* only of such as love Him. Observe this, a man may do as much as he has done, yet there may be a decay of his desire appearing in this: God is not his end.

QUESTION. How may I know when God is my end?

ANSWER. The end may be considered, in respect of its place and power.

The place of the end is in the intention and affection; here it sits as in her throne, and uses her authority and power. The soul intends and minds that which is her end, as the archer has his mark lined up at that which he shoots. Judge then yourselves what you intend. Is God in your eye? So far as you intend Him, you desire Him, and no more.

In the next place consider the end in her power:

the ultimate end has the greatest power in a man of all things. This power is fourfold, to draw, rule, hold, and quiet.

First, it draws to it, having, as it were, a magnetic virtue to attract. When it gets into the understanding, it sets the will and affections and all the powers of men into action. So they who make riches their end are strongly inclined and moved to them, willing and diligently laboring, patiently enduring and constantly endeavoring to attain them; and where riches are the goal to which the heart tends, this is the principle of motion and the reason of all endeavor. So that if it is asked what a covetous man seeks, and for what he studies, plots, sweats, toils, the answer in all is riches. Do you find God thus drawing you? When you pray, receive, or hear, consider what moves you, what sets you to work? For not the motion but the mover; not the endeavor but the ground of it, discovers the end.

Two men may walk in one way, yet their end may be different. One may walk for his health, the other for his profit. So in the same duties of godliness the end of one may be pride, of another peace of conscience only; but the best end is God. Note this, there are three ways to discharge duty: hypocritical, when a man intends not what he does, but something else, some worldly advantage; conscientious, when good is done as a duty and task; and spiritual, when good is done that we may please and enjoy God.

Second, the end rules. As it is the ground, so also it is the rule of action. As it draws to it with power, so with order; it draws to it in the due and direct way; that is, it puts the mind upon inquisition of fit means and due use of them.

It puts the mind upon a studious deliberation and inquisition about the most fit means. Hence come those many prayers to God which David lifted up to be directed, led, instructed, and taught in the way that he should go, Psalm 119. Hence came his study in pondering on the law as the light of his feet and lantern of his paths; hence the people being stirred by John's ministry to seek eternal life and inquire after God came to him and consulted with him: "What shall we do?" So did the publicans and soldiers, Luke 3:10, 15. Hence also came that cry of the Jews and the jailer newly awakened from their sleep of death: "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" Acts 2:37 and 16:30.

It also puts the mind upon the due use of means when they are found out, and this is necessary. For as a man may come short of his end by wrong means, so also by not using or misusing right means. Note here therefore two operations of the end about the means:

It puts a man upon the *use* of them, so that if God is a man's end, the minding and affecting of this will urge and press to the use of such means as God has appointed and discovered, yea, of one as well as another. He that either uses none or not all does not intend to follow God as he ought. Where a man desires God and makes Him his end, he finds in himself a disposition to the use of all means proportionate to the desire of the end which he fully seeks.

It puts a man upon the *due* use of them, that is, so to use all the ordinances that in them he may come to God. The promise of God's approach to man in grace and mercy is not predicated simply on the actions of godliness, but on the right performance of them. Not he who prays, but he who prays with fervency, faith,

and sincerity shall obtain. Not the hearer, but the wise, hungry, humble, and obedient hearer shall find the Word effectual. Therefore the Spirit that directs the heart to pitch on and pursue the right end also leads the heart in the way to it, working such dispositions as may fit it to a wise and effectual use of all means. He therefore who loses in the means loses in the end, for the end is in the means.

Third, the end holds the heart with it. As it has an attractive power, so it has a retentive power; and its bonds are so strong that nothing can dissolve them and draw away the heart. The last end is a man's chief good. And therefore, where it is so apprehended and minded, nothing can divide between it and the soul; for if anything should, it must be either good or evil. Good cannot, for the soul will not leave a greater good for a less; and there is no evil so great as the loss of the chief good. Therefore, if you are gone from God, it is a sign you do not make God your end as you should.

Fourth, the end quiets the heart so far as it is attained. Everything rests in its proper place; its appetite is satiated in its end; and a man who makes God his end cannot be quiet in His absence, but is ever restless in his motion and labor after Him till he finds Him. Yea, nothing can content him till he finds such a presence as he needs, though God gives riches, health, friends, and all the sweet accommodations of this life. Yet, as the child who wants the nurse's breast is not quieted with baubles, no, not bracelets of pearls or chains of gold, but it must have the breast, so he still pursues God and is not satisfied till he gets his hard heart softened, his dull heart quickened, his darkness enlightened, and God returning again into the taber-

nacle of his soul to fill it with the glory and power of His presence. And so far as he gains in this, he is at peace. If God opens the well of life and causes the streams thereof to flow in upon him, if He comes in with power to destroy his lusts, to quicken, awaken, and establish the soul, he counts it a greater happiness than to possess a crown, a heap of pearls or mines of gold.

2. *Hope.* The second act of love is hope. This is an act of the will, extending itself towards that which it loves as future. It is of great use to a Christian; it is an anchor to uphold in troubles and a goad to excite to endeavor. Yet such is our folly that though all Christians have a saving hope, yet few have a living hope—that is to say such a hope as lives in them and gives life unto them—but must rest in a poor, faint, feeble hope, seldom improving this grace except in the day of fears, sorrows, troubles, and death.

But surely, if hope is abated, a man is abated in his communion with the God of hope. And the decays of hope are in some or all of these three things: in the certainty, acts, or efficacy of hope.

(1) The certainty of hope. Certain hopes are not only man's portion; though there is a certainty in the object, yet not always in the subject. Hope in the saints respects the good hoped for in a threefold degree of futurity. Some hope for heaven as possible only; this is the lowest pitch of hope. Some hope for heaven as probable; though they have hope of attaining, yet it is not without fear of missing. Some hope for heaven as certain and infallible.

The hope of possibility is a weak hope. The hope of probability is a fluctuating hope. But the hope of cer-

tainty is a settled hope. It is that which the Apostle calls the full assurance of hope in Hebrews 6:11. Now, as in other parts, so in this the saints are subject to declension; but where it so fares that a man's hope is clouded and enfeebled, so that from a triumphant and joyful expectation and waiting for heavenly glory he is fallen into a habitual anxiety and dubiousness of mind, it argues that he does not enjoy God as before.

(2) The acts of hope. Note, hope has two acts: desire and expectation.

The one is the reaching forth of the will to the thing promised; the other has two things which constitute it. One is the fixing of the soul upon the thing desired; the other is the resting of the soul in the futurity of it. Concerning these, I will propound three things for your consideration. The acts of hope are decayed:

Where there is not that completeness in them that has been; as desire of heaven, without minding it, or some slight desire and scattering thoughts of it, without a patient and joyful waiting for it.

Where there is not that frequency of these acts that has been; as when you do not so often long and look for heaven, not so often mind it and feed your hearts in the expectation of it.

Where there is not that fullness in these acts which has been; as when your heart does not so eagerly desire it, but has lost her former breathings and pantings after it, not so looking for and hastening to it, 2 Peter 3:12. And when it does not dwell above, but has lost her habitation which she had in heaven, and has pitched up tents unto herself in the world, and when it does not comfort itself in the remembrance of the promise, and solace itself in the thoughts of its future

blessedness, it is certain here is a decay in the acts of hope.

(3) The efficacy of hope. Note that a lively hope is an efficacious hope, and there are many precious effects of it. I will instance four:

Prizing the promise. Faith commends the promise unto hope; it reveals the worth and truth of it, and then hope takes and hugs it so that it reckons it as its treasure and feeds upon it as its manna which God has given to refresh the soul in this desert. When you forget your consolation and let the promises lie as a thing of no account, when you afford them no room which deserve the highest room in your heart, when you build not your peace on this pillar and suck not your joys from these breasts, surely all is not well; your hopes are diminished.

Moderation of the affection to the world. Hope elevates the heart. "Where a man's treasure is, there will his heart be also," Matthew 6:21. If you are grown more proud in abundance, more covetous after what you have not, and more discontented with what you have, your hearts are again entangled in the love of the world and have fallen from the heights of heavenly hope.

Quickening endeavor. Hope makes a man willing, constant, cheerful, diligent, and abundant in endeavors. Therefore, if you strive less you hope less.

Making able to suffer. This steeled the saints with courage and patience in persecution; yea, this made them to rejoice, yea, glory in tribulation for Christ, Romans 5:3. Increase of fears of the cross and of impatience in suffering argues a decrease of the efficacy and vigor of hope.

3. *Delight.* The third act of love is delight. This is a sweet contentment of heart in God and in the things of God, a complacency or taking pleasure in God; and according to the degree of love is our delight in God. The same love that quickens desire and hope after God as absent shows itself in delighting in Him as present. It is true, God is in a sense absent from us while we are in the world, 2 Corinthians 5:6. That is, we have not fully attained, Philippians 3:12, but yet He is also present. He is present to faith, for faith has a prophetic eye to see that as present which is absent, and a magnetic hand to draw unto itself that which is afar off. And He is present to sense, for we taste and feel His power and goodness, and so far as the soul that loves Him enjoys Him, it joys in Him. Therefore, if your delight is less your love is less.

QUESTION. How may I know that my delight in God is less?

ANSWER 1. You may know if you are more forgetful of God, for that which we esteem we mind.

ANSWER 2. You may know if you delight more in the world's vanities. Heavenly delights and sensual pleasures are contrary each to the other. There is a lawful delight in the world consistent with delight in God; yea, for whom is delight in the world but for the heirs of heaven? He who is in his sins, stung with the venom of his guilt, and racked with the fears, clamors, and terrors of an unquiet conscience, can have no true delight in the world. What sweetness are a man's dainties to him who fears he has no portion in the bread of life? What comfort can he have in his great riches who looks to have heaps of eternal woes? What peace can he have in his fair dwelling who expects hereafter to

live in the lowest hell? What good do those pleasures do which are soured with hellish horrors and dreadful expectations of insufferable pains forever? No, no, he only has true pleasure who has God for his God. Yet even then he is subject to a carnal use of lawful comforts, which is when our delights are immoderate, nor used in that way or to the end that we may be more fitted to walk with God. And when our delights are such, the greater they are the less is our delight in God. A full delight in God deadens the heart to earthly and carnal delights. As with pipes of water, when the water has broken a vent to spurt upward, it ceases to run forward.

ANSWER 3. You may know by your unwillingness to walk with God, which lies in five things.

(1) Hardly drawn to God. A stone needs not be driven downward, because that motion is suitable to it and it follows naturally for gravity. The eagles fly willingly to their prey. A hungry man needs neither persuasion nor compulsion to take his meat. If you delighted in God as before, what does your hanging back from Him mean? And how is it that the counsels and thoughts of your hearts, the pressing persuasions of the Word, the strong motions of the Spirit, the shining examples of the godly, the wise advice of faithful friends, the sweet inducements of precious promises, the sad menaces of fearful evils, yea, the heavy strokes of an angry God, yea, the melting mercies of a tender Father, yea, the bleeding wounds of a crucified Redeemer—I say, how is it that none of these prevail more with you to a more ready walking with your God? This backwardness is hateful.

(2) Uncheerfulness in His presence, people,

and service. A man may soon see when a servant works willingly in his master's service. When David had his delight in God, he "delighted in all the ways of God," Psalm 119:16, 24, 35, 47, 70, 164. It may be that to be with God has in times past been to you better than your appointed food, but now you come to duties as to meals when you have no stomach. What then is more clear than this: your delight in God is less.

(3) Unevenness and inconstancy in the way of God. When a man is in and out, and constant in nothing but inconstancy, it is a sign he is not well pleased with his way. The soul rests in that which she fully likes. All changes are from dislike, for if a man has what he would have in anything, he would not desire to leave it. All unevenness in our walking with God argues a distaste of the ways of God, and of God Himself; and it is a great weakness to be drawn so from ourselves and to be so tottering.

(4) Being easily drawn from God. When a man is well pleased with his house or horse or anything, a small price will not buy it out of his hands. Therefore judge yourselves. When Satan comes and bids you such a price, offers such a pleasure or such an advantage to draw you from that which happily heretofore the whole world could not have won you from, and you easily and ordinarily are by this taken off from your holy course, it is a sign your hearts are not as delighted in God as they were.

(5) Loathness to rise to the highest pitch of a holy conversation. You have some hopes still, but you can rest with the sad mixtures of fears. You have some mortifying grace, but you seek not for the fullness of it. You have some quickening grace, but you strive not for

the abundance of it. You have some communion with God, but you strive not to be much in it. A man has never enough of that which delights him much.

Now I will speak briefly of the other main object about which our affections are conversant while we carry this flesh: in sin and carnal things. There will be a change in these in the time of desertion. In a word, that I may dispatch this, I will instance two affections: hatred and grief.

These two go together, and they are ever of an equal height. Hatred respects the nature of sin, grief the proximity of it. Though we had no sin, we should have hatred of it; but if it were not near us or in us, we could not have grief for it.

I will begin with hatred, which is a displacency against sin in the nature of it. This hatred is founded in love, and love is either terminated on a man's self or on God. Such is the hatred of sin. A man may have the former and yet be without God; that is, he may hate sin as repugnant either to his nature (so meek men hate contention) or to his peace. So enlightened men hate it for the evil that it brings: shame, sorrow, fears, pains, death, and hell. But they who thus hate it love it; their hatred is respective, but their love direct and real. Though they hate the fruit, they love the tree; though they dislike the effect of sin, yet they like the sin itself.

But true hatred is a displacency against sin itself. And since this is of God, the more we have of it the more we have of God. Consider then, if there is not an abating of this, is not your heart entered into a kind of league and amity with the former lusts?

QUESTION. How shall I know this?

ANSWER 1. The occasions of sin will be less feared and unwelcome. The occasions of sin are harbingers and spokesmen of sin, and where these find better entertainment, there sin is not so much disaffected. Princes show their loving respects to each other by kindly treating their ambassadors. Judge yourself if you have been formerly fearful, jealous, and watchful, but now have grown heedless, bold, and venturous; yea, not only less fearing occasions of sin, but also more delighting in them. It is a sure sign that the temper of your spirit is corrupted, and you have grown worse.

ANSWER 2. The law of God is less loved. There are two branches of the law—precepts and prohibitions—and our natures will more easily embrace the one than the other. Many times we are content to do much. If the law requires this or that, we yield and consent to it; but to be limited and barred is most distasteful when men love their sins, though they like not the law prohibiting those sins. And look into yourselves, for so strangely do the regenerate sometimes degenerate that sometimes it is a displeasing thing that there should be any law to cross and thwart their desires and lusts; yea, they are angry with them that hold this law unto them. So good Asa was overtaken in 2 Chronicles 16. The seer struck at his sin with this sword of the Spirit, and Asa stood up in defense of his sin and smote the seer. Oh! How far may the heart go out from God! What a thing is this, that a renewed man should so far decline as to love that which God hates, and so to love it as to reject God, to harbor it and to say in his heart, “Oh! that there were no bonds that I might be free. Oh! that I had my will; then would I repeal that law and return to sin.” Yea, this is sometimes found, but it is a sign that

a man is much estranged from the life of God.

ANSWER 3. His prayer will be less against his sin. That which we hate is our burden, and so far as the soul hates it, it desires to be freed from it. See how the Apostle cried out as a man tired with chains of a grievous bondage: "Oh, wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" Romans 7:24. Yea, and when he felt his sin stirring he prayed and prayed, and prayed again to heaven for help, 2 Corinthians 12:8. There is a praying against sin while yet the heart is towards it, but it is fearful mockery of that Majesty to whom we pray. It may be a man's case that the power of conscience may enforce and exert prayer for subduing of sin, and yet the power of sin may be such that it may hold the heart in the love of it. But if you slack in the sincerity and fervency of your prayers for mortifying grace, you have abated in hatred of sin.

In the next place comes grief for sin, a grief rising and springing from the bowels of love to God. This is a special grace which, as it is from God, is honored with the promise of God's presence. "For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy: I dwell in the high and holy place with him also that is of a contrite and a humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones," Isaiah 57:15. As when the streams are shallower, it has less of the fountain; so the less godly sorrow, the less of God. When a man is not as frequent in humbling his soul, nor as full of grief when sin's wounds are not so grievous as they have been, he has then cause to sit down and lament his case, for God is departed in a great measure from him.

Chapter 12

The second rule to judge of desertion is taken from the increase of sin: where, and how the increase of sin may be known

The second rule to guide the judgment in this matter, whether a man is deserted or not, is the consideration of his sins. Where sin is increased, there is less of God. Sin is contrary to godliness, and the nature of all contraries is that the intention and increase of the one is the remission and decrease of the other. In the air, when there is most darkness, then is least light. So, when the Spirit of holiness is present in His powerful working, then the power of sin is weakened; but when He withdraws His influence, then sin breaks out. As when the sun sets, the beasts that lay before lurking in their dens come forth with roarings and howlings for their prey. And as when the king is gone out of his kingdom, then the traitorous rebels, who before concealed themselves, rise up in arms to work their wills.

And it must be that upon God's departure, and His ceasing the acts and operations of His power in the soul, sin must revive and return upon a man with a renewed strength and prevail much. For:

First, Satan is vigilant and takes his time to do all the mischief that he can. When God leaves a man, he seeks to make a reentry as thieves break open houses, and pillage and spoil in the absence of the master. And

indeed, when God thus leaves the soul, there is not a mere desertion only, but a handing over also of a man into the hands of Satan. God permits him to deal with these souls as with Job's body, to lay his hand on them, to spoil them, to smite them with many sores, and though he cannot slay them, yet he may much hurt them so that they come out of his hands as the man in the gospel who fell among thieves and was robbed, wounded, and left half dead, Luke 10:30.

Second, sin is a potent thing; it has indeed many things against it, but more for it, and only God above it. So if God ceases to watch and keep the heart in His way, and to keep down this monster, it will be stirring.

Take a short view of the power of sin. It is compared to a husband who overcomes by kindness, to a lord who prevails by power; yea, it is compared to the things of the greatest power. It is called a conqueror leading all into captivity, a tyrant holding all in bondage, and a king holding all in subjection. Draw near and see the strength of it. Consider the city that she is mired in: it is man, an active creature. And as fire is more fierce in gunpowder than in wood, and rebellion stronger in a general than in a peasant, so sin is stronger for the subject of it.

Hence it comes that the devils exceed men in wickedness because their natures are more active and more potent. Sin also is in the whole man. Therefore as fire that has hold in every part of a house burns exceedingly fiercely if men cease to quench it, so sin rages much when God ceases to slack it by pouring in His Spirit, wh is compared to water, John 3:5, Ezekiel 36:25, as sin is compared to fire, James 3:5-6.

Again, behold the forts of sin: carnal thoughts and

reasonings, which are called strongholds in 2 Corinthians 10:4, in which it both strengthens its own power and defends itself against all adverse power.

Then behold her weapons: every faculty, ability, endowment, riches, wisdom, strength, honor, friends, and the members of the body, which are “weapons of unrighteousness,” Romans 6:13.

Then behold her allies and aids. Many things come in to contribute strength, I say, many things outside a man, such as Satan by counsel, suggestions, persuasions, diversions, discouragements, strong operations, and all the objects of sin; yea, every creature, and the examples and counsels of men; yea, and the acts of sin itself—all these make the power of sin greater. Therefore, considering these things, who can wonder that there should be a renewing of the power and working of sin when God denies His gracious presence in the soul?

But concerning this renewed power of sin, take these considerations:

1. We must distinguish among sins. Every sin is contrary to all holiness, and to the whole law in a sense, because holiness, in the nature of it, is contrary to sin and the law condemns all sin as a transgression against it; but some sins are more directly contrary to all holiness, as total apostasy or positive hatred of God, for example. Those who abide in Christ are kept from such, but other sins which are particular defects, though in their kind grievous, they may possibly fall into. But let me add these cautions:

They are seldom found in such, if they are heinous evils.

It concerns men to watch, because such ways are

ways of death; and the proper effect of great sins is wasting the conscience and incurring much wrath.

2. The power which sin gains is but a limited power, not an absolute one. Christ is not willing to lose His subjects. Though He may suffer them to be vexed, yet not conquered. Sin may rage, but not rule; or, as I said, its power is limited.

It is not full. Sin may have much power, but Christ still keeps the throne; though He permits it to do much, yet He keeps the scepter in His hand. Yea, though He lets sin loose in a degree, yet He holds the reins in His hand to curb it at His pleasure; and though it finds a part yielding in a man, yet it ever finds a part resisting, Galatians 5:17. He who has fully and resolutely given up himself to Christ as a King can never admit of another sovereign. It is not only contrary to his duty, but to his nature and to that anointing by which he is set above the world, above Satan, above himself, and under none but Christ. This anointing is the Spirit of Christ, which is a royal spirit, and makes us kings like Himself both in nobleness of spirit, which abhors bondage to base lusts, and in victorious power, by which he overcomes all. Yea, our strength is the blood, mercy, power, and truth of Christ, who has undertaken to rule His people with the rod of His strength, Psalm 110. And He will beat down their enemies with His iron rod, Psalm 2. And He has said, "Sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under the law, but under grace," Romans 6:14.

God will throw out sin by pouring out upon His servants a spirit of repentance, faith, prayer, and power; yea, and lust by winning loses, and her present renewed strength proves the occasion of her future

and greater weakness. For when the heart is awakened, and sees the ruins which lust has made, it stirs up itself, and girds its sword and buckles its armor about it; and the Spirit of the Lord comes upon it so that it subdues its enemies, drives out those pests from its territories, and takes up a resolution of perpetual enmity and war against them, never to admit peace treaties, or to show favor, but to be avenged on them. Not one shall escape.

The sun sets in a cloud and seems buried in darkness, but rises again in glory; and the earth seems vanquished and about to lose her crown and life by the fierce invasion of the cold armies of winter, yet at last regains her strength when the sun breaks forth and unties her bonds so that her imprisoned power and life may come forth again. And now, where are those blustering storms, those battering hails, those heaps of snow, or those nipping winds? Just so, the soul renewed, though it may be far gone, yet shall revive again, and sin's greater rise shall prove her greater fall, and at last sin shall perfectly be destroyed.

These being premised, I say that the increase of corruption is a sign of desertion. But yet with this caution:

Take not all renewed motions and stirrings of lust for the renewed power of it, for sin may stir much where it is much weakened. Temptations may be stronger, and so that grace which we have received may be less able to prevent all risings and workings of inherent lusts. God may seem to leave us, when He but tries to exercise us by suffering incursions of sin, and by permitting us to be assaulted with Satan's depths, stratagems, and power, as hereafter I shall declare.

Where repentance, prayers, and resolutions are multiplied according as the temptations, motions, suggestions, and solicitations of sin are increased, there sin, though it seems to grow, does not. And he who argues that God is absent because of his lust so working should consider that those lusts do not argue God's absence, but these graces stirring and working argue His presence.

Indeed, where sin and lust are grown stronger, there a man has cause to conclude against himself that so far as his sins have gained in him, thus far has he lost God.

QUESTION. How may it be known when sin has thus revived and become stronger?

ANSWER. It will be necessary to consider four things: the root, branches, soil, and fruit of sin.

The root of sin. The life of the plant is in the root, and there is something which has the resemblance of a root to sin in the soul by the means whereof sin lives: affection and understanding.

The affection and love of sin is the life of it. Sin dies when we hate it; it lives when we love it. Hence flow all resolutions to sin and all voluntary acts of sin, and all yielding to temptations and occasion of sin. Love is an affection begetting union and action. A man is desirous to be and do that which he loves. Judge then the increase of the power of sin by the increase of love for sin.

There are four degrees of love for sin.

The first degree is lack of resolution against it, which is when, though a man is not come to a resolution to fulfill his lusts, yet he is not at all (or but

slightly) resolved against it. His hatred against it is not as great as has been. Therefore his watch is neglected, his sin connived at, and the course of mortification slackened. Though he opens not the door to entertain sin, yet he leaves it unlocked and unbarred so that, if occasion presents itself, sin may not be excluded.

The second degree is an allowed desire of sin. Desire is love, or an act of love tending to that which pleases and suits the heart. As hatred begets an aversion, so love begets desire. When you find a leaning and hankering and lusting unto sin with allowance, it is a sign of love; and this is a woeful temper of spirit.

The third degree is a resolution to run to sin, when the heart has decreed with itself that it will do evil. It is a sign of a great strength of sin when a man retains a purpose of sinning, and, for the most part, this is a token of a rotten heart. What greater strength of sin can be imagined than against reason, religion, vows, threats, promises, heaven, and hell to maintain a resolution of evil in the heart? This begets a desperate prosecution of sin, and argues a great measure of atheism and contempt of God, and is ever joined in “enlightened” persons with a resisting of the Holy Ghost in the counsels of His Word, and the checks and dictates of conscience.

The fourth degree is a delightful acting out of sin and taking pleasure in unrighteousness. As here the acts of sin are very sinful—because the more an evil act is willful the more it is sinful—so the power of sin is very great because the more it is in delight the more in the will. And the more it has of the will, the stronger it is.

The second thing which is a part of the root, and

the main part, is the understanding. As it is in the root of the tree—one part conveys sap to another and then that conveys sap into the tree—so here affection feeds action, and the mind feeds affection; the mind gives strength to sin by good opinion of it. That fleshly wisdom that is in us, that carnal mind, is wholly for the strengthening of sin; and the more this ministers that which gives life to sin, the stronger it is. As for the church, so in every particular man there is a false prophet and a beast: the beast of sensuality and brutish lusts, and the false prophet of carnal wisdom, working miracles before the beast, raising up many representations of a bewitching nature by which lust is quickened and strengthened. Now while Christ rules with power in the soul, the beast is bound and the false prophet is silenced; but when He departs, then they are loosed and walk up and down with power and deceit, working in the heart. In a word, when the corrupt mind works unto sin, sin is grown.

QUESTION. How does it work unto sin?

ANSWER. 1. By diverting itself from the thoughts that might detain the heart from sin, being voluntarily inconsiderate.

ANSWER 2. By studying to defend it, either making it no sin or a small sin, being willingly careless to search and inquire into the utter sinfulness and exceeding danger of sin.

ANSWER 3. By drawing the heart to sin, by speculation, presenting sin to the heart as fire to powder; by persuasion, suggesting the sweetness, advantage, necessity, smallness, secrecy, and singularity of the sin; or the possibility, facility, and efficacy of repentance to remove the guilt of it. By such shifts or strategies the

corrupt mind, by these persuasions and suggestions as by cords drawing, entraps the heart in sin. Now when the operations and efficacy of the mind in this way are increased, sin is strengthened in the root.

Consider the branches of your sin. As it is a sign the tree grows when it spreads, so in this spreading of sin observe:

1. When your sinfulness spreads into gross sins—such as the Apostles call the “manifest fruits of the flesh,” Galatians 5:19, and “the defilements of the world,” 2 Peter 2:20—you have cause to reckon that your sin has regained much strength.

2. When it spreads into many sins and various lusts; when swarms of evils and many sinful distempers are put forth, such as pride, envy, passion, earthliness, unbelief, impatience and the like. It is a sign that a disease has much prevailed in the body when it has brought it into a general weakness. So when distemper and sickness have overspread the soul, so that it is every way incapable of a holy walking and overrun with various and manifold corruptions, it is evident that sin has gained.

3. When those sins sprout up with allure which you have confessed and bewailed. If there were not a strong stream of sinfulness in your soul, such a dam of resolutions and vows as is made with tears and heaviness in repentance could not be so knocked down.

Consider the fruits of sin: inclination and action.

First, inclination and propensity to sin is the fruit of sin. Disposition begets action, and action corroborates the disposition. Sin fostered, favored, and acted out grows stronger in the habit, and still more disposes the heart to it. As a stick that has been in the fire is more

apt to catch fire again, so if your heart is more bent and engaged to sin, if it is more easily drawn to and overcome by sin, sin has grown in you.

Second, action is the fruit of sin. The more sins blossom in the disposition to it, and bear in the execution of it, the stronger they are. Spiritual weakness and declension appear more by the acts of sin than the inclination to it; for many have ability to withstand the external act of some sins, the lusts whereto they cannot withstand. Inward lusts, whether they proceed from grace or sin, are both in the regenerate, and these lusts are as the commands of a master. Now two men, whereof one has been and the other is now his master, may command a servant contrary things, but he obeys the command of him to whom he is more subject. So when the flesh and the spirit lust one against the other, it is the doing of the will of the flesh that shows the power of sin.

When a man is led and walks in the power of the spirit, though he cannot but lust, yet he cannot so well fulfill the lusts of the flesh. The victory of sin lies not so much in the rising lust of the heart as in the fulfilling of it, Romans 6:16. When a tree is cut down, it will sometimes sprout but it bears no fruit; there is no strength to bring the bud to maturity. Therefore, if you are overcome to commit sin, it is a sign that the renewed part is on the footstool and lust is on the throne—that the one is weakened and the other is strengthened. In wrestling, both strive, yet the victory is not in the tugging and contending on either part, but in the casting down—whoever falls proves to be the weakest. So, in the acting of sin, the power of sin appears:

First, when a man is brought under by a small temptation. A small thread will pull a child down which will not stir a man, because the child is weak. And a master who has his servant in much subjection will do more with a word or a beckon than another with much compulsion. It was the centurion's power that caused his servants to be easily commanded: "I say unto one, Come, and he cometh; and to another, Go, and he goeth; and to my servant, Do this, and he doth it," Matthew 8:9. He believed that herein was the greatness of Christ's power, that if He would but speak the word his servant would be healed, verse 8. So when small occasions of sin, small advantages, and weak provocations can prevail, it is a sign of the power of sin.

Second, when the acts are frequent. Ordinarily there are not many sparks without much fire; and it is a sign that the tree is very vigorous and full of life when it is full of fruit. When you are often overtaken and frequently soiled, it is a sign that you are much under the power of sin; for all things, as they are in operation, so they are in being. A full stream argues an abundant fountain, and many children a fruitful womb.

Third, when the sins are such as have been of old subdued and long vanquished; for if they had that strength in you formerly, why did they not work and prevail as now? It is evident that here is an awakening and reviving of lust, where that from which you were delivered now again brings you into such bondage.

Fourth, when the acts of sin are with less reluctance and more delight, now sin's power is enlarged; for what greater power can be in any sovereign than to have his subjects yielding obedience willingly and without reluctance? It may be that the time has been

when the motions of sin have been grievous, and you have fought manfully by prayers, vows, meditations, and watchfulness. And if you have fallen, you have fallen fighting with your weapon in your hand; yea, when your sin has had the upper hand, yet you have fought being soiled; and you are overborne, yet you would not yield. But now your sin comes upon you as a conqueror into a vanquished city, where the gate is opened for him and no man holds up a sword against him. If it is so with you, your sin has grown upon you.

Consider the soil that feeds your sin. That soil is the objects of sin, which are as the earth to the tree, as the fuel to the fire, or as the oil to the lamp. If there were no riches in the world, there would be less covetousness; if no honor, less ambition. When the objects of sin do more prevail, sin has the greater strength. The offer of the whole world by the god of this world was to Christ but as music in a dead man's ear; it was weak because in Him was nothing found, John 14:30. And all earthly hopes and advantages prevailed not with the martyrs because they were crucified unto the world and the world unto them. If you offer a dog grass or a sheep flesh, you avail not, because there is no principle in them, no appetite carried to such things. Sin may lie asleep till a man comes to occasions of sin, as a swine may keep clean if she keeps in the fair meadow and comes not to the foul lanes. Lime, when it meets with water, shows its latent heat.

It was the sight of the golden wedge and the Babylonian garment that quickened Achan's covetousness. Look to yourselves, for sinful objects could not work upon you if you did not have corrupt affections and lusts to be wrought upon. If you pile never so

much wood in a chimney, there will be no burning unless there is fire. It was the strength of David's wantonness that he was so ensnared with the sight of Bathsheba. The strength of your sin will appear by the operations of it upon the presence of suitable objects.

Chapter 13

The third rule to judge in this case is from the consideration of the means of grace

The third rule is the consideration of the means of grace. In these, God is wont to meet His people and show Himself unto them. Now by two things you may judge whether God has withdrawn Himself:

1. Consider what frame of heart you have toward the ordinances. When God intends a blessing, He usually prepares the heart to receive it. He keeps the method of the covenant and therefore works in His people the dispositions to which He has promised a gracious presence in His ordinances. One principal quality is a poor and hungering heart, for His promise is to pour out waters upon the chopped earth and fill those who hunger. So far, then, as He upholds in you a humble and thirsting spirit, He is graciously present with you. Speak, you poor in heart, and you who seek Him with hungering affections. Does not the Lord meet you with comforts and influences of life? How often do you go from His house with your hearts laden with His hidden treasures and burning with a heavenly fire falling from His presence upon you? Oh, the streams of spiritual graces which water the valleys, while the mountains are left parched and dried! If you are grown proud and lifeless, if your thirstings after the ordinances are abated, you shall find God proportion-

ately hiding Himself and locking up His mercies from you. You being dead, all things are dead unto you.

2. Consider what quickening you find in the use of the ordinances. It may be time has been when you were wont to find God feeding you with milk and the honey of the Gospel, causing His glory to pass before you in His house, but now that those days are gone the Word does not warm you, cheer you, humble you, or quicken you as in former days. Now you come for manna to feed your starving soul and find none; you come in deadness and go away without life; you come with diseases and sores of spirit and are not healed. The gospel is hidden from you. The ministry that is a shining and burning light to others is to you without power. Others are melted, molded, cheered, elevated, strengthened, and blessing the Lord, meeting Him with gladness and praise who meets them with life and peace; but you find none of this. Yea, the Word that sank into your soul as the dew that falls upon the tender herb is now of no effect; it causes not your heart to mourn, rejoice, yield fear, or love as in times past. The golden showers are restrained, and you are left as the mountains of Gilboa.

You come to the Lord's table, but He bids you no welcome as He does His children or His friends. He gives you not so much as to taste of His cup which others drink from in your sight to their inestimable comfort; nor to eat of His children's bread. Tell me, then, has not God withdrawn and estranged Himself? If a father will not bid his son, when he comes into His house, so much as to drink, or afford him a kind look, will he not say, "My father is offended and has estranged himself"?

Time has been when the company of the saints was dear in your esteem and a sweet conveyance of grace into your heart. But now your delight is not with them, nor are you quickened by them, but converse as the dead with the living.

Thus, if the blessing of the ordinances is not upon you as before, know that God is not with you as before.

OBJECTION. But may not a man conclude amiss, supposing God has left him, because he finds no good by the ordinances? May it not be a man's own fault, or may he not think he has no profit when he really has?

ANSWER. Yes, but the answer to this follows in the place of "seeming" desertions. For the present I will propound only one thing which will clear the question whether you enjoy a comfortable communion with God in His ordinances or not. For there are flashes of fleeting affections, transient and fading impressions which fall upon the hearts of men, but they are not such as come from God's special presence. Know, therefore, that if God's saving presence in His ordinances distills the dew of spiritual blessings upon you, it makes you grow. They are food indeed, and incorporate themselves into the soul, and so become an effectual nutrient. The stony ground received the seed with joy, and many of John's hearers rejoiced in the light for a season, but they were not changed by it; there was not a power in it, to bring them unto God.

Such flashes are fading things. But those who receive the Word as an engrafted Word find a mighty power in it. The gospel comes to them not in Word only, but in power and in the Holy Ghost, 1 Thessalonians 1:5. Where God is in His ordinances there is power, 1 Thessalonians 2:13.

Chapter 14

Causes of desertion: they are for instruction, that nature and grace may be better known, the one in its sinfulness and weakness, the other in its freeness and necessity

Hitherto I have spoken of the state of the deserted Christian with the symptoms and signs. Now I come to the third thing, the causes of God's withdrawing, which are especially two: instruction and correction.

God, by withdrawing the aid of His Spirit, teaches us the knowledge of our natures and His grace.

By this He unmasks the quality of our nature and opens the state of a man in himself to himself, which point of knowledge, as it is most needful, is most difficult. The eye of the mind is like the eye of the body, which can see all things but itself. But because the knowledge of a man's self so conduces to his end, therefore God in sundry ways leads His people to it. And among all glasses there is none that gives a clearer view of the temper, frame, and state of human nature than our life before conversion and in desertion; for then a man is most truly himself. As the truest picture is drawn when the body is without her covering and ornaments—because often the blemishes of the body are hidden in its adorning, and the body shines with a beauty borrowed from an external dress—so in desertion, when a man is left most in his colors and shape,

he may best see what he is. Particularly, desertion makes a man see:

1. His sinfulness. While God is mightily present with restraining grace, bridling in and keeping down the violence of corruption, a man cannot think it has such a power in it or that it is so great. When the master or keeper is by the dog or bear, his authority muzzles and chains them up; but upon the first occasion, if there is no one to curb them, you shall see the utmost of a most fierce and cruel disposition which before lay hidden. A garden, so long as a gardener is in it, weeding daily and diligently, seems fair and pleasant, nothing appearing but wholesome herbs, useful trees, good fruits, fragrant flowers, and pleasant walks; but when the hand of the gardener slackens, then the cursed nature of the ground will appear, and it brings forth of its own, and is overrun with weeds, and so turned from a garden to a desert. So God leaves men that they may act by themselves. So it is said, "God left Hezekiah to try him, that he might know all that was in his heart," 2 Chronicles 32:31.

A man would not think that he is so bad as he is while he enjoys an abundant aid of spiritual grace. While the soul is in the body, its putrefying quality and filthiness does not so much appear; but when the soul has left it, then it becomes a rotten, unsavory carcass. A foul channel, while it is fed with the continued issues and streams of pure water from a clear fountain, shows not its filth; but when the streams are cut off, then the foulness of it reveals itself. If God but takes off His hand, cuts off the influence of His Spirit, and slips the collar of our vile affections, Oh, what monsters stare up! What a cage of unclean birds! What a den of

beasts! What a habitation of devils do our hearts appear to be! What a blackness of darkness covers the earth when the sun is gone! Yea, the air that now seems so lucid and clear, how filled with darkened storms and fogs is it when the sun withdraws itself! Herein is shame cast upon the soul, and a man is made vile in his own eyes when he sees his own image and complexion, and finds himself overgrown with botches and sores rising from an abundance of filthy humors in his soul. He who in the day and sunshine of quickening grace thought he had been freed from his lusts shall wonder with shame and astonishment to see in the night of desertion what darkness will appear, and what foul and fierce lusts will show themselves, like the lions of the evening raging for their prey.

2. A man's weakness and emptiness. A man shall discern, by his deadness, indisposedness, and unmeetness to all good, how great the insufficiency of nature is, and how little he has attained in grace. A child that is carried in the arms seems tall, and when it is led by the hand of the nurse and upheld it seems to have more strength than it has indeed; but when it is left unto itself, its great weakness and feebleness appears. A Christian may have high thoughts of himself while he is sustained in his way by a divine maintenance, and carried on with plentiful gales of auxiliary grace. But if God is pleased that this "wind that bloweth where it listeth," John 3:8, turn from Him, he shall see, who thought himself a pillar in the house of God, that he is but a bruised reed, and he who conceived himself rich is "poor, and miserable, blind and naked," Revelation 3:1.

God's withdrawing of Himself gives a fuller knowl-

edge of His grace in the freeness of it. Where a man sees the depths and worlds of wickedness in his nature, and discerns what a loathsome sepulcher and receptacle of rottenness his soul is, now he stands wondering that ever he should obtain that mercy, that the spirit of eternal life should be given to him. He wonders to see God take such a briar to plant in His own house, yea, to graft it into that true Vine, His beloved Son. He wonders that the waters of life should run in such a channel so full of filth, that so great a God should come under so base a roof, and that such a dungeon and den of devils should become "the temple of the Holy Ghost," 1 Corinthians 6:19.

God's withdrawing of Himself gives a fuller knowledge of the necessity of grace and a continual supply of aid. This is sure, a Christian lives in a continual dependence, and has no sufficiency in himself. All our stock would be soon spent if we had not continual supplies from heaven. Our fullness is not in ourselves, but in our Head. Suppose a vessel (cracked and apt to lose all it receives) were set to the conduit faucet; it has now a fullness from the conduit, and while that runs it cannot be empty; but if the faucet should cease to run the vessel would soon be emptied. Those who are in Christ live, but it is Christ who lives in them, Galatians 2:20. Our life is not so much in ourselves as in Him; our life is said to be hid in Him, yea, He is called our life in Colossians 3:3-4. In the natural body the members have life in themselves, yet we know the life of every member is not so much in itself as in the heart and head. This appears because, if there is a failing of spirits, either vital or sensitive, all the body sinks. Hereby we are taught the necessity of the grace of God, be-

cause if that is withdrawn, we wither as a blasted arm of a tree.

Oh, how woefully does the goodly fabric both of an enriched heart and a heavenly conversation come tumbling down if God withdraws the props of supporting and assisting grace! God, by His Spirit, leads and draws the heart to Himself, but when this bias is taken off by which the heart was wheeled up the hill, it is carried with great swiftness downward to sin and the world. David's fallings taught him to see a need of a stronger support than his own. Therefore he prayed: "Hold up my goings in Thy paths, that my footsteps slip not," Psalm 17:5. Yea, and he acknowledged God to be his strength, his stay, his rock, and He who establishes his way and carries him in it: "I am continually with thee," but whence was it? Because "Thou hast holden me by my right hand," Psalm 73:23. "My soul followeth hard after Thee." But what enabled him? "Thy right hand upholdeth me," Psalm 63:8.

Thus God, for this end, sometimes suspends the workings of the Spirit of power from us that we may see a necessity of grace and know where the fountain is, and that all is of God so that we may depend upon Him and not rest in ourselves, and ascribe all to Him and nothing to ourselves.

Chapter 15

Desertions are for correction, and are caused by pride and carelessness

The second end of desertion is correction. Desertion is out of love, and though it is grievous for the present, yet the fruit is good, like the lopping or winter season to the tree which makes for its strength and growth.

I will instance such special sins which bring this heavy rod upon the soul.

Pride is a swelling tumor in the spirit, a lifting up in the heart, 2 Corinthians 12:7, through a supposed abundance of revelation in the mind, or of other rich endowments of spiritual graces. It brought upon the Apostle that goring thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet him lest he should be exalted above measure. Pride is a dangerous evil; it breeds contempt of others, which God abhors; it is a crossing of God in the end of all His grace and mercy, which is to exalt His own glory, Ephesians 1:6, 12; 2:7–9. “That no flesh should glory, but that he that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord,” 1 Corinthians 1:29–31, 2 Corinthians 10:17. The more we esteem ourselves, the more we take from God’s account and put to our own, which is robbing God in that which He has said He will give to no other, Isaiah 42:8. Therefore God resists the proud, James 4:6, 1 Peter 5:5, cuts him short, and will not be friendly

to him. "The proud He looks at afar off," Psalm 138:6, as with disdain and displeasure, "making him low that exalteth himself," Proverbs 29:23. The pure in heart are dear in His eyes, and "the hungry He fills with good things, but the rich He sends empty away," Luke 1:53.

It is no wonder that a proud heart is a dead heart, and that upon an elevated spirit there is barrenness as upon the mountains, for pride kills the endeavor. Rich men take no pains, but the poor are diligent; and all increase and liveliness of soul is the reward of industrious seeking. As pride abates endeavors, so it debases them. Prayer, hearing, all duties are spoiled by the savor of this noisome evil. O you proud in heart, your commodities are marred and are not saleable; all your works lie upon your hands as broken and worthless wares. So, as the merchant loses when his goods are not current and marketable, you wax poor when you have no trade with heaven. That God who accepts the humble who come to Him laden with prayers, tears, groans, and cries, and takes these and likes them and gives him rich returns, turns back the proud and all their works.

Desertion is caused by carelessness in not accepting the seasons of grace. When God draws near and we regard not, when He knocks and we open not, He often leaves us and goes from us. He came to the church and knocked: "Open to me, my sister, my love, my dove, my undefiled; for my head is filled with dew, and my locks with the drops of the night," Song of Solomon 5:2. But she was careless, and regarded not the day of her visitation. What followed? "I opened to my Beloved, but my Beloved had withdrawn himself, and was gone; I

sought him, but I could not find him; I called him, but he answered me not," Song of Solomon 5:6.

Sometimes the Spirit comes sweetly melting and tempering the heart to a holy softness and godly sorrow, but it is quenched by negligence. Therefore, justly does that soul groan under the misery of a stupid heart, lamenting with the church: "Why hast thou hardened our hearts from Thy fear?" Isaiah 63:17. And the soul takes up that cry with her: "So often here, I cannot repent; my heart is frozen; I cannot mourn." Sometimes God comes with strong convictions, persuasions, and contractions to take the heart off from a way that is not good, so that the heart begins to draw back itself. But because we lose this opportunity, therefore our sins remain and tyrannize us, causing us to take up David's complaint: "Iniquities prevail against me," Psalm 65:3. Sometimes He comes exciting and raising thoughts and resolutions of heart to a more heavenly walking, but we hoist not up sails to these gales; we blow not up this spark. Therefore justly are we left to a spirit of dullness; we neither have life nor peace in the use of ordinances or the discharge of duties.

We also are careless by the neglect of the means of grace, which is:

1. When they are not so much used. As the body, when it is shortchanged in necessary food, grows weak, so the abating of the common things of the soul weakens grace. The less plants are watered, the worse they thrive. We are fed by that whereof we are bred. The Word begets us, 1 Peter 1:23, and the Word feeds us, 1 Peter 2:2. There is a nutritional virtue in every ordinance; they are means appointed of God, as pipes for the conveyance of living waters into these empty cis-

terns of our heart. If therefore, either out of wretchedness or pride, any withdraw from them, they withdraw from God; and if so, no wonder if God withdraws from them.

Therefore consider this: if you have not fallen from your abundant use of the ordinances, and if you enjoy God less than you have done, know it is because you seek Him less than you have done.

2. When they are not so well used. Not the mere use, but the use of them in a spiritual manner profits. A man may starve in a condition of plenty. When you receive the Word and Sacraments, if you think that the very act done is sufficient you are deceived; for the food of the soul is not like the food of the body, which being taken in only, though there is no more thought of it, yet nourishes. Nor is it like the pool of Bethesda, which required but coming into it when the angel moved it. We must bring hearts fitted and prepared, seeking earnestly of God the effusion of His Spirit; yea, we must work the Word upon our hearts, knowing that where the minister's part ends, there our part begins. When therefore we only hear, and labor not to work our hearts to a conformity to the Word, we deceive ourselves, James 1:12. And God requites our carelessness with spiritual impoverishment, shutting up His mercies and locking up His treasures from us. As the blessing and good providence of God make him who is diligent to increase in riches, whereas "he becometh poor that dealeth with a slack hand," Proverbs 10:4, so the same God plentifully recompenses the diligence of the saints in their spiritual affairs; and this He would have all men believe in their first coming to Him: "He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him,"

Hebrews 11:6. But it is just, that he who labors not should not eat; he who digs not for the pearl should not find it, but the fruit of spiritual slothfulness should be a decay in spiritual estate.

3. Neglect of duties and exercises of godliness. You know the promise: "To him that hath shall be given," Matthew 25:29. That is, he who uses his talent with fidelity and diligence shall increase in the same talent (I say in the same, for it holds not that he who uses the talent in one kind shall thrive in another; for "what a man soweth, that shall he also reap"), but such as are idle and negligent shall grow worse and worse. Duties of godliness are a Christian's trade, and he who is slack in them shall be on the losing hand. God will punish the unfaithful servant, and the wages of the idle shall be rods and stripes.

Now the failings in duties are these:

First, when duties are omitted, it hinders spiritual growth. For not only contrary acts of vice, but cessation of acts of virtue weakens the better part. We must not think that the liveliness and vigorous stirring of spirit gotten in our approach to God in any duty will last always. We live by prayer, reading, and meditation as we do in the flesh by food, sleep, and other natural nourishments. And as the body, though it is filled today, and its spirits are much cheered, yet, if there is not a constant use of food, it will wax weak; so it is with our souls: if they do not daily and constantly feed themselves on God, they become feeble and languid. Yet it must be noted that it is not mere omission, but the voluntary omission of duties which hurts. When the heart hangs off and forsakes it as a thing unpleasant, then it is in the way to lose itself, and much of that

sweet communion which it had. For when the heart withdraws from God, then God withdraws from it, Leviticus 26–28, 2 Chronicles 15:2.

Second, when duties are not omitted, but are only slightly done. A Christian may as well lose by doing good evilly as by doing what is evil, and as well by misdoing of good as not doing good. Remiss acts weaken habits as well as contrary acts; laziness and idleness in spiritual endeavors are secret thieves, robbing us of many heavenly influences from above. Cold prayer is like a bow slack and bent which will not deliver the arrow home to the mark. Where God reaps most, He sows most. If we sow to the Spirit, we shall reap of the Spirit. Any duty which is not spiritual and lively is like a sacrifice without life, which God will not accept. All is lost labor which is not done in the Spirit. And as our actions are formed by our spirits, so our spirits are much formed by our actions. He who accustoms himself to do good superficially will become superficial in goodness. We should never come to God in vain, nor think the duty well done, till we find God.

Third, failure to have private and secret conversation with God in duties. A man may do much in the view of others, with abundant flashes of affection, yet have little of God. Public actions are often, though materially spiritual, yet formally fleshly, being produced by human respects. The heart may be filled with ambition, or such other advantage, which fills her sails for the present and bears her on; but that which has its rise from fleshly principles does not work to the advancement of spiritual grace. Secret duties are free from such mixtures and ingredients as debase both the action and the spirit, and to a well-tempered soul are

very precious.

Consider, then, what you are in secret, where no ear can hear, no eye can see, no hand can reward, but God's alone. What are you in confession of personal failings, in supplication of such supplies, in thankfulness for such mercies as none are privy to but God and yourselves? For if you are less active and serious in your retired and closet duties than in those that are more open and public, it is evident that something outside you makes the difference; and if worldly motives are the wheels upon which your hearts are moved, it is no wonder that God meets you not with largesse of quickening grace.

Fourth, not watching. This is a great cause of declining, for the way is narrow, the heart is apt to stray, and there are many things to drive and draw you from the path of life. And if there were none without us to put us out of the way, yet there is still a sinfulness resident in us and active. When you go from God, you go from life, for your life is in Him and from Him. In nature, causes work strongest in propinquity. As the fire communicates more of its heat to that which is near it than to that which is far from it, so the closer we keep to God by a watchful and diligent carefulness, the more He pours into us of His fullness.

By nature, we were afar off; and in that condition we were like those in the remote northern parts where darkness and desolateness inhabit because the sun does little or no shining on them. We were then "without God, without Christ, and without hope in the world," Ephesians 2:12. But by grace we are made near, and so have fellowship and communion with God; but if by heedlessness and folly we go out from Him, we

have cause to blame none but ourselves that we are less happy in the enjoyment of Him. Yea, if God let loose upon us corruptions from within, and temptations from without to beset us, there would be much to spoil, pillage, waste, and weaken us.

Chapter 16

We grieve the Spirit by doing Him dishonor

Grieving the Spirit causes God to withdraw; yea, it works not only an eclipse of favor, but disfavor. They “vexed His Holy Spirit, therefore He was turned to be their enemy, and He fought against them,” Isaiah 63:10. We must not conceive that there is any passion in God. Therefore, that we may clear this matter, note that the Spirit may be considered as having a dwelling in us or others, so it is subject to passion; that is, that which is of God, that renewed and heavenly quality in the saints, may be molested, oppressed, and vexed. So the saints may grieve themselves and they may grieve others, doing that which brings disquietness of spirit; and though this spirit is human, yet in a sense it is divine; and when the renewed part is grieved, we may say the Spirit is grieved. That unpardonable sin, which is a malicious opposing of known truths and heavenly graces in others, is called the sin against the Holy Ghost; as it is in itself, and so it is impassible, yet it is said to be grieved:

1. Because those things that are the effects of grief in a man are sometimes done by Him. God is said to repent, Genesis 6, and yet it is said He cannot repent Numbers 23:19. That is, the form of repentance which is a change of mind cannot be in Him who is unchangeable; but the effects of repentance are wrought by God, these being signs of repentance. When God

does them, He is said to repent. When a man undoes what he had done, it is a sign that he repents. When God was about to pull down the fabric which He had raised, it is said that God repented that He had made it. In like manner, God is said to be grieved when He does that which men grieved by others commonly do, that is, when He chides, rebukes, or withdraws.

2. Because the Spirit may have cause of grief. That may be done which gives just cause of grief and which usually with men works grief. Now it is not every sin which is said to grieve, as every offense with man works a displacency, but only greater offenses and evils work grief.

Now, the things by which the Spirit is grieved may be discussed under two heads: dishonor and disobedience.

First, dishonor. Honor is a tender thing, and by how much the greater it is, by so much the more dishonor grieves.

We dishonor the Spirit negatively when we give not that esteem to His grace, comforts, ordinances, promises, and influences that we owe, especially if our defect is common. A king would think himself dishonored if his proclamations, embassies, pardons, and favors were not entertained with high respect, especially by such as are not only subjects to his power but the objects of his special grace and favor. When the sabbaths are not our delight, the Word our treasure, the promise our joy, or Christ our life, then is dishonor done to God who made these ours by His Son's blood, and reveals, offers, and seals them by His Spirit.

Or we may dishonor the Spirit positively in two ways: directly and occasionally.

Directly:

1. When we have low esteem of the counsels and comforts of the Spirit, when we accept them not gladly or keep them not diligently, being such precious fruits of so inestimable mercy. If a man sent to his friend his counsels of love and the tokens of amity, and they were rejected, he would count himself dishonored; much more, in this case, do we dishonor Him who is so glorious and so gracious.

2. When we prefer other things before Him, as the wisdom of the flesh before His counsels, and sinful contentments, beggarly treasures, or vanishing trifles before His comforts. What greater dishonor than that the things of the world should sit on the throne and the things of God on the footstool; that the slave, yea, the enemy, should have more respect than the supreme Lord?

3. When we charge our failings upon the Spirit, as if a subject should foist his bastard upon the prince. False opinions, boasting that we are taught of God; rash and precipitate fierceness, calling it the zeal of the Spirit; licentious walking, calling it Christian liberty; lumpish uncheerfulness, calling it godly sorrow; and presumptuous peace, naming it the comfort of the Spirit—what is this but to further error, madness, wickedness, and dull or sullen sadness upon the Spirit, which is a Spirit of truth a Spirit of holiness, and a Spirit of comfort?

4. When men put spiritual things to base employments, as when we use our knowledge, or any gifts of ability, spiritually to further our pride, covetousness, fraud, or any worldly end. This is as if the sacred vessels in the temple should be put to common employments,

or as if we should use the royal robes of a king to act a play. This was Simon Magus' sin in Acts 8, who would gladly have purchased those rare gifts of the Spirit that he might seem somebody and enrich himself. And thus many, even of the godly, much offend, putting forth their parts too much to their own advantage. Now, what is this but to serve yourself as your god, and to make spiritual gifts the price of worldly vanities? And what dishonor is this!

5. When we are ashamed of the Spirit before men, as when we dissemble and hide our graces lest we should be scorned; when we count it a dishonor to us to be judged and called spiritual, or persons walking in the Spirit. Would it not be a dishonor to a prince that a subject and servant should be ashamed of his master, his livery and service? This is a great threat: "Whosoever shall be ashamed of Me, and of My words, in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him also shall the Son of Man be ashamed, when He cometh in the glory of His Father with the holy angels," Mark 8:38.

As the Spirit may be thus dishonored directly, so also He may be dishonored by us when we do such things as bring dishonor, when by our faulty and unholy conversation we give men occasion to think and speak evilly of God. Thus did they whom God accused, Ezekiel 36:20–23; Romans 2:23–24. These things seldom go unpunished. If blasphemy is so heinous, then it must be a great sin to cause it. Now when we walk so that we either directly or occasionally work dishonor to the Spirit, we grieve the Spirit, and so procure the effects of offense and grievance: God's withdrawing Himself from us and leaving us to the unhappy state of a withering and languishing Spirit.

Chapter 17

The second means of grieving the Spirit is disobedience and resistance of the Spirit

The Spirit may be resisted in others or ourselves.

The Spirit may be resisted in others, even by the godly:

1. By envious workings against their spiritual gifts. This occurs when, out of a displacency of mind against the luster and life of grace and knowledge which shines forth in others, we set ourselves with detractions, discountenance, defamations, so that by such sinful courses we may cloud and darken them. We may and ought to emulate others, but not to envy any. The root of envy is pride; the fruit is opposition; and this is a grievous sin, and a sin against the Spirit, tending to the nipping and weakening of grace in others, in which way we work against the Spirit. For what He builds, we destroy; and what He plants, we pluck up; and what He cherishes, we withstand. But such envious spirits shall be brought low, for "God giveth grace to the humble; but He resisteth the proud," James 4:6.

2. By stubborn rejection of the counsels of the godly, especially the ministers. Thus the Jews are said to resist the Holy Ghost, Acts 7:51, because they rejected the doctrine and counsel of the Holy Ghost in his servants. When the prophets spoke to them, it is said the Spirit spoke; and their disobedience is

counted disobedience against the Spirit, Nehemiah 9:30. And though this is a sin of a high nature, yet so have the people of Israel been transported through the heat of lust that they have not only rejected the counsel, but have quarreled also with him who gave it. So Asa did. The prophet had reproved him for his fault in seeking the king of Syria, and for this Asa “was wroth with the Seer, and put him in a prison house, for he was in a rage with him, because of this thing,” 2 Chronicles 16:10. When the Spirit comes in his servants to convince, correct, or persuade, and we grieve them by our slighting, refusing, and rejecting them, we grieve the Spirit, Luke 10:16.

Second, we resist the Spirit in ourselves: 1. by not doing good required; 2. by sinning against light; and 3. by impenitence.

1. We resist the Spirit when we hang off from that good to which we are strongly moved. So the Israelites were much pressed to repent and turn from their evil ways to God, yet were rebellious and unmovable, as God complains of them: “Hear, O My people, and I will testify unto thee: O Israel, if thou wilt hearken unto Me. . . . But my people would not hearken unto My voice, and Israel would none of me.” But what followed? “So I gave them up unto their own hearts’ lust, and they walked in their own counsels,” Psalm 81:8, 11–12. God dealt with them as the physician does with an unruly patient who, if he will not do as ordered, he gives up. Here is a main cause why God has retired Himself: you have quenched and resisted His Spirit who, by inward pulsations and persuasions, would have drawn you to a more holy walking. But you would not;

rather you have withheld the truth in unrighteousness, Romans 1:28. For this sin God gave up the Gentiles to a reprobate mind, to a mind without judgment which could not discern things aright; but they called darkness light and light darkness, their foolish hearts being full of darkness. Yea, He gave them up to most vile affections.

Consider what a grievous sin it is to draw back from that holiness which God secretly draws you to.

It is a contempt of the sovereignty and authority of Him who is your God and guide, and to whom you have given up yourself, and who has power to judge and condemn you.

It is a contempt of His goodness, for to what does He call you but to that which is your good, your peace, your crown, and your life? If you had followed the Lord wholly, how He would have filled you with His goodness! He would have had you nearer Him so that He might have blessed you with greater riches of grace and peace; and do you not see how He leaves others to walk in a woeful way of darkness and licentiousness? Yet of His grace He came to call and to draw your soul into more communion with Himself. Oh, why did you so ungratefully despise such riches of mercy? How often has He sought you! How long has He waited on you! And have you condemned this abundant kindness?

It is a willful disobedience because you were not only enlightened, but moved with frequent, long, and strong persuasions. And the more your rebellion is voluntary, the more it is sinful and causes God to depart. He who sins against Him "sinneth against his own soul," Proverbs 8:36.

It is enmity against holiness, else it could not be resisted. Resistance is between contraries, and if you walk contrary to God, what wonder is there if He walks contrary to you? Leviticus 26.

2. We resist the Spirit when we sin against light and strong arguments of persuasion. There are two degrees of sin: desire and act. By both the Spirit is resisted.

QUESTION. Is it worse to will evil than to do it?

ANSWER. We must distinguish types of the will. There is an incomplete will and a complete will.

An incomplete will is that which is not fully and maturely set upon its object, and it has these two things in it, or at least one of them. First, it is not deliberate, but sudden, rash, and precipitate; when a thing is not done out of judgment and reason, it is not fully voluntary. Thus that which is done out of passion, as fear or anger, is not a complete act of the will because it is not deliberate. Second, it is not determinate, not so much a will as a desire, which is not a full tendency of the heart to a thing, but a weak, mixed, checked, fluctuating inclination to it, the will not going fully one way; but as it has something to persuade and something to dissuade, so it is divided—partly willing and partly unwilling.

These things premised, I say that the greater sinfulness in any act is from the will. For some acts which are materially evil are not formally evil without the will. If a man working with an ax kills a man, though killing is materially evil, yet if the will had no influence into the fact it is not murder, Deuteronomy 19:5–6. So it was perhaps with Lot's drunkenness. All acts which are formally evil are made more sinful by how much the more the will is in them.

A determinate will to sin, though, without the act is more sinful than an act of sin without a determinate will, because he who is fully willing sins as much as in him lies; and though the act is wanting, yet it is not from any reason against it, but from some other cause. It may be that it is out of his power, or may appear very hurtful, bringing shame, pain, damage, danger, or the like. He sins worse who is purposed to deny Christ, though yet he has not done it, than Peter who denied Him in act, but not with a full will. Where sin has the full consent it is an absolute sovereign, but where it has the act but not the consent, it is but a tyrant who prevails not so much by its own power as by the weakness of its adversary and the concurrence of external help.

A sinful act with the will is *most* sinful because there is an actual concurrence of the whole man to it. Yea, and this argues a great sinfulness in the subject, for lusts to sin are less avoidable than acts. Therefore, not only to conceive sin but to bring it forth argues a greater power of sin. There is more against acts of sin than against inclinations and desires; many respects keep men from doing evil that cannot prevent motions to evil, so that sin rules much in such a one who willingly commits it.

Now when the soul hankers after sin in frequent, potent, and allowed lustings unto it, the Spirit is resisted and so grieved. The Spirit is resisted in three respects:

First, in respect of the rule. The Word, which is the law of the spiritual kingdom, which is a pure and perfect law, not only orders and judges the external acts and issues of the heart, but the motions and lusts also, requiring not only abstinence from sin, but death unto

it, Ephesians 4:22 and Galatians 5:24.

Second, in respect of grace, which is a principle disposed against sin. This is checked, and the light and lusts of it are overcome through the rebellious disobedience of the heart.

Third, in respect of these inward operations and workings of the Spirit by which He excites and quickens the new man to newness of life. His counsels are repelled, His comforts rejected, His rebukes condemned, His offers devalued, all cords are broken, and the soul, like a prevailing stream, bears down all.

Men also resist the Spirit by doing evil. This is a further degree; when men not only lust unto sin but fall into it, here sin is perfected.

These things grieve the Spirit:

- When the acts are, of a kind, grievous. Such are the manifest deeds of the flesh, Galatians 5:19, and those pollutions of the world, 2 Peter 2:20. These are worse because the godly have more strength against such than against sins more spiritual. They are most contrary to grace for they are contrary to nature.

- When, to the shame of religion, sin is openly committed. Open sins are provoking sins because they feed and quicken that malice that lies in the sons of Belial, to devise reproaches against godliness, and lay stumbling blocks in others' ways. So they cross the Spirit in the great work of turning men from sin, because men are hardened and set further off when they see such wickedness in those who are godly. This was the sin that caused God's worship to be despised in Malachi 1:4: "This hath been by your means, and will he regard your persons, saith the Lord of hosts."

- When the sins are such as he has often fallen into

and often confessed and bewailed. Repeated sins are double sins. This strikes deep, that having been often in fault, and often freed, yet a man should sin again. This was what made Solomon's sin of a deeper dye, that he had found mercy. "The Lord was angry with Solomon, because his heart was turned from the Lord God of Israel, which had appeared unto him twice," 1 Kings 11:9.

So Ezra confessed the grievousness of sin, being committed after pardon. "And after all that is come upon us, for our evil deeds, and for our great trespass, seeing that Thou our God hast punished us less than our iniquities deserve, and hast given us such deliverance as this, should we again break Thy commandments, and join in affinity with the people of these abominations? Wouldst Thou not be angry with us, till Thou hadst consumed us, so that there should be no remnant, nor escaping?" Ezra 9:13-14. Concerning the sins the people of God committed before the captivity, God gives them special charge: "Thou shalt not commit this lewdness above all thine abominations," Ezekiel 16:43. When then a man, after mercy begged and graciously renewed, shall again transgress, this is high rebellion. See Malachi 2:13.

- When a man has suffered much for his sins—many rebukes from heaven, checks from conscience, frowns from men, stripes from God—yet willingly returns to do this evil. This was their great impiety in the wilderness, that though often reproved yet they sinned in the same way again and again. "They have tempted Me these ten times," Numbers 14:22. This was, in Nehemiah's eye, the great aggravation of their sin, that after they had suffered so great miseries, "They did evil

again before God," Nehemiah 9:28.

- When the acts are frequent, though in their kind less abominable than many. Many smaller sins may amount to as much as a great transgression; yea, often lesser evils provoke most. We say to our friend, "Would you not stick with me in so small a thing?" So God takes it ill when, in things which are more in our power, we transgress, for it proceeds from much neglect of Him. And it is more that He should be neglected by His children than when His enemies rebel.

- When the occasion is less, the sin is the greater. Adam's turning from God for the forbidden fruit, so small a matter, was very grievous. The less a man is tempted, the more voluntary is his sin, and so it is more sinful.

- When it is a leading sin. When a sin is committed by a governor or minister, whose example is great, especially if such a one sins in drawing others to sin, this God will punish. An example is Aaron, who was not only an occasion, but a cause of the people's idolatry by the idols he made, Exodus 32:4. Also Malachi 2:7-9.

It is a leading sin also when it is the first transgression and breach of a law. So it was with Nadab and Abihu, who, for offering strange fire, were judged of God in Leviticus 10. So it was with Uzzah for touching the ark, 1 Chronicles 13:10. In civil states, the first breach of a law is often punished with exemplary punishment. It is a dangerous thing in a commonwealth to be the first man in a rebellion, and to break the ice to others.

Thus you see how the Spirit may be resisted and grieved in many ways. And for such causes, as the outward man is often left unto great calamities, so the in-

ward man is afflicted with great miseries through God's departing from it. When the soul joins itself to other lovers, then comes a kind of divorce; and God says of a man as He did of Ephraim: "Ephraim is joined to idols, let him alone," Hosea 4:17. "Let him go on in his way; let his soul wither; let his lusts prevail upon him; let nothing do him good."

3. Men resist the Spirit when they bear themselves up with fearlessness, boldness, shamelessness, and impenitence in their way; especially when they are strongly called and urged to repentance.

The authority of a prince is resisted in two ways: when men willingly transgress, and when they bear themselves up impudently and stubbornly in their transgression. So God is not only opposed and affronted by disobedience, but also by impenitence. And indeed, there is more provocation in a fault when not bewailed than in a fault when it is committed. To a good disposition, he who is penitent is in a sense innocent. Humble confession is a kind of satisfaction, but stoutness and stiffneckedness increase rage.

Impenitence is a continuation of the offense. He is still in the offense; his heart is with it, and in interpretation of justice he sins continually who repents not. Repentance breaks off the soul from it, but impenitence is a continuing in it. Disobedience in committing sin is like falling into the mire, and impenitence is like lying in it.

Impenitence is a justification of the offense, for he who repents not acknowledges no offense. When a man apprehends that he has done evil, this breeds shame and sorrow, which ever arises as high as the

sight of the sinfulness of sin; so he who is not ashamed sees not the evil that he has done. See it in the Jews: "No man repented him of his wickedness, saying, What have I done?" Jeremiah 8:6. They, being stiffnecked people, were far from judging and condemning themselves; yea, they excused themselves and pleaded their cause, as if they had done nothing worthy of such evils as the prophet threatened. Yea, they argue the matter with God hand to hand. "O ye priests that despise My Name, ye say, Wherein have we despised Thy Name?" Malachi 1:6. "Ye offer polluted bread upon Mine altar, and ye say, wherein have we polluted Thee?" verse 7. "Ye have wearied the Lord with your words, yet ye say, Wherein have we wearied Him?" Malachi 2:17. "Return unto Me, saith the Lord of Hosts, and I will return unto you; but ye said, wherein shall we return?" Malachi 3:7. "Ye have robbed Me, but ye say, Wherein have we robbed Thee?" verse 8. "Your words have been stout against me, saith the Lord, yet ye say, What have we spoken against Thee?" verse 13.

Thus an impenitent person justifies himself, and this provokes highly, especially where the fault is great, and as clear as it is here.

Impenitence is disloyalty; yea, greater than an act of offense, for a man may offend out of fear, hope, rashness, or ignorance; but he who is willfully impenitent has a disloyal spirit towards his God.

Here is little love, for love would melt and draw the heart back to God. And here is little fear, for this would make a man serious in consideration, humble in confession, and fervent in supplication that his sin may be pardoned, and favor restored.

Chapter 18

Persuasive considerations to move men to study the preservation of communion with God

Now, having treated the causes of the sad loss of God's quickening presence, I come to consider the cure; and because, as some are actually in this miserable state, and all are *potentially* in it—that is, though they are not in this manner deserted, yet they may be—I will accordingly prescribe rules:

1. Preservative for all.
2. Restorative for such as are in this state.

In the former I will propound something for persuasion and for direction.

That which I persuade is that men would labor to maintain a constant communion with God.

1. Consider, you may lose much of God, as I have declared. The best may be in this case, therefore be not secure; though you sail now with a full gale, you may be becalmed; your mountain is not so strong that it may not be shaken. Dangers should make men wise, especially ones as great as this. Though the promise assures you of life, yet you are not out of danger of sickness. You carry a backsliding heart in your bosom, and there are seducing spirits (many legions) which seek to cloud the day of your spiritual prosperity. Therefore “watch that you enter not into temptation,” Matthew 26:41. But “work out your own salvation with fear and

trembling," Philippians 2:12.

2. You may lose that quickly which will not easily be recovered. A ship is easily borne down the stream, but it is with great difficulty fetched up again. The philosophers tell us that the way from the habit to the privation is easier than the way from the privation to the habit. A man may more easily make a seeing eye blind than a blind eye to see. A man may quickly put an instrument out of tune, but not so quickly put it in again. A man may lose more strength in a day's sickness than he can recover in many days of health. Therefore, when you are mounted aloft by plentiful supplies of grace as upon eagles' wings, take heed of falling; for it is easier not to fall than to rise. If you provoke your God to retire, it may cost you many prayers and tears to get Him to return. When your lusts begin to stir and be armed with a new strength, these monsters will cost you labor and sweat to muzzle and subdue them. It is easier to keep an enemy out than to expel him; a man may better keep an estate than get it. How did the Church seek Christ before she found Him again! Song of Solomon 5.

3. The loss will be grievous; it is most miserable to have been happy. When you have found the sweetness of God's presence, it will be a bitter thing to lose it.

4. It is possible to keep God's presence; you can be assured that care will keep it.

OBJECTION. But few maintain a constant communion with God, but at one time or another fall away.

ANSWER. 1. This does not argue it to be impossible, only difficult.

ANSWER 2. The more difficult, the greater care is required, and a wise man stirs the more when a case is

difficult.

OBJECTION. But God sometimes, of His own pleasure, shortens and diminishes the influences of His Spirit because He will, and for ends best known to Himself.

ANSWER 1. If it is not because of your default, it is not lost by you, though in such a case it may be lost to you. Because you have it not, yet you have not lost it, and so it is without sin to you. As it is in bodily health: if it departs, but not by your default, by want of due care of it, we sin not; it is our present affliction, nor our fault.

ANSWER 2. When God has so left, He has not left in that manner as He does others, as we may see in examples. He denies not a general assistance, but a special; that is, He withdraws not all those workings of His power by want of which a universal weakness and deadness overspreads His servants, but in some particular case only. Christ did not leave Peter to a general declension, but to a particular slip. He did sooner return to Peter, and caused Peter to return to Himself. He communicates more to them afterward, so Peter gained by his loss.

ANSWER 3. We are not so much to mind what God does in the way of His free pleasure and absolute sovereignty as what He does ordinarily; nor so much what *He* will do as what He wills that *we* shall do; nor so much what the issue of our work shall be as what our rule is. This, no doubt, we shall find by a holy walking with God; if not at this time, in this thing, in this kind, or in this measure, yet in another. For our labor shall not be in vain in the Lord, 1 Corinthians 15:5:8. It is frequently possible to find little strength in one case

and much in another. It may be that your lust may be working, but at the same time your heart is melting, fearing, mourning, warring, praying, and abounding in much spiritual life. It may be that in afflictions you may have more sorrow and unquietness of heart, being not so abundantly filled with spiritual comfort; but this may be recompensed in much meekness, humbleness, hungering after God, and dependence upon Him. God will not be wanting to you who fail not yourself. If your love is constant toward Him, much more is His toward you. We say love descends more strongly than it ascends; the father loves the child better than the child loves the father. God's love begets ours. Therefore, it is not only a preventing love before ours, but an excelling love above ours.

5. Consider the excellency of the enjoyment of God, first, in the means of it. The Son of God died to obtain it. His blood was poured out that there might be a way for man to have communion with God. We are made near and have access to God, and favor from God, at no less price than the blood of the only begotten Son of God.

The Spirit Himself is employed to pour in the treasures of divine grace. All the prophets, apostles, preachers, yea, the Word and Sacraments, are the instruments of conveyance of this high favor. It must be of great worth and excellency for the effecting of which such high persons and excellent means are employed.

Consider the excellency of the enjoyment of God, second, in the effects of it. It brings great peace and solace because it sets the soul in a harmonious state.

A man carried on in a heavenly course by a divine

hand has concord between conscience and himself.

Conscience, as it is a tutor for instruction, so it is a taskmaster for exaction. As it shows what we owe, so it demands it. Now, when a man has his rent ready for his lord's bailiff, he is not molested. Conscience will murmur and grumble if a man comes short, but holy walking keeps peace.

It brings concord between the affection and condition; that is, when a man enjoys God, he has what he would have. Now if a man has what he loves, he is satisfied. If you give a poor man riches, his heart is eased. Whom does the godly man love and desire in the world more than God? Psalm 73:25. He is his light, life, strength, joy, all in all to him, Colossians 3:11.

It brings concord between inclination and action. When a man has a principle that disposes him to holiness, and yet is hindered or perverted, this is a sickness and pain to the soul. If you stop water in its course, it is full of unquietness. Therefore, when by divine assistance the soul is loosed of its bonds and freed from impediments of running its desired course, it is at peace.

It brings concord between hope and reason. If a man's ways are not exact, reason will give check to hope, and fear and anxiety will break in and there cannot be peace; but where reason concludes for hope, it apprehends not only the excellency of the end and its possibility, but its probability and even certainty. If hope expects and the understanding disputes against it, going about to overthrow its title, it cannot but breed trouble. Supplies from heaven will prevent this, for these supplies keep the soul in her way, and the way leads to the promise, and the promise

strengthens hope, and in this way reason will join with it. The understanding will see all clear, and so the heart will be quiet.

It brings concord between the ordinances and our hearts. This concord lies not only in this, that a man shall more prize the ordinances, but also that he shall receive more by them. For the heart more sympathizes with them; it is more receptive. God's presence in the soul capacitates it; it makes it more meet for the gospel. And as wood that is dry will catch fire more than wood that is wet, because it is nearer the nature of fire, so the heart draws more life and partakes of the power of ordinances by how much more it has a preparedness through grace.

Where God is present in the soul, He is present in the ordinances. As all the servants are ready to serve him whom the master honors, God has a more full command of all than any sovereign; and if He wills that the means of grace shall bring in much of heaven, it will be done. And where a man is thus feasted with the fat things of God's house, it is a great solace to him; partly because the things themselves are excellent, and partly because they are testimonies of God's special favor and grace.

Communion with God brings concord between duty and ability. It is a great discomfort when a man sees his way and cannot walk in it, or when there is that disproportion of strength to his work so that he does it with much contention, difficulty, and weariness. But when a man is able, then he is merry at his work; his labor is not pain, since he has the help of a God of power. "He runs, and is not weary; and walks, and faints not," Isaiah 40:31. That is done with alacrity

which is done with facility.

It brings concord with the saints. Holiness is their proper quality, and therefore the more holiness, the greater agreement. There will be a sweet consenting, and centering with them; your motion and theirs, your hearts and theirs, your end and theirs will harmonize so sweetly that you shall have their counsel, countenance, company, and comfort. And it is a great solace to have communion with those who are so near *to God* and so full *of God*.

Communion with God brings glory, a glorying spirit, that is, it works joy and triumph in God. When the soul is carried in a holy course, presence of God is so dear, and the contentment and sweetness of His way so precious that he not only blesses his God, but he also blesses himself in his God; he sees that God is with him, and this is a sign of His favor. "For wherein shall it be known here, that I and thy people have found grace in Thy sight? Is it not in that Thou goest with us?" Exodus 33:16. And so a nobleness of spirit is begotten in him through his God, whom he finds better than a thousand worlds; he tramples upon the world, Romans 8:31, and is neither enticed with hopes, nor deterred with fears, but like a conquering champion breaks through the armies and hosts of the world. Why should a man fear the assaults of creatures when he has with him the power of the Creator? How well is he armed against all trouble who "hath the Spirit of glory and of God resting upon him," 1 Peter 4:14!

It is an honor to a man to be full of grace and full of life. If reason, which is but human, exalts a man so much above the beast, then how much more does grace, which is divine, exalt the saints above men! Yea,

if these ornaments of the reasonable creature, which are gotten by human endeavor and are common to all, are such a crown of glory, what honor is it to have the Spirit of God making the godly the tabernacle of His rest, and filling them with the glory of His presence and the blessed operations of His grace; to be trees ever green and flourishing, filled with fruits of grace; to receive daily from heaven that which exceeds the crowns of kings; to have Christ under your roof supping with you, Revelation 3:20; to sit down daily not only with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, but with Christ Himself; to be led into His wine cellar; to have the mighty God walking with you. What glory is all this to you, which is the highest honor of the angels!

It is an honor to have God coworking with you, His hand with yours. A man would think it an honor to be with princes in employment. While you enjoy inward quickenings and assistance, as heaven joins itself with you, so your work appears to be a noble employment, and an acceptable service. The sacrifice of Abel, Genesis 4, had this testimony of God's acceptance: fire came from heaven upon it, as also afterwards in the law, Leviticus 9:24. So when God kindles the soul with His Spirit for spiritual sacrifices, it is a sign that they are accepted by Him. The Apostle by this proves his ministry to be *of* God and according *to* God, because God worked in him, and gave him sufficiency for those great things, 2 Corinthians 3.

6. Consider there is a necessity of divine assistance. We are not like a ship rigged and fitted and sent out to sea, and so left to shift for itself; but God is our continual pilot, and that power which wrought at first unto the working of conversion, Ephesians 1, works still,

Colossians 1:18, unto sanctification, producing fruit, and perseverance. What need we have of the help of this power may appear if we consider that the most excellent saints have failed when they have been left to themselves, that our task is great, and that our strength is small. This is because of:

- The weakness of grace received. It is but little which we have attained, and grace being so imperfect, there remains in us a proportionate impotence and enmity to good.

- The measure and mixture of a contrary principle. The flesh is so rooted, so potent, so overspread, so active, so chaining and pressing down, Hebrews 12:1, that the Apostle not only says, "We cannot do what we would," Galatians 5:17, but also that he cannot, his sin like a tyrant leading him captive where he would not go, Romans 7.

- The exigencies in our way: great fears, straits, and extremities which, without the help of the Spirit, we could not pass through.

- Satan's mighty and subtle temptations. All these inherent corruptions and difficult circumstances, Satan's workings, meeting with small measures of grace, must prevail unto grievous consequences without the support of the hand of the Almighty.

And though we stand always in need of a divine presence, yet sometimes especially:

We stand in need of a divine presence especially when we are put upon some special service, as Abraham, who was to leave all and go he knew not where, Genesis 12. How would reason and affection have barred and blocked his passage, if he had not been mighty through God! So in that other business of

sacrificing his son, Genesis 22. When Ezra was to take a long journey by a way that he knew not, he asked of God a right way, and safe protection from the hazards that he might meet, Ezra 8:21–22. And when our path is not a clear way, or when it is a difficult way and we are put upon new and special service, then is a time to crave the aid of God.

We stand in need of a divine presence especially when there is some eminent weakness and decay grown upon the Spirit by a customary carelessness and long negligence in the way of holiness. In such a case, a man is like one in whom nature is so oppressed and overcome by the strength of a disease that, without the help of the physician, he cannot recover. This David found in his declined estate, which made him pray that God would set him right, restore and establish him: “Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me,” Psalm 51:10.

We stand in need of a divine presence especially when some lust has recovered strength. When the Jebusites have made inroads upon Israel, and Babel has prevailed upon Zion, then we need the help of the Spirit to charm down these spirits, to hush these winds, to deliver the poor captive out of chains. If lusts prevail to lead captive, they will easily hold fast in captivity; and except redemption come from heaven, how should a feeble soul pull itself out of the jaws of lions, yea, out of the hands of the powers of darkness?

We stand in need of a divine presence especially in fierce assaults and strong temptations. When Satan lays siege to the soul, shooting his fiery darts and using stratagems of policy, joining his endeavors with our corruptions as wind and tide, then we have cause to

pray as David: "Hold up my goings in Thy paths, that my footsteps slip not," Psalm 17:5. The Apostle also found he had need of help from heaven when he was assaulted. And therefore he prayed thrice that the thing he feared might depart from him, 2 Corinthians 12:8. Christ has taught us to pray daily, "Lead us not into temptation," for it is dangerous; and temptations are most dangerous when they are most suitable (when Satan joins with our disposition or constitution), when they are continual, and when opportunity and power are greatest.

We stand in need of a divine presence especially in great afflictions, wants, pains, dangers, and persecutions. It is hard to endure sight of afflictions, to suffer great and sore evils, especially when they are multiplied and continued. Whether our sufferings are corrections from God or persecutions from men, we need a greater strength than our own; for we see in both how the greatest champions have been soiled when God has for a time retreated and left them to try it out in their own strength. Job, the mirror of patience, was overtaken with much impatience. Peter, that man of courage, was overcome with cowardice. The former was defeated so far as to quarrel with his God, the latter so far as to deny His master; and these things are written for us.

We stand in need of a divine presence especially when the means of grace are cut off from us. These are the food of the soul, and when these fail it would be with the soul as with fire which, if one withdraws the fuel, would be extinguished; or as with the body which, for want of nutriment, would be famished. A garden, if when the heavens drop not in sweet showers it is not

watered by the gardener, withers. This is our comfort, that when the means of spiritual life are afforded we must expect all supplies in that way; yet we are not set in such an absolute dependence upon them but that, through God, when they are wanting, we may be sustained. Light in the present, ordinary course of nature comes from the sun and stars, yet God gave light at first to the world when yet they were not created, Genesis 1. So when the sun and moon (the means of knowledge) shall not give light, "The Lord shall be to thee an everlasting light, and thy God thy glory," Isaiah 60:19. But if God should not feed us Himself, when with Elijah we are in the wilderness, how should we subsist?

We stand in need of a divine presence especially when inward comforts are suspended and the streams of living water do not flow from the well of life, when storms and tempests arise and the waters of Marah overflow. Then, if God does not uphold, the soul sinks in the deeps as David, Psalm 69:1-2; Heman, Psalm 88; Job 1:6. In times when the sweet gust and taste of those things which refreshed the heart are cut off, if God puts forth Himself in a way of help, the thirst and labor of the heart will be much after God, Psalm 63:8. But if God withdraws His hand, either the heart lies sleeping and feeding upon inferior things—like the prodigal, who when he had not bread fed upon chaff and dross—or else it faints in discouragement, hangs the wing, and lies in fruitless and mournful dejection, either fearing to draw near so great a God or thinking it in vain to stir. It is hard to live by faith when all sense fails, and it is hard to retain a living hope when fears break in like a flood.

All these things considered, does it not much concern us to endeavor to keep the good hand of God with us in all our ways? Let this suffice for persuasion.

Chapter 19

Directions how to retain a divine quickening presence with us. The first two means are to acknowledge it and to use God's help

The next thing is directions how to retain the happiness of divine assistance.

When you have it, acknowledge it:

1. With thankfulness. Prize it, for it is a precious mercy; it is a multiplied favor. How much have you in this one thing? All the comfort and sweetness of duties, the quietness and liberty from lusts, the fruit and efficacy of ordinances, depend upon this. If God holds back this one mercy, all these are gone. Consider what a difference is in yourselves and your ways when you are carried in the gracious arms of God your Helper and when you are left to walk in your own strength. Oh, how great is God's goodness to you! He calls upon others for the same things, and conscience stands, as Pharaoh's taskmasters, requiring the quota of bricks, but not allowing straw; it impels and presses, but gives no enlargement of heart, and buffets and wounds them for neglect. The hard creditor takes the poor debtor by the throat and says, "Pay me what you owe me," but yields him no power to do it. Thus God might deal with you also, for He owes no assistance to us, but we owe obedience to Him. Remember, we had power; and it is just to demand what we cannot do because the

weakness that is in us is of ourselves. We have impoverished ourselves. Therefore, when in much mercy He puts forth His hand into the work with you, be very thankful. If the work is not done, He is no loser; if done and well done, He is no gainer; Job 22:2, 35:6–8; Psalm 16:2. The gain is all to you; all the good that comes by it is to yourself.

And take this also into your thoughts: it is a sign of great loving-kindness. Consider the infinite distance between you and the great God. Would a king sit down to work for and with a mean man in his trade, to help to maintain him?

One thing more I add: you have cause to be thankful because by this God testifies His acceptance of you and your way, or else His hand would be far from you. Get, therefore, and keep your heart in a thankful spirit. This is one way to continue it.

2. With faithfulness. Take heed of taking from God to set up thyself. Put not to your account that which belongs to Him. Take heed of sacrificing to your strength or parts; acknowledge that all the excellency of all your actions is from Him. God is very jealous of His honor, and (as I have said) oftentimes leaves His people to feel their own weakness because they honored not His strength. If the faculties of your soul bring in willingly and plentifully offerings unto God, say as David, when so much store freely was brought in by the people to build the temple: "Now, our God, we thank Thee, and praise Thy glorious Name; but who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able to offer so willingly after this sort? For all things come of Thee, and of Thine own have we given Thee; O Lord our God, all this store that we have prepared to build Thee a house

for Thine holy Name, cometh of Thine hand, and is all Thine own," 1 Chronicles 29:14–16. So the Apostle, when in that distress before Nero he was so courageous, did not ascribe it to his own strength, but acknowledged that it was the Lord. "The Lord stood by me and strengthened me," 2 Timothy 4:17. It was his way to strip himself and cast the honor of all his ministry and actions upon God. "By the grace of God I am that I am," 1 Corinthians 15:10. And you see with how full a gale of divine grace he was carried in all his way.

Learn therefore, in all things wherein the excellency and life of grace shine forth, to know that as the stars shine not by their own light alone, but by a light which they have from the sun, so your luster and vigor in your way are not of yourself, but from Him who is your life—so that you may not draw down that to the feeding of your pride which should be to the glory of God. Whatever you do, whenever you are carried through any service, still say as the Apostle: "Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think anything as of ourselves, but our sufficiency is of God," 2 Corinthians 3:5. I may say in a spiritual sense, as Solomon in a natural, "Honor the Lord with thy substance, and with the first fruits of all thine increase; so shall thy barns be filled with plenty, and thy presses shall burst out with new wine," Proverbs 3:9–10. As by the first fruits they acknowledged that all was His, and that it was not their tillage and labor but the influence of His blessing, which caused the fields to be clad with grass and stored with corn, so must you acknowledge that it is not by anything in you, but all of God that you bring forth the fruits of righteousness; and then His promise is to be with you, and to make you to abound still, and to bring

forth more fruit, Psalm 73:23–24.

Next, in addition to acknowledging His help, use it. When He comes with excitements and enlargements of heart, turn not back the inspiration of the Almighty. Quenching the Spirit is often the cause why God shuts in His Spirit. I have spoken of this before, but I will add something more here in revealing how men sin against the Spirit. Know therefore that you may sin against the Spirit. Know therefore that you may grieve the Spirit not only by doing evil voluntarily against knowledge, but also by omitting good and by remissness in good.

When God shows you what is good and stands ready to help you, if you walk not in your way you provoke Him to leave you. And because this is an evil so incident to men through sloth and worldly affections and distractions, I will briefly declare the sinfulness and the foolishness of it.

First, it is denying God His due. It is withholding from Him that which is due to Him, as you are His creatures, His servants, and His children, a people in covenant. He comes not to you as that cruel servant to his fellow servant, Matthew 18:28–29, but He entreats and graciously moves as His own. He forgave you all your former debts, and now, though He might demand the whole, yet He is content to take it as you can pay it. And will you now deny Him? The flesh calls and you yield; the world commands and you obey; yet you are not debtor to these, but to the Spirit, Romans 8:12. God comes with one hand to give and with the other to take; and He gives more to you than He demands of you. He gives you leave to ask Him whatsoever you will, Matthew 21:22, and is not backward to hear. “He doth

not turn back my prayer," Psalm 66:19–20. He might have said upon your praying to Him, as Solomon of Adonijah, "God do so to me and more also, if Adonijah have not spoken this word against his own life," 1 Kings 2:23. And if He should shut out your prayer, what a sad case would you be in! Therefore, be not of a withdrawing heart to deny God.

Consider further, when you neglect and refuse to do your duty, you deny His sovereignty, and in effect you say as Pharaoh: "Who is the Lord that I should obey His voice?" Exodus 5:2. Or, as those rebels, "this man shall not have dominion over us," Luke 19:14. Your denying of God in this way is worse than when the wicked, and such as are forsaken of Him, deny him; for they stand not so engaged unto God. God has not paid so dearly for them, He has not done that good for them that He has done for you. They have not so given up themselves to Him as you have done; yet, when they do not what they know, He visits their sin upon their heads. God took the kingly throne from that great king Nebuchadnezzar for his sin, and so God dealt with his son Belshazzar. The reason you may see in Daniel 5:22: "Thou, O Belshazzar his son, hast not humbled thyself, though thou knewest all this."

You stand against God for a small matter, having given up yourselves to God. If a man sues a woman, he takes it not so ill that she will not bestow herself upon him, being his wife, that she denies him some particular duty.

Others never knew as much of God, nor of His way, as you have known. They think it is a hard way, and that God is an hard master; but you have found much good. You have had a gracious assistance, God meeting

you in the way with a gracious hand of help. You have had a sweet recompense; the work has been your wages; it has brought meat in the mouth. Therefore it is very sinful for you to withdraw from the way.

There are other particular aggravations of the sinfulness of this neglect, respecting the duty:

In respect of the duty, omission becomes more sinful when the duty is of great importance, when much hangs upon it. If the duties of public places, magistracy, or ministry are neglected, much evil follows. If the duties that have greatest influence in the life of a Christian—meditation, searching the heart, repentance—are not done, God loses His due in many other ways, because the spirit and life of other duties depend upon these. All duties are necessary, but some are of more importance. There are the weightier matters of the law; these things must be especially minded, Matthew 23:23 and Luke 11:42.

Omission becomes more sinful when the duty is much enforced by former resolutions or by present impulsions.

Omission becomes more sinful when you have found much good in it.

Omission becomes more sinful when the duty is most easily carried out in respect of ability and opportunity. In such cases, the disobedience of the heart is greater, and so the sin also is greater.

In respect of the neglect, the sinfulness is increased when it is extended, when a man voluntarily lives in neglect of what he knows. Sinfulness is increased when it is not lamented, the heart being not only stubborn, but secure, senseless, and impenitent. In these cases this sin becomes exceedingly sinful and provoking.

As you have seen the sinfulness, so cast your eye upon the foolishness of denying God what He calls for.

In every voluntary action you have a reason that moves you, especially when two ways are set before you. Now, then, consider what it is that moves you to withdraw yourself from that unto which you are excited of God. What is it, the shunning of any evil? Think, then, if the good which is in God's way is not greater than all evil, and if the less of God is not a greater evil than all the evil you shun. Or, is it the difficulty of the duty? Think then, have you not found the way smooth? Does not God offer His hand with you to the work? What is the work to the wages? Or what is it to gratify yourself with some present advantage? Think, then, if anything can be good without God, and if there is not a greater good in His way, and if you may not have that very thing in God's way which you seek outside of it. Thus you will find that without reason you deny God.

God has devised the best way for your good. His wisdom and goodness have conspired to prepare that way which might be best for you. Therefore, to follow your own counsels and affections rather than His counsel is folly. See all that God has done; look into this visible world; who could have by wisdom framed and ordered everything in that order and beauty as all things now stand by His hand? Yet this is the great foolishness of the world: men think they can order things better for themselves than God has done; and this very principle is the main root of all the strayings of men. But suppose a ship were at sea in the winds among many rocks. Would it be better for the pilot, who is skillful, to steer her, or the passenger who knows not his way? Consider that good and evil are hardly known;

they many times are veiled with such visages that we need wisdom to discern, and it is always safest to follow the greatest light. Your wisdom is but borrowed; it is but a drop from that ocean of wisdom which is in Him who is wisdom, and it was given you for this end, that you might be ordered by His wisdom to the true and to the greatest good. The eye in the body was given you not to be a sole and sufficient guide to the body, but that by it you might be capable of perceiving the light of the sun, without which the eye cannot see. Therefore it is folly to be led by your own spirits and not by God's.

You cross your hopes and prayers, for it is in vain to ask or expect any good but in the way of good. God, who undertakes to save you, has shown you the way. Now if you refuse the way, you refuse your own good. Psalm 73:24: "Thou shall guide me by Thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory."

You refuse to do what you must do. When God speaks He will not be denied. If you stand firm now, He will have it out another way. He will have it out in repentance and mourning; and though now your heart is not bowed to do your duty, He will make you repent of your folly before He will forgive such disobedience.

You sin against the Spirit when you do less than is clearly due, when you do not as Caleb, who followed the Lord wholly, Numbers 14:24 and Joshua 14:1; when like bad debtors you pay something, but not the whole. Think not that it is enough for you to be doing good, for you may as well sin in doing good as in doing evil. Indeed, a good man sins more in good than in evil.

Note that the deficiency of a man in doing good is

from a twofold spring: insufficiency of strength and malignity and sinfulness of heart. In the former you are like a sick man who cannot do what he would; in the other, like an idle man who will not do what he can.

The difference between these two is that when a man falls short out of weakness, there is a present willingness; his heart yields all; he consents fully to the demands of God, and grieves that he cannot do what he would, Romans 7. Also, it is not imputed unto sin. God will not charge the defect upon such as are His because they are not under the law but under grace, Romans 6. But voluntary neglect He will require at your hands. It is certain that all the other churches were found defective and did not do all they should, not just Ephesus; but this was that which brought Ephesus under the rod: she did not what she could, but was *voluntarily* deficient, Revelation 2:4.

A man may be defective in two ways:

1. By doing less for *quality* than he should, by not putting so much into his duty as belongs to it, or not bestowing the cost that he might, but being slight, formal, and heartless. This is like the sin described in Malachi 1:14. Having in the flock a male, they offered a corrupt thing. This provoked God unto indignation, yea, to execration against them. God looks for what we can do, Deuteronomy 6:6 and Ecclesiastes 9:10; so David said, "I have prepared with all my might," 1 Chronicles 29:2. Common stuff will serve an ordinary house, but if it is for a palace for a king, then silver and gold and great art are used.

2. By doing less for *quantity* than he ought. God stands much upon quantity, because all our ability is

from Him, and to curtail His service is a dishonor to Him, for it detracts from His greatness and shows what little respect the heart bears Him when it puts Him off with half, short, lame, and curtailed duties.

We are wont to frame our actions and carriages towards men in a way proportionate to their quality. Our deportment to a king is such as may declare a stamp and impression of his majesty in the heart. God is sensible of this disesteem. See how He pleads with them in Malachi 1:8: "If ye offer the blind for sacrifice, is it not evil? And if ye offer the lame and the sick, is it not evil? Offer it now unto thy governor; will he be pleased with thee, or accept thy person, saith the Lord of hosts?" And verse 14: "Cursed be he that hath a male, and voweth, and sacrificeth unto the Lord a corrupt thing. For I am a great king, saith the Lord of hosts, and My name is dreadful among the heathen." Again, if God should not be strict in the quantity of His service, religion in time might come to nothing. It would be so lessened and nibbled at that in time there would scarcely be any memorial of a God or any honor done unto Him.

Here, by the way, let me take liberty to answer some questions in the next chapter.

Chapter 20

Answers to questions regarding our duty to God

QUESTION. Since all come short of what they know they should do, and God imputes not that as sin to those who are believers, how may a man know when his deficiency is imputed as a sin to him?

ANSWER 1. When his defect is voluntary. He does but little, and is not willing to do more; he knows he should do more, but his will is against it. God expects at least that though His people are unable to do all, yet they should be willing. He will have all their hearts towards Him. And this David gave as his charge to his son Solomon: "And thou, Solomon my son, know thou the God of thy Father, and serve him with a perfect heart, and with a willing mind. For the Lord searcheth all hearts, and understandeth all the imaginations of the thoughts. If thou seek Him, He will be found of thee, but if thou forsake Him, He will cast thee off for ever," 1 Chronicles 28:9.

ANSWER 2. When you do less than you have done, the same necessity still urging, conscience still pressing, opportunity still serving. This was the sin of that backsliding people in Revelation 2:4. They fell from their first works, therefore Christ threatened to forsake them.

ANSWER 3. When you do less than those who have like abilities, occasions, engagements, and opportunities; but much more clearly, you sin when others who

have more straits, more encumbrances, less abilities, less means and less advantages exceed you in fruitfulness and all the ways of godliness and piety.

ANSWER 4. When you live not by what you do, but lusts grow strong and grace weak, and all is worse and worse. In the field of bodily health, when a man declines it is a sign that he does not have a due care of his diet, rest, or exercise. The church of Ephesus doubtless was doing, but she was still a loser; her spirit and strength decayed. As it is with him who is in his trade, but does not follow it to purpose, and so declines in his estate, according to the wise man's speech: "He becometh poor that dealeth with a slack hand, but the hand of the diligent maketh rich," Proverbs 10:4. "By much slothfulness the building decayeth, and through idleness of the hands the house droppeth through," Ecclesiastes 10:18.

ANSWER 5. When God does not accept what you do. When He is pleased with our ways, He shows His liking of them. Sometimes He does so by a secret testimony, giving joy, "Our rejoicing is this: the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world, and more abundantly to youward," 2 Corinthians 1:12. Enoch had the testimony that he pleased God, Hebrews 11:5. Sometimes God shows His pleasure by rewarding, as He did with Phineas in Numbers 25:11-13. Sometimes He fills the heart with much spiritual life and vigor in the work, but where God accepts not, there is a damp upon the Spirit. The duty goes forth like the raven out of the ark, but returns not as the dove with an olive branch in the

mouth. A man is in no way bettered by what he does.

ANSWER 6. Inquire into the reason why you do less than God calls for; take a true account of yourself. Ask your heart what moves it, and take a full answer from it; for you may discern by the reason that it gives whether all is well or not. No doubt but it will have something to pretend, but weigh all in the balance. If the reason is insufficient, you are sinfully deficient; as if you find slothfulness, loathness to be at so much pains, which was their fault in Isaiah 64:7. "None stirreth up himself to take hold of Thee." Or if it is from respect to your lusts, your needless ease, superfluous gain, unnecessary employment, unseasonable delight; these and such like, robbing God of His due, leave a great guilt upon the soul.

QUESTION. How may a man know he does his duty, when the heart is still pressed to more and more than is done?

ANSWER. By way of caution and proposition.

CAUTION 1. Be liberal; keep your hearts open and full for God. Though other things should be done, yet the heart may, and ought to, hang most after God. These paths are more noble, more sweet, more suitable to a holy heart. A child should be willing to do what his father bids him, though he sends him as David into the field to keep sheep; but he would rather be in his father's presence. You should always come to God with delight *in* Him, and go away with desire *after* Him. As they say with regard to eating, it is good to live with an appetite, but satiation is hurtful. That friend is scarcely welcome who is glad to be gone from us. It is a sign that you have little love for God when you come

with unwillingness, stay with weariness, and go out with gladness. Be ever bent towards Him, account your duties and conversation with Him your pleasant seasons; let all other things be as your labor, this as your meal. Never think you do enough. Say as David, "I will yet praise Him more and more," Psalm 71:14.

CAUTION 2. Be rational. Take heed of being bound with more laws than are imposed by God, and of adding to the yoke which He puts upon you. There may be much deceit in having the heart engaged to more than God requires. There are two things which, concurring with principles and dispositions that are good and holy, may vex the soul with a kind of spiritual oppression and extortion.

1. An erroneous conscience. As sometimes it errs by exacting less than it should and giving acquittal when the debt is not fully discharged, so sometimes it errs by going beyond its commission and exacting above the bond. A weak servant sent to gather up his master's debts may mistake his business by misjudging the sums, requiring a hundred pounds where the bond is but for a hundred crowns. The spirit of a man is so apt to err that, like water which is hardly kept within its bounds, if it transgresses not on the left hand by defect, it often mistakes on the right hand by excess. Thus superstitious spirits do more than they need and lie in the chains of their own making, subjecting themselves to ordinances and ways which God did not make: poverty, single life, absolute obedience unto men, confessions, penance, fasting, watching, pilgrimages, and canonical hours of prayer. Superstition is prodigal, and there is this quality in men that in those things which indeed are enjoined to God they are deficient, but in their

own inventions abundant. They are loath that God should carve for Himself, but if God will take it of their cutting, they will go far. So the Pharisees, who in a way of religion were most irreligious, neglected judgment and mercy, Luke 11:42, but in traditions and rules of their own coining they were very free and liberal. Papistry offends more by addition and multiplication in religion than by subtraction.

And as the superstitious, so the melancholy and fearful spirits are often ready to go beyond the line and bring themselves into inhabitable and insufferable ways of religion. The sun of piety in a mistaking and yielding spirit is so set that nothing can grow for it—nature is parched, strength wasted, health impaired, and estate neglected. I have known some who have thought themselves illemployed in anything but the exercise of religion and who, when they have been in their business, or at meat, or in bed, have been forced to lay all aside and to go to prayer.

2. Satan puts men upon more. As he is sometimes an angel of darkness withholding men from good or drawing to evil, so he is sometimes as an angel of light exciting unto good. For it is his principle and constant rule, as much as he can, to sail with the wind and row with the tide, to join himself to the tempers and spirits of men in their own way; and if he finds principles and dispositions not altogether so fit for his turn, if he cannot change them he will rather use them as he finds them than cross them. So he found in the Jews a great zeal for the law of Moses, and he made use of it to set them against the gospel. Saul also was one who made conscience (it seemed) of seeking God before he went to battle; and hereupon, when Samuel did not come

according to expectation, Satan put him to offer sacrifice himself, and did it with that impetuosity and importunity that though Saul knew it was not his office, yet the case standing as it did, He forced himself and offered the burnt offering, 1 Samuel 13:12.

Satan has, in this way, a great end: he brings men by it into great straits. What have the Jews lost by that misguided zeal and religious disposition? And by this he wearies and tires out the spirits of men in their way, and breeds in them a dislike and weariness in religion, riding the soul, as it were, out of breath. So we have known many who were very forward and active for a time, but now, as wearied men, they are laid down to rest and their life is gone. By this also he works ill effects on others who, by the rigorous courses of religious men, look upon religion as a tyrant. Who is able to sum up his treacheries? What a plot was that which he had at Corinth! His device was to get advantage over them, 2 Corinthians 2:11. And how? He saw a zeal in the church against the offender, and a mournful spirit in the poor man, and he drove on the chariot and worked in the zealous spirit of the church so that they might hold on in a severe way against him, so that he might be swallowed up by overmuch sorrow, 2 Corinthians 2:7.

OBJECTION. How may a man know when he is pressed to good by Satan?

ANSWER. The print of his foot will be found where he has been, and though he puts upon good, yet it is ever in an evil way. For instance, he may be discerned:

1. When he divides piety from mercy, and carries the soul on without care of the body. When God

comes, he comes with much goodness; and as Jacob drove as softly as the children and cattle were able, Genesis 33:14, so He will not so put on the soul as to destroy the body. Grace and the law are for the perfection of nature, not the destruction of it. The religion that Satan devises is hard and cruel. How did the priests of Baal cut and lance themselves? Even till the blood poured out, 1 Kings 18:28. The Jews learned of God to sacrifice beasts, but of Satan to sacrifice their children. "They burned their sons and their daughters in the fire which I commanded them not, neither came it into My heart," Jeremiah 7:31. Rather than let His servants be oppressed, He will lose his right. "I will have mercy and not sacrifice," Matthew 12:7.

Yet we must not press this rule of mercy too far to an immoderate indulgence unto nature; the soul must not be too much a loser by the body, nor God for man, nor must this be extended to the base favoring and sparing of ourselves in times of persecution. For he that so saves himself shall lose himself, Luke 9:24. If you send your servant upon business of great concern, and he falls sick and so does not what you expected, you excuse him; but if he says as the sluggard, Proverbs 20:4, "The wind blew, and the air was stormy, and wet, and cold," you will not take this well. So when you cannot do Him service through disproportion of your strength to your work, He will bear with you; but whatever it costs you from men and devils, when you know His will, as you are able, you must obey.

2. When He divides between piety and charity. The Jews devoted so much to pious uses that they left nothing for their friends, no, not for their parents; but when their father and mother in necessity asked relief,

they said, "It is a gift by whatsoever thou mayst be profited by me," Matthew 15:5. That is to say, "That which you ask for, your supply is given to another use, and I have nothing for you." Again, when men walk in such a way of religion that they provide not for their families, this is so far from Christianity that the Apostle said, "He is worse than an infidel that provideth not for his family," 1 Timothy 5:8.

Again, when servants bestow that time with God which belongs to man. God never demands of you that which is not yours; He never requires you to rob your masters to pay Him.

3. When, without order and reason, you are put upon one duty in the season of another. As regards your calling, refreshing occasions may truly and necessarily call you one way, and yet conscience drives another; or when you are hearing, you may be put upon reading. Again, when you are put upon extraordinary duties without extraordinary occasions, or when put upon such actions as belong not to your place: Saul to offer sacrifice, Uzziah to burn incense.

Let this suffice for the first way of answering the question.

The second way of answering how a man may know he has done his duty is by proposition.

PROPOSITION 1. There are bounds of duties of godliness, for the law is full of reason. Now reason requires no action without limits. If it bids a man eat, give, or labor it, together with the matter, includes the measure. If a master bids his servant go, and says not where and how far, how can the servant obey when he knows not his master's mind? If I would have an house built or a garment made, unless I appoint the bounds

and measure, how can the artificer fit my desire?

Now there are bounds for extension and limitation of actions. The bounds of extension show how far you are to go. And I will, in general, lay down three rules to find out how much you must do.

1. Ability and opportunity. Where much is given, much is required, and to whom men have committed much, of him they ask more, Luke 12:48. Where God sows much, He will reap much; what may be enough from one is too little from another; yea, that may be abundance in one which is scant in another. He who had but two talents did well and earned praise in gaining another two; but if he who had had five talents had done no more, he would not have such praise. Where God gives much grace and large opportunities, you must do much. You who have much knowledge, spiritual engagements, fullness of the world, and much time, know that you should be more with God than others. Holiness is your trade and your closets are your shops, and every day is a sabbath to you; and this is a great favor that God has freed you from inferior drudgery to employ you in more noble things. In the court, who are happiest, those who are in the kitchen or those who attend to the prince? If then you see others, who are poor and made to work hard for a mean living, more lively, more frequent, and more abundant in duties than yourselves, know now you walk not by rule.

2. Sufficiency for the good state of the soul. The body must have so much food, rest, and exercise allowed to it as may uphold it. You must do so much as may keep the soul in life; when you grow weak, dull, languid, you do not enough. And you must do so

much as to keep the soul in health. The health of the body is the peace and concord of all things in itself. Such also is the health of the soul; you must put forth yourselves so far as to keep the soul from molestation. A threefold molestation comes by doing less than that which God calls for:

First, a restless accusation of heart. Conscience will not be quiet till God has His due, but it will dog you with incessant vexing reproofs. It is like David living not in a total neglect of repentance and humbling himself after his sin, but till he came to the work in earnest he had no quiet, Psalm 32:3.

Second, a strong pulling and drawing of heart. When the heart is set towards God it cannot be quiet but in Him, and where the disposition and motion of a thing are at variance, this breeds disturbance. How will the stomach pull when it is not fed?

Third, an impetuosity of lusts. The field of the sluggard will be overgrown with weeds. When you keep the body too short of her due, it breeds painful diseases. So lusts grow when you do not enough. When you do least, Satan does most. Your night is his day, when you slacken, he sends his forces.

3. Occasions. You must proportion your labors according unto them. Sometimes your ordinary course is not enough, such as in times of strong temptations, violent corruptions, great afflictions, inward fright, public fears, and calamities. In the natural state of man, sometimes it is necessary to allow more rest and more food; in the civil state, if a man is grown poor, he works the harder; if a kingdom is in danger, it doubles her care and endeavors for her conservation. So Paul, when the messenger of Satan was sent to buffet him,

prayed thrice, 2 Corinthians 12:8. When Peter was in prison, prayer without ceasing was made for him, Acts 12:5. Ezra, hearing of the great sin of the people, rent his garments and mantle, plucked off the hair of his head and his beard, and sat down astonished until the evening sacrifice, Ezra 9:4. In such cases the body must give way and all things else; we must look only to three things:

That we judge rightly of necessities.

That our time that we spend in duties is our own.

That we offer not too much violence to nature.

There are bounds for limitation, and it is needful to know and mind them, for we may overdo and offend in excess.

OBJECTION. Can a man do too much, or is there any excess in that which is good?

ANSWER 1. When it is said there is not excess in religion, you must understand it rather in respect of affection than action. Though a man may exceed in the one, yet he cannot in the other; as you cannot love God too much or desire Him too much, or hate sin too much or sorrow for it too much. If it is objected that if the affections should be very far extended it might destroy nature, as we commonly see it in mournful spirits, and David found it so, Psalm 13 and Psalm 32, I say, that godly sorrow never did hurt, but sometimes God drops in bitterness, and mingles it with it to the afflicting of the soul. As water that runs through mines has a tincture and touch of them, so sorrow meets with much in us, by which accidentally it becomes hurtful. But godly sorrow in itself is as all other grace, for the perfection of nature, and so far from being an oppression of it that to me it is not altogether improbable

that it shall be in heaven; for if our memories abide there to recollect the ways of this life, and our understanding and will are fully taken up in the sight and fruition of God, then I propound this to be considered, since a little sight and taste of God in the world work sorrow for sin, whether an abundant sight and full taste will not also do it in heaven, when a man shall remember (which I doubt not) his sins against so good a God.

ANSWER 2. The goodness of an action lies not only in the matter, but in the measure; it must have its just proportion. In giving alms, he who would be truly liberal must not only take care what, but how much; for as it must be proportioned to the necessity of the poor, so it must be also to his own ability. There are limits in all duties.

Take here three considerations:

1. There are various duties, therefore I must not be all in one, or in a few, with neglect of the rest. In the worship of God, I must not lay out my whole self, so that man shall not have his due, for God has appointed a service immediately to Himself, and has also required a service mediately to be performed. That is to say, He has consigned something to be paid to man. A king so requires honor and service to himself that he will have some also to be conferred upon his attendants. This is the fault of those who are unreasonable in religion, choosing a monastic and retired life upon pretense of bestowing all upon God; but religion consists of duties to be performed, some to God and some to man. The boat cannot move rightly when the oars on one side only are applied; the fowl, if she uses only one wing, cannot fly up; and religion will not profit which has

one hand wrapped up that should be towards man in all offices of charity, though the other is used towards God in all offices of piety. For this the Jews were blamed who were liberal in their kind towards God. "Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the high God? Shall I come before Him with burnt offerings, with calves of a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil?" Micah 6:6-7. Here are large offers unto God, but they neglected judgment and mercy to their brethren. Therefore, how does the Lord answer them? "He hath shown thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?" verse 8. And the Apostle has the like in 1 Corinthians 13:3.

2. Distinguish between actions. Some are occasional, and are to continue only during the occasion, such as feasting in some time of great rejoicing or fasting in some time of great mourning. Some are subservient and introductory to others; as studying for preaching, consideration for prayer, or examination for the sacrament. Now as a man must not always abide in the porch, so he is not to thrust out the main duty by continuing in the subservient duty. Many excuse themselves from preaching upon pretense of still fitting themselves for the work; and so they are like men who gather timber and stones all their days, but never build. In these preparatory duties a man must have a care of his end, and wisely order his way. Take this rule: when the heart is in some good measure quickened, then you have the end of that duty, and so in the fullness of your spirit you must go forth to meet the

Lord in faith and confidence of acceptance.

3. You must take heed of unfitting yourselves by one duty for another, especially by the less for the more principal, as to draw out your spirits so far in beginning the day in prayer and other duties of like alloy as to indispose and disable yourselves for the work of the day.

In all duties of godliness, you must be limited by calling, condition, ability, occasion, and opportunity. It is very hard to divide between these things and to give piety her due and other things their dues; and it is impossible punctually to direct every man in this, how far he should go. But let these general rules be considered. And observe that worldly respects, indulgence to nature, case of employments, observance of occasions, and respect to our affairs most commonly gain upon piety as the seas gain upon the land. These things are present and suitable to nature, therefore they draw to them with much strength and often get Benjamin's portion and are better served than the rest. They are allied to our flesh and kindred, and often have better usage than better friends. Take heed of this: the children's bread is not to be given to dogs. Nabal will be loath to give his bread and his wine to David. Nature will be apt to hold fast and be niggardly to piety. Therefore you must, as wise umpires, moderate on both sides, and take heed the lean cows eat not up the fat.

How many souls are like anatomies and skeletons, whose outward man in strength, pleasure, and wealth are like the cows of Bashan.

PROPOSITION 2. There is a prudence in Christians directing them as well in measure as matter and

manner of actions, and the same light usually sets the bounds that shows the duty; prudence dwells with wisdom, Proverbs 8:12. And that God in whom these are united does not part them in His dispensation of grace to man. He has abounded towards us in all wisdom and prudence, Ephesians 1:8. The renovation of our minds makes us to know what the good and acceptable will of God is, Romans 12:2. "A good understanding have all they that do His commandments," Psalm 111:10. And "a good man guides his affairs with judgment," Psalm 112:5.

Prudence is of universal use, insomuch that some philosophers have thought there is no other virtue, but this is what does all. As the seas passing by several countries have several names, so this prudence, in respect of several objects, is called temperance, fortitude, justice, and so forth. But I should rather say that other virtues are executive and this one is directive, and so it is as needful to the soul as the eye in the body. All the graces are as several members, but how shall they move aright if the eye be wanting? God has not built any ship to lead it with such treasure as is in His saints, and sent it to sea without this pilot. All creatures have their instincts to guide them to their ends, and the beast knows not only what, but how much to eat, drink, and rest. And He who has given this to all other creatures would not make this new creature, the godly, as a world without the sun to give light unto it.

Wisdom is the glory of a man, and puts the beauty and crown upon every action. Unless a man works by this rule, how crooked and unshaped will his actions be! Though zeal conceives, yet if prudence forms not the conception, the birth will prove a monster.

QUESTION. It may be said, "How is it then that men err so much, some doing too little, some too much, and that men know not well how to guide themselves?"

ANSWER. There are four reasons:

1. Their prudence is imperfect.
2. There is a false guide in every man.
3. Satan perverts the soul by his counsels.

4. There is a great fault in men. First, they are inconsiderate, not hearkening to the counsels of wisdom, or not consulting with her. Second, some spirits are too violent, partly by a natural vigor and heat (and indeed, all is not grace that seems to be grace; when the temper of the spirit is not regular according to rule, it is not right), partly out of excessive fears, which are apt to hurry the soul as the winds do the ship.

PROPOSITION 3. It is safer to extend yourselves by over-abounding than to come short. It favors of a better spirit when a man is free, though in excess, than when he is slack and backward. And it is not so much evil to pinch the flesh by abounding in duty as, by abating, to suffer loss in the spirit. The things that concern the body are not of such value as those that concern the soul; and so much the more cause you have rather to lean to the right hand because, as there is a greater worth in the way on the right hand, so there is usually a disposition inclining rather to the left hand. Few men offend in passing their bounds. More men are found defective in failing to give alms than in being excessive. So where one is in any way of piety carried with too full a gale, there are a hundred becalmed; where one piece weighs too much, many are found too light.

PROPOSITION 4. A man must not be ruled by his

own disposition, but must seek a rule to walk by; for in some men the heart hangs with perpetual hungering after conversation with God, so that if there were nothing to limit them, they would scarcely do anything else. There are three things draw the heart still unto God:

1. Great comforts in meeting God in duty. These make the soul say as David, "It is good for me to draw near to God," Psalm 73:28. When God opens Himself and His treasures, lets in His people to His presence, and feasts them with spiritual and joyful sights and tastes, this makes them loath to leave; they hang onto duties as the child to the breast. And finding so sweet a conjunction of plenty and sweetness, they are filled with delight and are ready to say to all things else, as Abraham to his servant when he went up to the mount, "Stay thou in the valley."

The spouse was with her beloved, and found him as an apple tree among the trees of the forest whose fruit was sweet unto her taste. He led her into his wine cellar, and she was ravished with his love, and greatly so-laced in his sweet embraces. And now see what care she took to keep that which she rejoiced to have and feared to lose: "I charge you, O ye daughters of Jerusalem, that ye stir not up nor awake my beloved till he please," Song of Solomon 2:7. But in such a case, it is a point of obedience and self-denial for a man to leave his banquet to do that which he is called to. And we should so prefer God to all our comforts as to be content to come down with Moses from the mount, when He has business for us below.

2. Love for God. This is of a living and large disposition, and apt to draw the heart much out. He who loves comes as a friend; he loves to come and converse

with God, and even then when his necessities are not urgent, yet his heart is drawing heavenwards as the wife loves to be with her husband.

3. Necessitousness of spirit. When one is sensible of great wants, great corruptions, temptations, or fears, then he is apt to be over solitious and active, especially when such an afflicted spirit has either or both of the following two things.

First, an opinion that all good lies in duties—that a hard heart may be softened, a stiff heart bowed, a corrupt heart changed, and all good obtained by labor and sweat. Men who know what it is to want will work even their souls out of breath, and are so carried with desire of the good that they are not sensible of the labor. But remember, all lies in Christ, and therefore you must seek it from Christ by the proper means. If you make duty and endeavor your refuge, you are deceived.

Second, if there is an opinion that God will not accept less. This is the case of many: they have been at prayer, and that not only in sincerity but with importunity, with a full tide of spirit, and yet they are afraid to take themselves to their employments out of opinion that they have not done that which is sufficient, but that their occasion and necessity call for more still. But herein men have too low thoughts of God, as if He were like the gods of the heathen who did not hear, or as if He were hard to be entreated.

For a close of this business, I will, in a brief view, present some things that may offer considerable satisfaction in such cases.

1. I will distinguish between occasions and duties

ordinary and extraordinary. When an extraordinary or great person comes, all stand by and give him place, which we will not do if an ordinary and common man comes. So affairs and things of the world and nature stand for their own, and will not be set aside as ordinary duties, to wait at the closet door when an extraordinary service is performed. Your time is divided between heaven and earth. Therefore you must not only give to both, but with equality; each must have its own.

2. There is a time to wait as well as to work. When you have presented your suits with what strength you are able, now faith must come in and lay hold upon the promise; and you ought to believe that God hears, for you have His Word. "The eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous, and His ears are open to their prayers," Psalm 34:15. Remember you come not to God to obtain a promise and grant, but it is obtained in Christ; you must only sue it out by prayer: "And whatsoever you ask in Christ's name, believing you shall receive it," Matthew 21:22. So was David's practice: he began often with prayer, but ended with praise.

It is want of faith that causes unquietness. Though you should not rest in your duties, yet you should rest in the promise. If God hears not at first, yet He will hear at last; yea, He hears when you think He hears not. But you must give God time; that is all He requires. The thing shall be yours, but the time is His. Do with your prayers as you do with your seed: be patient till God comes. "Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it until he receives the early and the latter rain. Be ye also patient, stablish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh," James 5:7-8. When you have

offered a petition to the king, you do not begin presently to write another; but you wait for a convenient time, and then you move again. So do with God. The door is open, and you may come again in due time, but live by faith, and rest upon Him as upon one who cannot fail you. Yea, though you, in weakness, might have hard thoughts, though they may keep you long from the accomplishment of your desire, yet not always. "If we believe not, yet He abideth faithful; He cannot deny himself," 2 Timothy 2:13.

3. When a Christian may conceive he walks approvedly in the path of piety, when his soul is held up in life, and when he grows up in Christ, when God blesses his labors, it is a sign that He accepts them. And though you cannot find a growth upward in joy, peace, and triumph of Spirit, yet see if you grow not downward in humility, hungering, mourning, and zeal. See if all grace is not more and more radiated and confirmed in you.

Perhaps I have been too large in this digression, but I have done it for the satisfaction of such as walk heavily, not knowing their bounds. I return now to the direction, which was to improve divine assistance when you have it. When God comes to fetch you to Him, if you put Him off as the Church did in Song of Solomon 5:2-6, you may lose Him as she did. Sometimes God comes as an angel to Lot, and with a mighty power draws on His people, and will not leave them. But at other times He so moves them that the working of His power does not effectually carry on the soul, but leaves them at their choice. And now, when the wind rises, if we hoist not sail, we may be becalmed. Therefore accept the season of grace and be doing. And I say to you

as David to Solomon, “Be strong and of good courage, and do it. Fear not, nor be dismayed. For the Lord God, even my God, will be with thee; He will not leave thee, nor forsake thee, until thou hast finished all the work for the service of the house of the Lord,”
1 Chronicles 28:20.

Chapter 21

The third means to retain a divine presence is prayer, in which care must be had of the rise, carriage, and end of it

Third, take this direction: beg His assisting grace. Prayer is the way to get it. In the sight of your deadness, look up to the God of life and pray with David, “Make me to go in the path of Thy commandments, for therein do I delight. Incline my heart unto thy testimonies, and not to covetousness. Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity. And quicken Thou me in Thy way. Quicken me after Thy lovingkindness, so shall I keep the testimony of Thy mouth. Hear my voice according to Thy lovingkindness. O Lord, quicken me according to Thy judgment. Consider how I love Thy precept; quicken me, O Lord, according to Thy lovingkindness,” Psalm 119:35–37, 88, 149, 159. When you find your spirit willing yet weak, so that you cannot walk in your way without help, then go to God and pray as David, “Uphold me according to Thy Word, that I may live. Hold Thou me up, and I shall be safe, and I will have respect unto Thy statutes continually,” Psalm 119:116–117.

In your prayer for help, I will propound three things to consider for better direction; the rise, carriage, and end of your desire.

The rise must be a strong desire to walk with God.

You are likely to prevail when you come in truth. Help is often desired out of custom, and in this way many prayers are lost. Therefore, set your heart to love the way, and when your heart is with God, His hand will be with you. This argument David used in seeking help of God: "Make me to go in the paths of Thy commandments, for therein do I delight," Psalm 119:35. "Let Thine hand help me, for I have chosen Thy precepts," verse 173. "With my whole heart have I sought Thee. Oh, let me not wander from Thy commandments," verse 10. Take heed lest your hearts draw back when you seem to crave His grace, so that you may walk in His ways; for in such God has no pleasure.

The rise must be necessity. Be sensible of your own insufficiency, taking heed of trusting your own strength. I have shown the evil of it before. "Trust in the Lord with all thine heart, and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct thy paths," Proverbs 3:5-6. "But be strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might," Ephesians 6:10. He who sees and considers the multiplicity and spiritualness of duties, and variety and activeness of corruptions, the swarms and violence of temptations which are in his way, will see he stands in need of a greater strength than his own that he may break through, walk on, and persevere unto the end. And he will be forced to use such language as you find in Psalm 143:7-11: "Hear me speedily, O Lord, my spirit faileth. Hide not Thy face from me, lest I be like unto them that go down unto the pit. Cause me to know the way wherein I should walk. For I lift up my soul unto Thee. Teach me to do Thy will, for Thou art my God; Thy Spirit is good. Lead me into the land of

uprightness. Quicken me, O Lord, for Thy name's sake." And he will cry out: "We have no might against this great company that cometh against us, neither know we what to do, but our eyes are upon Thee," 2 Chronicles 20:12.

Necessity must make you beggars; you must see that you cannot live upon the stock which you have received. God has not given you so much that you should be able to fulfill it without Him. The more indigent and poor you are, the more welcome you are to God; the needy shall find favor. "He filleth the hungry with good things." Go then, and take up David's words: "I am poor and needy; make haste unto me, O God. Thou art my help, and my deliverer, O Lord, make no tarrying," Psalm 70:5. And say as Moses: "If Thy presence go not with me, carry us not hence. For wherein shall it be known here that I and Thy people have found grace in Thy sight? Is it not in that Thou goest with us?" Exodus 33:15-16. Go with the Apostle and pray much, and you shall have like answer from heaven: "My grace is sufficient for thee," 2 Corinthians 12:8-9.

The carriage and managing of your request in this matter must be right, with confidence in the might and mercy of God. You have abundant cause of cheerfulness in coming to Him, for besides this—that it is His glory to hear, and that our Intercessor, who has taught us to pray that we be not led into temptation, but to be delivered from evil, and prayed for us Himself, is with Him and dear to Him—consider this is God's glory, that the life and strength of His people depend upon Him. He helped Jesus Christ our Head, Isaiah 42:6, and if He should not help you, the work would not be

perfected. And so all that Christ has done would come to nothing. God has called you to this way, and has appointed you by it to come to Him, so that His end would fail if He helped not. For this cause you have but little in yourselves, that you might live daily upon His alms. God leaves in you a necessity that He may better show His mercy. He will uphold what His hand has built.

You have had experiences of His presence; if He had not been with you, you would not now be with Him. His promise is with you: "Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the world," Matthew 28:20. It is a full promise, like a stream of living waters running in the church forever. He does not say, "I will be with you," but "I am with you," that we might be confident of His constant presence. And He has laid up much treasure in this promise, and therefore bids us look well into it. He excites by the word "lo," which He sets as a beacon on a hill, or as a special mark upon the head of this promise as having much in it.

Therefore come unto God in much assurance. He hates suspicion and jealousies. "Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need," Hebrews 4:16. This may be your comfort, that what you have not in yourselves you have in God, and what you have in God is yours by promise. Go then and sue God upon His own bond, for God will be sought; prayer is the key of the promise, Ezekiel 36:36-37. Though God is our friend, He may pass by us if He is not called in; but when He is going from us, prayer takes hold. When Christ acted as if He would have gone further, being come to Emmaus, the disciples constrained Him say-

ing, "Abide with us"; in response, "He went in to tarry with them," Luke 24:28–29. David found God when he sought Him: "In the day when I cried, Thou answeredst me, and strengthenedst me with strength in my soul," Psalm 138:3. When the angel sounded glory to God, he proclaimed peace, or expectation or hope to us, as some read it, Luke 2:14.

The end of your desire must be observed, for if your end is wrong you are not likely to speed. Take heed of drawing down the things of God to your ends, for this is evil. It is making God to serve you. For the end rules, and all that leads to it is beneath it. The end is above the means, and all the means, as Jacob's sons' sheaves bowed to Joseph's sheaf, do homage to the end; they are all for the end's sake, and what a thing is this but to set God in a servility to our designs? If the vessels of the temple might not be put to common use, how much less the help of grace? Take heed, therefore, of seeking things for yourselves, and of desiring assistance so as to advance yourselves. This is to desire God to lend His help against Himself, to make His Spirit the ladder of our ambition. It is as if a pirate should crave aid of his prince to rob his country, or as if a subject should pray his sovereign to help him lift the crown from his head to set it upon his own head.

You may seek yourselves; your own ends are allowed you, but they must keep their place. God must be your last end. Come then and say, "Lord, help me that I may honor Thee. I owe all to Thee, but I can do nothing without Thee. If I have life from Thee, I will live for Thee; what I receive from Thee, I will lay out for Thee."

"Restore unto me the joy of Thy salvation; uphold

me with Thy free Spirit." This is David's prayer, but what is his end? "Then will I teach transgressors Thy ways, and sinners shall be converted unto Thee," Psalm 51:12-13. It is as if he had said, "Help me by Thy hand, and I will help others; draw me, and I will bring company with me." "We will run after Thee," Song of Solomon 1:4. Again the words of Psalm 51 also show the like spirit in David: "O Lord, open Thou my lips, and my mouth shall show forth Thy praise," Psalm 51:15. It is as if he had said, "My tongue is like an instrument prepared. If Thy mercy may but touch the strings, it shall sound forth Thy name."

"I will run the way of Thy commandments, when Thou shalt enlarge my heart," Psalm 119:32. "Hold Thou me up and I shall be safe, and I will have respect unto Thy statutes continually," verse 117. Thus, be faithful with God and His help will not fail you, but while your eye is on Him, His hand is with you.

Chapter 22

*The fourth means: keeping the favor of God,
with directions how to do it*

Fourth, keep His favor and you shall keep His presence; love delights and dwells with love. Though the Lord has married you to Himself in a covenant that is unchangeable, yet you may have less of your Husband's company unless you keep His love. It is not inevitable transgression, but voluntary offenses which separate God and you. Take heed then of harboring lusts in imagination or purpose; take heed of frowardness and rebellion of heart. Unkindness breeds unkindness; can you with reason expect that God should be with you when you regard Him not? "Can two walk in one way who are not agreed?" Amos 3:3. Walk then before Him in all well-pleasing; keep close to Jesus Christ, for all the love of the Father is laid out upon the Son and comes to you through Him. Be dearly affected to His people, for they are His friends. "God dwelleth in such," 1 John 4:12. When you have your friend's good will, you have your friend; and when you fall into straits and lusts, and men and devils shall take up arms against you, if you come and say to God as Jehoram to Jehoshaphat, "The king of Moab hath rebelled against me; wilt thou go with me against Moab to battle?" God will answer as Jehosaphat did, "I will go up, I am as thou art, my people as thy people and my horses as thy

horses," 2 Kings 3:7. My brethren, you have a sure way to retain the favor of your God. He has shown you the way that is good, and have you not gone always with Him, who is the delight of His soul, one ready at your request to interpose Himself, and to take up all differences between you and Him? Lie not therefore under any guilt, but every day renew your peace and league with God by making Christ your Advocate. Then shall His face shine upon you, and His Spirit shall not be withheld from you.

Think it not enough to escape His wrath. A friend not only dreads displeasure, but delights in the favor of his friend. It cannot satisfy a living and a loving saint that God's hand is not against him unless it is also with him, or that God is not his adversary unless He is his Friend. A wicked man may fear His wrath, but a good man cannot bear His absence. If then you desire His presence, keep His favor. And because nothing but that which is against His will displeases, take heed of crossing His will. And for this I will prescribe two rules:

RULE 1. Keep up love, for this will make you of one heart with God. There will be a harmony between your hatred and His, your desire and His, your delight and His; your wills will run in the same channel with His. Fear may make the life better, but love makes the heart better. It carries a man out of himself and casts his affections and actions into God's mold; it works after His pattern, and does all to please Him, as love in the wife subjects her desires to the desire of her husband. Love would hold you in a uniform course of holiness, and all strayings in life are from decayings of love; this binds the soul to God. So that as the back wheels of the coach follow the front wheels, being all joined, so the

heart is drawn after God by love. Love will not suffer you to please yourselves with anything that may not please your God, nor to swerve from this rule to gain the world. But as God's love fulfills your will in giving all good, so your love in its measure will fulfill God's will in doing all good. And this is the property of our communion with God: there is a continual intercourse of love, God's will and man's sweetly joining in a happy concord, mutually delighting each in the other and mutually fulfilling the desires each of the other, God dwelling in his people and they in Him, 1 John 4:16, they cleaving to Him and He to them.

Let me a little more open the power and efficacy of love in this, and when I have done you shall see that it contributes not a little to keeping the heart to God.

Love sharpens and preserves desires after God, and what are desires but reachings of the heart? The soul by desires, as it were, with extended and spread arms raises itself after God; it will make a man unsatiable, always thirsting. And now, though the armies of the Philistines are in the way, yet the soul will break through all for the waters of Bethlehem. Desires after God have much good in them; they capacitate the soul. A hungry man eats much; the promise empties itself freely upon such: "Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled," Matthew 5:6. They quicken the soul. As they make it receptive, so they make it active, Psalm 63:1.

Love sets all the wheels in motion; it will not suffer the soul to be at rest. It cannot be content in anything unless it is fulfilled, but will put out all her sails and oars in strong pursuit. Psalm 63:8: "My soul followeth hard after Thee."

Love makes a man resolute, regardless of all things in comparison to what it longs for, and fearless, and invincible. No terrors can deter him, but as a giant he rejoices to run his race. It makes one also unweariable; no labor's too great but love will find patience; no difficulties so long but love will find tolerance and forbearance; nay, love thinks nothing hard. The commandments are not grievous, 1 John 5:3. It is a great advantage to have strength of resolution, for now the soul will be more full in all endeavors. The bow full bent delivers the arrow with full strength; a piece full charged will go off with great force, and its fullness and vigor in doing that are the graces of the action. The soul will be more steady; it is hard to stop the soul when she runs with strength. What was said of Aristides is much truer here: you may as well almost stay the sun in heaven as put such a one out of his way. When the resolutions are strong, the soul is like a fenced city: it is hard for temptations to break in. There is room left for Satan to work when through coldness of affection there is weakness in the resolution; a faint denial begets new suits, and a door left unbarred gives easy entrance. When you cleave not to God with full purpose of heart, Acts 11:23, other things may get in between God and you. The steeple moves not because it is settled upon its base, but the weather vane is turned with every wind.

Love makes the soul of an yielding temper. When God has your love, He has the key to your hearts; love sets Him on the throne; all the faculties will bow themselves with offerings to Him. Love opens the ears to hear God and moves the hands to work, and the feet to walk, and the head to devise for God.

God may have anything in a time of love. He never comes out of season; when the heart is in this temper, if He says the word it is done. Love cannot say no to God; it is full of promises, easily entreated, is not churlish but of a liberal property; it stands ready for all service and will trample upon all reasonings, respects, contradictions, and rebellions that rise up against God. If God says of the dearest lust, "Fall upon it," it will not spare; if God says, "You must be impoverished for My sake," love says, "I am content"; if God says, "I must have your life for My glory," love says, "Lord, it is Thine, take it; I am Thine, do what Thou wilt."

Love cannot hold when God asks, but will give all, do all, suffer all. If God calls it, it will give up its estate, peace, friends, even the world itself; yea, when it does much, it thinks it little, yea, nothing. And so when love has been laboring for God, it still says with David, "What shall I render to the Lord?" and with the Apostle, "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" It stops at no cost, nay, it is glad it has anything for God, and counts this the best use of all: to lay it out for God. And it counts this the best possession of all: to lose all for God.

Love will make you fearful of losing God. Every man's fears are equal to his love, so that as the worldly man fears to lose the world, which is his god, so a godly man fears to lose his God. Eli's heart trembled for the ark while he sat watching to hear news of the battle, 1 Samuel 4:13. Fear makes men wise, Proverbs 1:7; it keeps the heart waking and watching; it keeps the eye upon the treasure, and soon apprehends the least recess of God from a man.

Love keeps the intentions right. Upon the right

end, it is as the bias to direct the soul in all her ways to her God. For what is love but embracing God, and such a closing with Him? For example, as it finds indigence and want without Him, so it has complacency and contentment in Him; yea, and that contentment breeds hunger after what it has not, and gratitude for what it has, and so it turns all designs and her whole course to this thing, that she may be still blessed and more blessed in the fruition of God.

Love keeps the intentions in due plight in themselves. It makes them actual. Love has a good memory; it carries the stamp of God upon the heart, and seldom forgets Him. The soul lives where it loves. And as love came in by the eye, so it delights by the same door to run out to God. Love also makes the intentions vigorous and serious, and so able to order and regulate all the motions of the soul in their right way. Thus love is very useful to keep you from straying from God, and consequently needful that you may, by holy walking, retain His favor and presence.

RULE 2. Hold this as a fixed verity, that that is best which God wills. All that have come to God believe this, else they would have not come; for what could draw the heart from all its good but that which is greater than all? But though this is habitually in them, yet they do not always actually believe it; for what should be the cause of their excursions and deviations but because at present they think it better to walk in another way than the way of God.

There are but three causes of voluntarily declining anything; either it is because the thing is not worth consideration, or not desirable upon the terms proposed, or because a better thing is presented, which we

cannot enjoy with it. So that if a man could carry this truth in his heart unblotted, so that it might ever appear legible, it would be to his gadding affections as a curb, and settle the soul on God as on her center. If you could believe that you cannot mend yourselves or make your condition better in any other way, you would be steadfast and immovable, for now you would see a conjunction of God's will and your chief good; so that in crossing His will, you cross yourselves. As wisdom speaks: "He that sinneth against me wrongeth his own soul; all they that hate me love death," Proverbs 8:36.

To help you in this matter of great importance:

1. Get a clear knowledge of God—what He is in Himself—and of the wisdom of God in the commandments, which are full of reason, and of the end of the command, your good; and of the nature of that good.

2. Make this knowledge actual; often mind it.

3. Know that there is reason to give the lie to all opinion of good out of God's way and against His will, because God's love is fully towards you, and so perfect that He has not cut off any good from you. All that is truly good agrees with His will. As the formality of truth is the agreement that it has with the mind of God, so the verity of goodness is the agreement that it has with the will of God. And again, all true good is from Him and eminently in Him. Therefore, that which stands in opposition to Him cannot be good.

Consider the subject of such misapprehension. He is either one covered with darkness or clouded with passion. Men naturally are blind and so call evil good, and good evil; and good men sometimes are clouded

and with a frenzy of passion distempered, and judge that good which, when they become sober, they count the greatest evil. Which is the truest judgment, that of a man drunk and not himself, or that of a man who is calm, clear, and himself?

Remember that you must err in judging that to be good which you cannot entertain with contentment; but a godly man finds these two things as sure notes of the true evil in every sin: fear before and in commission of it, and pain and repentance after, and that forever.

When you see two conflicting counsels, weigh well these two things: the counselors and the reasons.

First, weigh the counselors. Consider well who they are who stand up to oppose God, and you shall find that which may disable their testimony. They can be but one of these: either your own lusts or Satan's suggestions and temptations. As for your lusts, consider they cannot incline to any type of good which God allows not. All the difference between God and them is in the time, measure, order, manner, and means. And therefore, since you have the same good in God's way, is it wisdom for circumstances to hazard your souls?

They urge without reason, and therefore are called foolish and brutish lusts. It is true, they have a color of reason, but such as a spark of wisdom would see to be folly. The order of reason and nature is that you should affect by judgment and not judge by affection. Affections are blind guides. Lust can see nothing but what is present and sensual, but they see not the spiritual evil, nor the future calamity and doleful consequences of sin. Now it is against reason to be so improvidently precipitous.

As for Satan, what can be expected by his counsel who seeks in all things to destroy? And let this prevail with you, that all opinion of good in that which is against the will of God is either immediately or mediately from Satan.

Therefore, see what cause you have to believe that that is best which God wills; and if you can carry this truth engraved upon you, it will be as a wall to limit and shut up your inordinate affections, and to shut out and break the force of Satan's temptations. Here you begin to be taken when you are seduced. If this fort had stood, you would have been safe, and if you keep to God's will in all, you shall have His favor and, consequently, His presence in all.

Weigh the arguments that are used on both sides, for you shall by this better judge between them:

1. God urges debt. You are His creatures; you live at His cost and charges. He has done you good and not evil all your days. Can your lusts plead this? Whence come fears, grief, pain, want, death, or hell but from sin? "You are then debtors, not to the flesh to live after the flesh," Romans 8:12.

2. God proposes good without evil. Can your lusts do so?

3. God proposes eternal good, but the pleasures of sin are but for a moment.

4. God proposes a certain good, but lust cannot. Ambition may reach for honors that it may never attain. Covetousness may hunt for riches which it can never find.

5. God proposes all good, but lust only proposes some particular good. Voluptuousness proposes pleasure, not dignity.

6. God proposes good to posterity, but can lust do it? Nay, it draws to evil without care of posterity, yea, to the shame and calamity of posterity.

7. God proposes true good, that which comforts and gives life indeed, but all the proffers of lust are delusions. Solomon tried them. Many spies have traversed this land, and find it a continent of lying vanities and true miseries. Therefore, keep close to God that you may have His favor and presence with you.

Chapter 23

The fifth means: keeping in God's way

Fifth, take this direction: keep yourselves in God's way, or else you cannot expect His help. "Thou meetest him that rejoiceth and worketh righteousness, those that remember Thee in Thy ways," Isaiah 64:5.

Here are two things to be carefully observed:

1. That the things which we undertake are good, that we may pray as David, "Hold up my goings in Thy paths, that my footsteps slip not," Psalm 17:5. For in an evil action to ask His aid is to provoke Him; it is an high indignity; it is to draw the great God into a cursed confederacy with sinful man against Himself.

2. The things must be such as we are called unto, for if out of rashness and folly or pride and vainglory we thrust ourselves into actions or difficulties without warrant or command, we may miss our aim if we think to be carried through with a divine hand.

QUESTION. How may a man know when he is called to such or such a work?

ANSWER 1. Some actions are tied and appropriated to an office, such as administration of sacraments to a minister or execution of justice to a magistrate. Concerning this take these rules:

1. Ordinarily no man is called to the work of an office who is not called to the office. Therefore Saul and Uzziah sinned. Samuel rebuked Saul when he, being a king, had meddled with the work of the priest, in offer-

ing sacrifice that he had done foolishly, and “kept not the commandment of the Lord his God,” 1 Samuel 13:13. And when Uzziah went into the temple to burn incense upon the altar of incense, Azariah with his brethren withstood him and said unto him, “It appertaineth not unto thee, Uzziah, to burn incense unto the Lord, but to the priests, that are consecrated to burn incense; go out of the sanctuary, for thou hast trespassed, neither shall it be for thine honor from the Lord God,” 2 Chronicles 26:16–18.

2. No man is called to the office in whom is no fitness and ability for it; these things at least are required.

3. No man is called to any act of office but according to commission and order annexed to his office, such as for the magistrate to execute judgment without hearing the case. So long, then, as I keep myself in my station and do the work that belongs particularly to me in my place, I may comfortably expect the good hand of God; and with cheerfulness I ought to walk in my way and not afflict my soul with fears and cares. God, who hates presumption in men thrusting themselves into things too great and weighty, requires alacrity in those whom He calls to His service. When He put Joshua into that great office of being a leader to His people Israel through the wilderness, He promised to be with him, and often pressed this: “Only be thou strong, and very courageous,” Joshua 1:5–7, 9. What should I say of Moses, Gideon, David, Jeremiah, Paul and others, in whom you have so many patterns of God’s goodness, not leaving His servants in that way in which He sets them to walk.

ANSWER 2. Some things belong to men as partakers of the heavenly calling, as all acts of piety and

charity. Yet in these take this rule: A man is not so called to these as that all are to be done by anyone, at any time, in any measure, or in any manner; but we must wisely know how to order our ways with discretion. For it is not enough to do good, but we must do all according to pattern in due season, and in due order; for a good work may be marred in the handling when we walk not by rule. When a man neglects his calling, and is unseasonable in conference, hearing, fasting, or praying, he cannot upon just ground expect God's assisting presence and blessing in his way.

ANSWER 3. Sometimes a man is, above ordinary course, called to some work. And here we find the calling of a man to be of God:

1. When he has a particular word. So Abraham had a particular charge to leave his country and slay his son in sacrifice. Peter also had a particular word to walk upon the water, and God failed him not.

2. When he has a strong bent and inclination of heart. Paul was bound in his spirit to Jerusalem, Acts 20:22, though dangers waited for him. So it is judged of Ehud in killing Eglon and of Phineas in slaying Zimri and Coshi.

3. When God fits not only with a disposition, but with a spirit for the work. When He called Saul to the kingdom, He gave him another spirit.

4. When He gives peace of heart in their way, and bears them out against all accusations from within or without. Paul and Silas had this testimony of their calling to their work, a spirit of glory resting upon them.

QUESTION. But evil men have sometimes a great flush of spirit, courage, ability, peace and confidence.

Have they this of God?

ANSWER 1. God may employ even wicked men, and may, for the service of Himself and His church, fill the sails with a full gale of great gifts and carry them on with a strong hand. So He helped Cyrus. He said of Cyrus, "He is My shepherd, and shall perform all My pleasure," Isaiah 44:28. And, "Thus saith the Lord to Cyrus, whose right hand I have holden," Isaiah 45:1.

ANSWER 2. There is a natural strength which may do much. Some have a natural vigor and confidence, which enables them to do and suffer much.

ANSWER 3. Men's lusts and sinful ends and respects may add activity and vigor to their spirits in good actions. Jehu was zealous, but that flame of zeal was kindled by the love of the kingdom. Many others do much, but it is by the strength of their self-love and political ends.

ANSWER 4. There is a diabolical power of that prince of the air, who works in the children of disobedience, which makes his zealots as God has His. As Pharaoh's magicians wrought like unto Moses, so Satan transforms himself often into an angel of light. And in a way of seeming piety and devout zeal, he makes many to be valiant champions. But there is this difference between that common assistance of the Spirit of God to evil men, the strength derived from nature, lusts, or Satan, and that which the Holy Spirit gives to the godly in their ways:

1. That which is from natural temper, lusts, or Satan is often found in an evil cause, as Saul's zeal, before he was called by Christ, was madness against the truth.

2. Only the Spirit of holiness works by love for God,

others for other ends.

3. Only the Spirit of holiness makes more holy by all assistance which He affords. This way alone wins the heart; so that the more God is with him in his way, the more he loves to serve Him, and so has this evidence that it is from God because it tends to Him. So David's heart was filled with love when God appeared to him: "Blessed be the Lord, because He hath heard the voice of my supplication. The Lord is my strength and my shield, my heart trusted in Him, and I am helped. Therefore my heart greatly rejoiceth, and with my song will I praise Him," Psalm 28:6-7.

Let this digression suffice for a brief answer to these questions. Now let us return to the direction. Be sure you keep in God's way, for you cannot find God but in His own way. When the ark and pillar of fire (the Word) move before you, walk after them; and then you shall find God pouring in Himself and girding your loins with strength. "Wait on the Lord, and be of good courage, and He shall strengthen thine heart. Wait, I say, on the Lord," Psalm 27:14. "Fear thou not, for I am with thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of My righteousness. I the Lord thy God will hold thy right hand, saying unto thee, Fear not, I will help thee. Fear not, thou worm Jacob, and ye men of Israel. I will help thee, saith the Lord, and Thy Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel," Isaiah 41:10-14. It is a precious promise. A man may say, and sigh in himself, "Alas! the work is great and I am weak"; but God said, "I will strengthen you and help you; and if the difficulty is too great for you, yet it is not too great for Me."

But a man may say, "Alas! Those who war against

me are many and great, and I cannot stand before them. I find mighty lusts, strong disputes, and strong temptations.”

But see what God says in verses 11–12: “They that strive with thee shall perish; they that war against thee shall be as nothing and as a thing of nought.” They may come against you, but you shall be above them; they shall vanish and be no more than a shadow.

But a man may say, “I find my heart shaking at the sight of these sons of Anak, and I am ready to say to myself, ‘I shall one day fall by the hands of Saul.’ ”

To this God answers:

1. By a repulsion of fear in a word of encouragement: “Fear not, nor be dismayed,” which He repeats again and again.

2. By reiteration of the promise: “I will help. I will help, I will strengthen thee, I will hold thy right hand.” It is as if He had said, “I will surely do it.”

3. By calling in His attributes as witnesses and assurances: “I am Jehovah, one who is, and will give being to all My words. I am the holy one, one who cannot deceive you.”

4. By pleading His relation and affection: “I am thy God, I am Jehovah, thy God, thy Redeemer.” It is as if He had said, “I have given Myself to you, and have undertaken to save you. And therefore fear not; though thou art but a worm, Jacob, yet will I uphold thee.”

Oh, then, that we could now, in our way, rejoice and say as the prophet, “The Lord Jehovah will help me. Therefore shall I not be confounded,” Isaiah 50:7.

Chapter 24

Sixth and seventh means: be doing, and wisely and diligently use the means of grace

Be doing. Many cry, "Lord, help," but they do not stir themselves up, thinking to live upon supply from heaven. But if you keep the seed in the garden, God will not increase your store. You must plow and sow, and in your endeavors look for the blessing from above. You have a life in you which you must put forth; God has said He will help you. That is, you must do what you can, and He then will join with you. "He hath said, He will meet you," Isaiah 64:5. That is, He expects that you should come, and then He will come. The mother will lead the child by the hand, but the child must use his legs. God will do as men do with young swimmers: He will hold your head, but you must use your limbs.

I shall speak more of this when I come to speak of such as seem to be deserted of God but are not. They find a deadness, but it is not because God will not co-work with them, but because they do not co-work with Him. I will only say what David said to Solomon his son: "Arise, therefore, and be doing, and the Lord be with thee," 1 Chronicles 22:16. Sit not weeping and sighing, for that will not profit; you must be doing.

Wisely and diligently improve the means of grace; for God ordinarily works only in them and by them,

where they are afforded. He has shown you the way of life; if you walk not in His counsels, no wonder if deadness and deformity of spirit overtake you. Having spoken something of this before, I will here add these two things: the faults of men in the use of means and the inducements to use them rightly.

There is often a faultiness in the godly in the use of means which weakens them and takes off their vigor.

1. One such fault is profaneness: when men come with slight and common spirits to these holy things without due composedness, reverence, and preparedness. This is to provoke God to forsake His sanctuary and leave his ordinances unclothed of their wonted working power and quickening virtue. For this is not service that He can bear. It overthrows His majesty and lays His honor low when men come so before Him. "If I be a father, where is Mine honor?" Malachi 1:6. It is as if God had said, "Your unholy and contemptible carriage in My worship declares that you think lightly of Me and make nothing of Me. If you had Me in esteem as your God, you would worship Me as God." Hebrews 12:28: "Let us have grace whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear."

2. Another such fault is confidence misplaced. When you make the minister, his gifts, his graces, his prayers, or the things that he administers the object or source of your trust, God will not bear it. Remember that gifts and ordinances, though they are ordained for edification, yet are but instruments; and the whole force of the instrument depends upon the chief agent. The waters of Bethesda heal not unless the angel moves them. "Neither is he that planteth anything, neither he that watereth, but God that giveth the in-

crease," 1 Corinthians 3:7. God has not appointed these as things without which He could not work, but out of liberty, because it pleased Him, partly to convey Himself in a way suitable to nature—the Word and Sacraments being fit things to deal with intelligent and rational creatures—and partly that His name might be more honored in the fellowship of many in the ordinances. Therefore our trust must not be in them, but in God, 1 Corinthians 2:5.

3. Men do not come to means for right ends. As the empty spirits of men unchanged gather the chaff, but let go the wheat and prefer a fine weed before the ears of corn, so many who are good catch things less useful. For the most part, men have what they seek and no more. In a field, one comes to get wood, another to pick flowers, another to take air, and the sheep come to get food. There is a spirit among men too much carried after difficulties, novelties, depths, and disputes; and by this means they become like children of swelled heads: with weak limbs and little strength.

Your end should be to get life, to meet God, and to be filled with the Spirit. You may be fattened in gifts and lean in grace, like a tree full of leaves and branches but empty of fruit. Knowledge is good when it is sought for a due end, not to set up yourselves above others, but to glorify God. It would be good to count nothing good to you till you find God in it. A thousand notions are but vanities, and as empty clouds in the air, unless they dissolve themselves in showers of grace and holiness upon the heart. "As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the Word, that you may grow thereby," 1 Peter 2:2.

4. Men use not the means in faith, but are ready to

say as Naaman, “What are the waters of Jordan?” 2 Kings 5:11–12. Unless you believe, you shall not see the power of God. When you say in your hearts, “My heart is corrupt, dead, dark, and past cure,” what is this but to charge God with weakness and folly in appointing these helps that cannot profit? Though lusts and temptations are many and strong, yet remember that God is able to deliver.

5. Now, drawing out the efficacy of the means by prayer, application, and meditation, you should hear; for hereafter the Word should remain upon you, and you should mold and form your hearts to it and by it. The benefit of the ordinances comes not always at present. They are like grapes that must be pressed. What encouragement God gives oftentimes! If you were wise, you might get much. Does not God present them sometimes like flowing breasts? Now, if you would lie sucking, how might you be filled! You put the Word away from you when it is like a mine not half broken up; yea, often when you are near to springs of life, you cease to dig. The diligent hand makes rich; a hungry soul finds many sweet meals in what you leave behind. God would give much of Himself if you would stay by it. What if nothing comes at present? Do with the ordinances as with a pump: dwell at it, and the waters will flow. It is not *much* hearing, but *wise* hearing that carries the blessing. The Word must be laid up and must soak into the heart, John 8:37.

Let me add a little to put you to seek God in this way:

1. Consider it is God’s way. Therefore you must not expect good without it. It is His way, and He will make it good. He has appointed the means for this end. And

therefore they shall prosper who use them. His power, wisdom, and goodness all stand inviting you, being as so many seals of this truth that they shall live who hear. And they say to you, "O thou that art named the house of Jacob, is the Spirit of the Lord straitened? Are these His doings? Do not My words do good to them that walk uprightly?" Micah 2:7.

2. His promise is with you. How fully has He expressed Himself in this: "Incline your ear and come unto Me; hear and your soul shall live," Isaiah 55:3. And has not Christ annexed His presence to His ordinances for His people's good unto the end of the world, Matthew 28:20? Look, then, at the ordinances in the promise, and see how God has engaged Himself unto His servants. If you could believe, you would see God more in His sanctuary; but, as it is said, Christ wrought no more miracles in his own country "because of their unbelief," Matthew 13:58. So God shuts in His power from working because your heart is shut up in unbelief. You should go with gladness to the house of God as to a place of feeding and healing, rejoicing in hope to find an effusion of the Spirit from on high, according to the promise.

3. God has done it. You see by these means He prevails upon men, and turns from darkness to light, and raises from death to life. You see how others flourish in the courts of God's house as trees by the waterside; and have not you yourselves found God often causing the ordinances to come as ships laden with rich treasures for you? Has not your heart burned when you have heard Him speaking? Have not some sermons been as Elijah's chariot? Has not Christ come often when His disciples have been together? Why do you not, then,

upon such experiences walk diligently and cheerfully in the gospel?

4. It is God's glory to meet His people. It sets out His goodness, wisdom, power, mercy, and faithfulness as the clear sun. It makes His name precious, His ways sweet, and His people fruitful. "And herein is My Father glorified, that ye bring forth much fruit," John 15:8. You have cause to seek to enjoy God in this way.

5. Consider with whom you have to deal. He knows who seeks Him. He knows who are His friends, and sees all the reaching of their hearts after Him. Christ asked the woman whom she sought, but He knew she sought Him and so showed Himself to her. The child may seek the mother, and she may be ignorant of it; but there is not a prayer, not a sigh after Him but it is in His ear; not a tear for Him but it is in His eye.

He can do what you desire. He can carry you on as upon eagles' wings. He is a fountain of life, and has enough for you and for thousands.

He is full of pity. He is sensible of your case. He knows your need of Him, what weakness you are left in. If He is not with you, He knows what temptations and lusts break in, what sorrow and heaviness if you enjoy Him not.

He is the author of that desire which you have after Him, and God knows the meaning of His own Spirit. These desires He sent from Himself to be as Pharaoh's chariots to bring Jacob to Joseph; and when they have brought you to God, will He not accept you? He would not have sent for you if He meant not to help you. Therefore seek Him with faith and diligence in the means, that you may have His presence for your guide and guard in all your ways.

Chapter 25

Three counsels to such as are deserted

Now I come to deal with such as are forced to draw this sad conclusion against themselves, that God has departed from them. And I fear that, when men seriously consider what has been said, it will be found that not a few have cause to sit down in the dust and pour out tears in the sad sense of the grievous loss of the quickening presence of God. I think it is visible in some that they are changed and have declined from that luster, life, and activity of Spirit which seemed once to be aloft, and to be elevated to an excellent height of holiness and heavenly-mindedness, but now lies groveling in the dust with clouds and chains of evident darkness and death upon them. And now I wish for such a spirit that I might come to them with like success as the angel to Peter when he lay sleeping in the prison. "The angel of the Lord came upon him, and a light shone in the prison, and he smote Peter on the side and raised him up saying, 'Arise up quickly,' and his chains fell off from his hands, and he went out and followed the angel," Acts 12:7-9. God has sent us also to strike off men's chains, and to open the iron gate that leads into the spiritual city, and has given us the hammer, Jeremiah 23:29, and with it the key of the gospel, Luke 11:52. And oh, that He would manage these by His strength that men might be delivered who are in prison.

In dealing with such, I will take this course to draw them out of these deeps. I will lay down the matter of persuasion, some arguments to prevail, and some rules to direct.

First, the matter of persuasion, or the things that I plead for are:

To consider well whether you are not in this case. Call home your thoughts; send them as spies throughout all the region and see if you find Christ in it as in former times. See if your soul lies not as Jerusalem when the Babylonians came upon it. Are not the walls broken down, the gates burned, the temple spoiled and pillaged, and the inhabitants driven into captivity? Lack of consideration undoes men. You will never sit down by the waters of Babylon and weep till you remember Zion from whence you are carried. There could not be place for so much sloth and security in you if you saw and considered how you are. According to the acquaintance which men have with themselves, so are their fears, cares, joys, and endeavors. No man will seek for what he thinks he has.

Laodicea dreamed golden dreams, when she slept in poverty and sought not relief, because she knew not her need, Revelation 3:17. It is not a slight view, weak conjecture, transient thought, or light suspicion which will rouse the heart out of her sleep. These things may disquiet, but they are as weak medicine which moves the humors but removes them not, working pain but not a cure. If you saw yourselves, indeed, wrapped in darkness and death, lying like Lazarus in the grave, covered with earth, bound up and putrefied, you would then hear when we cry to you, "Lazarus, arise."

Necessity would quicken you; nothing could hold you; you would mourn and howl and pray and seek, and not cease till you find. Therefore, put the case out of doubt and be serious and impartial; it is wisdom to know well what it is not safe to bear, and to know we have not that which is misery to want.

When you see in what a case you are, make haste to recover. Take heed of trifling; the business requires speed. Therefore, as the angel said to Peter, so I say, "Arise quickly," Acts 12:7.

Consider you are at a constant loss. You will not let your money lie dead; you count every day loss when it is not used, when your ships are ready to go out or come in, but cannot for want of wind. My brethren, grace is your stock, your money, the estate which is laid up in the soul, as in a ship that is bound for heaven, the place of the richest trade; and when you lie becalmed and cannot put forth, you lose much. If you had a wind, if the Spirit came with gales of grace, you would grow rich. The more goods you send to heaven, the greater will your account be; but when you lie still and trade not, or when your commodities are not salable, you wrong yourselves.

Think of it: you have but a few days to trade in, and what you sow, that you shall reap. If you were good husbands, diligent and industrious, what might you get? In contrast, by carelessness you are at loss. You might be getting more grace, strength, testimonies of divine love, sights and tastes of hidden treasures and pleasures in this life, and might be also still adding to the heap of glory in the next life. Count therefore every day a great loss and be speedy. Do as the disciples when Christ called them: immediately they left all and

followed Him. Say as David, "I thought on my ways and turned my feet unto Thy testimonies. I made haste and delayed not to keep Thy commandments," Psalm 119:59–60. Weigh it well. Grace is the richest treasure of heaven and earth; it brings in the best advantage. You lose, it may be, such a time of trade as you may never have again, as the days of youth and strength and health, when grace wastes, or the days of the gospel. While the sun shines, you should make hay.

There can be no reason for delay. If your case is sad, and you fear to begin so doleful a work and so stir in such a wound, will it not be worse? And must not the thing be done? And though there is pain in stirring, yet it is the way to the cure; and the disease is worse than the pain. Or if you think to wait for a fitter time, I say there is no choice in present necessity. Deliberation is idle where the eminence of the danger requires present action. Would you lie still and wait for a fit time if you were in the sea, or if your house were on fire? Or if you think to dispatch some business first, then, I say, this is folly; may not both be done? Or will you with Saul be seeking your asses when a kingdom seeks you? Will you leave your child starving to go to feed the hogs? Or if you think it is hard to recover your loss, and so rather sit down in heaviness than put forth yourselves in endeavors, then, I say, mourning will not help it; it is hard, but is it not necessary? Will it not be harder? Or if you think, "I may find myself in better case, my heart more quick, more soft. I may have a better time"—then, I say, on the other hand you may not.

What promise have you that while you lie still, your work shall be done to your hands? Nay, have you not learned, do you not understand, that if you come to

Him with what you have you shall receive what you have not? There is therefore no reason for delay.

Delay is very sinful in this case. It is disobedience. The authority of a superior is as much crossed in the time as in the matter of his commands. The Jews sinned as much in misplacing their feasts as in neglecting them. You call your servant to come presently, and he says, "I will come a week hence." And how do you construe this? The Jews thought to build the temple, but because they did it not in God's time God was angry, Haggai 1:2-4.

It is ingratitude. God calls you to come to Him that He might do you good, and you say you will come at leisure. Would you do so with your king in such a case?

It is contempt of God and His favor. You count it not worth your pains, for if you were willing you would do what He demands. Nothing keeps you at a distance from it but dislike. If the heart were pleased, it would yield.

There may be hard thoughts of God in it. You think He will not pardon or accept you; but then why does He call you?

It is disloyalty. Why are you willing to be unserviceable to your God for a moment? What are you fit for when you are asleep? And would you not wish that your servant should rise when you awake him? Much time is gone; you have but a short time of service, and your reward is for eternity. Up, then, and lose no more time. Shame on you who have lost so much! Is not He worthy of all your time, He who is your life? Rest not then in purposes and promises, for if the heart were faithful it would not only wish but work, not only purpose but perform.

Delay is dangerous, as it is Satan's advantage. When you are without God, he is diligent to deprave and corrupt. When the body is dead, it is meat for worms; when the house is empty, there is room for lusts and all evil, Matthew 12:45. You may get guests which you can never be rid of.

God may depart again. It is a great condescension when the great God comes to call upon you to come to Him. If you stand off He may turn from inviting to threatening, and from kind entreaties to bitter chiding. Love will not bear contempt. Therefore hear when He calls. If you take not his offer, if you accept not the season, you may provoke Him to go, never to return again; but you may run out your time in a dying life. Your sin may be clouded while you live. God may leave you to the will of Satan in a great measure, to buffet and bind the soul in chains. Therefore be speedy.

Attend to your purpose. With strength muster up all your power that you may recover yourselves out of the hands of those who have prevailed against you, that you may regain the ancient liberty which you have lost, and have a gracious hand of God with you in all your ways. You may seek and not find unless you seek with much contention.

The heart that has long gone astray will not be easily brought in frame. Then is such a habitual deadness upon it that without much intensity of endeavor it will not be raised. God will not easily be pursued and pressed. He has set all things in a way of justice so that he who fights shall overcome. All degrees of grace, and enlargements of spirit in life and joy, come as rewards. He is not prepared to receive him who is not prepared to seek, for he knows not the worth of His presence

who does not strongly seek it. People many times lose the commodity because they will not give a little more.

Sit not down till you have attained. Press on and resolve never to be quiet till God return again. He seeks in vain who does not continue seeking till he finds.

Chapter 26

Motives to use these counsels taken from possibility of recovery

The second thing is the arguments to persuade. If a man loses his health, friends, riches, and liberty, it is not a hard thing to persuade him to endeavors of recovery, and to run after them that he may bring them home again. But in spiritual things, men are often content to accept the loss of things of greater worth, and it is hard to set the wheels of the soul moving in a serious study to regain them. But let such who find themselves deserted provoke themselves to endeavor to cure this evil, and I will propound two things as persuasives: the possibility and the necessity of recovery.

First, it is possible to regain what you have lost. It is a comfort that there is hope. Hope adds life to endeavors, but despair kills them. Sit not down as if all hope were cut off; say not, "My wound cannot be healed." Lay not out yourselves as dead men; you may recover.

You have power to seek it. Though much deadness is upon you, yet if you are in Christ you have a Spirit of life in you. You have a natural life, a rational life, and a spiritual life. Reason does much in many without grace; much more may you do. A Christian is a living thing, and all life has power to do the acts of life; not to be able to act is to be dead.

I have shown before that God never leaves His people wholly; though He withdraws His arbitrary influence, yet not the vital influence. That may cease, in a great measure, which is to the well-being of a godly man, but yet neither does it cease totally; nor does God at any time hold back that which is necessary for life and being. You have a power; therefore you must stir up the grace of God in you, 2 Timothy 1:6. There is fire in the embers: "Thou hast a little strength," Revelation 3:8. And as in a natural way, God expects that nature should work or else He will not work, so, in a spiritual way, think not to find God unless you seek Him. Call upon yourselves; set your minds to consideration; commune and plead with yourselves, for your life is preserved by knowledge as it is wrought by it. And consideration is like the drum in an army to put all in motion. A considerate man is an active man. Apprehensions and thoughts put life into the heart. Therefore, stir up yourselves. If you will not help yourselves, God will not; but if you will do what you can God will draw near, James 4:8.

You are capable of reviving. Though now deadness is upon you, there is a warmth left. There is great difference between one in a swoon and one dead.

As you have a power, so you have encouragement. You have need to consider this, for a humble spirit is apt to oppose itself and sit down with hanging head, feeble knees, weeping eyes, and fainting heart as if it were incurable, like those in Acts 27:20. In such a dark and stormy season, such men reckon themselves among the dead, and think that all hope is gone of getting out of these depths. But now consider there is hope.

The life you have is from Christ; it is dear to Him. He laid down His life that you might live. He has planted in you that grace you have, and will He not cherish His own work which with so much cost and care has been undertaken? The breathings of your soul are the breaths of His own Spirit, and He will own them. If you come to Him, He will in no wise cast you out, John 6:37. That grace you have was given you to fit you for communion with Him; and when you come to Him, will He shut the door? He opened the door in your heart when you shut it, and will He not open His door when you knock? He loves to do much for His own, for He loves them much. You are not straitened in Him, but in yourselves. What is the meaning of the gospel? Does not Christ stand with a fullness in His hand? Why do you not look to Him with faith who is as full of goodness as of power? Is He not your Head? Are you not His members? He feels your pains and sickness; yea, He well knows, and that by experience in His humanity, what it is to be without God. He knows there is no help for you but in Himself. Your unkindnesses shall not hinder. If you will be friends with Him, He will be a Friend to you. The adulteress shall find acceptance if she returns, Jeremiah 3:1.

You have a promise. Why then do you not lift up your heads? You cannot come before you are called, and what you want is ready for you. He has said that He will give rest to the weary, strength to the weak, light to the blind, and health to the sick. He would not have said these things, but that He would have you rejoice in hope. When you come to ask for the Spirit, it is granted before you ask: "If you that are evil know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more

shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him?" Luke 11:13. Do you think that you have more compassionate love than He? You think if your children came hungering, crying, and fainting for bread, you could not deny them; how much less will Christ?

Your love is nothing to His. He is love, 1 John 4:16. That is to say, He is the fountain of love. He works it where it is, and the love that you have for Him is from Him. And would He be loved of you if He did not love you? Certainly He was your friend before He made you His friend, 1 John 4:19. So, then, believe, and God is ready.

Good hangs in the promise like ripe fruit; if you shake the tree the fruit will fall. Turn this promise into prayer, plead with God in His own language; make His bond your petition; live upon His Word. If you believe it shall be well. If you have faith as a grain of mustard seed, those mountains that lie upon you shall be removed. When God deals with us by way of promise, He deals in the sweetest way, for what would you expect but His good will? And how would you know His good will but by His Word, by the promise you have, God not inclining and yielding, but determining, binding Himself? By this ladder, climb up and bow your soul before Him upon the pillars of faith, which so surely interest you in your God. He proclaims and makes heaven and earth His witnesses that He is yours. He has given such power to faith that he who believes sits upon the throne with Christ, Revelation 3:21, and is made lord of all the treasures of the kingdom. "All is yours," 1 Corinthians 3:22. Yea, God has so tied Himself to His people that He has not only said, "Ask, seek,

and pray," but "command Me," Isaiah 45:11.

You have experience. You are ready to say as Gideon, "What sign dost Thou give me?" Still the heart cries for security and is hardly satisfied. Have you not signs? What is the Word but a sign of His favor? What are the sacraments but a sign and seal of His love? What is the grace you have but a sign and earnest of His love? What are all the saints but signs, a cloud of witnesses, Isaiah 43:10–12 and 44:8. How many cripples have you seen walking and leaping? How many sick healed? How many dead raised? And why do you think He should be harder on you than on all? What do you think, that He has some special quarrel with you? Are you alone, and have you none like you in sin? What if it were so, yet are not all the sins of all the saints more than yours? Cannot He pardon your personal debt who has sealed a discharge to so many thousands? It matters not how much you owe; a mountain is as easily covered in the sea as a molehill.

Have not you yourselves experience? Think to yourselves, have you not often been refreshed by His hand? Did you never find your bones out of joint, and your soul sick till now? And who helped you when you came groveling in the dust with your backs bowing under pressures? Did He not lift up your soul with a renewed strength? When you came with yokes upon your necks, irons on your hands and feet, like poor, captive slaves, did He not hear you when you cried? When you had but a little room to peep at, and could out of a close, stinking, dark dungeon see but little of heaven, when your souls were almost among the dead, and you had but so much life as to cry, "Lord, help me," did He not help? When Pharaoh and his taskmasters made

your souls to serve, you did not send up the groans and cries that Israel did, yet He came and led you out, not into the wilderness but unto Canaan. He gave you liberty, peace, and the good things of the land when you had run in a sense away from all. You came not as the prodigal to his father, but He came to you, renewed your stock, and filled your becalmed souls with fresh gales of grace.

And now, after all this, when He has been such a Friend, so faithful, such a Father, so merciful, will you say there is not hope? No, rather, if new temptations arise, and new lusts break in and spoil, say as David, "The Lord that delivered me out of the paw of the lion, and out of the paw of the bear, He will deliver me out of the hand of this Philistine," 1 Samuel 17:37, and as the Apostle, "We had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God which raiseth the dead, who delivered us from so great a death, and doth deliver us, in whom we trust that He will yet deliver us," 2 Corinthians 1:9-10.

Chapter 27

Motives to seek recovery taken from necessity

As a second branch of persuasion, as your recovery is possible, so it is necessary. When you feel a decay of spiritual life, this is not a state to be rested in; it is sinful and hurtful.

It is sinful. Consider what becomes of that precious talent and trust of worth which lies in your hands; does it not lie dead by you?

Where are you in such a case? Are you not sleeping in Meshech, and in the tents of wickedness? Is not your heart gone out from the presence of the Lord? Are not other lords on Christ's throne? Is not your way a way of spiritual whoredom, robbery, and disloyalty? Are not other gods set up in the temple of the living God? Are you not found with Saul against David? Are you not departed and gone afar off?

Either you know that it is thus or not. If not, then what stupidity, what carelessness is it not to miss Him who is your Lord, your Husband, your Father, your life! If yea, then to rest without Him is to despise Him highly; what do you do but choose Egypt and her calves before Canaan and the ark and presence of the Lord? What do you do but set God, His Son, and His Spirit in the dust to be trampled upon by every vanity and every base lust, cast off the yoke of Christ, serve the beast, yea, cast down the crown of Christ and make His throne the footstool of His enemies?

It is hurtful. That must be hurtful which is sinful.

It cuts off the comfort of the soul. The sun does not shine brightly when the air is full of clouds, and the Spirit is not a comforting Spirit where He is not a quickening Spirit. You may enjoy for a time some contentment in the creature, but when these trees shall wither, when these fountains shall cease or be embittered, then what will you do? You cannot find comfort in God when you are far from Him.

All things are dead when you are dead. A dead man loses with himself all things; and all things die to him, when he dies in himself.

When you are in this case, your receptive and active power is weakened; you cannot so well comply with the means of life; there is a great unsuitableness. Water that is frozen is not so capable of impression, nor so apt to move as before. A weak man cannot live upon his food as he was wont. The wheels of a clock that are clogged with dust cannot run well. There must be some fitness in the recipient to join with the agent. Wet wood will not kindle so soon as dry wood. A living heart will find that to be effectual which a dead heart finds but as a shadow. Those promises, those mercies, those duties, those thoughts which raise others with much power are but as the blasts of wind upon the rocks to you. Those means which are as the waters of the Nile, which makes the land rich in fruits, are to you but as winter showers which bring up nothing.

The power of God is the life of all. Though you had as much life as an angel, and had the food of angels, yet unless God is in it, you will not thrive. The ordinances are called the power of God, Romans 1:16 and 1 Corinthians 1:24, because they are the instruments of

His power. Now we know the power of the instrument depends upon the agent; the plow is fit to cut the ground, but the skill and strength of the husbandman must guide and move it. If the angel of God's presence moves not in these waters, they will not heal. All means are nothing. "It is God that giveth the increase," 1 Corinthians 3:7. Therefore, there is no safe resting in such a state without God.

The heart grows worse and worse. And the dead body grows more and more corrupt. This should awaken you; if you get not, you lose.

Consider what a change this is. You conversed with God, and now you converse with the devils; you were Christ's freemen, now you are drudges to Satan and your lusts; you had eagles' wings to soar aloft, and now you are like the serpent that creeps on his belly and licks the dust. Your soul was as beautiful as a pleasant palace for the King of kings, and now it is a dungeon of darkness, a sepulcher, a prison, a den of unclean spirits. Oh, the vast difference between a man enjoying God and a man forsaken by God. And to this, consider that it grows worse and worse; your bondage increases, your lusts grow; the palace grows more ruinous, the dungeon darker, the den fuller; all goes downward, worse and worse.

Your case grows more and more incurable. The heart grows harder, the mind blinder. Satan is still working; he loses no time, and you may be carried out so far into the ocean of sins and miseries that it will be hard to recover land again. The continuance of sin leaves so deep a dye as sometimes will not come out till death. When the temple was sorely wasted and spoiled and lay long in ruins, though in time it was built up

again, yet the second temple was not like the first. Therefore you hurt yourselves much by carelessness. Stir up and awaken yourselves; be not willingly worse and worse; suffer not that to abide which, when it has entrenched itself, will not without much difficulty be beaten out again. And when you have wearied yourselves, it may be you will not be able to raise your spirits to their old vigor. Diseases hanging long leave often such an impression that nature seldom is fully restored. The fire of the second temple, some Jews say, was not like the fire in the first.

You may have a worse time to seek God than now. If age, if sickness, if captivity, if poverty, if any misery comes, then it will be an ill time to find your heart so out of frame, to have banks to mend; when you have less time, less help, less strength, and when also the winds are high and the seas unquiet and breaking in upon you, this is to be taken in an ill time. Consider this, you must be better ere you die; you must build upon the ruinous house within. If you neglect these times of rest, you may be forced to do it in a hard time when you must work by day and watch by night. Carry a tool in one hand and a weapon in the other. If you have a journey to take, you will take the fittest season. Now is your summer; walk in the light while you have it. Now you have the help of strength, health, friends, ordinances, and a prosperous estate. You will find that when these are gone, it will be a sad thing to have this work to do.

God will fetch you in. If you come not, He will take your soul with fears, and drop bitterness into your spirit, or send outward afflictions upon you to visit your carelessness upon you. Physicians (they say) in the cure

of the lethargy sometimes put the patient into a fever. When Ephesus lay in such a stupefied condition, Christ came with a sharp medicine: "I will come unto thee quickly, and fight against thee," Revelation 2:4-5. Afflictions will stir you. When God lays on the rod, you will feel that it was a bitter thing to neglect Him. Then your heavy-eyed and sleeping conscience shall hit you home; and, as the young lions roar and yell, so shall the thoughts of your hearts fill you with a cry like unto that of the prophet: "Hast thou not procured this unto thyself, in that thou hast forsaken the Lord thy God, when He led thee by the way?" Jeremiah 2:17. And now it will put you in mind of the folly of running to your pleasures and sinful vanities, as the prophet does. "Now what hath thou to do in the way of Egypt, to drink the waters of Sihor; or what hast thou to do in the way of Assyria, to drink the waters of the river? Thine own wickedness shall correct thee, and thy backslidings shall reprove thee. Know therefore, and see, that it is an evil thing and bitter, that thou hast forsaken the Lord thy God, and that His fear is not in thee," verses 18-19. My brethren, if the Word will not, the rod must; learn then to avoid blows. If counsel draws you, you may escape; but the rod is for the back of fools. If you come not in, expect some sad messenger. God will do as Absalom with Joab, who set fire to his corn because he came not when he sent for him, 2 Samuel 14:29-31. Therefore, while the season is calm, put forth and seek to regain what you have lost.

God is not well pleased when He withholdeth Himself. When He estranges Himself and is not with you, it is a sign that He is angry. Remember those words of Moses in Numbers 14:41-43. When you go to

fight against the Canaanites and Amalekites, your lusts and temptations, you cannot prosper. Because you are turned away from the Lord, the Lord will not be with you. And how does the church bewail the displeasure of God against her? "Thou hast cast us off and put us to shame, and goest not forth with our armies," Psalm 44:9. It is true that sometimes, out of His sovereignty and absolute dominion, He may do this, but yet the thing in itself is a sign of disfavor. Therefore it is not safe to abide in such a case. Let then your relation to Him, the knowledge of His power, the sweetness of His favor, your love for Him, and the kindness which He has shown you put you upon a study of reconciliation that you may enjoy your former happiness and His ancient lovingkindness.

According to the presence of God with you, the proportion and measure of spiritual life will be. The more the plants have of the sun, the more they thrive. All the efficacy of ordinances and all the activity of grace depend upon this. As the house of Obed-edom was blessed, and all that pertained to him, when the ark, the sign of God's presence, was with him, 2 Samuel 6:11-12, so great prosperity of soul is there where God has His abode, and where He puts forth His power and spreads His quickening virtue upon the soul. Is it not a happiness to be enriched in grace, and to have your grain of mustard seed growing up unto a tall tree? Awaken yourselves, and fall to thinking of this matter: why are you willing to live so poorly who might live like princes? to creep with the snail when you might mount as eagles? Let me suggest a few incentives to quicken your spirits.

1. If you have but little you can do but little; for

nothing can exceed the sphere and compass of its ability. Much grace makes one strong to work, and abundant in working. As a full spring makes a full stream, so much grace gives much willingness; and as your willingness is, so is your strength. I say not that strength and willingness are always equal, for I know a godly man's will is beyond his power, and he cannot do what he would, Galatians 5:17; but yet by how much more the heart is prepared, by so much the more it is enabled. The greatest part of the impotence and deadness of unregenerate men is that they are unwilling and averse unto God, and disaffection binds them as in chains so that they cannot walk with God. The strength of a godly man lies most in his will. What is the strength of lusts in others but the will? What is the strength and courage of a soldier but a strong will? What is the bounty of a liberal man but a large will to do good? This will be then your advantage: you will do more when you have more, and the more you do, the greater will your reward be. "He that soweth sparingly shall reap sparingly, and he that soweth bountifully shall reap bountifully," 2 Corinthians 9:6. Every man has a large field to sow in, for the world is as a field to every man. Therefore get much into your garners that you may sow much now and reap much when the harvest comes.

2. Your works will be more perfect and complete if you have much. Everything works as it is. There is a great difference between the work of a child and the work of a man. "When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child," 1 Corinthians 13:11. Actions are the birth of habits; and the child will carry the likeness of the father. If the spring

is affected with an ill quality, so will the streams be also. A man who has but little of his trade and art cannot make complete work, but his work will carry a print of the weakness of his skill. A famous painter coming to his friend's house, and not meeting with him, would not leave his name, but with his pencil drew a line and bade the servant show his master the line. And when he came home and saw it, he knew whose hand it was. The Apostle took care to raise up the bounty of the Corinthians to such a height that something might be done that might be excellent and honorable, 2 Corinthians 9:5. So that all that you do will be more mature and excellent by how much more grace you have; and the more perfect your actions are, the better will your reward be. They shall have more praise with God. And your desire should be that all is done exactly.

3. The more grace is raised in you, the sweeter will your way be:

(1) Because there will be a greater agreement between your spirits and your work and rule. What is the cause of that weariness in duty, and backwardness to it, but a disproportion between you and it? When your hearts are more prepared, you will be as a smooth boy in a smooth way, who runs with much ease and few rubs.

(2) There is a sweetness in doing good. And the more you are able to do, the more sweetness you have; the deeper you dig, the more treasure you shall find. Every action spiritually performed casts a reward upon the soul. It is like pressing grapes: his labor drops in that which is better than wine. The ways of God are as beds of spices: the more you work in them, the more

they requite you with sweet delight and inward refreshments. "All the ways of wisdom are ways of pleasantness," Proverbs 3:17. Here motion rests, as in the heavens their perfection is their motion. God's ways are large; the soul is most free when at greatest liberty in them.

4. The less grace, the more corruptions. This is the nature of contraries which admit no middle ground to partake of either. Where one is not, there the other is, and the less of one, the more of the other. The less light in the air, the more darkness. Now you are miserable so far as you are sinful. It is not immunity from calamities, but from sin which makes happy; and what calamity is not upon him who has many strong corruptions? Think of all the evils in the world, and you shall find them meeting in such a one. His lusts are all evils, and contain all in their bowels—fears, sorrows, wants, wars, chains, wastings, and sickness.

5. The greater measure of grace brings in more comfort. Little grace will bring but little joy.

(1) The soul is not so capable. Much grace makes capacious. A little vessel cannot give much light. The same promises are sweetest to the heart that has most of God. The same food is sweeter to a healthy, strong man than to a sickly, weak man. The godly here have the same objective happiness with the saints in heaven, but not the same subjective happiness. They are more happy in heaven because they are more capacious and take in more of God.

(2) The less grace, the less evidence of truth and God's favor. A letter written in small and imperfect letters is not as legible as that which is written with larger characters. You will be hard pressed to spell

God's love out of weak and low graces. What is grace but a seal and stamp of God upon a man? The more visible the seal is, the more assurance it yields. When a plant is in the sprout you can hardly discern what it is, but when it rises up into a tree, it shows itself fully. Gold in the ore cannot be discerned by every eye, but when the earth and dross are taken away it is apparent. In a cloudy night the little stars are hidden, but the greater are more easily seen.

(3) Comfort is usually given as a reward. They who are very holy and walk much with God in much love and heavenly-mindedness usually exceed others in comfort; "they, being edified, walked in the fear of the Lord, and the comforts of the Holy Ghost," Acts 9:31. Though sometimes the best and chief of the saints come short in comforts, yet I say that they have more cause for comfort than others; and it is by accident that they rejoice not. Either they mind not what they have received, or they are under a dark cloud of unbelief which cuts off the light of joy from them. But whose fault is it? The promise lies fair for them, and they have a greater advantage to believe than others because with the promise they have a pledge.

6. That little which you have is for this reason left defective, that laboring with meekness you might seek continually for more. God has so ordered the conditions of His people that He will have them live in a perpetual dependence and come daily to the throne of grace for alms. More and more encourage yourselves, for God is on the giving hand. The days of the gospel are days of harvest. He has reserved better things for His people now than He gave in former days. The church of the Jews was a child in minority and had less,

Galatians 4:3. But in these times He has promised to pour out His Spirit more abundantly, Joel 3:28. Though this was literally fulfilled, and more eminently so in the coming of the Holy Ghost upon them, Acts 2:17, yet it extends itself unto all the Church unto the end, Acts 2:39. So the Apostle acknowledges an abundance of grace upon the godly afterward, 2 Corinthians 8:7, Ephesians 1:8, and Titus 3:6.

These times are also times of affliction and trouble, and God is wont in such times to give much of Himself. Therefore seek to abound, and to this end labor to recover yourselves and gain the good presence of God with you which you have lost.

Chapter 28

Two directions how to seek recovery

Now I come to the third thing propounded in the way of cure, directions to further your endeavors to recover your loss.

First, quicken your desires after God, for desires will yield a twofold advantage:

1. The promise is full to such as desire much. "Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled," Matthew 5:6. It is not every velleity and cold wish which entitles one to this promise. Every weak appetite or desire for meat and drink is not hungering and thirsting. When you are impatient and long much after Him, then you shall be filled. The word is borrowed from feeding cattle and imports that though now you are put to graze upon the dry and barren mountains, yet if you long after more, then the faithful shepherd of Israel, who leads Joseph like a flock, will put you into green pastures and feed and fill you by the waters of rest. God's hand is shut because your hearts are shut. Has He not said, "Open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it"? The first grace is given without precedent desires. God is found of them that seek Him not, but this grace that we speak of is given to them that seek it.

2. Desires, when they are high, beget endeavors like themselves, strong and vigorous, and the more you labor, the more you will get. Therefore stir up your de-

sires by the bellows of meditation; sit down and consider what it is to enjoy God and to want Him. These thoughts, if they abide, will fire you out of the bed of sloth and sleep in which you lie.

Bewail yourselves and your state before God; sit down and mourn. Mourn, I say, for your loss and for the cause.

Bewail your loss. Take up a lamentation and say, "Woe is me, for my God, my life is departed from me, and how am I changed. I was as the tree planted by the river's side, spreading and flourishing, and my fruits were fair and full; but alas! Now I am become as a tree in the desert, withering and shaking both fruits and leaves. My sweet spring is turned into a sad autumn, my first days were my best days, and my last days are my worst days. I was filled with light and life, but now my sight is dimmed and my strength is wasted. Time was, when faith had life in me, and I had life by it, but now, Oh, woeful overspreading of clouds of darkness and incredulity! My pleasant days of life and luster are fled away, and the bonds of death have taken hold of me. My soul was the temple and throne of Christ and I received daily oracles from His mouth, but now I am the habitation and region of vanity and darkness. What sweetness did I find in flights aloft when it was my greatest solace to be with God! But now I, who was as a star in heaven, have fallen into the depths of vanity and am become to myself as gall and wormwood. My soul was an enclosed garden and the chiefest of ten thousand, and walked in the shadow of the trees, and was delighted in their fruits; but now the fence is down; my love is gone; the beasts break in, and Sharon has become a desert.

“Time was when the thoughts of sin did pierce me, and the remembrance of God lifted me up to the third heavens; but now my heart has lost its fence; the things that I know have not their ancient strength. My tears, which were as pleasant waters to my taste, which I could pour out before my God, are gone; that melting of heart, which was my joy, is vanished; my heart is frozen; the spring is stopped; the heart of flesh has become a heart of stone. That blessed society of graces, those holy desires, those heavenly dispositions, which met in a happy conjunction in my soul, seem now scattered, and to lie in chains, while the troops of hell hold all in possession. My soul that walked with a heavenly guard of divine graces lies now like Daniel in the den among devouring lions. Oh, how was I wont to meet God! And what communion had I once with Him. But now He hides Himself and will not come to me. I pray and He hears not; I hearken after Him, but He speaks not; I call but He answers not. Oh, those golden days, will they never more return? I was wont to be feasted in my Father’s house; the fatted calf was killed, and the ring and the best garments were put upon me; but now I am forsaken and not owned. I go hungry and naked, and feed among the hogs, and in this I am more miserable than they because I was a son. It is a misery to have been happy. Lord, if I had never known Thee, I could have lived without Thee, but this is my misery, not so much that I am without Thee as that I have lost Thee. Many are well without Thee, because they never enjoyed Thee. The children of beggars and slaves count it not their misery that they are not princes, but it is a bitter evil when the children of princes shall become beggars.”

Thus then commit yourself to these sad thoughts; make your closet a house of mourning; breathe out your sighs; send forth your groans; pour out your tears; rend your heart; cast up your weeping eyes with the sad complaints of a bleeding soul to your ancient Friend. You may prevail upon Him. Though He has forsaken you, yet He has not forgotten you. He cannot hold from coming when you cannot hold from calling. The melting of your heart causes the yearning of His bowels. Can the mother forbear when the child cries? God will not deny mercy to the mourners. "Blessed are the mourners, for they shall be comforted," Matthew 5:4.

In two cases especially, God will not deny mercy: when the sorrow of His people is great and when it is ingenuous.

1. When the sorrows of His people are great, then His compassions are drawn out. When the woman came with a troubled spirit, pouring out tears upon the feet of Christ and wiping them with the hair of her head, then Christ poured out comfort upon her and sent her away with the pardon of all her sins, Luke 7:37-50. Zion sat in the dust, melting herself in heaviness and crying, "My God hath forsaken me, my God hath forgotten me." When she was tossed and afflicted and not comforted, then God came in and opened a well in the desert, and in the depths of her trouble no longer concealed Himself, but broke out in a most gracious protestation of His love: "Can a woman forsake her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the fruit of her womb? yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee. Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of My hands; Thy walls are continually before Me," Isaiah 49:15-16. The words are a strong

expression of His dear and faithful affection: "The mother's affections are dear and tender, so are Mine. The mother loves her child because it is the fruit of her womb. I also have begotten you, and you are My child. The mother is most tender to her sucking child which cannot help itself; if it cries, she cannot hold. You also are such before Me. The mother may possibly forget, but I will not. You are always in My eye, and if I cannot forget Myself, I cannot forget you, for you are engraved and imprinted in My hand." "The Lord hath comforted His people, and will have mercy upon His afflicted," Isaiah 49:13. "He comforteth those that are cast down," 2 Corinthians 7:6.

When the heart mourns much, God will show Himself, for the end of sorrow is not to afflict but to profit, not to cast down only but also to raise up. When God casts sorrows upon the wicked, His end is to afflict and to punish, and their sorrows attain their end when they lie like loads oppressing their spirits. But that which is a curse to them is a cure to the godly; their mourning is but sowing in tears to reap in joy. Sorrow in the spirits of such is like the rain upon the grass: it puts the soul into a flourish; it makes it yielding and tractable. Wax, when it is softened, will easily receive impressions, and metals dissolved are apt to be drawn out and to be molded as you would have them. "Sorrow is better than laughter; for by the sadness of the countenance the heart is made better," Ecclesiastes 7:3. The sad looks of others have a natural force to work seriousness and consideration in us much more when our own hearts are full. Ahab himself would do much in a pensive fit, and Manasseh's monstrous spirit was tamed by sorrow. God brought upon him the

Assyrian, and he bound him with fetters and carried him to Babylon. "And when he was in affliction, he besought the Lord his God and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers, and prayed unto Him," 2 Chronicles 33:11,12. You see the sweet fruit of this bitter root, and what was the issue? "God was entreated of him, and heard his supplication, and brought him again to Jerusalem into his kingdom," verse 13.

The greater sorrow, the fitter object of mercy. Mercy is for the miserable, and none more miserable than such as mourn in the loss of communion with God. This wound is the deepest and most bleeding of all wounds. The soul, in such a case, has no help in all the world. All things yield no more than a drop of water upon Dives' tongue. Look now upon the nature of God, and you shall see Him full of mercy; upon the promises, they also are full of mercy; upon the ways of God, they also are full of mercy. Therefore, if you clothe yourselves with the garments of heaviness, and can come before God with spirits much lamenting after Him, He will appear to you. "He will revive the spirit of the humble," Isaiah 57:15.

Much sorrow will put you upon strong pursuits after God. It will make you full and strong in prayers, and the power of prayer is great with God. It makes the soul run to Christ and improve all the hope and faith and interest that it has in Him; and they who seek the Father in the Son shall find Him.

Now God will be welcome when the soul is bitten with His absence. God leaves His people because they slight Him, but when they have learned to prize Him He will come. No place fits Him but the highest, and now God is lifted up when the heart, in the presence of

all things which were delightful and precious, pines after Him. Love is seen in sorrow. We grieve much in the loss of what we love much.

2. Sorrow prevails with God when it is ingenuous:

- When you sorrow not only for the loss, but for the cause; when you can mourn not only that you are deserted, but because you have sinned; when you can grieve much that you have procured this evil.

- When your sorrow is not only because of the misery of such a state, but also for the sinfulness. There must be many fears and great anxieties in such a soul as sees itself bereft of God; but a holy heart will grieve for this, not only that it is fallen into such misery, but also, and especially, that sin has regained strength, and that the life and luster of holiness are so weakened. Grace has a great beauty in the eye of him who has it, and sin carries in it the greatest deformity and misery unto him. So that such a one minds not so much his ease as his cure; yea, his heart is carried in such strong desires after God that it overlooks its suffering. Weeping is no burden, and if he might recover his loss, though it comes through a storm of fears, cares, and griefs, he would count himself happy. Another man, who has no greater thing to fear or desire than hell and heaven, dwells upon his fears when he is afraid, and is held in them. And if he could be delivered from his fears, he would be at rest; but a godly man, though he feels his troubles, yet would not count his case happier if these storms were down, but he will mourn still till he is restored to his former life in God. David was not satisfied till a new heart was created in him, and a right spirit renewed, Psalm 51:10–11.

- When you sorrow not only for the loss of the com-

fort and sweetness in a holy conversation with God, but for the loss of God Himself. A child has much comfort and relief from his father; but when his father is gone he not only laments his loss of comfort, but the loss of his father. So the wife more laments the loss of her husband than of her good by him. When a man sees what he has lost, he cannot but mourn to think what days he had when he lived under the wing of his gracious Father. But yet all the comforts that ever he had or hoped for do not lie as heavy as God Himself. For, to a godly man, all comforts and graces, and all good that he receives, serve to lead his heart to, and to fix it in, God. God has His end here, for He sends out these as Joseph sent chariots to bring his father and brethren to him. All these things are but conveyances and servants employed between God and His people, to invite and draw their hearts to Himself. And the saints do not rest in these; they do not settle for the handmaids. The fruits of God's love are sweet; and because they are sweet, God is precious. "Christ is precious to them that believe," 1 Peter 2:7.

- When your sorrow is not only for the loss, as it is your evil, but also as it betokens displeasure in God. A true friend is grieved when his friend leaves him and casts him off, not only for his own great loss, but also for his friend's anger. He can as well be without his friend as without his love, and is as loath his friend should be displeased as himself damaged.

- When your sorrow is that you have less strength to serve Him. Grace has great recompense in itself, but can you grieve that, by bringing yourselves into this state of deadness, you have lived to little honor to your God, and are not now able to do much for Him? This

is ingenuous sorrow.

- When you can gladly submit to all conditions of reconciliation and restoration. Though God requires much, or imposes much, yet you count all nothing in comparison with God. Can you say, “Lord, command me, chide, rebuke, smite, do what Thou wilt, though it be through a desert, yea, through a sea of straits and troubles, yet I am content to go so I may arrive at last at my desired end. If I may have Thy good presence it shall be enough; if Thou wilt come to me, if I may come to Thee, every way shall be sweet. Though I go through thorns and briars to the raking of my flesh, and the effusion of my blood, yet this shall be nothing to me if I may enjoy my God who is all in all to me”?

When your sorrow is ingenuous, then you will find God; yea, indeed, he has found much whose frozen head begins to thaw and dissolve itself in showers of tears for the return of God unto his deserted soul. The Lord has looked upon you if, with Peter, you weep bitterly.

Bewail the cause. This is part of the cure which the great physician of souls prescribed to Ephesus, languishing in a like disease: “I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love. Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent,” Revelation 2:4–5.

QUESTION. Is the subtraction of the quickening influences of the Spirit always for sin?

ANSWER 1. Sometimes He does it not because His people have sinned, but for higher ends. Peter was left to be strangely soiled with fears of suffering, falling exceedingly beneath his former spirit and resolution, yet

not for any particular sin of his, but, as it is likely, that he might see how unable he was of himself, that all the glory of his future heroic acts and sufferings might come not to himself, but unto Christ. And so Paul was buffeted that he might not be exalted. God let loose Satan not to punish, but to prevent his sin, 2 Corinthians 12. So the case stood with the blind man, John 9:3.

ANSWER 2. There is also cause in us, though God makes it not a cause to Himself and to His action. Therefore your responsibility is to consider your ways.

ANSWER 3. God usually does it for sin. And if you search the Scriptures, they testify that sin is the usual spring of this evil. "Sin separates between us," Isaiah 59:2. He has threatened that if we forsake Him, He will forsake us, 2 Chronicles 15:2.

QUESTION. How may a man find out what sin is the cause?

ANSWER 1. Sometimes the cause is visible, and a man can scarcely look past it. This is the case when, as a result of upon some particular, gross failing a damp has fallen upon him. In such a case God points at the sin and discovers the cause of His displeasure by this sudden punishment inflicted on him. Scripture affords many instances of discovering the sin by the time of the punishment.

There may have been an eminent neglect of those means by which life was upheld, and gross carelessness in omission or palpable remissness in duties, vanity of mind, sinful affections, and other evils connived at have so broken in that a man may plainly see the time when his fall began, and when his sun began to set.

Upon consideration, though the cause is not transparent, it may be discovered. And for help in this, I will propound four rules:

RULE 1. Pursue your loss and sad condition to the birth of it. Consider how long this night of darkness has been upon you; look back to the days in which you were happy, in a living communion with God. If a man has lost something, he asks himself when and where he had it, and so, as much as may be, pursues his loss to the very time and place. It may be that, when you come to this, you will have much light to find out how you lost your treasure. God goes not away upon small offenses. You will, by searching, find the gap that let in these floods.

RULE 2. Consider what things have been most pressed by God from time to time upon you. For though the whole law and all righteousness are enjoined to all, yet there are some things more especially pressed. Joshua was much pressed to courage, so much as if it had been his only task. "Be strong and of a good courage. Only be thou strong and very courageous," Joshua 1:6–9. The Israelites were mightily, among other things, called on to take heed of forgetting God and what He had done when they should possess the land of promise. "Only take heed to thyself, and keep thy soul diligently lest thou forget," Deuteronomy 4:9. And, after their return from Babylon, some things especially were again urged, as not to mix themselves with the heathen, which things Ezra and Nehemiah labored much in, and to build the temple, which the prophet Haggai again and again enforced. So every Christian, according to his station, temper, measure, gifts and graces, relation, age, and course is put upon

some things in a special manner. Hear what the Spirit says. The voice calls upon you, it may be, for more humiliation, or more meditation, or more thankfulness, prayer, reading, zeal, or mortification of particular lusts. Now, if you have been deaf to these calls, it is likely that here grew the difference between God and you, for here is great disobedience, when a man sins against such strong and continued calls. A friend takes it ill when he is often denied and long put off in a thing much desired and strongly requested.

RULE 3. Listen to conscience, for that is God's deputy; and it will tell you what it is that God takes ill at your hands. Observe at what door conscience lays his sad birth, this miserable plight of soul which you are in, for that is likely to be the father. As God witnesses with our spirits, so usually He chides with them, at least He never chides without them; but when He rebukes, He sets conscience to do it. Hear then its errands and receive its charges. It may be that it will say, "This is the pride, or thy slightness in duties, thy neglect of God and Christ, thy harbored lusts."

I deny not that conscience may err, and often charges that as sin which is no sin, or makes sin greater than it is, or accuses a man of that of which he is not guilty, or judges and condemns when the sin is pardoned. Therefore I add this last rule.

RULE 4. Pray the Lord to show you wherein you have offended. It was Elihu's counsel to Job in his sad case: Surely is it meet to be said unto God, I have born chastisement, I will not offend any more; that which I see not, teach thou me," Job 34:31–32. And when you are convinced of the evil of your ways, then look on them and mourn over them:

“What a thing is this, that I should provoke Him to leave me in whose presence I have had such light, such life, such strength, such liberty, such peace, such victories, such treasures, and such joys! Hear O you heavens, for I have committed two great evils. I have forsaken the fountain of living waters and have dug to myself cisters, broken cisters, that hold no water (Jeremiah 2:12). Oh, wretch that I am, that that precious communion which I had with my God was of no more esteem with me, that those sweet streams of comfort which now I lack, but then had from the Well of life, those quickening beams from the Sun of righteousness; those refreshing, those ravishing sights and tastes of Jesus Christ, those pleasant banquets which I had in the ordinances, and in duties those blessed embraces of the everlasting arms of the Lord my God, were of so low account with me that I should lose them by my folly.

“I have been careful to keep my name, my state, my health, yea, my vanities, but I have not been careful to keep my God. That life and comfort of the Spirit which Christ purchased with His blood, I, like profane Esau, have sold for nought.

“Woe is me that the Spirit of Jesus Christ should come in mercy to make His abode with me, and yet has no better reception. I set the doors open that he might depart, yea, by entertaining lusts and vanities I have made Him weary of His dwelling. He is gone in anger who came in love. That which I have begged with tears and enjoyed with comfort, I have lost for sin. Oh, what have I done against my God? Yea, what have I done against myself? What madness was this, to gain my lusts and lose my God! I am like that great commander who

sold himself for a draft of water.”

Thus break open the fountain within and add sorrow to sorrow. Drink your tears like water and mourn and mourn again. Say, “Oh, it is my folly that I have lost that for lack of care which now I would redeem with my blood. But once God is gone, who can tell me when He will return again? He goes from many and takes leave forever; and now, if I go long in heaviness, I may thank myself. If my soul is spoiled with long hostilities and tyrannies of the power of darkness, if my sins rage like the sea, if I walk as a shadow of death, my own hand has brought all this upon me, for God did not leave me until I left Him.”

Yea, further, cause the waters of sorrow to rise higher. Look upon former times and say, “What was I then? What am I now? My silver has become dross.” Take up the lamentation of the Church (Lamentations 4:1, 2, 5, 7, and 5:3, 5, 8, 15, 16, 17) and make it yours: “How is the gold become dim? How is the most fine gold changed? The stones of the sanctuary are poured out in the top of every street. The precious sons of Zion, comparable to fine gold, how are they become as earthen pitchers, the work of the hands of the potter? They that fed delicately are desolate in the streets. They that were brought up in scarlet embrace dunghills. Her Nazarites were purer than snow, they were whiter than milk, they were more ruddy than rubies, their polishing was of sapphire; but now their visage is blacker than coal, their skin cleaveth to their bones, it is withered, it is become like a stick. We are orphans and fatherless. Our necks are under persecution, and we have no rest. Servants have ruled over us, and there is none that doth deliver us out of their

hands. The joy of our heart is ceased, our dancing is turned into mourning. The crown is fallen from our head. Woe unto us that we have sinned: for this our heart is faint, for these things our eyes are dimmed.”

Look about you and gather matter of sorrow into your hearts. Cast your eyes upon your ways and say, “How little good have I done? How much evil? How poor is my life, my duties like things without life, and my unfaithfulness appears as the light in all my ways? I wonder how I could own such actions, which all stand like the children of beggars, clothed with rags and full of vermin.”

Cast your eyes upon others and say, “Such as had less engagements, less encouragements than I, have gotten far beyond me. The last is first and the first is last. Many are grieved and dulled by my deadness, who should have been quickened by my life.”

Look up to God and say, “Oh, foolish and unjust man! Have I thus requited the Lord my God?”

Look up to heaven and say, “I might, by sowing much, have made my harvest rich and full; but now it is just that I should reap little who has sowed little; yea, that having sowed vanity I should reap iniquity.”

Repentance is the way to make up your losses and repair your ruins. God has promised grace and mercy to the penitent. “When you are in tribulation, and all these things are come upon thee, if thou turn to the Lord thy God, thou shalt find Him, for the Lord thy God is a merciful God, He will not forsake thee, neither destroy thee,” Deuteronomy 4:29–31. Take then the counsel of the prophet, which he gave to Israel when God had departed from them: “Oh, Israel, return unto the Lord thy God, for thou hast fallen by

thine iniquity; take with you words and turn to the Lord; say unto Him, Take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously, so will we render the calves of our lips," Hosea 14:1-2. Do this so that you may find the same favor as they did, and so that God may do for you as He promised to them in verses 5-6: "I will heal their backslidings, I will love them freely: For Mine anger is turned away from him. I will be as the dew unto Israel, he shall grow as the lilly, and cast forth his roots as Lebanon; his branches shall spread, and his beauty shall be as the olive tree, and his smell as Lebanon."

When Ephraim repented and mourned, God pities him: "I have surely heard Ephraim bemoaning himself: Thou hast chastised me, and I am chastised, as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke: Turn Thou me, and I shall be turned; for Thou art the Lord my God. Is Ephraim my dear son? Is he a pleasant child? For since I spake against him, I do earnestly remember him still: therefore my bowels are troubled for him, I will surely have mercy upon him, saith the Lord," Jeremiah 31:18-20.

You see, then, what encouragement you have to seek in this way for peace with God, and for the quickenings of His Spirit which you have lost. Sin arms God against you, but He cannot hold back mercy from the humble. His promise has given repentance a power to prevail with Him, and He will not contend with the broken-hearted. He has a special eye upon mourners and will not hide Himself from the cry of the afflicted. A contrite heart is a sacrifice which He will accept, Psalm 51. "He is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart, and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit," Psalm 34:18. The father of the prodigal made haste to receive

and welcome his straying son, and rejoiced that “he that was lost was found again, and that he that was dead was alive again,” Luke 15. This is the way; walk in it. If God should deny such He would deny Himself, because He has said that, though He has been sorely displeased, “turn you unto Me, and I will turn unto you,” Zachariah 1:2–3.

Till you repent your sin is continued, and so, consequently, is God’s displeasure. Therefore, seriously consider your case, for lack of serious thought greatly hurts. If the heart is not affected enough, it sees often that all is not well and knows the cause. Yet because these things lie not upon the spirit by pondering thoughts, a man bears his misery, perhaps complaining, but not wisely and strongly endeavoring to remove it, and the heart is not quickly brought down. You must hold up the objects of spiritual grief by consideration so that they may be able to bear down the heart.

Therefore be much in pondering these two things:

The sad effects of the loss of God: what blindness, barrenness, weakness, depravity, vanity, fears, accusations of heart, what cries and clamors in your souls! And now, what if afflictions come? How will you be able to live other than a dying and a fearful life in such as time? What if death comes? Either a black cloud of darkness will overspread you or a storm of fright and terror will torment you. And now remember your sin has brought all this upon you.

The sinfulness of the cause. Why did you neglect and despise your God? If you had not set Him shamefully at a low rate, you would not have turned your back upon Him. What, could not the infinite majesty and mercy of the Father, the incomprehensible love of the Son, the

unutterable comforts of the Holy Ghost prevail with you?

Do you see what you have done? Have you not said to the Father, "I neither fear Thy majesty nor desire Thy mercy"? Have you not said to the Son, "I care not for all Thy love, nor yet for Thee that died for me"? And have you not said to the Holy Ghost, "I regard not all Thy saving counsels, influences, and high refreshments?"

Do you not hear these pleading with you, each for Himself, and each for all? They are one, and what you have done in this you have done against each and against all. Weigh well, then, what your carelessness and disobedience amounts to so that you may meet Him with a humbled spirit, drenched in tears and clothed with shame. Put the case now, that God should requite you in kind, and that His heart should not be towards you. Then you might bid peace, yea, life, yea, hope *adieu* forever.

Consider further how God followed you and entreated you not to go from Him. Did He not tell you that He could not bear contempts, and that you would repent of it at last? And will you see that what you have done against Him you have only done against yourselves? Did He not kindly use you? And were you not always welcome with Him? "O my people, what have I done unto thee, and wherein have I wearied thee? Testify against Me," Micah 6:3. And when you were going, did He not cry after you? "Return, thou backsliding Israel, and I will not cause Mine anger to fall upon you, for I am merciful and will not keep anger forever," Jeremiah 3:12. Yet you would not.

Consider now how long you have lived without

Him, and how often God has called upon you to consider your ways. If you will let your thoughts out, you will find abundant cause for grief. And when you seek Him with repentance, you will find Him drawing near in mercy. He will forget your unkindnesses and you shall hear no more of them.

Doubtless your sins this way are very great, so much so that sometimes God has come, as it were, to a stop as to what course to take. When God had promised mercy to His revolting people He added: "But I said, How shall I put thee among the children? And give thee a pleasant land? And I said, Thou shalt cast me, my Father, and shalt not turn away from me," Jeremiah 3:19.

When the Church had been disloyal, she at last fell to this course of repentance. You can see the issue in Jeremiah 3:21: "A voice was heard upon the high places, weeping and supplications of the children of Israel, for they have perverted their ways, and have forgotten the Lord their God. Return, ye backsliding children, and I will heal your backslidings." And oh, that you would tread in their steps and say, as did they, verse 22: "We come to Thee, for Thou art the Lord our God."

Chapter 29

Two other directions how to recover

Third, go to Christ and beg Him to cause a spirit of life to come into you. Aye, put yourself upon Christ, but take heed of mistakes here.

1. Think not that there is a greater willingness in Christ than in the Father or the Holy Ghost to show mercy to you. You must honor the Son as you honor the Father, John 5:23. They must have the same honor for they are one. They have the same being, the same will, and the same thoughts. "I and My Father are one," John 10:30. They have the same friends: "All Thine are Mine and Mine are Thine," John 17:10.

2. Think not that what you have from Christ you have from Him exclusively, for they are one fountain, and, as they are one in nature, so they are one in all that mercy which is shown to us. Therefore, so cast honor upon Christ that you also honor the Father and the Spirit. All that Christ does as Mediator He does by commission. And therefore, He said that He comes to do the will of His Father, Hebrews 10:7 and John 6:38. Look, then, upon this great Mediator as one sealed of the Father and filled with the Spirit, yea, clothed with our nature, standing between God and us to make both one and to convey to us all the riches of His Father. As the Son of God, He is equal with the Father and has a natural and eternal sovereignty with the Father. But as Mediator, His power is economical, dis-

pensed and delegated to Him. "All power is given to Me, both in things in heaven and in things on earth," Matthew 28:18. Therefore, lift up your hands with joy and come to Christ. Pray for Him to look upon a poor beggar. He has much power in His hand. He is the Lord of life.

Say, "Lord, I need much. Thou callest me to buy of Thee gold, raiment, and eye salve. Now behold my poverty, nakedness, and blindness and pity me."

Say to Him, "Lord, I would rather bear all evils than this evil. I could think myself happy if I might enjoy Thee, though all other troubles were upon me. Lord, Thou knowest what it is for a soul to be overtaken. It was sometimes Thine own case, when Thou complainedst, 'My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?' Not, O my Lord, but that Thou hadst a divine support, but Thou hadst not (it seems) that inward joy which at other times filled Thee. Now Thou art in Thy glory, pity a worm in misery who mourns and desires more after Thee than all things. Lord, Thou paid dearly for my good; let good come unto me. I desire more *from* Thee *for* Thee. Not merely that I might have more happiness, but that Thou mightest have better service. If Thou wilt give me much, I will return much.

"Thou hast bid me, 'If thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst give him drink,' Romans 12:20 and Proverbs 25:21. Lord, deny not such mercies to Thy children. And though I have sinned, yet Thou art my Father. Though Thou hast been angry, yet am I not Thy child? This shall be Thy glory, when these dead and dry bones shall live; when the graves shall be opened and the bonds of death shall be loosed and I shall walk before Thee.

“Thou saidst to the woman of Samaria that if she had known the gift of God and Thyself, she would have asked of Thee, and Thou wouldst have given her living water, John 4:10. Now, Lord, I know Thee and this gift; those waters would be sweet to my thirsting heart. Oh, give unto me also! I remember Thy mercies of old, and my heart both joys and dies. The remembrance of their sweetness delights me, but the thoughts of their absence afflict me. I could not have desired Thy presence but by Thee; these desires are Thine; turn them not back without their end. I was well without Thee (as I thought) till Thou camest to me, and since Thy coming I fell asleep again and was at rest; but Thou hast called me. And now, Lord, what wilt Thou do for me? A little will do me good, and I will bless Thee.

“There is no sorrow equal to this, to have Thy face hid, and lusts and devils to break in. Lord, what and how many are the troubles of my soul? Oh! in the multitude of Thy compassions help me, who am compassed about with a multitude of evils. Art Thou not set for the rising of them that fall, and to be a repairer of breaches? Is not Thy name Jesus? And is not salvation Thy employment? Oh! be a Savior to me, and pull my soul out of the depths; remember the covenant.”

Thus take up words and courage and go to the throne of grace. Carry your empty sacks to Joseph your brother, for he is the lord of all Egypt. Stand not wasting yourself in sad thoughts of your misery, but arise and pray. Turn the streams of your grief towards Christ. He will turn them into streams of joy. Sit not like Hagar weeping in the desert for her child, who is ready to die of thirst. Is not the well before you? Christ is the Fountain; let down your bucket and drink and

live. Go with indictments against yourself in one hand and with Christ's promise and your petition in the other, and you will be heard.

If you will take this course, then "you proud lusts and troops of hell must pack and be gone. You clouds of darkness and unbelief must be scattered; you chains of death must get you hence. Here is no abiding for you. For here the King of glory will make His temple, His throne, His rest." Only come with the whole heart. Cold prayers and remissness of spirit lose what you seek; and fervent prayers will find again what you lost. Do not be discouraged; here is the gate of life. He who dwells here is never away from home, nor ever asleep. Extend your prayers like those in Acts 12:5: stay till the alms come. The thing is sure, only the time is in the Lord's hand.

Many times prayer is lost because you do not wait for the answer. Lie at the gate. You need not fear knocking; the Lord will not be angry. You may be urgent. Wrest the door open by strong prayers. It is not shut because you should not enter, but because you should knock. Ask leave to enter. The bars of the gate are mercy; your prayers are like explosives to break a way into the city. Therefore, turn your fears into hopes, your complaints into prayers, your lamentation into supplication, and Christ will turn your darkness into light, your deadness into life, your bondage into liberty, and your weakness into strength.

Fourth, you must set your hands to the work, for it is vain to expect that God will help you if you will not help yourselves. You must use your hands as well as your tongues. Idle beggars must be whipped. He who will not work must not eat. Remember what I have said

before: you have a life in you if you are in Christ. And, as you have a life, so there is a never-failing presence of the Spirit to attend that power which you have. If then you put forth yourselves to what you are able, and as far as your power extends, God will draw near to you.

It is true, what you want is out of your reach; you are not able to make crooked things become straight and lay those swelling mountains of corruption level. Yet you must set to the work. Joshua could not, with the strength of ram's horns sounding, cast down the walls of Jericho; yet he must set upon the work. When the Midianites fall, there must be "The sword of the Lord, and of Gideon," Judges 7:18. Suppose a father held an apple out to his child. If the child cannot reach it, yet his short arm must be put forth. And then the father, whose arm is long enough, will give it to him. You must be doing the same.

Before I come to show what is to be done, it will be needful to convince you that regenerate men have power to do something of themselves. For oftentimes men, misunderstanding the state of regeneration, either excuse their negligence by pretended inability, or sit down discouraged as having no power in their hands at all. How often they complain and sigh in vain: "Alas! I am nothing of myself. Unless God gives me a heart and strength, what can I do? I can do nothing."

To these I say, these conclusions are ill drawn from a true principle, which is this: all is of God, and by nature we are dead. But it is ill urged in this case, for the regenerate have a power to do good, as appears:

1. Because they are living, and all life has a power to act.

2. Else there is no specific difference between a

regenerate man and an unregenerate man, if both were still dead and without strength.

3. Grace is a renewing of that image of God and holiness which we lost in Adam, Ephesians 4:24. But that was a power to do what God required. Therefore, as far as that image is repaired, so far there is a power.

4. Else we should not have as much benefit by the second Adam as we had by the first. The first would have communicated his power to do good, and, being corrupted, communicates power to sin. Therefore, much more by Christ have we a power to do good in our measure.

OBJECTION. It may be objected that it is said in John 15:5: "Without Me ye can do nothing." So it seems that we have no power in ourselves.

SOLUTION. The meaning is that unless you are implanted into Christ, you can do nothing. The words "without Me" signify "separate from Me" or "apart from Me," and intimate only this: that till we are knit to Christ we are but dead and barren branches. And so Christ explained Himself in verse 4: "As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in Me."

OBJECTION. Philippians 2:13 says, "It is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure."

ANSWER. The place proves what I say, that the saints have a power. It is true, it is of God; therefore we should work out our salvation in humility, not boasting in ourselves; for all is received of God. More fully, God is said to work the will and the deed:

1. By giving habitual grace, a renewed frame of heart.

2. In exciting and strengthening this grace.

And both of these are ever afforded to the saints; only the latter fluctuates more and less according to His pleasure. So that in the worst times, a Christian has a power to do good, though not alike at all times. And you must use this power and put forth yourselves as you are able, or else you cannot with reason expect His help. A ship has instruments of motion (though not an internal principle), and if the mariner would have help by winds, he must loose his cables and hoist his sails. So must you do or else you may lie still.

Now, that which you are to do is:

1. Stir up yourselves, for God has promised to meet you and reach out His hand to help you, if you are not wanting to yourselves. It is certain that a godly man cannot, by the strength of his endeavors alone, raise up his soul or recover his loss. Though he should lay mountain upon mountain, and pile endeavor upon endeavor, yet he could not reach the life he seeks. But the strength of all our endeavors is the grace and promise of God. As endeavors without God *cannot*, so God without endeavors *will* not. Therefore labor to quicken yourselves, that is, work upon your heart by your understandings. As the striking of the flint and steel together begets fire, so the meeting of these two faculties, having an internal life in them, quickens the soul. God has made the understanding the guide and treasure of the soul. Upon this altar lies the fire of God. If these coals are blown up and cast upon the heart, they will warm, melt, purge, and quicken it.

There are two things in a renewed mind:

First, a treasure of habitual knowledge. It is the ark

of God in which the tables of the law are kept. The mystery of the gospel is engraved on it so that the mind is as the head to the body, which gives sense and motion to all the members. Spiritual truths are the spirits in the head for the quickening of the soul.

Second, there is a power to use and improve these truths by meditation and application, to awaken and provoke the will. As a man has power to counsel and persuade another, so he may do this to himself by this discursive faculty. So we see David pleading with himself, sometimes chiding: "Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted in me?" Psalm 42:5. Sometimes he excites himself to duty: "Praise the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, praise His holy Name," Psalm 103:1; sometimes he is comforting himself in God: "Return unto thy rest, O my soul; for the Lord hath dealt bountifully with thee," Psalm 116:7. It was a usual thing with him to talk with himself.

The mind has a language as well as the body. "My reins teach me in the night season," Psalm 16:7. And he found so much good in this way that he put all upon it: "Commune with your own heart upon your bed, and be still," Psalm 4:4. Bring out those truths which are laid up in you and whet them upon yourselves. God has fitted you with faculties and powers to do this. You have an apprehensive faculty to lay in truths and notions—a retentive faculty to lay them up and a recollective faculty to lay them out. You have not only power of intelligence, but also of reminiscence, that you may call to mind and ponder things known, and call them out of the cells in which they lie to revive the heart. The understanding is to the heart as the

breast is to the child or as the stomach is to the body: all is fed by it. Set therefore upon your hearts with quickening thoughts, for as rubbing and chaffing the hands or other parts with hot oils is a means to recover them when they are numbed, so the plying of the heart with stirring thoughts and enforcing arguments is a means to revive it. Among all thoughts there are none more prevalent than of sins past, of heaven, hell, eternity, the love of God, and the death of Christ. These are strong comforts to cheer up the spirits.

To help you in this work of dealing with your hearts, let me propound these rules:

Make every notion practical. Let the heart share with the understanding. Count not yourselves better for a thousand notions unless there is some heat in them. Mind your hearts and strive to gain by all things. If you read or hear or discourse, let your aim and desire be to better your hearts.

Be frequent in thoughts, for mindless men are lifeless.

Be ponderous, for slight thoughts are weak in working.

Pitch upon things which most concern you. All are good, but some are more seasonable.

Observe the temper of your heart, what may work most. All thoughts have not the same efficacy in them; all the constitutions of men's souls differ. Learn to know your tempers.

When thoughts begin to take hold, ply them. Keep the fire burning, and let it not go out for want of blowing.

Arm your thoughts with prayer. Beseech God to be in them.

Thus then employ your minds. This is God's way; God will keep His method which He has set. He has appointed the mind to this office and He will not pass over it. Kings do all by their officers. God comes not Himself into the inward temple but by this gate. All His workings upon the heart are in a rational way, suitable to the state of the creature. He deals with the heart by the mind, and upon the whole man by the heart. As the first pipe takes in water for itself and for all the rest, whatever is in the cistern of the heart is conveyed by the mind. This is the spring in the watch of your souls. Wind this up and all the wheels will move.

Attend to the ordinances. I will say no more of this having covered it before.

Take the help of the saints. Crave their counsels and their prayers. Use their company, for they are living and will impart their life. They will be helpful to the infirmed; they have a spirit of compassion to succor the needy. Woe to him who is alone; if he falls, who shall raise him up? It may be that your forsaking the assembly of these has brought you into this withering state. God has appointed the saints unto fellowship, and when they knit not, but carelessly, whether out of pride, vain fears, envy, or any similar ungodly principle, hang off from each other, they shall not prosper.

Do your first works. This is the counsel of Christ to a backsliding church, Revelation 2:5. Do your first works for quantity, as much as you did. You see abatement has impoverished you; therefore work harder to make up yourselves again. Do them also as much as you are able, for quality, as you did before. Remember from whence you are fallen; call to mind with what fear, with what reverence, with what diligence, with

what intention of spirit, with what tenderness you were wont to do all. So do it again.

OBJECTION. Alas, I cannot. This is my misery. If I could do as I have done, I could rejoice.

ANSWER 1. You may do more than you do.

ANSWER 2. See if the fault lies not more in the defect of will than of power, and stir up yourselves. If you were more willing, things would be easier.

ANSWER 3. The more you strive, the more you will gain. The root of discouragement is unbelief. When God bids you repent, He knows how little your strength is and how hard your hearts are. So when He bids you pray, He knows what your infirmities are—both those of infancy and defect of grace, and those of sickness by declining from Him. And His intent is not that you should work out these alone, but He calls upon you to put your strength to the task, and He will join with you, and will go hand in hand with you. Therefore awaken yourselves and be encouraged; for if you are doing, then He will work with you, in you, for you, so you may recover yourselves again. And what are all your sorrows and labors to this recompense? If God will return again, you will think all labor and pains well bestowed. Oh, how sweet will a clear understanding and an established faith be after such mists of darkness and unbelief! How sweet will liberty be after so long a time of cruel servitude! How sweet will victory and rest be after so long and so bloody a war! Now the ordinances will be as the green pastures on which your souls shall feed and delight themselves. Now you who did dwell in the dust, and were compassed about with hellish lusts and unclean spirits, shall be filled with the Spirit of Christ and shall converse with God. It will be a

sweet time when all things shall become new; when your diseases shall be turned to health and you shall renew your strength as the eagles; when Christ shall come into His ancient throne and rule you with the scepter of His grace.

And I pray God that all who have been deserted may seek Him and find Him. This shall suffice for the first sort of spiritual desertions: real ones. Now follows another sort, if I may so call it: desertions only in appearance.

Chapter 30

Of desertions in appearance only, with the causes of mistakes in this case

Having finished the first sort of desertions, or God's withdrawing the quickening influences of His Spirit, which are when men are really so deserted, I now come to those desertions which seem such but are not. A godly man sometimes may draw sad conclusions against himself, and conceives that God has departed from him when it is not so. This mistake proceeds from:

1. Fearfulness. This abounds in some more than in others. The matter is weighty, and in such cases man is apt to fear. One upon a tower, though the place is strong and he is sure, yet when he looks down is appalled at the dreadfulness of the precipice and counts himself in danger. This fear is increased in men, because they know they may sink into such depths, and they see many have fallen. Now, as in a time of pestilence and great mortality, fear so takes hold of some that they think sometimes they are stricken, and that they also are going to the house of silence and darkness when they are really in a healthful state. So men think sometimes in this case. And the tempers of some spirits are such that they are apt to fear there are dusky clouds of melancholy darkening their reason, so that they think

with that melancholy king that they, of men, have become beasts, and so are ready to depose themselves from that princely state which they lived in to feed with oxen. And in all this there is a working of the prince of darkness, laboring to hide the light and increase the darkness and sadness of a fearful soul. And this fear being raised creates dismal visions and apprehensions, so that a man seems to himself to be metamorphosed, and thinks he is as one cast out from God when yet his case is good.

2. Mistakes in the cause of present deadness. When they are clogged with indisposedness and ill-disposedness, they lay this to God's withdrawing Himself which, indeed, is the fruit of their own carelessness, slothfulness, and untowardness. They take not pains with themselves, but suffer their hearts to die and be depraved; and then they cry out that God has forsaken them. There is an aptness in men to charge God, but awaken yourselves lest God withdraw indeed.

3. Misjudging themselves. They think worse of themselves than they are, and there are sundry things which occasion them to make this mistake.

Spiritual poverty. A poor man is apt to complain, and a humble man is apt to think meanly of himself. "There is one that maketh himself rich, yet hath nothing; there is one that maketh himself poor, yet hath great riches." Some men's hearts are high when their worth is low. The emptiest ears stand highest, but the richest mines lie low. A humble Christian is a rich treasure, yet he thinks he is worth but little. But I must tell you, all is not gold that glitters; all in a godly man that seems to be

grace is not. There is a bastard humility as well as a genuine humility. True humility is judicious; though it thinks meanly of itself, yet justly. It judges not against truth. False humility is distempered and errs in judgment. I say, it is a melancholy distemper in the habit of humility which can see nothing but ill sights. It can see no good. When it looks this way, it cannot see wood for trees; it ever is in subtraction in its account of real worth and matter of encouragement, but ever in multiplication and addition, beyond measure, of faults and wants and all matter of discouragement. Ask him how he does, and he will tell you he is a very beggar, a miserable man, bankrupt, full of sin, and empty of God. He is nothing, has nothing, sees nothing, tastes nothing, and does nothing. Yea, he will tell you (but who can believe him who knows his rich worth?) that he is worse than nothing.

Hungering and thirsting after more grace. This is a sweet companion of humility, but it has this property to lead the soul still outward; it is so serious in seeking what it has not that it minds not what it has. A covetous man is ever poor because he is ever wanting; he forgets what is behind and is still pressing toward that which is before. It is the fault of such as are filled with strong desires after God that they much forget what they have received. Pride ever feeds on what it has, but humility sees best what it has not. But you should remember that strong desires after God are strong evidences of His presence. Other things are first desired and then attained, but spiritual things are first attained and then desired. Without these the heart would rest without God.

And as it cannot be without some chief good, so it would seek it outside of God. But when it is wheeled about with a strong bias towards God, doubtless God is there.

Much love. This also is near in blood unto the two former, and is an occasion sometimes of sad thoughts in the heart. Love has qualities which expose the heart to trouble. It is jealous, ever fearful lest it should lose the happiness which now it has in enjoying God. This jealousy, sometimes rising high, inclines one to think that God is gone. It is the nature of a fearful heart to fall from care to fear, from fear to jealousies, from jealous suspicions to sad conclusions. The mother, out of the vehemency of affection for her child, if he is out of her sight, first takes care, then is filled with fears and sad conjectures, and at last cries out, "Where is my child?" Love is liberal and is never satisfied; it would still do better and be better. And the more it is, the less it seems to itself. It is so enlarged in dispositions and resolutions to do good, that, as it knows it cannot do enough, it is apt to think it does almost nothing. Hence many complaints arise with lovers that it is not with them as in former days: that which they did before seemed much then because love was not much, and now all seems little because love is great. But you should consider that God is much there where He works much, and that this flame of love is blown up by Him, for "God is love," 1 John 4:16, that is to say, He is the Fountain and Author of love. As love is eminently and infinitely in Him, so it flows from Him, "and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him."

Chapter 31

*The false rules of men's judging themselves,
causing mistakes in this case*

Judging by false rules is another cause of mistakes. For instance:

FALSE RULE 1. Men judge that they are deserted, and fear they are in a state of declension, because they have less quickness and vivacity, as they conceive, than they have had. I confess this is an ill sign, yet this may be where there is no just cause of such sad conclusions. And to satisfy such, let me propound four things:

First, distinguish between God's working in gifts and His working in graces. God is sometimes pleased to carry up the gifts of men very high when their spiritual life has no proportionate elevation. We see He is much this way, sometimes in men who are not good. Gifts are given to the members for the body; and for others' sakes oftentimes He pours out great measures, and bears them on with a full gale of assistance. And when the work is done to which those gifts serve, then God may withdraw. I doubt not but many faithful preachers may find a weakness and dullness in their gifts as a sign of judgment upon the people; for the deafness of the hearers, He smites the messengers dumb, and so, in sundry cases, it may happen. It is said Christ "could there do

(in His own country) no mighty work," Mark 6:5. His hands were, as it were, tied and bound. His power was suspended because of their unbelief. And where God had some great work to do, He opened the hearts of the apostles and much enlarged their spirits. Wisely, therefore, distinguish between gifts and graces. Though you may not be able to do as you have done, yet see into the frame and disposition of your hearts towards God, for that may continue when the other fades. It may be you have no occasion for the use of gifts as heretofore, and unless they are used they inevitably grow dull, as the most expert musician, by disuse, may lose his skill. But note here that where there is occasion for use of gifts, and they are not stirred up, but suffered by idleness and carelessness to be quenched, this is a sin against the Spirit and breeds a damper not only upon gifts, but upon grace.

Second, God may, and sometimes does give more full assistance to the graces of His people than He will perpetually continue; and the abatement of this is no just cause for concluding that God has forsaken them.

In times of seeking Him, and of mediate conversation in prayer and meditation and the like, there is a fuller taste of Him than at other times. A godly man enjoys God in all things, but especially in duties of piety. There is an evident reason why a man has more of God then, because grace is now acting and feeding upon God. Duties are the meals of a Christian, and other actions are his work. He comes in duties to revive strength; in other things he uses it, as the body gets strength and refreshment by eat-

ing, and draws it out in working, and then comes to repair it again by eating. Times of immediate approach to God are meeting times. There is a mutual visit between God and the soul, and this is the proper end of these things: that God and the soul may meet together. It would be a happy thing if those impressions, which the soul receives at such times, were abiding; but such is our condition here that we must hunger and eat, and when we are filled, we shall hunger again. Heaven is the place of constant life; there it is a continual feast, but here we cannot have it so. The mind is but finite, and since it must converse with other things besides God we cannot expect that it should be so constantly filled with Him. A man enjoys Him as much as he seriously minds Him. Therefore, they who neglect duties, or slightly perform them, must lose much of God. But one cannot be expected to carry such a spirit in other employments and other actions as in conversing with God, though the more a man has in duties, the better he will be in all things, and the fitter to meet God in His seasons.

In times of great necessity, God is wont to afford more of Himself than at other times—when temptations, afflictions, and dangers are many and great. A father, when his child comes to a ditch or deep way which he cannot pass, takes the child into his arms; but when he has gotten over, he sets him down again. So God, in such hard cases, ministers more abundant aid which He does not continue always. Hence we see that even the weakest of the flock become lions, and those who seemed to be but little prove to be mighty champions, victoriously con-

quering all difficulties and treading under foot the glory and terror of the world, yea, the fears of death itself. These, by the transcendent nobleness and high courage of spirit (so far above their ordinary pitch), declare that there is another Power with them than their own which makes them so gloriously to exceed not others only, but themselves also. As the Spirit came upon Samson when the Philistines came upon him, so it is in this case. But God does not always so offer Himself. When the necessities of His people are less, then He gives them their accustomed pension. When Israel was in the desert, a place barren of comforts but full of troubles and exigencies, God, by His mighty power, worked greater things for them than ever after; yet He was still their God. At the first coming of the gospel, the way being new and so subject to cavils and persecutions, which Christ knew the world would raise against it, He poured out more of His Spirit, and wrought with more glorious power than in succeeding ages; yet the promise of Christ stands firm, "Lo, I am with you, even unto the end of the world."

Third, at or about the time of conversion, there may be more quickness and vivacity of spirit than afterwards; and hence many conclude that they are sinfully abated, and that they are fallen from their first love. Although I doubt not but that it is indeed a just complaint in many, yet I believe that some charge themselves without cause. Note therefore that by two things there may be a greater flush of affection at that time than in a later time:

First is the newness of the condition. Naturally new things affect much; the suddenness of the

change, to be translated from blackness of darkness into marvelous light, greatly affects them. In this case, distinguish between solid affection and fleeting passion. The soul of a new convert is put into a kind of astonishment, to see so strange and sudden a metamorphosis, as if he had become another man and the whole world were turned upside down, so that heaven stands where the earth did, and the earth in the heaven's place. High things are made low and low things are set on high. These things put the soul into amazement, but much of this will wear off.

Suppose a man was going to execution in great heaviness and fears, and on the way his pardon, with promise of the prince's favor, was brought to him. I think I see his heart leaping, his spirit dancing, and the man filled with abundant joy; but mark him, and in process of time you will see much of this vanishing, yet his life is still as dear as ever. Or suppose two persons married, sweetly joined in dear affections, and, after many dangers and difficulties, happily enjoying each other's desired company. What a flush of joy; what a violence of affection is mutually expressed! In time much of this ceases, but true love still remains. Count not all that grace, which is working at the time of the first conjunction of Christ and the soul. There is much passion in it, yet such as is holy and good. But as it was stirred up on a special occasion, so, the occasion ceasing, it may cease and yet the case may be good. The Jews were as those who dreamed when they were first delivered, but that dream did not always last. The lame man, when he was first healed, was seen "walking and

leaping, and praising God," Acts 3:8. But though he was always glad of his recovery, yet he did not always leap and dance.

God does more at the first conversion for His people. He gives more assistance, for now a man is entering upon a new way, a way of difficulties, and all the power of hell comes out, as Pharaoh, to recover their escaping captives. Therefore God covers them with His hand, and fills them with strength to grapple with this legion and break through these difficulties.

God often pours in much comfort at that time. When the prodigal was returned, his father made him very welcome and called to his servant, "Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet. And bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat, and be merry. For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found," Luke 15:22-24. Here was more than of necessity; not only shoes, but a ring; not only clothes, but the best robes; here is feasting and joy and cheer. This son was as welcome afterwards, yet had not this entertainment every day. It may be that some of that comfortable presence of God which He then affords, some of that abundant joy, may cease because it was given upon a special occasion; and yet no just cause is thereby given to raise such sad thoughts that God has forsaken you.

Fourth, there may be less activity, not from change of the Spirit but of nature. The body may be more feeble; sickness or age may clip the wings of activity, and take off much of a man's former vigor. The body is the instrument of the soul. And as he

who rides upon a weak and tired horse cannot ride post, so when the oil of natural life and vigor begins to waste it cannot burn as clearly as it formerly did.

We see in sickness, when the natural strength is decayed, how the loss of spirits degrades them from that high luster wherein they were admired in the time of health. By the way, it may be a caveat and warning to careless and dilatory spirits to be better husbands in opportunity, and while their blood is full in their veins and their arteries are rich in spirits, to take hold of time by this golden forelock and make their voyage while they have full tide and wind, lest, when death creeps on and by diseases has dismounted them from their vigor, they find darkness and sleepiness to bind them in chains.

But for those whose feet ran in the ways of God, and who were as the winged bird when youthfulness and vigor were in them and their breasts flowed with milk and their bones were full of marrow, though now, nature being decayed, they seem less, yet their case is safe and good. Alas, “when the keepers of the house tremble, and the strong men bow themselves, and those who look out of the windows are darkened; and when the almond tree shall flourish, and the grasshopper is a burden, and desire fails; when the silver cord is loosing and the golden bowl breaking”; when nature is brought to this low state, how can there be that liveliness of soul which was before? Ecclesiastes 12:3–6.

FALSE RULE 2. Men think they are in this sad condition because they do less than they have done. And I say that this is an ill sign, simply considered, because all things work as they are. And I desire not

to be mistaken here, for I would not be so injurious to God or cruel to men as to nourish a slothful and backsliding person in his apostasy and carelessness. But I say that it is possible less may be done than has been, yet without all loss of life. For besides that which has been said before, I add, by way of satisfaction, these considerations:

1. It may be that that which was done before was more than should have been. As other men are apt to fall short, so a godly man is apt to exceed, especially where his necessities pinch him and when the fears of God lie heavy upon his soul. Then he neither minds business, nor friends, nor himself, but is so intent upon this one thing, as if it were the only thing which he had to mind. I have discussed at length before how a man may know when he does so much that he may, with comfort, walk in his way.

2. The abundance of doing is to rise and fall according to occasions. When a man is in straits, he may and must do much, yea, more than is required at other times.

3. God may give less opportunity for the same abundance of holy duties at all times. He may put them upon such conditions and employments as may take them up more—as a woman, when she is married, by the variety of occasions that attend that state may be deprived of some opportunities which she had when she was free. There is a difference between a wife and a virgin. “She that is unmarried careth for the things that belong to the Lord, how she may please the Lord; but she that is married careth for the things of the world, how she may please her husband,” 1 Corinthians 7:34. The Apos-

tle does not mean that the married care not for the things of God, but that that condition will bring distractions, yea, and by God's appointment puts them upon such things that they cannot have that fullness of time for exercises of godliness which they had in a single state. In all abatements of spiritual action, a special eye must be had to the cause; for if either we thrust ourselves into a thicket of busyness unnecessarily, or have lost that edge of holy desires and dispositions which we had, we have here cause to lament our distance from God.

Chapter 32

Other false rules causing mistakes in judgment

FALSE RULE 3. Because men feel greater workings of lusts and corruptions than before, they think that God is not with them as before. But by way of addressing these concerns, as I must needs grant that this also is an ill sign, yet I will demonstrate that it may be the case of a man who is as full of God as ever.

1. Distinguish between corruptions formally considered and effectively considered. There may be many motions to sin which are not corruptions; they are corruptions when they corrupt and deprave the heart. Christ Himself had motions to sin, though not rising from Himself, but caused by the tempter; so that His soul was but as a glass of pure water jogged. And though the motions to sin which arise from that sinfulness in us are formally, and in interpretation of the law, sins, yet, unless they take hold of the heart and infect it, they are not corruptions, nor such as argue less of God. Nay, as when a man lives in an unhealthful and infectious air the power of God is much seen in keeping him up in health, so the power of the Spirit is much put forth in that soul which is kept sound from the plague in the midst of infectious and poisonous workings, and foamings of that sinfulness within.

This was the Apostle's case: he had some burning lust like a splint or coal in his flesh, but God kept him. "My grace is sufficient for thee: for My strength is made perfect in weakness," 2 Corinthians 12:9.

2. A man may have more occasions to stir corruptions than before; and occasions to lusts are as wind to the seas, or fuel to the fire. It may be that you thought better of yourselves than you had cause to; you might think you had more meekness when you were less angry, but it may be that your anger was not so much, not because your meekness was great but because your offenses were few. Know that occasions do not so much beget as bring forth corruptions.

3. It may be that your lusts have not more life, but they seem so because you have more ability to use them.

There is more light to see them. At first, grace is busy about the outward man and grosser sins; but afterwards it descends into the lower and more retired parts of the soul, and because the candle of God searches the hidden depths and finds there still new worlds of sin, you are apt to think you are worse than you were. The puddle smells when it is stirred. But as the sun shows a great deal of dust in the air, yet you should know it was there before, though not seen before.

There is more sense. When there was but little life many lusts might work unfelt, but now every touch of sin is felt, and so you may think amiss that you have more, when indeed the cause is not the increase of sin but of grace. The Apostle made noth-

ing of lusts and many other things till grace had incorporated itself and made him quick to feel the bitter and stinging workings of it, Romans 7.

4. It may be that your life has been in a continual tumult and warfare, with great afflictions of body and mind so that corruptions had no time to work; but now, being brought to a greater calm, they begin to stir. In a tempestuous day, the birds hide themselves in the hedges, and the conies in their holes; but when the storms are past, then they come forth. While Rome was held in wars, and while the Athenians were busied by the Lacedaemonians, their own dissensions and internal evils lay asleep; but when they had rest, then that which lay hidden broke forth to their great hurt. Men who are seriously laden with weighty concerns, living in crowds of affairs, or distracted with great cares and fears, are free from many vices in their lives which break out when they have more liberty. Consider well if there is not some eminent change in your conditions, for a calm state is subject to many inconveniences of this kind; but it is not because lusts have more life, but because they have more advantage.

5. God may permit Satan to work in men, and suffer their corruptions to be drawn out, that they may be more mortified. We take up arms and fight much when we see our enemy coming upon us. If the enemy had kept in his trenches and holds, he would have been safe; but by coming out he falls into our hands. The rats and mice in their holes are secure, but when they show themselves by coming out they are taken and killed. When therefore the snuff that you thought was extinguished smells and begins to

bud again, it is that you may make surer work in more full extinction.

FALSE RULE 4. Men are too much swayed by the opinion which others have of them. If they are censured or rejected or discountenanced by such, it makes deep impressions upon them, especially if they are near, beloved, wise, and godly to such as know them. There is a disposition in a man to be much affected with the judgment others make of him. Hence come those inquiries into others' breasts to see what shape we hold in their mirrors—as the emperor acted dead and caused his funeral to be solemnly performed, his hearse erected, his followers clad in mourning, and himself carried as a dead corpse so that in the meantime, through a secret passage, he might observe what respect he had in his subjects' hearts.

Hence also arise suspicious and secret dejections of mind upon conjecture of disesteem and disapproval by others. Hence also vain glorying and supercilious elation of mind upon the applause and fame which men have with others. And indeed, to be approved by wise and good men is both desirable and honorable; the concurrence of their testimony is a glorious thing. And, for the same reason, the disfavor and ill opinion of such to an ingenuous spirit is an unhappiness. But sometimes there is too much weight laid on these things. If the opinion and judgment of others were infallible, reason would require that we mold our thoughts of ourselves to the model of other men's opinions; but others are not always competent and sufficient judges in this case. Therefore, as their sentence is

not to be wholly neglected, so it is not to be overvalued.

God sometimes reveals His displeasure by stirring up His servants against men. When the master of the family would estrange himself from someone, he bids his children and servants to show him no countenance. If this is your case, you should humbly and wisely consider it and say, as David when Shimei reviled him, "The Lord hath bidden him," 2 Samuel 16:11. Consider yourselves, and do not rest in the sentence which men give; but appeal from them to the supreme Judge, and study to approve yourselves to God, for "He is a Jew, which is one inwardly . . . whose praise is not of men, but of God," Romans 2:29.

FALSE RULE 5. Men think they grow not, and hence conclude sadly against themselves. They think the time has been when they thrived more in grace, and that therefore they are in this deplorable state of which we speak. But here may be a great mistake, and for the relief of such let me propound some considerations tending to rectify their judgment in this case:

1. The growth in some graces, sometimes in weak spirits, hinders the discerning of growth in others. Besides that spiritual poverty and humility which I have spoken of, the increase of light proves sometimes an impediment.

The more light, the more weight lies upon the soul concerning the matters of eternity, which sometimes raises up care and solicitousness to such a height that a man is disposed to fear and jealousy concerning his condition.

The more light, the more duties are discovered. A Christian sees not all his work at first. God raises up His way to his eye by degrees. A child is put at first to such things as are proportionate to his age and strength, and as he grows in years to more capacity and ability, so he is put on to greater things. Now the godly, finding still a disproportion in their strength to their work, think that they grow not. This would be as if he who takes the measure of his height in a tree, coming afterwards to measure his growth again and finding that he does not exceed, yea, scarcely reaches his mark, should conclude that he has not grown. This would be no good reasoning, because the tree has grown also. Or, as if one who tries his strength by shaking a tree when it is young comes back some years later, and upon trial, finding that he cannot stir the tree more, yea, it may be, not so much, should conclude he has not increased in strength. He would be judging amiss, because he is not considering that the tree is also grown more strong, and is less apt to be moved. The task of a godly man grows; his relations, state, temper, calling, company, temptations, and such like things cause great variations in his work. And God uses a gracious indulgence in not imposing so much in the infancy as in the progress of His people. As many things are not imposed at first, so the spiritualness and exactness of duties are more and more discovered. Hence it is that the godly, laboring still with weakness and disproportion of strength, think (though causelessly) that they grow not.

2. There are different growths.

There is a growth upward in hope, peace, and joy.

There is a growth downward, as a tree that grows in the root. So many grow in humility and lowliness, and hence, as I have shown, they are apt to think meanly, yea, more meanly of themselves than is fitting.

There is a growth in bulk, as when a tree grows bigger.

There is a growth in maturity, as a child who grows for a great while more in bulk and quantity than in ripeness and dexterity; but afterward he grows more in perfection of parts than extension of parts. He grows more strong, active, apprehensive, and wise. So a godly man grows at first much in the bulk of knowledge and grace, but after these he becomes more mature to know the things which he knows better, more practically and vitally, and to be able to do what he did more spiritually and perfectly. An apple, for a time, grows bigger and bigger; but afterward it grows better and sweeter. Now men, not discerning this, are apt to think that they grow not when they do.

3. Men often mistake in the judgment of their growths by being too hasty. Proper judgment of growth is by comparing oneself with oneself; but if a man measures himself one day, and a week hence measures himself again, his growth, though it is real, will be imperceptible. When you compare yourselves with yourselves, if you find no growth, then look upon yourselves at a great distance. If you cannot discern growth by comparing yourselves with what you were a year ago, then see what you were two years, or three years, or several years past. And now tell me if you find not yourselves better, if not sensi-

bly increased in the bulk, yet at least in maturity and spiritualness of your graces?

4. Growth is not always equal. As, in nature, a child shoots up sometimes more in one year than afterward in two or three years, so grace grows not so fast some times as at other. As in nature, diseases, wounds, obstructions, or ill diet may keep down, so the soul by distempers, falls, or ill diet may be hindered in her spiritual growth. But a man must take heed of concluding in such cases that God has deserted him. For, as I have said before, it is not every fit of unproficiency which argues a man is in such a state. Yea, all things considered, though the growth in times past exceeds the present growth, yet, considering the abatement of means of growth and other strong impediments to growth, it may be that a man may have as full a presence of God with him, though he, for a time, grows not as he did.

Be not therefore hasty in passing sentence. For as many, through slackness and slowness to judgment of themselves, are declined but know it not, so many others, by hastiness in judgment, conclude they are deserted when they are not.

Chapter 33

*The second sort of spiritual desertions:
loss of comfort*

Now, I come to the other head of spiritual desertions, the eclipsing of the comfort of the soul. This is oftentimes the sad case of the saints. The sons of peace and consolation are often men of sorrows, cast from a paradise of comfort into a wilderness of discomfort; wandering in a maze of perplexed thoughts, heavy cares, afflicting fears, bitter sorrows, and vexed with the roars and yells of devouring beasts; yea, rent and wounded, and almost becoming a prey unto them.

Before I come to treat this mournful state in which the sweet streams of comfort fail, leaving the soul as a parched heath, I must premise some considerations about the comfort of the soul: the nature of it, the cause of it, and the defectibility of it.

First, the nature of it. It is a cheeriness or satisfaction of the soul; the name shows the thing. Comfort is from a word which imports strength; and what is comfort but strengthening of the heart. It is expressed by strengthening in the Scriptures, Psalm 27:14; 52:7; 104:15; 1 Samuel 23:16; Job 4:4; Isaiah 35:3. And discomfort is the enfeebling or weakening of the soul so that it cannot walk in its way, but falls and faints. But comfort keeps her upon the wing

and maintains, yea, increases her strength. It is the life of the soul. So when Naomi would express that Boaz should be a comfort to Ruth, she said, "He shall be a restorer of thy life," Ruth 4:15. For take away the contentment of the heart and it dies. The damned live in hell, yet because it is a life without comfort they are said to die and their estate is reckoned a state of death. They are dead while they live. Hence David called it quickening in Psalm 119:50, 93: "Thy Word hath quickened me." Restoring comfort to mourners is called reviving: "I dwell with them to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones," Isaiah 57:15. So it is said of Jacob when he heard of his son, and saw the wagons which he had sent, "The spirit of Jacob their father revived," Genesis 45:27. Those words of Ezra are similar: "Grace hath been shewed . . . that our God may lighten our eyes, and give us a little reviving in our bondage," Ezra 9:8.

Comfort, in a word, is that strength and life which the object contributes to the heart. There is then a difference of comfort according to the difference of objects. Every good thing which a man has, either in expectation or possession, yields a comfort proportionate to its worth and a man's portion in it. All good things in the world are as the fence of the soul, or her fort against invasions of fear, care, trouble, and misery. So that as he who has the best guard, strong and able soldiers, is strongest and safest, so the heart is so much strengthened as it has of good. Then the best things yield the best comfort, as the freest fountain yields the fullest streams. But forasmuch as not only the property of the object, but

the portion also is the measure of comfort, therefore, according to the degrees of enjoyment of God, so are the degrees of comfort. Those in heaven, being fully possessed of God, have a fullness of comfort: "In Thy presence is fullness of joy," Psalm 16:11. But the saints in the world have but an imperfect comfort.

Comfort is not stable. Sometimes it is gone, and a day of gladness is turned into a night of heaviness so that they complain as the church: "The joy of our heart is ceased; our dance is turned into mourning," Lamentations 5:15.

Comfort is not full. It is mixed with various fears and sorrows which, like waters of Marah, flow into the soul. For though the object of comfort is sufficient, yet the assurance and enjoyment of it are deficient. So that as the soul is comforted because it has God in a measure, so it is troubled because it wants still, not being so sure and full of Him as it desires.

There are three degrees of spiritual comfort:

1. *Peace*. When a man agrees with himself, and is freed from that war and combustion which were within him by incursion of fears and terrors of soul, this is a rest in the soul—a rest, I say, not from motion, but from commotion and tumult. An uncomfortable state is a tumultuous state. "My bowels boiled, and rested not," Job 30:27. He was like the sea, moving and working. It is a tempestuous condition. "Oh thou afflicted, tossed with tempest, and not comforted," Isaiah 54:11. Comfort is the ebbing of the storm, the hushing of the winds, the stilling of the raging sea. When a man has comfort in God, he has a twofold rest:

Mental. While God is hidden, the mind is agitated, and rolls to and fro to seek Him, hunting and beating itself out in running after Him; but when it sees Him, then it is quieted and says as David, "Return unto thy rest, O my soul," Psalm 116:7.

Emotional. The heart sits in heaviness till it recovers what it has lost; unquietness abides with it. If the mind is puzzled, the heart is troubled. If the pilot is disconsolate, how are the passengers afflicted! What tears, what paleness, what wringing, what fainting may one see there! What sighing, crying, howling, and screeching may one hear! In such a troubled case is the heart when God hides Himself and will not be found, like "Rachel weeping for her children, who would not be comforted, because they are not," Jeremiah 31:15. But when the soul sees God, then it is quiet; the cries of the heart are stilled; her wound is healed; her pain ceases, and all is calm.

2. Joy. This is a higher degree of comfort. Peace is negative comfort; joy is positive comfort. Peace is a cessation or mitigation of trouble, but joy is a higher contentment. Peace is like the ebbing of the storm; joy like the breaking out of the sun. A woman in travail, when pain ceases, is at rest; but when a child is born, she has joy, John 16:21. A condemned man, when he is pardoned, is at peace, and his fears and sorrows cease; but if with his pardon he attains preferment, he rejoices. There is a kind of joy in peace, and so joy is the fruit of peace and rest. But still it is a further contentment than mere peace. Sorrow is turned into joy, John 16:21, but first it is turned into peace. Joy is the noontide of comfort,

and peace is the morning; peace is a return to itself, after it had been tossed and driven from its desired state. Joy is an assent above itself; peace is a rest within itself. Joy carries the heart higher; it is a kind of elation which, if it is strong, is called exultation, a kind of vaulting and leaping of the mind, yea, a leaping out of itself. Peace is contentment, when the heart is bounded by its condition and is not effused and poured out of its own channel, as the river is when the channel is too scanty or not passable. But joy is an enlargement of the heart, as it is called in Psalm 119:32. The heart opens itself, and is filled with the thing it loves.

3. Triumph and glorying, which is joy elevated. And this consists in two things:

A victoriousness and magnanimous conquest of heart over all things. When the heart is raised to this pitch of comfort in God, all the world is brought under a man; and the greatest evils cannot daunt. There is such a gradation as we speak of in Romans 5: "We have peace with God," verse 1; "We rejoice in hope," verse 2; "And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also," verse 3.

A boasting, and holy vaunting of heart. The word which is used by the Apostle for glorying imports a jutting out or strutting of the neck. It is often used by the Apostle for boastings, as in 2 Corinthians 9:2; 10:8; Romans 2:17, 23; 11:18. A man boasts when he is full of that which he thinks excellent, and to add worth and excellency to him; when a man counts it not only happiness but honor to have such a God, and is not only not ashamed of Him, but in his account magnified by Him; when he is able to hold up

His Spirit against the proffers and terrors of the world, and professes to heaven and earth, amidst all blasphemies, jealousies, threats, sufferings, and glory which are in the world, that God is good, sufficient, worthy of all love, fear, and trust. I say, when the heart comes with undauntedness and full contentment, and sets God against all, this is a holy boasting of God or in God, like that of David: "I will bless the Lord at all times; His praise shall be continually in my mouth. My soul shall make her boast in the Lord," Psalm 34:1-2. "In God we boast all the day long, and praise Thy name for ever," Psalm 44:8; also Psalm 64:10.

Chapter 34

The causes and root of comfort

Now, from the nature of spiritual comfort, let us descend to the cause and root of it. And that we may not run too large a compass, we will confine ourselves to the causes: efficient and material.

The efficient cause is various; but we will only pitch upon the principal working cause, which is God, who is called "the God of all comfort," 2 Corinthians 1:3. Here I will discuss briefly two things: that it is of God, and how it is wrought by God.

That comfort is of God appears thus:

Suppose a man is dead in trespasses and sins; here is required the same power to give comfort which is to give life.

Suppose one is troubled in spirit, vexed with fears; here no less power can comfort than the power of God.

For comfort in this case is an act of supremacy. In a civil state, none can take off chains of imprisonment but he who put them on. All creatures in heaven and earth cannot loose him whom God has bound. Though all should speak well of someone, yet if God frowns, chides, smites, or condemns, this prevails because He is supreme. Nothing can comfort but to have what God only can give, such as pardon of sin and deliverance from hell, and to know what God only can reveal, such as whether sin is par-

doned and God is reconciled. These things God only knows, and none can know them but those to whom He reveals them. And further, when God afflicts He does it for an end; till that is compassed, the soul lies in the depths. Grief and fear are to bring the heart to Christ. Therefore none but He can take them off who is set forth as the Physician, to cure the sores and wounds of a broken spirit. And there is in the soul, when God shakes it with His power, a disposition set towards him that nothing can satisfy the soul but His favor.

Consider what comfort is: it is a strength or satisfaction of spirit. That then which comforts must be proportionate to, or exceeding, that which may cause grief or trouble. Now, if a man is in great affliction from the world, that which can comfort must be something greater than the world; or if he is afflicted by terrors of conscience, comfort cannot be but by one who is greater than conscience. If death, sin, hell, or wrath disquiets the soul, what good in heaven or in earth can outweigh these but God Himself?

2. Note how this comfort is wrought by God. There are three acts of God concurring in this work of comfort: preparation, or disposing of the soul for comfort by giving sight, faith, or fitness; delivery of the matter of comfort; and attestation.

God illuminates the understanding to see the true fountain and proper object of true comfort, with the means and condition of it. Till a man knows the excellency of spiritual things, with their sufficiency and eternity, and till he sees them as attainable, either the heart is deluded with the dying

vanities of this sinful and mortal life or held under the terrors of a guilty, accusing, misgiving, and despairing conscience. Though there is incomparable worth and most delightful sweetness in Jesus Christ, yet what is this to him who dwells in darkness? The understanding is the gate of both life and comfort. And as the heart rules not what the eye sees not, so it joys not in what it knows not. It is necessary for true and strong consolation that a man has sight:

First, clear sight. Dark visions breed but weak comforts; darkness is the harbor and womb of doubts. And in this case, so far as the soul doubts, it dies. If a condemned man has a pardon, but it is so poorly written, in either letter or language, that he cannot read or understand it, though this pardon is his life indeed, yet it is but small comfort at present.

Second, extended sight. The heart cannot be established and filled with comfort till the latitude of the object of comfort appears. Unless the mind sees things in all their due requisites, which make them able to comfort fully, there will be something wanting to a peaceful state; as if he sees a worth but not a fitness; or if that, yet not the possibility; or if that, yet not sufficiency; or if that, yet not perpetuity. I say, if any one of these appears not, the heart will remain unsatisfied. What a check to contentment in a thing is this, when, though a man sees it is good, yet he says, "It is not fit for me; it pleases me not," or, "it is not possible; I cannot obtain it," or, "it is not sufficient; it will not serve my turn," or, "it is fading and not certain. I may lose it again."

Third, actual sight, for not just knowing good, but *mind*ing good comfort. Habitual knowledge does

not comfort. It has a power to comfort, but till our knowledge is actual it gives no actual comfort. It is but as fire in the embers, which warms not unless it is blown up. The rich promises laid up in a knowing man are but as bread in the cupboard which, unless by actual knowledge the mind feeds upon, does not nourish him. If a man has much wealth in his chest, unless he takes it forth for his use, wherein is he happier than a beggar? Though the well is full of water, yet, unless a man draws it out, he may thirst. We must not forget our consolation. Unmindfulness breeds uncomfortableness. When therefore God will give comfort, He is the Remembrancer of His people.

Fourth, serious sight. Fleeting thoughts breed flashy comforts. Passing views and glances of the mind cannot produce a settled comfort; nay, rather they discomfort as much by their vanishing as they comfort by their presence. The fruit of such sights of God, Christ, and heaven yields a present, but a transient, blaze of joy; like fire in straw, soon up and soon down. Yea, this sweetness leaves a bitterness, and wounds the heart so that it loses so quickly what it had so happily. So that by such transitory gusts, the soul learns more indeed how to prize the things for sweetness, and how to lament them for their absence; and not his comfort but his sorrows are increased by such cursory views. However, this is sure: unless our light is permanent, our comfort will be transient and the heart will be still unsatisfied. These fits of glaring light are but like lightening in the night which makes not day; it is night still in the soul because the sun sets over it. When therefore

God comforts, He fixes the eye of the soul upon Himself, and the good things of His grace.

The second act of preparation of the heart for comfort is working of faith, which is the main organ of comfort. Though a man knows the gospel, yet unless he believes it all the glorious treasures of grace and mercy in it are but as a golden dream or a pleasant tale; or as a fire which is painted on a wall which yields neither light nor heat. The Word profits not him who believes not. This was the case of the Jews: they had great promises made to them, "But the Word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it," Hebrews 4:2. As exceedingly strong drink, not tempered and qualified, profits not nature, so those great promises, so much exceeding opinion and expectation of reason, if "not being mixed with faith," will not profit. Or, as some conceive, the metaphor lies thus: as he who drinks of an empty cup, so were they who did not believe; the promise to them was but as an empty cup. Or, as in the margin of our Bibles, they were not united by faith to them that heard, i.e., to them that believed, so that they had not the same benefit by the Word.

Faith then is a necessary requisite, and that as a condition upon which comfort is given, and as an instrument by which it is received. For faith gives the promise a life and subsistence—though not in itself, yet in us. Unless the gospel is believed, it has no dwelling, no root, no power, no life, no being to us, but is as a thing that is not. Therefore God works faith, which enables and disposes the soul to such sweetness from the breasts of consolation. Joy and

peace are fruits of faith. "Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost," Romans 15:13.

The third act of preparation is sanctification, which is simply necessary for true comfort as a condition of the covenant—for without holiness no man shall see God, Hebrews 12:14—and as disposing the soul. For these two things are required to make a man capable of comfort:

Life. When a man is dead in himself, he is dead to all things and all things are dead to him. The best cordials are no better than puddle water, the richest jewels no better than the meanest trash to a dead man.

Suitableness. What comfort does a piece of flesh yield to a sheep? What is a rich pasture to a man? That only is comfortable that is good for a man, and that only is good which is convenient. The best dish is but as poison to him who has an antipathy against it. The nature of man is such that, since it forsook God, it so cleaves to the creature that till it is healed it is not capable of spiritual comforts, and could no more live in God than a fish in the air. There is a certain compass of goodness which every creature walks in. The world is divided among them, and every sort of creature has its latitude, which is bounded by its particular form and disposition. The fishes keep below in the waters; their walk is in the deeps. The beasts inherit the earth and go no higher; they mind not honor, riches, or learning. These are the flowers of that Eden which mankind has in possession, and these are the highest things

of a natural man; but heaven, the gospel, God, and Christ are the portion of the spiritual man, the new creature. Man must be elevated above the *pitch* of nature (as now it is) to live in these things.

The eye is made for light and colors, the ear for sounds and voices, the smell for savors, the mind for truths, and the will for good. So everything is fitted for its object. And as in motion there is no rest but in a fit place, so the soul could not be quieted and pleased in spiritual things unless there was a fitness and agreement between them. There are some desires and imperfect motions of a natural will heightened by the gospel, but these give not true comfort, because the will closes not. It is easily moved from them, as a round body upon a plain is easily moved, because it has but a weak hold, touching the ground at only one point. But a plain or square body upon a plain stands fast, and has full rest, because their surfaces agree, and they mutually meet and close together.

The second work of God in giving comfort is delivery of matter of comfort. God bestows things comfortable; these are the food and fuel of joy. When God says, "Be of good cheer, be comforted," He does not do as those whom the Apostle reproves in James 2:15-16: "If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, and one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit?" When God comes to comfort, He gives that which may comfort—precious promises and sweet mercies, such as pardon, grace, light, heaven, His favor, His pres-

ence, His ordinances, and Christ. Who is able to sum up the riches and treasures which God bestows upon His people as a portion to live upon? Great things in possession, greater in reversion. "Oh how great is Thy goodness, which Thou hast laid up for them that fear Thee; which Thou hast wrought for them that trust in Thee," Psalm 31:19. See also Isaiah 64:4.

So when a man shall see himself so fully stored, he may with mirth and gladness say to his soul, "Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease." Having such a portion, he is a rich man, enjoying such a sufficiency as is a strong basis of rest and contentment, and makes him live a life above men, a life only in degree inferior to the life of angels. That paradise which God made for Adam was as a desert to this Sharon. Those fruitful trees were but shadows of the happiness which is in this new Eden, the garden which God has planted for His people.

The third work of God in comforting His people is attestation. The soul is exposed to many controversies and is prone to unquiet agitations. It is not easily satisfied. Though it has a present happiness, yet it has a provident and solicitous eye upon future times, and extends her cares and fears even to eternity. Add also unto this that the mind is hardly satisfied in that which it comprehends not, and sinful reason will be wrangling where it sees not its way and end, but must take all upon trust and credit. And in things of importance, a serious and fearful man is apt to entertain jealousies, and will scarcely believe what he sees. But though God pronounces

him blessed, yet he is apt to call his tenure into question, and to cast himself into doubt.

The doubts and controversies by which the soul is vexed may be reduced to two heads: those concerning the gospel, and those concerning themselves.

The first question is about the gospel. There is an abundance of unbelief in the soul. It is a difficult and rare thing to believe. There are two things which much hinder faith:

First, a disposition in man to judge of all things by sense or reason.

Second, the lack of evidence (in one sense) of the gospel. As things are more or less clearly propounded to sense or reason, so they are received with more or less assent. A philosopher believes more strongly that the sun is much bigger than the earth, or that there will be an eclipse at such or such a time, than does a country man. When we say the object of faith is not evident, we must distinguish of the types of evidence.

Evidence can be of narration or of the thing itself.

Evidence of narration is when a thing is so expressed as it may be understood; so in this sense the Scripture is evident and clear.

Evidence of the thing itself is when either sense or reason apprehends it. In this sense the things of the gospel are not evident, such as "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard," 1 Corinthians 2:9.

The gospel is divided into doctrine, history, and prophecy.

The doctrine has in it something that is evident,

and easily falls in with reason. For there are things in it appertaining to natural philosophy: elements, men, beasts, trees; to ethics: all the moral rules and virtues; to economics: precepts for ordering of families; to politics: laws for cities and commonwealths. These a natural understanding can deal with. But there are other things of a higher nature which are called supernatural, such as the Trinity, incarnation, and resurrection. These are above reason.

The history is of things past, and has no evidence to sense—for what can the eye see of paradise, the flood, the ark—nor to reason, by anything in itself? How should reason conclude that such things have been but that they are related and revealed?

The prophecy is of things to come, and so to come that a man cannot see them. A philosopher may see the effects in their causes, for they come within such a course. However, no creature can, by reason, conclude their futurity; but as their being depends upon God's will, so their manifestation (that they will come) is only by God's Word. Hence it is that nature, being so unapt to receive things upon trust, and desiring to see all things hold to rules of sense and reason, is with great difficulty brought to believe the gospel. Because of this unbelief, we need a divine assistance, which is the working of faith and witnessing unto faith (or to the believer) of the truth of the gospel. There are many witnesses of the gospel. Therefore it is frequently called the testimony. There is a cloud of witnesses, which is miracles, Hebrews 2:4. The ministers, apostles, and prophets are among them especially, Acts 10:43; 26:16; 5:32; the saints also, Isaiah 43:10. But the

Holy Ghost is the Head of this grand jury, Hebrews 10:15; 1 John 5:6. He comes with His testimony and settles the heart in assurance of the gospel so that it may find firm ground and sure footing. So long as faith is wavering, comfort will be unstable; the house cannot be strong if the foundation is weak. The gospel is the foundation, and if that is laid firm, the whole fabric of peace will stand strongly, able to bear out all storms and tempests.

The second question concerns the persons themselves and their interest in the gospel. For though a man knows clearly what that faith and holiness are which give him a real title to the promise, yet he may be unable to know *his* faith to be *that* faith.

There are many things which make true faith often hardly discernible:

The first is great imperfection. It is hard to know for certain, when a plant is newly sprouted above ground, what it is. A low faith has but little evidence; there is a light in every grace to show itself. But as it is with some stars—they are so small that they are scarcely seen—so a man may have faith and yet not be able to say positively and peremptorily that he believes.

The second is the similarity between false faith and true. A man may know in general what is requisite to the nature of gold, yet when he comes to apply his rules he may be puzzled, because art can exactly imitate nature. Yea, a famous painter was deceived by a fly which, though it was artificial, he thought was natural.

The third is that conscience is not always a com-

petent judge because it may be clouded with fears and jealousies.

The fourth is that Satan often so snarls this question that the soul is not able to extricate itself. We need, therefore, the help of the Spirit, whose office it is to be our Comforter. And as conscience, in its court, is witness, advocate, and judge, so is the Spirit. He is a Witness, giving evidence concerning the fact that the man believes. He is an Advocate to plead the equity of his cause, and that by the law of grace he should live. He is the Judge by pronouncing sentence, applying the law of grace in a judicial way, and saying, "The soul shall live." But all are comprised in the testimony; for it is a testimony clearing and determining the case. That there is such a testimony of the Spirit as evidences the truth and sincerity of grace, and consequently a personal interest in the promise, appears further by these arguments:

The spirit of bondage and the Spirit of adoption are opposed to each other, Romans 8:15. Now the thing wherein they are opposed is their proper working, the one causing fear and the other peace. Look then into the work of the spirit of bondage, and you will find it not only enlightens the soul to know and apprehend in general wrath against sin, and to apprehend what sin is, but it evidences to a man particularly that *his* ways are ways of sin, and consequently works a kind of preview of hell, a dreadful expectation of wrath upon himself; so that a man comes to conclude upon conviction, "I am the man who has transgressed, and I am the man who, unless salvation comes to me in Christ, shall be damned." And as the spirit of bondage thus joins

in the sentence of condemnation by stirring up, clearing, fixing, and strengthening the conscience, in like manner the Spirit of adoption works with conscience in the sentence of absolution, reconciliation, and adoption.

If the Spirit is a Comforter, which will not be questioned, it must witness the truth of our believing, and by that our interest in the promise. For until this is done, till a man is assured that his faith is saving, he cannot be satisfied in the question which now troubles him: "Shall I be saved? Will mercy be my portion?"

There are three main steps to comfort:

1. Salvation comes through Christ in the free promise, but here it yields no other comfort but this: It may be mine if I receive it.

2. The heart goes out to take hold of salvation. This is a further step to comfort, and here the foundation is laid. But yet, though this is sufficient for life and salvation in the end, it is not sufficient for peace and consolation at present.

3. A man cannot be satisfied till he attains a third thing, which is this: a knowledge that he has rightly and savingly received salvation.

If the knowledge of the true definition of faith and holiness were sufficient to give assurance, to him who truly believes, that he indeed truly believes, then none who are so qualified, and reflect carefully upon themselves, could be uncertain or doubtful whether their faith is right or not. But now we see, oftentimes, that even men who have much grace and quick-sighted understandings are much in fears of their own estates, and have given themselves up

for hypocrites, unsound, yea dead, yea, damned men. In Psalm 88, you see Heman as a sad instance of such a heavy condition. Grace lies often so hidden that they who seek it cannot find it in themselves.

Consult that text in Romans 8:16: "The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God." Besides the stream of interpreters who give testimony to this testimony of the Spirit, let the place itself be considered.

In the text there are three things which come in as props to this truth:

First, the Spirit witnesses with our spirits. Here are two distinct witnesses: our spirits—that is, our conscience or understanding renewed—and God's Spirit. God keeps the course which He appointed, "that in the mouth of two or three witnesses" everything shall be confirmed.

Second, the Spirit Himself. Sometimes the graces and gifts of the Spirit are called the Spirit, as in John 1:15; Acts 6:5; 1 Corinthians 14:32; Galatians 3:2. But it is not to be so taken here, but the Spirit in this place is the Holy Ghost Himself; for so it is expressed: not "the Spirit," but "the Spirit Himself." The graces of the Spirit are witnesses. As every effect is a witness of its cause, so God "left not Himself without witness" to the heathen, Acts 14:17; but by His works He declared Himself. So Christ said that His works bore witness of Him, John 5:36. But this is not all the testimony which the Spirit gives to the saints, but does it Himself, says the text.

Third, the Spirit makes particular application with our spirits. It is not just that the Spirit witnesses that those who believe are sons—as if it were only a

testifying of the truth of the gospel—but rather the Spirit witnesses with our spirits that we, even we, are the sons of God.

Consider the context. The thing which the Apostle (for their comfort) would prove is that they shall live, verse 13. But how does he prove it? Because they are sons, verse 14. And that they are sons, he gives a twofold evidence: first, “the Spirit of adoption” by which they cry, “Abba, Father.” But they might say, “May not men be deceived and claim a child’s place with God when he is a stranger?” Therefore he adds the testimony of the Spirit. The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirits that we are the sons of God. As if he had said, “You have a sure ground of assurance; for not only your own spirits, but God with them, joins in testimony that you are children.”

But concerning this testimony, note that all the saints have it not, at least in such a measure as to settle the heart clearly in this persuasion that they believe and are children. Nor is the testimony of our own spirits alike in all, but as the graces are more evident and conspicuous so is the testimony clearer. And herein differ the testimony of God’s Spirit and our spirit: our spirits give testimony according to the measure, workings, and evidence of our graces; but the Spirit of God often gives less testimony to the best Christians, and not all have it, at least not in a satisfactory degree.

It is a testimony which, for all that appears in the Word, may cease; those who have it may later want it—though it is true that once the testimony is obtained, though it may not abide actually and always, yet the efficacy should. So it is weakness to doubt

again, because it is the voice of God, a judicial sentence.

This testimony may be distinguished from all fantastical or diabolical enthusiasms. It reveals itself in those who have it. As the light of the sun is different from all other lights, so he who has a full testimony knows it to be of God. "Ye know Him; for He dwelleth with you, and shall be in you," John 14:17. And it must needs be so, else the testimony would not be sufficient, for the question would still remain undecided concerning a man's condition. It is as much to be regarded who speaks as what is spoken. Though a man hears a voice from heaven, or a voice within him, declaring and pronouncing his reconciliation and adoption, yet unless he knows it is of God it will not satisfy. As if a condemned man should have news of his pardon, yet, unless he knows it is the king's act, it cannot quiet him.

Further, this testimony is ever according to the Word. The witness of the Spirit and of the Word is the same. There are two voices, or determinations or testimonies of the Word. The one is concerning the way, the other is concerning the end; that is, the Word says, "They who believe shall be saved." But then the question is, "Who believes?" To this the Word answers by describing what that faith is which saves; and so the rule gives sentence of that which is to be ruled by it. When the Word and faith in the heart are brought together by examination, the Word either accepts or rejects, approves or disallows faith, as it is in itself true or false. But as when the gold is brought to the touchstone, though the stone may identify it as true gold, yet the examiner may

lack skill to perceive this testimony, so it is in this case.

The Word is the law by which all are judged. But as in a civil state there is need of a judge to open and apply the law to particular cases, so there is a need of the Spirit to join with the Word to give out not another verdict, but that of the Word which is made more intelligible by the Spirit, not varied but opened. Still the testimony is the same, so that the Spirit never looses where the Word binds. Therefore, those who live in pride, idleness, or any other way of sin, and pretend assurance of salvation given by the Spirit, are deceived. For if a man is such as the Word condemns, there is no absolution from God while he continues such.

This testimony is holy: holy formally, originally, effectively; it makes one holy, more humble, more contrite, more watchful, more zealous, and more thankful. That assurance which breeds vanity, contempt of ordinances, neglect of duties, and security in sin is deceitful and abominable.

Thus of the efficient cause. Now the matter of spiritual comfort follows. That which is comfortable must be such as can, in some measure, satisfy and fill the desire and appetite of the soul; for as long as desire is held from her object, there is an unrest and unquietness in the heart. There will be a whining and crying of spirit; there is pain in hunger and grief in want. Now, as desire is an extension or reaching of the soul after something suitable, so it is not satisfied but by possession of the thing or by hope and expectation. So the proper objects of spiritual comfort are:

1. Things spiritual, given to us and received by us here: as the light of God's countenance, the quickenings of His Spirit, subduing of lusts, success in our prayers, and tastes of heaven.

2. Things promised. In the former, desire is turned into joy, and the accomplishment of desire becomes "a tree of life," Proverbs 13:12. Here, it is the anchor of the soul, and the best cure of sorrow in the want of things future: "We are saved by hope," Romans 8:24. The main things of our life and happiness for eternity are now ours only in the promise.

Concerning these things, note that the promise gives as strong comfort to faith as things present to sense, yea greater, for the things to come are greater. The things to come are more permanent, 1 Corinthians 13. The things to come are sure, so that faith makes them as present, Hebrews 11:1.

The soul may have the comfort of hope, yet lose the comfort of sense. It may find the way sad when it believes the end will be sweet.

If a man loses the life and comfort of hope, he loses the comfort of sense; his way will be sad who is afflicted about his end.

According to the strength of faith and hope's claim, comfort is advanced. When hope fluctuates and looks for eternal life only as possible or probable, then comfort also is unstable and weak. But when it looks upon it as certain, then the heart has a full rest.

Now, having seen the nature and causes, let us come to the defectibility of comfort. It may be lost. The tenure of grace and peace is not the same; in point of comfort, we are but tenants at will, and may

in a moment be turned out of a heaven upon earth into a hell upon earth. Comfort is not of the being, but *well-being* of the saints; it is rather a reward than grace, and belongs rather to glorification than sanctification. Joy is not that which makes a Christian, but grace. It is the light, not the warmth of the sun, that makes day. So this comfort may fail: God may suspend His testimony; He may let in Satan to afflict. He may hide Himself, and not meet His people in approaches to Him or in combats for Him.

I must cut myself short here, for I see the book swells bigger than I desire. Let this therefore suffice for entrance into the business itself.

Chapter 35

Of the state and degree of this sad condition

Now I come to the sad state of the soul lacking the comforts of the Holy Ghost, God withdrawing Himself with respect to that gracious effusion of His mercy and manifestation of His love to the soul, shutting up those sweet streams of refreshment which were wont to flow.

Here I will speak of the case and the cure.

The case of a deserted and disconsolate soul requires us to consider the nature, degrees, effects, and cause of it.

First, then, let us consider the nature. It is an eminent and abiding uncomfortableness of heart towards God, or a loss of that comfort which the soul was wont to have in God.

It is a loss of comfort in God. A man may have much inquietness, and yet not be in this case we speak of. Discomfort, unless the object of it is God's displeasure or departure, makes not a deserted case. A man may be afflicted in his spirit in many ways, yet God's wonted presence may continue. As the conscience of some sin may cause much sadness and mourning, either some sin stirring or some sin acted out may much afflict. But trouble of reluctance or sorrow of repentance is there, and will be there where God is most present. Paul is a pattern of the

first in Romans 7, and David of the other in Psalm 51.

The sins of others may disquiet. "Rivers of tears run down mine eyes because men keep not Thy law," Psalm 119:136. Lot, Ezra, all who have most of God, have most of these sorrows; and these sorrows are not miseries but mercies. There is much sweetness in this temper.

The troubles of the churches may, in a way of compassion and sympathy, afflict; yea, outward afflictions may, in a natural way, pain the spirit for a time, and the soul may mourn because of its deficiencies and poverty, wanting that completeness of holiness which it desires. Though present degrees of grace are sweet, yea, because they are sweet, the soul is not contented in a state of want; it will be in motion till it attains the fullness, Philippians 3:12. But desertion imports a loss of comfort in God.

It is a loss of usual comfort. As the former kind of desertions is a loss of usual quickenings, so this is a loss of usual quietness. And as there are seasons in which God gives more of Himself in a way of quickening than He will constantly continue, so He gives comfort sometimes in such fullness as shall not always abide. Every day is not a feast day. Paul was taken up into the third heaven, but he came down again. The sun does not always shine in an equal luster. God sometimes gives flashes of glory, but like lightnings they disappear again. As a father sometimes sends for his sons from school and makes merry with them at home, these play times come not every day; the children must go to school again and live under tutors and governors till they come to full

age. God opens Himself much at some times:

In special approaches of the soul to Him. Then a man sees and tastes such things from which he is loath to depart, but these comforts, though they come from heaven, are like plants that are carried out of their native soil and climate: they keep not their sweetness in a constant height. A man warms himself at the fire and is refreshed, but this refreshment wears off again.

In times of great afflictions. The greatest comforts are usually found in sufferings; then God opens Himself, 2 Corinthians 1:4–5. The martyrs shone like stars in the night of persecution, and abounded most in comfort when filled most with troubles.

In the ordinances lively administered. Here so much is found that a man said, as the Apostle, “It is good to be here,” yea, as Jacob, “This is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven,” Genesis 28:17.

In times of abundant sorrow and melting of heart. God often, in such cases, breaks in with sweet effusions of peace, as to Ephraim, Jeremiah 31:18–20.

At the time of conversion. God often comes with extraordinary comfort. Many (as one observed) came to Christ in their sins and went away renewed; afflicted, and went away comforted; coming with a hell in their souls, and going away with a heaven; having a fullness of joys instead of a fullness of fears.

I need not cite further instances. The case is clear that comfort may fail; yet unless a man loses that comfort which he ordinarily enjoyed, he is not deserted.

It is an eminent loss. It is not every cloud that

makes night, but when the air is full of darkness, when the sun is set.

It is not a fit of uncomfortableness, but a state. An eclipse of the sun makes not night. He is not a poor man who has a present want, but he who lives in want. Every cold blast makes not winter.

Second, the degrees of this uncomfortable state must be considered. There are some nights darker than others, and some winters colder than others; and there are degrees of God's withdrawing from the soul.

DEGREE 1. When His quieting presence is much abated:

1. Not so full as has been. God seems not so friendly, but looks somewhat more strangely; so the soul complains as Jacob: "I see your father's countenance, that it is not toward me as before," Genesis 31:5. When the soul comes to God, it finds not those enlivening and refreshing visions and tastes. The cup of consolation that was wont to be filled is now but empty; the heavens are not so clear; his hopes are not so full; his knowledge of his happiness is more obscured; and fears begin to overflow. The light of God's face is darkened and the soul is troubled.

2. Not so frequent. The visits of the comforting Spirit are more seldom. God holds off, as if He were about to break off from the soul. It is a grief when a friend goes often by us and seldom recognizes us; so it is heaviness when the soul complains (to use the words of Job in another sense): "Lo, He goeth by me, and I see Him not: He passeth on also, but I perceive

Him not," Job 9:11. Time was when the soul had good news from heaven every day, but now she is like the wife who, when her husband is gone far from her, seldom hears from him. Returns are not so quick at a great distance. God is so sparing in manifestations of kindness that the soul thinks it long. "How long wilt Thou forget me, O Lord? for ever? how long wilt Thou hide thy face from me?" Psalm 13:1. "Will the Lord cast off for ever? and will He be favorable no more? Is His mercy clean gone for ever? doth His promise fail for evermore? Hath God forgotten to be gracious? hath He in anger shut up His tender mercies?" Psalm 77:7-9. "My soul fainteth for Thy salvation: but I hope in Thy Word. Mine eyes fail for Thy Word, saying, When wilt Thou comfort me?" Psalm 119:81-82.

3. Not so permanent. God comes and goes. The day of their peace is often overcast; the comforts which flowed ebb again. The soul is grieved as much with God's sudden departure as it delighted in His gracious presence; it has not so constant health, but is well only by fits. The soul that was as a dwelling place to her friend is but as an inn now. He whom she loves comes rather as a stranger and as a passenger than an inhabitant. So that here you may hear the prophet's complaint: "O the hope of Israel, the Savior thereof in time of trouble, why shouldest Thou be as a stranger in the land, and as a wayfaring man that turneth aside to tarry for a night?" Jeremiah 14:8. Comfort comes like thin clouds that yield sweet showers, but are soon gone. The gourd whose shade was sweet soon withers. The heart is become like a cracked vessel which, though it re-

ceives much, holds but little. The waters of life run out as fast as they come in.

DEGREE 2. The second degree of desertions and uncomfortableness is when there is much quickness but no quietness; grace lives but peace dies. The soul is so happy that it seeks what it has lost, but herein unhappy that it finds not what it seeks; it thirsts but drinks not; it runs but obtains not. Holiness is in flourish, but it is the winter of comfort. David was full of holy affections even when he was empty of consolation. When is the heart in a better case than when it calls, inquires, runs, weeps, sighs, and cries after God? Yet in such a case a man may lack all comfort. The richest ships may wander in the dark and be tossed in the storm. Sometimes a father will frown upon the best and dearest child. The most living Christian may account himself as dead, Psalm 88. Grace and peace are not linked in indissoluble society; these lovers may shake hands and part. And the more a man abounds in grace, the more grievous it is to lack the comfortable presence of God. A father's frown, and such a Father's frown, is bitter to so filial a spirit. Strangeness to strangers is not strange, but to lovers it is grievous. But it is a lesser evil in itself when God is with the soul quickening it, though He does not comfort it, than when God leaves it in uncomfortable deadness; though it is more bitter to sense, yet to reason it is worse when comfort ceases and grace sleeps at once.

DEGREE 3. When neither comfort nor liveliness, but a night of darkness and woeful deadness covers the soul; when hope and love are both in a damp, so that a man is as far from a holy and living state of

heart as from comfort, neither joying nor desiring, but being fallen from the height of living and joyful conversation with God. He is like the prodigal, brought to another life to feed upon husks with swine instead of bread in his father's house. Many there are who had reviving tastes of Jesus Christ, and rejoiced to see the streams of the well of life sweetly flowing and, with overflowing, abundantly filling the saints and themselves with comfort. But now the tree in the midst of their paradise is to them like the withered fig tree: the shadow and fruit of it cease. They are miserable in the loss of that which is the happiness of those who have it; and herein their misery is so much the greater by how much they count it less. Is it not a sad thing to see a man so degenerated that he can live without his life, and rest out of his place, that place where he has had such peace and such contentment? Oh, here is a heavy spectacle. A man has lost his estate and he grieves; he has lost his name or health, and he grieves. But he has lost his God, and yet he mourns not; he says it is well. Alas, he is not himself! When the day breaks and the sun sends out her beams into this dark region, when a spirit of truth and life shall bring this wandering creature home again and cause him to be himself, then you shall see the man acting another part. Alas, what amazement will seize upon him! How will he melt who is now frozen! How will he be afflicted to see himself and his case, in which now he lies as quiet as Peter in his chains, Acts 12!

DEGREE 4. When God not only suspends His comforts, but afflicts the soul; not only not continu-

ing the staff of living bread, but feeding the soul with the bread of sorrow and affliction, which He does divers ways.

The first is by rebukes from the Spirit. The Spirit of God comes sometimes in a way of displeasure and chides and rebukes the soul. This David found, which made him often cry and mourn, as the child whom his father rebukes.

This chiding is a conviction of sin, not only of the fact, but of the sinfulness. God sometimes comes to set out a sin unto man, and then it is very dreadful. Such a terror and astonishment seize upon him by a full sight and sense of sin; if there is not a supporting hand of grace and mercy extended to him, he cannot stand under it. Sin is a strange thing, and if God should pull off the visage of this monster and reveal fully the fearful nature of it, it would be a burden too heavy to be borne. Now then, when God conceals His love and reveals guilt, it must be bitter. When a man sees his indictment, but has not his pardon, it must be grievous.

This chiding opens the desert of sin and shows a man into what a gulf he has cast himself. Now in justice and sentence of law, he stands condemned to eternal death. When the grace of the promise is obscured, and the justice of the law clearly presented, it must cause a man to fear much. "Now," says God, "see what I may do. I may cause all your welfare to pass away like a cloud, and bring in a deluge of woes upon you. I might shut you by a decreed banishment from My presence, and cast you as a stone that is hurled from a sling into hell forever!" Such words as these are heavier than mountains. When the soul

sees that vastness of eternity filled with death and sufferings, and sees not the refuge in the gospel, this is a great shaking to the soul.

This chiding holds the eye upon these sad things so that wherever a man turns, his sin is with him and hell before him. The cry of sin and the curse of the law are ever in his ears. "My sin is ever before me," Psalm 51:3. It was also Job's sad case that the sins which he thought he had been rid of long ago returned upon him and so cleaved to him, as if they had been his possession. "Thou writest bitter things against me, and makest me to possess the iniquities of my youth. Thou puttest my feet also in the stocks," Job 13:26-27. This is a heavy thing when God continues in this way of displeasure, breaking the spirit with these grievous charges.

Finally, in this chiding God threatens menacing outward or inward troubles, as He did to David when he had sinned greatly against Him. He told him what He would do, how He would follow him with evils forever, and that his posterity should rue his folly. And when he had numbered the people, what a severe way did God take! Now temporary evils, especially spiritual, are often very grievous, when God shall say: "I will shut up peace and My comforts from you, you rebel, you ungrateful wretch. You shall no more see My face as you have done. Others shall drink, but you shall thirst; others shall rejoice, but you shall mourn. I will no more meet you as I have done. I will spare your life, but I will not show you My favor all your days. You shall live dubiously and die anxiously." I say, when these words are heard, what a heavy case is this! How did David even waste

himself with grieving when God estranged Himself! See Psalms 32 and 51.

But when God shall menace not only this, but hell and eternal death, this is far more grievous. But this God does even to His own, and sets it on so strongly that He often makes their spirits to waste and their strength to consume. David and Heman were drenched in these depths, and how grievous were their complaints!

The second way in which God suspends His comforts is by abandoning the soul:

Into its own hands. The heart of a man is the greatest tyrant and cruelest monster against itself. It is more a devil than the devil. He needs no furies to fulfill his troubles who is given up unto an accusing spirit. It has cries, clamors, stripes, stings, wounds, deaths; it will be law, witness, plaintiff, judge, executioner, chains, racks, gibbets; what not? He has a hell within him who is in such a case. For consider the temper and nature of the soul. It is receptive of much evil and misery and very active. And this activity is intensified to self-affliction by guilt, which is as powder to the flames, or as the winds to the seas, which makes them to rage and boil; by the weapons which the heart disquieted has against itself—an eternal God and a just law; and by unbelief, by which the soul is made naked to her own blows.

A guilty conscience strikes the promise out of a man's hand, and draws the sword and sheathes it in the soul. It undermines all forts and batters down all comforts in former evidences as walls of paper; it cuts off all relief and represents God is unwilling to hearken to any reconciliation; and it has also many

abettors which contribute strength to make this man more bloody. For example, temper of body pours in an abundance of dark and black thoughts and passions, while the censures of others, who by their cloudy aspects and rejecting carriages sharpen the sword in the hands of an unbelieving and accusing conscience, make more ghastly wounds and draw out fuller streams of blood. Thus the soul, like the man who fell into the hands of thieves, is left half dead. Distracting and accusing thoughts are worse than robbers; a man may say of them what David said of Goliath's sword, "There is none like that," 1 Samuel 21:9. Here is a sore battle, when the soul, like Saul, falls upon its own sword, 1 Samuel 31:4.

Consider also the power of God. God has given to conscience a commission to afflict. God has a hand in all things, working and ordering. He can send hornets into the soul, even stinging thoughts and piercing fears. He rules much in men's spirits, and in these seas raises storms at pleasure. Though He works not despairing thoughts in His people, yet He orders that unbelief which is in them. And as He orders the sinfulness of men's hearts this way or that way, not being a cause of it, so He does in this case. Yea, He presents sin and wrath so that the heart, being left to its own darkness and unbelief, cannot but be a cruel and active enemy against itself.

And now, as the prophet said in that case, so it may be said to a man in this case, "O thou sword of the Lord, how long will it be ere thou be quiet? put up thyself into thy scabbard, rest, and be still. How

can it be quiet, seeing the Lord hath given it a charge against Ashkelon, and against the sea shore? there hath he appointed it," Jeremiah 47:6-7.

Into Satan's hands. God may leave His people much to the will of Satan, as He did Job. And he, out of envy at our happiness, enmity against God, and hatred of us, is willing to devote all his skill and power to afflicting the saints, so that a man may here take up that complaint: "His troops come together, and raise up their way against me, and encamp round about my tabernacle," Job 19:12.

DEGREE 5. When to all this, He adds an accumulation of other miseries:

1. The disfavor of the saints. This is a great cutting to a holy heart, for he construes their favor and disfavor to be the reflection of God's. And indeed, oftentimes God sets His children against such as He is displeased with. As a master of a family says to his household concerning a child whom he will correct for much stubbornness, "Show him no countenance; eat not with him; keep not with him," so here God says, "With such a one, have no amity, no fellowship, no familiarity."

It was a great grief to Job, and he complained of it: "He hath put my brethren far from me, and mine acquaintance are verily estranged from me. My kinsfolk have failed, and my familiar friends have forgotten me. They that dwell in mine house, and my maids, count me for a stranger; I am an alien in their sight. I called my servant, and he gave me no answer; I entreated him with my mouth. My breath is strange to my wife, though I entreated for the children's sake of mine own body. Yea, young children

despised me; I arose, and they spake against me. All my inward friends abhorred me: and they whom I loved are turned against me," Job 19:13–19.

You see sometimes how even the nearest friends fall off with God; and when divine grace is clouded, nature itself is also clouded. Heman also found this evil added to all his evils: "Thou hast put away mine acquaintance far from me; thou has made me an abomination unto them," Psalm 88:8.

2. The loss of worldly comforts, such as peace, liberty, and estate. This was Job's case. Now, when the soul is bereft of all comforts from heaven and from earth, it is a heavy case.

3. The loss of the means of grace. God may remove His candlestick and take away the showbread; the doors of His house may be shut, or a man may be imprisoned by sickness so that the clouds above and the springs beneath failing breed sore distress.

DEGREE 6. When all this is extended and continued, so that a man complains not of days, but years of affliction. A man may lie long in this miserable plight like Paul and his company, to whom neither sun nor stars appeared for many days, Acts 27:20. Hence come those mournful sighings: "Lord, how long! Will the Lord cast off forever? Will He be favorable no more?" "How many are the days of Thy servant?" Psalm 119:84. "I am afflicted and ready to die from my youth up," Psalm 88:15.

There may be much praying that God would break these dark clouds and shine upon the soul. A man may cry with Job: "Oh that I knew where I might find Him! that I might come even to His seat!" Job 23:3. And with the church, a man may call

after Him, yet may complain: "Behold, I go forward, but He is not there; and backward, but I cannot perceive Him: on the left hand, but I cannot behold Him: He hideth Himself on the right hand, that I cannot see Him," Job 23:8-9. "I sought Him, but I could not find Him; I called Him, but He gave me no answer," Song of Solomon 5:6. "Thou hast covered Thyself with a cloud, that our prayer should not pass through," Lamentations 3:44. "When I cry and shout, He shutteth out my prayer," verse 8.

A man may seek Him in the ordinances, yet not find Him; yea, his sorrow may increase. God may seem angry with His prayer: "O Lord God of hosts, how long wilt Thou be angry against the prayer of Thy people?" Psalm 80:4. And the Word may seem to be against him, and may make his wounds sorer, so that these words may well be taken up by this afflicted soul: "If I go forth into the field, then behold them slain with the sword! and if I enter into the city, then behold them that are sick with famine; yea, both the prophet and the priest go about into a land that they know not. Hast Thou utterly rejected Judah? hath Thy soul loathed Zion? why hast Thou smitten us, and there is no healing for us? we looked for peace, and there is no good; and for the time of healing, and behold trouble!" Jeremiah 14:18-19.

Chapter 36

The effects and consequences of this sad condition

In the next place, let us view the effects and consequences of God's withdrawing and leaving the soul in this uncomfortable case. The effects are various, according to the quality of the persons thus deserted, and are of two sorts: sleeping and awakened.

1. First, for the sleeping Christian, when he falls from a comfortable enjoyment of God; as he is senseless in a great measure, so he is:

Careless. He sets not himself to regain his lost friend, but lies bound in chains of sloth and sleep, as it is supposed David did till Nathan came to him to rouse him out of that slumbering state. It is strange to consider how far a living man may be overtaken with fits of deadness, and how he may be so infatuated that he may be robbed of his comfort, as Samson was of his strength, when he was asleep.

Declining in affection and vigor for a holy walking with God. He is now hardly drawn to Him, and soon drawn from Him. He comes unwillingly and abides with Him uncheerfully; he comes slowly and goes quickly; having lost his first love, he hangs the wing and flags in duties.

Aptness to be drawn to evil. Having lost his comfort and ancient vigor, he is easily persuaded to start

from God. God lies lower in his affection, which is the bond of the soul, and being cooled in love he is more easily overcome. While the soul is delighted in God, it easily condemns all vain delights; but now it becomes a prey to Satan in his temptations. Solomon fell strangely when he fell from God. The heart will pitch upon something; and if it has not its contentment in God, it will hunt for it in the world. Hence it is that many descend from heaven to earth, and fall from a glorious height of comfort in and from God to a worldly and sensual condition, feeding upon vanities and filling themselves with the creature, so that their life is but a diversion to present contentments.

2. Now from these dull and sleeping persons, we come next to such as are awakened to view what operation this mournful state has in them. Among these there are different workings: evil and good. First, of the evil effects or consequences:

Heartless complaint. This is found in some who, though they are in a degree sensible of their loss, yet are not sensible enough; though they complain and grieve, yet their sorrows are not deep enough; they feel a burden upon their spirits, but they can bear it; the heart is affected, but not afflicted.

A fruitless complaint. Some are of a whining temper, apt to fill the ears of all their friends with sad tales of their mournful case; but there is little else to be found besides complaints. The soul humbles not itself before God, nor contends in prayer, nor strives by the ordinances and holy walking to find what it has lost. These men are like the sick man who lies grieving himself, but in no way seeks in earnest to

help himself. Or they are like Issachar crouching under his burdens. Such spirits as these are of a stubborn temper, and they have cause to expect such multiplied uncomfortableness as shall force them to seek after God with more seriousness and strength. David stuck to his own way and did not come to a full endeavor after reconciliation with God till night and day the hand of God was heavy upon him so that his moisture was turned into the drought of summer, Psalm 32:4.

Great unquietness. In some the apprehension of loss of communion with God and the sight of His displeasure work to the height indeed, yea, so far that it works a fever, or rather a frenzy, in the soul by bringing:

(1) Hard thoughts of God. As if God were implacably incensed, and so departed that He would never more return, that He has forgotten to be gracious and has shut up His mercy forever so that there is no hope. These persons believe that God will not hear their prayer, that He has passed a doom upon them, and it must stand. "He is in one mind, and who can turn Him? and what His soul desireth, even that He doeth. For He performeth the thing that is appointed for me. Therefore am I troubled at His presence: when I consider, I am afraid of Him. For God maketh my heart soft, and the Almighty troubleth me," Job 23:13–16. Sadness and fear cloud the understanding and cause monstrous apprehensions.

(2) Hard thoughts of themselves. They reflect upon the time past as on a course of hypocrisy, upon the time present as a state of death, and looking

upon the future as without hope. They say, "My sins are so mighty that they will not be subdued, and so many that they will not be pardoned. God cannot show mercy to me. I shall surely die." With the Psalmist they say, "I am counted with them that go down into the pit. Free among the dead, like the slain that lie in the grave, whom Thou rememberest no more; and they are cut off from Thine hand," Psalm 88:4-5. "Thou hast removed my soul far off from peace: I forgot prosperity. And I said, my strength and my hope is perished from the Lord," Lamentations 3:17-18.

(3) Dreadful passions, such as tremblings and shakings. "Fear came upon me, and trembling, which made all my bones to shake," Job 4:14. "The hair of my flesh stood up," verse 15. "Mark me, and be astonished; when I remember I am afraid, and trembling taketh hold on my flesh," Job 21:5-6. Sometimes also roarings are heard from these men. "My bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long," Psalm 32:3. "My sighing cometh before I eat, and my roarings are poured out like the waters," Job 3:24. Yea, so great is the anguish that oftentimes the body is wasted. "I am as a man that hath no strength," Psalm 88:4. Yea, sometimes they are tired and weary of themselves and of life. "My soul is weary of my life," Job 10:1. "Wherefore is light given to him that is in misery, and life unto the bitter in soul; which long for death, but it cometh not; and dig for it more than for hid treasures; which rejoice exceedingly, and are glad, when they can find the grave? Why is light given to a man whose way is hid, and whom God hath hedged in?" Job 3:20-23.

In a word, they think they can never complain enough; they account their misery beyond all words. "Oh that my grief were thoroughly weighed, and my calamity laid in the balances together! For now it would be heavier than the sand of the sea; therefore my words are swallowed up, (or, I want words to express my grief). For the arrows of the Almighty are within me, the poison whereof drinketh up my spirit: the terrors of God do set themselves in array against me," Job 6:2-4. And when the soul has exceeded all eloquence and passed almost all human bounds of language and expression, it is not satisfied, but thinks it falls exceedingly short of uttering her misery. "My stroke is heavier than my groaning," Job 23:2.

But all this is not a right carriage of the spirit. Such passions would befit such as have a God without mercy, and distress without a promise and without a Redeemer. Faith is suspended when these clamors are heard, and the soul forgets the freeness and fullness of grace when it is thus transported out of itself and from its hopes.

Second, the good effects of such uncomfortable eclipses of God's favor and presence follow, which are:

1. Sorrow, great sorrow. "Thou hidest Thy face, and I was troubled," Psalm 30:7. The heart should not, yea (if it is in due temper), cannot rest without God. His absence is worthy to be lamented whose presence is most worthy to be prized.

2. Longing desires for God's gracious return. The soul thinks delays grievous. "Hope deferred

maketh the heart sick," Proverbs 13:12. The church said she was "sick of love," Song of Solomon 5:8. The heart that has had a sense of God's sweet presence cannot be satisfied without Him, but counts all things nothing till it regains Him who is to her as the sun to the world and the soul to the body.

3. Repentance and humbling of soul. It seeks what unhappy and accursed thing has raised this cloud between God and her, and falls down at His feet confessing, weeping, and begging His favor in Jesus Christ, willingly grieved and ashamed. It counts not this sorrow to be bitterness, but finds some sweetness in it.

4. Subjection to all conditions of agreement. It says, "Lord, impose, demand what Thou wilt. I count nothing too dear for Thee. I count the gain of the whole world loss for Thee, and will deny myself for Thee. If my heart draws back, draw it on to Thee; as far as I am able to sacrifice myself to Thee, I do it." Thus the soul sets itself towards God, inquires for Him in all means, and will not be put off. It falls not by despair, nor sleeps in sloth, but faith holds up hope, and hope keeps up endeavors, and it cannot be quiet without God.

There are two main causes of the restlessness of the soul without God. First is the condition of the subject.

The soul is tender. The soul, especially in a believer when he is in a living state, is very sensible of any evil, especially of the greatest evil. A man's sorrow is as his sight is. Therefore, where he sees God and has a knowledge of Him in His excellency, the loss of Him is grievous. All evils on the body are but

as the rending of the garment; but grief in the soul is as the tearing of the flesh. "A wounded spirit who can bear?" Proverbs 18:14. Outward evils are but as the breaking out of the inner workings. All sense in the body is from the soul; therefore the soul must be most sensible.

The soul is spiritual. If the body is in misery, external things may help; in sickness, medicine; in want, relief; in famine, bread. But when the soul is in distress, all the world is but like a great cipher; it amounts to nothing. Heaven and earth are but as a shadow; nothing but God can quiet the soul. As the body is not satisfied with things spiritual, so the soul is not content with things corporeal. There must be a fitness in the object, else it moves not. As the ear is not pleased with light and colors, nor the eye with sounds, the soul therefore, being spiritual, must meet with that which is spiritual and proper for it, else it is not contented. Every living creature has an appetite and sense carried to some things; and out of that compass it has no quiet. You shall never satisfy a beast but with pastures and such things as he affects. A man must have other things, things of higher worth suitable to his nature. Take a spiritual man whose soul is illuminated and drawn out to higher and more spiritual things, and you cannot quiet him with a thousand worlds, without interest in Christ and the favor of God. The spiritual man is carried to things spiritual as the natural man is to things natural. And as a natural man cannot be quieted without natural accommodations and enjoyment of such things as suit him, so the spiritual man cannot have rest without his spiritual treasure.

The soul has pitched upon God by faith and hope. It has devolved itself upon Him, and that for eternity, in the business of life and death. Now, if a man were passing over a deep and swift torrent, and when he is upon these depths feels the bridge cracking and sinking, it must let in a sea of fears and amazement upon him. How can it be that a man sees the vastness of eternity, the greatness of sin, the terrors of the wrath that burns like fire, and has in his agony thrown himself upon God in Christ, and now is doubtful whether Christ will own him or take apt care of him? I say, how can it be but he should be in great distress? At such a time when God withdraws His comforts, everything that may afflict stands forth in greatest strength. Now death is death and sin is sin and the soul feels the weight of every load. Comfort lightens all burdens; and when Christ is present all evils vanish, and discouragements scatter as a mist. But when that is gone, then those evils gather like clouds of fire and blood over the soul; and those mysteries which lay as conquered men rise up with renewed strength. And what a sad time is this, when the soul sees its danger and not its refuge; its wounds, but not its cure! Nay, to see Him who is its only trust not only not to be with it, but against it! It has chosen Him as its chief treasure. Therefore it can be no more without Him than without itself.

The soul has had hopes of God's favor. Time has been when it saw itself in the arms of Christ, and walked with some assurance that it had a Friend in heaven. And therefore, seeing now its hopes to wither, and those golden days to pass as a pleasant

dream, it cannot but be much afflicted. This shall be the bitterness of the anguish of unsound hearts at last who, after they have fed their souls with hope and have run out their days in a paradise of imaginary happiness, find when they come to die that all those joys and all that confidence spend themselves like a vapor, and the lean cows eat up the fat! Sorrow and everlasting perdition come instead of joy and salvation which they looked for. Oh, who can utter this misery! A man is hurled from a pinnacle of high and glorious hopes into a depth of eternal woe! By this we may guess what it is for a deserted soul who has reckoned long upon high things, and now sees such a change that it is forced to count itself deceived, and to exchange her living hopes for killing fears. And whereas she thought herself a child, she is cast forth as a stranger, yea, as an enemy.

The soul has had much in communion with God and Christ. Time was when the man was kindly used, when God conversed with him as a man with his friend, when He invited him often, and entertained him in love, and poured in much of heaven upon him. Therefore now to see God estranging Himself, yea, frowning, chiding, and arming Himself against him, cannot but be a cutting in his soul. David, having lost the liberties of the ordinances which were better than his kingdom to him, sat down in heaviness as one taught by the experience of his former happiness, the deeper to lament his present misery. "When I remember these things, I pour out my soul in me; for I had gone with the multitude, I went with them to the house of God, with the voice of joy and

praise, with a multitude that kept holyday," Psalm 42:4. And this was the affliction of the church, that she lost Him in whose presence she had received such abundant comfort, Song of Solomon 5. The more the soul has had of God, the more bitter is her loss of Him.

As the second cause of the souls restlessness, the object is such that if you weigh it, you will see that a man cannot be at rest when God holds back and leaves him in this doleful case.

Consider, first, the quality of the object. There are three things in God which cause the wound of an afflicted spirit to bleed much.

The first is goodness. Because God is good, therefore His disfavor is a great affliction. This sweet balm the heart, in such a day, will turn into a sharp corrosive, and out of this sea of comfort it will draw bitter waters. This golden mine, which is a rich treasure unto others, yields that which the heart turns into iron rods and sharp swords to wound itself.

For if it apprehends His goodness to be His kindness and gracious disposition to pity and mercy, then it reasons heavily: "O unhappy wretch, that there should be so sweet a fountain, and I should not drink of it; that streams should flow forth towards thousands, and none to me! I envy not others' happiness, but I lament my own misery; that I should die in the midst of life and perish in the midst of salvation. God is so good, so ready to show mercy, that surely He is highly incensed against me who seeks and calls and cries, yet is not relieved. If my wickedness were not very great, yea, if I were in His heart at all, surely He who is so good in Himself,

and unto thousands, would not thus reject me. I am tossed night and day, and carry a hell in my soul continually; and if I were not as an enemy in His eye, if I were a child, His bowels would not hold. I would surely be received." Who can reckon the heavy conclusions which the heart will draw against itself? It is so disposed to its own hurt that not only against faith, but against reason, it will afflict itself, turning the sun into darkness and the moon into blood, fetching misery out of mercy and hell out of heaven.

Alternatively, the goodness of God is taken for His holiness and perfection, then they reason thus: "Surely I am very evil, whom goodness rejects; if I had any spark of good in me, God would not cast me off; but certainly He sees my abundant naughtiness. Therefore He sets Himself against me." Thus, in sundry ways the goodness of God makes the hiding of His face and the manifestation of His displeasure to be very grievous.

The second thing in God causing pain to the afflicted spirit is greatness. When a man apprehends the majesty of God, the fear of His disfavor falls heavily upon him. "Who knoweth the power of Thine anger? even according to Thy fear, so is Thy wrath," Psalm 90:11. The favor of a man of power is of much worth, and there is power in his wrath. "The king's wrath is as the roaring of a lion; but his favor is as dew upon the grass," Proverbs 19:12. The wrath of the God of power is terrible as thunder. And as the beasts fall down astonished at the roaring of a lion, so the soul is overwhelmed when so glorious a majesty is incensed.

In God there is a twofold power. A power, first, of

authority, which is that power by which He dispenses all things as having all in His hand as absolute Lord and Sovereign. And what a misery is this, that He who has eternal life and death, heaven and hell in His power, should seem to be against a man? This is the fullness of all evil when He, upon whose will all things depend, becomes one's enemy. The loss of a particular comfort and contentment is great, but how much worse is the loss of all? It is a power by which He judges all. God, being the supreme Lord, holds this royalty: all men and angels are accountable to Him in all things. Now, to apprehend that the Judge of all the world will not show mercy, but will proceed in strictness of justice, especially when a man knows that he is guilty in many ways, and that God is privy to all his sins, must be a sore shaking to the soul. Though all friends and ministers, yea, though all angels come in to comfort, yet it will not satisfy because they are but subjects. God is supreme, and His Word shall stand. If you tell a poor, trembling prisoner going to the bar for his life that he needs not fear, that he shall surely escape, he will be apt to answer you: "Alas, unless the judge says so, all that you say will not profit me." So will a poor, afflicted soul think when others come and tell him, "Surely your case is good, and doubtless you will find mercy, and heaven will be your portion." He will reply, "Oh, that God would say this to me! Unless this is my sentence at His bar, your comforts are but as sounding brass, or as a tinkling cymbal."

Second, there is a power of ability by which God is able to work what He wills and execute His own

purposes. If He pronounces sentence from the throne of judgment, there is no way to shun it. If in the word of a king is power, Ecclesiastes 8:4, how much more in the Word of the Almighty? What makes anything dreadful but its power? And all that power in the creature is but derived from Him and limited by Him; but His power has no bounds but His will. Therefore, when the soul is not only in doubt of His good will, but in fear of His ill will, how can it have any rest?

The third fearful aspect of God to the afflicted soul is eternity. God abides forever; this makes His favor and displeasure more considerable. The loss of a perpetuity we reckon a great loss in our estates; but what is it to lose God forever? And not only to lose Him, but to bear His displeasure who is eternal? Eternity, oh, eternity! How does this swallow up the soul in a day of fears? This sets on all other terrible things with a double strength and causes them to fall with weight more heavy than of mountains upon the spirit. Such a thought as this—that He who has all power and lives forever has forsaken me—batters the soul as a wall of paper before a cannon.

Consider the relation in which God stands to a believer. He is to them in the nearest and dearest relation, a Friend, Father, and Husband.

God is all these perfectly: the closest and most active Friend, the kindest and most tender Father, the sweetest and most loving Husband. The loss therefore of such a One is grievous. Yea, the loss of any one of these is great: if a child loses a tender-hearted father, or a friend a free-hearted friend, or a wife a kind-hearted husband; but if one loses a

friend, a father, and a husband all at once, this is very grievous. But when the soul is deserted, it apprehends itself to lose all these; yea, the best Friend, Father, and Husband; yea, her only Friend, Father, and Husband. No wonder if it takes up Jeremiah's sad complaint: "When I would comfort myself against sorrow, my heart is faint in me," Jeremiah 8:18. Nothing can heal but that which wounded.

Consider the operation of God. He has not only put into the heart which He renews a longing and restless desire after Him, but He quickens this desire by a sense of misery, and by manifestation of His greatness and goodness that the soul may be carried with incessant reachings after Him. He is then drawing the soul towards Him when He seems to be departing; and how can that man rest whom heaven draws? God's end in afflicting the soul is not its pain, that it may waste itself in sighs and groans, but that it may with more eagerness pursue Him. So He is secretly and strongly working in the darkest night of spiritual sadness to a more full and comfortable conjunction and communion with His people. Therefore it is that they seek and run to and fro to find Him, because God draws them by His power. When David was in the desert, he followed hard after God; but what set his soul in that constant motion? "Thy right hand upholdeth me," Psalm 63:8.

Let this suffice for the effects and consequences of God's hiding His face and cutting off the comforts which the soul was wont to enjoy in Him.

Chapter 37

The causes and cure of this sad condition

Having seen what a woeful case a man is in when God withdraws, let us now weigh the causes for which God deals thus with His people:

CAUSE 1. God does it to put a difference between heaven and earth. God is wont to fit His actions to times and seasons. Israel was a child as well as we, yea, the firstborn; yet that Church had not so much of Him as the churches of the Christians. It was not a time for fullness. While the Church was in her infancy, God dealt with them as with children in minority; He gave them much of the world and less of heaven. The Spirit of adoption was poured out more fully when the Church was grown more full. And as God reserved much till the Gentiles were called, that when His guests were more fully met He might set out more abundance of His provision, so God will keep the rich store of consistent and abiding comforts till the great day so that, when all the families shall come together, He may pour out the fullness of His hidden treasures upon them.

We are now but in the way, and it is fit the best should come last. We are but yet in the morning of the day; the feast is to come. In the meantime, a running banquet, a breakfast, and a taste shall suffice to stay the stomach till the time comes that the King of saints with all His friends, shall sit down to-

gether at the royal feast.

If you send your son to travel, you give him less than his inheritance; and you will send him forth by sea and land for your ends. So God has sent you abroad; you are but travelers, therefore you must not think it strange if you meet with storms and weary days, and if you have not so constant a presence of God with you. The difference between this life and the next is not so much in the kinds of comfort as in the degrees and continuance of them. This life has such a presence of God as brings with it a kind of absence. We know this, that while we are present in the body we are absent from the Lord, 2 Corinthians 5:6.

This life is but our seedtime of comfort, Psalm 97:11; and the seed will have a time to be out of our hands, use, and sight, till the harvest comes.

Now is working time, and the time to fight; and servants and soldiers must not expect any settled rest till their service is done and the wars cease. There remains a rest for the people of God, Hebrews 4:9.

All the saints who have gone before us have found ill days and hard times; yea, Jesus Christ Himself, till His hour came that He should be glorified, had trouble in the world; yea, He drank of this cup which we have in hand. This makes heaven sweeter, and puts the soul upon more longings for it, because there it knows it shall not fear nor sorrow any more.

Constant joys in such a condition as this is in the world suit not more than constant feasting in times of heaviness. We are freed from the power of sin but in part; so we are but in part freed from afflictions.

And it is probable, unless grace were more abundant, that constant peace would have ill consequences. Paul was tempted after His exaltation that he might not be exalted. Comfort belongs not to sanctification but glorification; therefore the fullness of it is kept till we are set in glory. Comfort is the reward of holiness; therefore the perfection and stability of it are kept till that time when holiness shall be perfected. And the perfection, both of grace and peace, is deferred so that when Christ shall appear in glory this may set out the day. When Christ came in the flesh, God poured out much of His Spirit at His ascension, and He will pour it gloriously when all shall be consummated. Then Christ shall shine among all His saints and the fullness of their perfections, as the sun attended with all the stars in their brightest glory.

Till that time, while you are children under tutelage at school, you will meet with frowns as well as smiles, and correction days as well as play days. And it is well the day is coming that has no night, and joy that has no sorrow with it.

CAUSE 2. In judgment of the world. God could send out His saints as stars in glory that all eyes might gaze on them, but He will not. All things are in a mystery and hidden to the world; the graces of the saints are hidden under many infirmities, and the comforts of the saints under many sorrows in just judgment upon the world. God is wise, and knows how to fit the same things for many ends. Christ came in a poor estate, and His glory and majesty were covered with the cloud and mantle of a mean outside. And why was this? It is true, it was for

satisfaction of justice, for the sin of His people, but it was also in judgment of the world. He was a precious One, yet, because He came not in state and pomp, He was a stone refused by the builders, and so was "a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense," 1 Peter 2:7-8. And because the gospel came not with human dress and external ornament, "the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness," 1 Corinthians 1:18.

God has not stooped, in the matters of heaven, to sense as He has in the matters of the world. He will not send unto men any from the dead, nor yet shall any walk among men with shining robes of heavenly glory. The things of this life are seen and tasted, but spiritual things are conveyed mostly in a spiritual way. If Adam had continued in his integrity, God would have manifested Himself to the world as a man to his friend; and not only faith and reason, but the senses should have been blessed in communion with God. But now He so disposes of all things that even His people walk by faith and not by sight. He will not give such a sensible demonstration of His bounty to the world, so that it may justly perish in its wickedness if it will not believe Moses and the prophets and if it will not believe the gospel.

The world is led by sense. Though the Scriptures testify of the excellency of redemption and adoption and of the great happiness of the saints, yet they foolishly cast away faith and the Word and run to sense; and finding the heirs of glory to be often sad, beholding not their comforts but their sorrows, they conclude that the way is worthless and that religion

is but a sour grape, as bitter waters and the way of the desert.

CAUSE 3. To establish them in more full comforts. There was darkness before light in the world. After the strong wind, which rent the mountains and broke the rocks, came the still voice in which God was, 1 Kings 19:11–12. And as God often sends great comforts before great afflictions in the world (Christ was transfigured on the mount before His great agony in the garden), so He often promises affliction of the soul before great comforts, and the soul is settled the more afterwards as the tree is rooted more by shaking. It is God's method to bring first to Egypt, and through the sea and wilderness, and then to Canaan. The apostle prayed that they may be strengthened and established, but when? "After ye have suffered a while," 1 Peter 5:10.

When the soul has passed through straits, and has seen the wonders of the Lord in the depths, it is blessed much with the advantage of further establishment:

1. Because that comfort and evidence which comes so immediately from God are strongest. When a man has been taken off from all his foundations, and God has appeared unto him in the desert, it is a strong demonstration of His love, and wins the heart to much love and to strong confidence. This is as if a friend, when he is offended, and has us at an advantage so that he may justly, and has the power to, undo us—if then he spares, and not only so, but is as Esau to Jacob, turning wrath into love and anger into compassionate kindness. This greatly knits us to Him, to love Him and cleave to

Him as a good and a fast friend indeed.

2. God gives much proof and evidence of the truth of grace which He has wrought in them, when He makes them see they had hearts that could love Him, even when it was doubtful to them whether He loved them. When the truth of grace is evidenced clearly, it brings much comfort; and what greater evidence of an upright heart than to follow God when He seems to flee away, to love Him when He seems to abhor and hate them, to weep upon Him in love when He seems armed with weapons of death, and to pour out the soul to Him when He seems to be pouring down fire and brimstone upon them.

3. It gives hope that if dark clouds arise, yet they shall be scattered again. The sense of former troubles may help one to conclude that such depths are passable; and the soul will be apt to say, "There is hope concerning this." Experience of mercy is a great help to faith, and holds up the soul that it will not fall so flat and lie so long under discouragements again. It will help and furnish the heart to pray much, because God has been entreated in such times before, and to say as the Apostle, "having delivered us from so great a death, in Him we trust, that He will yet deliver us," 2 Corinthians 1:10.

4. It works more closing with Christ. The death of comfort occasions a greater life and strength towards Christ, both in desire for Him and dependence upon Him. And for this cause God shakes the soul with earthquakes that it may stand faster upon its true basis and foundation. That which at first brings the soul to Christ is His worth and our need; and the more we see ourselves necessitous, the more

our hearts gather in to Christ. The soul must have some rest; and if it finds none within or without, it is carried to Christ as Noah's dove to the ark. That which is the first cord to draw to Him has also a strength to bind to Him. Therefore God gives His people sad visions of sin and wrath that, by being shaken, they may root themselves more in Christ. This was God's great aim: to set up His Son as the hope and help of His people, and as that glorious means by which He may diffuse the beams of His mercy and love upon men. He loves to see the saints advancing Him by flying to Him and abiding in Him.

And the more they go forth to Christ and seek the Father in the Son, the more they are blessed. Christ is the Rock of the saints, and when they are knit to it they stand fast. The nearer they are to Christ, the nearer are they to all happiness. God will not look with a friendly eye upon the soul but through Christ. He will not pour out the Spirit of comfort but through Him. And as comfort is obtained by coming, so the more often the soul comes, and the more it converses with Christ and rests on Him, the more comfort it will find at last. Christ will tell you many secrets, and open His Father's bosom to you, when you stick close to Him.

And this advantage comes by desertions, by which the soul is so frightened with those storms which it met with that it is afraid to be any more out of its harbor, but seeks to dwell under the wing of Christ and keep closer to Him than ever it did before. And so this affliction brings forth "the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are ex-

exercised thereby," Hebrews 12:11.

CAUSE 4. The correcting and healing of some evil in His people. He does it for their profit, that they may be "partakers of His holiness," Hebrews 12:10. There are many things in the saints which are very repugnant to that filial state in which they are set by grace. And it is no wonder if God takes such courses wherein He seems not to be a Father to them who are not as children to Him. I will instance in some particular evils which God will not bear with, but visits in His people with this and other rods.

1. Deadness and dullness of heart. Sometimes living men are in a lifeless state; their hearts are so benumbed that they seem to lie among the dead. The former vigor and activity of their grace are gone, and they have become barren and unfruitful. Now, as in a lethargy or apoplexy physicians use strong and sharp medicines, so God casts the soul into a fever to take off this stupidity. He hangs their souls over the mouth of hell and makes them drink of that cup of red wine, "the dregs whereof the wicked of the earth shall wring out and drink," Psalm 75:8, that by this strong potion He may quicken their dull and sleepy spirits. Deadness is such a state in which a man is neither receptive nor active, fit neither to receive good nor do good; and such a case is not tolerable, for in this God's ends are stopped. For He calls out His people to be vessels to receive mercy, to hold forth His Name, but he can do neither who is dead. Nature itself loves not a dead thing; it is both useless and uncomely, for where life fails there is corruption, just as in the body a mortified member

putrefies not only itself but others. Therefore, as a man uses all means to recover the life and spirits in his body, so God does with His people. David lay in a slumbering drowsiness a long time, but at last when he lay, like Jonah, sleeping by the sides of the ship, He sent a storm into his soul to awake him; then he revived like a different man.

2. Fearlessness of God. This is a temper to which the saints are apt to grow, as children are wont to grow saucy and presumptuously impudent and irreverent, till the Father's frown and majestic austere-ness take down their spirit. God will not be carelessly dealt with; though He allows us confidence and holy boldness in approach to Him, and conversation with Him, yet He expects a due sense of His majesty and greatness. "Let us have grace, whereby we may serve God with reverence and godly fear: for our God is a consuming fire," Hebrews 12:28-29. Though He is a Father, yet He is a terrible, holy, and almighty God. And therefore, to correct the sinful boldness of His people, and to cause them to stand in awe of Him, He sometimes shuts in His favor and holds state by concealing Himself, as the Persian kings shunned familiarity and were seldom seen that they might be more honored.

The fear of God is one of the main pillars of His throne, and so far as He is not our fear, He is not our God. Therefore He has ever shown Himself in His power and greatness unto men. When He came to give the law, He came in great majesty, "with fire, blackness, and darkness, and tempest, and the sound of a trumpet. And so terrible was the sight that Moses said, 'I exceedingly fear and quake,' "

Hebrews 12:18, 19, 21. Yea, and in the gospel it was foretold that God would "show wonders in heaven above, and signs in the earth beneath; blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke: the sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and notable day of the Lord come," Joel 2:3—31; Acts 2:19, 20, 21. When He came to publish peace to the Gentiles, He came with great terror in judgment upon the Jews, and struck off the natural branch that the Gentiles might "not be high-minded, but fear," Romans 11:20. And in particular persons He so works, by intermixtures of frowns and favors, majesty and mercy, that they may learn to walk as those churches did, "in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost," Acts 9:31.

It is not a servile fear or a fear of discouragement which God expects, but a fear of reverence, a fear intermixed and tempered with love. There is a great difference in fears: a man fears a beast and runs from him; a man fears an enemy but hates him; but a child fears his father and loves him. Yea, therefore he fears because he loves; they "shall fear the Lord and His goodness," Hosea 3:5.

3. Slightness of heart. There is a certain wantonness and trifling disposition in the heart such that men are apt to be superficial and imperfect in their ways, and this God visits upon them.

Dallying with sin. They will be playing with snares and baits and allow a secret liberty in the heart to sin, conniving and winking at many workings of it, and not setting upon mortification with earnest endeavors. Though they are convinced, yet they are not persuaded to arise with all their might against the

Lord's enemies, but do His work negligently, which is an accursed thing. And for this cause God casts them upon sore straits. The Israelites should have done the work perfectly when they were commanded to root out the Canaanites, but because they were slack, and did it but by halves, therefore God left the Canaanites as a scourge, and as briars and thorns to be always an affliction to them. When you are pressed to fight for Christ, and have taken up arms against the rebels in your hearts, if you fight not with all your strength and pursue the victory to the utmost till you find your enemies dead before you, God may give you into their hands to lead you into captivity and to hold you in chains that will eat into your souls, and may in this distress stand afar off as One who knows you not.

Dallying with duties. Men do them as if they did them not, without heart and in a loose, lazy, formal, lifeless manner. And when there is such idleness and negligence and indisposedness, God comes in a way of anger to whip up the slothful and unfaithful spirit. Duties of godliness are not only a debt to God, but a reward to us. Therefore, in slightness there is not only unfaithfulness, but unthankfulness also; both the majesty and the mercy of God are despised; and can God be well pleased with such things? Remember the wise man's counsel: "Whatsoever thine hand findeth to do, do it with (all) thy might," Ecclesiastes 9:10. You are in an evil frame of heart when you can do the weighty things of God with slightness. And because you serve God so, He therefore comes with a kind of expulsion and banishment, and throws you out of His sight that you may

see what it is to dally with God.

Dallying with ordinances, in slight and careless attendance upon them. God comes in a way of gracious condescension, and stoops down with offers of grace and mercy to poor things of dust. He sets before them Jesus Christ, the most precious treasure of heaven and earth, and calls them to a near communion with Himself, and holds forth precious promises of life. But what is the carriage of the soul? It neither minds these nor vouchsafes God in all His goodness, not so much as a look; or, if it is affected, it is but little. It makes no great haste, nor uses much solicitousness or pains about the matter; but as if the things were of no great importance, it is very moderate and easy-going in pursuing them. Neither that high hand that holds them forth, nor that blood that bought them, nor that worth that is in them works much; all is slighted. And therefore God comes amidst our despising these high things to vindicate them from our contempt, and teaches the soul by the sense of misery to value mercy, and by the fear of hell to prize Christ and be more serious in the ordinances as means of that good which they have learned to esteem by the want of it.

The Apostle's rule is to work out our salvation with fear and trembling, Philippians 2:12. Salvation is a tender business, and of great concern, and therefore will not be dallied with. What think you? Shall God set that before you which is better than the world, only to have you abuse it? You yourselves take away the bread when the child plays with it; and shall the Bread of Life be slighted? Shall God stand waiting upon you with calls and calls, and with gra-

cious offers, and will you dally with Him? Hence is that black cloud which now darkens the heavens over you. You have grown wanton, and unless the gospel comes dressed to please you, you slight it. Therefore God puts you into straits, and then you will come with a stomach, and in earnest.

Living too much upon the creature.

QUESTION. When is that?

ANSWER 1. When it takes up so much of a man's time, strength, thoughts, affections, and spirits that he is unfit for God; when the soul is sick with a surfeit of the world, drunk with cares, fears, and delights so that the heart is stolen away, and an indisposedness grows upon the soul towards God. This was Solomon's case till God fetched him by embittering his ways to him. The world is allowed as a way, or as an inn in our travels, but not as our home; to be a staff in our hand, but not to have a throne in our hearts. For this cause God rains down wrath and bitterness upon our spirits to wean us from the world, and thrusts out Hagar to give Sarah more full possession.

ANSWER 2. When a man cannot be without the world. When it gains so much in our opinion and affection that we think there is no life or subsistence without it, this is that for which God comes and takes off the soul with a storm, and rescues the poor captive with violence who was held in chains, and makes him see of how little use these things are in an evil day. When the soul falls to adulterous leagues with the world, when they are so joined that it lives and dies with the world, God brings this bill of divorce and turns off, as it were, the disloyal soul

to her miserable lovers that it may see the folly and wickedness of its way.

ANSWER 3. When a man can live without Christ. The pleasantness and abundance of earthly contentments have so bewitched him that he becomes like a prince who has such fullness that he can reign with Christ, and says in his heart as those: "We are lords; we will come no more unto thee," Jeremiah 2:31. Oh, what unworthy carriage is this! What, is Christ shut out that the world may reign? Expect God to say and do to you as He did to them: "Can a maid forget her ornaments, or a bride her attire? yet My people have forgotten Me days without number. Yea, thou shalt go forth from Me, and thine hands upon thine head: for the Lord hath rejected thy confidences, and thou shalt not prosper in them," Jeremiah 2:32, 37. While the sun shines and the sea is calm you may sport in the deep, but when the storm comes then the harbor will be precious. God will teach you that your life is in Christ, and in a day of fears and frights of soul you will say, "None but Christ, none but Christ."

God will bring all the enemies of Christ under His feet, and if there is a treacherous disposition like Joab exalting Adonijah into the throne of David, God will bring it down. Christ must have His own place; the throne must not be given to another. If you so set up the world that you count it happiness, and seek it more than Christ, and are more careful to leave this than Christ unto your children, God will arm Himself against you to subdue this treacherous conspiracy and rebellion against His Anointed.

ANSWER 4. Intractableness and stiffness of heart. This is another cause of the clouding of our comfort. God deals with the heart by cords of mercies and by bonds of affliction; but sometimes mercies move not and afflictions prevail not. Therefore God takes another course, as physicians, when gentle means profit not, will apply sharper ones. God will not lose any whom He has called; therefore if they are stubborn and stand like rocks against all ordinary means, He will come upon the tenderest part and use the sharpest way, and when He comes in storms and clouds, who can abide it? His rebukes are more terrible than thunder. "The spirit of a man will sustain his infirmity; but a wounded spirit who can bear?" Proverbs 18:14. Now the soul is opened up and comes upon her knees to submit herself, and melts like wax and yields to anything. It sees an absolute necessity of agreement with God when it is beleaguered with such trouble on every side. David had enough upon him to have humbled him, but his heart was strong till God put the cup of trembling into his hand; and this wrought so that it fetched up all and brought the man in frame.

Clay is easily molded, but the marble must have many blows. The sunbeams will melt the snow, but brass must be put into the fire. A tender sprig is easily nipped, but a stiff oak must be hacked and hewed before it falls. A stout spirit brings much sorrow upon it; it is a grievous temper; if it is not bowed to God, it grows worse and worse. If it is bowed, it is often with great violence. In natural causes, resistance increases the vigor and operation of contraries. When fire and water meet in strong opposition, how

does the stronger rage till it has gotten the victory! If a man enters a weight-lifting contest against a stout and a strong opponent, he calls up all his spirits and power that he may get the conquest. If a king sends messengers to deal with rebels, if neither offers, nor patience, nor counsels, nor favors can prevail, he arms himself against them. God will overcome; if fair means do not do the work, then He awakes Himself as a lion and comes as a man of war and lets fly His arrows into the soul, Job 6:4. God tried Ephraim in divers ways, but his heart yielded not; at last, when warning pieces did not bring him over, God mounted His cannons against him and gave him a broadside: "For the iniquity of his covetousness was I wroth," Isaiah 57:16-17; and then he struck sail and yielded, Jeremiah 31:19.

ANSWER 5. Rigidity and unmercifulness to the spiritual state of others. The saints are sometimes much wanting in bowels of pity and tenderness, and are apt by censures, neglects, contempts, and rough dealing to break the bruised reed; and it is hard to pity much till they have felt much. For this cause Christ was a man of sorrows: that we might be assured of His compassion. "Wherefore in all things it behooved Him to be made like unto His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people. For in that He Himself hath suffered being tempted, He is able to succor them that are tempted," Hebrews 2:17-18. God chooses broken vessels to pour comfort into that it may diffuse itself upon others. "Whether we be afflicted, it is for your consolation," 2 Corinthians 1:6.

Sense of the pains of a wounded spirit makes the heart tender, and God loves such a spirit. He abhors pride, insolence, and unmercifulness in all, but most in His children. It is very natural for family members to be uncompassionate one to another. The relationship requires love, and love calls for mercy. Christ is full of meekness and will not quench the smoking flax, nor break the bruised reed. And He who abounds in mercy loves mercy.

What if your brother is low in gifts and graces; yet know you not that the beauty of Christ's body is made up, as of the symmetry and congruity, so of the inequality of members? And the least infant in grace is as the apple of His eye. Take heed of destroying by your uncharitable carriage the temple of Christ, or causing those to grieve whom He would not have grieved. Is it for you, whom He has spared, to deal so with your fellow servant? Your hard dealing is the way to bring you into prison and lay you in chains.

What if he is poor and mean? Yet look not over him with disdain. "Have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with respect of persons," James 2:1. In this you are corrupt judges, "judges of evil thoughts," verse 4. The poor are chosen of God, "rich in faith, heirs of the kingdom," verse 5. If you despise the poor, it will occasion men to "blaspheme that worthy name by which ye are called," verse 7. The law said if "thou love thy neighbor as thyself, ye do well," verse 8. You must be judged by this law, and "he shall have judgment without mercy, that hath shewed no mercy," verse 13.

If your brother has many failings, or has offended, remember the rule: "Brethren, if a man be

overtaken in a fault, restore such a one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted. Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ," Galatians 6:1-2. Edom's sin was great because he added affliction to Jacob's troubles. "Neither shouldest thou have spoken proudly in the day of distress. As thou hast done, it shall be done unto thee: thy reward shall return upon thine own head," Obadiah 12,15.

ANSWER 6. Some great transgression. There are daily infirmities which have a pardon in course; but though God is merciful to the weakness of His servants, yet if they sin willingly and put out the light of counsel, He will put out the light of comfort. If they break the bonds of His government, He will cast them into bonds of distress.

David is a visible and known pattern in this case. Sometimes the saints take heed and run, as the wild ass in the desert does till her month comes in which she has travail and sorrow. Sometimes they wound the honor of the gospel, and so bring a wound upon themselves; a sword is sheathed in their souls. Sometimes they will run to their old ways, and this renews their old fears and breeds new troubles. Sometimes they lie long unhumbed, till God awakens them with rods and raises them by kindling a fire about them. Rebellion brings many loads. Disobedience and impenitence are springs of bitterness. A fire comes out of this bramble to burn the cedar of Lebanon.

CAUSE 5. To show that He is the God of all comfort, 2 Corinthians 1:4. He keeps the cistern empty that we may look to the clouds above, for the pleas-

ant fruit of peace has her roots in heaven. Our own hearts, though they may be planted with pleasant trees, yet of themselves bring forth nothing but briars. God loves to show Himself the Lord of these treasures of comfort that the heart may have no dependence but in Him, and that it may always fear, because He can soon turn the clearest day into the darkest night. Comfort is not given us in absolute possession, but we are always tenants at will. If God wills, He can, in a moment, lay our hopes and joys in the dust and strip us of all our garments of joy and turn us into mourning. And as light in the air, or as water not in the spring but in the vessel, so it may soon be cut off. God needs not go far to seek a rod to whip us with. If He but withdraws His comforting Spirit, our spirit will soon prove an afflicting spirit. The peace of the soul is by virtue of the power and presence of God, but if He departs, all is in uproar; our own thoughts will be as scourges.

The Roman Emperors kept lions to destroy the Christians; and our hearts are grates and dens of lions. If God lets them loose, oh, the rendings that happen by them! If God keeps not garrison, the enemies will break in; so all our peace is from Him. The brightest star that shines most with light of comfort derives it from the Sun of Righteousness. And therefore, that they may have a sight of that dark and dismal nature of their own hearts, He shuts in His light. And then, when the soul lies in a mournful and distressed case in depths where it finds no bottom, and from whence none can deliver; when a man sees all creatures standing as dead pictures, and reckons himself past all hope, then, I

say, God shows Himself to be the God of comfort by commanding light to shine out of darkness, and quieting the high and raging storms, which beat down all before them.

CAUSE 6. To revive their esteem of mercy. When a man is first brought out of Babylon, he is as those who dream. The heart is full of gladness, and the mouth full of praise. The birds sing sweetly in the spring. When a man is newly brought out of the pit and delivered from the sorrows of death which compassed him about, and from the pains of hell which got hold of him—while the prints of the chain are on him and the scars of his hurt remain—he says as David, “I love the Lord, because He hath heard my voice and my supplications,” Psalm 116:1. “I was brought low, and He helped me. Return unto thy rest, O my soul; for the Lord hath dealt bountifully with thee. For Thou hast delivered my soul from death, mine eyes from tears, and my feet from falling,” verses 6–8.

The soul floats in exultation at first, but when the days of mercy continue, the remembrance of the days of sorrow wears off and the fire of love begins to abate, and Christ is not of so high account; though at first He was the chiefest of ten thousands, the joy of their hearts, yet now His love and kindness grow stale. Therefore God sends back the soul into its old prison to feel the weight of its ancient irons and chains, and causes it to put on its old cast garments of mourning, that sackcloth and ashes which it wore in the days of old, that by laying this rod upon it, as the prophet spread himself upon the dead child, so a new life may come into the dying love.

ing love. And now mercy is raised to its former price, and Christ is advanced on high; now the soul returns with doubled strength, and with multiplied and increased thankfulness.

CAUSE 7. That others may be instructed. Sometimes God chooses the most eminent to set them out as demonstrations of this: that assurance is not essential to holiness; that their conjunction is not indissoluble. Weak ones might have thought their cause worse if they had seen much grace always attended with abundant joy. But now God shows that comfort and rejoicing are not always the portion of the saints; that in their dark nights, when they see no light, they may live in hope that the sun will rise. Though their way is a dark way, it may be a sure way.

CAUSE 8. To fit for special service. Those who go down into the depths see many wonders which others know not. Experience gives wisdom. Many are kept in a low way, and have neither strong fears nor strong joys. These are not as David's worthies, but are Christians of the lower rank, common soldiers. Many are carried much aloft in great hopes and flashes of joy, but they much overlook the things below; many infirmities and failings lie undiscovered. But when God fetches the soul down, and sets it to dig beneath, this man is more enlarged in true wisdom and holiness, and carries a fuller knowledge of sin, Christ, hell, and heaven than others do, and so is made a stronger and more complete man. He who has been in all conditions, and has traveled through sea and land, and seen many countries, gains an excellency by his experience above others. A homebred spirit is a low spirit. God will not do much with

many, but leaves them to this work mainly to save their own souls. But He will use some as His agents and factors in His great designs and affairs of mercy, and therefore trains them up to the knowledge of heights and depths. Some are ordinary passengers, and it is enough for them to look to themselves, being able to do but little for others; but some must be pilots, and therefore must be acquainted with winds and seas and rocks and sands that they may not only save themselves, but others.

Afflictions come not empty-handed, but like a dark cloud bring much after them. There are many things which a man cannot learn in books, but he must learn them in himself. A scholar may read and acquaint himself with the art of navigation, but that will not make him a good mariner; nor will the study of war make a soldier. But experience makes both.

God does all; as in great freedom, so in great wisdom. And having appointed men to several ends, He leads them in several paths, and works them in several molds. Out of the same lump He makes some differ from others in form, quantity, and excellence. Some metal which is for highest use, He casts often into the fire. It may be that God may call you out to suffer much for Him, and desertions are great preparations—partly because they give much experience of the vanity of all creatures. He has shown you; learn how little they avail in the day of wrath, so that you may see you part not with so great matters, if you do part with the world. God has shown you that life is not in them, and that you may live without them; and, partly because you have felt greater evils, you

are more encouraged to endure lesser ones. You will not fear to fight a stripling after you have encountered a Goliath. Moreover, in the greatest depths, have you not seen how all your fears have vanished, and all your sorrows passed away by the light of God's countenance shining forth upon you?

And so you see that the joy of the Lord is strong. It is a sign of much love, and that you are highly placed with God, when He thus leads you into several states; for this is to lead you by the hand, to see all that may be seen; and if He did not intend much good, He would not bestow so much work upon you. You stand in the greatest conformity to Christ when through many tribulations and afflictions you enter into glory.

God keeps you from much soiling by constant rubbing, and uses the fan so much to blow away the chaff, and keeps you awake by these stirs. Some troubles ennoble the spirit from a state which would degenerate into effeminacy by constant peace. Winds fan the air and purge it; and the running and restless waters are most clear.

This may suffice to have pointed at some causes of God's cutting off the comforts of the saints.

Having hitherto treated the case of the afflicted soul, I now come to the cure. I shall not need to enlarge myself much here, having been somewhat copious in the cure of the first kind of desertions. There are two sorts of men who walk much without the consolations. In the first sort, the cause is natural, in the second spiritual.

As for the first, who are oppressed with melan-

choly, that dark and dusky humor which disturbs both soul and body, their cure belongs rather to the physician than to the divine. Galen is more proper for them than a minister of the gospel. It is a pestilent humor where it abounds; one calls it the devil's bath.

These men cannot walk clearly. But as a light in a dark lantern shines dimly, so is the soul in such a body. The distemper of the body causes distemper of soul, for the soul follows its temper. This disease works strange passions, strange imaginations, and heavy conclusions; it is not possible for such a man to be quiet till he is cured. The seas rage not more naturally when the winds blow than this man. He may sometimes be elevated, as it were, into the third heavens; but soon he will be brought, as it were, into the lowest hell. But I leave such with this advice: when you find your temper to be melancholic naturally or by disease, use all such ways as God has prepared in a natural way. For as the soul is not cured by natural causes, so the body is not cured by spiritual remedies.

But I shall direct myself to those whose heaviness of spirit is from spiritual causes.

These persons are of two sorts: sleeping and awakened.

First, there are some slumbering and drowsy spirits who are fallen from their former comforts and know it, but make up that want in the creature in which they take delight, living in the meantime without God. As it was in the former kind of desertion, so it is in this: God is departed, and either men know it not or mind it not. They bear their doleful

loss with a stupid and a sinful patience, or, rather, with a stupid dullness. But if you find yourselves in such a case, consider what a contempt of God it is to be willing to live without Him, and to pour out your hearts upon the creature. You must look for a bitter scourge unless you repent, or else God will leave you to walk on to your graves in a dull and a low way.

It is a woeful change to descend from communion with God and Christ to these poor things below. And how little do you set by all precious promises, the favor of the great and eternal God, and the blood and love and presence of Jesus Christ, who can be content to live in such a state! Look upon others, how their souls have melted when God has been estranged from them. Where is your love, faith, fear, hope, and life that you can endure to be so? If these were not all asleep, you would take up a cry for your former happiness, and sit down and weep over your present misery. Is the loss of a friend in the earth so grievous, and is a Friend in heaven of no more account? You live in spiritual adultery because your Husband is neglected while other things are entertained. Awaken yourselves, and seek to regain your former peace and joy in God.

Some are awakened and see their loss, and are affected with it. This sort, though it has more sorrow, yet is in a better way than the former.

To both these groups I will propound some persuasives and directives.

For persuasion, consider that comfort is your strength. The more a man sees and feels the love of God, the more the heart is established. There are three great assaults and trials a man is exposed to.

The first is temptations to sin. He who will walk in the way of God shall not always sail in a calm. The great Leviathan will show himself, he whose victories have been many, even among the highest saints. Now, if your hearts are filled with comfort, you have a strength greater than the world. For the manifestation of divine love is the incendiary of love, which is stronger than death. So long as love for Christ is kept up, the heart is safe; love is a strong garrison and makes the soul impregnable. And while you keep a fresh and clear sight of the love of God and Christ, it feeds love and keeps it up in strength. In addition, consider that the comfortable enjoyment of God carries the heart aloft; it makes the conversation to be in heaven. And while a man's way is above, he is safe from the snares below. Then the heart is in danger of being ensnared when it wanders in the creature. The fowl is in danger when she is upon the earth, but when she is mounted upon the wing she is safe.

The second assault is inward accusations. The world may accuse, but that is not as shaking as when Satan casts in objections. He is a subtle sophist, and comes oft with snarling and cunning disputes; and unless you are well settled, he will drive you from your ground. Unless God clears the state of your souls, and gives evidence of your graces, you will not be able to hold up against Satan. I speak this to such as live with low comforts, and content themselves with dark evidences. Though you may hold out till you are set upon, when that time of trial comes you will find yourselves weak.

The third assault is outward straits. What if a day

of trouble comes? You may see changes; you have no sure hold of anything under the sun, and what shall support you in such a time? What a heavy thing will this be that you should find trouble in the world, and no peace in heaven! Spiritual comfort would make you undaunted and strong. What need is there for him to care where he goes who sees Jesus Christ with him? You have heard of the patience of the martyrs, and of their stoutness; such was their courage that it could neither be corrupted nor daunted; water could not quench it, famine could not starve it, fire could not burn it, wild beasts could not devour it. And what was that which gave them this strength but the sight of Him who is invisible, and the sense of His favor and presence? A Spirit of glory rested upon them. The Apostle acknowledged the force of peace towards God and comfortable access to Him. We "rejoice in hope of the glory of God. And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also," Romans 5:2-3. This was that which made him say, "For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day," 2 Corinthians 4:16.

He is well fenced who is encircled with salvation, and who has Christ with him. He reckons not much of the world when he is sure of heaven. Therefore, seek to get abundance of comfort. Labor to recover your loss; you will have need of all. What will you do when you come to die? How sad will death be when you are going you know not where? But death is but a shadow to him who meets it with assurance of life.

Your sadness does hurt to yourselves, wasting your strength, and to others by discouraging them.

Your recovery is possible. You may attain to your former comforts. The same way is open still. There is the same mercy in God, the same Mediator, the same promises.

You are not now in further distance from peace with God than in former times. Are you not now as capable as then, when God found you in your blood, in enmity against Him, in darkness, in bondage unto every lust, altogether without Him? Did God appear to you when you sought Him not, and will He not be found when you inquire after Him? Is not His promise to revive the spirit of the contrite, as in Isaiah 57?

Others have recovered. David was in these depths, yet he was restored. This testimony God gives, that He is the God "that comforteth those that are cast down," 2 Corinthians 7:6. Therefore, live in hope.

He hides His face that you may seek Him. He goes from you that you may seek Him. And the promise is that they who seek shall find. He will open to them who knock.

You have a right to peace and comfort. For it is that which Christ died for, and which He has left as a legacy to His people. "Peace I leave with you, My peace I give unto you," John 14:27.

Sit not therefore under discouragements. Say not, "There is no hope." Take heed of hard thoughts of God, who is a Father of mercies, but encourage yourselves in your God. Weeping and mourning are good fruits of love; you must not stay here, but reach after that which is before you. This shall suffice by way of persuasion.

Now for directions, let me propound a few counsels.

1. Seek the Father in the Son. Perhaps you have not held up Christ in your hearts; and due to your strangeness to the Son the Father has estranged Himself. Go and carry Christ in your arms, for He is dear unto God, and the Father has determined to pour out all His love through the Son. Christ is set before you; stir up yourselves to take hold of Him; if you will come to Him, you have the Father's heart. You make your case to be Christ's case when you come to Him, and He cannot be denied. The Father's mercies melt at the Son's mediation. You may pray and weep and lift up your voice on high, but unless you come in Christ, all will be of no profit. A man comes in Christ when he thankfully accepts the offer of Christ and devolves his cares upon Him, desiring in his heart that Christ would undertake for him, and then believes that he shall be accepted. If any one of these is wanting, you come not in Christ.

You must entertain the offer of Christ, counting Him worthy of all acceptance. You must cast yourselves upon Christ, else He will not undertake for you. Holy dependence engages Him, and makes Him your Friend. You must believe that you shall find God a Friend; for unless you believe the promise, Christ will not move for you. But when you are thus come to Him, then He will not fail you. The Son will hold fast to you. "Him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out," John 6:37. This is a precious word. Christ will not shut the door upon you when you come. When you cast yourselves into His arms,

He will not, no, He will not cast you out; you have a sure hold. When you fall into His arms, you fall into His heart; and being in His heart you will be sure that if He has any power with the Father, He will work your peace.

Why do you afflict yourselves? If you believe, you shall be established. Christ will carry you in to the Father, and will draw out His kindness towards you. And know that if the Father loves the Son, He will show favor to His friends. And who can express that love that Christ bears to a mourning soul who flies for refuge to Him? His love was such that He died for you, and will He not speak a good word for you?

You sit poring and searching for pillars of hope within you, and bestow much pains to answer your own fears; but the ready way to make the business clear is by going to Christ. Stand not so much upon this query, whether you have believed in truth or not, but put all out of doubt by a present faith. The door is open; enter and live. You may more easily build a new house and fabric of comfort by taking Christ than repair your old dwelling, and you may thus clear all suits that are brought against your tenure.

Hear, Christ calls you: "Come unto Me, all ye that are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest," Matthew 11:28. And, "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come," Isaiah 55:1. "Let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely," Revelation 22:17. And now will you not go? Oh, that you would go! How soon would your mourning be turned into joy, and your sadness into gladness! How would those everlasting arms of

mercy embrace you! And you should have future happiness in a kind of presence.

2. Seek peace much. Be not weary, but strengthen yourselves in the promise. Let this pillar hold up your trembling hands, for "He that shall come will come, and will not tarry." Behold, He comes, and His reward is with Him. Oh, I think I see the fountain opening itself to the thirsty. I see the clouds dissolving; prepare your vessels; stay a while, for I hear the sound of many waters. You are at the right door; knock, and knock hard; the Lord is there, there dwells everlasting mercy. Hark, how the saints sing for joy! Look in and see paradise, and rivers of joy feeding them. How came they to get in but by lying at the gate? Hold on, for in due time you shall reap if you faint not, Galatians 6:9.

My friends, these are not dreams, they are real truths which Jehovah will make good to those who believe. You come, it may be, but you come not in faith, and you stay not with patience. Consult with reason and with the Scriptures: is there a way to God or not? If yea, what is that way? If God tells you this is the way, then walk in it; wait in it. And though you have lost your comfortable enjoyment of Christ, yet I say to you as the angels to them: "This same Jesus, which is taken from you, shall so come as ye have seen Him go," Acts 1:11. Therefore keep your eyes upward; pray much and the heavens will open. When you believe and pray, you have the key of heaven in your hand; those everlasting doors will open to you. Therefore, hold up yourselves in seeking. You may meet with fire and a tempest and storms, but stay and the still voice will come.

3. Come with much love for God. Come as a friend, then come and welcome. Many desire ease, and desire to be delivered from wrath and hell, but come in love; desire God to be your Friend and be willing to be His friend. Let love show itself in two things:

Lament your sin. That has caused a strangeness between God and you. Come weeping for sin and humbled for your unkindness, and all is forgiven. You think too meanly of God when you think He has much ado to pardon you. He is ready to forgive, and He overflows in pardoning mercy. He expects your acknowledgment and repentance, and then you are friends.

Come with new and strong engagements of heart. Bring yourselves as an offering to Him, and sacrifice yourselves upon that golden altar, Jesus Christ. Say, "Lord, if Thou wilt love me, I will love Thee; be Thou mine, and I am Thine, and will be Thine."

Thus two old friends shall renew their friendship, and those who were at a distance shall meet in love. He who departed shall return with kindness, and he who was forsaken shall be received with mercy; and the ancient joy which was in heaven at his first conversion shall be renewed at his restoration. Now clap your hands, ye heavens and earth, for the son who was lost is found, and he who was dead is alive. The exile is received, and a covenant of peace is renewed between a man of sorrows and the God of peace, through the Prince of Peace, to whom be praise forever.

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