

THE WORKS OF JOHN OWEN
EDITED BY
WILLIAM H. GOOLD
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THE WORKS OF JOHN OWEN
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ΦΡΟΝΗΜΑ ΤΟΤ ΠΗΕΨΜΑΤΟΣ
(*Phronema tot Pneumatos*)

THE MIND OF THE SPIRIT

OR, THE

**GRACE AND DUTY OF BEING
SPIRITUALLY MINDED**

DECLARED AND PRACTICALLY IMPROVED.

*To be spiritually minded is life and peace. — Romans 8:6
Set your affection on things above. — Colossians 3:2.*

John Owen

London
1681

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Notes on Modernization

Owen's wording here is more pastoral than theological. These are sermons written for the Church, not treatises for the Academy. As you'll read in his preface, it was born of personal experience — notes he'd written to himself at the close of his life, as he worked through the reasons for his own spiritual frustrations. And so, I've tried to make it more personal, almost colloquial. This is a pastor speaking to his flock, comforting and encouraging them, even as he exhorts them to be *spiritually minded* at all times. I've tried to make it easier to read, but Owen is never easy.

Let me explain one unusual use of language: today we say that we "act *in* faith," or we "act *under* grace," and the Spirit imparts the grace that we act under. But Owen says that the Holy Spirit imparts a living principle to us, then "acts grace" in us, and we "act faith" (rather than "act out our faith"). *Actings* are repeated acts of this kind. The words *actual* and *actually* are the adjectival and adverbial forms of "act;" today we use them interchangeably with "real" or "really."

There is much here that Owen had previously written in *Mortification of Sin*, in 1656. You'll see many of the same principles and phrases. But this isn't a rehash of that book. It's much warmer, richer, and more application oriented — a deeper examination of what often gets in the way of our mortification. Owen speaks of events in his own day, of the social tumult, and of the indications of Christians' distractedness, even worldliness "in their habits, attires, and vestments, in their usual converse and misspent time, in their overly-liberal entertainment of themselves and others, to the borders of excess." That should sound familiar to Christians in the 21st century.

As with *Mortification*, it's possible to read this book as a self-critique — to feel self-condemned that our walk with Christ is not as sincere, godly, or productive as it could be. That would be the wrong thing to take away from Owen's exhortation. He warns us *against* such legalism. Every Christian knows that we can do the right thing for the wrong reasons — that our heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked (Jer 17.9). How, then, can we be assured that what we do will be pleasing to God, honoring to Christ, and a benefit to the Church? Owen says that to the extent our thoughts are filled with God, as He is in Himself, for who He is — our thoughts, motives, and actions will be sanctified, and made acceptable to Him. To the extent we can take our thoughts away from the world, and fill them with the Gospel, we will find life and peace. To the extent that we live for the world *to come*, as we serve Christ in *this* world, we can endure and prosper in all that we do and experience. It begins in the mind, in what we most think about. This is the measure of a changed and increasingly sanctified heart.

Owen was 65 years old when he wrote this. Imagine him looking back on his life, maybe wondering if he'd made a difference. The English Civil wars ended in 1660, but so did the *Interregnum*. Roman Catholics again had the upper hand in Church and State. In 1662, in *The Great Ejection*, two thousand Puritan preachers had been ousted from their pulpits. The *Restoration* of the monarchy had succeeded, and the Royalists held sway under Charles II. Hard-fought Puritan gains were undone by the *Clarendon Code*. Owen had experienced twenty years of civil unrest, spiritual disenchantment, moral decline, political corruption, and persecution of the Protestant Nonconformists. The king dissolved the Parliament in 1681, the year this book was written. The *Glorious Revolution* wouldn't arrive till 1688; but Owen died in 1683. There was much going on in the world, to distract his mind from the things of God, even as he labored for Christ.

How then are Christians to live in such a world? How then is the Church to conduct itself when it is filled with so many who know only a form of godliness, but not its power? This treatise is Owen's counsel to the true Church, to his fellow believers, in times such as these. *Draw near to God*; be *spiritually minded*; focus on the things of God — for these earthly things shall soon pass away.

William Gross

9/17/2020

PREFATORY NOTE.

OWEN is an instance that attention to the outward order of the sanctuary, and zeal for the general rights of those who worship in it, are not incompatible with the cultivation of personal holiness and spirituality. In the year 1681, when he had published a tract in defense of the Nonconformists, and his laborious "Inquiry into Evangelical Churches," the following treatise, so rich in the spiritual experience of a renewed heart, was given to the world. During a season of indisposition so great that he had been led to anticipate the close of his earthly labors, he had composed some meditations for his own use. On his recovery, he preached the substance of them to his congregation; and they were afterwards published in the shape of this treatise. There is scarcely one of Owen's more important works, that some authority might not signify a preference for it as the *best* of his productions. *This* treatise, however, would perhaps command the greatest number of votes in its favor. It evinces the same sharp discrimination of human motives and character; but its prevailing design seems to be to elevate believers above earthly objects, and console them amid present trials. And it contains some passages which, in solemn tenderness and beauty, are not surpassed in all the writings of our author, who is here not so much a *Boanerges* set for the defense of the gospel, as a *Barnabas* intent on the consolation of the saints.

"The following treatise of Dr. Owen," says Dr. Chalmers, "holds a distinguished rank among the voluminous writings of this celebrated author. And it is characterized by a forcible application of truth to the conscience, by a depth of experiential feeling, an accuracy of spiritual discernment into the intricacies and operations of the human mind, and a skill in exploring the secracies of the heart, and the varieties of affection, and the ever-shifting phases of character, which render this admirable treatise not less a *test*, than a valuable *guide* to the honest inquirer, in his scrutiny into the real state of his heart and affections."

PREFACE

I THINK it necessary to give the reader a brief account of the nature and design of the ensuing plain discourse, which may both direct him in the reading and be some kind of apology for myself in publishing it. He may know, therefore, that the thoughts communicated here were originally private meditations for my own use, in a season in which I was in every way unable to do anything for the edification of others, and far from any expectation that I should be so able anymore in this world. Receiving, as I thought, some benefit and satisfaction in the exercise of my own meditations in this, when God was graciously pleased to restore a little strength to me, I insisted on the same subject in the instruction of a private congregation. And I did this, partly out of a sense of the advantage I had received myself by being conversant¹ in them, and partly from an apprehension that the duties directed and pressed for in the whole discourse, were timely (from all sorts of present circumstances) to be declared and urged on the minds and consciences of professors.² For leaving others to the choice of their own methods and designs, I acknowledge that these are the *two things* by which I regulate my work in the whole course of my ministry — to impart those truths of whose power I hope I have had a real experience *in some measure*; and to press those duties which *present occasions, temptations, and other circumstances, render it necessary* to be attended in a particular manner.

These are the things which I would principally apply myself to in the work of teaching others. For as in the work of the ministry in *general*, the whole counsel of God is to be declared concerning the salvation of the church by Jesus Christ, so in *particular*, we are not to fight uncertainly as men beating the air, nor shoot our arrows at random without a certain scope and design.

Knowledge of the flock of which we are overseers, with a due consideration of their wants, their graces, their temptations, their light, their strength and weakness, are required in this. And when, in pursuit of that design, the preparation of the word to be dispensed, proceeds from zeal for the glory of God and compassion for the souls of men — when it is delivered with the demonstration of a due reverence for God, whose word it is, and of authority towards those to whom it is dispensed — with a deep sense of that great account which both those who preach and those who hear the word preached, must shortly give before the judgment-seat of Christ — there may be a comfortable expectation of a blessed issue (*outcome or fruit*) of the whole work.

But my present design is only to declare in particular the reasons why I judged the preaching and publishing of this small and plain discourse, concerning “the Grace and Duty of being Spiritually Minded,” not to be altogether unseasonable at this time, in the present circumstances of most Christians. And the first thing I would observe to this end, is the present importunity of the *world* to impose itself on the minds of men, and the various ways of insinuation by which it possesses and fills them. If it attains this — if it can fill the minds, thoughts, and affections of men with *itself* — then in some, it will fortify the soul *against* faith and obedience, and in others it will *weaken* all grace, and endanger them to eternal ruin. For “if we love the world, the love of the Father is not in us;” and when the world fills our thoughts, it will entangle our affections. And first, the present state of all public affairs in the world, with an apprehended concern by private persons in it, continually exercises the thoughts of many. It is almost the only subject of their mutual converse;³ for the world at present is in a mighty hurry. And in many places, being thrown off all foundations of steadfastness, it makes the minds of men giddy with its revolutions, or it makes them disorderly in their expectations of them.

¹ *Conversant*: closely familiar; current; having frequent interaction.

² *Professors*: believers; those who profess their faith in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior.

³ *Converse*: here it means public interaction with others, in both words and deeds.

Thoughts about these things are both allowable and unavoidable, *if* they don't take the mind away from its own power by their multiplicity, vehemency, and urgency, until it is *unframed* as to spiritual things, retaining neither room nor time to entertain them.

Hence, men walk and talk as if the world were *all*, when comparatively, it is *nothing*. And when men come with their heated affections, reeking with thoughts of these *worldly* things, as to the performance of or attendance to any *spiritual* duty, it is very difficult for them, if not impossible, to stir up any grace to a due and vigorous exercise. Unless this plausible advantage which the world has obtained of insinuating itself and its occasions into the minds of men, so as to fill and possess them — unless this is watched against and obviated, at least so far as it may not transform the mind into its *own* image and likeness — this grace of being *spiritually minded*, which is *life* and *peace*, cannot be attained or kept to its due exercise. Nor can any of us be delivered from this snare, in this season, without a watchful endeavor to keep and preserve our minds in the constant contemplation of things spiritual and heavenly, proceeding from the prevalent adherence of our affections to them, as will appear in the ensuing discourse.

Again; there are such great and pregnant evidences of the prevalence of an earthly, worldly frame of spirit in many who make a profession of religion, that it is high time they were called to a due consideration of how at odds they are in this, to the power and spirituality of that religion which they profess. There is no way by which such a frame may be shown to prevail in many (indeed, in *most* such professors), that is not already manifest to all. In their habits, attires, and vestments, in their usual converse and misspent time, in their overly-liberal entertainment of themselves and others, to the borders of excess — and sundry other things of a like nature — there is in many, such a conformity to the world (a thing severely forbidden) that it is hard to make a distinction between them. And these things manifest such a predominance of carnal affections in the minds of men, that whatever may be pretended to the contrary, it is inconsistent with spiritual peace. To call men away from this evil frame of heart and mind — to reveal the sin and danger of it, to direct them to the ways and means by which it may be affected, to supply their thoughts and affections with better objects, to reveal and press that exercise of them which is indispensably required of all believers if they want life and peace — is some part of the work of the ensuing discourse.

It may be that it will be judged a weak attempt to attain that end. But it cannot be denied that it has these two advantages — *first*, that it is timely, and *secondly*, that it is sincerely intended. And this labor will not be lost if it has only this success — that it may occasion others who have more ability and opportunity than I have, to bring in their assistance for opposing the vehement and importunate insinuations of the world, in these things which entertain the minds of professors.

But things have come to pass among us, that unless a more than ordinary vigorous exercise of the ministry of the word, with other means appointed for the same end, are engaged in to recall professors to that strict mortification — to that sincerity of conversation, that separation from the ways of the world, that heavenly mindedness, that delight in the contemplation of spiritual things — which the gospel and the whole nature of Christian religion require, we will lose the glory of our profession, and leave it very uncertain what will be our eternal condition. The same may be said concerning love of the world, as to the advantages and emoluments which men trust to attain for themselves thereby. This is what renders men earthly-minded, and most remote from having their conversation above.

In the pursuit of this corrupt affection, many professors of religion grow withered, useless, sapless, giving no evidence that the love of God abides in them. On these and many other accounts, many Christians evidence that they are strangers to spiritual mindedness, to a life of meditation and holy contemplation on things above. Yet, unless we are found in these things in some good measure, no grace will thrive or flourish in us, no duty will be rightly performed by us, no condition will be sanctified or improved, nor are we *prepared* in a due manner, or "*made fit* for the inheritance of the saints in light."

Owen's Preface

This is why, as it was said, the design and scope of the ensuing discourse is to direct and provoke men to the only remedy for all these evils — to what alone is the means of giving them a view into, and a foretaste of eternal glory, especially for those who are in my own condition — namely, in a near approach to a departure out of this world, and why it is recommended to the grace of God, for the benefit of the reader.

THE GRACE AND DUTY OF BEING SPIRITUALLY MINDED.

PART 1.

CHAPTER 1. THE WORDS OF THE TEXT EXPLAINED.

“To be spiritually minded is life and peace.” Rom 8.6.

THE expression in our translation sounds different from that in the original. “To be spiritually minded,” we say. In the original it is φρόνημα τοῦ πνεύματος (*phronema tou Pneumatos*), because in the former part of the verse is φρονημα τῆς σάρκος (*phronema te sarkos*), which we render “to be carnally minded.” In the margin we read, “the minding of the flesh” and “the minding of the Spirit;” and there is great variety in the rendering of the words in all translations, both ancient and modern. *“Prudentia, sapientia, intelligentia, mens, cogitatio, discretio, id quod Spiritus sapit,”* — “The wisdom, the understanding, the mind, the thought or contrivance,¹ the discretion of the Spirit, that which the Spirit savours,” are all used to express it. All our English translations, since Tyndale’s, the first of them, have constantly used, “To be spiritually minded;” nor do I know any words by which the emphasis of the original, considering the design² of the apostle in the place, can be better expressed. But the meaning of *the Holy Ghost* in them must be further inquired into.

In the whole verse, there are two entire propositions, containing a double *antithesis* — the one in their subjects, the other in their predicates. And this opposition is the highest and greatest that is beneath eternal *blessedness* and eternal *ruin*.

The opposite *subjects* are, “minding of the flesh” and “minding of the Spirit,” or being “carnally minded” and “spiritually minded.” And these two constitute two states of mankind, one of which every individual person in the world belongs to; and it is of the highest concern to the souls of men to know which of them they pertain to. As for the qualities expressed by “the flesh” and “the Spirit,” there may be a mixture of them in the same persons at the same time — this is so in all who are regenerate; for in them “the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh, and these are contrary,” Gal 5.17. Thus, different and contrary actings in the same person, don’t constitute distinct states; but where either of them is *predominant* or has a prevalent rule in the soul, it makes a different state. The apostle expresses this distinction in Rom 8.9, “But you are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit.” Some are “in the flesh, and cannot please God,” verse 8; they are “after the flesh,” verse 5; they “walk after the flesh,” verse 1; they “live after the flesh,” verse 13. *This is the one state.* Others are “in the Spirit,” verse 9; “after the Spirit,” verse 5; “walk after the Spirit,” verse 1. *This is the other state.* The first are “carnally minded;” the other are “spiritually minded.” Again, every living man belongs to one of these; he is under the ruling conduct of the *flesh* or of the *Spirit*; there is no middle state, though there are different *degrees* in each of these, as to good and evil.

The difference between these two states is great, and the distance in a manner is infinite, because an eternity in blessedness or misery depends upon it. At present, this is evidenced by the different fruits and effects of the *principles* and their operations, which constitute these different states. This is expressed in the opposition that exists between the predicates of the propositions: for the minding of the flesh is “death,” but the minding of the Spirit is “life and peace.”

“To be carnally minded is death.” Death, as it is absolutely penal, is either *spiritual* or *eternal*. It is *formally* spiritual, and *meritoriously* eternal. It is formally spiritual death: for those who are carnally minded are “dead in trespasses and sins,” Eph 2.1; for those who “fulfill the desires of the flesh and of the mind are by nature children of wrath,” verse 3 — they are penal under the power

¹ *Contrivance*: the faculty of devising a plan; an inventive skill. — WHG

² *Design*: as Owen often uses this word, it is to *intend* or *mean*; — WHG

CHAPTER 1. THE WORDS OF THE TEXT EXPLAINED.

of spiritual death. They are “dead in sins and the uncircumcision of the flesh,” Col 2.13. And it is eternal death meritoriously: “For if you live after the flesh, you shall die,” Rom 8.13; as “the wages of sin is death,” Rom 6.23.

The reason why the apostle denounces so woeful a doom, so dreadful a sentence on the carnal mind, he declares in the two next verses: “Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can it be. So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God.” If it is thus with the carnal mind, it is no wonder that “to be carnally minded is death;” it is not fit to be anything else. That which is enmity against God, is under the curse of God.

In opposition to this, it is affirmed that “to be spiritually minded,” or the minding of the Spirit, “is life and peace.” And these are the things which we will particularly inquire into — namely, What is this “minding of the Spirit?” And then, How it is “life and peace?”

1. The “Spirit” in this context is evidently used in a double sense, which is usual where both the Holy Spirit *himself*, and his *work* on the souls of men, are related.

(1.) The *person of the Spirit of God himself*, or the Holy Ghost, is intended by it: Rom 8.9, “If the Spirit of God dwells in you.” And so also, verse 11, “The Spirit of Him who raised up Jesus from the dead.” He is spoken of as the principal efficient cause of all the spiritual mercies and benefits that are here and afterward insisted on.

(2.) It is used for the *principle of spiritual life* wrought in all who are regenerated by the Holy Ghost; for “that which is born of the Spirit is spirit,” Joh 3.6.

It is most probable that the name “Spirit” is used here in the second sense — not for the Spirit himself, but for “that which is born of the Spirit,” the *principle of spiritual life* in those who are born of God; for in its nature, it is those actings, inclinations, and operations, that are opposed to “the flesh,” Rom 8.1, 4, 5. But “the flesh” intended here, is that inherent corrupt principle of the depraved nature from which all evil actions proceed, and with which the actions of all evil men are vitiated. The opposition between them is the same as that mentioned and declared by the apostle in Gal 5.17, etc. Therefore, “the Spirit” in this place is the holy, vital principle of new obedience, wrought in the souls of believers by the Holy Ghost, enabling them to live to God.

2. A *mind* is ascribed to this Spirit, φρόνημα (*phronema*). As we have intimated, it is translated with great variety. Φρόνησις (*phronesis*) is the principal power and act of the mind. It is its light, wisdom, prudence, knowledge, understanding, and discretion. It is not merely with respect to speculation or ratiocination¹, which is διάνοια (*dianoia*). But this σύνεσις (*sunesis*), is its power as it is *practical*, including the habitual frame and inclination of the affections also. It is its faculty to *conceive* of things, with a delight in them and adherence to them, from that suitableness which it finds in them to all its affections. Hence we sometimes translate φρονεῖν (*phronein*) “to think,” — that is, to conceive and judge, as in Rom 12.3; sometimes “to set the affection,” Col 3.2 — to have such an apprehension of things as to cling to them with our affections; sometimes to “mind,” to “mind earthly things,” Phi 3.19. This includes that relish and savor which the mind finds in the things it is fixed on. Nowhere does it design a notional conception of things only, but principally the engagement of the affections to the things which the mind apprehends.

Φρόνημα, (*phronema*) the word used here, expresses the actual exercise, τῆς φρονήσεως (*tes phroneseus*), of the power of the mind described before. Therefore, “minding the Spirit” is the actual exercise of the mind as renewed by the Holy Ghost; as furnished with a principle of spiritual life and light in its conception of spiritual things, and setting its affections on them; as finding that relish and savor in them with which it is pleased and satisfied.

¹ *Ratiocination*: logical and methodical (rational) reasoning

CHAPTER 1. THE WORDS OF THE TEXT EXPLAINED.

And some things we must still further observe, to give light to this description of “minding the Spirit” as spoken of here, are these:

1. It is not spoken of absolutely as to what it is *in itself*, but with respect to its power and prevalence *in us*, significantly rendered, “To be spiritually minded;” that is, to have the mind changed and renewed by a principle of spiritual life and light, so as to be continually acted and influenced by it to thoughts and meditations about spiritual things, from the affections clinging to them with delight and satisfaction. So too, on the contrary, it is when men “mind earthly things.” From a principle of love for them, their thoughts, meditations, and desires are continually engaged about them, arising from their suitableness to their corrupt affections. Therefore —

2. Three things may be distinguished in the great duty of being spiritually minded, under which notion it is recommended to us here:

(1.) The *actual exercise of the mind*, in its thoughts, meditations, and desires, about things spiritual and heavenly. So is it expressed in the preceding verse: “Those who are after the flesh mind the things of the flesh” — they think about them, their contrivances are about them, and their desires are for them; “but those who are after the Spirit, the things of the Spirit.” They mind them by fixing their thoughts and meditations upon them.

(2.) The *inclination, disposition, and frame of the mind*, in all its affections, by which it adheres and clings to spiritual things. This “minding of the Spirit” resides habitually in the affections. Therefore, the *φρόνημα* (*phronema*) of the Spirit, or the *mind* as renewed and actuated by a spiritual principle of light and life, is the exercise of its thoughts, meditations, and desires, on spiritual things, proceeding from the love and delight of its affections in them, and engagement to them.

(3.) A *complacency of mind*,¹ from that gusto, relish, and savor which it finds in spiritual things, from their suitableness to its constitution, inclinations, and desires. There is a salt in spiritual things, by which they are seasoned and made savory to a renewed mind — though to others they are like the white of an egg, that has no taste or savor in it. In this gusto and relish lies the sweetness and satisfaction of spiritual life. When speculative notions about spiritual things, are alone, they are dry, sapless, and barren. In this gusto we taste by experience that God is gracious, and that the love of Christ is better than wine, or whatever else has the most grateful relish to a sensual appetite. This is the proper foundation of “joy which is unspeakable and full of glory.”

All these things concur in the minding of the Spirit, or they constitute any person who is spiritually minded. Although the foundation of the whole duty included in it lies in the affections, and their immediate adherence to spiritual things, from which the thoughts and meditations of the mind about them proceed, yet I will treat the distinct parts of this duty in the order laid down, beginning with the exercise of our thoughts and meditations about them. For being the first genuine actings of the mind according to the prevalence of affections in it, they will make the best and most evident discovery of what nature the spring is from which they arise. I need not speak distinctly to what is mentioned in the third place, concerning the complacency of the mind in what its affections are fixed on; for it will fall in with sundry other things that are to be spoken to.

But before we proceed, it is not amiss, I suppose, to remark upon those important truths which are directly contained in the words proposed as the foundation of the present discourse, such as:

1. *To be spiritually minded is the great distinguishing character of true believers from all unregenerate persons.* As such is it asserted here by the apostle. All those who are “carnally minded,” who are “in the flesh,” are unregenerate; they are not born of God, they do not please him, nor can they do so, but must perish forever. But those who are “spiritually minded” are born

¹ *Complacency*, as Owen uses it, means self-satisfaction, or contentment, rather than indifference or apathy. — WHG

CHAPTER 1. THE WORDS OF THE TEXT EXPLAINED.

of God, and live to him, and will come to the enjoyment of him. The trial and determination of what state we belong to, depend on these.

2. *Where any are spiritually minded, there, and there alone, is life and peace.* What these are, in what they consist, what their excellency and pre-eminence is above all things in this world, how they are the effects and consequents of being spiritually minded, will be declared afterwards.

Each of these considerations is sufficient to demonstrate how great a concern it is to us, to be spiritually minded, and to diligently inquire whether we are so, or not.

It will therefore be of no small advantage to us to have our souls and consciences always affected with and in due subjection to the power of this truth — namely, that “to be spiritually minded is life and peace.” From this it will follow that whatever we may think otherwise, if we are not so, we have *neither* of them — neither life nor peace. It will, I say, be of use to us if we are affected with the power of it; for many greatly deceive themselves in hearing the word. They admit sacred truths in their understanding, and assent to them, but don’t imbibe their power on their consciences, nor do they strictly judge their state and condition by them, which proves to be their ruin. For by this they seem to themselves to believe what in truth they don’t believe one syllable of, as they should. They hear it, understand its notion, assent to it (or at least they don’t contradict it) — indeed, they often commend and approve of it — and yet they don’t *believe* it. For if they did, they would judge themselves by it, and reckon on it, that it will be with them at the last day when things are determined according to it.

Or such persons are, as the apostle James declares, “like a man beholding his natural face in a mirror; for he beholds himself, and goes his way, and straightway forgets what manner of man he was,” chapter 1.23,24. There is a representation of them, of their state and condition, that is made to them in the word. They behold it, and conclude that it is even so with them as the word declares. But immediately their minds are filled with other thoughts, acted on by other affections, taken up with other occasions, and they forget in a moment the representation made of themselves and their condition. This is why all that I have to offer on this subject will be utterly lost, unless a firm persuasion of it is fixed on our minds — unless we are under the power of it — that “to be spiritually minded is life and peace.” So that, whatever our light and profession is, our knowledge or our duty, without *this* we have indeed no real interest in life and peace.

These things being premised, I will more practically open the nature of this duty, and what is required for this frame of spirit. To be “spiritually minded” may be considered either as to the nature and essence of it, or as to its degrees; for one may be so, more than another; or the same person may be more so at one time than another. In the first way, it is opposed to being “*carnally minded*;” in the other to being “*earthly minded*.”

“To be carnally minded is,” as the apostle says, “death;” it is so in every way; and those who are so, are dead in trespasses and sins. This is opposed to being “spiritually minded,” as to its nature or essence. When a man, as to the substance and being of the grace and duty intended, is not *spiritually minded*, he is *carnally minded* — that is, he is under the power of spiritual death, and liable to eternal death. This is the principal foundation we proceed upon, and from which we demonstrate the indispensable necessity of the frame of mind that is inquired after.

There are two ways in which men are earthly minded. The one is absolute, when the love of earthly things is *wholly predominant* in the mind. This is not formally and properly to be carnally minded, which is of a larger extent. The one term is from the *root* and *principle*, namely, the flesh; the other from the *object*, or the things of the earth. The latter is a branch from the former, as its root. To be earthly minded is an operation and effect of the carnal mind in one especial way and instance; and it is as exclusive of life and salvation as the carnal mind itself, Phi 3.19; 1Joh 2.15,16. This is therefore opposed to being spiritually minded, no less than being carnally minded is. When there is in anyone, a love of earthly things that is predominant, for which a person may be rightly

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termed to be earthly minded, he is not, nor can he be, spiritually minded at all; he has no interest in the frame of heart and spirit intended by that term. And thus it is evidently, with most of those who are called Christians in the world, let them pretend whatever they will to the contrary.

Again, there is an earthly mindedness which consists in an *inordinate* affection for the things of this world. It is that which is sinful, and which ought to be mortified; and yet it is not absolutely inconsistent with the substance and being of the grace inquired after. Some who are really and truly spiritually minded, may yet, for a time at least, be under such an inordinate affection for and care about earthly things, that they may justly be said to be earthly minded — if not absolutely, yet comparatively, as to what they *ought* to be and *might* be. They are earthly minded relative to those degrees of being spiritually minded which they ought to aim at and may attain to. And where it is so, this grace can never thrive or flourish; it can never advance to any eminent degree.

This is the Zoar¹ of many professors — that “little one” in which they would be spared. They would avoid an earthly mindedness that is *wholly* inconsistent with being spiritually minded, as to the state and condition which depends upon it; for *this* they know would be absolutely exclusive of life and peace. They cannot but know that such a partial frame is as inconsistent with salvation, as living in the vilest sin that any man can contract the guilt of. But there are more ways than one of spiritual and eternal death, as well as natural. All who die don’t have the plague; and all who perish eternally are not guilty of the same profligate sins. The covetous are excluded from the kingdom of God, no less severely than fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, and thieves, 1Cor 6.9,10. But there is a *degree* in being earthly minded, which they suppose their interest, advantages, relations, and occasions of life call for, which they would indulge *a little*; they may abide in such a partial frame without any disparagement of their profession of faith. The truth is, they have too many guilty companions to fear any special reflection on themselves. The multitude of the guilty take away their own sense and shame of guilt. But besides this, they well *hope* that it isn’t absolutely inconsistent with being spiritually minded. Only they cannot well *deny* it is contrary to such degrees in that grace — such *thriving* in that duty — as is recommended to them. They think well of others who are spiritually minded in an eminent degree; or at least they do so in general, as to the thing itself. For when they come to particular instances of this or that man, for the most part they esteem in others, what is beyond their own measure, to be little better than a pretense. But *in general*, to be spiritually minded in an eminent degree, they can only esteem it as something excellent and desirable — but it is for those who are more at leisure than they are. Their own circumstances and occasions require them to satisfy themselves with an *inferior* measure.

To obviate such pretenses, I will insist on nothing in the declaration of this duty and the necessity of it, but what is incumbent on all who believe, and without which they have no grounds to assure their conscience before God. At present, I will say in general that, *Whoever does not sincerely aim at the highest degree of being spiritually minded which the means he enjoys would lead him to, and which the light he has received calls for — whoever judges it necessary to his present advantages, occasions, and circumstances, to rest in such measures or degrees of it as he cannot help but know come short of what he ought to aim at, and so he does not endeavor after completeness in the will of God in this — can have no satisfaction in his own mind; he has no unfailing grounds on which to believe that he has anything at all of the reality of this grace in him.* Such a person may possibly have *life* which accompanies the essence of this grace; but he cannot have *peace*, which follows its degree in a due improvement. And it is to be feared that, by far, the greatest number of those who satisfy themselves in this apprehension — who willingly neglect to endeavor after further degrees of this grace and growth in this duty, which their light or convictions, and the means they enjoy, suggest to them — are indeed *carnally minded*, and in every way liable to death.

¹ Zoar, the little city to which Lot fled at Sodom and Gomorrah’s destruction, rather than to the hills. Gen 19.20.

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CHAPTER 2. THE NATURE OF THIS GRACE AND DUTY.

A particular account of the nature of this grace and duty of being spiritually minded — how it is stated in and evidenced by our thoughts.

HAVING stated *the general concerns* of that frame of mind which is here recommended to us, we may proceed to inquire more particularly into the nature of it, according to the description given before in distinct propositions. And we will carry on both these intentions together — first, to show *what it is*, and in what it consists; and then, *how it evidences itself*, so that we may frame a right judgment whether it is in us or not. And we will have no regard to those who either neglect or despise these things on any pretense whatever. For this is the word according to which we will all shortly be judged: “To be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace.”

Thoughts and meditations proceeding from spiritual affections, are the first things in which this spiritual mindedness consists, and by which it evidences itself. Our thoughts are like the blossoms on a tree in the spring. You may see a tree in the spring all covered with blossoms, so that nothing else of it appears. Multitudes of these blossoms fall away and come to nothing. Oftentimes where there are the most blossoms, there is the least fruit. Yet there is no fruit, of whatever sort it may be, good or bad, that doesn’t come in and from some of those blossoms. The mind of man is covered with thoughts, like a tree with blossoms. Most of them fall off, vanish, and come to nothing; they end in vanity. And sometimes where the mind most abounds with them, there is the least fruit; the sap of the mind is wasted and consumed in them. However, there is no fruit which we actually bring forth, whether good or bad, that does not proceed from some of these thoughts. That is why, ordinarily, these give the best and surest measure of the frame of men’s minds. “As a man thinks in his heart, so is he,” Pro 23.7.

In case of strong and violent temptations, the real frame of a man’s heart is not to be judged by the multiplicity of thoughts about any object. For whether they are from Satan’s suggestions, or from inward darkness, trouble, and horror, they will impose such a continual sense of themselves on the mind, as to engage all its thoughts about them. As when a man is in a storm at sea, the current of his thoughts run quite another way than when he is in safety about his circumstances. But ordinarily, voluntary thoughts are the best measure and indication of the frame of our minds. As the nature of the soil is judged by the grass which it brings forth, so may the disposition of the heart be judged by the predominance of voluntary thoughts. They are the original actings of the soul, the way by which the heart puts forth and empties the treasure that is in it, the waters that first rise and flow from that fountain. Every man’s heart is his treasury; and the treasure that is in it, is either good or evil, as our Savior tells us. There is a good and bad treasure in the heart; but whatever a man has, whether good or evil, there it is. This treasure is opening, emptying, and spending itself continually, though it can never be exhausted. For it has a fountain in nature or in grace, which no expense can diminish; indeed, it increases and gets strength by it. The more you spend of the treasure of your heart in any kind, the more you will abound in treasure of the same kind. Whether it is good or evil, it grows by expense and exercise; and the principal way by which it presents itself, is by the thoughts of the mind. If the heart is evil, these thoughts are for the most part vain, filthy, corrupt, wicked, and foolish. If it is under the power of a principle of grace, and so it has a good treasure in it, it presents itself by thoughts that are suitable to its nature, and compliant with its inclinations.

That’s why these thoughts give the best measure of the frame of our minds and hearts. I mean those which are *voluntary*, such as the mind of its own accord is apt for, inclines to, and ordinarily turns to. Men may have a multitude of thoughts about the affairs of their callings, and the occasions of life, which may yet give no due measure of the inward frame of their hearts. So men whose calling and work it is to study the Scripture, or the things revealed in it, and to preach them to others, cannot help but have many thoughts about spiritual things. And yet these may be, and oftentimes are, most remote from being *spiritually minded*. They may be forced by their work

and calling to think of them early and late, evening and morning; yet their minds are in no way rendered or proved spiritual by this. It would be well if all of us who are preachers would diligently examine ourselves in this. So it is with those who oblige themselves to read the Scriptures, maybe so many chapters every day. Notwithstanding the diligent performance of their task, they may be most remote from being spiritually minded. See Eze 33:31.¹ But there is a certain track and course of thoughts that men ordinarily turn to when not affected with present occasions. If these are vain, foolish, proud, ambitious, sensual, or filthy, such is the mind and its frame; if they are holy, spiritual, and heavenly, such may the frame of the mind be judged to be. But these things must be more fully explained.

It is the great character and description of the frame of men's minds in an unregenerate condition, or before the renovation of their natures, that "every imagination of the thoughts of their hearts is only evil continually," Gen 6:5. They are continually coining figments and imaginations in their hearts, stamping them into thoughts that are vain, foolish, and wicked. All other thoughts in them are occasional; but these are the natural, *genuine* product of their hearts. Hence the dearest, and sometimes first, discovery of the bottomless evil treasure of filth, folly, and wickedness, that is in the heart of man by nature, is from the innumerable multitude of evil imaginations which are coined and thrust forth there every day. So the wicked are said to be "like the troubled sea when it cannot rest, whose waters toss up mire and dirt," Isa 57:20.

There is a fullness of evil in their hearts, like the waters in the sea. This fullness is troubled or put into continual motion by their lusts and impetuous desires; hence the mire and dirt of evil thoughts are continually tossed up in them.

It is therefore evident that the predominance of voluntary thoughts is the best and surest indication of the inward frame and state of the mind. For if it is so on the one side as to the carnal mind, then it is so on the other as to the spiritual mind. That's why, to be spiritually minded, in the first place, is to have the course and stream of those thoughts which we ordinarily retreat to, which we approve of as suited to our affections, be about spiritual things. In *this* consists the minding of the Spirit.

But because all men, unless horribly profligate, have thoughts about spiritual things, and yet we know that all men are not spiritually minded, we must consider what is required for such thoughts to be rendered a *certain* indication of the state of our minds. Three things are required for it:

FIRST, That they be *natural*, arising from ourselves, and not from outward occasions. The psalmist mentions the "inward thought" of men, Psa 49.11, 64.6. But whereas *all* thoughts are the inward acts of the mind, it would seem that this expression makes no distinction between the specific kind of thoughts intended, and those of another sort. But the difference is not in the formal nature of them, but in the causes, springs, and occasions of them. Inward thoughts are those which arise merely and solely from men's inward principles, dispositions, and inclinations — that are not suggested or excited by any outward objects. In wicked men, such are those actings of their lusts by which they entice and seduce themselves, Jas 1.14. Their lusts stir up thoughts that lead and encourage them to make provision for the flesh. These are their "inward thoughts." Of the same nature are those thoughts which are the "minding of the Spirit." They are the first natural egress and genuine acting of the habitual disposition of the mind and soul.

Thus, in covetous men there are two sorts of thoughts by which their covetousness conducts itself: first, those which are occasioned by outward objects and opportunities. So it was with Achan, Jos 7.21. "When," he says, "I saw among the spoils, a beautiful Babylonian garment, and two hundred shekels of silver, and a wedge of gold, I coveted them." His *sight* of them, with an *opportunity* to possess them, excited covetous thoughts and desires in him. So it is with others every day, whose

¹ **Eze 33:31** So they come to you as people do, they sit before you as My people, and they hear your words, but they do not do them; for with their mouth they show much love, *but* their hearts pursue their *own* gain.

occasions call them to converse with the objects of their lusts. And by such objects, some may be surprised into thoughts that their minds are not habitually inclined to; and therefore when they are known, it is our duty to avoid them. But the same sort of persons have thoughts of this nature arising *from themselves only*, from their own dispositions and inclinations, without any outward provocations.

“The vile person will speak villainy, and his heart will work iniquity,” Isa 32.6; and he does this just as the “liberal devises liberal things,” verse 8. From his own disposition and inclination, he is contriving in his thoughts how to act according to them. So the unclean person has two sorts of thoughts with respect to the satisfaction of his lust: — *First*, those which are occasioned in his mind by external objects of it. As to this, stage plays, revelings, dancings, with the society of bold persons, persons of corrupt communication, contribute their wicked service. To avoid this snare, Job “made a covenant with his eyes,” chap. 31.1; and our Savior gives that holy declaration of the evil of it, Mat 5.28.¹ But he has a habitual spring of these thoughts in himself, constantly inclining and disposing him to it. Hence the apostle Peter tells us that such persons “have eyes full of an adulteress, that cannot cease from sin,” 2Pet 2.14.

Their own affections make them restless in their thoughts and contrivances about sin. So it is with those who are given to excess in wine or strong drink. They have pleasing thoughts raised in them from the object of their lust represented to them. Hence Solomon advises against occasions for them, Pro 23:31.² But it is their own habitual disposition which carries them to pleasing thoughts of satisfying their lust, which he describes in Pro 23.33-35.³ So is it in other cases. The thoughts of this latter sort are men’s inward thoughts; and such must these thoughts be of spiritual things, from which we may be esteemed spiritually minded.

In Psa 45.1, the psalmist says, “My heart is composing a good matter: I speak of the things which I have made concerning the King.” He was meditating on spiritual things, on the things of the person and kingdom of Christ. Hence his heart “bubbled up” (as it is in the original) “a good matter.” It is an allusion taken from a quick spring of living waters: from its own life and fullness it bubbles up the water that runs and flows from it. So it is with these thoughts in those who are spiritually minded. There is a living fullness of spiritual things in their minds and affections, that springs up into holy thoughts about them.

From this our Savior gives us this great description of spiritual life. It is “a well of living water springing up into everlasting life,” Joh 4.10-14. The Spirit, with his graces residing in the heart of a believer, is a well of living water. Nor is it such a well that, content with its own fullness, it does not of its own accord — without any instrument or pains in drawing — send out its refreshing waters, as it is with most wells, even though it is of living water. For this is spoken by our Savior in answer and opposition to that objection of the woman, upon his mention of giving living water, verse 10: “Sir,” she says, “you have nothing to draw with, and the well is deep; where will you get this water from?” verse 11. He responds, in essence, “True, such is the nature of this well and water, of dead, earthly things — they are of no use unless we have instruments, lines and buckets to draw with. But the living water which I will give is of another nature. It is not water to be kept in a pit or cistern outside us, from which it must be drawn; but it is *within* us. And that water is not dead and useless, but continually springing up for the use and refreshment of those who have it.” For so is it with the principle of the new creature, of the *new nature*. The Spirit and His graces in the hearts of those who believe — of itself and from itself, without any external influence on it

¹ **Mat 5:28** “But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

² **Pro 23:31** Do not look on the wine when it is red, When it sparkles in the cup, *When* it swirls around smoothly;

³ **Pro 23:33-35** Your eyes will see strange things, And your heart will utter perverse things. ³⁴ Yes, you will be like one who lies down in the midst of the sea, Or like one who lies at the top of the mast, *saying*: ³⁵ “They have struck me, *but I* was not hurt; They have beaten me, *but I* did not feel *it*. When shall I awake, that I may seek another *drink*?”

— incline and dispose the whole soul to spiritual actings that tend to eternal life. Such are the thoughts of those who are spiritually minded. They arise from the *inward principle*, inclination, and disposition of the soul — these are the bubblings of this well of living water; they are the mindings of the Spirit.

So our Savior describes them, Mat 12.35, “A good man out of the good treasure of the heart, brings forth good things.” First, the *man* is good; as he said before, “Make the tree good, or the fruit cannot be good,” verse 33. He is made so by grace, in the change and renovation of his nature; for in ourselves we are in every way evil. This good man has a treasure in his heart. So all men have a treasure; as the next words are, “The evil man out of the evil treasure of the heart.” And this is the great difference that exists between men in this world. Every man has a treasure in his heart; that is, a prevailing, inexhaustible principle of all his actings and operations. But in some, this treasure is *good*; in others it is *evil* — that is, the prevailing principle in the heart, which carries along with it, its dispositions and inclinations. In some it is good and gracious; in others it is evil. Out of his good treasure, a good man brings forth good things. It is first opened, first brought forth, by these thoughts. The thoughts that arise out of the heart are of the same nature as the treasure that is in it. If the thoughts that naturally arise and spring up in us, are for the most part vain, foolish, sensual, earthly, and selfish — such is the treasure that is in our hearts, and such are we. But where the thoughts that naturally proceed from the treasure that is in the heart, are spiritual and holy, it is an argument that we are spiritually minded.

Where it is not this way with our thoughts, they give no such evidence of what we inquire after. Men may have thoughts of spiritual things — many of them, and frequently — which do *not* arise from this principle, but may be resolved into two other causes:

1. Inward force.
2. Outward occasions.

1. *Inward force*, as it may be called. This is by *convictions*. Convictions put a kind of a force upon the mind, or an impression that causes it to act contrary to its own habitual disposition and inclination. It is in the nature of water to descend; but apply an instrument to it that compresses it and forces it to a vent, it will fly upwards vehemently, as if that were its natural motion. But as soon as the force of the compression ceases, it returns immediately to its own proper tendency, descending towards its center. So it is with men’s thoughts oftentimes. They are earthly — their natural course and motion is downwards to the earth and the things of earth. But when any efficacious conviction presses on the mind, it forces the egress of its thoughts upwards towards heavenly things. It will think much and frequently about them, as if that were their proper motion and course. But as soon as the power of conviction decays or wears off, and the mind is no longer sensible of its force and impression, thoughts of it return again to their old course and track, as the water tends downwards.

This state and frame is graphically described in Psa 128:34-37, “When he slew them, then they sought him: and they returned and inquired early after God. And they remembered that God was their rock, and the high God their redeemer. Nevertheless, they flattered him with their mouths, and lied to him with their tongues. For their heart was not right with him, neither were they steadfast in His covenant.”

Men in troubles, dangers, sickness, fears of death, or under effectual conviction of sin from the preaching of the word, will endeavor to think and meditate on spiritual things. Indeed, they will be greatly troubled that they cannot think of them more than they do, and esteem it their folly that they think of anything else. But as freedom and deliverance approach, these thoughts decay and disappear; the mind will not be compelled to give way to them anymore. The prophet gives the reason for it, Jer 13.23, “Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? Then may you also do good, who are *accustomed* to doing evil.” They have had another haunt, been

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taught another course — the habit and inclination of the mind lies another way, and they will tend towards spiritual things no longer than an impression is made on them from their convictions.

And it is an argument for very mean attainments, for a low and weak degree in this frame of heart — in our being spiritually minded — when our thoughts of spiritual things rise or fall according to renewed occasional convictions. Say we are under rebukes from God in our persons or relations, in fear of death and the like, and with this we have renewed convictions of sin in their commission, or omission of duties, and *thereupon* we endeavor to be more spiritually minded in the constant exercise of our thoughts on the spiritual things that we fail in. If these thoughts decay as our convictions in their causes wear off or are removed, then we have attained a very low degree in this grace, if we have any interest in it at all.

Water that rises and flows from a living spring runs equally and constantly, unless it is obstructed or diverted by some violent opposition; but water from *thundershowers* runs furiously only for a time, and is quickly dried up. So those spiritual thoughts which arise from a prevalent internal principle of grace in the heart, are even and constant, unless they are interrupted for a time by temptations. But those which are excited by the *thunder of convictions*, however filled their streams may be for a time, they quickly dry up and utterly decay.

2. Such thoughts of spiritual things may arise in the minds of men who are not spiritually minded, from *outward means and occasions*. I intend those thoughts which are indeed useful, indeed appointed by God for this end among others: that they may ingenerate and stir up holy thoughts and affections in us. But there is a *difference* in their use and operation. In some, they excite the inward principle of the mind to act in holy thoughts, according to its own sanctified disposition and prevalent affections. This is their proper end and use. In others, they occasionally suggest such thoughts to the minds of men, which spring only from the *notions* of the things proposed to them. With respect to this end they are *also* of singular use to the souls of men. Yet such thoughts do not prove men are spiritually minded. When you till and manure your land, if it brings forth plentiful crops of corn, it is an evidence that the soil itself is good and fertile; the dressing of the soil only gives occasion and advantage to produce its own fruit-bearing virtue. But if in tilling the land, you lay much dung upon it, and it brings forth here and there a handful only where the dung lay, you will say, “The soil is barren; it brings forth nothing of itself.”

The means that we will address, are like tilling fruitful soil. They help it produce its fruit, by exciting its *own* virtue and power — they stir up holy affections to holy thoughts and desires. But in others, whose hearts are barren, they only serve some of them, here and there as it were, to stir up spiritual thoughts — which gives no evidence of a gracious heart or spirit. But because this is a matter of great importance, it will be handled distinctly by itself.

CHAPTER 3. HOW WE KNOW OUR THOUGHTS ARE SPIRITUAL.

Outward means and occasions of such thoughts of spiritual things as do not prove men to be spiritually minded — Preaching of the word — Exercise of gifts — Prayer — How we may know whether our thoughts of spiritual things in prayer are truly spiritual thoughts, proving us to be spiritually minded.

1. SUCH a means is *the preaching of the word* itself. It is observed concerning many in the gospel, that they heard it willingly, received it with joy, and did many things gladly upon the preaching of it; and we see the same thing exemplified in multitudes every day. But none of these things can be *without* many thoughts in the minds of such persons, about the spiritual things of the word, for they are the effects of such thoughts. And being wrought in the minds of men, they will produce more of the same nature. Yet they were all *hypocrites* concerning whom these things are spoken, and yet who were never spiritually minded.

The cause of this miscarriage is given by our Savior in Mat 13:20, 21, “The one who received the seed in stony places, this is one who hears the word, and immediately receives it with joy; yet he has no *root in himself*, but endures only for a while.”

The good thoughts they have don’t proceed from any *principle* in themselves. Neither their affections nor their thoughts of these things, have any internal root on which they might grow. So it is with many who live under the present dispensation of the gospel. They have thoughts of spiritual things continually suggested to them, and they abide with them more or less, according to how they are affected. For I am not speaking of those who are either despisers of what they hear, or wayside hearers, who understand nothing of what they hear, and immediately lose all sense of it, and all thoughts about it. Rather, I speak of those who attend with some diligence, and receive the word with some joy. These insensibly grow in knowledge and understanding, and therefore *cannot* be without some thoughts of spiritual things. However, for the most part they are, as was said, like waters that run off after a shower of rain. They pour themselves out *as if* they proceeded from some strong, living spring; whereas indeed they have none at all. Once the waters of the shower are spent, their channel is dry; there is nothing in it but stones and dirt. When the doctrine of the word falls on such persons like showers of rain, it gives a course to their thoughts that is sometimes greater, sometimes less, towards spiritual things; but they don’t have a well of water in them springing up into everlasting life. That’s why, after a while, their minds are dried up from such thoughts; nothing remains in them but earth, and that is perhaps foul and dirty.

It must be observed that the best of men, the most holy and spiritually minded, may have — no, *ought to have* — their thoughts of spiritual things excited, multiplied, and confirmed by the preaching of the word. It is one end of its dispensation, one principal use of it in those by whom it is received. And it has this effect in two ways:

(1.) As it is *the spiritual food* of the soul, by which its principle of life and grace is maintained and strengthened. The more this is done, the more we will thrive in being spiritually minded.

(2.) As it *administers occasions* for the exercise of grace; for, in proposing to the soul the proper object of its faith, love, fear, trust, and reverence, it draws forth all those graces into exercise. That’s why, although the vigorous actings of spiritual thoughts are occasional from the word, and are more *under* and *after* the preaching of it than at other times, it is no more than what arises from the nature and use of the ordinance by God’s own appointment. Nor is it any evidence that those with whom it is so, are *not* spiritually minded, but on the contrary, that they *are*. Yet, where men have no other thoughts of this matter than what are occasioned by the outward dispensation of the word, such thoughts don’t prove them to be spiritually minded. Their endeavors in them are like those of men in a dream. Under some oppression of their spirits, their imagination fixes on something or other that is most earnestly to be desired, or avoided. In this, they seem to themselves to strive with all their might, to endeavor to go, run, or contend. But it is all in vain —

everything fails them, and they are not relieved until they are awakened. So too, in the impressions they receive from the word, such persons seem to strive and contend in their thoughts and resolutions to comply with what is proposed to them. But their strength fails; they find no success for lack of a *principle* of spiritual life. After a while they give up their endeavors, until occasionally renewed again. Now, in the dispensation of the word, the thoughts which proceed from an *inward* principle of grace, which is excited to its due *exercise*, are distinguishable from those which are only occasionally suggested to the mind by the word *outwardly* preached; for —

[1.] They are *special actings of faith and love* towards the things that are preached. They come from receiving the truth *in a love of it* — and love respects the goodness of the things themselves, not merely the truth of the propositions in which these things are expressed. The other thoughts are only the understanding of the mind as affected with light and truth, *without* any cordial love for the things themselves.

[2.] They are accompanied with a *complacency* of soul, arising from love, and from experience of their power, more or less, and their suitableness to the new nature or principle of grace in them. For when our minds find that it is so indeed *in us*, as it is *in the word* — that this truth is what we want to be more conformable to — it gives a secret complacency and satisfaction to the soul. The other thoughts, which are only occasional, have none of these consequential effects, but are dry and barren, except as recalled in a few words or a transient discourse.

[3.] The former thoughts [born of love for the things themselves] are means of *spiritual growth*. So some say the natural growth of vegetables is not by imperceptible motion, but by gusts and perceptible eruptions of increase. These are *both* at work in spiritual growth. Such gusts greatly consist in those thoughts which the principle of the new nature is excited to, by the word.

2. The *duty of prayer* is another means of like nature. One principal end of it is to excite, stir up, and draw out the principle of grace, of faith and love in the heart, to a due exercise in holy thoughts of God and spiritual things, with affections that are suitable to them. Those who don't design this end in prayer, don't know at all what it means to pray. Now, all sorts of persons have frequent occasion to join with others in prayer, and many are under the conviction that it is their own duty to pray every day, it may be, in their families and otherwise. And it is hard to conceive how men can constantly join with others in prayer, much more how they can pray themselves, without having thoughts of spiritual things every day. However, it is possible that they may have no root or living spring of such thoughts in themselves, but they are only occasional impressions on their minds from the outward performance of the duty. I will give some instances of the grounds of this, which for many reasons, require our diligent consideration:

(1.) Spiritual thoughts may be raised in a person in his own duty, *by the exercise of his gifts*, even when there is no acting of grace in them at all. For they lead and guide the mind to those things which are the subject of prayer — that is, spiritual things. Gifts are nothing but a spiritual improvement of our natural faculties or abilities; and a man cannot speak or utter anything but what proceeds from his rational faculties, by invention, or memory, or both — managed in and by his thoughts — not unless he speaks by rote, and that which is not rational. Therefore, whatever proceeds from a man's rational faculty, in and by the exercise of his gifts, that is what his thoughts must be exercised about.

A man may *read a long prayer* that expresses spiritual things, and yet never have one spiritual thought arise in his mind about them. For there is no exercise of any faculty of his mind required for such reading, except to attend to the words that are to read. This, I say, *may* be so; I don't say it is *always* so, or that it *must* be so. But as was said, in the exercise of gifts, it is impossible that there not be *an exercise of reason*, by invention, judgment, and memory; and consequently, that there be thoughts of spiritual things. And yet they may all be merely occasional, from the present external performance of the duty, without any living spring or exercise of grace. In such

a course, men of tolerable gifts may continue all their days, to the satisfaction of themselves and others, deceiving both them and their own souls.

This being evident from the Scripture and experience, an inquiry may be made upon this as to our own concern in these things, especially of those who have received spiritual gifts of their own; and also of those who, in some degree, usually enjoy the gifts of others in this duty. For it may be asked how we would know whether the thoughts which we have of spiritual things in and upon prayer, arise from gifts only, those of our own or other men's, giving occasion for them, or if they are influenced from a living principle and spring of grace in our hearts. This is a case of great importance (however it may be apprehended by some), which would require much time to fully resolve. For there is nothing by which the refined sort of hypocrites more deceive themselves and others, nothing by which some men more countenance themselves in an indulgence of their lusts, than by this part of the *form of godliness* — when they *deny its power*.¹ And besides, it is that in which the best of believers ought to keep a diligent watch over themselves in every particular instance of the performance of this duty. With respect to this, in an especial manner, they are to be watchful in prayer.² If they are at any time negligent in this, they may rest in a bare exercise of gifts when, upon a due examination and trial, they have no evidence of the acting of grace in what they have done. I will therefore, with what brevity I can, give a resolution to this inquiry; and to this end observe the following.

It is an ancient complaint, that *spiritual things are filled with great obscurity and difficulty*; and it is true. Not that there is any such thing in themselves, for they all come forth from the Father of lights, and are full of light, order, beauty, and wisdom; and light and order are the only means by which anything reveals itself. But the ground of all darkness and difficulty in these things, lies in ourselves. We can more clearly and steadily see and behold the *moon* and the *stars*, than we can the sun when it shines in its greatest luster. It is not because there is more light in the moon and stars than in the sun, but because the light of the sun is greater than our visual faculty can directly bear and behold. So we can more clearly discover the truth and distinct nature of things that are moral and natural, than we can of things that are heavenly and spiritual. See Joh 3.12.³ It's not that there is more substance or reality in them, but because the ability of our understanding is more suited to comprehending them; the others are above us. We know but in part, and our minds are liable to be hindered and disordered in their apprehension of things that are heavenly and spiritual, by our ignorance, temptations, and prejudices of all sorts. In nothing are men more subject to mistakes than in the application of things to themselves, and a judgment of their interest in them. Fear, self-love, along with the prevalence of temptations and corruptions, all engage their powers to darken the light of the mind and to pervert its judgment. In no case does the deceitfulness of the heart, or of sin (which is the same thing), more display itself. Hence multitudes say "Peace" to themselves to whom God does not speak peace; and some who are children of light yet walk in darkness. Hence is that fervent prayer of the apostle for help in this case, Eph 1.15-19.⁴ There is also a great similitude between *temporary* faith and that which is *saving* and *durable*, and between gifts and graces in their operations; which is what is under present consideration. It is acknowledged, therefore, that without the special light and conduct of the Spirit of God, no man can make a

¹ 2Tim 3.5.

² 1Pet 4.7.

³ **Joh 3:12** If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things?

⁴ **Eph 1:15** Therefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, ¹⁶ do not cease to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers: ¹⁷ that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, ¹⁸ the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, ¹⁹ and what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power.

judgment about his state and his actions that will be a stable foundation for giving glory to God and of obtaining peace for his own soul. And therefore, most of mankind constantly deceive themselves in these things.

But ordinarily, under this blessed conduct in searching ourselves and the concerns of our duty, we may be satisfied whether they are influenced by faith, and have grace exercised in them, especially in this duty of prayer — or whether it derives from *the power of our natural faculties*, raised by light and spiritual gifts only. And so we may be satisfied whether our spiritual thoughts spring from a vital principle of grace, or from occasional impressions on the mind, made by the performance of the duty itself.

If men are willing to *deceive themselves*, or to hide themselves from themselves, to walk with God in all dubiousness, to leave all things at risk, to put off all trials until that trial at the last day, and so never call themselves to an account as to the nature of their duties in any particular instance, then it is no wonder if they neither *do* nor *can* make any distinction in this matter as to the true nature of their thoughts in spiritual duties.

Two things are required for this:

[1.] That we impartially and seriously *examine and test* the frames and actings of our minds in holy duties, by the word of truth; and thereupon we are not afraid to speak plainly to our souls, that which the word speaks to us. This diligent search ought to respect our principles, aims, ends, and actings, with the whole deportment of our souls in every duty. See 2Cor 13.5.¹ If a man receives a lot of money, and looks only at the outward form and imprint, then when he supposes that he has a great store of current coin in gold and silver, he may have only heaps of lead or copper *counterfeits*. But someone who trades in it for a living, will test what he receives, both by the balance and the touchstone,² as the occasion requires, especially if it is a time when much adulterated coin is being passed in the world. So too, if a man reckons his duties by tale and number, he may be utterly deceived, and be spiritually poor and a bankrupt, when he esteems himself rich, increased in goods, and lacking nothing. Some duties may appear to hold in the balance as to *weight*, what will not match the touchstone's *worth*. Both means are to be used, if we would not be mistaken in our accounts. Thus God himself, in the midst of a multitude of duties, calls the people to test and examine themselves whether or not they have faith and grace in them, and so are likely to have acceptance with him, Isa 58.2-7.³

[2.] We must add to our own diligent inquiry, *fervent prayers to God*, that he would search and try us as to our sincerity, and reveal to us the true frame of our hearts. We have an express example of this in Psa 139.23,24, “Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: and see if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.”

This is the only way by which we may have the Spirit of God witnessing to our sincerity, with our own spirits. There is a need to call in divine assistance in this matter, both from the

¹ **2Cor 13:5** Examine yourselves *as to* whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you? — unless indeed you are disqualified.

² **Touchstone:** a basis for comparison; a standard of authenticity against which other things can be evaluated.

³ **Isa 58:2** Yet they seek Me daily, And delight to know My ways, As a nation that did righteousness, And did not forsake the ordinance of their God. They ask of Me the ordinances of justice; They take delight in approaching God. ³ ‘Why have we fasted,’ *they say*, ‘and You have not seen? Why have we afflicted our souls, and You take no notice?’ “In fact, in the day of your fast you find pleasure, And exploit all your laborers. ⁴ Indeed you fast for strife and debate, And to strike with the fist of wickedness. You will not fast as *you do* this day, To make your voice heard on high. ⁵ Is it a fast that I have chosen, A day for a man to afflict his soul? *Is it* to bow down his head like a bulrush, And to spread out sackcloth and ashes? Would you call this a fast, And an acceptable day to the LORD? ⁶ “*Is this not* the fast that I have chosen: To loose the bonds of wickedness, To undo the heavy burdens, To let the oppressed go free, And that you break every yoke? ⁷ *Is it not* to share your bread with the hungry, And that you bring to your house the poor who are cast out; When you see the naked, that you cover him, And not hide yourself from your own flesh?

importance of it and from its difficulty, God alone knowing fully and perfectly what is in the hearts of men.

I in no way doubt that in the impartial use of these means, a man may come to an assured satisfaction in his own mind, one in which he will not be deceived, whether he animates and quickens his thoughts of spiritual things in duties with inward vital grace; or whether they are mere impressions on his mind made by the occasion of the duty.

This is a duty of great importance and necessity, now that hypocrisy has made so great an inroad on profession, and gifts have deflowered grace in its principal operations. No persons are in greater danger of walking at risk with God, than those who live in the exercise of spiritual gifts in their duties, to their own satisfaction and that of others; for they may countenance themselves with an appearance of everything that *should* be in them in reality and power, when there is *nothing* of it in them. So it has fallen out. We have seen many who are earnest in the exercise of this gift, who have turned vile and debauched apostates. Some have been known to live in sin, indulging their lusts, and yet they abide constant in their duties, Isa 1:10-15.¹ We may hear prayers sometimes that openly reveal themselves to a spiritual sense, to be the labor of the brain, by the help of gifts in memory and invention, without evidence of any mixture of humility, reverence, or godly fear; without any acting of faith and love. They flow as wine, yet smell and taste of the unsavory cask from which they proceed. It is necessary, therefore, to put ourselves to the severest trial, lest we be found *not* to be spiritually minded in our spiritual duties.

Gifts are gracious grants of Christ to make grace useful to ourselves and others; indeed, they may make them useful to the grace of others who have no grace in themselves. But as for our own souls, they are of no other advantage or benefit than to stir up grace to its proper exercise, and to be a vehicle to carry it on in its proper use. If we do not always regard this in their exercise, we would better be off without them. If instead of this, they begin to impose themselves on us practically, such that we rest in *spiritual light* acting out our own inventions, memories, and judgments, with a ready utterance (such as it is), there is no form of prayer that can be more prejudicial to our souls. Wine, if taken moderately and seasonably, helps the digestion, and quickens the natural spirits, enabling the powers of nature to their duty; it is useful and helpful to it. But if it is taken in excess, it doesn't *help* nature, but *oppresses* it, and takes upon *itself* to do what *nature* should be assisted to do; it fills men's carcasses with diseases as well as their souls with sin. So while spiritual gifts are used and employed only to excite, aid, and assist grace in its operations, they are unutterably useful; but if they *take the place of grace*, to do all that *grace* should do, they are hurtful and pernicious. We therefore need to be very diligent in this inquiry, whether our spiritual thoughts, even in our prayers, are *occasioned* by duty rather than springing from a *gracious principle* in our hearts, as acts of real saving grace.

(2.) Where thoughts of spiritual things in *prayer* are *occasional only*, in the way described before, such prayers will not be a means of spiritual growth for the soul. They will not make the soul humble, holy, watchful, and diligent in universal obedience. Grace will not thrive under the greatest constancy in such duties. It is an astonishing thing to see how, under frequent prayer and a seeming fervency in it, many of us are at a standstill as to visibly thriving in the fruits of grace, and it is to be feared, are without any increase in strength at the root of it. "The LORD's hand is not shortened that it cannot save, nor is His ear heavy that it cannot hear." Isa 59.¹ He is

¹ **Isa 1:10** Hear the word of the LORD, You rulers of Sodom; Give ear to the law of our God, You people of Gomorrah: ¹¹ "To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices to Me?" Says the LORD. "I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams And the fat of fed cattle. I do not delight in the blood of bulls, Or of lambs or goats. ¹² "When you come to appear before Me, Who has required this from your hand, To trample My courts? ¹³ Bring no more futile sacrifices; Incense is an abomination to Me. The New Moons, the Sabbaths, and the calling of assemblies — I cannot endure iniquity and the sacred meeting. ¹⁴ Your New Moons and your appointed feasts My soul hates; They are a trouble to Me, I am weary of bearing *them*. ¹⁵ When you spread out your hands, I will hide My eyes from you; Even though you make many prayers, I will not hear. Your hands are full of blood.

the same as in the days of old, when our fathers cried to him and were delivered, when they trusted in him and were not confounded.

“Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, and today, and for ever.” ^{Heb 13.8} Prayer is the same that it was, and will lose nothing of its prevalence while this world endures. Why is it, then, that there is so much prayer among us, and so little success? I’m not speaking with respect to the outward dispensations of divine providence in afflictions or persecutions, in which God always acts in a way of sovereignty, and oftentimes gives the most useful answer to our prayers by denying our requests. I intend only that in which the psalmist shares his experience, Psa 138.3, “In the day when I cried, you answered me, and strengthened me with strength in my soul.”

Where prayers are effectual, they will bring in spiritual strength. But the prayers of many seem to be very spiritual, and to express all conceivable supplies of grace, and they are persisted in with constancy — and God forbid that we should judge them to be hypocritical and wholly insincere — yet there is a *defect* somewhere, which should be inquired after. For they are not so answered that those who pray them are *strengthened with strength in their souls*. ^{Psa 52.7} There isn’t that spiritual thriving, that growth in grace, which might be expected to accompany such supplications.

I know that a man may pray often, pray sincerely and frequently, for *especial mercy*, grace, or deliverance from a particular temptation, and yet no spiritual supply of strength comes into his own experience by it. So Paul prayed three times for the removal of his temptation, and yet he had the exercise of it continued. In such a case, there may be no defect in prayer, and yet the grace particularly aimed at may not be attained; for God has other holy ends to accomplish by this on the soul. But how persons may continue in prayer in general, according to the mind of God (so far as can be outwardly discovered), and yet not thrive at all as to spiritual strength in their souls, is hard to understand.

And what is still more astonishing, is that men abide in the duty of prayer, and do so with constancy, in their families and otherwise, and yet they live in known sins. Whatever spiritual thoughts such men have in and by their prayers, they are *not* spiritually minded. Shall we now say that all such persons are gross hypocrites, those who know they but mock God and man — who know that they have no desires nor aims after the things which they mention in their own prayers, but do these things either for some corrupt end, or at best to satisfy their convictions? If we could thus resolve it, then the whole difficulty of the case would be taken away; for such “double-minded men” have no reason to “think that they shall receive anything from the Lord,” as James says, chapter 1.7. Indeed they do not — they never act faith with reference to their own prayers. *But it is not so with all of this sort.* Some judge themselves to be sincere and in good earnest in their prayers — not without some hopes and expectations of success. I will not say of *all* such persons, that they are among the number of those concerning whom the Wisdom of God says, “Because I called, and they refused; they shall call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me,” Pro 1.24,28.

And although we may say to such a person in general, “Either leave your sinning or leave your praying,” from Psa 1.16,17, and that is with respect to present scandal and certain miscarriage in the end if both be continued in, yet in particular I would not advise any such person to leave his praying until he had left his sin. This would be to advise a sick man to use no remedies until he was well cured. Who knows but that the Holy Spirit, who works when and how he pleases, may take a time to animate these lifeless prayers, and make them a means of deliverance from the power of this sin? In the meantime, the fault and guilt is wholly their own, who have effected a consistency between a way in sinning and a course in praying. And it arises from here, that they have never labored to fill up their requests with *grace*. What there has been of earnestness or diligence in them, has been from a force put upon them by their convictions and fears; for no man was ever absolutely prevailed on by sin, who prayed for deliverance according to the mind

of God. Every praying man who perishes was a hypocrite. The faithfulness of God in his promises will not allow us to judge otherwise. That's why the thoughts that such persons have of spiritual things, even in their duties, don't arise from within, nor are they a natural emanation of the frames of their hearts and affections.

(3.) *Earnestness and appearing fervent in prayer*, as to the outward delivery of the words of it, yes, even if the mind is so affected as to contribute much to it, will not of themselves prove that the thoughts of men in this, arise from an internal spring of grace. There is a fervency of spirit in prayer that is one of the best properties of it, being an earnest acting of love, faith, and desire; but there is also a fervency with which the mind itself may be affected, that may arise from other causes:

[1.] It may do so from the engagement of *natural affections* for the objects of their prayer, or the things prayed for. Men may be mighty earnest and intent in their minds in praying for a dear relation, or for deliverance from eminent troubles or imminent dangers. And yet all this fervor may arise from the vehement actings of natural affections about the things prayed for, excited in an especial manner by the present duty. Hence God says that the earnest cries of some for temporal things, are not a "crying unto him," but a "howling," Hos 7:14; that is, they are the cry of hungry, ravenous beasts, that would be satisfied.

[2.] Sometimes it arises from the *sharpness of convictions*, which will make men even roar in their prayers from a disquietude of heart. And this may be where no true grace is received as yet, nor it may be, will ever be received; for the perplexing work of *conviction* goes before real *conversion*. And as it produces many other effects and changes in the mind, so it may produce this effect of great fervency in vocal prayers, especially if it is accompanied with outward afflictions, pains, or troubles, Psa 78:34,35.¹

[3.] Oftentimes, the mind and affections are very little involved in that fervor and earnestness which appear in the *outward performance* of the duty. But in the exercise of *gifts*, and through their own utterance, men put their natural affections into such an agitation as to carry them into great vehemence in their expressions. It has been so with sundry persons who were later discovered to be rotten hypocrites, or had turned cursed apostates. That's why all these things may be found where there is no gracious spring or vital principle acting itself from within, in spiritual thoughts.

It may be that some design an advantage by these conceptions, which promote profaneness and scoffing; for if these evils may exist under the exercise of the gift of prayer, both in constancy and fervency — if there may be a total lack of the exercise of true grace *with* it and *under* it — then maybe all that is pretended by this gift and its use, is but hypocrisy and talk. But I say,

(1.) It may be as well pretended that because the sun shining on a dunghill causes offensive and noisome steams, all that is said about the sun's influence on spices and flowers, causing them to produce their fragrance, is therefore utterly false. No one ever thought spiritual gifts changed or renewed the minds and natures of men; gifts alone, only help and assist the useful exercise of natural faculties and powers. And therefore, where the heart is not first savingly *renewed*, no gifts can stir up a saving exercise of faith. But where the heart is renewed, gifts are a means to cause faith's savor to flow forth.

(2.) Even if some evils may be found under the exercise of the gift of prayer, what remedy for them may be proposed? Is it that men should renounce their use of it, and resort to reading prayers only?

¹ **Psa 78:34** When He slew them, then they sought Him; And they returned and sought earnestly for God. ³⁵ Then they remembered that God was their rock, And the Most High God their Redeemer.

[1.] The same may be said of *all spiritual gifts* whatsoever, for all of them are liable to abuse. And shall we reject all the powers of the world to come, the whole complex of gospel gifts, for the communication of which the Lord Christ promised to continue his Spirit with his church to the end of the world, just because they are abused by some?

[2.] Not only the same, but far greater evils, may be found in and under the *reading* of prayers; this needs no further demonstration than what it displays every day.

[3.] It is hard to understand how any benefit at all can accrue to anyone by this relief, when the advantages of the other way are evident.

And so this inquiry remains: *How may we know to our own satisfaction, that the thoughts we have of spiritual things in the duty of prayer, come from an internal fountain of grace*, and thus are an evidence that we are spiritually minded, to which all these things tend? I will offer a few things towards our satisfaction in this:

(1.) I take it for granted, on the evidence given before, that persons who have any spiritual light, and will diligently examine and try their own hearts, will be able to discern what real actings of faith, of love, and delight in God, there are in their duties; and consequently, what is the spring of their spiritual thoughts. In general we are assured that “he that believes has the witness in himself,” 1Joh 5.10. Sincere faith will be its own evidence; and where there are sincere actings of faith, they will evidence themselves if we try all things impartially by the word. But if men do, as for the most part they do, content themselves with the performance of any duty, without an examination of their principles, frames, and actings of grace in it, it is no wonder if they walk in all uncertainty.

(2.) When the soul finds a sweet spiritual complacency in and after its duties, it is an evidence that grace has been acted in its spiritual thoughts and desires. In Jeremiah 31, the prophet receives a long gracious message from God, filled with excellent promises and sympathetic exhortations to the church. The whole is summed up, as it were, in the close of it: Verse 25, “For I have satiated the weary soul, and I have replenished every sorrowful soul.” To which the prophet adds, “Upon this I awaked, and beheld; and my sleep was sweet to me.” God’s gracious message had so composed his spirit and freed his mind from trouble, that he entered a quiet repose in himself, like a man asleep. But after the end of it, he stirs up himself to a review and consideration of what had been spoken to him: “I awaked, and beheld,” or, “I stirred myself up, and considered what had been delivered to me;” “and,” he says, “my sleep was sweet to me,” — “I found a gracious complacency in and refreshment for my soul from what I had heard and received.” So it is oftentimes with a soul that has had real communion with God in the duty of prayer. It finds itself spiritually refreshed, both during it and afterward, when it is awakened to consider it; it is sweet to him.

This *holy complacency*, this rest and sweet repose of mind, is the foundation of the delight of believers in this duty. They don’t pray only because it is their duty so to do, nor because they stand in need of it, such that they cannot live without it. Rather, *they take delight in it*. To keep them from it is the same as keeping them from their daily food and refreshment. Now, we can’t take delight in anything, if we haven’t found some sweetness, rest, and complacency in it. Without any such experience, we may do or use anything, but we can’t do it with delight. And that delight arises,

[1.] From the approach that is made to God in it. In its own nature, it is an access to God on a throne of grace, Eph 2.18, Heb 10.19,20.¹ And when this access is animated by the actings of

¹ **Eph 2:18** For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father. **Heb 10:19-22** Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, ²⁰ by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh; ... ²² let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith;

grace, the soul has a spiritual experience of a *nearness* in that approach. Now, God is the fountain and center of all spiritual refreshment, rest, and complacency; and in such an access to him, there is a refreshing taste of them communicated to the soul: Psa 36.7-9, “How excellent is your loving-kindness, O God! therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of your wings. They shall be abundantly satisfied with the fulness of your house; and you shall make them drink of the river of your pleasures. For with you is the fountain of life: in your light we shall see light.”

God is proposed in the excellency of his loving-kindness, which comprehends his goodness, grace, and mercy; and so he is also like the spring of life and light, all spiritual powers and joys. Those who believe are described as putting their “trust under the shadow of his wings.” In his worship, in the “fulness of his house,” they make their approaches to him. And the fruit of it is that he makes them “drink of the river of his pleasures” — the satisfying, refreshing streams of his grace and goodness. They approach him as to the “fountain of life,” so as to drink of that fountain in renewed communications of life and grace, and in the “light of God,” the light of his countenance, to “see light” in satisfying joy. In these things consist, and from them arises, that spiritual complacency which the souls of believers find in their duties.

[2.] It arises from the due exercise of faith, love, and delight, the graces in which the life of the new creature principally consist. There is a suitableness to our *natural* constitution, and a secret complacency of our natures, in the proper actings of natural life for its own preservation and increase. This is so in our *spiritual* constitution too, in the proper actings of the powers of our spiritual life for its preservation and increase. These graces, in their due exercise, compose and refresh the mind, as those which are perfective of its state, and which quell and cast out whatever troubles it. From there a blessed satisfaction and complacency befall the soul. In this, “he that believes has the witness in himself.” Besides, faith and love are never really acted *on Christ*, but they prepare and make the soul fit to receive communications of love and grace *from him*; which it never fails of, although it is not always sensible of it.

[3.] It arises from the testimony of conscience, bearing witness to our sincerity both in aims, ends, and performances of duty. A gracious repose of mind and great satisfactoriness ensue from this.

If we have no experience of these things, it is evident that we walk at random in the best of our duties; for they are among the principal things that we *do* or *ought to* pray for. And if we have no experience of the effects of our prayers in our hearts, neither do we have advantage by them, nor can we give glory to God in them.

Yet here, as in most other spiritual things, one of the worst of vices is ready to impose itself in the stead and place of the *best of our graces*; and this vice is *self-pleasing* in the performance of the duty. Instead of a grace steeped in humility, as all true grace is, this is a vile effect of spiritual pride, or the offering of a sacrifice to our own net and drag. It is glorying in the flesh; for whatever of *self* anyone glories in, it is but *flesh*. When men have had enlargements in their expressions, and especially when they apprehend that others are satisfied or affected with it, they are apt to have a secret self-pleasing in what they have done; and before they are aware, it turns into pride and a noxious elation of mind. The same may befall men in their most secret duties, performed outwardly by the aid of spiritual gifts. But this is most remote from and contrary to that spiritual complacency in duty which we speak of, which it will yet pretend to until it is diligently examined. The language of spiritual *complacency* is this: “I will go in the strength of the Lord GOD; I will make mention of your righteousness, of yours only,” Psa 71.16 — that of spiritual pride is, “God, I thank you that I have done thus and thus;” as it was expressed by the Pharisee. *That is in God alone; this is in self.* *That* draws forth the *savor of all graces*; *this* immediately covers and buries them all, if there are any in the soul. *That* fills the soul eminently with *humility and self-abasement*; *this* with a *lifting up of the mind* and proud self-

conceit. *That* casts out all remembrance of what *we have done ourselves*, retaining only a sense of what *we have received from God*, of the impressions of his love and grace; *this* blots out all remembrance of what we have freely received from God, and retains only what we have done ourselves. Wherever it is, there is no due sense either of the greatness or goodness of God.

Some will perhaps say that if it is so, then for their part they are cut off. They have no experience of any such spiritual rest and complacency in God, in or after their prayers. At best, they begin their prayers with tears and end them with sorrow; and sometimes they don't know what has become of them, but fear that God is not glorified by them, nor are their own souls bettered.

I answer —

[1.] There is great *spiritual refreshment* in that godly sorrow which is at work in our prayers. Where the Holy Ghost is a Spirit of grace and supplication, he causes mourning, and in that mourning there is joy.

[2.] The secret encouragement which we receive by praying, to adhere to God constantly in prayer, arises from some experience of this *holy complacency*, even if we don't have tangible evidence of it.

[3.] Perhaps some of those who make this complaint, if they would awaken and consider, will find that their souls, at least sometimes, have been thus refreshed and brought to a holy rest in God.

[4.] Then you will know the Lord, if you *follow on* to know him. *Abide* in seeking after this complacency and satisfaction in God, and you will attain it.

(3.) It is a sure evidence that our thoughts of spiritual things in our supplications are from an internal spring of grace, and are not merely occasioned by the duty itself, when we find *the daily fruit and advantage of them*, especially in the preservation of our souls in a holy, humble, and watchful frame.

The advantages, benefits, and effects of prayer which are commonly spoken of are innumerable. Growth in grace and consolation is the substance of them. Where there is *continuance* in prayer, there will be spiritual growth in some proportion. For men to be earnest in prayer, and thriftless in grace, is a certain indication of prevalent corruptions, and lack of being spiritually minded in prayer itself. If a man eats his daily food, however much or often he eats, if he is not nourished by it, then his body is under the power of prevalent maladies; and so is his *spiritual* constitution, if he doesn't thrive in the use of the food of the new creature. But what I fix on with respect to the present inquiry, is the *frame* that it preserves the soul in. Prayer will keep it humble and on a diligent watch as to its dispositions and actings. *He who prays as he ought, will endeavor to live as he prays.* This none can do, who does not with diligence keep his heart to the things he has prayed about. To pray *earnestly* and live *carelessly* is to proclaim that a man is not spiritually minded in his prayer.

By this, then, we will know what is the spring of those spiritual thoughts which our minds are exercised with in our supplications. If they are influenced to a constant, daily watch for the preservation of that frame of spirit, and for those dispositions and inclinations to spiritual things which we pray for, then they are from an internal spring of grace. If there is generally an *unsuitableness* in our minds to what we seem to contend for in our prayers, the *gift* may be in exercise, but the *grace* is wanting. If a man is at the market every day, and talks diligently and earnestly there about merchandise and the affairs of trade, but when he comes home he thinks no more about them because, indeed, he has nothing to do, and no interest in them, then he may be a very poor man notwithstanding his pretenses. Likewise, a man may be very poor spiritually, who on occasions is fervent in prayer, if when he retires into himself, he is not careful and diligent about the matter of those prayers.

(4.) When *spiritual affections* and due preparation of heart for the duty, excite and animate the gift of prayer, and the gift doesn't make impressions on the affections, then we are spiritually minded in this. Gifts are servants, not *rulers*, in the mind — they are bestowed on us to be *serviceable to grace*; not to lead but to follow it, and to be ready with their assistance upon its exercise. For the most part, where they *lead all*, they are *all alone*. This is the natural order of these things: *grace* habitually inclines and disposes the heart to this duty; *providence* and *rule* give the occasions for its exercise; *sense of duty* calls for preparation. *Grace* coming into actual exercise, *gifts* come in with their assistance. If they lead all, then all is out of order. It may be otherwise sometimes. A person who is indisposed and lifeless, engaging in prayer only in a way of obedience, and upon conviction of duty, may have his affections excited, and grace engaged to its proper work, in and by the gift. It may be so, I say; but let men take heed how they trust to this order and method. For where this is so, there may be little or nothing of the exercise of *true grace* in all their fervor and commotion of affections. But when the genuine actings of faith, love, holy reverence, and gracious desires, stir up the *gift* to its exercise, calling in its assistance to express themselves, then the heart and mind are in their proper order.

(5.) It is so when other duties of religion are equally regarded and attended to with prayer itself. Someone whose religion lies all in prayer and hearing, has none at all. God has an equal respect to all other duties, and so must we. So is it expressed as to the instance of alms, Act 10.31; and James places all religion in this, because there is none without it, Jas 1.27. I won't value his prayers at all, however earnest and frequent he is in them, who doesn't give alms according to his ability. And in an especial manner, this is required of us who are ministers, that we not be like a hand set up at cross-roads, directing others which way to go, but staying behind itself.

This digression about the *rise and spring of spiritual thoughts in prayer*, I judge was not unnecessary in such a time and season, in which we ought to be very jealous lest gifts impose themselves in place of grace; and be careful that they are employed only to their proper end, which is to be serviceable to grace in its exercise, and not otherwise.

3. There is *another occasion for thoughts of spiritual things*, when they don't spring from a living principle within, and so they are no evidence of being spiritually minded; and this is the discourse of others. "Those who fear the LORD will be speaking to one another" of the things in which his glory is concerned, Mal 3.16. To declare the righteousness, the glory of God, is the delight of his saints: Psa 145:3-8,

"Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised; and his greatness is unsearchable. One generation shall praise your works to another, and shall declare your mighty acts. I will speak of the glorious honor of your majesty, and of your wondrous works. And men shall speak of the might of your terrible acts: and I will declare your greatness. They shall abundantly utter the memory of your great goodness, and shall sing of your righteousness. The LORD is gracious, and full of compassion; slow to anger, and of great mercy."

And accordingly, there are some who are ready on all occasions to speak of or mention things that are divine, spiritual, and holy; and it is to be wished that there were more of them. All the atrocious sins that the world is filled with are not a greater evidence of the degeneracy of the Christian religion than this — that it has grown unusual, indeed, a shame or scorn, for men to speak together of the things of God. It was not so when religion was in its primitive power and glory; nor is it so with those who really fear God and are sensible of their duty. There are some, I say, who embrace all occasions of spiritual communication. Those with whom they converse, if they're not profligate, if they have *any* spiritual light, will so far comply with what they say, as to think about the things said which are spiritual. Oftentimes the track and course of men's thoughts lie so out of the way, are so contrary to such things, seem so strange to them, that they won't entertain them. If you but cross their way with such discourses, they may stand still a little, and then pass on. Even the countenances of some men will change upon this; they return an unsatisfied silence until they can

divert to other things. Some will make replies of such empty words, as to evidence their hearts are far estranged from the things proposed to them. But with others, these occasional discourses will make such impressions on their minds, as to stir up present thoughts of spiritual things. But though frequent occasions of this may occur, such thoughts give no evidence that any man is spiritually minded — for they are not genuine, issuing from an internal spring of grace.

It is from these causes that the thoughts of spiritual things for many, are like *guests* who come into an *inn*, and not like *children* who dwell in the *house*. They enter occasionally, and then there is a great stir about them, to provide fit entertainment for them. In a while they are disposed of, and so they depart to their own occasions, being neither looked at nor inquired about anymore. Things of another nature are attended to; new occasions bring in new guests for a season. Children are owned in the house; they are missed if they are out of the way, and have their daily provision constantly made for them. So it is with these occasional thoughts about spiritual things. By one means or another they enter into the mind, and there they are entertained for a season; all of a sudden they depart, and men hear of them no more. But those thoughts that are natural and genuine, arising from a living spring of grace in the heart, disposing the mind to them, are like the children of the house. They are expected in their places and at their seasons. If they are missing, they are inquired about. The heart calls itself to account as to why it has been so long without them, and it calls them over into its usual converse with them.

CHAPTER 4. OTHER EVIDENCES OF SPIRITUAL THOUGHTS.

Other evidences of thoughts about spiritual things arising from an internal principle of grace, by which they are an evidence of our being spiritually minded — The abounding of these thoughts, how far, and in what they are such an evidence.

The SECOND evidence that our thoughts of spiritual things, proceeds from an internal fountain of sanctified light and affections. Or the evidence that they are acts or fruits of our being spiritually minded, is that *they abound in us, that our minds are filled with them*. We may say of them as the apostle says of other graces, “If these things are in you, and abound, you will not be barren.” (2Pet 1.8) It is well, indeed, when our minds are like the land of Egypt in the years of plenty, when it “brought forth by handfuls” (Gen 41.47) — when they flow from the well of living water in us with a full stream and current. But there is a measure of abounding which is *necessary* to evidence our being spiritually minded in them.

There is a double effect ascribed here to this frame of spirit — first “life,” and then “peace.” The nature and being of this grace depend on the former consideration of it — namely, that it proceed from an *internal principle of grace*, the effect and consequence of which is “life.” But that it be “peace,” also depends on this *degree* and *measure* of the actings of this part of it in our spiritual *thoughts*; and this we must consider.

It is the character of all men in the state of depraved nature and apostasy from God, that “every imagination of the thoughts of their hearts is only evil continually,” Gen 6.5. It is not *all* persons in that condition who are swearers, blasphemers, drunkards, adulterers, idolaters, or the like. These are the vices of particular persons, the effects of particular constitutions and temptations. But thus it is with them, all and every one of them: that *all the imaginations of the thoughts of their hearts* are evil, and this is *continually* — some as to the *matter* of them, some as to their *end*, but *all* as to their *principle*; for out of the evil treasure of the heart can proceed nothing but what is evil (Mat 12.35). That infinite multitude of open sins which is in the world gives a clear prospect or representation of the nature and effects of our apostasy from God. But whoever can consider the numberless thoughts which pass through the minds of every individual person, every day — all evil, and that continually — will have a further comprehension of it.

We can therefore have no greater evidence of a change in us from this state and condition, than a change wrought in the *course of our thoughts*. A relinquishment of this or that *particular sin* is not an evidence of a translation from this state; for as said, such particular sins proceed from particular lusts and temptations, and are not the immediate universal consequence of that depravation of nature which is equal in all. Such alone are the vanity and wickedness of the thoughts and imaginations of the heart. A change in this is a blessed evidence of a change of state. Someone being cured of dropsy is not immediately healthy, because he may have the prevailing seeds and matter of other diseases in him, and the next day die of a lethargy. But whoever is restored from a *state of sickness* — in the temperature of the mass of blood and the animal spirits, and all the principles of life and health — to a good crisis and temperature,¹ the *state* of his body is changed. The cure of a particular sin may leave behind it the seeds of eternal death, which they may quickly effect; but someone who has obtained a change in this character, which belongs essentially to the state of depraved nature, is spiritually recovered. And the more the stream of our thoughts is turned, the more our minds are filled by those of a contrary nature, the greater and firmer is our evidence of a translation out of that depraved state and condition.

There is nothing so unaccountable as the *multiplicity of thoughts* of the minds of men. They fall from them like the leaves of trees when they are shaken by the wind in autumn. To have all these thoughts, all the several figments of the heart, all the conceptions that are framed and agitated in

¹ Crisis here means a crucial stage or turning point in the course of something, as when a fever breaks. — WHG

the mind, to be evil, and that continually — what a hell of horror and confusion that must be! A deliverance from this loathsome, hateful state is more to be valued than the whole world. Without it, neither life, nor peace, nor immortality, nor glory, can ever be attained.

The design of conviction is to put a stop to these thoughts, to reduce their number, and thereby to lessen their guilt. That doesn't deserve the name of *conviction of sin*, which regards only the outward actions, and not the inward actings of the mind. For an outward change alone will, for a season, make a great change in the thoughts; it will especially do so when assisted by superstition, directing those thoughts to other objects. These two in conjunction (i.e., outward actions and superstition), are the rise of all that devotional religion which is in the Papacy. Conviction labors to put some stop and bounds to thoughts that are absolutely evil and corrupt; and superstition suggests other objects for them, which they readily embrace; *but it is a vain attempt*. The minds and hearts of men are continually minting and coining new thoughts and imaginations; the cogitative faculty is always at work. As the streams of a mighty river running into the ocean, so are the thoughts of a natural man, and through self, they run into hell. It is a silly thing to set a dam before such a river, to try to curb its streams. It may be stopped for a little while, but it will quickly break down all obstacles, or overflow all its bounds. There is no way to divert its course except by providing other channels for its waters, and turning it into them. The mighty stream of the evil thoughts of men will allow no bounds or dams to put a stop to them. There are but two ways of relief from them — the one respecting their *moral evil*, the other their *natural abundance*. The first is by throwing salt into the spring, as Elisha cured the waters of Jericho (2Kng 2.21) — that is, to get the heart and mind seasoned with grace; for the tree must be made good before the fruit will be good. The other is to turn their streams into new channels, putting new aims and ends upon them, fixing them on new objects. So shall we abound in *spiritual thoughts*; for abound in thoughts we shall, whether we would or not.

To this purpose is the advice of the apostle, Eph 5.18,19, "Do not be drunk with wine, in which there is excess; but be filled with the Spirit; speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs." When men are drunk with wine to excess, they make it quickly evident what vain, foolish, ridiculous imaginations it fills their minds with. In opposition to this, the apostle advises believers to be "filled with the Spirit" — to labor for such a participation of Him as may fill their minds and hearts, as others fill themselves with wine. To what *end*, to what *purpose*, should they desire such a participation of him, and to be so *filled* with him? It is to *this end*: namely, that by his grace, he may fill them with holy, spiritual thoughts — as on the contrary, men who have drunk to excess are filled with thoughts that are foolish, vain, and wicked. So the words of verse 19 declare. For he advises us to express our abounding thoughts in those duties that will give a special vent to them.

This is why, when we are spiritually minded, we *abound* in spiritual thoughts, or thoughts of spiritual things. That we merely have such thoughts will not sufficiently evidence that we are so, unless we *abound* in them. And this leads us to the principal inquiry on this topic: namely, what *measure* we should assign to this, that we may know when we abound in spiritual thoughts, so that they may be an evidence of our being spiritually minded.

I answer generally, among other Scriptures, read over Psalm 119 with understanding. Consider what David expresses about himself in it, as to his constant delight in and continual thoughts of the law of God, which was the only means of divine revelation in that season. Test yourselves by that pattern; examine yourselves, whether you can truly speak the same words he did — if not in the same *degree of zeal*, at least with the same *sincerity of grace*. You may say, "That was David. It is not for us; it is not our duty to be *like* him, at least not to be *equal* with him." But as far as I know, we must be like him, if we ever intend to come to the place where he is. It will ruin our souls, if when we read in the Scripture how the saints of God expressed their experience in faith, love, delight in God, and constant meditation on him, we then grant that it was so with *them* —

that they were good and holy men — but it is not necessary that it be so with *us*. These things are not written in the Scripture to show what *they were*, but what *we ought to be*. All things concerning them were “written for our admonition,” 1Cor 10.11. And if we don’t have the same delight in God as they had, the same spiritual mindedness in thoughts and meditations of heavenly things, we can have no evidence that we please God as they did, or that we will go to that place where they have gone. Profession of the life of God passes with many at a very low and easy cost. Their thoughts for the most part are vain and earthly, their communication unsavory and sometimes corrupt, their lives at best uneven and uncertain as to the rule of obedience; and yet all is well, all is life and peace! The holy men of old, who obtained this testimony — that they pleased God — did not walk this way before Him. They meditated continually on the law; thought of God in the nighttime; spoke of his ways, his works, his praise; their whole delight was in him, and in all things they “followed hard after him.” (Psa 63.8) It is the example of David in particular that I have proposed. And it is a promise of the grace to be administered by the gospel, that “the one who is feeble shall be as David,” Zec 12.8; and if we are not so in his being *spiritually minded*, it is to be feared that we are not partakers of the promise. But that we may better judge ourselves in this, I will add a few rules in this direction, by way of examples:

1. Consider *what proportion your thoughts of spiritual things, bear to those about other things*. Our principal interest and concern, as we profess, lies in spiritual, heavenly, and eternal things. Isn’t it a foolish thing, then, to suppose our thoughts about these things should not be proportional to those about *other* things; indeed, that they should not *exceed* them? No man is so vain in earthly things, as to pretend that his principal concern lies in that about which he thinks very seldom in comparison to other things. It isn’t so with men in reference to their families, their trades, their occasions of life. It is a truth not only consecrated by the testimony of Him who is Truth, but it is also evident in the light of reason, that “where our treasure is, there will our hearts be also;” (Luk 12.34) and the affections of our hearts act themselves by the thoughts of our minds. That’s why, if our principal treasure is (as we profess) in things spiritual and heavenly (and woe to us if it isn’t so!) then our affections, and consequently our desires and thoughts, will be principally fixed on them.

That we may better examine ourselves by this rule, we must consider of what sort men’s *other* thoughts are. And as to our present purpose, they may be reduced to these heads:

(1.) There are those thoughts which are exercised about *their callings and lawful occasions*. These are numberless and endless, especially among the sort of men who rise early and go to bed late, and eat the bread of carefulness, or are particularly industrious and diligent in their ways. Men approve themselves in having these thoughts, and judge them their duty, as they are in their proper place and measure. But no heart can conceive the multitude of these thoughts, which partly in contrivances, partly in converse, are engaged in and spent upon these things. And the more men are immersed in them, the more they and others esteem them to be diligent and praiseworthy.

And there are some who have neither the need nor the occasion to be engaged much in the duties of any special calling. And yet, by their words and actions, they declare themselves to be almost confined in their thoughts, to *themselves*, their *relations*, their *children*, and their self-concerns. Though most of these are very impertinent thoughts [unrelated to spiritual things], yet they justify themselves in them. All sorts may do well to examine what proportion their thoughts of spiritual things have to those of other things. I fear that with most, it will be very small — with many, next to none at all. What evidence, then, can they have that they are spiritually minded, that their principal interest lies in *things above*? (Col 3.2) It may be, and it *will* be asked, whether it is necessary for men to think as *much* and as *often* about things spiritual and heavenly, as they do about the lawful affairs of their callings?

I reply, it is needed more, and more often, if we are what we profess ourselves to be. Generally, it is the best sort of men, as to the things of God and man, who are busied in their callings, some of one sort, some of another. But even among the best of these, many will continually spend the strength of their minds and the vigor of their spirits, about their *affairs* all day long. And so they can pray in the morning and evening, with some thoughts sometimes about spiritual things occasionally administered, supposing they acquit themselves very well. It is like a man who pretends that his great design is to prepare himself for a voyage to a far country where his patrimony and his inheritance await. But all his thoughts and contrivances are about a few trifles which, if he indeed intends his voyage, he must leave behind him — and he scarcely thinks at all of his main design. We all profess that we are bound for heaven, immortality, and glory. But is it any evidence that we really design it, if all our thoughts are consumed about the trifles of this world, which we must leave behind us, and if we have only occasional thoughts of things above? Elsewhere I will show, if God wills, how men may be spiritually minded in their earthly affairs. If some relief may not be obtained there, I cannot tell what to say or answer for those whose thoughts of spiritual things are not proportional with, indeed exceed those which they lay out about their callings.

This whole rule is grounded on that of our Savior, Mat 6.31,33,34, “Take no thought, saying, What will we eat? or, What will we drink? or, With what will we be clothed? But seek first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things will be added to you. Therefore take no thought for tomorrow.” When we have done all we can, when we have made the best of them that we are able, all earthly things, as to our interest in them, amount to no more than what we eat, what we drink, and with what we are clothed. Our Savior forbids us to have any thought about these things — not absolutely, but with a double limitation; such as —

First, That we take no such thought about them that would carry with it a *disquietude of mind*, through a distrust of the fatherly care and providence of God. This is the design of the context.

Secondly, No thought, for *constancy and engagement of spirit*, should be like those we have about spiritual things. “Seek first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness,” Let that be the principal thing in your thoughts and consciences. We may therefore conclude that they must at least be an exceeding proportion of our thoughts.

Let a man who is industriously engaged in his calling, test himself by this rule every evening. Let him consider what his thoughts have been about his earthly circumstances, and what they have been about spiritual things; and based on that, ask himself whether he is spiritually minded or not. Don’t be deceived; “as a man thinks, so is he.” Pro 23.7 And if we account it a strange thing that our thoughts should be more exercised about spiritual things than about the affairs of our callings, then we must not think it strange if, when we come to the trial, we cannot find that we have either “life” or “peace.”

Moreover, it is known how often, when we are engaged in spiritual duties, *other thoughts* will interpose and impose themselves on our minds. Those which are about men’s secular concerns will do so. The world will frequently make an inroad on the way to heaven, to disturb the passengers and wayfaring men. There is nothing more frequently complained of by those who are awake to their duty and sensible of their weakness. Therefore, call to mind how often, on the other hand, spiritual thoughts interpose and, as it were, impose themselves on your minds while you are engaged in your earthly affairs. Sometimes, no doubt; but with all who are *true* believers it is so. “Before I was ever aware,” says the spouse, “my soul made me like the chariots of Amminadib,” Song 6.12. Grace in her own soul surprised her into a ready, willing frame for spiritual communion with Christ, when she was intent on other occasions. But if these thoughts of heavenly things so arising in us, bear no proportion with the other sort, it is evidence of what frame and principle is predominant in us.

(2.) There are a *multitude of thoughts in the minds of men* which are *vain, useless, and altogether unprofitable*. These ordinarily, through a dangerous mistake, are not looked at as sinful because it is supposed that the matter of them is not sinful; and therefore men shake them off for their *folly*, rather than their *guilt*. But they arise from a corrupt fountain, and woefully pollute both the mind and conscience. Wherever there are “vain thoughts,” *there is sin*, Jer 4.14.¹ Such are those numberless imaginations by which men fancy themselves *to be what they are not, to do what they do not, to enjoy what they do not, and dispose of themselves and others* at their pleasure. That our nature is liable to such pernicious folly — which some of tenacious fancies have turned into madness — we are beholding alone to our cursed apostasy from God, and to the vanity that then possessed our minds. Hence the prince of Tyre thought he was a god, and “sat in the seat of God,” Eze 28.2. So it has been with others. Even in those in whom such imaginations are kept to some better order and bounds, being traced to their origin, some of them will be found to spring immediately from pride, some from sensual lusts, some from the love of the world, all from self, and the old ambition to be as God, to dispose of all things as we think fit. I know no greater misery or punishment in this world than the debasing of our nature to such vain imaginations; and a perfect freedom from them is a part of the blessedness of heaven. It is not my present work to show how sinful they are; let them be esteemed only fruitless, foolish, vain, and ludicrous. But let men examine themselves, how many of these vain, useless thoughts night and day rove up and down in their minds. If now it is apprehended too severe, that men’s thoughts of spiritual things should exceed those that are employed about their lawful callings, then let them consider what proportion they bear to those that are vain and useless. Don’t many give more time to them than they do to holy meditations, without an endeavor to mortify the one or to stir up and enliven the other? Aren’t they more usual to their seasons than holy thoughts are? And should we suppose that those with whom this is so, are spiritually minded?

(3.) There are thoughts that are *formally evil*; they are evil in their own nature, being corrupt contrivances to fulfill the desires of the flesh in its lusts. These too will tempt the minds of believers. But those are always looked at as professed enemies to the soul, and normally watched against. I will not, therefore, make any comparison between *them*, and *spiritual* thoughts, for they abound only in those who are carnally minded.

2. The second rule to this purpose, is that we should consider whether thoughts of spiritual things *constantly take possession in their proper seasons*. There are times and seasons in the course of men’s lives, in which they retire themselves into their own thoughts. The busiest men in the world have some times for thinking to themselves. And those who design no such thing, as if afraid of becoming wiser and better than they are, yet spend time in these thoughts, whether they will or not. But those who are wise will be at home as much as they can, and have as many seasons for such retirements as it is possible for them to attain. If that man is foolish, who busies himself so much abroad in the concerns of others, that he has no time to consider the state of his own house and family, then much more foolish is the one who spends *all* his thoughts on *other* things, and never makes use of them to inquire how it is with himself and his own soul. However, men can hardly avoid having some seasons, partly *stated*,² partly *occasional* times, in which they entertain themselves with their own thoughts. The evening and the morning, times of waking on the bed, the necessary cessation of all ordinary affairs — of walking, journeying, and the like — are such seasons.

If we are spiritually minded, if *thoughts of spiritual things abound in us*, they will ordinarily, and with constancy, possess these seasons. Look at them as those times which are their *due*, which

¹ **Jer 4:14** O Jerusalem, wash your heart from wickedness, That you may be saved. How long shall your evil thoughts lodge within you?

² *Stated*: planned and scheduled; set aside for a purpose.

belong to such thoughts; for they are expressly assigned to them by rule, as expressed in examples and commands (see Psa 16:7,8; 92:2; Deu 6.7).¹ If they are usually surrendered to *other* ends and occasions, if they are possessed with thoughts of *another* nature, then it is open evidence that spiritual thoughts have but little interest in our minds, little prevalence in the conduct of our souls. It is our duty to afford to them *stated times*, taken away from other affairs that call for them. But if instead of that, we rob them of what is as it were *their own*, which no other things or business can lay any just claim to, how will the love of spiritual things dwell in us? Most professors are convinced that it is their duty to pray morning and evening; and it is to be wished that they were all found in the practice of it. But if ordinarily they judge themselves in the performance of that duty, to be discharged from any *further* exercise of spiritual thoughts, applying them to things that are worldly, useless, or vain, they can make no pretense to be spiritually minded.

And it must be observed (which will be found to be true), that if the seasons are taken from them which are, as it were, *owed* to such meditations, then they will be the worst employed of all the minutes of our lives. Vain and foolish thoughts, corrupt imaginations, will make a common haunt for the minds of men, and habituate themselves to expect entertainment, from which they will grow importunate for admission. Hence, with many, those precious moments of time which might greatly influence their souls to life and peace, if they were indeed spiritually minded, make the greatest provision for their trouble, sorrow, and confusion. For the vain and evil thoughts which some persons accustom themselves to in such seasons, are (or ought to be) a burden upon their consciences more than they can bear. That which providence tenders for their good, is turned into a snare; and God righteously leaves them to the fruits of their own folly, who so despise His gracious provision for their good. If we cannot afford to God our spare time, it is evident that indeed we can afford nothing at all. Mic 2:1, "They devise iniquity upon their beds," — the season that is proper for holy contemplation, they use to fill their minds with wicked imaginations; "and when the morning is light they practice it," walking all day on all occasions suitable to their devices and imaginations of the night. Many will have cause to complain unto eternity, of those leisure times which might have been improved for their advantage unto eternal blessedness.

If we intend, therefore, to maintain a title to this grace of being spiritually minded, if we would have any evidence of it in ourselves — without which we can have none of life or peace (and what we pretend about it, is but an effect of security) — then we must endeavor to preserve the claim and the right of spiritual thoughts to such seasons, and to actually *put them* in possession of them.

3. Consider how we are affected *with our disappointments about these seasons*. Have we by negligence, by temptations, have we by occasional diversions or affairs of life, been distracted from thoughts of God, of Christ, of heavenly things, when we should have been engaged in them? How are we affected with a view of this? A carnal mind is well enough satisfied with the omission of any duty, so it has the pretense of a necessary occasion. If it has lost a temporal advantage through attendance to a spiritual duty, it will deeply reflect upon itself, and maybe dislike the duty even more afterward. But a gracious soul, one that is truly spiritually minded, will mourn under a review of such omissions, and is stirred up by every one of them, to more watchfulness for the future. "Alas," will it say, "how little have I been with Christ this day! How much time has passed by me, without a thought of him! How foolish I was to be lacking in such an opportunity! I am in arrears to myself, and I will have no rest until I am satisfied."

¹ **Psa 16:7** I will bless the LORD who has given me counsel; My heart also instructs me in the night seasons. ⁸ I have set the LORD always before me; Because *He is* at my right hand I shall not be moved. **Psa 92:2** To declare Your lovingkindness in the morning, And Your faithfulness every night; **Deu 6:7** "You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up.

CHAPTER 4. OTHER EVIDENCES OF SPIRITUAL THOUGHTS.

I say, if indeed we are spiritually minded, we will duly and carefully cull over ¹ the consideration of those times and seasons in which we should have exercised ourselves in spiritual thoughts; and if we have lost them, or any of them, *mourn over our own negligence*. But if we can omit and lose such seasons or opportunities from time to time, without regret or self- reflection, it is to be feared that we grow worse and worse. A way will be made by this for further omissions, until we grow wholly cold about them.

And indeed, that woeful *loss of time* that's found among many professors is greatly to be bewailed. Some lose it on themselves by a continual track of fruitless, *impertinent thoughts* about their own concerns. Some in vain converse with others, in which (for the most part) they edify one another toward vanity. How much of this time might, no, *should* be redeemed for holy meditation! May the good Lord make all professors sensible of their loss of former seasons, that they may be more watchful for the future in this great concern of their souls! Little do some think what light, what assurance, what joy, what readiness for the cross or for heaven, they might have attained, had they laid hold of all just seasons for exercising their thoughts about spiritual things which they have enjoyed, who now are at a loss in all, and surprised by every fear or difficulty that befalls them.

This is the first thing that belongs to being spiritually minded. For although it doesn't absolutely or essentially consist in this, yet it is inseparable from it, and it is the most undeceiving indication of it — and thus of abounding and abiding in thoughts about those spiritual things which arise and spring naturally from a *living principle*, a *spiritual frame* and *disposition of heart* within.

¹ Originally, “call over;” but the sense is to “cull over,” to sift through and gather such remembrances of His love. It seemed to be a typo (perhaps misreading Owen’s handwriting). It occurs again in chapter 21. We may call these things to mind (Lam 3.21), but we don’t normally “call them over.” – WHG

CHAPTER 5. THE OBJECTS OF SPIRITUAL THOUGHTS.

The objects of spiritual thoughts, or what they are conversant about, evidencing them in whom they are to be spiritually minded — Rules directing us to steadiness in the contemplation of heavenly things — Motives to fix our thoughts with steadiness in them.

BEFORE I proceed to the next general head, which is the principal thing and foundation of the grace and duty inquired after, some things must be said to render what has already been insisted on, still more particularly useful. And this is to inquire what are, or ought to be, the *special objects* of those thoughts which, under the qualifications laid down, are the *evidences* of our being spiritually minded. And we may be useful to many in doing this, by helping them to fix their minds, which are apt to rove into all uncertainty. For this has befallen us through the disorder and weakness of the faculties of our souls — that sometimes what the mind guides, leads, and directs us to, in things spiritual and heavenly, our wills and affections will not comply with, through their depravation and corruption. And so the good designs of the mind are lost. Sometimes what the will and affections are inclined to and ready for, the mind cannot lead them to accomplish, because of its weakness and inconstancy. So *to will* is present with us, but how to *perform* that will, we don't know. Thus many are barren in this duty, because they don't know what to fix upon, nor how to exercise their thoughts when they've chosen a subject for their meditations. Hence they spend their time in fruitless *desires* to use their thoughts to more purpose, rather than make progress in that duty itself. They tire themselves, *not* because they're not willing to go, but because they cannot find their way. That's why both these things will be spoken to — what are the proper objects of our spiritual thoughts, and how we may be steady in our contemplation of them. And to this purpose, I will first give some *general* rules, and then some *particular instances* by way of direction:

1. *Observe the special calls of providence*, and apply your minds to thoughts of the duties required in them and *by* them.¹ There is a voice in all signal dispensations of providence: "The LORD's voice cries to the city, and the man of wisdom will see your name: hear the rod, and who has appointed it," Mic 6:9. There is a call, a cry in every rod of God, in every *chastising providence*, and in this [He] makes a declaration of his name, his holiness, his power, his greatness. Every *wise* and *substantial man* will labor to discern this, and so comply with the call. God is greatly provoked when it is otherwise: "LORD, when your hand is lifted up, they *will not* see: but they *shall* see, and be ashamed," Isa 26:11.

If, therefore, we would apply ourselves to our present duty, we are to wisely consider what is the voice of God in his present providential dispensations in the world. Do not hearken to any who would give another interpretation of them, but they are plain declarations of his displeasure and indignation against the sins of men. Isn't his wrath in them revealed from heaven against the ungodliness of men, especially those who retain the truth in unrighteousness, or against false hypocritical professors of the gospel? Doesn't he also signally declare the uncertainty and instability of earthly enjoyments, as from life itself to a shoe strap? And also how vain and foolish it is to adhere inordinately to them? The fingers that appeared on the wall, writing the doom of Belshazzar, wrote in characters that none could read, and words that none could understand but Daniel. But the present call of God in these things, is made plain upon tablets, that whoever reads it may run. If the heavens gather black with clouds, and it thunders over us, if any who are on their journey will not believe a storm is coming, they must bear the severity of it.

¹ Owen doesn't enumerate a Christian's "spiritual duties," but in chapter 3 he associates them with spiritual gifts: "the exercise of spiritual gifts in their duties." That would include teaching, preaching, administration, etc. In chapter 4, he associates them with prayer and our *special callings*, which include employment or parenting, as well as the ministry. Ordinarily these duties encompass the Christian *disciplines*: prayer, bible study, meditation, fellowship, charity (alms), fasting, hearing or preaching the word, evangelism, etc. We are to be spiritually minded in *all* of them. — WHG

Suppose, then, *this* to be the voice of providence; suppose there is in it these indications of the mind and will of God, as to what the duties are that we are called to by it? They may be referred to two heads:

(1.) A diligent *search into ourselves*, and a holy watch *over ourselves*, with respect to those ways and sins which the displeasure of God is declared against. We take for granted that present providences are indications of God's anger and displeasure. But when this is done, most are apt to put on *others* the causes of them, and to excuse *themselves*. So long as they see others as more wicked and profligate than themselves, openly guilty of the crimes they abhor the thought of, they will cast all the wrath on *them*, and fear only that *they* will suffer with them. But alas! when the storm came on the ship at sea, in which there was but one person who feared God, and upon an inquiry for whose sake it came up them, the lot fell upon Jonah, 1.7. The cause of the present storm may as well be the secret sins of professors of Christ, as the open provocations of ungodly men. God will punish severely those whom he has known, Amo 3.2. It is therefore certainly our duty to search diligently, that nothing be found resting *in us*, against which God is declaring his displeasure. Take heed of negligence and a false security in this. When our Savior foretold his disciples that "one of them would betray him," he alone who was guilty, was the last to ask, "Master, is it I?" Let no ground of hopes you have of your spiritual condition and acceptance with God, no sense of your sincerity in any of your duties, no visible difference between you and others in the world, impose themselves on your minds, to divert them from diligence in this duty. "The LORD's voice cries to the city, and the man of wisdom will see his name," Mic 6.9.

(2.) A diligent endeavor to *live in a holy resignation of our persons, our lives, our families, and all our enjoyments, unto the sovereign will and wisdom of God*, so that we may be ready to part with all things upon His call, without repining. This also is plainly declared in the voice of present providences. God is making wings for men's riches; he is shaking their habitations, taking away the visible defenses of their lives, proclaiming the instability and uncertainty of all things here below. And if we are not minded to contend with Him, we have nothing left to give us rest and peace for a moment, except a holy resignation of all to His sovereign pleasure.

Would you now know what you should fix and exercise your thoughts upon, so that they may be evidences of your being spiritually minded? I say, be frequently conversant in them about these things. They lie before you; they call upon you, and will find you a just employment. Count them part of your business; allow them some part of your time; do not cease until you have the testimony of your consciences, that you have, in sincerity, stated *both* these duties in your minds. This will never be done without many thoughts about them. Unless it is so with you, God will be greatly displeased at the neglect of His coming and call, now that it is so plain and articulate. Fear the woeful dooms recorded to this purpose, Pro 1.24-31, Isa 65:12, 66:4.¹ And if any calamity, public or private, overtakes you under a neglect of these duties, you will be woefully surprised, and not know which way to turn for relief. This, therefore, is the time and season in which you may have an especial trial and experiment as to whether you are spiritually minded or not. It is the wisdom of faith to excite and draw forth grace into exercise, according to present occasions. If this grace is habitually resident in you, it will display itself in many thoughts about these present duties.

But, alas! for the most part, men are apt to walk contrary to God in these things, as the wisdom of the flesh is contrary to Him in all things. We have a great instance with respect to these duties, especially the latter of them (*resigning ourselves to God's solemn will and wisdom*); for —

¹ **Pro 1:24** Because I have called and you refused, I have stretched out my hand and no one regarded. **Isa 65:12** Therefore I will number you for the sword, And you shall all bow down to the slaughter; Because, when I called, you did not answer; When I spoke, you did not hear, But did evil before My eyes, And chose *that* in which I do not delight." **Isa 66:4** So will I choose their delusions, And bring their fears on them; Because, when I called, no one answered, When I spoke they did not hear; But they did evil before My eyes, And chose *that* in which I do not delight."

[1.] Who makes a diligent search into and tests his *own* heart and ways, with respect to the procuring causes of the displeasure and judgments of God? Generally, when the tokens and evidences of these most abound, the world is full of outrageous, provoking sins. These visibly proclaim themselves to be the causes of the “coming of the wrath of God on the children of *disobedience*.” Hence, most men are apt to put the whole reason for present judgments on *them*, and to put it wholly away from *themselves*. Hence there is never *less* self-examination than when it is called for in a peculiar manner. But as I won’t deny that the open, daring sins of the world are the procuring cause of the wrath of God against it in temporal judgments, so the wisest course for us is to refer them to the great judgment of the Last Day. The apostle directs us to do this, in 2The 1.6-10.¹ Our duty is to consider on what account “judgment begins at the house of God,” ¹Pet 4.17 and to examine ourselves with respect to it.

[2.] Again, the other part of our present duty, in compliance with the voice of providence, is *a humble resignation of ourselves and all our concerns, to the will of God* — setting loose our affections from all earthly, temporal enjoyments. Let us profess what we will, we neither *do* nor *can* do this, unless our thoughts are greatly exercised about the reasons and motives for doing it. For this is the way by which faith puts forth its efficacy to the mortification of self and all earthly enjoyments. That’s why, *without* this, we cannot resign ourselves to the will of God. But alas! how many at present openly walk contrary to God in this! The ways, the countenances, the discourses of men, evidence this. Their love for present things, their contrivances for their increase and continuance, grow and thrive under the calls of God to the contrary. So it was of old: “They ate, drank, married and were given in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark.” Can most professors at this day give testimony to the exercise of their thoughts upon those things which would dispose them to this holy resignation? Or that they meditate on the calls of God, and from there make themselves ready to part with it all, at His time and pleasure? How can persons pretend to be spiritually minded, whose current of thoughts lies in direct contrariety to the mind of God?

Here lies the ground of their self-deceiving: They are professors of the gospel in a peculiar manner; they judge themselves believers; they hope they will be saved and have many evidences for it. But one negative evidence will render useless a hundred that are positive. “All these things I have done,” says the young man. “Yet you lack one thing,” says the Savior. And the lack of that one, rendered his “all things” of no avail to him. Many things you have done, many things you do, many grounds of hope abide with you — neither you nor others doubt your condition; but are you *spiritually minded*? If this one thing is lacking, all the rest will not avail you; you have, indeed, neither life nor peace. And what grounds have you to judge that you are so, if the current of your thoughts lies in direct contrariety to the present calls of God? If at such a time as this, your love for the world is the same as it ever was, and perhaps increased; if your desires are strong to secure the things of this life for you and yours; if the daily contrivance of your minds is not how you may attain a constant resignation of yourselves and your all to the will of God — which will not be done without much thoughtfulness and meditations on the reasons and motives for it — then I cannot understand how you can judge yourselves to be spiritually minded.

If any therefore say they would abound more in spiritual thoughts, only they don’t know what to fix them on, I propose *this* in the first place, as that which will lead them to the due performance of their present duties.

2. The *special trials and temptations of men* call for the exercise of their thoughts in a peculiar manner with respect to them. If a man has a bodily disease, pain, or distemper, it will cause him to think much about it whether he wills it or not, at least, if he is wise he will so do. Nor will he always complain about the smart; rather, he will inquire into the causes, and seek their removal.

¹ **2The 1:6** Taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Yet are there some distempers, such as lethargies, which in their own nature take away all sense and thoughts of themselves; and some have a slow, secret progress, such as hectic fevers, that they are not taken notice of — but both these are mortal. And will men be more negligent about the spiritual distempers of their souls, as to let temptations multiply (which are the cause of all spiritual diseases), and take no thought about them? Isn't it to be feared that where this is so, they are such that they have, in their own nature, deprived them of spiritual sense; or else by their deceitfulness, they are leading on insensibly to death eternal? Not to have our minds exercised about these things, is to be stupidly secure, Pro 23.34,35.¹

There is, I confess, some difficulty in this matter, about how to exercise our thoughts aright about our temptations. For the great way of the prevalence of temptations is by stirring up multiplied thoughts about their *objects*, or what they lead to. And this is done or occasioned several ways:

(1.) From the previous power of *lust in the affections*. This will fill the mind with thoughts. The heart will coin imaginations in compliance with it. They are the way and means by which lust draws the heart away from duty, and entices to sin, Jas 1.14; they are at least the means by which men come to have “eyes full of adultery,” 2Pet 2.14, or to live in constant contemplation of the pleasures of sin.

(2.) They arise and are occasioned by renewed representations of the object of sin. And this is twofold:

[1.] That which is *real*, as Achan saw the wedge of gold and coveted it, Jos 7.21; Pro 23.31.² Against this is the prayer of the psalmist, “Turn my eyes away from beholding vanity;” Psa 119.37 and the covenant of Job, chapter 31.1.³

[2.] And that which is *imaginary*, when the imagination is tainted or infected by lust, and continually represents the pleasure of sin and the actings of it to the mind. In this, men “make provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts,” Rom 13.14.

(3.) From the suggestions of Satan, who uses all his wiles and artifices to stir up thoughts about that sin to which the temptation leads. And temptation seldom fails to attain its end, when it can stir up a multitude of unprofitable thoughts about its object. For when temptations multiply thoughts about sin, which proceed from some or all of these causes, and the mind has made a habit of entertaining them, those in whom they exist, lack nothing but opportunities and occasions, removing the power of outward restraints, for the commission of actual sin. When men have so devised mischief, “they practice it” when it is “in the power of their hand,” Mic 2.1. It is not safe to advise such persons to have many thoughts about their temptations; these will all turn to their disadvantage.

I speak only to those to whom *their temptations are their affliction and their burden*. And such persons also must be very careful how they allow their thoughts to be exercised about the matter of their temptation, lest it become a snare and be too hard for them. Men may begin their thoughts of any object with abhorrence and detestation; and if it is a case of temptation, they will end them in complacency and approval. The deceitfulness of sin lays hold of something or other, that lust in the mind stays upon with delight; and so it corrupts the whole frame of spirit which began the duty. There have been instances in which persons have entered with a resolution to punish sin,

¹ **Pro 23:34** Yes, you will be like one who lies down in the midst of the sea, Or like one who lies at the top of the mast, *saying*:³⁵ “They have struck me, *but I was not hurt*; They have beaten me, *but I did not feel it*. When shall I awake, that I may seek another *drink*?”

² **Jos 7:21** “When I saw among the spoils a beautiful Babylonian garment, two hundred shekels of silver, and a wedge of gold weighing fifty shekels, I coveted them and took them. And there they are, hidden in the earth in the midst of my tent, with the silver under it.” **Pro 23:31** Do not look on the wine when it is red, When it sparkles in the cup, *When it swirls around smoothly*;

³ **Job 31:1** “I have made a covenant with my eyes; Why then should I look upon a young woman?

and have been ensnared by the occasion, to *commit* the sin they thought to *punish*. That's why it is seldom that the mind of anyone who is exercised with an actual temptation, is able to safely conflict with it, if it entertains abiding thoughts about the matter of that sin, or of the sin to which it leads. For sin has a thousand noxious arts.¹ It is able to transfuse its poison into the affections, from everything it once made into bait, especially if it has already defiled the mind with pleasing contemplations of it. Yes, oftentimes a man has some spiritual strength, and engages it to perform his duties. But if in the midst of them, the matter of his temptation is so presented to him as to take hold of his thoughts, then *in a moment*, as if he had seen (as they say) Medusa's head, he is turned to stone. His spirits are all frozen; his strength is gone; all actings of grace cease; his armor falls from him; and he surrenders himself, a prey to his temptation. Only a *new* supply of grace can give him any deliverance. That's why, while persons are exercised by any temptation, I advise them not to converse in their thoughts about the *matter* of that sin; for sometimes remembrances of the former satisfaction of their lusts, surprises them with its susceptibility to a corruption that is not yet mortified; sometimes the craft of Satan, by fixing their imagination on it, makes it too hard for them, and leads them to yield again to that sin which they would be delivered from.

But this season calls in a special way, for the exercise of the thoughts of men about the ways and means of *deliverance from the snare in which they are caught*, or the danger they find themselves exposed to. Think of the *guilt* of sin, so that you may be humbled. Think of the *power of sin*, so that you may seek strength against it. Don't think of the *matter of sin*, the things in the world that are suited to "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life," ^{1Joh 2.16} lest you become more and more entangled. Rather, the present direction is to think much about the ways of relief from the power of your own temptation leading you to sin. But unless men are spiritually minded, they are very loath to come to this. I'm not speaking of those who love their shackles, glory in their yoke, and like their temptations well enough — those who give the most satisfactory entertainment to their minds. Such men don't well know *what* to do, unless it is to converse in their minds with the objects of their lusts, and continually multiply their thoughts about them. The apostle calls it "making provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts." ^{Rom 13.14} Their principal trouble is that they cannot fully yield to them, because of some outward restraints. They dwell near those fools who mock sin; and before long, they take up residence among them.

But I speak, as I said before, only of those whose *temptations* are their *afflictions*, and who groan for deliverance from them. We acquaint such persons with the great, indeed, the *only* way of relief in this distress, as it is expressed in Heb 2.17,18, "He is a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God; for in that he himself has suffered being tempted, he is able to succor those who are tempted;" and Heb 4.15,16, "We don't have a high priest who cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin; let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need." Let them know that the only way for their deliverance is by acting faith in thoughts of Christ, in his power to comfort those who are tempted. Use the ways by which he administers a sufficient grace to that end; retreat to him for relief upon the urgings of temptations. But they can hardly be brought to yield to that. For they are ready to say, like the leper Naaman, "Are not Abana and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel?" ^{2Kng 5.12} Isn't it better to turn to ourselves, and to trust our own promises, resolutions, and endeavors, with such other ways of escape as are *in our own power*?" I will say nothing against any of these in their proper place, so far as they are warranted by Scripture rule. But this I say: none will ever be delivered from perplexing temptations, to the glory of God and their own spiritual advantage, except by acting and exercising faith in Christ Jesus, and the sufficiency of his grace for our deliverance: *But when men are not spiritually minded, they cannot fix their thoughts on spiritual things.* Therefore,

¹ *mille nocendi artes* — sin is crafty in a thousand ways, like the wily serpent in the Garden. Satan never *causes* us to sin; he *leads* us to sin, by inflaming our innate desire for what is forbidden (Jas 1.14). — WHG

men pine away daily under their temptations; they are ground upon them, until their breach grows great like the sea, and there is no healing it.

I mention this only to show the weight and necessity of the duty proposed. For when men who are under the power of conviction are pressed with temptation, they will do anything rather than resort to the only efficacious relief. Some groan and cry out under their vexation from the torture they are put into, in the conflict between their temptations and their convictions; some resort to the pretended relief that any false religion offers. But to apply themselves in thoughts of faith unto Jesus Christ, whose grace alone is sufficient for all — *that* they will not be persuaded to.

All of us are liable to temptations. Those who are not sensible of it, are under the power of what the temptation leads to. And temptations are of two sorts: *first*, those that are *extraordinary*, when the hand of God is upon them in a peculiar manner for our rebuke. It is true, *God tempts none*, because temptation formally leads to sin; but He *orders temptations* so far as they are afflictive, and chastisements. Thus it is when He allows an especial corruption *within*, to fall in conjunction with an especial temptation *without*, to prevail thereby. Of these, there is no doubt that any man who is not judicially hardened, may know both his disease and the remedy.

But *secondly*, that *ordinary course* of temptations with which we are exercised, needs diligent attendance for their discovery, as well as for our deliverance from them. It is to be feared that many are kept in spiritual weakness, useless, and in darkness all their days, through the power of their temptations; and yet they never know what these are or what they consist in. These “gray hairs are sprinkled on them, and yet they don’t know it.”¹ Hos 7.9 Some approve themselves in the very things and ways which are their temptations. Yet in the exercise of due watchfulness, diligence, and prudence, men may know both the plague of their own hearts — in their prevailing corruptions, and the ways by which it is excited through temptation — with the occasions it makes use of, and the advantages it takes. For instance, one may be eminent in gifts, and useful or successful in his labors, which give him great acceptance with others. Such a person could hardly avoid a double temptation —

First, the temptation of spiritual pride and self-exaltation. Hence the apostle will not admit “a novice” into the office of the ministry — one who is inexperienced in the ways of grace and the deceits of sin, lest he be “lifted up with pride,” and “fall into the condemnation of the devil,” 1Tim 3.6. He was not himself without danger of this, 2Cor 12.1-7.¹ The best of men can hardly fortify their minds against the secret workings of pride upon successes and applause, unless they keep constantly balanced with thoughts of their own vileness in the sight of God.

And *secondly*, the temptation to be remiss as to strict and universal mortification in themselves, which they countenance by their acceptance and success above others in the ministry. It would be much desired that all ministers be careful in these things; for although some of us may not much please *others*, yet we may so far please *ourselves* as to expose our souls to these snares. And the effects of negligence in this, openly appear to the disadvantage of the gospel. Others are familiar with the world and its affairs. Negligence as to a spiritual watch, vanity in conduct, love of earthly things, with conformity to the world, will on all occasions impose themselves upon them. If they don’t understand their temptations in these, spiritual mindedness will be continually impaired in them. Those who are rich have their especial temptations, which for the most part are many, plausible, and effectual; and those who are poor have theirs also. The snares of some lie in their *constitutions*; of others, in their *society*; and of most, in the *various circumstances* of life. Those who are on watch in any due measure, who exercise any wisdom or observation concerning themselves, may know where their temptations lie, and what are the advantages by which they perplex their minds and endanger their souls.

¹ **2Cor 12:1** It is doubtless not profitable for me to boast. I will come to visions and revelations of the Lord, etc.

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In such cases generally, men are taught the ways and means of their deliverance and preservation. To this end, there are three things required for this duty, and spiritual wisdom for them all:

(1.) To know the *especial temptations* from which you suffer, and by which the life of God is obstructed in you. If this is neglected, if it is disregarded, no man can maintain either life or peace, nor is he spiritually minded.

(2.) To know your *remedy*, your relief, in which alone it consists. Many duties are required of us to this end, and are useful for it; but know assuredly that no one of them, not even all of them in conjunction, will bring in relief, to the glory of God and your own peace, without application by faith, to Him who “is able to succor those who are tempted.” Heb 2.18

(3.) In this lies your great duty with respect to your temptations: namely, in a constant exercise of your thoughts on the love, care, compassion, and tenderness of Christ, with his ability to help, succor, and save those who believe, so as to strengthen your faith and trust in him; this will assuredly prove successful and victorious.

The same duty is incumbent on us with respect to any *urgent prevalent general temptation*. There are seasons in which an hour of temptation comes on the earth, to try those who dwell in it. What if a man judged that *now* is such an hour, and that the power of darkness is growing in it? What if he were persuaded that a general security, coldness, deadness, and decay in grace — especially as to the vigorous actings of zeal, love, and delight in God — with an indifference to holy duties, are the effects of this hour of temptation? I don’t say determinately that it is so; let others judge as they see cause. But if anyone does so judge, undoubtedly it is his duty to be exercised in his thoughts about how he may escape in this day of trial, and be counted worthy to stand before the Son of man. He will find it his concern to be conversant in his mind with the reasons and motives for watchfulness, and how he may obtain supplies of grace, that may effectually preserve him from such decays.

3. *All things in religion, both in faith and practice, are to be the objects of such thoughts.* As they are proposed or occur in our minds in great variety, and on all sorts of occasions, so we ought to entertain them in our meditations. To hear things, to have them proposed to us, may be in the way of a divine ordinance; and to let them slip out, or flow from us like water poured into a leaking vessel, is the ruin of many souls. I will therefore select some instances, as proposed before, concerning those things which I judge ought to abide and abound in the thoughts of those who would be spiritually minded.

It is our duty greatly to *mind the things that are above, eternal things, both as to their reality, their present state, and our future enjoyment of them.* In this consists the life of this grace and duty. To be *heavenly minded* — that is, to mind the things of heaven — and to be *spiritually minded*, is all one. Or being heavenly minded is the *effect* of being spiritually minded, *as to its origin and essence*, or as to its first proper actings. Being spiritually minded is the *cause* of being heavenly minded, *as to its growth and degrees*, and it is the *evidence* of it in experience. Nor do I understand how it is possible for a man to place his chief interest in things above, and not have many thoughts of them. It is the great advice of the apostle, on a supposition of our interest in Christ and conformity to him, Col 3.1,2, “If you then are risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sits on the right hand of God. Set your affection on” — or your thoughts on, mind greatly — “things above.” It becomes those who, through the virtue of the resurrection of Christ, are raised to newness of life, to have their thoughts exercised on the state of things above, with respect to the presence of Christ among them. And he instructs us in the singular use of our looking into these things, or our meditations on them:

2Cor 4.16-18, “For which cause we do not faint; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, works for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; while we do not look at the things which

CHAPTER 5. THE OBJECTS OF SPIRITUAL THOUGHTS.

are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal."

Not to faint under the daily decays of our outward man, and the approaches of death thereby, to bear afflictions as things that are light and momentary, to thrive under all in the inward man, are unspeakable mercies and privileges. Can you attain a better frame? Is there anything that you would more desire, if you are believers? Isn't it better to have such a mind in us than to enjoy all the peace and security that the world can afford? One principal means by which we are made partakers of these things, is a due meditation on things that are unseen and eternal. These are the things that are within the veil, on which we ought to cast the anchor of our hope in all the storms we meet with, Heb 6.19,20. We will speak more of this afterward.

Without a doubt, most Christians are greatly defective in this duty, partly for lack of light into them, partly for lack of delight in them; they think little of an eternal country. Wherever men are, they don't usually neglect thoughts of that country in which their inheritance lies. If they are absent from it for a season, they will yet labor to acquaint themselves with the principal concerns of it. But this *heavenly country*, ^{Heb 11.16} in which our eternal inheritance lies, is not regarded. Men don't exercise themselves as they should with thoughts of eternal and invisible things. It would be impossible if they did so, for their minds to be so earthly, and for their affections to cling as they do to present things. Someone who looks steadily at the sun, although he cannot fully bear the brightness of its beams, yet his sight is so affected by it that when he takes his eyes off it, he can see nothing of the things about him; they are all dark to him. And someone who looks steadily in his contemplations on things above, eternal things, though he cannot comprehend their glory, yet a veil will be cast by it on all the desirable beauties of earthly things, and take his affections away from them.

Men live and act under the power of a conviction that there is a state of immortality and glory to come. With a persuasion of this, they are greatly relieved in their sorrows, sufferings, and temptations; yet with many, it is only a reserve when they can be here no longer. But as to a daily contemplation of the nature and causes of it, or as to any entrance into it by faith and hope, most are strangers to it. If we are spiritually minded, nothing will be more natural to us than to have many thoughts of eternal things, as those in which all our own principal concerns lie, as well as those which are excellent and glorious in themselves. The direction from this, is that we would make heavenly things (the things of the future state of blessedness and glory) a principal object of our thoughts, that we would think much about them, and that we would meditate much upon them. Many are discouraged in this by their ignorance and darkness, by their lack of due conceptions and steady apprehensions of invisible things. Hence, one of two things befalls them when they would meditate on things above:

1. The *glory of them, the glory of God in them*, being essentially infinite and incomprehensible, immediately overwhelms them, and as if in a moment, puts them to an utter loss, so that they cannot frame one thought in their minds about them. Or,

2. They want *skill and ability to conceive rightly about invisible things*, and to dispose of them in such an order in their minds, that they may sedately exercise their thoughts about them. Both these shall be spoken to afterward. At present I will only say, that —

Whoever sincerely engages in this duty according to what he has, and abides constant in it, will make such a refreshing progress in his apprehension of heavenly things, that he will be greatly satisfied with it. We are kept in darkness, ignorance, and unsteadiness of meditations about them, not from the nature of the things themselves, but from our own sloth, negligence, and readiness to be turned aside by apprehensions of difficulties, of the lion in the way. Therefore I will consider two things:

(1.) What the *principal motives* are to this duty of fixing our thoughts on the things that are above, and the advantages which we receive by doing so.

(2.) Give *some directions* how, and on what in particular we may exercise our thoughts on those things above [*which will be covered in chapter 6*].

(1.) Principal motives:

[1.] *Faith will be increased and strengthened by it.* Invisible things are the proper objects of faith. It is “the evidence of things not seen,” Heb 11.1. Therefore, in our thoughts of them, faith is in its proper exercise, which is the principal means of its growth and increase. And two things will ensue from this:

1st. *The soul will come to a more satisfactory, abiding sense of their reality.* Things of the imagination, which maintain their value by darkness, will not bear a diligent search into them. They lose of their reputation on every serious inquiry. If rational men would but give themselves the liberty of free examination by their own thoughts, it would quickly cashier the fool’s paradise of Mohammed, the purgatory of the Papists, and all such creatures of imagination and superstition. But where things are real and substantial, the more they are inquired into, the more they evidence their being and subsistence. Therefore, it’s not every profession of a faith of a future state of blessedness that will realize it in our minds; for the most part, it is a notion that men have of heavenly things which they don’t contradict, rather than any solid satisfaction in, or spiritual sense of their reality. For these are things that “eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor will enter into the heart of man to conceive,” 2Cor 2.9 whose existence, nature, and real state, are not easily comprehended. But through the continual exercise of holy thoughts about them, the soul obtains an entrance into the midst of them, finding in them both durable substance and riches. There is no way, therefore, to strengthen faith to any degree except by a daily contemplation of the things themselves. Those who don’t think of them *frequently* will never believe them *sincerely*. They don’t allow for any collateral evidence, where they don’t evidence themselves to our souls. Faith thus exercised, as we said, will give them a subsistence — not in themselves, which they have antecedent to this, but in *us*, in our *hearts*, in the *minds* of those who believe. *Imagination* creates its own object; *faith* finds it prepared beforehand. It will not leave a bare notion of them in the understanding, but give them a spiritual subsistence in the heart, as Christ himself dwells in our hearts by faith. There are two things that will reveal this subsistence of them in us:

(1st.) When we find them continually ready to *rise up in our minds* on all occasions in which the thoughts and remembrance of them are needful and useful to us. There are many seasons (some of which will be immediately spoken to) and many duties, *in which and to which* the faith and thoughts of things invisible and eternal are needful for us, such that without them, we cannot fill up those seasons nor perform those duties in a due manner. If on all such occasions, from the inward frame of our minds, they present themselves to us, or, through our acquaintance and familiarity with them, and we recur in our thoughts to them, then they seem to have a real subsistence given to them in our souls. But if on those occasions in which such thoughts alone will yield us help and relief, we instead accustom ourselves to *other* thoughts, if those concerning them are, as it were, out of the way, and don’t arise in our minds of their own accord, then we are yet strangers to this effect of faith.

(2dly.) They are realized for us, they have a subsistence in us, when the soul continually *longs to be in them*. When they have given such a relish to our hearts, as the first fruits of glory, that we cannot help but desire on all opportune occasions to be in the full enjoyment of them, then faith seems to have had its effectual work upon us. For lack of these things, many among us walk in disconsolation all their days.

2dly. It will gradually give the heart an acquaintance with the especial nature and use of these things. General thoughts and notions of heaven and glory fluctuate up and down in the mind, and very little influence the mind to other duties; but assiduous contemplation will give the mind such distinct apprehensions of heavenly things, as to duly affect it with their glory.

The more we discern of the glory and excellence of them in their own nature — of their suitableness to ours, as our only proper rest and blessedness; as the perfection and complement of what has already begun in us by grace; of the restless tendency of all gracious dispositions and inclinations of our hearts towards their enjoyment — the more faith will be established in its clinging to them. So, in the contemplation of these things consists *the principal food of faith*, by which it is nourished and strengthened. And we are not to expect much work where there is no provision of proper food for those who labor. No wonder we find our faith is faint and weak in the work it has to do (which oftentimes is great and weighty), if we neglect to guide it daily to that which would administer strength to it.

[2.] It will give *life and exercise to the grace of hope*. Hope is a glorious grace, to which blessed effects are ascribed in the Scripture; and it is an effectual operation for the support and consolation of believers. By hope we are purified, sanctified, and saved. And to sum up the whole of its excellency and efficacy, it is a principal way of the working of Christ as inhabiting us: Col 1.27, “Christ in you, the hope of glory.” Where Christ evidences his presence with us, he gives us an infallible hope of glory; he gives us an assured pledge of it, and works our souls into an expectation of it. Hope in *general* is but an uncertain expectation of a future good which we desire; but as it is a gospel grace, all uncertainty is removed from it, which would keep us from the advantage intended in it. It is an earnest expectation proceeding from faith, trust, and confidence, accompanied with longing desires of enjoyment. It is from mistaking its nature that few Christians labor after it, exercise themselves toward it, or have the benefit of it. For they suppose that to live by hope infers a state not only beneath the life of faith and all assurance in believing, but also exclusive of them. They think that hoping to be saved, is a condition of men who have no grounds for faith or assurance; but this is to turn a blessed fruit of the Spirit into a common affection of our nature. *Gospel hope* is a fruit of faith, trust, and confidence; indeed, the height of the actings of all grace, issues in a well-grounded hope; nor can it rise any higher, Rom 5.2-5.¹

Now, the reason why men have no more use of, and no more benefit by this excellent grace, is because they don't abide in thoughts and contemplation of the things that are hoped for. The especial object of hope is eternal glory, Col 1.27; Rom 5.2. The peculiar use of it is to support, comfort, and refresh the soul in all trials, under all weariness and despondencies, with a firm expectation of a speedy entrance into that glory, with an earnest desire for it. That's why, unless we acquaint ourselves by continual meditation, with the reality and nature of this glory, it is impossible for it to be the object of a vigorous, active hope, such as the one by which the apostle says, “we are saved.”² Rom 8.24 Without this [hope of glory], we can have neither that evidence of eternal things, nor that valuation of them, nor that preparedness in our minds for them, that would keep us in the exercise of gracious hope about them.

Suppose various persons engaged in a voyage to a most remote country, in which all of them apprehend they will have a place of rest, and an inheritance provided for them. Under this apprehension they all set upon their voyage, to possess what is so prepared. However, some of them have only a general notion of these things; they know nothing specific concerning

¹ Rom 5:2 through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. ³ And not only *that*, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; ⁴ and perseverance, character; and character, hope. ⁵ Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.

them, and they are so busy about other affairs, that they have no leisure to inquire into these things; nor do they suppose they can come to any satisfactory knowledge of them in particular, and so they are content to go on with general hopes and expectations. There are others who by all possible means acquaint themselves particularly with the nature of the climate where they are going, with the excellency of the inheritance and the provision that is made for them. Their voyage proves long and wearisome, their difficulties many, and their dangers great, and they have nothing to relieve and encourage themselves with but the hope and expectation of the country where they are going. Those of the first sort will be apt to despond and faint; their general hopes will not be able to relieve them. But those who have a distinct notion and apprehension of the state of things where they are going, and of their incomparable excellency, always have something ready with which to cheer their minds and support themselves.

In that journey or pilgrimage in which we are engaged towards a heavenly country, we are sure to meet with all kinds of dangers, difficulties, and perils. It is not a general notion of blessedness that will excite and work a spiritual, refreshing hope in us. But when we think and meditate on future glory as we should, that grace which is neglected for the most part as to its benefit, and dead as to its exercise, will of all others be most vigorous and active, displaying itself on all occasions. Therefore, for those who are really spiritually minded, this is an inestimable benefit of the duty they are exhorted to, and which they find the advantage of.

[3.] This alone will make us *ready for the cross*, for all sorts of sufferings that we may be exposed to.

There is nothing more necessary for believers at this time, than to have their minds furnished with provision of those things which may prepare them for the cross and sufferings. Various intimations of the mind of God, circumstances of providence, the present state of things in the world, with the instant peril of the latter days — *all* call them to this. If it is otherwise with them, they will at one time or other be woefully surprised, and think their trials strange, as if some strange thing befell them.¹ Pet 4:12 Nothing is more useful to this end than constant thoughts and contemplations of eternal things and future glory. From this alone can the soul have in readiness something to lay in the balance against all sorts of sufferings. When a storm arises at sea, the mariners rouse themselves to manage the ship's tackle, and make other applications of their craft for their safety; but if the storm increases and becomes extreme, they're forced to forego all other means and resort to a sheet-anchor¹ to hold their ship steady against its violence. So too, when a storm of persecution and troubles arise, men have various ways and considerations for their relief; but once it becomes extreme — if sword, nakedness, famine, and death are inevitably coming upon them — they have nothing to resort to that will yield solid relief, but the consideration and faith of things invisible and eternal.

The apostle declares such a state of things in 2Cor 4:16-18 (the words insisted on before):

“For which cause we do not faint; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, works for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal.”

He lays all sorts of afflictions in one scale, and upon considering them, he declares them to be “light” and “but for a moment.” Then he lays glory in the other scale, and finds it to be ponderous, weighty, and “eternal,” — “an exceeding weight of glory.” In the one is sorrow for a little while, in the other eternal joy; in the one is pain for a few moments, in the other

¹ *Sheet anchor*: a large strong anchor carried in the waist of a ship, and used as a spare in an emergency.

everlasting rest; in the one is the loss of a few temporary things, in the other the full fruition of God in Christ, who is all in all.

Hence, the same apostle tosses up the account of these things, and gives us his judgment about them in Rom 8.18: “I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us.” There’s no comparison between them, as if one had as much evil and misery in it, as the other had of good and blessedness; as though his state were in any way be complained of, if he must undergo the one, while having an interest in the other; or as though by escaping the one, he risks the enjoyment of the other.

It is inseparable from our nature to have a fear of and aversion to great, distressing sufferings that are above the power of nature to bear. Even our Lord Jesus, having taken on himself all the sinless properties of our nature, had a fear and aversion, though holy and gracious, with respect to his own suffering. Those who, through stoutheartedness, condemn sufferings before their approach, boasting about their ability to undergo them, censuring those who will not unadvisedly engage in them, are those who seldom glorify God when they are really called to confront them. Peter alone trusted to himself that he would not forsake his Master; and he seemed to take the warning badly, saying that they should all do so; yet he alone denied Him. All church stories are filled with such instances of having borne themselves high before the approach of trials, then shamefully miscarrying when their own trials have come. That’s why we are allowed to use all lawful means for avoiding them. Both rules and examples from the Scripture give sufficient warranty for it.

But there are times and seasons in which, without any equivocation, they are to be undergone to the glory of God and in the discharge of our duty, confessing Christ before men, as we would be owned by him before his Father in heaven. All things now call us to prepare for such a season, to be *martyrs in resolution*, even if we never really lose our lives by violence. Nothing will give us this preparation except to have our minds exercised in the contemplation of heavenly things, of things that are invisible and eternal. Whoever is thus spiritually minded, who has his thoughts and affections set on things above, will always have something in readiness, to oppose to any circumstance of his sufferings.

Those views which someone has had by faith, of the uncreated glories above, of the things in heavenly places where Christ sits at the right hand of God, of the glory within the veil, views which have been realized and made present to his soul, will now visit him every moment, abide with him continually, and put forth their efficacy for his support and refreshment. Alas! what will become of many of us who are continually grovelling on the earth, whose bellies cling to the dust, who are strangers to thoughts of heavenly things, when distressing troubles befall us? Why should we think that refreshing thoughts of things above will *then* visit our souls, when we resisted their admittance in *days of peace*? “Do you come to me in your distress,” asks Jephthah, “when in the time of your peace you drove me from you?”^{Jdg 11.7} When we would thus think of heavenly things to our refreshment, we will hardly get them to abide with us. I know God can come in by the mighty power of his Spirit and grace, to support and comfort the souls of those who are called and even surprised into the greatest of sufferings. Yet I also know that it is our duty *not* to tempt Him by neglecting the ways and means which he has appointed for communicating his grace to us.

Our Lord Jesus Christ himself, as “the author and finisher of our faith, for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross, despising the shame,” Heb 12.2. His mediatory glory in the salvation of the church was the matter of the joy set before him. For his refreshment and support, he took the view and prospect of this in all his sufferings. And his example, as “the author and finisher of our faith,” is more efficaciously instructive than any other rule or precept. Eternal glory is set before us also. It is the design of God’s wisdom and grace that by contemplating it, we might be relieved in all our suffering; indeed, that we might rejoice with

joy unspeakable and full of glory.^{1Pet 1.8} How many of those blessed souls now in the enjoyment of God and glory, who passed through fiery trials and great tribulations, were enabled to sing and rejoice in the flames by *pre-possession of this glory* in their minds through believing! Indeed, some of them have been so filled with these views as to take off all sense of pain under the most exquisite tortures. When Stephen was to be stoned, to encourage him in his suffering, and comfort him in it, “the heavens were opened, and he saw Jesus standing at the right hand of God.” ^{Act 7.55} Who can conceive what contempt of all the rage and madness of the Jews, what a neglect of all the pains of death, this view raised his holy soul to? Therefore, to frequently obtain such views by faith, as those believers do who are truly spiritually minded, is the most effectual way to encourage us unto all our sufferings. The apostle gives us the force of this encouragement in a comparison with earthly things:

1Cor 9:25, “Every man who strives for mastery is temperate in all things. Now *they* do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we do it for an incorruptible crown.”

When a corruptible crown of vain honor and applause is offered to men, they will do and endure all that is needed to attain it, and to be relieved in their hardships with thoughts and imaginations of attaining it, grounded on uncertain hopes. Shouldn’t *we*, then, who have an *immortal and invisible* crown offered to us, with the highest assurance of enjoying it, cheerfully undergo, endure, and suffer what we are to go through on the way to receiving it?

[4.] The *most effectual means to wean the heart and affections from things here below*, is to keep the mind to an undervaluation, indeed, a contempt of these things, as occasion requires. For there is a season in which there is such a contempt required in us of all relations and enjoyments, that our Savior calls it “hating” them — not absolutely, but comparatively — in comparison to him and the gospel, with the duties which belong to our profession. Luk 14.26, “If any man comes to me, and does not hate his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple.”

Some, I fear, if they only considered it, would be apt to say, “This is a hard saying, who can bear it?” and others would cry out, with the disciples in another case, “Lord, who then can be saved?” ^{Joh 6.60} but it is the word by which we must be judged; nor can we be the disciples of Christ on any other terms. But here, in an especial manner, lies the wound and the weakness of faith and profession in our days: “The bellies of men cling to the dust,” ^{Psa 44.25} or their affections cling to earthly things.

I’m not speaking of those who, by rapine, deceit, and oppression, strive to enrich themselves; nor of those who design nothing more than the attainment of greatness and promotion in the world, though not by ways of open wickedness; least of all of those who make religion, and perhaps their ministry in it, a means for attaining secular ends and preferments. No wise man can suppose that such persons, *any of them*, are spiritually minded; and it is most easy to disprove all their pretences. But I intend only those at present, whose ways and means of attaining *riches* are lawful, honest, and unblameable; who use them with some moderation, and profess that their portion lies in better things — so that it is hard to fasten a conviction on them in the matter of their conversation. Whatever may seem to reflect upon them, they esteem it to be an omission that would make them foolish in their affairs or negligent in their duty. But even among these, there is oftentimes that inordinate love for present things, that esteem and valuation of them, that concern in them, which is not consistent with being spiritually minded.

With some, it’s *their relations*; with others, *their enjoyments*; with most, *both in conjunction*, are an idol which they set up in their hearts and secretly bow down to. Their hopes and fears are exercised about these, their love is upon them, their delight is in them. They are wholly taken up with their own concerns, count everything lost that is not spent on them, and all time

is misspent that is not engaged about them. Yet the things which they do, they judge to be good in themselves; their hearts don't condemn them as to the matter of them. The valuation they have of their relations and enjoyments, they suppose to be lawful, within the bounds which they have assigned to it. Their care about them, in their own minds, is but their duty. It is no easy matter, it requires great spiritual wisdom, to fix right boundaries for our affections and their actings about earthly things. But let men plead and pretend what they please, I will offer one rule in this case, which will not fail, and it is this:

When men are so confident in the good state and measure of their affections and their actings towards earthly things, that they assign their engagements in them to known duties of religion, piety, and charity, they have gone into a sinful excess.

Is there a state of the poor that requires their liberality and bounty — you must excuse them, they have *families to provide for*; when what is expected from them signifies nothing at all as to a due provision for their families, nor is it what would lessen their inheritances or portions one penny in the result. Are they called to attend to seasons of religious *duties*? — *they are so full of business* that it's impossible for them to have leisure for any such occasions. So by all such ways, they declare that they are under the power of a prevalent, predominant affection for earthly things. This fills all places with lifeless, sapless, useless professors, who approve themselves in their condition, while it is visibly *unspiritual* and *withering*.

The heart will have something on which, in a way of *pre-eminence*, it will fix itself and its affections. In all its perpetual motions, it seeks this for its rest and satisfaction. And every man has an edge — the edge of his affections is set one way or other, though it is keener in some than others. And whereas all sorts of things that the heart can fix upon or turn the edge of its affections to, are categorized by the apostle into “things above” and “things beneath,” things heavenly and things earthly, if we don't have such a view and prospect of heavenly things as to cause our hearts to cling to them and delight in them, pretend what we will, it is impossible for us not to be under the power of a predominant affection for the things of this world.

In this lies the great danger of multitudes at this present time; for let men profess what they will, under the power of this frame, their eternal state is at risk every moment. Persons are engaged in it in a great variety of degrees; and we may put them under two heads:

1st. Some *don't at all understand that things are amiss with them*, or that they are greatly to blame. They plead, as observed before, that they are all *lawful* things which their hearts cling unto, and which it is their duty to take care of and regard. “May they not delight in *their own relations*, especially at such a time, when others break and cancel all duties and bonds of relation in the service of and provision they make for their lusts? May they not be careful, in *good and honest ways* of diligence, about the things of the world, when the most either squander their time in the pursuit of bestial lusts, or heap them up by deceit and oppression? May they not *contrive for the promotion of their children* in the world, to add the other hundred or thousand pounds to their advancement, so that they may be in as good condition as others, seeing that “he is worse than an infidel who does not provide for his own family?”^{1Tim 5:8} By such reasonings and secret thoughts, many justify themselves in their earthly mindedness. And they are so fixed in the approval of themselves, that if you urge them to their duty, you may lose their acquaintance, if they don't become your enemies for telling them the truth. Indeed, they avoid one duty that does *not* go against their earthly interest, because it leads to another — so they won't engage in religious assemblies, or be constant in their duty to them, for fear that duties of *charity* might be required or expected of them. On what grounds such persons can satisfy themselves that they are spiritually minded, I don't know. I will leave only one rule with persons who are thus minded:

Where our love for the world has prevailed by its reasonings, pleas, and pretenses, to remove our fear and jealousy for our own hearts lest we inordinately love the world, there it is assuredly predominant in us.

2dly. Others are sensible of the *evil of their hearts*, at least they are jealous and afraid lest it be found that their hearts cling inordinately to these things. Hence they endeavor to contend against this evil, sometimes by forcing themselves to such acts of piety or charity as are contrary to that frame, and sometimes by laboring for a change of the frame itself. They will especially do so when God is pleased to awaken them by trials and afflictions which write *vanity* and *emptiness* on all earthly enjoyments. But for the most part, they don't strive lawfully, and so they don't obtain what they seem to aim at.

This disease with many is mortal, and will not be thoroughly cured in any except by the due exercise of this part of spiritual mindedness. Other duties are also required for the same end — namely, the duty of mortifying our desires and affections for earthly things — which I treated elsewhere. But without this, or a fixed contemplation on the desirableness, beauty, and glory of heavenly things, it will not be attained. To further evince the truth of this, we may observe these two things:

(1st.) If by any means a man seems to have taken his heart away from *the love of present things*, and he is not at the same time taken up with *the love of things that are heavenly*, his seeming mortification is of no advantage to him. Thus persons frequently — through discontentment, disappointments, or dissatisfaction with relations, or from mere natural weariness — have left the world with its affairs and cares, as to their usual conduct in it, and gone to monasteries, convents, or other retirements suiting their *principles*, but without any advantage to their *souls*.

(2dly.) God is not such a severe lord and master as to require us to remove our affections, and mortify them, to those things which the law of our nature makes dear to us — such as wives, children, houses, lands, and possessions — and not propose to us something that is incomparably *more excellent* to fix them upon. So he invites the elect of the Gentiles to Christ: Psa 45.10, “Hearken, O daughter, and consider, and incline your ear; forget also your own people, and your father's house;” that is, “Come into the faith of Abraham, who forsook his country and his father's house to follow God wherever He pleased.” But he proposes this for their encouragement, verse 11, “So shall the King greatly desire your beauty: for he is your Lord; and worship him.” The love of the great King is an abundant satisfactory recompense for parting with all things in this world. So when Abraham's servant was sent to take Rebekah as a wife for Isaac, he required that she immediately leave her father and mother, brothers, and all enjoyments, and go along with him. But that she might know she would be no loser thereby, he not only assured her of the greatness of his master, but also at present, he gave her “jewels of silver, and jewels of gold, and raiment,” Gen 24.53. Likewise, when our Savior requires that we part with all for his sake and the gospel, he promises a hundredfold in lieu of them, *even in this life* — namely, in an interest in things spiritual and heavenly. That's why, without an assiduous meditation on heavenly things as better, nobler, and more suitable objects for our affections to fix on, we can never be freed in a due manner from an inordinate love of the things here below.

It is sad to see some professors who keep up spiritual duties in churches and in their families, who will speak and discourse about spiritual things, and keep themselves from the open excesses of the world — and yet, when they are tried by those duties which encroach on their love for and adherence to earthly things, they quickly manifest how remote they are from being spiritually minded in a due manner. If they were to be tried as our Savior tried the young man who made such a profession of his conscientious and religious conduct, “Go sell what you have,

give to the poor, and follow me,” something might be pleaded to excuse their equivocation. But alas! they would decline their duty, even when their enjoyments aren’t impacted a hundredth.

I bless God that I don’t speak this way of many whom I know; and I may say with the apostle, to most of those I usually speak to in this manner, “But beloved, we are persuaded of better things about you, things that accompany salvation, though we speak in this way,” Heb 6.9.

Yes, the same testimony may be given about many in this city, which that same apostle gives to the churches of Macedonia: 2Cor 8.1-3, Understand “the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia; that in a great trial of affliction, the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded to the riches of their liberality. For to their power, and beyond their power, they were willing to give of themselves.”

There has been nothing done among us that may or can be boasted about. And yet, considering all circumstances, it may be that there have not been more instances of true, evangelical charity in any age or place for these many years. For those who have been but useful and helpful in this, may the Lord remember them for good, and spare them according to the multitude of his mercies! It is true, many of them have not founded colleges, built hospitals, or raised works of state and magnificence; for very many of them are those whose comparatively deep poverty has abounded to the riches of their liberality. The backs and bellies of multitudes of poor and needy servants of Christ have been warmed and refreshed by them, blessing God for them. “Thanks be to God,” says the apostle in this case, “for his unspeakable gift,” 2Cor 9.15. Blessed be God, who has not left the gospel *without this glory*, nor the profession of it *without this evidence* of its power and efficacy! Yes, God has exalted the glory of persecutions and afflictions. For many, since they have lost much of their enjoyments by them, and been continually endangered, they have abounded in duties of charity beyond what they did in the days of their fullness and prosperity. So, “out of the eater came meat.” Jdg 14.14 If the world only knew what fruits by way of charity and bounty — to the praise of God and glory of the gospel — have been occasioned by their making many poor, it would abate their satisfaction in their successes.

But with many, it isn’t so. Their minds are so full of earthly things, they so cling to them in their affections, that no sense of duty, no example of others, no concern for the glory of God or the gospel, can make any impressions on them. If there is yet in them so much life and light of grace as to design a deliverance from this woeful condition, the means insisted on must be *used*.

This advice is especially needed for those who are rich, who have large possessions, or abound in the goods of this world. The poor, the afflicted, the sorrowful, are prompted from their outward circumstances, as well as excited by inward grace, to frequently remember and to think about the things above. For in this lies their only reserve and relief against the trouble and urgency of their present condition. But the enjoyment of these things in abundance, is accompanied with a twofold evil, lying directly contrary to this duty:

First, a desire for increase and adding to it. Earthly enjoyments enlarge men’s earthly desires, and the love of them grows with their income. A moderate stock of waters, sufficient for our use, may be kept within their ordinary banks. But if a flood pours into them, they know no bounds, but overflow everything about them. The increase of wealth and riches enlarges the desires of men for them, which go beyond all bounds of wisdom, sobriety, or safety. Someone who labors hard for his daily bread, seldom has such earnest, vehement desires for an addition to what he has, as many others have who already have more than they know how to use, or almost what to do with. They must have more of this; the last advantage serves only to stir them up to look for another. Yet on other accounts, such men would be esteemed good Christians, and spiritually minded, as all good Christians are.

Secondly, they draw the heart to value and esteem them as those things which bring them satisfaction, and make them differ from those whom they see are poor and miserable. Now,

CHAPTER 5. THE OBJECTS OF SPIRITUAL THOUGHTS.

these things are contrary to, and where they are habitually prevalent, utterly inconsistent with being spiritually minded. Nor is it possible for any who are in the least degree under their power, to ever attain deliverance unless their thoughts are fixed upon, and their minds are thereby possessed with, due apprehensions of invisible things and eternal glory.

These are a few of those many advantages which we may obtain by fixing our thoughts and meditations, and thereby our affections, on the things that are above. There are some things which make me willing to give a few directions for the practice of this duty. For whatever else we are and do, we neither are, nor can we be truly spiritually minded (on which life and peace depend) unless we really exercise our thoughts to meditate on things above. Without it, all our religion is but vain. And just as I fear men are generally lacking and defective in this practice, so I also fear that many — through the darkness of their minds, the weakness of their intellects, and their ignorance of the nature of all things unseen — seldom set themselves to contemplate them. I will therefore give a few directions in the next chapter, for the practice of this duty.

CHAPTER 6. EXERCISING OUR THOUGHTS ON THINGS ABOVE.

Directions for the exercise of our thoughts on things above, things future, invisible, and eternal; on God himself; with the difficulties of it, and oppositions to it, and the way of their removal — Right notions of future glory stated.

(2.) [continuing the subject from Chapter 5]. WE treated in general before, the proper objects of our spiritual thoughts as to our present duty. What we were last engaged in is a special instance in heavenly things — things future and invisible — with the fountain and spring of them all in Christ and God himself. And because men are generally unskilled in this, and great difficulties arise in discharging this part of the duty in hand, I will give some special directions concerning it:

[1.] *Possess your minds with right notions and apprehensions of things above, and of the state of future glory.* In this duty, we are to “look at things which are not seen,” 2Cor 4.18. It is only by faith that we have a prospect of them; for “we walk by faith, and not by sight.” And faith can give us no interest in them unless we have due apprehensions of them; for it only assents and clings to the truth of what is proposed to it. The greater part of mankind deceive themselves and feed on ashes in this matter. They fancy a future state which has no foundation except in their own imaginations. That’s why the apostle, directing us to seek and mind the “things that are above,” adds for the guidance of our thoughts, the consideration of the principal concern of them, “where Christ sits on the right hand of God,” Col 3.1,2. He would lead us to distinct apprehensions of those heavenly things, especially the presence of Christ in his exaltation and glory. Therefore, the true notion of these things with which we are to possess our minds, may be considered here:

1st. All who have an apprehension of a future state of happiness agree in this matter, that it contains in it, or it is accompanied with, *a deliverance and freedom from all that is evil*. But what such a deliverance consists in, they are not agreed. Many esteem that it consists only those things that are grievous, troublesome, wasting, and destructive to nature. That is, in what is penal — in pain, sickness, sorrow, loss, poverty, with all kinds of outward troubles, and death itself; these are evil. Therefore they suppose that the future state of blessedness will free them from all these things, if they can attain to it. They will lay this in the balance against the troubles of life, and sometimes maybe, against the pleasures of life which they must forego. Indeed, persons who are profane and profligate will (in words at least) profess that heaven will give them rest from all their troubles: but it is not a place of rest for such persons.

For all others also, for believers themselves, these things are evil — things that they expect a deliverance from in heaven and glory. And there is no doubt that it is lawful for us and fitting that we should contemplate them, as those things which will give us a deliverance from all outward troubles, death itself, and all that leads to it. Heaven is promised as “rest” for those who are “troubled,” 2The 1.7. It is our duty, under all our sufferings, reproaches, persecutions, troubles, and sorrows, to raise up our minds to the contemplation of that state in which we will be freed from them all. It is a blessed notion of heaven, that “God shall wipe away all tears from our eyes,” Rev 7.17, or remove all causes of sorrow far from us. And it would be to our advantage if we accustomed our minds more to this kind of relief than we do — if upon the incursion of fears, dangers, and sorrows, we more readily retreated to thoughts of that state in which we will be freed from them all. Even this most inferior consideration of it would render thoughts of it more familiar, and the thing itself more useful to us. On such occasions, that would be much better than to be exercised with heartless complaints, uncertain hopes, and fruitless contrivances.

But to those who are truly spiritually minded, there is that which has more evil in it than all these things together; and that is sin. Heaven is a state of deliverance from sin, from *all* sin, in all the causes, concomitants, and effects of it. The one to whom sin is not the greatest burden, sorrow, and trouble, is no true believer. Other things, such as the loss of dear relations, or extraordinary pains, may make deeper impressions on the mind by its natural affections, at some times than our sins ever did at any one time, or in any one instance. Thus a man may have a greater sense of pain by a toothache, which will be gone in an hour, than in a hectic fever or consumption, which will assuredly take away his life. But if we take in the whole course of our lives, and all the actings of our souls, in spiritual judgment as well as in natural affection, I don't understand how a man can be a sincere believer, to whom sin is not the greatest burden and sorrow.

This is why, in the first place, it belongs to the true notion of heaven — that it is a state in which we will be eternally freed from sin and all concerns about it; but that is only through the exaltation of the glory of God's grace in Christ, by the pardon of sin. Someone who truly hates and abhors sin — whose principal desire and design of life is to be freed from it so far as possible; who walks in self-abasement through a sense of his many disappointments when he hoped it would act in him no more — I judge he will frequently take refreshment from thoughts of that state in which he will be freed from it and triumph over it to eternity. This is a notion of heaven that is easily apprehended and fixed in the mind, and which we may dwell upon to the great advantage and satisfaction of our souls.

Frequent thoughts and meditations on heaven under this notion, argue that a man is spiritually minded. For it is convincing evidence that sin is a burden to him, that he longs to be delivered from it and all its consequents, that no thoughts are more welcome to him than those of that state in which sin will be no more. And although men are troubled about their sins, and desirous of being freed from them — so far as sins perplex their minds and make their consciences uneasy — if they don't think much about the prospect of this relief, if they don't find refreshment in it, I fear their trouble isn't as it ought to be. Therefore, when men can so wrangle and wrestle with their convictions of sin, and yet the best of their relief is in hopes that it will be better with them at some time or other *in this world*, without longing desires for that state *in which sin will be no more*, they can give no evidence that they are spiritually minded.

It is quite otherwise with sincere believers in the exercise of this duty. The consideration of the grace and love of God, of the blood of Christ, of the purity and holiness of that good Spirit who dwells in them, of the light, grace, and mercy which they have attained through the promises of the gospel, are those which make the remainders of sin most grievous and burdensome for them. This is what breaks their hearts, and makes some of them mourn all day long — namely, that anything of that alone which God hates, might be found in them or remain with them. In this condition, it is evidence they are spiritually minded *if*, together with watchful endeavors for the universal mortification of sin, and the utter excision of it, root and branch, they constantly add these thoughts of that blessed state in which they will be absolutely and eternally freed from all sin, with refreshment, delight, and complacency.

These things belong to our direction for fixing our thoughts and meditations on things above. The lowliest and weakest person who has the least spark of sincerity and grace, is capable of apprehending and practicing this. The sense they have of the evil of sin, will put their thoughts on things above every day, if they don't shut their eyes against the light of the refreshment that's in it. Let those whose minds cannot rise to fixed and stable thoughts of any other notion of these invisible things, dwell on *this* consideration of them, in which they will find no small spiritual advantage and refreshment for their souls.

2dly. As for the positive part of this glorious future state, the thoughts and apprehensions of men are quite varied. That we may know what to avoid, as well as what to embrace, we will reflect a little on some of them:

(1st.) Many are not able to entertain any *rational conceptions* about a future state of blessedness and glory, nor any notions in which either faith or reason is concerned. They imagine something that is great and glorious, but they don't know what it is. No wonder such persons take no delight in heaven, and have no use for thoughts of it. When their imaginations have fluctuated up and down in all uncertainties for a while, they are swallowed up in nothing. They take for granted that it must be glorious, and therefore desirable. But nothing can be so for them, except what is suitable to their present dispositions, inclinations, and principles; and there is nothing of this in the true spiritual glory of heaven, or in the eternal enjoyment of God. These things are not suited to the will of their minds and of the flesh; and therefore they cannot rise up to any constant desires for them. Hence, to please themselves, they begin to imagine what heaven is *not*; but what heaven truly is, doesn't please them. And what *does* please them is not heaven, nor is it to be found there. And so they seldom or never endeavor in good earnest, to exercise their thoughts about it.

It would be good if darkness and ignorance of the true nature of the future state and eternal glory did not overly prejudice believers as to their delight in them and meditations about them. They would have nothing fixed or stated in their minds, which they can turn to when they contemplate that future state. And by the way, whatever diverts the minds of men from the power and life of spiritual worship (as do all pompous solemnities in the performance of it), greatly hinders them as to right conceptions of that future state. There was a promise of eternal life given to the saints under the Old Testament. But though they were obliged to a worship that was carnal and outwardly pompous, they never had clear and distinct apprehensions of the future state of glory, for "life and immortality were brought to light by the gospel." ^{2Tim 1.10} Therefore, although no man living can see or find out the infinite riches of eternal glory, yet it is the duty of all to be acquainted with the nature of it *in general*, so that they may have fixed thoughts of it, love for it, and an earnest desire for it — all under its own true and proper notion.

(2dly.) So great a part of mankind as the Mohammedans, to whom God has given all the principal and most desirable parts of the world to inhabit and possess,¹ conceive the state of *future blessedness to consist in the full satisfaction of their sensual lusts and pleasures*. And this is evidence that the religion which they profess has no power or efficacy on their minds, to change them from the love of sin, nor from placing their happiness in fulfilling the desires of the flesh. It does not at all enlighten their minds to discern a beauty in spiritual things, nor excite their affections to love them, nor free the soul to look after blessedness in those things which alone are suited to its rational constitution. For if it did, they would place their happiness and blessedness in them. Therefore, it is nothing but an artifice of the god of this world to blind the eyes of men, to their eternal destruction.

(3dly.) Some of the philosophers of old attained an apprehension that the blessedness of men in another world *consists in the soul's full satisfaction in the goodness and beauty of the divine nature*. There is a truth in this notion, which contemplative men have adorned with excellent and rational discourses; sundry learned Christians have greatly improved

¹ In 1681, the Ottoman Empire held most of the land around the Mediterranean. It stretched from the Sinai Peninsula *east* across the Tigris and Euphrates rivers; *south* to Medina and Mecca; *north* to the far side of the Baltic Sea, including Crimea and Ukraine, nearly to Kiev; *west* across Egypt, and along the northern shores of Africa almost to the Iberian Peninsula. It held most of eastern Europe (Hungary, Serbo-Croatia, Bulgaria, etc.) nearly to Vienna. It occupied Greece, Macedonia, Cyprus, Turkey and Asia Minor, thus controlling the Aegean Sea. — WHG

this truth by the light of the Scripture. From reason, they take up thoughts of the goodness, amiableness, self-sufficiency, and all-sufficient satisfactoriness of the infinite perfections of the divine nature. These things shine with such a glorious light, that no more is required to perceive them, than that men do not willfully shut their eyes against it through bestial sensuality and the love of sin.

From reason, they also frame their conceptions concerning the capacity of the souls of men for the immediate enjoyment of God, and what is suited in this for their utmost blessedness. No more is required for these things than a due consideration of the nature of God and man, with our relation to him and dependence on him. By the light of the Scripture, they frame these things into that which they call the “beatific vision.” By this they intend first, all the ways by which God, in the highest and immediate instances, can and does communicate Himself to the souls of men, and secondly, the utmost elevation of their intellectual capacities to receive those communications. It is such an intellectual apprehension of the divine nature and perfections, with ineffable love, as to give the soul the utmost rest and blessedness which its capacities can extend to.

These things are so, and they have been both piously and elegantly illustrated by many. However, they are above the capacities of ordinary Christians — they don’t know how to manage them in their minds, nor exercise their thoughts about them. They cannot reduce them to present usefulness, nor make them subservient to the exercise and increase of grace. And the truth is, the Scripture gives us another notion of heaven and glory, not contrary to this, and not inconsistent with it, but more suited to the faith and experience of believers. And this alone can convey a true and useful sense of these things to our minds. Therefore, this notion is to be diligently inquired into, and firmly set in our thoughts and affections.

(4thly.) The principal notion which the Scripture gives us of the state of heavenly blessedness, and which the lowliest believers are capable of improving in daily practice, is that *faith shall be turned into sight, and grace into glory.* “We walk by faith, and not by sight,” says the apostle, 2Cor 5.7. Therefore, this is the difference between our present and our future state, that sight hereafter will take the place of faith, 1Joh 3.2;¹ and if sight takes the place of faith, then the object of that sight must be the same as the present object of our faith. So the apostle informs us, 1Cor 13.9-12, “We know in part, and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect has come, that which is in part will be done away. For now we see in a mirror, darkly; but then face to face.”

Those things which we now see darkly, as in a mirror, we will then have an immediate sight and full comprehension of; for that which is perfect must come and do away that which is in part. What, then, is the principal present object of faith as it is evangelical, into whose place sight must succeed? Is it not *the manifestation of the glory of the infinite wisdom, grace, love, kindness, and power of God in Christ, the revelation of the eternal counsels of his will and the ways of their accomplishment, to the eternal salvation of the church, in and by him, with the glorious exaltation of Christ himself?* That’s why the glory of heaven principally consists in the full, satisfactory representation of these things to our souls, received by sight, or a direct, immediate intuition of them. We behold them now darkly, as in a mirror — that is the utmost which we can attain to by faith; in heaven they will be openly and fully displayed. The infinite, incomprehensible excellencies of the divine nature are not proposed in Scripture as the immediate object of our faith; nor will they be so to our sight in heaven. The manifestation of them *in Christ* is the immediate object of our faith here, and it shall be so to our sight hereafter. Only through this

¹ **1Joh 3:2** Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.

manifestation of them are we led by faith to ultimately acquiesce in them, as in heaven we will be led by love to perfectly adhere to them with ineffable delight. This is our immediate objective glory in heaven; we hope for no other. And if God wills, I will more fully explain this shortly.

Whoever lives in the exercise of faith, and has any experience of the life, power, and sweetness of these heavenly things — those to whom they are a spring of grace and consolation — these are able to meditate on the glory of them in their full enjoyment. Think largely of heaven, as that which will give you a perfect view and comprehension of the wisdom, and love, and grace of God in Christ, with those other things which will be immediately declared.

Some perhaps will be ready to say that if this is heaven, they can see no great glory in it, no such beauty for which it should be desired. It may be so, for some have no instrument to take a view of invisible things except carnal imaginations. Some have no light, no principle, no disposition of mind or soul, to which these things are either acceptable or suitable. Some will go no further in the consideration of the divine excellencies of God, and the faculties and actings of our souls, than reason will guide them; and this may be of use. But we look for no other heaven, we desire none, except what we are led to and prepared for by the light of the gospel — that which will perfect all the beginnings of God's grace in us, and *not* what will be quite of another nature and destructive of them. We don't value that heaven which is equally suited to the desires and inclinations of the worst of men as well as of the best. For we know that those who don't like grace here, do not and cannot like that glory which is hereafter. Whoever has not experienced in some measure, the life, power, and evidence of faith here, cannot have any other heaven in his aim than what is erected in his own imagination.

The glory of heaven which the gospel prepares us for, which faith leads and conducts us to, which the souls of believers long for — as that which will give full rest, satisfaction, and complacency — is the full, open, perfect manifestation of the glory of the wisdom, goodness, and love of God in Christ, in His person and mediation, with the revelation of all his counsels concerning them, and the communication of their effects to us. Whoever doesn't like it, to whom it is not desirable, may turn to *Mohammed's paradise* or *the philosophers' speculations*; for he has no interest in *the gospel heaven*. These are the things which we now see darkly, as in a mirror, by faith. In viewing them, our souls are gradually changed into the likeness of God; and the comprehension of them will give us our utmost conformity and likeness to Him, of which our natures are capable. All our spiritual consolations and joys consist in a sense and experience of their reality and goodness, given to us by the Holy Ghost. The effects produced by them in our souls are the first fruits of glory. Our light, sense, experience, and enjoyment of these things, however weak or frequently interrupted; our apprehensions of them, however dark and obscure — are the only means by which we are “made fit for the inheritance of the saints in light.” Col 1.12

To have the eternal glory of God in Christ, with all the fruits of his wisdom and love, while we are ourselves under the full participation in their effects, immediately and directly revealed, proposed, and made known to us in a divine and glorious light; our souls being furnished with a capacity to behold and perfectly comprehend them — *this* is the heaven which we look for, according to God's promise. But as said, these things will be more fully treated elsewhere.

It is true that there are sundry other things in particular that belong to this state of glory; but what we have mentioned is the fountain and spring of them all. We can never have an immediate enjoyment of God in the immensity of his nature; nor can any created understanding conceive any such thing. God's communications of Himself to us, and our enjoyment of him, will be in and by the manifestation of his glory *in Christ*. The one who can see no glory in these things, who isn't sensible of their blessedness, is a stranger to that heaven which the Scripture reveals and which faith leads to.

It may be inquired, “What is the *subjective glory*, or what change is to be wrought in ourselves, that we may enjoy this glory?” Now, that consists principally as to our souls, in *the perfection of all grace which is initially wrought and subjectively resides in us in this world*. The grace which we have here will not be ended as to its essence and nature, though it will somewhat cease as to the manner of its operation. What soul could think with joy of going to heaven, if he must thereby lose all his present light, faith, and love of God — even if he is told that he will receive in lieu of them, that which is more excellent, which he has no experience of, and cannot understand its nature? When the saints enter into rest, their good works follow them. How can they do so if their grace doesn’t accompany them, from which they proceed? The perfection of our present graces, which here are weak and interrupted in their operations, is a principal eminency of the state of glory. *Faith* will be heightened into vision, as proved before; this doesn’t destroy its nature, but it causes it to cease as to its manner of operation towards things invisible.

Say a man has a weak, small faith in this life, with little evidence and no assurance, such that he doubts all things, questions all things, and has no comfort from what he believes. If afterward, through supplies of grace, he has a mighty prevailing evidence of the things believed, and is filled with comfort and assurance — this is *not* by a faith or grace of another kind than what he had before; it is by the *same* faith raised to a higher degree of perfection. When our Savior cured the blind man and gave him his sight, Mark 8, at first he saw all things obscurely and imperfectly — he saw “men as trees, walking,” verse 24; but on another application of virtue to him, “he saw every man clearly,” verse 25. It was not a sight of another kind which he then received than what he had at first; only its imperfection was taken away, by which he “saw men as trees, walking.” Nor will our perfect vision of things above be a grace that is absolutely of another kind from the light of faith which we enjoy here; it is only that what is imperfect in it, will be done away, and it will be made fit for the present enjoyment of things that *here*, are at a distance and invisible. *Love* will have its perfection also, and will have the least alteration in its manner of operation, of any grace whatever. There is nothing that should more excite us to labor after a growth in love to God in Christ than this: that to all eternity, it will be the same in its nature and in all its operations, only both of these will be made absolutely perfect. By this, the soul will be enabled to cling to God unchangeably, with eternal delight, satisfaction, and complacency. *Hope* will be perfect in its enjoyment, which is all the perfection it is capable of. So shall it be as to other graces.

This *subjective perfection of our nature*, especially in all the faculties, powers, and affections of our souls and all their operations, belongs to our blessedness; nor can we be blessed without it. All the objective glory in heaven would not, by our beholding and enjoying it (if it were possible), make us blessed and happy, if our own natures were not first made perfect — freed from all disorder, from irregular motions, and from weak, imperfect operations. What, then, is needed to give our natures this subjective perfection? It is that grace alone whose beginnings we are made partakers of here. For in this consists the renovation of the image of God in us; and the perfect communication of that image to us, is the absolute perfection of our natures, the utmost to which their capacity is suited.

This gives us the last thing to be inquired into — namely, by what means in ourselves we shall eternally abide in that state; and this is by the unalterable adherence of our whole soul to God, in perfect love and delight. By this alone, the soul reaches to the essence of God, and the infinite, incomprehensible perfections of his nature. For divine revelation has left the perfect nature of this under a veil; and so must we do also. Nor do I designedly handle these things here, except in the way of a direction how to exercise our thoughts about them.

This is the notion of heaven which those who are spiritually minded ought to be conversant with; and the true stating of this notion by faith, is a discriminating character of believers.

This is no heaven for any others. Those who have no experience of the excellency of these things in their initial state in this world, and of their incomparable transcendency to all other things, cannot conceive how heavenly glory and blessedness might consist in them. Unskilled men may cast away *rough unwrought diamonds* as useless stones; they don't know what polishing will bring them to. Nor do men who are unskilled in the mysteries of godliness, judge that there can be any glory in *rough unwrought grace*; they don't know what lustre and beauty the heavenly Hand will give to it by polishing.

It is generally supposed that however men might differ in and about religion here, yet they agree well enough about heaven — they would all go to the *same* heaven. But that is a great mistake; they differ in nothing more than that; they would *not* all go to the same heaven. How few are those who value that heavenly state which we have treated, or understand how any blessedness can consist in the enjoyment of it! But we would go to *this*, and no other heaven. There may be, and *are* other notions of it. These being but fruits and effects of men's own imaginations, the more they dwell in the contemplation of them, the more carnal they may grow; at best, the more superstitious they become. But spiritual thoughts of *this* heaven — consisting principally in freedom from all sin, in the perfection of all grace, in the vision of the glory of God in Christ, and of all the excellencies of the divine nature as manifested in him — are an effectual means for the improvement of spiritual life and the increase of all graces in us. For they cannot help but effect an assimilation in the mind and heart, to the things contemplated, when the principles and seeds of them are already inlaid and begun. This is our first direction.

Having fixed *right notions and apprehensions* of heavenly things in our minds, it is our duty to *think and contemplate greatly on them*, and our own concern in them. Without this, all our speculations concerning the nature of eternal things will be of no use to us. And for your encouragement and direction, take these few short rules relating to this duty:

1st. Here lies the great *test* of whether we are spiritually minded or not: it is by virtue of this rule, "If we are risen with Christ, we will mind the things that are above," Col 3:1.

2dly. Here lies the great *means* by which we may attain further degrees in that blessed frame of mind, if it is already formed in us by virtue of this rule: "Beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, we are changed into the same image from glory to glory," 2Cor 3:18.

3dly. Here lies the great *evidence* of whether we have a real interest in the things above or not, whether we place our portion and blessedness in them. It is by virtue of this rule: "Where our treasure is, there will our hearts be also." Mat 6:21 Are they our treasure, our portion, our reward, in comparison to which all other things are "but loss and dung?" Phi 3:8 If so, we will assuredly be conversant in our minds about them.

4thly. It cannot be imagined that a man would have a principle in him related and suited to things above, of the same kind and nature as those things, that his soul would be conducted by those habits of grace which strive and naturally tend toward perfection — laboring greatly here under the weight of their weaknesses, as it is with all who are truly spiritually minded — and yet *not* have his thoughts greatly exercised about these things, 1Joh 3:2,3.¹

It would be well if we were to test ourselves by things of such uncontrollable evidence. What, can anyone object to the truth of these things or the necessity of this duty? If it is otherwise with us, then it is from one of these two causes: either we are not convinced of the truth and reality of these things, or we take no delight in them because we are not spiritually minded.

¹ **1Joh 3:2** Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. ³ And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.

Do we think that men may embroil themselves in earthly thoughts all day long, and when they are freed of their affairs, turn to things that are vain and useless, without any fixed converse with things above — and yet *enjoy life and peace*? We must take *other measures* of things if we intend to live to God, to be like him, and to come to enjoy him.

What is the matter with men that they are so stupid? They all generally desire to go to heaven, at least when they can live here no longer. Some have no regard for it other than they would not go to hell. Most would “die the death of the righteous,” and have their “latter end like his.” Num 23:10 And yet few endeavor to attain a right notion of it, to test how it is suited to their principles and desires; rather, they content themselves with general notions of it that please their imaginations. It is no wonder if such persons seldom exercise their minds or thoughts about it; nor do they so much as *pretend* to be spiritually minded. But as for those who are instructed in these things, who profess that their chief interest lies in them, not to abound in meditation concerning these things, argues that whatever they may profess, they are earthly and carnal.

[2.] Again, meditate and *think of the glory of heaven so as to compare it with the opposite state of death and eternal misery*. Few men care to think much of hell and the everlasting torments of the wicked. Those who are in the most danger of falling into it, do so the least. They put the evil day far from them, and suppose their covenant with death and hell to be sure. Some begin to advance an opinion that there is no such place; because it is their interest and desire that there should be none. Some, out of profaneness, scoff at it, as though a future judgment were but a fable. Most seem to think there is a severity in thoughts about hell, which it is not fitting to be too terrified with. They may have some transient thoughts of it, but will not let them abide in their minds, lest they be too discomposed. Or they think it is inconsistent with the goodness of Christ to leave anyone in that condition; yet there is more spoken directly by Christ himself, of hell, its torments, and their eternity, than in the rest of Scripture besides.

These thoughts, in most, proceed from an unwillingness to be troubled in their sins, and are useful to no one. It is the height of folly for men to endeavor to hide themselves for a few moments from what is unavoidably coming upon them to eternity; and the due consideration of it, is a means for an escape from it. But I speak only of true believers. The more they are conversant in their thoughts about the future state of eternal misery, the greater evidence they have of the life and confidence of faith. It is a necessary duty to consider what we were by nature liable to, as “children of wrath;” what we deserved by our personal sins, as “the wages of sin is death;” what we are delivered from through Jesus the deliverer, who “saves us from the wrath to come;” what an expression it is of the indignation of God against sin, who has “ordained Tophet [hell] of old” ¹ — that we may be delivered from sin, kept to an abhorrence of it, walking in humility, self-abasement, and the admiration of divine grace. This, therefore, is required of us: that in our thoughts and meditations, we compare the state of blessedness and eternal glory — as a free and absolute effect of the grace of God in and through Christ Jesus — with that state of eternal misery which we deserved. And if there is any spark of grace or of holy thankfulness in our hearts, it will be stirred up to its due exercise.

It may be, some will say they complained before, that *they cannot get their minds fixed on these things*. Weakness, weariness, darkness, diversions, occasions, prevalently obstruct their abiding in such thoughts. I will speak further to this afterward. At present I will only suggest two things:

¹ **Isa 30:33** For Tophet was established of old, Yes, for the king it is prepared. He has made it deep and large; Its pyre is fire with much wood; The breath of the LORD, like a stream of brimstone, Kindles it. **Jer 7:32** “Therefore behold, the days are coming,” says the LORD, “when it will no more be called Tophet, or the Valley of the Son of Hinnom, but the Valley of Slaughter; for they will bury in Tophet until there is no room.

First, If you cannot attain, yet *continue to follow after*. Get your minds in a perpetual endeavor for an abode in spiritual thoughts. Let your minds be rising towards them every hour — yes, a hundred times a day, on all occasions, in a continual sense of duty. And sigh within yourselves for deliverance when you find disappointments, or non-continuance in them. It is the sense of Rom 8.23-26.¹

Secondly, Take care that *you not go backwards* and lose what you have worked for. If you neglect these things for a season, you will quickly find yourselves neglected *by them*. So I observe this every day, in the hearing of the word. While believers diligently attend to it, where they find it preached to their edification, they find great delight in it, and will undergo great difficulties for the enjoyment of it — but let them be diverted from it for a season, and after a while it will grow indifferent for them; *anything* will satisfy them, that pretends to the same duty.

¹ **Rom 8:23** Not only *that*, but we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body. ²⁴ For we were saved in this hope, but hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one still hope for what he sees? ²⁵ But if we hope for what we do not see, we eagerly wait for *it* with perseverance. ²⁶ Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.

CHAPTER 7. SPIRITUAL THOUGHTS OF HEAVEN.

Especial objects of spiritual thoughts on the glorious state of heaven, and what belongs to it — First, of Christ himself — Thoughts of heavenly glory in opposition to thoughts of eternal misery — The use of such thoughts — Advantage in sufferings.

IT will be to our advantage, having stated *right notions of the glory of the blessed state above* in our minds, to fix on some particulars belonging to it as the especial objects of our thoughts and meditations. [The first is considered here (I.), the second (II.) in Chapter 8.] Such as,

I. Think much about *the One who is the life and center of all the glory of heaven to us*; that is, Christ himself. I will be very brief in treating this, because I have designed a peculiar treatise on this subject, of beholding the glory of Christ, both here and unto eternity.¹ At present, therefore, only a few things will be mentioned, because they are not to be omitted on this occasion. The whole of the glory of the state above is expressed by being “ever with the Lord, where he is, to behold his glory.” For in and through him, the beatific manifestation of God and his glory is made forevermore; and through him are all communications of inward glory made to us. The present resplendence of heavenly glory consists in his mediatory ministry, as I have declared at large elsewhere;² and he will be the means of all-glorious communications between God and the church unto eternity. Therefore, if we are spiritually minded, we should fix our thoughts on Christ above, as the center of all heavenly glory. To help us in this, we may consider the things that follow:

1. Faith has continual recourse to him, on account of what *he did and suffered* for us in this world; for upon *that*, depend pardon of sin, justification, and peace with God. This arises, in the first place, from a sense of our own wants. But *love of him* is no less necessary to us than *faith in him*; and although we have powerful motives to love, from what he did and what he was in this world, yet the formal reason for our adherence to him by this, is what he is *in himself*, as he is now exalted in heaven. If we don’t rejoice at the remembrance of his present glory, if thoughts of it are not frequent with us and refreshing to us, how does his love dwell in us?

2. Our hope is that before long, we will be with him forever; and if so, it is certainly our wisdom and duty to be with him *here* as much as we can. It is a vain thing for any to suppose that they place their chief happiness in being forever in the presence of Christ, who don’t care at all to be with him here, as they may. And the only way of our being present with him *here*, is by faith and love acting themselves in spiritual thoughts and affections. It is an absurd thing for men to esteem themselves Christians, who scarcely think of Christ all day long. Yet some, as one complained of old, scarcely ever think or speak of Him except when they swear by his name. I have read of those who have lived and died in continual contemplation of him, so far as the imperfection of our present state will allow. I have known and do know those who call themselves to reproof, if at any time He has been out of their thoughts for many minutes; and it is strange that it should be otherwise with those who love him in sincerity. Yet I wish I did not know more who give evidences that it is a *rare thing* for them to be exercised in serious thoughts and meditations about Him. Yes, there are some who, on occasion, are not averse to speak of God, of mercy, of pardon, of his power and goodness; but if you mention Christ to them with anything of faith, love, and trust in him, these seem a strange thing to them. There are few who are sensible of any religion beyond what is natural. Things about the wisdom and power of God in Christ are foolishness to them.

Take some directions for the discharge of this duty: In your thoughts of Christ, be very careful that they are *conceived and directed according to the rule of the word*, lest you deceive your own souls, and surrender the conduct of your affections to vain imaginations. Spiritual notions befalling carnal minds, once ruined the power of religion by *superstition*. Men had a conviction that they

¹ See *Meditations on the Glory of Christ*, volume 1. — ED.

² See the author’s treatise on the Person of Christ, volume 1, p. 252. — ED.

must think much about Jesus Christ, and this alone would make them conformable to him. But having no real evangelical faith, nor the wisdom of faith to duly exercise it in their thoughts and affections, nor understanding what it meant to be truly like him, they gave themselves up to many foolish inventions and imaginations by which they thought to express their love and conformity to him. They would have images of him, which they would embrace, adore, and bedew with their tears. They would have *crucifixes*, as they called them, which they would carry about them, and wear next to their hearts, as if they resolved to lodge Christ always in their bosoms. They would go in pilgrimage to the place where he died and rose again, through a thousand dangers, and purchase a feigned chip of a tree on which he suffered, at the price of all they had in the world. They would endeavor, by long thoughtfulness, lasts, and watchings, to cast their souls into raptures and ecstasies, in which they fancied themselves in his presence. They came at last to make themselves like him, in getting impressions of wounds on their sides, their hands, and feet. Superstition abused and corrupted the minds of men, leading them from a pretense of a principle of truth, to all these things, and many others of a like nature and tendency. For there is no more certain gospel truth than this, that believers should continually contemplate Christ by the actings of faith in their thoughts and affections, that thereby they might be changed and transformed into his image, 2Cor 3.18.¹ And we are not to forego our duty because other men have been mistaken in theirs, nor part with practical, fundamental principles of religion because they have been abused by superstition. But we may see in this how dangerous it is to depart in anything from the conduct of Scripture light and rule. For want of this, the best and most noble endeavors of the minds of men, even to love Christ and be like him, result in provocations of the highest nature.

Therefore pray that you may be kept to the truth in all things, by a diligent attendance to the only rule of it, and by conscientious subjection of the soul to the authority of God in it. For we should not allow our affections to be entangled with the paint or artificial beauty of any way or means of giving our love to Christ, which are not warranted by the word of truth. Yet I must say that I prefer to be among those who, in the actings of their love and affection for Christ, fall into some irregularities and excesses in the manner of expressing it (provided their worship of him is neither superstitious nor idolatrous), rather than be among those who, professing themselves to be Christians, almost disavow having any thoughts of or affection for the person of Christ. But there is no need for us to foolishly run into either of these extremes. In the Scripture God has sufficiently provided against them both. He has both shown us the necessity of our diligent acting of faith and love on the person of Christ, and He has limited the way and means by which we may so do. Let our designs be what they will, wherever we depart from his prescriptions, we are not under the conduct of his Spirit, and so we are sure to lose all that we do.

Therefore, two things are required that we may thus think of Christ and meditate on him according to the mind and will of God:

- (1.)** That the means of bringing him to mind be what God has promised and appointed.
- (2.)** That the continued proposal of him as the object of our thoughts and meditations be of the same kind.

For both these ends, the superstitious minds of men invented the ways of images and crucifixes, with their additions mentioned before; and this rendered all their devotion an abomination. That alone which tends to these ends among believers, is the promise of the Spirit and the institutions of the word. If then, you would think of Christ as you should, take these two directions:

- (1.)** Pray that the Holy Spirit may abide with you continually, to remind you of him; which he will do in all those in whom He abides, for it belongs to his office.

¹ **2Cor 3:18** But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.

(2.) For more fixed thoughts and meditations, take for yourself some express place of Scripture in which He is set forth and proposed, either in his person, office, or grace, *e.g.*, Gal 3.1.¹

3. This duty lies at *the foundation of all that blessed communion and intercourse* that is between Jesus Christ and the souls of believers. This, I confess, is despised by some, and the very notion of it esteemed ridiculous. But in this they do no less than renounce Christianity, and turn the Lord Christ into an idol that neither knows, sees, nor hears. But I speak to those who are not utter strangers to the life of faith, who don't know what religion is unless they have real spiritual intercourse and communion with the Lord Christ by it. Consider this, therefore, as it is in particular exemplified in the book of Canticles.² There is not one instance of it to be found which does not suppose a continued thoughtfulness of Him. And in answer to them, because they are actings of faith and love, in which he is delighted, he insinuates into our minds and hearts, by his Spirit, a gracious sense of his own love, kindness, and relation to us. The great variety in which these things are mutually carried on between him and the church, the singular endearments which ensue from that, and the blessed estate in rest and complacency, make up the substance of that holy discourse. No thoughts of Christ, then, shall be lost, which proceed from faith, accompanied with love and delight. Those who sow this seed will return with their sheaves. ^{Psa 126.6} Christ will meet them with gracious intimations of his acceptance of them and delight in them, and return a sense of his own love to them. He will never be, he never was, behind with any poor soul in His returns of love. Those gracious and blessed promises which he has made of "coming to those" who believe in him, of "making his abode with them," and of "supping with them," — all expressions of a gracious presence and intimate communion — *all depend on this duty*. Therefore, we may consider three things concerning these thoughts of Christ:

(1.) That they are *exceedingly acceptable* to Him, as the best pledges of our cordial affection: Song 2.14, "O my dove, who are in the clefts of the rock, in the secret places of the stairs, let me see your countenance, let me hear your voice; for sweet is your voice, and your countenance is attractive." When a soul withdraws, through manifold discouragements and despondencies, and as it were hides itself from him, He calls to see a poor, weeping, blubbered face, and to hear a broken voice, that scarcely goes beyond sighs and groans.

(2.) These thoughts are the only means by which we comply with the gracious invitations of His love, as mentioned before. By them we hear his knocking, know his voice, and open the door of our hearts to give him entrance, that he may abide and sup with us. Sometimes, indeed, the soul is surprised into acts of gracious communion with Christ, Song 6.12; but they are not to be expected unless we abide in those ways and means which prepare and make our souls fit to receive and entertain him. Therefore,

(3.) Our lack of experience in the power of this holy intercourse and communion with Christ arises principally from our defect in this duty. I have known one ³ who, after a long profession of faith and holiness, fell into great darkness and distress merely on this account: that he did not experience in himself the sweetness, life, and power of the testimonies given concerning the real communications of the love of Christ, and the intimacy of his presence with believers. He knew the doctrine of it well enough, but didn't feel the power of it. At least he understood there was more in it than he experienced. God carried him by faith through that darkness, but taught him with it, that no sense of these things was to be let into the soul except by constant thoughtfulness and contemplations of Christ. How many blessed visits we lose by not being exercised in this duty! (See Song 5.1-3). Sometimes we are busy, sometimes careless and

¹ **Gal 3:1** O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you that you should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed among you as crucified?

² *Canticles*: that is, the Song of Solomon.

³ Owen is perhaps referring to himself here, as alluded to in his preface. — WHG

negligent, sometimes slothful, sometimes under the power of temptations, so that we neither *inquire after* nor are we ready to *receive* them. This is not the way to have our joys abound.

4. Again (I speak now with special respect to Him in heaven), the glory of his presence, as God and man eternally united; the discharge of his mediatory office, as he is at the right hand of God; the glory of his present acting for the church, as he is the minister of the sanctuary and the true tabernacle which *God* has fixed, and not man; the love, power, and efficacy of his intercession, by which he takes care to accomplish the salvation of the church; the approach of his glorious coming for Judgment — these are to be the objects of our daily thoughts and meditations.

Let us not mistake ourselves. To be spiritually minded is *not* to have the notion and knowledge of spiritual things in our minds; it is *not* to be constant, nor even to abound in the performance of duties — both of which may exist where there is *no grace in the heart* at all. It is to have our minds really exercised with *delight* about heavenly things, the things that are above, especially Christ himself at the right hand of God.

5. Again, we are to so think of eternal things as to continually lay them in the balance against all the sufferings of this life. I have somewhat spoken of the use of this before, and it is necessary that it be pressed on all occasions. It is very probable that we will yet suffer more than we have done. Those who have gone before us have done so. It is foretold in the Scripture, that if we live godly in Christ Jesus, we must do so.^{2Tim 3.12} We stand in need of it, and the world is prepared to bring it upon us. As we must suffer, so it is necessary, to the glory of God and our own salvation, that we suffer *in a due manner*. Mere sufferings will neither commend us to God, nor in any way advantage our own souls. When we suffer according to the will of God, it is an eminent grace, gift, and privilege, Phi 1.29.¹ But many things are required for this. It is not enough that men *suppose* they suffer for conscience' sake — though if we don't so suffer, then all our sufferings are in vain. Nor is it enough that we suffer for this or that way of profession in religion, which we esteem to be true and according to the mind of God, in opposition to what is not so. The glory of sufferings on these accounts *solely*, has been greatly sullied in the days in which we live.² It is evident that persons, out of a natural courage, accompanied with deep-rooted persuasions, and having their minds influenced with some sinister ends, may undergo hard and difficult things in giving testimony to what is *not* according to the mind of God. We have had examples of this in all ages, and especially the age in which we live. See 1Pet 4.14-16.³ We have had enough to remove all paint and appearance of honor from those who, in their sufferings, are deceived in what they profess. But men may, from the same principles, suffer for what is *indeed* according to the mind of God. Yes, they may give their bodies to be burned in this, and yet it is not to His glory nor to their own eternal advantage. Therefore, we are to duly consider all things that are requisite to make our sufferings acceptable to God, and honorable to the gospel.

I have observed in many a frame of spirit, with respect to sufferings, what I never saw a good event of when it was tried to the uttermost. Boldness, confidence, a pretended contempt of hardships, and scorning other men whom they suppose are defective in these things, are the garments or livery they wear on this occasion. Such principles may carry men out in a bad cause; they will never do so in a good cause. Evangelical *truth* will not be honorably witnessed to, except by evangelical *grace*. Distrust of ourselves, a due apprehension of the nature of the evils to be undergone and of our own frailty, with continual prayers to be delivered from them or supported under them, and prudent care to avoid them without an inroad on conscience or neglect of duty,

¹ **Phi 1:29** For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake.

² That is, Protestant or Catholic, Presbyterian or Baptist, Lutheran or Anglican, etc. — WHG

³ **1Pet 4:14** If you are reproached for the name of Christ, blessed *are you*, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. On their part He is blasphemed, but on your part He is glorified. ¹⁵ But let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, an evildoer, or as a busybody in other people's matters. ¹⁶ Yet if *anyone suffers* as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this matter.

are much better preparations for an entrance into a state of suffering. Many things belong to rightly learning this first and last lesson of the gospel; namely, bearing the cross, or undergoing all sorts of sufferings for the profession of it; but they don't belong to our present occasion. This alone is what we now press as an evidence of our sincerity in our sufferings, and an effectual means to enable us cheerfully to undergo them — which is this: to have such a continual prospect of the future state of glory, as to lay it in the balance against all that we may undergo; for —

1. To have our minds filled and possessed with thoughts of it will give us an *alacrity* (eagerness) in our entrance into sufferings in a way of duty. Other considerations will offer themselves for our relief, but they will quickly fade and disappear. They are like a cordial water, which gives a little relief for a time, and then leaves the spirits to sink beneath what they were before it was taken. Some relieve themselves by considering the *nature* of their sufferings — they are not so great that they may not conflict with them, and yet come away safely. But there is nothing of that kind which is so small that it won't prove too hard and strong for us, unless we have especial assistance. Some do the same from their *duration*; they are only for ten days or six months, and then they will be free; some are relieved by the *compassion* and esteem of men. These and like considerations are apt to occur to the minds of all sorts of persons, whether spiritually minded or not. But when our minds are accustomed to thoughts of the "glory that shall be revealed," ^{Rom 8.18} we will cheerfully entertain every way and path that leads to it, as suffering for the truth does in a unique way. Through this medium, we may look cheerfully and comfortably at the loss of name, reputation, goods, liberty, even life itself, knowing that we have better and more abiding comforts to take ourselves to. And we can in no other way glorify God by our alacrity in the entrance of sufferings, than when it arises from a prospect into, and a valuation of those invisible things which He has promised as an abundant recompense for all we can lose in this world.

2. The great aggravation of sufferings is their *long continuance*, without any rational appearance or hope of relief. Many who have entered into sufferings with much courage and resolution, have been wearied and worn out with their continuance. Elijah himself was hereby reduced to pray that God would take away his life, to put an end to his ministry and calamities. ^{1Kng 19.4} And by this, not a few in all ages have been so broken in their natural spirits, and so shaken in the exercise of faith, that they have lost the glory of their confession, in seeking deliverance by sinful compliances in the denial of truth. Although this may be done out of mere weariness (as it is the design of Satan to "wear out the saints of the Most High" ^{Dan 7.25}), with reluctance of mind, and a love for the truth remaining in their hearts — yet it constantly has one of two effects. (1) Some, by the overwhelming sorrow that befalls them on account of their failure in profession, and out of a deep sense of their unkindness to the Lord Jesus, are stirred up immediately to higher acts of confession than they were ever engaged in before, and to a higher provocation of their adversaries, until their former troubles are doubled upon them, which they frequently undergo with great satisfaction. Instances of this nature occur in all stories of great persecutions. (2) Others being cowed and discouraged in their profession, and perhaps neglected by those whose duty it was to rather restore them, have by the craft of Satan given way to their declensions, and become vile apostates. To prevent these evils arising from the duration of sufferings without a prospect of deliverance, nothing is more prevalent than a constant contemplation on the future reward and glory. So the apostle declares in Heb 11.35.¹ When the mind is filled with thoughts of the unseen glories of eternity, it has in readiness what it needs to lay in the balance, against the longest continuance and duration of sufferings which, by comparison, at their utmost extent, are "but for a moment." ^{2Cor 4.17}

I have insisted longer on these things, because they are the peculiar objects of the thoughts of those who are *indeed*, spiritually minded.

¹ **Heb 11:35** Women received their dead raised to life again. And others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection.

CHAPTER 8. SPIRITUAL THOUGHTS OF GOD.

Spiritual thoughts of God himself — The opposition to them and neglect of them, with their causes and the way of their prevalence — Predominant corruptions expelling due thoughts of God, how to be discovered, etc. — Thoughts of God, of what nature, and what they are to be accompanied with, etc.

II. I HAVE spoken very briefly to the first particular instance of the heavenly things that we are to fix our thoughts upon, namely, *the person of Christ*; and I have done it upon the reason mentioned before; namely, that I intend to write a peculiar treatise on that subject, or an inquiry as to how we may behold the glory of Christ in this life, and how we will do so unto eternity. What I have reserved for the last place, about who are spiritually minded as to the exercise of their thoughts, is that which is the absolute foundation and spring of all spiritual things; namely, *God himself*. He is the fountain from which all these things proceed, and the ocean in which they issue; he is their center and circumference, in which they all begin, meet, and end. So the apostle issues his profound discourse about the counsels of the divine will and mysteries of the gospel, Rom 11.36, “Of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever.”

All things arise from His power, and are disposed by his wisdom into a tendency to his glory: “Of him, and through him, and to him, are all things.”¹ Rom 11.36 Under that consideration alone, they are to be the objects of our spiritual meditation — namely, as they come from him and tend to him. All other things are finite and limited, but they begin and end in that which is immense and infinite. Thus God is “all in all.” He therefore is, or ought to be, the only supreme, absolute object of our thoughts and desires; other things are *from* and *for* him alone. When our thoughts do not either immediately and directly, or mediately and by just consequence, tend toward and end in him, *they are not spiritual*, 1Pet 1.21.²

To make way for directions as to how to exercise our thoughts on God himself, something must be premised concerning a sinful defect in this, with its causes:

First, it is the great character of a man presumptuously and atrociously wicked that “God is not in all his thoughts,” Psa 10.4; that is, he is in *none* of them. And there are many degrees of this lack of thoughts about God, for all wicked men are not equally so forgetful of him:

1. Some are under the power of *atheistic thoughts*. They deny or question, or do not avowedly acknowledge the very being of God. This is the height of what the enmity of the carnal mind can rise to. To acknowledge God, and yet refuse to be subject to his law or will, one would think is as bad, if not worse, than denying the being of God; but it is not so. *That* is a rebellion against his authority; *this* a hatred for the only Fountain of all goodness, truth, and being — because they cannot own it unless they also acknowledge Him to be infinitely righteous, holy, and powerful, which would destroy all their desires and security. Such may be the person in Psalm 14; for the words may be read, “All his thoughts are that there is no God.” Yet the context describes him as one who despises His *providence* rather than denies His *being*. But there are those whom the same psalmist brands elsewhere as fools, though they themselves seem to suppose that wisdom was born and will die with them, Psa 14.1, 53:1.²

It may be that no age since the flood more abounded with open atheism, among those who pretended to the use and improvement of reason, than that in which we live. Among the ancient civilized heathen, we hear time and again of a person branded as an atheist, and yet we are not certain whether it was done justly or not. But in all the nations of Europe in our day, their cities,

¹ **1 Pet 1:21** who through Him believe in God, who raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God.

² **Psa 14:1, 53:1** The fool has said in his heart, “*There is no God.*”

courts, towns, fields, and armies, abound with persons who, if any credit may be given to what they say or do, don't believe there is a God. And the reason for this may be briefly inquired into.

Now this is no other, in general, but that men have reduced and atrophied ¹ the light and power of Christian religion. It is the fullest revelation of God that he ever made; it is the last he will ever make in this world. If this is despised, if men rebel against the light of it, if they break the cords of it, and are senseless of its power, then nothing can preserve them from the highest atheism that the nature of man is capable of. It is in vain to expect relief or preservation from inferior means, when the highest and most noble means are rejected. Reason or the light of nature gives evidences of the being of God, and arguments are still well pleaded from those evidences to the confusion of atheists. They were sufficient to retain men in an acknowledgment of the divine power and Godhead, who had no other, no higher evidences of them. But where men have had the benefit of divine revelation, been educated in the principles of Christian religion, had some knowledge and made some profession of them, and then through the love of sin and hatred of everything that is truly good, have rejected all convictions from them concerning the being, power, and rule of God, they will not be held to a confession of them by any considerations the light of nature can suggest.

There are therefore, among others, *three reasons* why there are more atheists among those who live where the Christian religion is professed, and the power of it rejected, than there are among any other sort of men, even among the heathens themselves:

(1.) God has designed to *magnify above all, His word and His name* — that is, above all other ways of revealing himself to the children of men, Psa 138.2. Therefore, where this is rejected and despised, he will not honor reason or the light of nature, such that they will preserve the minds of men from any evil whatever. Reason will not have the same power and efficacy on the minds of men who reject the light and power of divine revelation by the *word*, as it has or may have on those whose best guide it is, who never enjoyed the light of the *gospel*. And therefore oftentimes honesty is more common among civilized heathens and Mohammedans than among degenerate Christians; and for the same reason, the children of professors are sometimes irrecoverably profligate. It may be *said*, “Many are recovered to God by afflictions, who have despised the word.” But it is otherwise. Never were any converted to God by afflictions, who had rejected the word. Men may be recalled to the light of the word by afflictions, but none are directly turned to God by them. A good shepherd, when a sheep wanders from the flock and will not hear his call, sends out his dog which stops and nips the sheep; at this, he looks about him, and hearing the call of the shepherd, returns again to the flock, Job 33.19-25.² But with this sort, it is the way of God that when the principal means of revealing himself, and in which He most glorifies his wisdom and goodness, are despised by the person, God will not only dull the efficacy of inferior means, but judicially harden the hearts and blind the eyes of men, so that such means will be of no use to them. See Isa 6.9,10; Act 13.40,41; Rom 1.21,28; 2The 2.11,12.

(2.) The contempt for gospel light and Christian religion, because they are *supernatural* (which is the beginning of transgression for all the atheists among us), begets and leaves in the mind such a *depraved, corrupt habit* — such a conglomeration of all the evils that the hatred of the goodness, wisdom, and grace of God can produce — that it must be wholly inclined to the worst of evils. Just as all our original vicious (vice-ridden) inclinations succeeded immediately upon our rejection and loss of the image of God. The best things, once corrupted, yield the worst savor;

¹ Originally, “decocted and wasted.”

² **Job 33:19** “Man is also chastened with pain on his bed, And with strong *pain* in many of his bones,²⁰ So that his life abhors bread, And his soul succulent food.²¹ His flesh wastes away from sight, And his bones stick out *which once* were not seen.²² Yes, his soul draws near the Pit, And his life to the executioners.²³ “If there is a messenger for him, A mediator, one among a thousand, To show man His uprightness,²⁴ Then He is gracious to him, and says, ‘Deliver him from going down to the Pit; I have found a ransom’;²⁵ His flesh shall be young like a child’s, He shall return to the days of his youth.

just as manna stunk and bred worms. The knowledge of the gospel being rejected, stinking worms take the place of it in the mind, which grow into vipers and scorpions. Every degree of apostasy from gospel truth brings in a proportionate degree of inclination to wickedness in the hearts and minds of men, 2Pet 2.21;¹ and total apostasy inclines them to all the evils they are capable of in this world. Whereas multitudes, from their darkness, unbelief, temptation, love of sin, pride, and contempt of God, fall away from all subjection of soul and conscience to the gospel — either notionally or practically, deriding or despising all supernatural revelations — these are a thousand times more disposed to downright atheism, than persons who never had the light or benefit of such revelations. Take heed of *decays*! Whatever ground the gospel loses in our minds, sin possesses it for itself and for its own ends.

Let no one say it is otherwise with them. Men grow cold and negligent in the duties of gospel worship, both public and private; *this is to reject gospel light*. Let them say and pretend what they please, that it is well with them in other things, in their minds and conversations; but indeed, *it is not so*. Sin will, sin *does*, one way or another, increase in them proportionate to these decays; and it will sooner or later reveal itself doing so. If they are not utterly hardened, they may greatly discover it, either inwardly in their peace, or outwardly in their lives.

(3.) Where men are *resolved not to see*, and the greater the light is that shines about them, the faster they must close their eyes. All atheism springs from a resolution *not to see* things invisible and eternal. Love of sin, a resolved continuance in the practice of it, the effectual power of vicious inclinations in opposition to all that is good, make it the interest of such men that there be no God to call them to account. For a supreme, unavoidable judge, an eternal rewarder of good and evil, is inseparable from the first notion of a Divine Being. Therefore, whereas the most glorious light and uncontrollable evidence of these things shines forth in the Scripture, men who abide by their interest to love and live in sin, must close their eyes with all the skills and powers they have, or else it will pierce their minds to their torment. They do this by downright atheism, which alone pretends to give them security against the light of divine revelation — as against all other convictions in which they might take shelter from their fears, under lesser degrees of it.

Therefore, it is not to the *disparagement*, but to the *honor* of the gospel, that so many avow themselves to be atheists, in those places in which the truth of it is known and professed. For none can have the least inclination or temptation to it unless they have first rejected the gospel, which immediately exposes them to the worst of evils.

Nor are there any means for the recovery of such persons. The opposition that has been made to atheism, with arguments for the divine being and existence of God — taken from reason and natural light, in this and other ages — has been of good use to cast contempt on the pretenses of evil men to justify themselves in their folly. But I greatly doubt that they have changed the minds of any. No man is under the power of atheistic thoughts, or can be for long, unless he is ensnared in them by his desire to live securely and uncontrollably in sin. Such persons know it is in their interest that there be no God; and they are willing to take shelter under the bold expressions and reasonings of those who, by the same means, have hardened and blinded their minds in such foolish thoughts. But the most rational arguments for the being of the Deity will never prove an effectual cure for a predominant love of, and habitual course in sin, in those who have resisted and rejected the means and motives to that end, declared in divine revelation. Unless the love of sin is cured in the *heart*, thoughts in the acknowledgment of God will not be fixed in the *mind*.

¹ **2Pet 2:21** For it would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known *it*, to turn from the holy commandment delivered to them.

2. There are those of whom also it may be said that “God is not in all their thoughts,” though they acknowledge his *essence and being*; for they are not practically influenced in anything by the notions they have of Him. Such is the person about whom this is affirmed, in Psa 10.4. He is one who, through pride and profligacy, hardened in sin, does not regard God in the rule of the world, verses 4,5,11,13. The world is filled with such men these days, as they are described in Tit 1.16, “They profess that they know God, but in works they deny him, being abominable, disobedient, and reprobate for every good work.”

They think, live, and act in all things, as if there were no God, or at least as if they never thought of him with fear and reverence. And for the most part, we need not look far for evidences of their disregard of God — the “pride of their countenances testifies against them,” Psa 10.4; and if they are followed further, cursed oaths, licentiousness lives, and hatred of all that is good, will confirm and evidence the same. Such as these may own God in words; they may be afraid of him in dangers, and outwardly attend to His worship; but they don’t think of God at all in a due manner — “he is not in all their thoughts.”

3. There are still lesser degrees of this disregard of God and forgetfulness of him. Some are so filled with thoughts of the world and the occasions of life, that it is impossible for them to think of God as they should. For just as the love of God and the love of the world, in prevalent degrees, are inconsistent (for if a man loves this world, how does the love of God dwell in him?), so thoughts of God and of the world, in like degree, are inconsistent. This is the state of many who would yet be esteemed spiritually minded; they are continually conversant in their minds about earthly things. Some things impose themselves on them under the notion of *duty*; they belong to their *callings*, and so “they must be attended to.” Some are suggested to their minds from daily occasions and occurrences. Common converse in the world engages men in no other thoughts than worldly ones. Love and desire for earthly things, for their enjoyment and increase, exhaust the vigor of their spirits all day long. In the midst of a multitude of thoughts arising from these and like occasions — while their hearts and heads reek with the steam of them — many fall immediately to the performance of holy duties in their seasons. And those times must suffice for any thoughts of God.

But notwithstanding such duties, through the lack of a due preparation for them, through the fullness of their minds and affections with other things, and through a neglect of exercising grace in them, it may be said, comparatively, that “God is not in all their thoughts.”

I pray God that this, at least as to some degrees of it, is not the condition of many among us. I’m not speaking now of men who visibly and openly live in sin, who are profane in their principles, and profligate in their lives. The prayers of such persons are an abomination to the Lord; nor do they ever have thoughts of him which He accepts. But I speak of those who are sober in their lives, industrious in their callings, and not openly negligent about the outward duties of religion. Such men are apt to approve of themselves, and others also speak well of them, for these things are in themselves commendable and praiseworthy. But if they are traced home, it will be found for many of them, that “God is not in all their thoughts” as he ought to be. Their earthly conversation, their vain communication, with their foolish designs, all manifest that the vigor of their spirits and the most intense contrivances of their minds, are engaged in things below. Some leftover, transient, unmanaged thoughts are sometimes cast away on God; which He despises.

4. Where persons do *cherish secret predominant lusts in their hearts and lives*, God is not in their thoughts as he ought to be. He may be, he often is, much in the *words* of such persons. But he is not, and cannot be in their *thoughts* in a due manner. And no doubt there are such persons. Time and again we hear of one or another whose secret lusts break out into discovery. They flatter themselves for a season; but God oftentimes so orders things in his holy providence, that their iniquity shall be found to be hateful. Some hateful lust reveals itself to be predominant in them: one is drunken, another unclean, a third is an oppressor. There were ever such men found among

professors of the gospel, even in the best of times. One among the apostles was a traitor, “a devil.” Among the first professors of Christianity, there were those “whose god was their belly, whose end was destruction, who minded earthly things,” Phi 3.18,19.

Some may take advantage of this acknowledgment that there are such evils among those who are called professors of Christ. And it must be confessed that great scandal is given by this to the world, putting both those who give it, and those to whom it is given, under a most dreadful woe. But we must bear the reproach of it as they did of old, and commit the outcome of all things to the watchful care of God. However, it is good in such a season to be jealous over ourselves and others, to “exhort one another daily, while it is called Today, lest any be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin,” Heb 3.13. See chapter 12.13-17. And because those with whom it is this way cannot be spiritually minded, and there remain some difficulties as to the predominance of a secret lust or sin, I will consider it somewhat more distinctly:

(1.) We must distinguish between a *time of temptation* in some, and the *ordinary state of mind and affections* in others. There may be a season in which God — in his holy wise ordering of all things towards us, for his own glory, in his holy blessed ends — may permit a lust or corruption to break loose in the heart. He allows it to strive, tempt, suggest, and agitate to the great trouble and disquietude of the mind and conscience. Nor can it be denied that, falling in conjunction with some vigorous temptation, it may proceed so far as to surprise the person in whom it is found, into actual sin, to his own defilement and shock. In this case, no man can say, “I am tempted by God;” for “God tempts no man, but every man is tempted when he is drawn away by his own lust, and enticed.” Jas 1.13,14 Yet temptations, of whatever sort they are, so far as they are afflictive, corrective, or penal, they are ordered and disposed by God himself — there is no evil of that nature, and *He* has not done it. And where he would have the power of any corruption to be afflictive in any instance, *two things* may safely be ascribed to Him:

[1.] He *withholds the supplies of that grace* by which it might be effectually mortified and subdued. He can provide a sufficiency of efficacious grace to repel any temptation, to subdue any or all our lusts and sins; for he can and does work in us to will and to do according to his pleasure. Phi 2.13 Ordinarily he does so in those who believe — so that, although their lusts may rebel and war, they cannot defile or prevail. But he is not obliged to the continual supplies of this actual prevailing grace. When it may have a tendency to his holy ends, he may and does withhold it. When, it may be, a proud soul is to be humbled, a careless soul is to be awakened, an unthankful soul is to be convinced and rebuked, a backsliding soul is to be recovered, a froward, selfish, passionate soul is to be broken and humbled, He can leave them for a season to the sore exercise of a prevalent corruption. Under his holy guidance, it will contribute greatly to his blessed ends. It was so in the temptation of Paul, 2Cor 12.7-9 (his thorn).

If a man, through disorder and excesses, is contracting many habitual distempers of body, which gradually and insensibly tend to his death, it may be an advantage to be thrown into a violent fever, which immediately threatens to take his life. For by this, he will be thoroughly awakened to consider his danger. He will not only labor to be freed from his fever, but also for the future, to watch against those disorders and excesses which throw him into that condition. Sometimes a loose, careless soul, who walks in a secure, formal profession, contracts many spiritual diseases which tend to his death and ruin. No arguments or considerations can prevail to awaken him to “shake himself out of the dust,” Isa 52.2 and turn to a more diligent and humble walking before God. In this state, perhaps, through the permission of God, he is surprised (ambushed) into some open, actual sin. Upon this, through the vigorous actings of an enlightened conscience, and the stirrings of any sparks of grace which still remain, he is shocked and terrified, and stirs himself to seek deliverance.

[2.] God may and does in his providence *administer objects and occasions for men’s lusts, for their trial*. He will place them in such relations, in such circumstances, as will be apt to

provoke their affections, passions, desires, and inclinations, for those objects that are suited to them.

In this state, any lust will quickly get such power in the mind and affections, as to manage continual solicitations to sin. It will not only dispose the affections towards it, but multiply thoughts about it, and darken the mind as to those considerations which ought to prevail to its mortification. In this condition, it is hard to conceive how God could be in the thoughts of man in a due manner. However, this state is very different from the habitual prevalence of any secret sin or corruption in the ordinary course of men's walking in the world; and therefore I do not directly intend it.

If anyone inquires how we may know the difference between the occasional *prevalence* of any lust or corruption in conjunction with a temptation, and the power of sin in any instance that is habitually and constantly complied with, or *indulged* in the mind, I answer —

1st. It is no great matter whether we are able to distinguish between them or not; for the end for which God permits any corruption to be such a snare and temptation, such a thorn and brier, is to awaken the souls of men from their security, and to humble them for their pride and negligence. The more severe their apprehensions concerning it, the more effectual it will be to this end and purpose. It may be good that the soul apprehend more of what is sinful in it as a *corruption*, than of what is afflictive in it as a *temptation*. For if it is conceived as a predominant lust, and if there is any spark of grace remaining in the soul, it will not rest until it is subdued in some measure. It will also immediately put the soul on a diligent search of itself, which will issue in deep self-abasement, which is the principal end designed.

2dly. For the relief of those who may be perplexed in their minds about their state and condition, I say there is an apparent difference between these things. A lust or corruption arising or breaking into a violent temptation, is the continual burden, grief, and affliction of the soul in which it exists. And because the temptation which befalls such a person will give him no rest, for the most part, from its reiterated solicitations, so he will give the temptation no rest. He will continually conflict with it and contend against it. It fills his soul with shock, and with continual self-abhorrence, that any such seeds of filth and folly still remain in it. For those in whom any sin is ordinarily prevalent, *it is otherwise*. According to their light and renewed occasional convictions, they are troubled by it; they cannot help it, unless their consciences are utterly seared. But this trouble respects principally, if not solely, its *guilt* and *effects*. They don't know what may ensue upon giving in to it, in this world and another. Beyond this, they like it well enough, and are not willing to part with it. It is this latter sort of person, of whom we speak at present.

(2.) We must distinguish between the *perplexing solicitation* of any lust, and the *conquering predominance* of it. The evil that is present with us will solicit and press for sin of its own accord, even where there is no such especial temptation as that spoken of before. So is the case stated, and so are its nature and operations described, Rom 7, Gal 5.17.¹ And sometimes an especial, particular lust may be so warmed and fomented by men's constitutions within, or be so exposed to provoking, exciting occasions without, as to bring perpetual trouble on the mind. Yet this may be true where no sin has the predominance that we inquire about. And the difference between the perplexing *solicitation* of any corruption unto sin, and the *conquering prevalence* of it, lies in this: that under the former, the thoughts, contrivances, and actings of the mind, are generally disposed and inclined to opposing it, and conflicting with it — how it may be obviated, defeated, and destroyed — how an absolute victory may be obtained against it. Indeed, death itself is sweet to such persons, under this notion: that it would deliver them from the perplexing power of their

¹ **Gal 5:17** For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish.

corruptions. So is the state of such a soul represented at large in Romans 7. In the other case, namely, of its *predominance*, it disposes the thoughts, for the most part, to make actual provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts.^{Rom 13:14} It fills the mind with pleasing contemplations of its object, and puts it to contriving for its satisfaction. Indeed, part of the bitterness of death for such persons is that it will make an everlasting separation between them and the satisfaction they have received in their lusts. To a *worldly-minded* man, his thoughts of it are bitter, because it will take him from all his enjoyments, his wealth, profits, and advantages. It is this way for the *sensual* person, as that which finally resolves all his pleasures.

(3.) There is a difference in the *degrees* of such a predominant corruption. In some it taints the affections, vitiates the thoughts, and works the will to acts of a secret complacency in sin; but it proceeds no further. The whole mind may be vitiated by it, and rendered vain, sensual, or worldly in the multitude of its thoughts, depending on the nature of the prevailing corruption. Yet here God puts bounds on the raging of some men's corruptions, and says to their proud ways, "Thus far shall you proceed, and no further." He either lays a restraint on their minds, that when lust has fully conceived, it will not bring forth sin; or he sets a hedge before them in his providence, so that in their circumstances they will not be able to find their way to what perhaps they most earnestly desire.

It is a woeful life that such persons lead. They are continually tortured between their corruptions and convictions, or the love of sin and fear of its event. With others, it pursues a course to outward actual sins, which in some, are discovered in this world; in others they are not — for some men's sins go before them unto judgment, and some follow after. Some fall into sin upon surprisal, from a concurrence of temptation, with corruption and opportunities. Some habituate themselves to a course in sin. Though in many it is not discovered, in some it is.

But among those who have received any spiritual light, and made a profession of religion, this seldom happens without the great displeasure of God. For when men have long given way to the prevalence of sin in their affections, inclinations, and thoughts, and God has set many a hedge before them, to set bounds for their inclinations and to shut up the womb of sin — sometimes by afflictions, sometimes by fears and dangers, sometimes by the word — and yet the bent of their spirit is towards their sin, God takes away his hand of restraint, removes his hindrances, and gives them up to their own hearts' lusts, to do the things that are not convenient. All things then suit their desires, and they rush into actual sins and follies, setting their feet in the paths that go down to the chambers of death. The uncontrollable power of sin in such persons, and the greatness of God's displeasure against them, make their condition most deplorable.

Those who are in this state, of either sort, the first (*worldly*) or the latter (*enlightened*), are far from being spiritually minded, nor is "God in all their thoughts" as he ought to be; for —

First, They *will not so* think and meditate on God. Their delight is turned another way. Their affections, which are the spring of their thoughts, which feed them continually, cling to the things which are most adverse to Him. Love of sin has gotten to be the spring in them, and the whole stream of the thoughts which they choose and delight in are towards its pleasures. If any thoughts of God come in, as a faint tide does for a few minutes, and drive back the other stream, they are quickly repelled and carried away with the strong current of those which proceed from their powerful inclinations. Yet such persons may abide in the performance of outward holy duties, or attendance to them. Pride of their gifts, or satisfaction in them, may give them delight in their own performances, and somewhat in those of others whom they may be exceedingly pleased with, as expressly affirmed in Eze 33:31,32.¹ But in these things, they have no *immediate*

¹ **Eze 33:31** "So they come to you as people do, they sit before you *as* My people, and they hear your words, but they do not do them; for with their mouth they show much love, *but* their hearts pursue their *own* gain.³² "Indeed you *are* to

real thoughts of God, none that they delight in, none that they seek to stir up in themselves; and they reject those thoughts of God which impose themselves on them.

Secondly, As they *will not*, so they *dare not*, think of God. They *will not*, because of the power of their lusts; they *dare not*, because of their guilt. No sooner would they begin to think of Him in good earnest, than their sin would lose all its desirable forms and appearances, and represent itself in the horror of guilt alone. And in that condition, all the properties of the divine nature are suited to increase the dread and terror of the sinner. Adam heard God's voice before with delight and satisfaction; but upon hearing the same voice *after* he sinned, he hid himself and cried that he was afraid. There is a way for men to think of God *with the guilt of sin upon them*, which they intend to *forsake*; but there is none for any to think of Him with the guilt of sin which they resolve to *continue in*. Therefore, it may be said of these sorts of persons, that "God is not in all their thoughts," and thus they are far from being spiritually minded — for unless we have many thoughts of God, we cannot be so. Moreover, there are *two things* required for those thoughts which we have of God, to be evidence of our being spiritually minded:

[1.] That we *take delight in them*: Psa 30.4, "Sing to the LORD, O you saints of his, and give thanks at the remembrance of His holiness." The remembrance of God delights and refreshes the hearts of his saints, and stirs them up to thankfulness:

1st. They rejoice in *what God is in Himself*. Whatever is good, amiable, or desirable; whatever is holy, just, and powerful; whatever is gracious, wise, and merciful — and all that is so — they see and apprehend in God. That *God is what he is*, is the matter of their chief joy. Whatever befalls them in this world, whatever troubles and disquietude they are exercised with, the remembrance of God is a satisfactory refreshment for them. For in this they behold all that is good and excellent, the infinite center of all perfections. Wicked men would have God be anything but what he is; nothing that God is, really and truly, pleases them. Therefore, they either frame false notions of him in their minds, as in Psa 50.21;¹ or else they don't think of him at all, at least not as they should, unless sometimes they tremble at his anger and power. They suppose some benefit may be had by what He can do; but how there can be any delight in what He is, they don't know. Indeed, all their trouble arises from this: that *He is what he is*. It would be a relief to them if they could abate any of his power, his holiness, his righteousness, his omnipresence; but his *saints*, as the psalmist says, "give thanks at the remembrance of his holiness." Psa 30.4

And when we can delight in the thoughts of what God is in himself, of his infinite excellencies and perfections, it gives us a threefold evidence of our being spiritually minded:

(1st.) It is such an evidence, that we have a gracious interest in those excellencies and perfections, and can say with rejoicing in our hearts, "*This God*," thus holy, thus powerful, thus just, good, and gracious, "*is our God forever and ever; he will be our guide unto death*." So the psalmist, considering his own frailty and apprehensions of death in the midst of his years, comforts and refreshes himself with thoughts of God's eternity and immutability, and with his interest in them, Psa 102.23-28. And God himself proposes to us his infinite immutability as the ground on which we may expect safety and deliverance, Mal 3.6.² When we can thus think with delight of God, and of what he is, it is I say, an evidence that we have a gracious covenant interest even in what God is in himself; which none have but those who are spiritually minded.

them as a very lovely song of one who has a pleasant voice and can play well on an instrument; for they hear your words, but they do not do them.

¹ **Psa 50:21** These *things* you have done, and I kept silent; You thought that I was altogether like you; *But I will rebuke you, And set them in order before your eyes.*

² **Mal 3:6** For I *am* the LORD, I do not change; Therefore you are not consumed, O sons of Jacob.

(2dly.) It is an evidence, that the *image of God has begun to be wrought* in our own souls, and that we approve of and rejoice in it more than in all other things whatever. Whatever notions men may have of the divine goodness, holiness, righteousness, and purity, they are all but barren, meagre, and fruitless, unless there is a similitude and conformity to them wrought in their minds and souls. Without this, they cannot rejoice in the thoughts and remembrance of the divine excellencies. That's why, when we can do so, when such meditations on God are sweet to us, it is evidence that we have some experience in ourselves of the excellency of the *image* of those perfections, and that we rejoice in them above all things in this world.

(3dly.) They are also delightful in that they manifest that we discern and judge that *our eternal blessedness consists in the full manifestation and enjoyment of God in what he is, and of all his divine excellencies*. For the most part, men take this for granted; but how it should be so, they don't know. Those whose hearts are here deeply affected with delight in them, understand it in some measure; they are able to believe that the manifestation and enjoyment of the divine excellencies will give eternal rest, satisfaction, and complacency to their souls. No wicked man can look upon it other than as a torment, to abide forever with "eternal holiness," Isa 33.14. And we ourselves can have no present prospect into the fullness of future glory, when God will be all in all, except through the delight and satisfaction which we have here, in the contemplation of what God is in himself as the center of all divine perfections.

I would therefore, in an especial manner, press this *unknown*, this *neglected* duty on the minds of those of us who are visibly drawing near to eternity. The days are coming in which what God is in himself (that is, as manifested and exhibited in Christ), shall *alone* be as we hope: the eternal blessedness and reward of our souls. Is it possible that anything could be more necessary for us, more useful to us, than to be exercised in such thoughts and contemplations? The benefits we may have by this are not to be reckoned; some of them may only be named. Such as —

[1st.] We shall have the best trial of how our hearts really stand affected towards God; for if upon examination we find ourselves not really delighting and rejoicing in God for what he is in himself, and that all perfections are eternally resident in him, then how does the love of God dwell in us? But if we can truly "rejoice at the remembrance of his holiness," in the thoughts of what he is, our hearts are upright with him.

[2dly.] This is what will effectually *take our thoughts and affections off* things here below. One spiritual view of the divine goodness, beauty, and holiness, will have more efficacy to raise the heart to a contempt of all earthly things, than any other evidences whatsoever.

[3dly.] It will increase *the grace of being heavenly minded* in us, on the grounds declared before.

[4thly.] It is the *best*, I almost said it is *the only, preparation* for the future full enjoyment of God. This will gradually lead us into His presence, take away all fears of death, increase our longing for eternal rest, and ever make us groan to be unclothed. Let us not, then, cease laboring with our hearts, until through grace we have a spiritually-sensible delight and joy in the remembrances and thoughts of what God is in himself.

2dly. In thoughts of God, his saints rejoice at the *remembrance of what he is, and what he will be to them*. In this they have regard to all the holy relations that he has taken on himself towards them, with all the effects of his covenant in Christ Jesus. To that purpose were some of the last words of David: 2Sam 23.5, "Although my house is not so with God; yet he has made an everlasting covenant with me, ordered in all things, and sure: for this is all my salvation,

and all my desire.” In the prospect he had of all the distresses that were to befall his family, he triumphantly rejoiced in the everlasting covenant that God had made with him. In these thoughts, His saints take delight; they are sweet to them, and full of refreshment: “Their meditations of him are sweet,” and they are “glad in the LORD,” Psa 104.34. Thus is it with those who are truly spiritually minded. They not only think much about God, but they take delight in these thoughts — they are sweet to them; and not only so, but they have no solid joy or delight *except* in their thoughts of God, which therefore they retreat to continually. They do so especially on great occasions, which of themselves are apt to divert them from thoughts of God. Suppose a man has received a signal mercy, and he is exceedingly affected and delighted with the matter of it. The minds of some men on such occasions, are apt to be filled with thoughts of what they have received, and their affections are apt to be wholly taken up with it. But the one who is spiritually minded will immediately retreat to thoughts of God, placing his delight and taking up his satisfaction in Him. And so, on the other side, great distresses, prevalent sorrows, strong pains, violent distempers, are apt of themselves to take up and exercise all the thoughts of men about them. But those who are spiritually minded will in them, and under them all, continually turn to thoughts of God, in which they find relief and refreshment against all that they feel or fear. In every state, their principal joy is in “the remembrance of his holiness.”

[2.] That they be accompanied *with godly fear and reverence*. These are required of us in all we have to do with God, Heb 12.28,29.¹ Just as the Scripture doesn’t more abound with precepts to any other duty, so the nature of God and our own, with the infinite distance between them, makes it indispensably necessary, even in the light of the natural conscience. Infinite greatness, infinite holiness, infinite power, all which God is, command the utmost reverential fear that our natures are capable of. The lack of this is the spring of innumerable evils — yes, of *all* that is evil. Hence are blasphemous abuses of the holy name of God in cursed oaths and execrations; hence His name is taken in vain in ordinary exclamations; hence is all formality in religion.

It is the spiritual mind alone that can reconcile those things which are prescribed to us as our duty towards God. “To delight and rejoice in him always, to triumph in the remembrance of him, to draw near to him with boldness and confidence,” are prescribed to us on the one hand; and on the other it is “that we fear and tremble before him, that we fear that great and dreadful name *the LORD our God*, that we have grace to serve him with reverence and godly fear, because he is a consuming fire.” Carnal reason cannot comprehend consistency in these things — what it is afraid of, it cannot delight in; and what it delights in, it will not fear for long. But the consideration of faith, concerning what God is in himself, and what He will be to us, gives these different graces their distinct operations, and a blessed reconciliation in our souls. That’s why all our thoughts of God should be accompanied with a holy awe and reverence, from a due sense of His greatness, holiness, and power. Two things will utterly vitiate all thoughts of God and render them useless to us — *vain curiosity* and *carnal boldness*.

1st. It is unimaginable how the subtle disquisitions and disputes of men about the nature, properties, and counsels of God, have been corrupted, rendered sapless and useless, by *vain curiosity*, and by striving for an artificial accuracy in the expression of men’s apprehensions. When the wits and minds of men are engaged in such thoughts, “God is not in all their thoughts,” even when all their thoughts concern Him. Once men have gotten into their metaphysical curiosities and logical niceties, in their contemplations about God and his divine properties, they bid farewell, for the most part, to all godly fear and reverence.

2dly. Others are so under the power of *carnal boldness*, that they think of God with no other respect than if they thought worms of the earth were like themselves. There is no holy awe

¹ **Heb 12:28** Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. ²⁹ For our God is a consuming fire.

upon their minds and souls in the mention of His name. By these things, our thoughts of God may be so vitiated, that the heart will not be affected with a reverence of Him, nor will any evidence be given that we are spiritually minded.

It is this *holy reverence* that is the means of bringing sanctifying virtue into our souls from God, upon our thoughts of him. None who thinks of God with a due reverence, will fail to be sensible of his advantage by it. Hereby we sanctify God in our access to him. And when we do so, he will sanctify and purify our hearts by those very thoughts in which we draw near to him.

We may have many sudden, occasional, transient thoughts of God, that are not introduced into our minds by a preceding *reverential fear*. But if they don't *leave* that fear on our hearts in proportion to their continuance with us, they are of no value, but will insensibly habituate us to a common, bold frame of spirit, which He despises.¹

So it is in the case of thoughts of a contrary nature. Thoughts of sin, and of sinful objects, may arise in our minds from the remainders of corruption, or be occasioned by the temptations and suggestions of Satan. If these are immediately rejected and cast out of us, the soul is no more prejudiced by their entrance, than it is advantaged by their rejection, through the power of grace. But if they make frequent returns into the minds of men, or make any abode or continuance in their soliciting of the affections, they greatly defile the mind and conscience, disposing the person to further entertain them. So too, if our occasional thoughts of God immediately leave us, and pass away without much affecting our minds, we will have little or no benefit by them. But if, by their frequent visits and some continuance with us, they dispose our souls to a holy reverence of God, then they are a blessed means of promoting our sanctification. Without this, I say, there may be thoughts of God that have no advantage to the soul.

There is implanted on our nature, such a sense of a divine Power and Presence, that upon all sudden occasions and surprisals, it will act according to that sense and apprehension. There is "*vox naturae clamantis ad Dominum naturae*," — a voice in nature itself, upon anything that is suddenly too hard for it, which cries out immediately to the God of nature. So it is with men; on such occasions, without any consideration, they are surprised into calling on the name of God and crying out to him. And it is from the same natural apprehension that wicked and profane persons will break forth on all occasions into cursed swearing by His name. So men in such ways have thoughts of God without either reverence or godly fear, without giving any glory to him, and for the most part, to their own disadvantage. Such are all thoughts of God that are not accompanied with holy fear and reverence.

There is scarcely any duty that should at present be more pressed on the consciences of men, than this of keeping up a constant holy reverence of God in all they have to do with him, both in private and public, in their inward thoughts and outward communication. Formality has so prevailed on religion, and under the most effectual means of its suppression, that many manifest they have little or no reverence of God in the most solemn duties of his worship, and maybe less in their secret thoughts. Some ways that have been found to keep up a pretense and appearance of it, have been and are *destructive* to it.

But in this consists the very life of all religion. In the Old Testament, the *fear of God* is the usual expression for all the respect that is due to Him by our souls. And that is because where that is not in exercise, *nothing* is acceptable to him. Hence, the whole of our wisdom is said to consist in this (Psa 111.10). If it isn't in prevalent exercise in all we have to do with Him immediately, then all our duties are utterly lost as to the ends of His glory, and the spiritual advantage of our own souls.

¹ i.e., if troubling thoughts no longer trouble us, because of their constant refrain, we can lose our fear of God. — WHG

CHAPTER 9. WHAT WE ARE TO THINK OF GOD.

What of God or in God we are to think and meditate upon — His being — Reasons for it; oppositions to it; the way of their conquest — Thoughts of the omnipresence and omniscience of God are peculiarly necessary — The reasons for this — As also of His omnipotence — The use and benefit of such thoughts.

THESE things mentioned have been premised in general as to the nature, manner, and way of exercise of our thoughts on God. That which remains is to give some particular instances of what we are to think upon in an especial manner, and what we will be conversant with in our thoughts, if we are spiritually minded. I won't insist at present on the things which concern His grace and love in Christ Jesus, which belong to another head, but on those which have an immediate respect to the divine nature itself, and its holy essential properties.

First, Think much of *the being and existence of God*. In this lies the foundation of all our relation and access to him: Heb 11.6, “He that comes to God must believe that He exists.” This is *the first object* of faith, and it is the *first act* of reason; and being the sole foundation of all religion, it is our duty to be exercised to multiplied thoughts about it, renewed on all occasions. For many who are not direct atheists, still live without any solid, well-grounded assent to the divine being; they don't believe it so as to be *practically influenced* by the consideration of it. It is granted that the inbred light of nature, in the due exercise of reason, will give any rational creature satisfaction in the being of God. But in most, there is an anticipation of any thoughts of this nature by tradition and education, which has united men into an unknowing assent to it. They never called it into question, nor do they suppose there is any cause to do so. Nature itself startles at the first thought of denying it. But if ever such persons, on any urgent occasions, come to have real thoughts about it, they are at a loss and fluctuate in their minds, not having any certain, indubitable conviction of its truth. Our knowledge of the Divine Being, as to its foundation, is laid in the light of nature, the operation of conscience, and the due exercise of reason about the works and effects of infinite power and wisdom. So this knowledge ought to be increased and rendered useful by faith in divine revelations, and the experience of divine power through them. By this faith we ought to let in frequent thoughts of the divine being and existence. And that is for two reasons, rendering the duty necessary in an eminent manner in this age in which we live:

1. The *abounding of atheism*, both notional and practical. The reasons for it have been given before, and the fact of the matter is evident to any ordinary observation. And on two accounts with respect to this, we ought to abound in thoughts of faith concerning the being of God:

(1.) An especial testimony is required in us in opposition to this cursed effect of hell. Therefore, whoever is spiritually minded, must have many thoughts of the being of God, thereby giving glory to him: Isa 43.9-12, “Let all the nations be gathered together, and let the people be assembled: who among them can declare this, and show us former things? Let them bring forth their witnesses, that they may be justified; or let them hear, and say, It is truth. You are my witnesses, says the LORD, and my servant whom I have chosen, that you may know and believe me, and understand that I am he: before me there was no God formed, neither shall there be any after me. I, even I, am the LORD; and beside me there is no savior. I have declared, and have saved, and I have showed, when there was no strange god among you. Therefore you are my witnesses, says the LORD, that I am God.” Chap. 44.8, “Fear not, neither be afraid: haven't I told you from that time, and have declared it? You even are my witnesses. Is there a God beside me? Indeed, there is no God; I don't know any.”

(2.) We will have occasion for them continually administered to us. Those atheistic impieties, principles and practices which abound among us, are grievous provocations to all pious souls. Without frequent retreat to thoughts of the being of God, there is no relief nor refreshment to

be had under them. Such was the case of Noah in the old world, and of Lot in Sodom; which rendered their graces illustrious.

2. Because of *the unaccountable confusions* that all things are filled with at this time in the world. Whatever in former times has been a temptation in human affairs to any of the people of God, it abounds at this day. Never did men have more profane and profligate outward appearances to strengthen them in their atheism, nor did those who are godly have greater trials for their faith, with respect to the visible state of things in the world. The psalmist of old on such an occasion was almost surprised into unbelieving complaints, Psa 123.2-5, etc.; and such surprisals may now also befall us, that we may be ready to say with him, "Truly I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocence. For all day long have I been plagued, and chastened every morning."

Hence, when the prophet Habakkuk was exercised with thoughts about such a state of things as we find at this day in the world, which he declares in chap. 1.6-10, he lays the foundation of his consideration in the fresh exercise of faith on the *being* and *properties* of God, verses 12,13; and David makes that his retreat on a like occasion, in Psa 11.3-5.

In such a time as this, on both the accounts mentioned, those who are spiritually minded will greatly exercise their thoughts about the being and existence of God. They will say within themselves, "Truly there is a reward for the righteous: truly he is a God who judges in the earth." (Psa 58.11) From this will follow such apprehensions of the immensity of His nature, of his eternal power and infinite wisdom, of his absolute sovereignty, as will hold their soul firm and steadfast in the highest storms of temptation that may befall them.

Yet are there *two things* that the weaker sort of believers may be exercised with, in their thoughts of the divine being and existence, which may occasion some trouble for them:

(1.) Satan, knowing the weakness of our minds in the immediate contemplation of things infinite and incomprehensible, will sometimes take advantage to insinuate *blasphemous imaginations* in opposition to what we would fix upon and relieve ourselves with. He will take that very time, trusting to our weakness and his own methods of subtlety, to suggest his temptations to atheism by ensnaring inquiries, when we go about to refresh our souls with thoughts of the divine being and excellencies. "But is there a God indeed? How do you know that there is a God? And may it not be otherwise?" will be his language to our minds. For he still proceeds in much the same way as his first temptation, by way of an ensnaring question. "Indeed, has God said, you shall not eat of every tree of the garden?" So he did with our Savior himself, "If you are the Son of God." "Is there a God? What if there were none?" In such a case, the rule is given to us by the apostle: "Above all, take the shield of faith, with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked," Eph 6.16, Τοῦ πονηροῦ, (tou ponerou) "of the wicked one;" that is, the devil. And faith will act itself in *two ways* on such occasions:

[1.] By a *speedy rejection of such diabolical suggestions, with detestation*. Our Savior did so in a case that was not unlike it: "Get behind me, Satan." Mat 16.23 Therefore, if any such thoughts are suggested or seem to arise in your minds, know assuredly that they are no less immediately from the devil, than if he personally stood before you and visibly appeared to you. If he did so, there are none of you who would not arm yourselves with an utter *defiance* of what he would offer you. It is no less necessary on *this* occasion, when you may *feel* him, even if you don't see him. Don't suffer his fiery darts to abide one moment with you; entertain no parley or dispute about them; reject them with indignation; and strengthen your rejection of them with some pertinent testimony of Scripture, as our Savior did. If a man has a grenade or fire-ball cast into his clothes by his enemy, he doesn't consider whether it will burn him or not, but he immediately shakes it off! Don't deal otherwise with these fiery darts, lest by letting them abide with you, they inflame your imagination to an even greater disturbance.

[2.] In case these fiery darts don't utterly depart by this endeavor to exclude and cast them out, then without further dispute, return immediately to your *own experience*. When the devil asks you the question, if you answer him, you'll be ensnared. But if you ask *yourselves* the question, and apply your own experience in answer to it, you'll frustrate all his designs.

There are arguments to be taken, as it was said, from the light of nature and reason in its proper exercise, sufficient to defeat all objections of that kind. But these are not our proper weapons in case of our own *temptation*, which alone is now under consideration. It requires longer and more sedate reasoning than such a state will allow; nor is it a sanctified medium for our relief.

It is what is suited to suggestions on the occasion of our *meditations* that we inquire about. In them, we are not to argue on such principles, but to take the shield of faith to quench these fiery darts. And if, on such occasions, Satan can divert us into long disputes about the being of God, he has his end, by carrying us away from our meditation on God, which we designed. After a while, he will prevail to make it a common road and trade, that no sooner do we begin to think of God, than we must immediately dispute about His *being*.

Therefore, in this case, the way for someone who is *really a believer*, is to retreat immediately to his own experience; which will pour shame and contempt on the suggestions of Satan. No believer who has knowledge, and time to exercise the wisdom of faith in considering himself and God's dealings with him, who doesn't have a witness in himself of God's eternal power and Godhead — and also of all those other perfections of His nature which he is pleased to manifest and glorify by Jesus Christ. And so, on this suggestion of Satan that there is no God, he will be able to say, "He might better tell me that I do not live or breathe, that I am not fed by my food or warmed by my clothes, that I don't know myself or anything else — for I have the spiritual sense and experience of the contrary." This is like the one of old who, when a cunning sophister would prove to him by syllogisms that there is no such a thing as *motion*, gave no answer to his arguments, but arose and walked! "How often," the believer will say, "have I experienced the *power and presence* of God in prayer, as though I had not only heard of Him by the hearing of the ear, but also seen him by the seeing of the eye! How often has He exerted his power and grace in me by his *Spirit and his word*, with an uncontrollable evidence of His being, goodness, love, and grace! How often has he refreshed my conscience with the sense of the pardon of my sin, speaking that peace to my soul, which all the world could not communicate to me! In how many *afflictions*, dangers, and troubles, has He been a present help and relief! What tangible *emanations* of life and power from Him have I obtained in meditation on his *grace and glory*!" The one who had been blind, answered the Pharisees' ensnaring and captious questions, "Be it what it will, 'one thing I know, that whereas I was blind, now I see.'" ^{Joh 9.25} Even so, a soul will say, "Whatever is in this temptation of Satan, one thing I know full well, that whereas I was dead, I am alive; whereas I was blind, now I see — and that is by the effect of divine power."

This shield of faith, managed in the hand of experience, will quench the fiery darts of Satan, and he will fall under a double defeat:

1st. His temptations will be repelled by the proper way of resistance, upon which he will not only desist in his attempt, but even flee from you. "Resist the devil," says the apostle, "and he will flee from you." ^{Jas 4.7} He will not only depart and cease to trouble you, but he will depart as one who is defeated and confounded. And it is for lack of this resistance, lively made use of, that many hang so long in the briars of this temptation.

2dly. Recalling the experiences we have had of God, will lead us to exercise all kinds of graces; which is the greatest disappointment of our adversary.

(2.) In thoughts of the divine being and existence, we are apt to be at a loss, to be *overwhelmed* in our minds, because the object is too great and glorious for us to contemplate. Eternity and immensity, everything under the notion of *infinite*, takes the mind away from its distinct actings, and reduces it, as it were, to nothing. In some, who are unable to abide in the strict reasons of things, vain and foolish imaginations are apt to arise, and questions about how those things can be, which we cannot comprehend. Others are utterly at a loss, and turn their thoughts away from them, as they would turn their eyes from the bright beams of the sun. Two things are advisable in this case:

[1.] That we take up a *holy admiration* of what we *cannot comprehend*. In these things, we cannot see God and live; even in life eternal, they are not to be absolutely comprehended. Only what is infinite can fully comprehend what is infinite. *Here*, they are the objects of faith and worship. We may find rest and satisfaction in them when inquiries and reasonings disquiet us, and maybe overwhelm us. Infinite glory forbids us any near approach except by faith. The soul thereby bowing down to God's adorable greatness and incomprehensible perfections, we find that we are nothing, and God is all; this will give us rest and peace in these things, Rom 11.33-36.¹ We have but unsteady thoughts about the greatness of the world and all the nations and the inhabitants of it; and yet, both it and these thoughts, are "as small dust on the balance, as a drop in a bucket, ...as vanity, as nothing," Isa 40.15.²³ compared with God. What, then, can our thoughts concerning him result in, but holy admiration?

[2.] In case we are brought to a loss and disorder in our minds upon contemplating any one infinite property of God, it is good to divert our thoughts to *the effects of it*, such as those we have or may experience. For what is too great or high for us in *itself*, is made suitable to our understandings in its *effects*. So the "invisible things of God" are known in and by the things that are seen. And there is, indeed, no property of the divine nature that we may not have an experience of it, as to some of its effects in and upon ourselves. We may consider these, and in the streams, we may taste of the fountain which we cannot approach. By them we may be led to a holy admiration of what is in itself infinite, immense, and incomprehensible. I cannot comprehend the immensity of God's nature; it may be that I cannot understand the nature of immensity. Yet if I find by experience, and strongly believe, that He is always present wherever I am, I have the faith of it, and satisfaction in it.

Secondly, thoughts of the Divine Being, of his *omnipresence and omniscience*, ought to continually accompany us. We cannot take one step in our walk before him, unless we remember that always and in all places, *He is present with us*; and that the frame of our hearts and our *inward thoughts* are continually in his view, no less than our *outward actions*. And as we ought to be perpetually in the awe and fear of God in these apprehensions, so there are some seasons in which our minds ought to be engaged in the actual conception and thoughts of these attributes, without which we will not be preserved in our duty.

1. The first season of this nature is when times, places, with other occasions of *temptation*, and consequently of *sinning*, come and meet. With some, company constitutes such a season; and with some, secrecy with opportunity do the same. There are those who are ready, with a careless boldness, to put themselves into those societies which they know have been temptations to them, and occasions of sin. Every such *entrance* into any society or company, for those who know how it has formerly succeeded, is their actual sin; and God justly leaves them to all the evil consequents that ensue. Others too, either choose or are frequently cast into such societies; and no sooner are

¹ **Rom 11:33** Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out! ³⁴ "For who has known the mind of the LORD? Or who has become His counselor?" ³⁵ "Or who has first given to Him And it shall be repaid to him?" ³⁶ For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen.

they engaged in them, but they forget all regard to God, and give themselves up not only to vanity, but to various sorts of excess. David knew the evil and danger of such occasions, and gives us an account of his behavior in them:

Psa 39.1-3, “I said, I will take heed to my ways, that I not sin with my tongue: I will keep my mouth with a bridle, while the wicked is before me. I was dumb with silence, I held my peace, even from good; and my sorrow was stirred. My heart was hot within me; while I was musing, the fire burned; then spoke I with my tongue.”

As for their evil words and ways, he would have no communication with them; and as to good discourse, he judged it unreasonable to “cast pearls before swine.” He was therefore silent as to that also, though it was a grief and trouble to him. But this afterward occasioned in him those excellent meditations which he expresses in the succeeding verses. Upon entering these occasions, if men would remember the presence of God with them in these places, with the holy severity of the eye that is upon them, it would put an awe upon their spirits, and embitter those jovialities whose relish is given to them by temptation and sin. He walks neither humbly nor circumspectly, being necessarily cast into the society of wicked or profane men — on such occasions in which ordinary men give more than ordinary liberty to corrupt communication, or to excess of any kind — if he does not in entering them, call to mind the presence and all-seeing eye of God. And at his departure, he should consider whether his deportment had been proper in that Presence, and under that Eye. But, alas! pretenses of business and necessary occasions, engagements of trade, carnal relations, and the common course of communication in the world, with a supposition that all sorts of society are allowed for diversion, have cast out the remembrance of God from the minds of most, even when men cannot be preserved from sin without it.

This has sullied the beauty of gospel conversation among most, and left in very few any prevalent evidence of being spiritually minded. Therefore, as to those who, either by their voluntary choice or the necessity of their occasions, enter and engage promiscuously in all societies and companies, let them know assuredly that if their hearts and spirits are not continually awed with the thoughts and apprehensions of the *omnipresence and omniscience* of God — that He is always with them, and his eye always upon them — they will not be preserved from snares and sinful miscarriages. Indeed, such thoughts are needful for the best of us, and in the best of our societies, so that we don’t behave indecently in them at any time.

Again, for some, privacy, secrecy, and opportunity, are occasions of temptation and sin. They are so for persons under convictions, but not wholly turned to God. Many a good beginning has been utterly ruined by this occasion and temptation. Privacy and opportunity have overthrown many such persons in the best of their resolutions. And they are so for all persons who are not yet atrociously wicked. Cursed fruits proceed every day from these occasions. We need no other demonstration of their power and efficacy in tempting us to sin, than their visible effects. And what they are to *any*, they may be to *all*, if not diligently watched against. So the apostle reflects on the shameful things that are done in the dark, in a concurrence of secrecy and opportunity. This, therefore, gives a just season for thoughts of the omnipresence and omniscience of God, and they will not be wanting in some measure, in those who are spiritually minded.

God is in this place; the darkness is no darkness to him, light and darkness with Him are both alike — these are sufficient considerations to lay in the balance against any temptation springing out of secrecy and opportunity. One thought of the actual presence of the holy God and the open view of his all-seeing eye, will do more to cool those affections which lust may put into a tumult on such occasions, than any other consideration. A speedy retreat to this, upon the first perplexing thought with which temptation assaults the soul, will be its strong tower, where it will be safe.

2. A second season calling for the exercise of our minds in thoughts of the omnipresence and omniscience of God is made up of *our solitudes and retirements*. These give us the most genuine

tests of whether we are spiritually minded or not. What we are in them, *that* we are, and no more. Yet in some of them — such as walking, journeying, and the like — vain thoughts and foolish imaginations are very apt to solicit our minds. Whatever is stored in the affections or memory will, at such a time, offer itself for our present entertainment. And when men have accustomed themselves to any sort of things, they press on them to possess their thoughts, as it were, whether they will or not. The psalmist gives us the way to prevent this evil:

Psa 16.7,8, “I will bless the LORD, who has given me counsel: my reins also instruct me in the night seasons. I have set the LORD always before me: because he is at my right hand,” etc.

His “reins,” — that is, his affections and secret thoughts — gave him counsel and instructed him in all such seasons. But from where did they have that wisdom and faithfulness? In themselves, they are the seat of all lusts and corruptions; nor could they do anything but seduce him into an evil frame. It was from this alone, that “he set the LORD always before him” — continual apprehensions of the presence of God with him, kept his mind, his heart and affections, in that awe and reverence of Him, such that they always instructed him to his duty. But as I remember, I said something before as to the due management of our thoughts in this season.

3. Times of *great difficulties, dangers, and the perplexities of mind brought on by them*, are a season calling for the same duty. Suppose a man is left alone in his trials for the profession of the gospel, as it was with Paul — when “all men forsook him, and no man stood by him.” ^{2Tim 4.16} Suppose he is brought before princes, rulers, or judges, who are filled with rage and armed with power against him; all things are disposed to affect him with dread and terror. It is his duty to call his thoughts away from all things that are visibly present, and fix them on the omnipresence and omniscience of God. He sits among those judges, though they don’t acknowledge Him; he rules over them at his pleasure; he knows the cause of the oppressed, and justifies them whenever the world condemns them, and He can deliver them whenever he pleases. Those holy souls supported themselves with thoughts of this, when they stood before the fiery countenance of the bloody tyrant on the one hand, and the burning fiery furnace on the other:

Dan 3.17,18, “Our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of your hand, O king. But if not, let it be known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods, nor worship the golden image which you have set up.”

Thoughts of the presence and power of God gave them not only comfort and support under their distress, when they were alone and helpless, but courage and resolution to defy the tyrant to his face. And when the apostle was brought before Nero, that monster of cruelty and villainy, and “all men forsook him,” he affirms that “the Lord stood by him and strengthened him,” ^{2Tim 4.17} He refreshed himself with thoughts of his presence, and he had the blessed fruit of it.

Therefore, on such occasions, when the hearts of men are ready to quake, when they see all things about them filled with dread and terror, and all help is far away — I say it is their duty and wisdom to abstract and take their thoughts off all outward and present appearances, and to fix them on the presence of God. This will greatly change the scene of things in their minds, and they will find that strength, and power, and wisdom, are on their side alone — all that appears against them is but vanity, folly, and weakness.

So when the servant of Elisha saw the place where they were compassed with a host that came to take them, both horses and chariots, he cried out for fear, “Alas, my master! how shall we do?” But upon the prayer of the prophet, the Lord opening the eyes of the young man to see the heavenly guard that He had sent to him, the mountain being full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha, his fear and trouble departed, ^{2Kng 6.15-17} And when, in the same extremity, God opens the eye of faith to behold His glorious presence, we will no longer be afraid of the dread of men. In this the holy martyrs of old triumphed, and even despised their bloody persecutors. Our Savior himself made it the ground of his support on a like occasion:

Joh 16.32, “Behold,” he says to his disciples, his only friends, “the hour comes, yes, it has now come, that you will be scattered, every one to his own, and will leave me alone: and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me.”

If we could but possess our souls with the apprehension that when we are left alone in our trials and dangers, from any countenance of friends or help of men, that indeed we are *not* alone, for the Father is with us, it will support us under our despondencies, and enable us to our duties.

4. Especial providential warnings call for thoughts of God’s omnipresence and omniscience. So Jacob in his night vision instantly made this conclusion, “God is in this place, and I didn’t know it.” Gen 28.16 We frequently have such warnings given to us. Sometimes we have them in the things we think are accidental, from which perhaps we are strangely delivered; sometimes we have them in the things which we see befall others; or by thunder, lightning, or storms at sea or on land: for all the works of God, especially those that are rare and strange, have a voice by which he speaks to us. The first thing suggested to a spiritual mind in such seasons will be. “God is in this place,” — “He is present who lives and sees,” as Hagar confessed on a like occasion, Gen 16.13,14.

Thirdly, Have frequent thoughts of *God’s omnipotency*, or His almighty power. Most men, it may be, suppose they don’t need much exhortation to this; for none ever doubted it. Who doesn’t grant it on all occasions? Men grant it, indeed, in general; for eternal power is inseparable from the first notion of the Divine Being. So they are conjoined by the apostle: “His eternal power and Godhead,” Rom 1.20. Yet few believe it for themselves and as they should. Indeed, to believe the almighty power of God with reference to ourselves and all our concerns, temporal and eternal, is one of the highest and most noble acts of faith, which includes all others in it. For this is what God proposed at first as the solitary proper object of our faith, in [Abram’s] entrance into covenant with Him, Gen 17.1, “I am the Almighty God.” This is what Job arrived at after his long exercise and trial. “I know,” he says, “that you can do everything, and no thought of yours can be hindered,” chapter 42.2. “God has spoken once,” says the psalmist; “twice I have heard this; that *power belongs to God*,” Psa 62.11. God saw it necessary to frequently instruct him in this; for we are ready to be affected with the appearances of *present power* in creatures, and to suppose that all things will go according to their wills, *because of* their power. But it is quite otherwise; all creatures are poor feeble ciphers,¹ that can do nothing.

Power belongs to God; it is a flower of His imperial crown, which he will permit none to usurp. If the proudest of them go beyond the bounds and limits of His present permission, he will send worms to eat them up, as he did to Herod. Act 12.23

It is utterly impossible for us to walk before God to his glory, or with any real peace, comfort, or satisfaction in our own souls, unless our minds are continually exercised with thoughts of his almighty power. Everything that befalls us, everything that we hear about which has the least danger in it, will discompose our minds, and either make us tremble like the leaves of the forest that are shaken by the wind, or we will turn to foolish or sinful relief — *unless* we are firmly established in the faith of this. Consider the promises of God to the Church, which are on record, and as yet unaccomplished; consider the present state of the Church in the world, with all that belongs to it, in all the fears and dangers they are exposed to, in all the evils they are exercised with — and we will quickly find that unless this sheet-anchor is well fixed, we will be tossed up and down by all uncertainties, and exposed to the most violent temptations, Rev 19.6. To this end we are called to this by God himself, in His answer to the despondent complaints of the church in its greatest dangers and calamities:

Isa 40.28-31, “Have *you* not known? Have *you* not heard? The everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth, does not faint, neither is He weary. There is no searching of his

¹ *Cipher*: a person with no influence.

understanding. He gives power to the faint; and to those who have no might, He increases strength. Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall: but those who wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint."

Take one instance, which is the continual concern of us all. We are liable to death every moment. It is never any further from any of us just because we don't think of it as we should. It will lay our bodies in the dust, from which they will have no more disposition nor power in themselves to rise again, than any other part of the mould of the earth. Their recovery must be an act of *external almighty power*, when God desires the work of his hands — when He will call, and we will answer him out of the dust. Death will transmit the soul into an invisible world, putting a final end to all relations, enjoyments, and circumstances here below. I'm not speaking of those who are hard-hearted and far from righteousness — who live and die like beasts, or under the power of horrible presumption, without any due thoughts of their future and eternal state. But I am speaking of others — what comfort or satisfaction can any man have in his life, on which his all depends, and which is passing from him every moment, unless he has continual thoughts of the mighty power of God, by which He is able to receive his departing soul and to raise his body out of the dust?

Not to insist on more particulars, it is this way with those who are spiritually minded; it must be this way with us *all* if we pretend to have a title to that privilege. They are filled with thoughts of God, in opposition to that character of wicked men that "God is not in all their thoughts." And it is greatly to be feared that many of us, when we come to be weighed in this balance, will be found too light. Men may be in the performance of outward duties; they may hear the word with delight, and do many things gladly; they may escape the pollutions that are in the world through lust, and not run out into the same compass of excess and riot as other men. And yet they may be strangers to inward thoughts of God with delight and complacency. I cannot understand how it can be otherwise with those whose minds are over and over filled with earthly things, however they may satisfy themselves with pretenses of their callings, and lawful enjoyments, or that they are not in any way inordinately set on the pleasures or profits of the world.

To "walk with God," to "live unto him," is not merely to be found abstaining from outward sins, and performing outward duties, even if with diligence in the multitude of them. All this may be done on such principles, for such ends, and with such a frame of heart, as to find no acceptance with God. It is our *hearts* that He requires, and we can in no way give them to him except by our affections and holy thoughts of him with delight. *This* is to be spiritually minded; *this* is to walk with God. Let no man deceive himself: unless he thus abounds in holy thoughts of God, unless our meditation of Him is sweet to us, all else that we pretend to, will fail us in the day of our trial.

This is the first thing in which we may evidence to ourselves that we are under the conduct of the *minding of the Spirit*, or are *spiritually minded*. I insisted longer on it, because it contains the first tangible egress of the Spirit of living waters in us, the first acting of spiritual life to our own experience. I should now proceed to the consideration of our affections, of whose frame and state these thoughts are the only genuine exposition. But there are, or may be, some who are sensible of their own weakness and deficiency in discharging that part of this duty in being spiritually minded which we have now passed through. They may have fallen under discouragements from it. We must follow, as we are able, Him who "will not quench the smoking flax, nor break the bruised reed," ^{Isa 42:3} by offering something for the relief of those who are sincere under the sense of their own weakness.

CHAPTER 10. RULES CONCERNING SPIRITUAL MEDITATION.

Sundry things tendered to those who complain that they don't know how, they are not able to abide in holy thoughts of God and spiritual or heavenly things, for their relief, instruction, and direction — Rules concerning stated spiritual meditation.

SOME will say, indeed, on many occasions they *do* say, that there is nothing in all their duty towards God, in which they are more at a loss than they are in this one of *fixing or exercising their thoughts or meditations on heavenly or spiritual things*. They acknowledge it is a duty; they see an excellency in it, with inexpressible usefulness. But although they often try and attempt it, they cannot attain to any thing but what makes them ashamed both of it and themselves. Their minds, they find, are unsteady, apt to rove and wander, or to entertain other things, and not abide on the object which they design their meditation towards. Their abilities are small, their invention barren, their memories frail, and their judgments (to dispose of things into a right order) are weak and unable. They know not what to think on, for the most part; and when they fix on anything, they are immediately at a loss as to any progress, and so they give up. Hence other thoughts, or thoughts of other things, take advantage to impose themselves on them; what began in spiritual meditation, ends in carnal vanity. On these considerations, they are oftentimes discouraged to enter on the duty; oftentimes they give it up as soon as it is begun; and they are glad if they come away without being losers by their endeavors, which often befalls them. With respect to other duties, it is not so with them. For those who are really concerned in these things, to whom their want and defect is a burden, who mourn under it, and desire to be freed from it, or refreshed in their conflict with it, I will offer the things that ensue:

First, *That sense of the vanity of our minds which this consideration will give us if duly attended to, ought to greatly humble and abase our souls.* Why is it this way with us, that we cannot abide in thoughts and meditations of things spiritual and heavenly? Is it because they are things that we have no great concern in? It may be that they are worthless and unprofitable things to us, so that it is to no purpose to spend our thoughts about them. *The truth is, they alone are worthy, useful, and desirable; all other things in comparison to them are but “loss and dung.”* ^{Phi 3.8}

Or is it because the faculties and powers of our souls were not originally suited to contemplate and delight in them? *This also is otherwise;* they were all given to us, all created by God for this very end, all fitted with inclinations and power to abide with God in all things, without aversion or weariness. Nothing was so natural, easy, and pleasant to our souls, as steadiness in the contemplation of God and his works. The cause of all this evil, therefore, *lies at our own door.* All this, therefore, and all other evils, came upon us *by the entrance of sin.* And therefore Solomon, in his inquiry after all the causes and effects of vanity, brings it under this head: “Lo, this only have I found, that God made man upright; but they have sought out many inventions,” Ecc 7.29. For hereby our minds, that were created in a state of blessed adherence to God, were wholly turned away from him; and not only so, but they were filled with enmity against Him. In this state, the vanity that is prevalent in them, is both their sin and their punishment: their sin in a perpetual inclination to things that are vain, foolish, sensual, and wicked — so the apostle describes it at large in Eph 4.17-19, Tit 3.3; and their punishment, *in that*, being turned away from the chief good, in which alone rest is to be found, they are filled with darkness, confusion, and disquietude, being “like the troubled sea that cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt.” ^{Isa 57.20}

By grace our minds are renewed — that is, they are changed and delivered from this frame; but only partially. The principle of vanity is no longer predominant in us, to alienate us from the life of God, or to keep us in enmity against him. Those who are so renewed do not “walk in the vanity of their minds,” as others do, Eph 4.17. They go up and down, in all their ways and occasions, with a stream of vain thoughts in their minds. But the remainders of it are *effectually operative* in us, in all the actings of our minds towards God, affecting them with uncertainty and instability. It is

like someone who has received a great wound in any principal part of his body. Though it may be so cured that death won't immediately ensue from it, yet it may make him weak and lame all his days, and hinder him in the exercise of all the powers of life. The vanity of our minds is so cured as to deliver us from spiritual death; yet such a wound, such a weakness remains, that it weakens and hinders us in all the operations of spiritual life. Hence, those who have made any progress in grace, are sensible of their vanity as the greatest burden of their souls, and they groan after such a complete renovation of their minds that they may thereby be perfectly freed from it. This is what they principally regard in that complaining desire of Rom 7.24, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from this body of death?" Yes, they groan under a sense of it every day; nor is anything such a trouble to them, observing how it defeats them in their designs to contemplate heavenly things; how it frustrates their best resolutions to abide in the spiritual actings of faith and love; how they are imposed on by it with thoughts of things which, either in themselves or in their consequences, they most abhor. Nothing are they so afraid of, nothing is so grievous and burdensome to them, nothing do they more groan for deliverance from.

When there is war anyplace, it behoves those who are concerned, to have an eye and regard to all their enemies and their attempts against them. But if they are vigilant and diligent in their opposition to those who are outside, who visibly contend with them, and in the meantime neglect those who act traitorously within, among themselves — betraying their counsels and weakening their strength — they will undoubtedly be ruined. Wise men first take care of what is within, knowing that if they are betrayed there, all they do against their open enemies is to no purpose. In the warfare in which we are engaged, we have enemies of all sorts that openly and visibly, in various temptations, fight against our souls. It is our duty to watch against these, to conflict with them, and to seek a conquest over them. And it is this *internal vanity of mind* that endeavors in all things to betray us, to weaken us in all our graces, or to hinder their due operation, and to open the doors of our hearts to our cursed enemies. If our principal endeavor isn't to discover, suppress, and destroy this traitor, we won't succeed in our spiritual warfare.

Therefore, this being the *original cause* of all that disability of mind (as to our steadiness in holy thoughts and meditations) which you complain of when you're affected with it — turn to consider what it proceeds from. Labor to be humbled greatly, and to walk humbly, under a sense of the remainders of this vanity of mind, that some wholesome fruit may be taken from this bitter root, and meat may come out of this eater. If you reflect on this cause of it, when you cannot abide in holy thoughts of God and your relation to Him — to your further humiliation and self-abasement — then your good design and purpose are not lost. Say to yourself, "I began to think of God, of his love and grace in Christ Jesus, of my duty towards him; and now, where do I find myself in a few minutes? I have gotten to the ends of the earth, into useless and earthly things, or I am at such a loss that I have no mind to proceed in the work in which I was engaged. 'O wretched man that I am!' what a cursed enemy have I within me! I am ashamed of myself, weary of myself, I loathe myself. 'Who shall deliver me from this body of death?'" Such thoughts may be as useful to you as those which you first designed.

It's true, we can never be freed *absolutely* from all the effects of this vanity and instability of mind in this world. Unchangeable clinging to God *always*, in *all* the powers and affections of our minds, is reserved for heaven. Yet great degrees may be attained in the conquest and expulsion of it, such as I fear few have experienced, yet all ought to labor for it. If we apply ourselves as we should to the increase of spiritual light and grace; if we labor diligently to abide and abound in thoughts of spiritual things, and do it out of love for them and delight in them; if we watch *against* the entertaining and approving those thoughts and things in our minds by which this vain frame is pleased and confirmed — there is, even if not an absolute perfection, yet a blessed degree of heavenly mindedness to be attained. And in that, is the nearest approach to glory that we are capable of in this world. If a man cannot attain an athletic constitution of health, or a strength like that of Samson, yet if he is wise, he won't omit the use of those means which may make him useful

in the ordinary duties of life. And although we cannot attain perfection in this matter — which it is our duty to continually press after — yet, if we are wise, we will endeavor for such a cure of this spiritual distemper, that we may be able to discharge all the duties of the life of God. But if men feed the vanity of their own minds in all other things; if they permit them to rove continually after things that are foolish, sensual, and earthly; if they willfully supply them with objects to that end, and don't labor by all means to mortify this evil frame — then in vain they will desire or expect to bring them at *any* time, on *any* occasion, to be steady in the thoughts of heavenly things. If it is thus with *any*, as it is feared to be with *many*, it is their duty to mind the words of our Lord Jesus Christ in the first place, “Make the tree good, and the fruit will be good” — *and not before.* ^{Mat 12.33} When the power of sanctifying grace has made the mind habitually spiritual and heavenly, thoughts of such things will be natural to it, and accompanied with delight. But they will not be so until the God of peace has sanctified us in our whole spirit, soul, and body, by which we may be preserved blameless to the coming of Jesus Christ. ^{1The 5.23}

Secondly, always be sensible of your own insufficiency to raise in your mind thoughts of things spiritual and heavenly, or to manage them in a due manner. But in this case, men are apt to suppose that as they *may*, so they *can* think of what they please — thoughts are their own (they think), and therefore, of whatever sort they wish, they need no assistance for them. In truth, they cannot think as they should; they can do nothing at all; and nothing will convince them of their folly as to spiritual things, until they are burdened with an experience to the contrary. But the advice given is expressly laid down by the apostle, in the instance of himself: 2Cor 3.5, “Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think anything as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God.”

He speaks principally of ministers of the gospel, and of those who were most eminently furnished with spiritual gifts and graces, as he declares in verse 6. And if it is so with *them*, and with respect to the work and duties of *their* calling, then how much more is it so with others who don't have their graces or their office! Therefore, if men without regard to the present actual grace of God and the supplies of his Spirit, suppose that they can of themselves exercise their minds in spiritual thoughts — and so they only fret at themselves when they fall into disappointment, not knowing what is the matter with them — they will live in a lifeless, barren frame all their days.

By the strength of their *natural abilities*, men may frame thoughts of God and heavenly things in their minds, according to the knowledge they have of them. They may methodize them by rules of art, and express them elegantly to others. But even while they do so, they may be far from being spiritually minded; for there may be in their thoughts no actings of faith, love, or holy delight in God, or any grace at all. But these alone are the things which we inquire after; only those in which the graces of the Spirit are in their proper exercise. With respect to them, we have no sufficiency in ourselves; all our sufficiency must be of God. Among persons of light and knowledge, there is no truth more generally granted in the notion of it than this: that of ourselves we can do nothing, and none are more neglected in daily practice. Men profess they can do *nothing* of themselves, and yet they go about their duties as if they could do *all things*.

Thirdly, Remember that I have not at present treated *solemn stated meditation*, concerning which other rules and instructions should be given. By solemn or stated meditation, I mean thoughts about some spiritual and divine subject, with the fixing, forcing, and ordering of our thoughts about it, having a design to affect our own hearts and souls with the matter of it, or the things contained in it. By this design, meditation is distinguished from the study of the Word, in which our principal aim is to learn the truth, or to declare it to others. And it is also distinguished from prayer, in which God himself is the immediate object. But in *meditation*, it is affecting our own hearts and minds with love, delight, and humiliation. At present I have only shown what it means to be spiritually *minded*; and in this instance, it is about our thoughts as they proceed from the habitual frame of our hearts and affections, or of what sort the constant course of our thoughts

ought to be with respect to all the occasions of the life of God. Persons may be ready for this, who are yet unskilled in and disabled for stated meditation. For this, what is required is such an exercise of our natural faculties and abilities as some, through their weakness and ignorance, are incapable of. But as to what we have insisted on up to here, it is attainable by any in whom the Spirit of faith and love abides; for it is but the frequent actings of these that I intend. Therefore, do your heart and affections lead you to many thoughts of God and spiritual things? Do they spring up in you as water in a well of living waters? Are you ready on all occasions to entertain such thoughts, and to be conversant with them as opportunity offers itself? Do you labor to have in a readiness, what is useful for you with respect to temptations and duties? Is God in Christ, and are the things of the gospel, the ordinary retreat of your soul? — even if you are not able to carry on an orderly, stated meditation in your mind, you may yet be spiritually minded.

A man may not have a capacity and ability to carry on a great trade of merchandise in the world. The knowledge of all sorts of commodities and seasons of the world and its nations, with those contrivances and accounts which belong to such trade, may be above his comprehension, and he may quickly ruin himself in undertaking such an employment. Yet the abilities of this man may serve him well enough to carry on a retail trade in a private shop, in which perhaps he may thrive and get as good an estate as any whose greater capacities lead them to larger and more hazardous employments. So it may be with some in *this* case. The natural faculties of their minds are not sufficient to enable them for *stated meditation*; they cannot arrange things by that method and order which it requires, nor frame the conceptions of their minds into significant and expressive words. And yet, as to *frequency of thoughts of God*, and a disposition of mind for it, they may thrive and be skillful beyond most others of greater natural abilities. However, because even stated meditation is a *necessary duty*, indeed, the *principal way* by which our spiritual thoughts profitably act themselves, I will regard it in the following direction. Wherefore —

Fourthly, *Whatever principle of grace we have in our minds, we cannot attain a ready exercise of it, in a way of spiritual meditation or otherwise, without great diligence, or great difficulty.*

It was shown at the entrance of this discourse, that there is a difference in this grace, between the essence, *substance*, or reality of it — which we would not exclude men from, under many failings or infirmities — and the useful *degrees* of it, in which it has its principal exercise. There is a difference in natural life and its actings in a weak, diseased, sickly body, and in that which is of a good constitution, and in a vigorous health. Supposing the first sort, the reality of this grace is wrought in us or implanted in our minds by the Holy Ghost, as a principal part of that *new nature* which is the workmanship of God, created in Christ Jesus for good works. And yet, the growth and improvement of it, as with all other graces, requires our own diligent care, watchfulness, and spiritual striving in all holy duties. Unless the most fruitful ground is manured, it will not bring forth a useful crop. Let no one think that this frame of a spiritual mind — in which there is a disposition to and a readiness for all holy thoughts of God, of Christ, of spiritual and heavenly things, at all times and on all occasions — will befall him and continue with him, he knows not how. It is as likely for a poor man to expect to be rich in this world without industry, or for a weak man to be strong and healthy without food and exercise, as to be spiritually minded without an earnest endeavor after it. It may be asked what is requisite to it; and we may name some of those things *without which* such a holy frame will *not* be attained. Such as —

1. *A continual watch is to be kept in and on the soul* against the *incursions* of vain thoughts and imaginations, especially in those seasons in which they are apt to obtain advantage. If they are permitted to make an inroad into the mind, if we accustom ourselves to entertain them, if they habitually lodge within, then in vain we may hope or desire to be spiritually minded. In this consists a principal part of that duty which our Savior so frequently, so emphatically charges on us all; namely, to “watch,” Mar 13.37. Unless we keep a strict watch in this, we will be betrayed into the hands of our spiritual enemies; for all such thoughts are but making provision for the

flesh, to fulfill its *desires* in its lusts, however disappointed they may be as to *actual sin*. This is the substance of the advice given to us in this charge in Pro 4.23, “Keep *your* heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life.”

2. *Careful avoidance of all societies and businesses of this life* which are apt, under various pretenses, to draw and seduce the mind to an earthly or sensual frame. If men venture on those things which they have found by experience, or may find by their observation, that they seduce and draw their minds away from a heavenly frame to that which is contrary to it, and will not watch to *avoid* them, they will be filled with the fruit of their own ways. Indeed, the common converse of professors among themselves and others — walking, talking, and behaving themselves like other men, being as full of the world as the world is of itself — has lost the grace of being spiritually minded *within*, and has stained the glory of profession *without*. The rule observed by David will manifest how careful we ought to be in this:

Psa 39.1-3, “I said, I will take heed to my ways, so that I don’t sin with my tongue. I will keep my mouth with a bridle while the wicked is before me. I was dumb with silence, I held my peace, even from good; and my sorrow was stirred. My heart was hot within me; while I was musing the fire burned: *then* spoke I with my tongue.”

— this place was mentioned before [chap. 9].

3. *A holy constraint* put on the mind to abide in the duty of spiritual thoughts and meditations, pressing it continually to consider their necessity and usefulness. The mind will be apt of itself to step aside from purely spiritual duties, through the mixture of the flesh abiding in it. The more inward and purely spiritual any duty is, which has no outward advantages, the more prone the mind will be to decline from it. It will be more prone to decline from *private prayer* than *public*, and more from *meditation* than *prayer*. And other things will be apt to draw it aside, by objects without, and various stirrings of the affections within. A holy constraint is to be put upon it, with an instant rejection of whatever rises up to divert or disturb it. Therefore, we are to call upon all constraining motives, such as the consideration of the love of Christ, 2Cor 5.14,¹ to keep the mind steady toward its duty.

4. *Diligent use of means* to furnish the soul with that light and knowledge of heavenly things which may administer continual matter of holy thoughts and meditations from within ourselves. This has been largely spoken to before. The lack of it is what keeps many from the least proficiency in these duties. It is like a man who has some skill or ability for a trade; if he has no materials to work with, he must sit still and let his trade alone. So it is with men regarding the work of holy meditation. Whatever the ability of their natural faculties, their creativity or memories, if they’re not furnished with knowledge of things spiritual and heavenly, which are the subject-matter of such meditations, they must let their work alone. Hence the apostle prays for the Colossians, that “the word of Christ might dwell in them richly in all wisdom,” Col 3.16; that is, that they might abound in the knowledge of the mind of Christ, without which we will be unfit for this duty.

5. *Unwearied in our conflict with Satan*, who, by various artifices and the injection of fiery darts, labors continually to divert us from these duties. He is seldom or never lacking on such occasions. The one who is furnished in any measure with spiritual wisdom and understanding, may find Satan more sensibly at work in his craft and opposition with respect to *this duty*, than any other way. When we stand thus before the Lord, Satan is always at our right hand to resist us; and oftentimes his strength is great. Hence, as observed earlier, men often design to really exercise themselves in holy thoughts, but end up in vain imaginations; they take up with trifles rather than continue in this duty. Steadiness in the resistance of Satan on these occasions, is one great part of our spiritual warfare. And we may know that he is at work, by his engines and methods — for they

¹ **2Cor 5:14** For the love of Christ compels us...

consist in his suggestions of vain, foolish, or corrupt imaginations. When they begin to rise in our minds at those times in which we would engage in spiritual meditation, we may know assuredly where they come from.

6. *Continual watchful care that no root of bitterness springs up to defile us, that no lust or corruption is predominant in us.* When it is so, if persons, in compliance with their convictions, endeavor sometimes to be exercised in these duties, they will labor in the very fire, where all their endeavors will be immediately consumed. ¹

7. *Mortification to the world in our affections and desires, with moderation in our endeavors for the things needed from it,*² are also necessary — indeed, to such a degree that without these, no one can in any sense be said to be spiritually minded. For otherwise our affections cannot be so preserved under the power of grace, that spiritual things may be always savory to us.

Some may say, perhaps, that if all these things are required for it, it will consume a man's whole life and time to be spiritually minded. They hope to attain it at a lower cost, and not forego all the other advantages and savors of life, which a strict observation of these things would require.

I answer that although it may prove a hard saying to some, I *must* say it. My heart would reproach me if I didn't say that, if the principal part of our time is not spent about these things, then whatever we may suppose, we indeed have neither life nor peace. The first fruits of all were to be offered to God; and in sacrifices, He required the blood and the fat of the inwards. If the *best* is not His, he will have *nothing*. So it is with our time. Tell me, I ask you, how you can better spend your time and your lives, or to what better purpose, and I will say, "Go and prosper." I am sure some spend so much of their time, on so much worse, that it is a shame to see it.

Do you think you came into this world to spend your whole time and strength in your employments, your trades, your pleasures, to the satisfaction of the "wills of the flesh and of the mind?" Eph 2:3 Do you have time enough to eat, to drink, to sleep, and to talk unprofitably, it may be corruptly, in all sorts of unnecessary societies, but don't have enough to live to God in the very essentials of that life which consists in these things? Alas! you came into the world under this law: "It is appointed to men once to die, and after this the judgment," Heb 9:27; and the end for which your life is granted to you here, is that you may be prepared *for that judgment*. If this is neglected, if the principal part of your time is not improved with respect to this end, you will fall under the sentence of it unto eternity.

But men are apt to mistake in this matter. They may think these things tend to take them away from their *lawful employments and recreations*, which they are generally afraid of; they are unwilling to purchase any frame of mind at so dear a cost. They may suppose that to have men be spiritually minded, we would make them mopes,³ and disregard all the lawful occasions of life. But let no one be mistaken — I am not proposing a design that will be easily, or maybe, honestly defeated. Men are able to defend themselves in their callings and enjoyments, and to satisfy their consciences against any persuasions to the contrary. Yet there is a season in which we are obliged to part with all we have, and to surrender ourselves wholly to follow Christ in all things, Mat 19:21.⁴ If we neglect or refuse it in that season, it is an evidence that we are hypocrites. And there was a time when superstition had so much power on the minds of men, that multitudes were persuaded

¹ **1Cor 3:12** Now if anyone builds on this foundation *with* gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, ¹³ each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is. ¹⁴ If anyone's work which he has built on *it* endures, he will receive a reward. ¹⁵ If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.

² That is, moderation in satisfying our basic needs for food, clothing, and shelter. — WHG

³ *Mope*: someone who wastes time; meaning here, "so heavenly minded that they're of no earthly good."

⁴ **Mat 19:21** Jesus said to him, "If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me."

to forsake, to give up, all their interest in relations, callings, goods, possessions, and to take up tedious pilgrimages, even hard service in war, to comply with that superstition. It is not to the glory of our profession that we have so few instances of men parting with all, and giving themselves up to heavenly retirement. But I am at present proposing no such design. My aim is not to take men away from their lawful earthly employments, but to bring spiritual affections and thoughts into the management of them all. The things mentioned will deprive you of no time that you can lay claim to, but will sanctify it all.

I confess that someone must be a great *expert in spirituality* if he dares venture on an *absolute retirement*. He must be well satisfied that he is not called to any usefulness among men that is inconsistent with it; though it may prove a disadvantage to them. Yet this too is attainable if other circumstances concur. Men under the due exercise of grace and its improvement, may attain to that *fixedness in heavenly mindedness*, to that unconcern in all things here below, as to give themselves up entirely and continually to heavenly meditation, to a blessed advancement of all grace, and a near approach to glory. I would hope it was so with many of those in ancient times who renounced the world, with all circumstances of relations, state, inheritances, and turned to retirement in the wilderness, to abide always in divine contemplation.¹ But afterward, multitudes whose minds were not prepared by a real growth in grace and mortification to the world, as these others were, turned (under the same pretenses) to a *monastic* retirement. They turned to the devil, the world, sensual lusts, superstition, and all manner of evils; they pursued them, found them, and possessed them, to the unspeakable damage and scandal of religion.

This is *not* what I invite the common sort of believers to. Let those who are able and free, receive it. Most Christians have lawful callings, employments, and businesses which ordinarily they ought to abide in. That they too may live to God in their circumstances, they may do well to consider two things:

(1.) Industry in men's callings is very commendable *in itself*. If nothing else, it has an advantage in this: that it is a means to preserve men from those excesses in lust and riot which otherwise they are apt to run into. And if you consider the two sorts of men into which most men are distributed — namely, those who are industrious in their affairs, and those who spend their time, if able, in idleness and pleasure; the former sort are far more amiable and desirable. Even so, industry is capable of being greatly abused. Earthly mindedness, covetousness, devouring holy things as to the times and seasons of duty, uselessness, and similar pernicious vices, invade and possess the minds of men. There is no lawful calling that absolutely excludes this grace of being spiritually minded in those who are engaged in it, nor in any calling that includes it. Men may be in the least of lawful callings and be spiritually minded; and men may be in the best and highest callings, and *not* be so.

Consider the calling of the ministry: Its work and duty calls on those who are employed in it, to have their minds and thoughts conversant about spiritual and heavenly things. They are to study them, meditate on them, commit them to memory, and speak them to others. It will be said, "Surely such men must be spiritually minded." If they go no further than what is mentioned, I say they must be so, in the same way that *printers* must be learned, who are continually conversant about letters. A man may engage himself in these things with great industry, and yet his mind be most remote from being spiritual. The event declares that it may be so. And the reasons for it are manifest. It requires as much if not more watchfulness, more care, and more humility, for a minister to be spiritually minded in the discharge of his calling, than for any other sort of men in theirs, and for other reasons. The commonness of the exercise of such thoughts, with their design upon *others* in their expression, will reduce their power and efficacy. He will have little benefit by his own ministry, if he does not in the first place, endeavor to experience

¹ For example, the *Desert Fathers*, early Christian hermits, ascetics, and monks who lived in the Scetes or Nitrian desert of Egypt in the third century, such as Anthony the Great. — WHG

in his own heart, the power of the truths which he teaches others. There is evidently as great a failing in this among us ministers, as among any other sort of Christians, as every occasion of trial demonstrates.

(2.) Industry in any honest calling is allowable; yet, unless men labor to be spiritually minded in the exercise of that industry, they have neither life nor peace. All the things mentioned before are necessary; I don't know how any of them can be abated — even more is required than is expressed in them. If you burn this scroll, another must be written, and many like things must be added to it. The objection from the expense of time in observing them has no force; for a man may do as much work while he is spiritually minded as he does while he is carnal. Spiritual thoughts will no more hinder you in your callings than those which are vain and earthly, which all sorts of men find leisure for in the midst of their employments. If you have filled a vessel with chaff, you may still pour a great deal of water into it, which will be contained in the same space and vessel. If it is necessary that you take much of the chaff of the world into your minds, yet they are capable of such measures of grace as will preserve them sincere unto God.

Fifthly, This frame will never be preserved, nor the duties mentioned ever be performed in a due manner, unless *we dedicate some part of our time particularly to them*. I speak only to those whom I suppose daily set apart some portion of time to holy duties, such as prayer and reading the word, and they find by experience that it succeeds well with them. For the most part, if they lose their seasons, they lose their duties. For some complain that the urgency of business and the multitude of tasks drive them first from the fixed times of their duties, and then has brought them into a course of neglecting the duty itself. That's why it is our wisdom to consistently set apart some part of our time to exercise our thoughts about spiritual things, in the way of *meditation*. And I will close this discourse with some directions in this particular, to those who complain about their disability to discharge this duty:

1. Choose and separate a *fit time or season*, free from other occasions and diversions. Because it is our duty to redeem time with respect to our holy duties, such a time may be more useful the more the purchase of it [puts us in a position to do them]. We are at no time to serve God with what costs us nothing, nor with any time that comes within the same rule.^{2Sam 24.24} If we allow only *the refuse of our time* for this duty, when we have nothing else to do, or maybe, wearied by other occasions, these times are fit for nothing else, we should not expect any great success in it. This is one pregnant reason why men are so cold and formal, so lifeless in spiritual duties — namely, because of the times and seasons they allot to them. When the body is wearied with the labor and occasions of the day, and maybe the mind is indisposed in its natural faculties, even by the means of necessary refreshment, men think themselves fit to *engage with God* about the great concerns of his glory and their own souls! This is what God condemns by his prophet: Mal 1.8, “If you offer the blind for sacrifice, isn't it evil? And if you offer the lame and sick, isn't it evil? Offer it now to your governor; will he be pleased with you, or accept you?”

Both the law of nature and all the laws of holy institutions require that we serve God with *the best that we have*, just as all the fat of the inwards was to be offered in sacrifices. And do we think to offer that time to God in which we are unfit to appear before an earthly ruler? Yet such, in my account, are the seasons, *especially evenings*, that most men choose for the duties of their holy worship. And you may do well to consider beyond the day and time which he has taken for Himself by an everlasting law,¹ how little of the choice of your time you have offered to God as a free-will offering, that you may be excited to future diligence. If you therefore seriously intend this duty, choose the seasons for it in which you are most fit, when *the natural vigor of your spirits* is most free and active. Possibly some will argue that this may be such a time that the occasions of the

¹ i.e., the Sabbath, Exo 31.17 “It is a sign between Me and the children of Israel forever, for in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, and on the seventh day He rested and was refreshed.”

world call most earnestly for your attendance to them. I say *that* is the season I would recommend. And if you can conquer your minds to redeem it for God at any cost, then your endeavors in it will be prosperous. However, don't trust to whatever times offer themselves; don't risk taking them up. Let the time itself be a free-will offering to God, taken from the top of the heap, or the choicest part of your useful time.

2. Preparation of mind to a due reverence of God and spiritual things is required prior to this. When we go about this duty, if we rush into thoughts of heavenly things without due reverential preparation, we will quickly find ourselves at a loss. See the rule, Ecc 5:1,2. "Grace to serve God with reverence and godly fear" is required in all things in which we have to deal with Him — as we have in this duty, in an immediate and especial manner. Endeavor, therefore, in the first place, to get your hearts *deeply affected with an awed reverence of God*, and a holy regard for the heavenly nature of the things you would meditate on. By this your minds will be composed, and the roots of other vain or earthly thoughts which are apt to arise and divert you from this duty, will be cast out. The principles of these contrary thoughts are like Jacob and Esau. They struggle in the same womb; oftentimes Esau will come out first, and for a while seem to carry the birthright. So too, if various thoughts conflict in our minds, some for this world and some for another, those for this world may carry it for a season. But where a due reverence for God has "cast out the bondwoman and her children" Gal 4:29,30 —the workings of the flesh in its vain thoughts and imaginations — the mind will be at liberty to exercise itself on spiritual things

3. Earnest desires for a renewed sense and relish of spiritual things are required for this. If we engage in this duty merely on a conviction of the *necessity* of it, or set ourselves about it because we think we ought to do so, and it would not be good to utterly neglect it, then we may not expect to be successful in it. But once the soul has tasted that the Lord is gracious, when its meditations on Him have been sweet, when spiritual things have had a savor and relish in the mind and affections, and upon this it comes to this duty with *earnest desires* to have the same tastes, the same experience, yes, to have them *increased*, then it is on the path of hopeful progress. And this also will make us persevere in our endeavors to go through with what we undertake — namely, when we know by former experience what will be attained by it, if we dig and search for it as for a treasure.

If you think the right discharge of this duty may be *attained another way*, if you suppose it doesn't deserve all this cost and charge about it, then judge by what is past, whether it's advisable to give it up and let it alone. There are as many good intentions that lie quietly on the ground, as those which continually attempt to rise and yet never once effect it. Remember how many successless attempts you have made upon it, and all of them have come to nothing (or to what is as bad as nothing). I cannot say that in this way you will always succeed; but I fear that you will never have success in this duty *without* such things that are of the same nature and use.

When, *after this preparation*, you find yourselves still perplexed and entangled, and not able to comfortably persist in spiritual thoughts for your refreshment, take these two directions for your relief:

1. Cry and sigh to God for help and relief. Bewail the darkness, weakness, and instability of your minds, so as to groan within yourselves for deliverance. And if your designed meditations result only in a renewed gracious sense of your own weakness and insufficiency, with an application to God for supplies of strength, they are by no means lost as to a spiritual account. The thoughts of Hezekiah's meditations didn't seem to have any great order or consistency when he so expressed them: "Like a crane or a swallow, so I chattered; I mourned like a dove: my eyes fail with looking upward. O LORD, I am oppressed; undertake for me," Isa 38:14. When the soul labors sincerely for communion with God, but sinks into broken, confused thoughts under the weight of its own

weakness, if he but looks to God for relief, his chattering and mourning will be accepted with God and profitable to himself.

2. *Supply the brokenness of your thoughts with ejaculatory prayers*, as either their matter or your defect in managing them requires. Thus is was with Hezekiah in the instance mentioned before. When his own meditations were weak and broken, he cries out in the midst of them, “O LORD, I am oppressed; undertake for me!” And meditation, properly, is a mixture of spiritual apprehension of God and of heavenly things, in the thoughts and conceptions of our mind, with desires and supplications concerning them.

It is good and profitable to have some special designed subject of meditation in our thoughts. I declared at large before what things are the proper objects of the thoughts of those who are spiritually minded; but they may be more particularly considered as the *matter* of designed meditation. They may be taken out of some especial spiritual experience that we recently had, or some warnings we received from God, or something with which we have been particularly affected in the reading or preaching of the word, or what we find the present posture and frame of our minds and souls require, or what supplies all most frequently — the person and grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. If anything of this nature is particularly designed *prior* to this duty, and a time is sought for it with respect to that duty, the mind will be fixed and kept from wandering after a variety of subjects, in which it is apt to lose itself and bring nothing to completion.

Lastly, don’t be discouraged with an apprehension that *all you can attain to in the discharge of this duty is so little, so contemptible, that it is to no purpose to persist in it; nor be wearied with the difficulties you meet with in its performance.* You have to deal with Him alone in this matter who “will not break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax,” ^{Isa 42.3} whose will it is that none should “despise the day of small things.” ^{Zec 4.10} And “if there is” in this duty “a ready mind, it is accepted according to what a man has, and not according to what he has not.” ^{2Cor 8.12} He that can bring into this treasury only the mites of broken desires and ejaculatory prayers, so long as they are his best, shall not come behind those who put into it out of their greater abundance in ability and skill. To faint and give up because we cannot rise to such a height as we aim at, is a fruit of pride and unbelief. He who finds himself to gain nothing by continual endeavors after holy, fixed meditations, but only a living, active sense of his own vileness and unworthiness, is a sufficient gainer by all his pains, cost, and charge. But ordinarily, it will not be so; constancy in the duty will give the ability for it. Those who conscientiously abide in its performance will increase in light, wisdom, and experience, until they are able to manage it with great success.

These few plain directions may possibly be of some use to the weaker sort of Christians, when they find a disability in themselves to discharge this duty, in which those who are spiritually minded should be peculiarly exercised.

PART 2.

CHAPTER 11. SPIRITUAL MINDEDNESS IN THE AFFECTIONS.

The seat of spiritual mindedness in the affections — The nature and use of them — The ways and means used by God himself to call the affections of men away from the world.

IN the account given at the entrance of this discourse, of what it means to be spiritually minded, it was reduced to three heads:

The FIRST was, *The habitual frame, disposition, and inclination of the mind in its affections.*

The SECOND was, *The usual exercise of the mind in its thoughts, meditations, and desires, about heavenly things.*

To these was added, THIRDLY, *The complacency of mind in that relish and savor which it finds in spiritual things* that are thus thought and meditated on.

Up to here, only the second of these has been spoken to, as that which leads the way to the others, and gives the most tangible evidence of the state inquired about. In this consists the stream which, rising in the fountain of our affections, runs into a holy rest and complacency of mind.

I will now handle the first and last together, and in so doing, comprehend the account of what it means to be spiritually minded:

Spiritual affections, by which the soul adheres to spiritual things, taking in such a savor and relish of them that it finds rest and satisfaction in them, is the peculiar spring and substance of our being spiritually minded.

This is what I will now further explain and confirm.

The great contest of heaven and earth is about the affections of the poor worm which we call *Man*. It is no wonder that the world contends for these affections; it is the best that it can pretend to. All things here below are capable of no higher ambition than to be possessed by the affections of men — and as they lie under the curse, it can do us no greater mischief than by prevailing in this design. But that the holy God should, as it were, engage in the contest and strive for the affections of man, is an effect of infinite condescension and grace. He does this expressly: "My son," he says, "give me your heart," Pro 23.26. It is our affections that He asks for, and comparatively nothing else. To be sure, He will accept nothing from us without them; the richest and costliest sacrifice will not be accepted if it is without a heart. All the ways and methods of the dispensation of His will by his word, all the designs of his effectual grace, are suited to and prepared for this end — namely, to recover the affections of man to Himself. So he expresses himself concerning his word:

Deu 10:12, "And now, Israel, what does the LORD your God require of you, but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all his ways, and to love him, and to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul?"

And as for the word of his grace, he declares it to the same purpose: Deu 30.6, "And the LORD your God will circumcise your heart, and the heart of your seed, to love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul."

And, on the other side, all the artifices of the *world*, all the paint it puts on its face, all the great promises it makes, and the false appearances and attires that it clothes itself with by the help of Satan, have no other end than to draw and keep the affections of men to itself. And if the world is

preferred before God in this address which is made to us for our affections, we will justly perish with the world unto eternity, and be rejected by Him whom we have rejected, Pro 1.24-31.¹

Our affections on the matter, are our all. They are all we have to give or bestow; the only power of our souls by which we may give ourselves away and become another's. Other faculties of our souls, even the noblest of them, are suited to *receive* to our own advantage; but by our affections, we can *give away what we are and have*. Hereby we give our hearts to God, as he requires. Therefore, the one to whom we give our affections, we give our all — ourselves and all that we have; and to whom we don't give them, *whatever we may give*, we give nothing at all upon the matter.

In what we do *to* or *for* others, whatever is good, valuable, or praiseworthy in it, proceeds from the affection with which we do it. To do anything for others without an animating affection, is but contempt for them; for we judge them really unworthy of doing anything for them. To give to the poor upon their importunity, without pity or compassion, to supply the wants of the saints without love or kindness, with other actings and duties of a like nature, are things of no value, things that recommend us neither to God nor to men. It is so in general with God and the world. Whatever we do in the service of God, whatever duty we perform on his command, whatever we undergo or suffer for his name's sake, if it doesn't proceed from the clinging of our souls to him by our affections, it is despised by him; he will not own us. It is as "if a man gave all the substance of his house for love, it would be utterly despised," Song 8.7 — it is not to be bought or purchased with riches; so if a man would give to God all the substance of his house without love, it would in like manner be despised. However, on the other hand, we may be diligent, industrious, and sedulous, in and about the things of this world, and yet if it doesn't have our affections, we are not of the world, we don't belong to it. The affections are *the seat of all sincerity*, which is the jewel of divine and human conversation, the life and soul of everything that is good and praiseworthy. Whatever men pretend, as their affections are, so are they. *Hypocrisy* is a deceitful interposition of the mind, upon various reasons and pretenses, between men's *affections* and their *profession*, by which a man appears to be what he is not. *Sincerity* is the open declaration of the reality of men's affections, which renders them good and useful.

Affections in the soul are like the helm in the ship; if it is laid hold on by a skillful hand, he turns the whole vessel whichever way he pleases. If God has the powerful hand of his grace upon our affections, he turns our souls to a compliance with his institutions and instructions, in mercy, afflictions, trials, and all sorts of providences, and holds them firm against all winds and storms of temptation, so that they will not rush them into pernicious dangers. Only such a soul is tractable and pliable to all the intimations of God's will.

All others are stubborn and obstinate, hard-hearted and far from righteousness. And when the *world* has a hand on our affections, it turns the mind, with the whole industry of the soul, to its interest and concerns. It is in vain to contend with anything that has the *power of our affections* at its disposal; it will prevail in the end.

On all these considerations it is of the highest importance to rightly consider how things are stated in our affections, and what the prevailing bent of them is. "Iron sharpens iron; so a man sharpens the countenance of his friend," says the wise man, Pro 27.17. Every man has his edge, which may be sharpened by outward helps and advantages. The predominant inclination of a man's affections is his edge. However that is set, so he cuts and works; he is sharp and keen in that, but blunt to all other things.

Now, because it must be that our affections are either *spiritual* or *earthly* in a prevailing degree, either *God* has our hearts, or the *world* does. Thus, our edge is either towards heaven or things here below. Before I give an account of the nature and operations of spiritual affections, I will

¹ **Pro 1:24** "Because I have called and you refused, I have stretched out my hand and no one regarded, ²⁵ Because you disdained all my counsel, And would have none of my rebuke, ²⁶ I also will laugh at your calamity;" etc.

consider and propose some of those arguments and motives which God is pleased to make use of to call our affections away from the desirable things of this world. For as they are weighty and cogent, and cannot be neglected without the greatest contempt of divine wisdom and goodness, they will serve to press and enforce those arguments and motives that are proposed to us to set our affections on things that are above — which is to be spiritually minded.

First, God has, in all manner of instances, *poured contempt on the things of this world*, in comparison to things spiritual and heavenly. All things here below were at first made beautiful and in order, and were declared by God himself to be exceedingly good, and that was not only in their being and nature, but in the use for which they were designed. They were then desirable to men, and the enjoyment of them would have been a blessing, without danger or temptation; for they were the ordinance of God to lead us to the knowledge of him and love to him. But since the entrance of sin, by which the world fell under the curse and into the power of Satan, the things of the world, in Satan's management, have become effectual means to draw the heart and affections away from God. For it is the world and the things of the world, as summed up by the apostle in 1Joh 2.15,16,¹ that strive for our affections, to be their sole objects. Sin and Satan but woo on behalf of the world, to take our affections away from God. By these things, the god of this world blinds the eyes of those who do not believe. And the principal way by which he works in them, is by promises of satisfaction for all the lusts of the minds of men, with a proposal of whatever is dreadful and terrible in the lack of them. Being now in this state and condition, and used to this end through the craft of Satan and the folly of the minds of men, God has shown by various instances, that they are all vain, empty, unsatisfactory, and in every way to be despised in comparison to things eternal:

1. He did it most eminently and signally in *the life, death, and cross of Christ*. What can be seen or found in *this world*, after the Son of God has spent his life in it, having nowhere to lay his head, and after he went *out of it* on the cross? Had there been anything of real worth in things here below, certainly he would have enjoyed it. If not crowns and empires, which were all in his power, then those goods and possessions which men of sober reasonings and moderate affections esteem a good living. But things were disposed quite otherwise, to manifest that there is nothing of value or use in these things, except to support nature so as to perform our service to God. In this, they are serviceable unto eternity. Christ never attained, he never enjoyed, more than daily supplies of bread out of the stores of providence; and this alone is what he instructed us to pray for, Mat 6.11. In his cross the world proclaimed all its good qualities and all its powers; and to those who believe, it has given its naked face to view and contemplate — nor is the world now one jot more seemly than it was when it had gotten Christ on the cross. Hence comes that inference and conclusion of the apostle in Gal 6.14, “God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world is crucified to me, and I to the world;” Gal 65.14 — in other words, “Since I have believed, since I have had a sense of the power and virtue of the cross of Christ, I am done with all things in this world; it is a dead thing to me, nor do I have any affection for it.” This is what made the difference between the promises of the Old Covenant and the New. For many of the Old were about temporal things, the good things of this world and this life; while those of the New are mostly of things spiritual and eternal. God would not call the church entirely away from a regard for these things, until he had given a sufficient demonstration of their emptiness, vanity, and insufficiency, in the cross of Christ, 2Cor 4.16-18.²

¹ **1Joh 2:15** Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. ¹⁶ For all that is in the world — the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life — is not of the Father but is of the world.

² **2Cor 4:16** Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward *man* is being renewed day by day. ¹⁷ For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, ¹⁸ while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal.

Where to so fast, my friend? What is the meaning of this rising so early and going to bed late, eating the bread of carefulness? Why this diligence, why these contrivances, why these savings and hoardings of riches and wealth? To what end is all this care and counsel? "Alas!" says one, "it is to get enough in and of this world for me and my children — to prefer them, to raise an estate for them which, if not so great as others, may yet be sufficient to give them some satisfaction in their lives and some reputation in the world." These are fair pretenses; nor would I ever discourage any from the exercise of industry in their lawful callings. Yet I know that with many, this is but a pretense and covering for a shameful engagement of their affections to the world. Therefore, in all these things, be persuaded sometimes to have an eye to Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith. ^{Heb 12.2} Behold how he is set before us in the gospel: poor, despised, reproached, persecuted, nailed to the cross, and all *by this world*. Whatever your designs and aims, let his cross continually interpose between your affections and this world.

If you are believers, your hopes are within a few days to be with him forevermore. You must give an account of yourselves to Him, and what you have done in this world. Will it be acceptable to Him to declare what you have saved of this world, what you have gained, what you have preserved and embraced yourselves in, and what you have left behind you? Was this any part of his employment and business in this world? Has he left us an example for any such course? That's why no man can set his affections on things here below, who has any regard for the pattern of Christ, or is in any measure influenced by the power and efficacy of his cross. "My love is crucified," said a holy martyr of old.¹ The one whom his soul loved was crucified, and in Him his own love for all things here below was crucified. Do you, by contrast, find your affections ready to be engaged to, or too entangled with the things of this world? Are your desires of increasing them, your hopes of keeping them, your fears of losing them, your love for them and delight in them, operative in your minds, possessing your thoughts and influencing your conversations? Turn aside a little while, and by faith contemplate the life and death of the Son of God. It will be a blessed mirror where you may see what contemptible things they are which you perplex yourselves about. Oh, that any of us should love or esteem the things of this world — the power, riches, goods, or reputation of it — who have a spiritual view of them in the cross of Christ!

Maybe it will be said that the circumstances mentioned were *necessary to the Lord Christ*, with respect to the especial work he had to do as the Savior and Redeemer of the church. And therefore it doesn't follow that *we* should be poor and lack all things, as he did. I confess it doesn't; and therefore all along I make an allowance for honest industry in our callings. But what does follow unavoidably from this, is that what he forewent and trampled on for our sake, should not be the object of our affections; nor can such affections prevail in us if he dwells in our hearts by faith.

2. He has done the same *in his dealings with the apostles*, and generally with all who have been most dear to him and instrumental to the interest of his glory in the world, especially since life and immortality were brought to light by the gospel. He had great work to do by the apostles, and it was of the greatest use to his interest, and kingdom. Laying the foundations of the glorious kingdom of Christ in the world was committed to them. Who wouldn't think that he would provide for them, if not principalities or popedoms, at least archbishoprics and bishoprics, with other good ecclesiastical dignities and preferments? By these they might have been made fit to converse with princes, and been freed from the contempt of the vulgar. But Infinite Wisdom otherwise disposed of them and their concerns in this world. For God was pleased to exercise them with the common afflictions and calamities of this life, which he makes use of to reduce the sweetness of present enjoyments; so they lived and died in a condition of poverty, distress, persecution, and reproach. God presented them as examples for *other* ends — namely, of light, grace, zeal, and holiness in their lives — so as to manifest of how little concern the abundance of all things here below is to

¹ Ignatius, 3rd bishop of Antioch (d. 110), walking towards his martyrdom. "Now I begin to be a disciple ... Let fire and cross, flocks of beasts, broken bones, dismemberment ... come upon me, so long as I attain to Jesus Christ." — WHG

our own blessedness, or to an interest in his love; and also that the lack of them all may consist with the highest participation in His love and favor:

1Cor 4.9, 11-13, “I think that God has displayed us, the apostles, *last*, as appointed to death; for we are made a spectacle to the world, and to angels, and to men... Even to this present hour, we both hunger, and thirst, and are naked, and are buffeted, and have no certain dwelling-place; and we labor, working with our own hands. Being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we suffer it; being defamed, we entreat. We are made as the filth of the world, and are the offscouring of all things to this day.”

And if the consideration of this has no weight with others, undoubtedly it ought to be so with those who are called to preach the gospel, and are the successors to the apostles. There can be nothing more uncouth, absurd, and shameful, nothing more opposite to the intimation of the wisdom and will of God in his dealings with those first and most honorable dispensers of it, than for such persons to seek and follow greedily after secular advantages in worldly power, riches, wealth, and honor. Hence, in former ages there was an endeavor to separate those persons who were by any means dedicated to the ministry of the gospel, from all secular dignities and revenues. Indeed, some maintained that they were to enjoy nothing of their own, but were to live on alms or the free contributions of the people. But this was quickly condemned as heresy, by Wycliffe and others. Another sort said they would pretend to this only for themselves, and would not oblige others to the same rule. This produced swarms of begging friars, whom those of the church who were in possession of wealth and power, thought it fitting to laugh at, and let alone. In recent years, this contest is at an end. The clergy have happily gotten the victory, and esteem that all is due them that they can obtain by any means; nor is there any greater crime than for a man to be otherwise minded. But these things are not our present concern. From the beginning it was not so; it is good if men, in this way, are able to maintain the frame of mind inquired after, which is life and peace.

3. God continues to cast contempt on these things, by always giving incomparably *the greatest portion of them to the vilest men*, His own avowed enemies. This was a temptation under the old covenant, but is highly instructive under the new. None will judge those things to be of real value which a wise man daily throws to swine, making little or no use of them in his family. Those monsters of men, Nero and Heliogabalus,¹ had more interest in and more power over the things of this world, than the best of men ever had — such villains in nature, so pernicious to human society, that their *not-being* was in the interest of mankind; yet more of the world was poured on them than they knew either how to enjoy, possess, use, or abuse. Look at all the principal treasures and powers of this world that was in the hand of one of these monsters, and there disposed of by divine providence, and you may see at what rate God values them.

In our own day, the greatest, most noble, wealthy, and fruitful parts of the earth are given to the great Turk, with some other eastern potentates, either Mohammedans or Pagans, who are prepared for eternal destruction. If we look nearer to home, we may see in whose hands is the power of the chief nations of Europe, and to what end it is used. The utmost of what some Christian professors among ourselves are intent and designing upon, as that which would render them wondrously happy in their own apprehensions — if you put hundreds of them together, it would not match the waste made by those forementioned beasts every day.

Doesn't God proclaim in this, that the things of this world are not to be valued or esteemed? If they were so, and had *a real worth in themselves*, would the holy and righteous God so distribute them? Most of those whom he loves, who enjoy his favor, not only have comparatively the least share of them, but are exercised with all the evils that the destitution and lack of them can be accompanied with. In the meantime, His open and avowed enemies have more than they know

¹ Elagabalus or Antoninus (c. 203–222), Roman Emperor (218). Named after the Arab sun god Elagabalus, whom he decadently served as high priest. He offended everyone with his various perversions, and was shortly assassinated.

what to do with. Who would set his heart and affections on those things which God pours into the bosoms of the vilest men, to be a snare to them here and an aggravation of their condemnation forever? It seems that you may go and take the world, and take the curse, death, and hell along with it; but “what will it profit a man to gain the whole world and lose his own soul?”^{Mat 16.26} What can any man do upon considering this — who wouldn’t forego all his [earthly] hopes and expectations from God — but retreat to the faith of things spiritual and eternal, as containing an excellency in them which is incomparably above all that he enjoyed here below?

4. *God continues to give perpetual instances of their uncertainty and unsatisfactoriness, in the utter disappointment of men who have had expectations from them.* The ways of doing this are so varied, and the instances so multiplied, that most men in the world — unless they are like the fool in the Gospel, ^{Luk 12.19f} who told his soul to take its ease for many years, because his barns were full — live in perpetual fears and apprehensions that they will quickly lose whatever they enjoy, or are under the power of stupid security. There is such an account of this consideration, given by the wise man, that nothing can be added to it, and no reason or experience can contradict it (Ecclesiastes 2).¹ By these and like ways, God casts contempt on all things here below, revealing the folly and falseness of the promises which the world uses to allure our affections to itself. This, therefore, is to be laid as the foundation in all our considerations of what or whom we will cling to by our affections: that God has not only declared the insufficiency of these things to give us that rest and happiness which we seek, but has also poured contempt on them in his holy, wise disposal of them in the world.

Secondly, God has added to their vanity *by shortening the lives of men*, reducing their continuance in this world to so short and uncertain a season that it is impossible to take any solid satisfaction in what they enjoy here below. So it is expressed by the psalmist, “Behold, you have made my days as a hand-breadth; and my age is as nothing before you.”^{Psa 39.5} Hence he draws two conclusions:

1. That “every man in his best state is altogether vanity,” Psa 39.5.
2. That “every man walks in a vain show (*as a shadow*); surely they are disquieted in vain; he heaps up riches, and doesn’t know who will gather them,” Psa 39.6.

The uncertainty and shortness of the lives of men render all their endeavors and contrivances about earthly things both vain and foolish. When men lived eight or nine hundred years, they had opportunity to suck out all the sweetness that was in creature-comforts, to make large provisions of them, and to have long projections about them. But when they did, they all resulted in that violence, oppression, and wickedness, which brought the flood on the world of ungodly men. *And it still so abides.* The more of and the longer men enjoy these things without the sovereign preservative of grace, the more they will abound in sin and provocation of God. But God has reduced the life of man to the small pittance of seventy years, casting whatever may fall out from a longer continuance, into travail and sorrow. Besides, for most that space is shortened by various and innumerable incidences and occasions. Therefore, in these seventy years, consider how long it is before men begin to have a taste or gusto of the things of this life — how many things fall cross to it, to make us weary of them before the end of our days; how few among us (not one in a thousand) attain that age; what is the uncertainty of men continuing their lives till the next day — and we will see that the holy, wise God has left no such season for their enjoyment, that might put a high value on them. And when, on the other hand, it is remembered that this man, who is of such short continuance in this world, is yet made for *eternity* — whether eternal blessedness or

¹ e.g., **Ecc 2:10-11** Whatever my eyes desired I did not keep from them. I did not withhold my heart from any pleasure, For my heart rejoiced in all my labor; And this was my reward from all my labor. ¹¹ Then I looked on all the works that my hands had done And on the labor in which I had toiled; And indeed all was vanity and grasping for the wind. *There was no profit under the sun.*

misery, which state depends wholly on his interest on things above, and setting his affections on them — they must forfeit all their reason, as well as bid defiance to the grace of God, who give these up to things below.

Thirdly, God has openly and fully declared *the danger in these things*, as to their enjoyment and use. And yet what multitudes of souls miscarry by an inordinate adherence to them! For they are the matter of those temptations by which the souls of men are ruined forever — the fuel that supplies the fire of their lusts, until they are consumed by it.

Men under the power of spiritual convictions don't fall into sin, don't fail eternally, except by the means of temptation; that is the mire in which this rush (this plant) grows. Others, who live and die in the madness and wildness of nature, without any restraint in their minds from the power of convictions — they need no external temptations, but only opportunities to exert their lusts. But for those who are by any means convinced of sin, righteousness, and judgment, so as to order their lives with respect to the sense they have of them — they don't fall into *actual sin except upon temptations*. Whatever it is which prevails with, causes, and occasions a convinced person to sin, *that is temptation*. Therefore, this is the great means of the ruin of the souls of men.

Now, though there are many *principles* of temptation, many *causes* that actually concur to its efficacy — such as sin, Satan, and other men — yet the *matter* of almost all ruinous temptations is taken from this world, and the things of this world. From there Satan takes all his darts; from there evil men derive all the ways and means by which they corrupt others; and from there is taken all the fuel of sin and lust. And adding to this evil, *all* that is in the world contributes its utmost to this. “All that is in the world” is “the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life,” 1Joh 2:16.

[What is a temptation] is not a direct, formal enumeration of the things that are in the world, nor a distribution of them under several heads, but it is from the principal lusts of the minds of men, to which *all* things in the world are subservient. Therefore, not only the *matter* of all temptations is taken from the world, but *everything* that is in the world is apt and fit to be abused to that end. For it would be easy to show that there is nothing desirable or valuable in this whole world, that is not reducible to its subservience to one of these lusts, and applicable to the interest and service of temptations and sins.

When men hear of these things, they are apt to say, “*Let the dream be for those who are openly wicked, and the interpretation of it for those who are profligate in sin.*” It may be that this is so for unclean persons, drunkards, oppressors, proud, ambitious persons. But as to themselves (they say), they use the things of this world with a due moderation, so that they are not a snare to them! But they must own that for whatever end they are used, if the affections of men are set upon them, one way or another, there is nothing in the world that is not a snare and temptation. However, we should be very careful how we adhere to or undervalue that which is the cause and means of the ruin of multitudes of souls. God designs by the warnings given to us about the use of means, to teach us the vanity and danger of fixing our affections on things below.

Fourthly, Things are so ordered in the holy, wise dispensation of God's providence, that *it requires much spiritual wisdom to distinguish between the use and the abuse of these things* — between a lawful care about them, and an inordinate clinging to them. Few rightly distinguish here; and therefore many will find their great mistake in these things at the last day. [For] the

disappointments that they will fall under — as to what concerns their earthly enjoyments, and the use of what they were entrusted with — see Mat 25.34, to the end of the chapter.¹

It is granted that there is a lawful use of these things, a lawful care and industry about them. So too it is acknowledged, and cannot be denied, that there is an *abuse* of them, springing from an inordinate love and clinging to them. But here men deceive themselves, taking their measures by the most crooked, uncertain rules. Some make their own inclinations the rule and measure of what is lawful and allowable; some take the example of others; some, the course of the world; some, their own real or pretended necessities. They confess there is an inordinate love of those things, and an abuse of them, in excesses of various sorts, which the *Scripture plainly affirms*, and which *experience openly testifies to*. But as to *their own* state and circumstances, their care, love, and industry are all allowable (of course). What influences all these persons is self-love, which inveterate, corrupt affections and false reasonings apply to these occasions.

Hence we have men approving of themselves as just stewards of their enjoyments, while others judge them to be hard, covetous, and earthly-minded, in no way laying out what they are entrusted with to the glory of God in any due proportion. Others also don't think amiss of themselves in this kind, who live in palpable excesses, either of pride of life, or sensual pleasures, vain apparel, or the like. So, in particular, most men in their feastings and entertainments, walk in direct contempt of the rule which our Savior gives in that case, Luk 14.12-14,² and yet approve themselves in it.

But what if any of us are *mistaken in our rule and its application* to our conditions? Men at sea may have a fair gale of wind by which they may sail freely and smoothly for a time; and yet, instead of being brought into a port by it, they are at last tossed onto destructive shelves or rocks. What if that which we esteem to be allowable love, care, and industry, proved to be the fruit of earthly affections, inordinate and predominant in us? What if we miss in our measures, and that which we approve of in ourselves, were to be *disapproved of by God*? We are cast forever; we belong to the world; and we will perish with the world.

It may be said, “If it is so difficult to distinguish between these things — namely, the *lawful use* of things here below, and their *abuse*; the allowable industry about them, and the inordinate love of them — knowledge of which our eternal condition depends on, it is impossible for men not to spend their time in solicitous anxiety, not knowing if they have rightly discharged their duty.”

Ans. 1. I press these things no further at present, than to allow *how dangerous a thing it is for anyone to incline in his affections for the things of this world*, in which an excess is ruinous and hardly discoverable. Surely no wise man would freely and frequently venture to the edge of such a precipice. He will be jealous of his measures, lest they not hold by the rule of the word. A due sense of it is the best preservative of the soul from clinging inordinately to things below. And when God in any instance, by afflictions or otherwise, shows believers their transgression in this, and how they have exceeded, Job 36.8,9,³ it makes them careful for the future. They will now or never be diligent, lest they fall under the peremptory rule, *do not love the world*, 1Joh 2.15.

Ans. 2. When the soul is upright and sincere, there is no need in this case for any more *solicitousness or anxiety of mind* than there is with other duties; but when it is biased and acted

¹ **Mat 25.34ff** “Then the King will say to those on His right hand, ‘Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: ³⁵ ‘for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; etc.

² **Luk 14:12** Then He also said to him who invited Him, “When you give a dinner or a supper, do not ask your friends, your brothers, your relatives, nor rich neighbors, lest they also invite you back, and you be repaid. ¹³ “But when you give a feast, invite *the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind*. ¹⁴ “And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you; for you shall be repaid at the resurrection of the just.”

³ **Job 36:8** And if *they are* bound in fetters, Held in the cords of affliction, ⁹ Then He tells them their work and their transgressions— That they have acted defiantly.

by self-love, and its stronger inclinations to things present, it is impossible for men to enjoy solid peace, or be free from severe reflections on them by their own consciences, in those seasons in which they are awakened to their duty and the consideration of their state; nor do I have anything to offer for their relief. With others it is not so. And therefore I will so far digress in this place, as to give some directions to those who, in sincerity, would be satisfied in this lawful use and enjoyment of earthly things, so as not to adhere to them with inordinate affection:

1. Remember always, that you are not *proprietors* or *absolute possessors of those things*, but only *stewards* of them. With respect to men, you are or may be upright proprietors of what you enjoy; but with respect to Him who is the great possessor of heaven and earth, you are but stewards. We are to give an account of this stewardship, as we are taught in the parable, Luk 16.1, 2.¹ This rule always attended to, will be a blessed guide in all instances and occasions of duty.

But if a man is left in trust with houses and large possessions, as a steward for the right lord, owner, and proprietor of them, if he falls into a pleasing dream that they are all his own, and uses them accordingly, it will be a woeful surprise for him when he is called to account for all that he has received and laid out, whether he wishes or not, and when indeed he has nothing to pay. It will scarce be otherwise with those at the Great Day who forget the trust which is committed to them, and suppose they may do what they will with what they call *their own*.

2. There is nothing, in the ways of *getting, enjoying, or using of these things*, that doesn't give its own evidence to spiritual wisdom, whether it is within the bounds of duty or not. Men are not lightly deceived in this, except when they are evidently under the power of corrupt affections, or won't attend at all to themselves and the language of their own consciences. It is a man's own fault if he doesn't know what he exceeds in.

A due examination of ourselves in the sight of God, with respect to these things, the frame and actings of our minds in them, will greatly check our corrupt inclinations and reveal the folly of those reasonings by which we deceive ourselves into the love of earthly things, or justify ourselves in it, and bring to light the secret principle of *self-love*, which is the root of all this evil.

3. If you want to be able to make a right judgment in this case, be sure you have another object for your affections, which has a predominant interest in your minds, and which will evidence itself to have this on all occasions. However observant a man may be of himself as to all outward duties required of him with respect to these earthly things, let him be liberal in the disposal of them on all occasions; let him be watchful against all intemperance and excesses in the use of them. Yet, if he doesn't have another object for his affections, which has a prevailing influence on them — if they are not set upon the things above, one way or the other, then it is the world that possesses his heart: for the affections of our minds will and must be placed chiefly on things below or things above. There will be a *predominant* love in us. And therefore, even if all our actions testify to another frame, if God and the things of God are not the *principal* object of our affections, one way or the other, *we belong to the world*. This is what is taught so expressly by our Savior,

Luk 16.9-13, "And I say to you, Make yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness; so that, when you fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations. He that is faithful in that which is least, is faithful also in much: and he that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much. If therefore you have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true riches? And if you have not been faithful in that which is another man's, who will give you that which is your own? No servant can serve two masters: for either he will hate the

¹ **Luk 16:1** He also said to His disciples: "There was a certain rich man who had a steward, and an accusation was brought to him that this man was wasting his goods. ² So he called him and said to him, 'What is this I hear about you? Give an account of your stewardship, for you can no longer be steward.'

one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. you cannot serve both God and mammon."

4. Labor continually to *mortify your affections* to the things of this world. In the state of corrupted nature, they are set and fixed on them. Nor will any reasonings or considerations effectually divert or remove them in a due manner, unless they are mortified to the world by the cross of Christ. Whatever change is *otherwise* wrought in them, it will be of no advantage to us. It is mortification alone that will take them away from earthly things, to the glory of God. Hence the apostle, having thus charged us, "Set your affection on things above, and not on things on the earth," Col 3,2, adds this as the only way and means to do so: "Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth," verse 5. Let no man think that his affections will fall away from earthly things of their own accord. Their keenness and sharpness may be abated in many things by the decay of their natural powers in age and the like; they may be accompanied by frequent disappointments, by sicknesses, pains, and afflictions, as we will see; they may be willing for a reallocation of earthly enjoyments, so as to have the *reputation* of being mortified (*i.e.*, to still cling to the world, but under another form and appearance); or they may be so startled by convictions, as to gladly do many things that belong to another frame. But on one pretense or other, under one appearance or other, they will forever adhere or cling to earthly things, unless they are mortified to them through faith in the blood and cross of Christ, Gal 6.14.¹ Whatever thoughts you may have of yourselves in this matter, unless you have the experience of a work of mortification on your affections, you can have no refreshing ground of assurance that you are spiritually minded in anything.

5. In all the instances of duty belonging to your stewardship of earthly things, *attend diligently to the rule of the word*. Without this, the grace exhorted to may be abused. Of old, under a pretense of a relinquishing the things of this world, because of the danger in adhering to them, their own superstition and the craft of other men prevailed with many to part with all they had, to serve others who were no better, and perhaps not so good as themselves.² This evil wholly arose from lack of attendance to the rule of truth, which gives no such direction in ordinary cases. But not much is seen these days of an excess in this kind. On the other hand, in all instances of duties of this nature, most men's minds are habitually influenced with pretenses, reasonings, and considerations that tip the scales, as to what they ought to do in this duty, proportionally, on the side of the world. To be safe, you must, in all instances of duty — as in works of charity, piety, and compassion — give authority in and over your souls to the rule of the word. Let neither self, nor unbelief, nor the custom and example of others, be heard to speak; but let the rule alone be attended to, and yield obedience to what that says.

Unless these things are found in us, none of us — no man living, if it is not so with him — can have any refreshing evidence or assurance that he is not under the power of an inordinate, or even predominant love for this world.

And indeed, to add a little more on the occasion of this digression, it is a sad thing to have this exception made against the state of any man on just grounds, "Yes, but *he loves the world*." He is sober and industrious, he is constant in duties of religion; it may be, he is an earnest preacher of them; a man of sound principles, and blameless as to the excesses of life — "but *he loves the world!*" The question is, How does this appear? It may be, that what you say is but one of those evil surmises which all things are filled with. Therefore, I'm not speaking at all to countenance the rash judging of others, which none are more prone to do than those who, one way or other, are eminently guilty *themselves*. I would rather have every man judge himself, so that none of us are condemned by the Lord. If notwithstanding the things mentioned, any of us center in self, which

¹ **Gal 6:14** But God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.

² Mendicant monks begged for a living, receiving money for prayers, funerals, and other religious "services." — WHG

is supplied and filled with the world — if we prefer self above all other things, and aim at the satisfaction of self in whatever we do good or bad, and are useless to the only good and blessed end of these earthly things, in supplying the wants of others according to the proportions with which we are entrusted — it is to be feared that the world and the things in it have the principal interest in our affections.

And the danger is still greater for those who divert to the other extreme. Such are those who, in the pride of life, vanity in apparel, excess in drinking, pampering the flesh every day, tread close on the heels of the world, if not fully keeping company with it. It is altogether in vain for such persons to countenance themselves with an appearance of other graces in them, or the sedulous performance of other duties. This one rule will eternally prevail against them: “If any man loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.” ^{1Joh 2.15} And by the way, let men take heed how they walk in any instance against the known judgment and practice of the wiser or more experienced sort of Christians; this would be to their regret and sorrow, if not to their offense and scandal. And let them not walk in any way to which they might win the consent of their own light and conscience, by reasonings and considerations that carry no weight in the balance of the sanctuary. It is this way and not otherwise with all those who, under a profession of religion, indulge excesses in which they are conformed to the world.

Fifthly, God makes a *hedge* against the excess of the affections of rational men who are in any way enlightened as to the things of this world, by suffering men generally to *carry on the use of them*, and *be carried by the abuse of them*, into actings so filthy, so abominable, so ridiculous, as reason itself cannot help but abhor. Men transform themselves by them into beasts and monsters, as might be manifested by all sorts of instances. Hence the wise man prayed against riches, lest he not be able to manage the temptations with which they are accompanied, Pro 30.8,9.

Lastly, To close this matter, and show us what we are to expect in case we set our affections on things here below, and thereby give them a predominant interest in our hearts, God has positively determined and declared that if this is so, he will have nothing to do with us, nor will He accept those affections which we pretend we can and do spare for Him and spiritual things. Some may say or think, “If we abstain from open sins, if we abhor the lewdness and uncleanness of men in the world, if we are constant in religious duties, and give ourselves up to walk after the strictest sort in religion, like Paul in his Pharisaism, may we not find acceptance with God, even if our hearts cling inordinately to the things of this world?” I say, God has peremptorily determined the contrary. And if other arguments will not prevail with us, he leaves us at last to this, “Go, love the world and the things of the world; but know assuredly that you do it to the eternal loss of your souls.” (see 1Joh 2.15; Jas 4.4)

I have given these few instances of the arguments and motives by which God is pleased to deter us from fixing our affections on things here below; and most of them are only those that He makes use of in the administration of his providence. There are two other heads of things that offer themselves for our consideration:

1. The *ways, means, arguments, and enticements*, which the world makes use of to draw, keep, and secure the affections of men to itself.
2. The *secret, powerful efficacy of grace*, in taking the heart away from these things, and turning and drawing it to God, with the arguments and motives that the Holy Spirit makes use of in and by the word to this end.

In these we must show what is the act of conquering grace, by which the heart is finally prevailed on to choose and adhere to God in immutable love. But these things cannot be handled in any measure, according to their nature and importance, without such lengthy discourse as I cannot divert to here. I will therefore proceed to what is the proper and peculiar subject before us.

CHAPTER 12. WHAT IS REQUIRED TO MAKE OUR AFFECTIONS SPIRITUAL.

What is required in and to our affections, so that they may be spiritual — A three-fold work on the affections is described.

TO declare the interest of our affections in this frame of being spiritually minded, and what they contribute to it, I will do these three things: — *First*, Declare *what is required that our affections may be spiritual*, in which lies the foundation of the whole duty; *secondly*, What are *their actings* when they are spiritual; *thirdly*, What are *the means* by which they may be kept and preserved in that frame; with sundry other things of like nature.

How our affections are concerned in or belong to the frame of mind inquired about, was declared before. Without spiritual *affections* we cannot be spiritually *minded*. And that our affections may be spiritual, three things are required:

- I.** Their principle;
- II.** Their object;
- III.** The way and manner of their application to their proper object by virtue of that principle.

I. As to the principle acting in them, so that our affections may be spiritual and the spring of our being spiritually minded, it is required that they be *changed, renewed, and inlaid with grace, spiritual and supernatural*. To clear the sense of this, we must consider a little what is their state by nature, and then by what means they may be worked on as to a change or renovation. For they are like some things which in themselves and their own nature are poisonous; but being corrected, and receiving a due temperament from a mixture of other ingredients, they become medicinal and of excellent use.

By nature our affections, all of them, are depraved and corrupted. Nothing in the whole nature of man, no power or faculty of the soul, has fallen under greater disorder and depravation by the entrance of sin, than our affections. In and by them the heart is wholly gone and turned away from God, Tit 3.3.¹ It would be a long work to set forth this depravation of our affections, nor does it belong to our present design. I will briefly observe a few things concerning it, to make way for what is proposed concerning their change:

1. This depravation of our affections by the fall, is the only corruption of our nature that is evident to reason, or to the light of nature itself. The wise among the heathen both saw it, and complained of it. They found a weakness in the mind, but saw nothing of its darkness and depravation as to things spiritual. But they were sensible enough of this disorder and tumult of the affections in things moral, which renders the minds of men “like the troubled sea, whose waters cast up mire and dirt.” Isa 57.20 This greatly aggravates the neglect of those who aren’t sensible of it in themselves, because it is discernible in the light of nature.

2. The affections, as depraved, are the seat and subject of all lusts, both of the flesh and of the spirit; indeed, lust or evil concupiscence is nothing but the irregular motion and acting of our affections as depraved, defiled, and corrupted, Rom 7.8.² Hence no sin can be mortified without a change wrought in the affections.

3. Affections are the spring, root, and cause of all actual sin in the world, Mat 15:19. The “evil heart,” in the Scripture, is the corrupt affections of it, with the imaginations of the mind, by which

¹ **Tit 3:3** For we ourselves were also once foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving various lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another. **Rom 8:7** the carnal mind is enmity against God; **Jam 4:4** friendship with the world is enmity with God.

² **Rom 7:8** But sin, taking opportunity by the commandment, produced in me all *manner of evil* desire.

they are excited and acted, Gen 6.5. ¹ At this time, these are what fill the whole world with wickedness, darkness, confusion, and terror; and we may learn what is their force and efficacy from these effects. So the nature of the plague is most evident when we see thousands dying of it every week.

4. Affections are the way and means by which the soul applies itself to all sinful objects and actings. Hence they are called our “members,” our “earthly members;” because as the body applies itself to its operations by its members, so the soul applies itself to what belongs to it by its affections, Rom 6.13; Col 3.5. ²

5. They will not be under the conduct of the mind, its light or convictions. Rebellion against the light of the mind is the very form by which their corruption conducts itself, Job 24.13.³ Let the apprehensions of the mind and its notions of good and evil be what they will, affections reject them, and lead the soul in pursuit of their inclinations. Hence, no natural man may in any measure answer the light of his mind, or the convictions of his understanding; rather, he sees and approves of “better things,” following those that are worse. There is no greater spiritual judgment than for men to be given up to themselves and their own evil affections, Rom 1.26. ⁴

Many other instances might be given of the greatness of that depravation which our affections are fallen under by sin; these may suffice for our present purpose.

In general, this depravation of our affections by nature may be reduced to two heads:

1. *An utter aversion to God and all spiritual things.* In this lies the spring of all that dislike of God and his ways that the hearts of men are filled with; indeed, they not only produce an aversion to them and a dislike of them, but they fill the mind with an enmity against them. Therefore men say in their hearts to God, “Depart from us; for we don’t desire the knowledge of your ways. What is the Almighty, that we should serve him? and what profit would we have, if we pray to him?” Job 21.14,15. See Rom 1.28, 8:7. ⁵

2. *An inordinate clinging to things vain, earthly, and sensual,* causing the soul to engage in the pursuit of them, as the horse rushes into battle. ^{Jer 8.6}

While our affections are in this state and condition, we are far from being spiritually minded, nor is it possible to engage them in an adherence to or delight in spiritual things. In this state they may be wrought upon in two ways, and yet not be so renewed as to be serviceable to this end:

1. There may be various *temporary impressions* made on them. Sometimes this is done by the preaching of the word. Upon this, men may hear it with joy, and do many things gladly. Sometimes it is done by judgments, dangers, sicknesses, apprehensions of the approach of death, Psa 128.35-37. For a time, these things take men away from their greedy delight in earthly things, and the pursuit of the interest of lust in making provision for the flesh. On many other occasions, from a great variety of causes, there may be temporary impressions made on the affections, that seem for a time to have turned the stream of them. And upon that, we have many who on any given day will be wholly for God, as it were — resolved to forsake sin and all its pleasures . But the next day

¹ **Gen 6:5** Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man *was* great in the earth, and *that* every intent of the thoughts of his heart *was* only evil continually.

² **Rom 6:13** do not present your members *as* instruments of unrighteousness to sin; **Col 3:5** put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.

³ **Job 24:13** There are those who rebel against the light; They do not know its ways Nor abide in its paths.

⁴ **Rom 1:26** For this reason God gave them up to vile passions. For even their women exchanged the natural use for what is against nature.

⁵ **Rom 1:28** And even as they did not like to retain God in *their* knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting;

they return to all their former excesses. For this is the effect of those impressions: that ordinarily men are predominantly acted (motivated) by love, desire, and delight, which lead them to act according to the true natural principles of the soul, but now for a time they are acted by fear and dread, which put a kind of force on all their inclinations. Upon this, for a time they have other thoughts of good and evil, of things eternal and temporal, of God and their own duty. And then some of them may and do persuade themselves there is a change in their hearts and affections, which there is *not*. It's like a man who persuades himself that he has lost his fever because his present fit is over. The next trial of temptation carries them away again, to the world and sin.

Sometimes there are sudden impressions made on our spiritual affections, which are always of great advantage to the soul, renewing its engagements to God and duty. So it was with Jacob, in Gen 28.16-20; so it often is with believers in hearing the word, and on other occasions. On all of them, they renew their clingings to God, with love and delight. But the effect of these impressions on *unrenewed* affections, are neither spiritual nor durable. Indeed, they are for the most part, but checks given to the raging of their lusts, in the providence of God, Psa 9:20.

2. They are liable to a *habitual change*. The experience of all ages gives testimony to this. There may be a habitual change wrought in the passions and affections of the mind, as to the inordinate and violent pursuit of their inclinations, without any gracious renovation of them. Education, philosophy, or reason, long afflictions, spiritual light and gifts, have wrought this change. So Saul, upon his call to be king, became "another man." Persons who are naturally passionate and furious, have been made sedate and moderate by this; and those who have been sensual have become temperate; yes, and haters of religion come to be professors of it. All these things, and many more of like nature, have proceeded from a change wrought upon the affections only, while the mind, will, and conscience, have been totally unsanctified.

When it is alone, no *man ever became spiritually minded by this change*; for there are *two* parts of the depravation of our affections: that by which they are turned away from God, and that by which they inordinately cling to other things. Their change *principally*, if not *only*, respects the latter. They are brought into some order with respect to present things. The mind is not continually tossed up and down by them like the waves of the troubled sea, which cast up mire and dirt. Changed affections don't carry those in whom they occur, into vicious, sensual actions; rather, they allow them to show virtue in moderation, sobriety, temperance, fidelity, and usefulness in several ways, to be their design. It is admirable to think what degrees of eminency in all sorts of moral virtues even many among the heathens attained, upon this one principle of *moderating the affections*. But as to their aversion to God and spiritual things, in the true spiritual notion of them, *they are not cured by this change*; or at least, this change may exist, and yet this latter effect not be wrought.

Again; this alteration only *turns the course or stream of men's affections*; it doesn't change their nature. They are the same in their spring and fountain as they ever were; only they are habituated to another course than what they are inclined to of themselves. You may take a young whelp of the fiercest and most savage creature, like a tiger or a wolf, and by custom or usage make it as tame and harmless as any domestic creature — a dog, or the like. But although it may be turned into quite another way or course of acting than what it was inclined to of itself, yet its nature is not changed. And therefore frequently, on some occasion, opportunity, or provocation, it will fall into its own savage inclination; and having tasted of the blood of creatures, it will never be reclaimed. So it is with the depraved affections of men with respect to their change. Their streams are turned, they are habituated to a new course; but their nature is not altered, at least not from rational to spiritual, from earthly to heavenly. Yet this is what was most beautiful and desirable in nature — the glory of it, and the utmost of its attainments. Whoever has by any means proceeded to such a moderation of his affections as to render him kind, benign, patient, useful, preferring public good before private, ordinary and temperate in all things, will rise up in judgment against

those who, professing themselves to be under the conduct of the light of grace, are yet morose, angry, selfish, and worldly. They manifest that their affections are not subdued by the power of that grace. Therefore, to be spiritually minded, there is yet another work required upon our affections, which is their *internal renovation*, by which not only the course of their *actings* is changed, but their *nature* is altered and spiritually renewed. I intend that which is expressed in this great evangelical promise:

Isa 11.6-9, “The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them. And the cow and the bear shall feed; their young ones shall lie down together: and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. And the sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice’ den.¹ They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain.”

A change and alteration is promised in the natures, principles, and first inclinations of the worst and most savage sinners who pass under the power of gospel grace.

This is what is required of us in a way of duty: Eph 4.23, “Be renewed in the spirit of your mind.” There is a renovation of the mind itself, by the communication of spiritual, saving light and understanding to it, which I treated elsewhere at large. (See Rom 12.2; Eph 1.17,18).² But “the spirit of the mind” — that by which it is enlivened, led, and disposed to its actings — *that* is to be renewed also. “The spirit of the mind” in this place, is opposed to “the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts,” or depraved affections, Eph 4.22. These affections, therefore, are that “spirit of the mind” which inclines, bends, and leads it to act suitably toward its inclinations, which is what it means to be *renewed*. And when our affections are inclined by the saving grace of the Holy Spirit, *then* they are renewed, and not otherwise. No other change will give them a spiritual renovation. By this renewal, those things which are only natural affections in themselves, become fruits of the Spirit in those who believe: Gal 5.22,23, “The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace,” etc. They continue the same as they were in their essence, substance, and natural powers; but they are changed in their properties, qualities, and inclinations, whenever a new nature is given to them. So the waters at Marah were still the same waters before and after their cure. But of themselves, and in their own nature, they were bitter, such that the people could not drink them. Upon casting a tree into them, they were made sweet and useful, Exo 15:25. So it was with the waters of Jericho, which were cured by casting salt into them, 2Kng 2:19-22. Our affections continue the same as they were in their nature and essence; but they are so cured by grace, that their properties, qualities, and inclinations, are all cleansed or renewed. The tree or salt that is cast into these waters, by which the cure is wrought, is the love of God above all, proceeding from faith in Him by Christ Jesus.

¹ Cockatrice: a legendary monster hatched by a reptile from a rooster’s egg; able to kill with a glance. The word is now translated *cobra* or *serpent*. — WHG

² **Rom 12:2** And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what *is* that good and acceptable and perfect will of God. **Eph 1:17** that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, ¹⁸ the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints.

CHAPTER 13. HOW THE RENOVATION OF OUR AFFECTIONS IS EVIDENCED.

The work of the renovation of our affections — How it is differentiated from any other impression on or change wrought in them, and how it is evidenced to be so — The first instance, in the universality accompanying affections that are spiritually renewed — The order of the exercise of our affections with respect to their objects.

THAT which is our concern in this, is to inquire about the nature of *that work which has been on our own affections, or in them*, and how it differs from those which, whatever they do or effect, will not render us nor themselves spiritual.

And we ought to use the best of our diligence in this, because the great means by which multitudes delude and deceive their own souls, persuading themselves that there has been an effectual work of the grace of the gospel in them, is the change that they find in their affections — which on many occasions may be without any spiritual renovation:

1. As to the *temporary* and *occasional* impressions on the affections (mentioned before), whether from the word or any other divine warning, by afflictions or mercies, they are common to all sorts of persons. There are some whose “consciences are seared with a hot iron,” 1Tim 4.2, “who” thereupon, “being past feeling” (senseless of all calls, warnings, and rebukes), “have given themselves up to lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness,” Eph 4.19. Such persons, having hardened themselves in a long course of sin, and being given up to a reprobate mind or vile affections, in a way of judgment, may perhaps have no such impressions on their affections on any occasion, as to move them with a sense of things spiritual and eternal. They may be terrified with danger, sudden judgments, and other revelations of the wrath of God from heaven against the ungodliness of men, but they are not drawn to take shelter in thoughts of spiritual things. Nothing but hell will awaken them to a due consideration of themselves and things eternal.

It is otherwise with most men who are not profligate and impudent in sinning. For although they are in a natural condition, a course of sin, and the neglect of known duties, yet by one means or another — most frequently by the preaching of the word — their affections are stirred towards heavenly things.

Sometimes they are afraid, sometimes they have hopes and desires about them. These push them to resolutions, and some temporary endeavors to change their lives — to abstain from sin and to perform holy duties. But, as the prophet complains, “their goodness is like a morning cloud, and like the early dew, it goes away.” Hos 6.4 Yet, many poor ignorant souls deceive themselves by this means, and cry “Peace, peace, when there is no peace.” Jer 6.14 And sometimes they express how affected they are, with complaints about themselves as to their long neglect of spiritual things, so that others may entertain good hopes concerning them; but it all comes to nothing in the trial.

It’s not difficult for spiritual light to distinguish between these *occasional impressions* on the affections, and that *spiritual renovation* which we inquire about. This alone is sufficient to do it: that all of them are temporary and vanishing. They abide “for a while” only, Luk 8.13 as our Savior puts it, and every occasion defeats all their efficacy. They may be frequently *renewed*, but they never *abide*. Some of them pass away immediately, and are utterly lost between the place where they hear the word and their own homes; and in vain they inquire after them again — they are gone forever. Some have a larger continuance, endure longer in the mind, and produce some outward effects. *None* of them will withstand any trial or shock of temptation.

Yet I have something to say to those who have such impressions on their affections, and warnings by them:

(1.) *Don’t despise them*, for God is in them. Although he may not be in them in a way of saving grace, yet he is in them in what may be preparatory to it. They are not common human accidents, but special divine warnings.

(2.) *Labor to retain them*, or a sense of them, on your hearts and consciences. You gained nothing by losing so many of them already; and if you proceed in their neglect, then after a while you will hear of them no more.

(3.) *Put no more in them than belongs to them*. Don't quickly conclude that your state is good because you've been affected by the hearing of the word, or under a sickness, or in danger. Upon this you may think that all is now well with your affections, having what pleases them — until they are wholly immersed in their former security.

2. We may consider the difference between the *habitual change* of the affections described before, and that *renovation by grace* which renders them *spiritual*. And this is of great concern to us all, to inquire into it with diligence. Multitudes are deceived in this, and that is to their ruin. For they resolve their present peace, and build their hopes of eternal life, on a change in themselves that will not abide the trial. Therefore, this difference is to be examined by Scripture light, and the experience of those who believe. And —

(1.) There is a double universality with respect to the spiritual renovation of our affections — that which is *subjective* with respect to the affections themselves; and that which is *objective* with respect to spiritual things.

[1.] Sanctification extends itself to the “whole spirit, soul, and body,” ¹The 5.23. When we say that we are *sanctified in part* only, we're not saying that any part, power, or faculty of the soul is *unsanctified*, but only that the work is not absolutely perfect in any of them. All sin may retain power in some one affection (such as anger, fear, or love) more than all the rest, as to its actual eruptions and effects. Just as one affection may be more eminently sanctified in some than in others, for it may have advantages to this end from men's natural tempers and various outward circumstances. Hence, some find little difficulty in mortifying all other lusts or corruptions in comparison to what they meet with in some *inordinate* affection or corruption. This may be what David referred to in Psa 18.23.¹ I have known persons shining exemplarily in all other graces, who have been barely free from giving great scandal by the excess of their passions, and being easily provoked. Yet they knew that setting themselves to the sincere, vigorous mortification of that disorder is the most eminent pledge of their sincerity in *other* things; for the trial of our self-denial lies in the things that our natural inclinations lie strongest toward. However, as I said, there is no affection in which this renovation is at work, that is not sanctified and renewed; *none* of them is left absolutely to the service of sin and Satan. Therefore, because of the advantages mentioned, sin greatly contends to use some of them to its interest and service in a peculiar manner. Yet they are enabled and made fit for gracious actings; and in their proper seasons, they will display themselves accordingly. There is no affection of the mind from which the soul and conscience have received the greatest damage — *i.e.*, the field on which the contest is waged between sin and grace — that does not have its spiritual use and exercise when the mind is renewed.

There are some who are so inordinately subject to anger, and passionate in it, as if they were absolutely under its power and dominion; yet they also know how to be “angry and sin not,” to be angry at sin in themselves and in others: “What indignation; what revenge!” etc. ²Cor 7.11 Yes, God is sometimes pleased to leave more than the ordinary power of corruption in one affection, that it may be an occasion for the continual exercise of grace in the *other* affections. Yet they are *all* sanctified in their degree, that which is relieved as well as that which relieves. And therefore, the remainder of sin in those who believe is called “the old man,” which is to be crucified in all its members, because of its adherence to the whole person in all its powers and faculties. So too, the grace implanted in our natures is called “the new man,” there being nothing in us that is not seasoned and affected with it. As nothing in our natures escaped the

¹ **Psa 18:23** I was also blameless before Him, And I kept myself from my iniquity.

taint of sin, so nothing in our natures is excepted from the renovation that comes by grace. The one in whom any one affection is utterly unrenewed, has none graciously renewed in him. Let men take heed how they indulge any depraved affection, for it will be an unavoidable impeachment of their sincerity. Don't think to say with Naaman, "God be merciful to me in this thing; in all others I will be for him." ^{2Kng 5.18}

He requires the whole heart, and will have it or none. The chief work of a Christian is to make all his affections, in all their operations, subservient to the life of God, Rom 6.17,18;¹ and he who is wise will keep a continual watch over those affections in which he finds the greatest reluctance to do so. Every affection is originally sanctified according to its use in the life of holiness and obedience.

To be entire for God, to "follow him fully," to "cling to him with purpose of heart," to have the "heart circumcised to love him," is to have *all* our affections renewed and sanctified; without this we can do none of them. When it is otherwise, there is a "double heart," "a heart and a heart," which God abhors: "Their heart is divided; now they shall be found faulty," Hos 10.2.

So it is in the other change mentioned. Whatever is or may be wrought upon our affections when they are not spiritually renewed, *that very change, as to its extent, is not universal*. It does not affect the *whole* mind in all its powers and affections, until a vital prevailing principle and habit of grace is implanted in the soul. Sin will not only radically adhere to all the faculties, powers, and affections, but it will, under any change that may befall them, refer the rule and dominion in some of them to itself. So it was with the young man who came to our Lord Jesus Christ to know what he should do to obtain eternal life, Mar 10,17-22.

There are many who in other things are reduced to moderation, sobriety, and temperance, yet there remains in them "the love of money" to a predominant degree; to them, this is "the root of all evil," as the apostle says. ^{1Tim 6.10} Some "seem to be religious," but they don't "bridle their tongues;" through anger, envy, hatred, and the like, "their religion is vain." ^{Jas 1.26}

Most men, in their several ways of profession, pretend not only to religion, but to *zeal* in it; yet they set no bounds to their affections for earthly enjoyments. Some of old, who subdued their passions and affections most eminently in all other things, were the greatest enemies to and persecutors of the gospel.

Some who seem to have had a mighty change wrought in them by a superstitious devotion, still walk in the spirit of Cain towards all the disciples of Christ — as it is with the principal devotionists of the church of Rome. And elsewhere, we may see some go soberly about the persecution and destruction of other Christians.² Some will cherish one secret lust or other, which they cannot help but know is pernicious to their souls. Some love the praise of men, which will never permit them to be truly spiritually minded: so our Savior testifies of some, that they "could not believe, because they loved the praise of men." ^{Joh 12.43} This was the known vice of all the ancient philosophers. Many of them, on the principles of reason and by severe exercise, subdued their affections to great moderation about temporary things; but in the meantime, all of them were slaves to vainglory and the praise of men. This continued until by the public observation of it, and some contradictions in their lives as to their pretenses to virtue, they lost that praise among wise and considerate men. Generally, if men who are *not spiritually renewed* were able to search themselves, they would find some of their affections are so far from having any change wrought in them, that they are a quiet habitat for sin, where it exercises its rule and dominion.

¹ **Rom 6:17** But God be thanked that *though* you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered. ¹⁸ And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness.

² The St. Bartholomew's Day massacre (1572) led to mob violence, and the deaths of perhaps 10,000 Huguenots.

[2.] There is a *universality that is objective in spiritual things*, with respect to the renovation of our affections; that is, affections spiritually renewed fix themselves upon and cling to all spiritual things, in their proper places, and for their proper ends. For the ground and reason for our adherence to any *one* of them, is the same with respect to *all* of them — which is their relation to God in Christ. That's why, when our affections are renewed, we don't choose between spiritual things, clinging to some and refusing others, making use of Naaman's restraint. Rather, our adherence is the same to all of them in their proper places and degrees. And if, because of darkness and ignorance, we don't know if any of them are from God — for instance, the observation of the Lord's day — it is of unspeakable disadvantage to us. An equal respect is required for *all* God's commands. Yet there are various distinctions in spiritual things; and thus a man may and ought to value one above another, as to the degrees of his love and esteem, even though he is to be sincere with respect to them all:

1st. God himself — that is, as revealed in and by Christ — is in the first and chief place. He is the proper and adequate object of our affections as they are renewed. He is so for himself, or for his own sake alone. This is the spring, the center, and the chief object of our love. Whoever does not love God for himself — that is, *for what He is in himself alone*, and *from what he is and will be to us in Christ* (which are inseparable considerations) — has no true affection for any spiritual thing whatsoever. And not a few deceive themselves here, or they are deceived. This should make us more diligent in examining ourselves. They suppose that they love *heaven* and heavenly things, and the duties of divine worship. This persuasion may be based on many grounds and occasions which won't endure the trial. But as to *God himself*, they can give no evidence that they have any love for him — either on account of the glorious excellencies of his nature, with their natural relation to him and dependence on him — or on account of the *manifestation of himself in Christ*, and the exercise of his grace in that. But whatever may be pretended, there is no love of God of which these two things are not the formal reason, and that doesn't proceed from these springs. And because all men pretend they love God, and defy those who think them so vile as not to — even though they live in open enmity against him and hatred of him — it becomes us to strictly examine ourselves on what grounds we pretend to love Him. Is it indeed because we see such an excellency, beauty, and desirableness in the glorious properties of his nature, that our souls are refreshed and satisfied with thoughts of it *by faith*; and in whose enjoyment our blessedness consists, so that we always rejoice at the remembrance of his holiness? Is it our great joy and satisfaction that God is what he is? Is it from the glorious manifestation that He has made of himself and all his holy excellencies *in Christ*, with the communication of himself to us *in and by Christ*? If it is so indeed, then our love is generous and gracious, from the renovation of our affections. But if we say we love God, yet truly don't know why, or it's on principles of education (what we've been taught), or because it is esteemed the height of wickedness to do otherwise, then we will be at a loss when we are called to our trial. This is the first object of our affections.

2dly. In other spiritual things, renewed affections cling to them *according to God's presence in them*. God alone is loved *for himself*; all other things are loved *for Him*, in the measure and degree of His presence *in them*. This alone gives them pre-eminence in renewed affections. For instance, God is in Christ, in the human nature of the *man* Jesus Christ, in a singular way and manner, in concern alike, *incomprehensible*, such that he is in the same kind in nothing else. Therefore the Lord Christ is, even as to his human nature, the object of our affections in such a way and degree as nothing else is or ought to be, spiritual or eternal, except God himself. All other spiritual things become so from the presence of God in them; and they have their nature and use from the degree of that presence. Accordingly they are, or ought to be, the object of our affections as to the degree of their

exercise. Evidences of the presence of God in things and persons, are the only attractants of renewed affections.

3dly. In those things which seem to *stand equally* as to what is of God in them, yet for some especial occasions and reasons our love may incline eminently to one more than another. Some particular truth, with the grace communicated by it, may have been the means of our conversion to God, of our edification in an especial manner, of our consolation in distress; it can't be helped that the mind will have a peculiar respect to and valuation of such truths, and the grace administered by them. And so it is as to our duties. We may have found such a lively intercourse and communion with God in some of them, that may give us a peculiar delight in them.

But, notwithstanding these differences, affections that are spiritually renewed, cling to all spiritual things *as such*; for the true formal reason of their doing so is the same in them all — namely, *God in them*. Only, they have several ways of acting towards them. I will give one instance of this.

Our Savior distributes spiritual things into those that are *heavenly* and those that are *earthly*, and that is comparatively so: Joh 3.12, “If I have told you earthly things, and you don’t believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things?” The “heavenly things” are the deep and mysterious counsels of the will of God. Renewed affections cling to these with holy admiration and satisfactory submission, captivating the understanding toward what it cannot comprehend.

So the apostle declares in Rom 11.33-36, “O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out! For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counsellor? Or who has first given to Him, and it shall be paid back to him? For of Him, and through Him, and to Him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen.” What the mind cannot comprehend, the heart admires and adores, delighting in God, and giving glory to Him in all.

The “earthly things” intended by our Savior in that place are the work of God upon the souls of men in their regeneration, wrought here on the earth. The affections act toward these with delight and with great thanksgiving. The experience of the grace of God in and upon believers is sweet to their souls. But one way or another they cling to them all; they don’t have a prevailing aversion to any of them. They have a regard for *all* God’s precepts, a delight in *all* his counsels, a love to himself and *all* his ways.

Whatever other change is wrought on the affections, if they are *not* spiritually renewed, it is not so with them. For they don’t cling to any spiritual things, in their own true proper nature, in a due manner, because of the evidences of the presence of God in them. And so for those whose affections are not renewed, there are always some spiritual things to which they maintain an aversion and an enmity. Although this frame doesn’t instantly reveal itself, yet it will do so upon any especial trial. So it was with the hearers of our Savior, in John 6. There was a great impression made on their affections by what he taught them concerning “the bread of God, which came down from heaven and gave life to the world.” ^{Joh 6.33} For upon hearing it, they cried, “Lord, give us this bread evermore,” verse 34. But when the mystery of it was further explained to them, they didn’t like it, and cried, “This is a hard saying, who can hear it?” verse 60. And thereupon they fell away both from him and his doctrine, although they had followed him long enough to be esteemed his disciples, verse 66. Therefore I say, whenever men’s affections are not renewed, whatever other change may have been wrought upon them, just as they have no true delight in any spiritual things or truths for themselves, and in their own nature, so there are some instances in which they will maintain their natural enmity and aversion to them.

This is the first difference between affections that are spiritually renewed and those which, from any *other* causes, may have some kind of change wrought in them.

CHAPTER 14. SPIRITUAL RENEWAL OR MERE CONVICTION?

The second difference between affections spiritually renewed, and those which have been only changed by light and conviction — Grounds and reasons of men's delight in duties of divine worship, and of their diligence in their performance, whose minds are not spiritually renewed.

THE second difference lies in this, that *there may be a change in the affections, in which men may delight in the duties of religious worship and be diligent in their observance; but it is the spiritual renovation of the affections that gives delight in God through Christ, in any duty of religious worship whatsoever.*

Where the truth of the gospel is known and publicly professed, there is great variety in the minds, ways, and practices of men about their duties of religious worship. Many are *profane* in their minds and lives, or at *least practically*, they despise or wholly neglect the observance of them. These are hard-hearted and far from righteousness, Tit 1.16. Some attend to them *formally* and *cursorily*, from the principles of their education, and maybe out of some convictions they have of their necessity. But there are many who, in *the way they choose* and are pleased with, are diligent in their observance, and show great delight in it; yet they give no evidence of the spiritual renovation of their minds. Indeed, the way by which some express their devotion in them, being superstitious and idolatrous, is inconsistent with that or any other saving grace. Therefore, we must diligently inquire or search into *the grounds and reasons for men's delight in divine worship*, according to their convictions of the way of it, while they continue altogether unrenewed in their minds.

1. Men may be greatly affected with the *outward part of divine worship*, and the manner of its performance, who have no delight in what is internal, real, and spiritual in it: Joh 5.35, “He was a burning and a shining light: and you were willing for a season to rejoice in his light.” So, many were delighted in the preaching of Ezekiel, because of his eloquence and the elegance of his parables, chapter 33.31,32.¹ This gave them both delight and diligence in hearing, for which they called themselves the people of God, though they continued to live in sin; their hearts went after covetousness. The same may befall many at present with reference to the spiritual gifts of those by whom the word of God is dispensed. I don’t deny that men may be more delighted or satisfied with the gifts, with the preaching of one than another, and yet be sincere in their delight in the dispensation of the word. For they may find more spiritual advantage by it than in the gifts of others; and things may be so prepared as to be more suited to their edification than elsewhere. But what we insist on at present refers only to some outward circumstances, pleasing the minds of men, 2Tim 3.5 [*a mere form of godliness*].

This was principally evident under the Old Testament, while they had carnal ordinances and a worldly sanctuary. Under that dispensation, the people were often given to all sorts of idolatry and superstition; and when they were not so, the body of them was still carnal and unholy, as evident from the whole tract of God’s dealing with them by his prophets and in his providences. And yet they had great delight in the outward solemnities of their worship, placing all their trust of acceptance with God in them. Those who really and truly believed, looked through them all to the Christ, whom the worship fore-signified — without that, these things were a yoke to them, and a burden almost insupportable, Act 15.10. But those who were carnal, delighted in *the things themselves*; and for the sake of the signs, they rejected the One who was the life and substance of them all. This proved the great means of the apostasy of the Christian church also. To maintain some *appearance* of spiritual affections, men introduced carnal incitements of those affections

¹ **Eze 33:31** “So they come to you as people do, they sit before you as My people, and they hear your words, but they do not do them; for with their mouth they show much love, but their hearts pursue their own gain. ³² “Indeed you are to them as a very lovely song of one who has a pleasant voice and can play well on an instrument; for they hear your words, but they do not do them.

into evangelical worship, such as singing with music, and pompous ceremonies. For they find such things needful to reconcile the worship of God to their minds and affections; and through them they appear to take great delight in worship. If some men in their thoughts could but separate *divine* service from that *outward* order — those methods of variety, show, and melody with which they are affected — they would take no delight in it, but look at it as something that must be endured. How can it be otherwise conceived of among the Papists? With great earnestness, many evidences of devotion, sometimes with difficulty and danger, they repair to their solemn worship. And yet when they are present, they don't understand one word¹ by which their minds might be excited to *real* actings of faith, love, and delight in God! Only order, ceremony, music, and other incentives of carnal affections, make a great impression on them.

Affections that are spiritually renewed are not concerned in these things. Indeed, if those with renewed affections were engaged in their use, they would find them a means of *diverting* their minds from the proper work of divine worship, rather than an advantage in it. It will also appear to them — unless they are content to lose their spiritual affections, acting in faith and love — that they are embracing in their stead a carnal, imaginary devotion. Hence, two persons may at the same time attend to the same ordinances of divine worship, with equal delight, but on very distinct principles. It is as if two men entered the same garden, planted and adorned with a variety of herbs and flowers, one being ignorant of their nature, the other a skillful herbalist. Both may be equally delighted, the one with the colors and smell of the flowers, the other with the consideration of their various natures, their uses in physical remedies, or the like. So it may be in hearing the word. For instance, one may be delighted with the outward administration, another with its spiritual efficacy, both at the same time.

Hence Austin² tells us that singing in the church was laid aside by Athanasius at Alexandria — *not the people's singing of psalms*, but a kind of singing in the reading of the Scripture and in some offices of worship, which began then to be introduced into the church. And the reason he gave, was that the modulation of the voice and musical tune might not divert the minds of men from that spiritual affection which is required of them in sacred duties. What there is of real order in the worship of God — that order which is an effect of divine wisdom — is suited and useful to spiritual affections, because it proceeds from the same Spirit by which they are internally renewed. “Beholding your order,” Col 2.5. Everything of God's appointment is both helpful and delightful to them. None can say with higher raptures of admiration, “How amiable are your tabernacles, O LORD of hosts!” Psa 84.1,2, than those whose affections are renewed. And yet their delight is not terminated on these duties, as we will see directly.

2. Men may be delighted in the performance of outward duties of divine worship, because in them they comply with and give some kind of satisfaction to their convictions. When conscience is awakened to a sense of the necessity of such duties — namely, of those in which divine worship consists — it will give the mind no rest or peace in the neglect of them. Let them be attended to in the seasons which light, conviction, and custom call for, and it will be so far satisfied that the mind will find present ease and refreshment in it. And when the soul is used to this relief, it will not only be diligent in the performance of such duties, it will not only *not* omit them, but it will *delight* in them as those which bring it great advantage. Hence many will not omit the duty of prayer every morning, who are yet resolved to live in sin all day long. And there are but few who sedulously endeavor to live and walk in the frame of their hearts and ways, according to their own prayers; and yet, all that is in our prayers, beyond our endeavors to respond in conformity of heart and life, is but the exercise of gifts in answer to convictions. Others find their troubles are allayed in them, as sick persons find by drinking cold water in a fever, whose flames are assuaged by it for a time.

¹ Referring to the Catholic mass, conducted in Latin, a language unknown to the average believer. — WHG

² That is, Augustine of Hippo (354-430).

They make their prayers like an antidote against the poison and sting of sin, which allays its rage but cannot expel its venom.

Or these duties, for them, are *like sacrifices for sin under the law*. They gave a guilty person present ease, but as the apostle says, they didn't make men perfect; they didn't utterly quench a conscience condemning them for sin. Presently, on the first omission of duty, a sense of sin again returned to them; and that was not only as the *act*, but as the *person himself*, was condemned by the law. Then, the sacrifices were repeated for a renewed propitiation. This gave that carnal people such delight and satisfaction in those sacrifices, that they trusted in them for righteousness, life, and salvation. So it is with persons who are constant in spiritual duties merely from conviction. The performance of those duties gives them a present relief and ease. Though it doesn't heal their wound, it assuages their pain and dispels their present fears. Hence they are frequently in them, and oftentimes that is not without delight, because they are eased thereby. This condition is somewhat dangerous for those who, upon the sense of the guilt of any sin, turn for relief to their prayers. Having discharged that duty, they are much at ease in their minds and consciences, even though they have obtained no real sense of the pardon of sin, nor any strength against it.

It may be said, “Don't all men, the best of men, perform *all spiritual duties out of a conviction of their necessity*? Don't they know it would be their sin to omit them, and so they find satisfaction in their minds upon their performance?” I say, *They do*. But it is one thing to perform a duty out of a conviction of its necessity as God's ordinance, which respects only *the duty itself*.¹ It is another thing to perform it to satisfy convictions of other sins, or to quiet the conscience that is troubled about them; *that* is the conviction we speak to. The first begins and ends in *self*; self-satisfaction is its sole design. Men aim only at some rest and quietness in their own minds, which otherwise they cannot attain. But in the second, performing our duties *in faith*, from a conviction of their necessity as God's ordinance, and their use in the way of His grace, the soul begins and ends in *God*. It seeks no satisfaction *in them*, nor finds it *from them*, but its satisfaction is in and from God alone *by them*.

3. The principal reason why men delight in holy duties of divine worship — whose affections are only changed, and not spiritually renewed — is because *they place their righteousness before God in these duties*, on which they hope to be accepted by him. They don't know, they don't seek, any righteousness other than what is of their own working. Whatever notions they may have of the righteousness of faith, of *the righteousness of Christ*, what they practically trust to is *their own*. And it reveals itself to be so in their own consciences, upon every trial that befalls them. Indeed, when they cry to the Lord, and pretend to faith in Christ, they quickly make it evident that their principal trust is in themselves. Now, in all that they can plead by way of duties or obedience, nothing carries a fairer pretense to a righteousness, than what they do in the worship of God, and in the exercise of religious acts towards him. This (they think) is what He expects at their hands, what is due Him in the light of their consciences, the best they can *do* to please him — therefore, they must put their trust in these acts, or nothing. They secretly suppose not only that there is a righteousness in these things which will answer for itself, but that it will also compensate in some measure for their sins. And therefore, though they cannot but frequently fall into sin, they relieve themselves from the reflection of their consciences, *by multiplying their duties*, and having a renewed diligence in them.

It is inconceivable what delight and satisfaction men will take in anything that seems to contribute so much to a righteousness of *their own*. For it suits and pleases all the principles of a corrupt nature, after being brought under the power of a conviction concerning sin, righteousness, and judgment.

¹ That is, “I feel guilty that I don't pray often enough; I will therefore pray.” It's about the *duty* of prayer, not the *means* of prayer; it makes prayer an end in itself, an *idol*, rather than an entrance to God through Christ. — WHG

This made the Jews of old so stubbornly adhere to the ceremonies and sacrifices of the law, and to prefer them above the gospel, “the kingdom of God, and its righteousness,” Rom 10.3. They looked and sought for righteousness by them. For many generations, they were kept to any tolerable observance of them, only with great difficulty — when they learned to place all their hopes of righteousness in them. Then they would and did adhere to them, to their own temporal and eternal ruin, Rom 9.31-33.¹ And when men were persuaded that righteousness was to be attained by works of munificence and supposed charity, in the dedication of their substance to the use of the church, those who otherwise were covetous, greedy, and oppressing, would lavish gold out of the bag, and give up their whole patrimony, with all their ill-gotten goods, to attain it — so powerful an influence does the desire for self-righteousness have upon the minds of men. It is the best fortification of the soul *against* Christ and the gospel — the last reserve by which it maintains the interest of self, against the grace of God.

Hence, I say, those who place their righteousness, or the principal part of it, in the duties of religious worship, will not only be diligent in them, but often abound in multiplying them. They will especially do so if these duties may be performed in such a way and manner as pleases their affections with a show of humility and devotion, requiring nothing of the exercise of faith or sincere divine love in them. So it is with many in all kinds of religion, whether the way of their worship is true or false, whether it be appointed by God or rejected by him. And the declaration of this is the subject of the discourse of the prophet Isaiah, 1.11-17; also Micah, 6:6-8.²

4. The reputation of devotion in religious duties may insensibly affect the unrenewed minds of men, with great diligence and delight in their performance. However men may be divided in their apprehension and practice about religion, however different from and contrary to each other their ways of divine worship may be — yet among all sorts of men, indeed, in the secret thoughts of those who outwardly contemn these things, it is a matter of reputation to be devout, to be diligent, and to be strict, in and about those duties of religion which they judge to be incumbent on them, according to their own light and persuasion. This greatly affects the minds of men while pride is secretly predominant in them, and while they love the praise of men more than the praise of God.

This consideration will especially prevail on them when they suppose that *the credit and honor of the way which they profess*, in competition with others, greatly depend on their reputation as to their strictness in duties of devotion. For then they will not only be diligent in themselves, but zealous in drawing others to the same observances. These two principles — their own reputation and that of their sect — constituted the life and soul of Pharisaism of old. To the extent the minds of men are influenced with these apprehensions, a love for and a delight in those duties by which their reputation is attained, will thrive and grow in them.

I am far from concluding that any men are such *vile hypocrites* as to do all that they do in religion, just to be seen and praised by men, being influenced in all public duties by it. At least, I’m not speaking of those who *are*. This is what some among the Pharisees were given to do. But I speak of those who, being under the convictions and motives mentioned before, yet give admittance to this corrupt end: a desire for reputation or the praise of men. For every such end, being admitted

¹ **Rom 9:31** but Israel, pursuing the law of righteousness, has not attained to the law of righteousness. ³² Why? Because *they did not seek it* by faith, but as it were, by the works of the law. For they stumbled at that stumbling stone. ³³ As it is written: “Behold, I lay in Zion a stumbling stone and rock of offense, And whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame.”

² **Isa 1:11** “To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices to Me?” Says the LORD. “I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams And the fat of fed cattle. I do not delight in the blood of bulls, Or of lambs or goats. ¹² “When you come to appear before Me, Who has required this from your hand, To trample My courts? ¹³ Bring no more futile sacrifices; Incense is an abomination to Me, etc. **Mic 6:6** With what shall I come before the LORD, *And bow myself before the High God?* Shall I come before Him with burnt offerings, With calves a year old? ⁷ ... ⁸ He has shown you, O man, what is good; And what does the LORD require of you But to do justly, To love mercy, And to walk humbly with your God?

and prevalent in the mind, will universally influence the affections to delight in those duties by which that end may be attained, until the person is habituated to them with great satisfaction.

5. I should, in the last place, insist on *superstition*. As this is an undue fear of the divine nature, will, and operations — built on false notions and apprehensions of them — it may befall the minds of men in all religions, true and false. It is an internal vice of the mind. As it respects the outward way and means of religious service, and consists in the devout performance of those duties which God indeed does *not* accept, but forbids, so it belongs only to religion as it is *false* and *corrupt*. It is too long a work here, to declare how in both respects, superstition engages the minds of men to perform religious duties, for the most part, with the most scrupulous diligence, and sometimes with prodigious attempts to exceed the measures of human nature in what they design. It may suffice to have mentioned it among the causes and reasons why men whose affections are *not* spiritually renewed, may yet greatly delight in the diligent performance of the outward duties of religion. Our design in these things is the discovery of the true nature of this grace and duty of being spiritually minded. For this, we have declared that it is necessary that our affections be spiritually and supernaturally renewed. And because there may be a great change wrought on the affections of men with respect to spiritual things, where there is *nothing* of this supernatural renovation, our present inquiry is this: What are the differences between the actings of the affections of the one sort and of the other, whether *spiritually renewed* or *occasionally changed*? And because the great exercise of them consists in the duties of religious worship, I declared what the grounds and reasons are, for which men of unrenewed minds often delight in the duties of divine worship, and are diligent in their performance.

From these and the like considerations, it may be made manifest that most of the devotion that is in the world, does *not* spring from the spiritual renovation of the minds of men. Yet, without this, it is not accepted by God. What remains is to give in instance, as further evidence of the discovery we're in pursuit of. What are the grounds and reasons on which those, whose minds and affections are spiritually renewed, delight in the institutions of divine worship, and attend to their observance with great heed and diligence? Because this is an inquiry of great importance, and is of great use in other stated cases as well as the one before us, I will treat it by itself in the ensuing chapter. This is done that the reader may more distinctly comprehend it, both in the nature of the doctrine concerning it, and in the place it holds in our present discourse.

CHAPTER 15. REASONS TO DELIGHT IN DIVINE WORSHIP.

Delight of believers in the holy institutions of divine worship — The grounds and reasons for it — The evidence of being spiritually minded thereby, etc.

IT is fully evident that all *true believers*, whose minds are spiritually renewed, have a singular delight in all the institutions and ordinances of divine worship, both in the examples of the saints in the Scripture, and in their own experience, which they will never forego. For this has been the greatest cause of their persecution, and martyrdom itself, in all ages. If the primitive Christians living under the power of the pagan emperors, or the witnesses for Christ under the antichristian apostasy, would or could have omitted observing them (according to the advice and practice of the Gnostics), they might have escaped the rage of their adversaries. But they didn't love their lives in comparison to that delight which they had in observing the commands of Christ as to the duties of evangelical worship. David frequently gives us an instance of this in himself:

Psa 42.1-4, “As the hart pants after the water-brooks, so pants my soul after you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God: when shall I come and appear before God? My tears have been my food day and night, while they continually say to me, Where is your God? 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.”

Psa 63.1-5, “O God, you are my God; early will I seek you: my soul thirsts for you, my flesh longs for you in a dry and thirsty land, where there is no water; to see your power and your glory, so I have seen you in the sanctuary. Because your loving-kindness is better than life, my lips shall praise you. Thus will I bless you while I live: I will lift up my hands in your name My soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness; and my mouth shall praise you with joyful lips.”

Psa 84.1-4, “How amiable are your tabernacles, O LORD of hosts! My soul longs, yes, even faints for the courts of the LORD: my heart and my flesh cry out for the living God. Yes, the sparrow has found a house, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young, even your altars, O LORD of hosts, my King, and my God. Blessed are those who dwell in your house: they will be still praising you. Selah.”

But “a greater than David is here.”¹ Our Lord Jesus Christ himself, on all occasions, declared his delight in and zeal for all the ordinances of divine worship which were then in force by virtue of divine institution and command. He severely reproved and rejected whatever men had added to it under the pretense of a surpassing² strictness of outward order, laying it all under that dreadful sentence, “Every plant which my heavenly Father has not planted shall be plucked up,”^{Mat 15.13} and so cast into the fire. Yet, as to what was of divine appointment, his delight in it was singular, and exemplary to all his disciples. With respect to this, it was said of him that “the zeal of God’s house had eaten him up,”^{Joh 2.17} because of the affliction which he had in his spirit, seeing the worship of it neglected, polluted, and despised. This caused him to cleanse the temple, the seat of divine worship, from the polluters and its pollutions; it was not long before his sufferings, in the face of and to the high provocation of all his adversaries. So he longed with earnest desire for the celebration of his last Passover: Luk 22:15, “With desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer.” It is a sufficient evidence of the frame of spirit and practice of his disciples afterward, regarding the duties of evangelical worship by His appointment, that the apostle says when any fall into a neglect of them, it is an assured token of an unsound condition, and tends to final, cursed apostasy, Heb 10.25-27.

These things are manifest and unquestionable. But our present inquiry concerns only these: what believers so delight in, in the ordinances and institutions of divine gospel worship; what engages

¹ A play on Luk 11.31.

² Originally, *supererogating*.

their hearts and minds in a diligent observance of them; and also, how and in what things they exercise their love and delight. I say, in general, that their delight in all ordinances of divine worship — evident in the testimonies produced before — is in *Christ himself, or God in Christ*. This alone is what they seek, cling to, and are satisfied with. They make use of the streams, but only as means of communication with the Spring. When men are really renewed in the spirit of their minds, this is so. Their regard for ordinances and duties of divine worship, is because they are appointed by God as a blessed means of communion and intercourse between himself in Christ, and their souls. By them Christ communicates his love and grace to us; in and by them we act faith and love in him. It is the treasure hidden in the field, which when a man has found it, he purchases the whole field; but it is so that he may enjoy the *treasure* which is hidden in it, Mat 13.44. This field is the gospel and all its ordinances. Men sometimes purchase it at a dear price, even with the loss of all they enjoy. Yet, if they obtain nothing but the field, they will have little cause to rejoice in their bargain. *Christ alone is the treasure*, that pearl of great price which will eternally enrich the soul. The field is to be used only so as to find and dig up the treasure that is in it. I say it is *Christ alone*, in the preaching of the gospel, that renewed affections cling to as the treasure. And they cling to all other things according to their relation to Him, or as they have a participation of him. Therefore, in all duties of religion, in all ordinances of worship, their inquiry is after the One whom their souls love, Song 1.7.

Yet we must treat these things more particularly and distinctly. Those whose affections are spiritually renewed, will love, adhere to, and delight in ordinances of divine service and duties of worship, upon the ensuing grounds and reasons:

1. In general *they do so as they find faith, love, and delight in God through Christ, excited and acted in and by them*. This is the first and immediate end in their institution. It is a pernicious mistake to suppose that any external duties of worship — such as the hearing of the word, prayer, or the sacraments — are appointed or accepted for themselves alone.

The Jews of old had such thoughts concerning their sacrifices — namely, that they were appointed for their own sake, and were acceptable service to God merely on their own account. Therefore, to deliver them from this pernicious mistake, God often affirms that He never appointed them at all; that is, for any such end, Jer 7.22,23, Isa 1.12-14, etc.¹ And now, under the gospel, sundry things that are destructive to the souls of men have proceeded from such a supposition. There have always been some who satisfied and contented themselves with the external observance of them, without desiring or endeavoring any holy communion with God, in or by them. This constitutes the state and condition mentioned in Rev 3.1.² And by following this track, most Christians wander out of the way. They cannot leave them, nor do they know how to use them to their advantage, until they come wholly to that woeful state in Isa 29.13.³ Some, to establish this deceit, have taught that there is much more in the outward work of these duties than God ever put into them, and that they are sanctified merely by virtue of the work wrought.

But all the duties of the second commandment (as are all instituted ordinances of worship) are only means to express and exercise those of the first commandment, such as faith, love, fear, trust, and delight in God. The end of them all is that *through them and by them*, we may act those graces

¹ **Jer 7:22** “For I did not speak to your fathers, or command them in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, concerning burnt offerings or sacrifices. ²³ “But this is what I commanded them, saying, ‘Obey My voice, and I will be your God, and you shall be My people. And walk in all the ways that I have commanded you, that it may be well with you.’ **Isa 1:12** “When you come to appear before Me, Who has required this from your hand, To trample My courts?

¹³ Bring no more futile sacrifices; Incense is an abomination to Me. The New Moons, the Sabbaths, and the calling of assemblies — I cannot endure iniquity and the sacred meeting. ¹⁴ Your New Moons and your appointed feasts My soul hates; They are a trouble to Me, I am weary of bearing *them*.

² **Rev 3:1** I know your works, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead.

³ **Isa 29:13** these people draw near with their mouths And honor Me with their lips, But have removed their hearts far from Me, And their fear toward Me is taught by the commandment of men;

on God in Christ. Where this is not attended to, when the souls of men don't apply themselves to this exercise of grace in them — however solemn as to their outward performance, or attended to with diligence, or performed with earnestness and delight — they are neither acceptable to God nor beneficial to themselves, Isa 1:11.¹ This, therefore, is the first general spring of the love of believers, of those whose affections are spiritually renewed, as to the ordinances of divine worship and their delight in them. They experience that in and by them, their faith and love are excited to be graciously exercised on God in Christ. And when they find it is otherwise with them, they can have no rest in their souls. It is for this end that they are ordained, sanctified, and blessed by God; and therefore they are effectual means of grace, when their efficacy is not defeated by unbelief.

Those who have no experience of this in their attendance to them, fall into pernicious extremes, as has been said. Some continue their observance with little regard to God, in *cursed formality*. So they make them a means of their ruin by countenancing them in their security. Others utterly reject them (at least the most solemn of them) — and in so doing, they reject both the wisdom, grace, and authority of God, by whom they are appointed — because through the power of their own *unbelief*, they find nothing in them.

This being the immediate end of all divine institutions; this being the only way by which we may give glory to God in their observance (which is their ultimate end in this world); and this being the design of believers, in general, in that obedience which they yield to the Lord Christ in their diligent observation of them — we may consider how, in what way, and by what means, those whose affections are spiritually renewed, should apply their minds and souls for their observance. And we may first consider in this, what they *design*; and second, why they endeavor to be found in the exercise and *practice* of these graces, in their use and enjoyment:

(1.) They come to them with this desire, design, and expectation — namely, to be enabled, directed, and excited by them to *the exercise of divine faith and love*. When it is not so with any, where there is not this design, then in various degrees they take the name of God in vain in their observance. These are “*approximationes Dei*,” the “ways of drawing near to God,” as they are everywhere called in Scripture. To suppose that drawing near to God may consist merely in the outward performance of duty, whatever its solemnity, is to reject all due reverence of Him. “Forasmuch,” says the Lord, “as this people draw near me with their mouth, and honor me with their lips, but have removed their heart far from me, therefore, behold, I will proceed against them,” Isa 29:13,14. By a *synecdoche*,² the mouth and lips refer to all the means of outward worship and honor. These men may use and diligently attend to all these means, while their hearts are far from God — *i.e.*, when they don't draw near to him by faith and love. But all this worship is rejected by God, with the highest tokens of his displeasure and indignation with it.

Our souls, then, have no way to approach God in duties of worship *but by faith*; no way of adherence or clinging to him *but by love*; no way of abiding in him *but by fear, reverence, and delight*. Whenever these are not in exercise, outward duties of worship are so far from being a means of approach to him, that they set us at a greater distance from Him than we were before; or at least, they are utterly useless and fruitless to us. So indeed they are to most who come to them, they know not why; and behave themselves under them, they care not how. Nor is there any evil in the hearts and ways of men of which God complains more in His word, than that which is accompanied with the highest contempt of Him. These ordinances of divine worship are the means which the wisdom and grace of God has appointed to this end: namely, the exercise and increase of divine faith and love. He therefore sanctifies and blesses them for it. Thus, I don't believe that those by whom these great means are despised or neglected, have any delight in the exercise of these graces, nor do they intend growth in them.

¹ Isa 1:11 “To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices to Me?” etc.

² *Synecdoche*: a figure of speech; substituting a more inclusive term for a less inclusive one or vice versa.

I have seen those [fruitful] valleys of public worship forsaken, either on pretenses that higher attainments in faith, light, and love are such that they aren't needed anymore; or on a foolish opinion that they ceased upon the dispensation of the Spirit, which is given to us to make them useful and effectual; or on some provocations given to some men, or which they have taken to themselves, which they thought to revenge by neglecting public administrations; or through slavish peace and negligence in times of difficulty, as is “the manner of some who forsake the assemblies of the saints,” Heb 10.25 — and yet I never saw it fail to issue in a great decay, if not in an utter loss of all exercise of faith and love, and sometimes in open profaneness. For such persons condemn the way and means which God, in his infinite wisdom and goodness, has appointed for their exercise and increase — and this shall not prosper. We may therefore do well to consider that the principal way by which we may sanctify the name of God in all duties of His worship, and obtain the benefit of them to our own souls, is by a conscientious approach to them, with a holy desire and design to be found in the exercise of faith and love on God in Christ, and to be helped and guided in this by them.

To be under an efficacious influence from this design is the best preparation for any duty. So David expresses his delight in the worship of God: “How amiable are your tabernacles, O LORD of hosts! My soul longs, yes, even faints for the courts of the LORD: my heart and my flesh cries out for the living God,” Psa 84.1,2.

He longed for the tabernacle and its courts; but it was the enjoyment of God himself, the living God, that he desired and sought. This was what made him so fervent in his desires after those ordinances of God. So he expresses it in Psa 63.2, “To see your power and your glory, so I have seen you in the sanctuary,” David had great communion with and delight in God, by faith and love, in the solemn duties of his worship; and it was this that inflamed him with desires for renewed opportunities to the same end.

(2.) This design is not *general, inactive, useless, and slothful*; but such persons diligently endeavor to be found in the exercise of these graces, in the use of these ordinances and attendance to them. They not only have an antecedent design to be so, but a diligent actual endeavor after it, not letting their minds be diverted by anything, from the pursuit of that design, Ecc 5.1.¹ Whatever is not quickened and enlivened by this, they esteem to be utterly lost. Neither outward administrations nor order will give them satisfaction when these things are wanting in themselves. Without the *internal* actings of the life of faith, *external* administrations of ordinances of worship are but dead things; nor can any believer obtain real satisfaction in them, or refreshment by them, without an inward experience of faith and love in and by them. If we are wise, we will continually attend to the consideration of it. A watchful Christian will be careful lest he lose any one duty by taking up with its carcass. And the danger of so doing is not small. Our affections are renewed but in part; and as they are still liable to be diverted and seduced from spirituality in duty — specifically by things earthly and carnal, through the corruption that remains in them — so there is a disposition abiding in them to be pleased with those external things and religious duties which others satisfy themselves with (as we showed before), who are in no way graciously renewed. The grace and oratory of the speaker in preaching the word, especially in these days in which the foppery² of fine language is so extolled, even in sacred things; the order and circumstances of other duties; with an inclination and love for party (*partisanship*) — these are apt to insinuate themselves with great complacency into our affections, so far as they are unrenewed.

¹ **Ecc 5:1** Walk prudently when you go to the house of God; and draw near to hear rather than to give the sacrifice of fools, for they do not know that they do evil.

² *Foppery*: dress or speech that showy and ostentatious; designed to impress; overly ornate.

And these things reveal the true grounds for why the ordinances of divine worship are as useless as they are to many who seem to attend to them with diligence. These grounds may be referred to these three heads:

[1.] They don't come to them as the means appointed by God for *the exercise of faith and love to Christ*, so as to make *that* their design in approaching them; without this, all that is said about advantage in and by other duties, is utterly lost.

[2.] In and under them, they don't labor to *stir up faith and love* to their due exercise.

[3.] They let their minds be *diverted from the exercise of these graces*, partly by occasional temptations, and partly by attendance to what is *only outward* in the ordinances.

Spiritual affections find no place of rest in any of these things. Those proposals of God in Christ, of His will and their own duty, that may draw out their faith, love, godly fear, and delight, into their due exercise — these are what they should inquire after and acquiesce in.

Faith regards two things alone in all duties of worship, as to its outward administration — the one *absolutely*, the other *comparatively* — both are with respect to the ends mentioned, or the exercise, growth, and increase of grace in us.

The *first* (the *absolute* respect) is that they may be of divine appointment. Where their origin and observance are resolved into divine authority, there and there alone will they have a divine efficacy. In all these things, faith regards nothing but divine precepts and promises. Whatever regards anything else isn't faith, but fancy. Therefore, those un-commanded duties in religion, which so abound in the papal church, that if not the *whole*, all the *principal parts* of their worship consist in them, are such that in discharging them, it is impossible for faith to be duly exercised.

The *second*, to which it has a *comparative respect*, is the spiritual gifts of those to whom the administration of the ordinances of the gospel in the public worship of the church is committed. With respect to them, believers may have more delight and satisfaction in the ministry of one than another, as touched on before. But this is not because one is more learned than another; or more elegant than another; or has more ability of speech than another; or more fervency in utterance than another; or is more fervent or earnest in his delivery. It is because they find the gifts of one are more suited and more effectual to stir up faith and love to a holy exercise in their minds and hearts, than what they find in some others. Hence they have a particular value for and delight in the ministry of such persons, especially when they can enjoy it in due order, and without offending others. Ministers who are wise will, in holy administrations, neglect all other things, and attend to *this* alone: how they may be helpful to the faith, and love, and joy of believers, so far as they are the object of their ministry.

This is the first reason and ground on which affections that are spiritually renewed, cling to the ordinances of divine worship with delight and satisfaction — namely, because they are the means appointed and blessed by God for the exercise and increase of faith and love, with an experience of their efficacy to that end.

2. The second is, *because they are the means of the communication of a sense of divine love, and supplies of divine grace for the souls of those who believe*. So far as our affections are renewed, this is the principal attractive for clinging to them with delight and complacency.

They are, as observed before, the ways of our approaching to God. Now, we don't draw near to God, as to a "dry heath or a barren wilderness,"^{Jer 17:5-6} where no refreshment is to be obtained. To make a pretense of coming to God, and not expect to receive good and great things from Him, is to despise God himself, to overthrow the nature of the duty, and deprive our own souls of all benefit thereby. Lack of this is what renders worship, the most useless and fruitless to themselves. We are always to come to God as to an eternal spring of goodness, grace, and mercy, of all that our souls stand in need of, of all we can desire for our everlasting blessedness. And all these things,

as to believers, may be reduced to the two heads mentioned before: the *communication of a sense of His love in Christ*, and *supplies of internal, sanctifying, strengthening grace*.

(1.) They come for a *communication of a sense of his love in Jesus Christ*. From this comes all our peace, consolation, and joy; all our encouragement to do and suffer according to the will of God, all our supports under our sufferings solely depend on this; in these things our souls *live*; and without them we are, of all men, the most miserable. ^{1Cor 15.9}

It is the Holy Spirit who is the immediate efficient cause of all these things in us. He “sheds abroad the love of God in our hearts,” Rom 5.5; He testifies to us of our adoption, Rom 8.15,16; and thereby of an interest in the love of the Father, in God as He is love. But the outward way and means by which he ordinarily communicates these things to us, and effects them in us, is by the dispensation or preaching of the gospel. He does the same work in prayer also, and oftentimes in other holy administrations. For this end, for a participation of this grace, of these mercies, believers come to God by them. They use them as means to “*draw water from the wells of salvation*,” to receive that spiritual sense of divine love which God communicates by them.

So Christ knocks at the door of the heart by his word. If it is opened by faith, He comes in and sups with men, giving them a gracious refreshment by the testimony of his own love, and the love of the Father, Rev 3.20; Joh 14.23.¹ This is what believers look for in, and in various measures receive by, the ordinances of divine worship. Although some are not sensible of it, through their fears and temptations, they inwardly receive those blessed, gracious supplies by which their souls are held in life, without which they would pine away and perish. So He deals with them, Song 4.5,6. These are the gardens and galleries of Christ, in which he gives us his love, Song 7.12. Those who are humble and sincere know how *often* their souls have been refreshed in them, and how *long* the impressions they have received of divine grace and love, have sometimes continued with them, to their unspeakable consolation. They remember what they have received in the opening and application of the “exceedingly great and precious promises” that are given to them, by which they are gradually, more and more, “made partakers of the divine nature.” ^{2Pet 1.4} — how many times they have received light in darkness, refreshment under despondencies, relief in their conflicts with dangers and temptations, in and by them. For this cause, affections that are spiritually renewed *cling* to them. Who can help but love and delight in what he has found by experience, to be the way and means of communicating to him the most invaluable mercy, the most inestimable benefit of which he can be made partaker in this life? Someone who has found a hidden treasure, though he at once takes away the whole of it, will yet esteem the place where he found it. But if it is of that nature that no more can be found or taken from it at once, except what is sufficient for the present occasion — and it is yet so full and boundless that whenever he comes back to seek it, he will be sure to obtain a fresh supply — then he will always value it, and constantly apply himself to it. Such is the treasure of grace and divine love that is found in the ordinances of divine worship.

If we are strangers to these things, if we have never received *efficacious intimations of divine love* for our souls, in and by the duties of divine worship, then we cannot love them and delight in them as we should. What do men come to hear the word of God for? What do they pray for? What do they expect to receive from Him? Do they come to God as the eternal fountain of living waters — as the God of all grace, peace, and consolation? Or do they come to his worship without any design, as if to a dry and empty show? Do they fight uncertainly with these things, as men beating the air? ^{1Cor 9.26} Or do they think they bring something to God, but receive nothing back from Him? — that the best of their business is to please Him in doing what he commands, but not to expect to receive anything from Him. Nor do they ever examine themselves, whether they

¹ **Joh 14:23** Jesus answered and said to him, “If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him.

have done so or not? It is not for persons who walk in such ways, to ever attain a due delight in the ordinances of divine worship.

Believers have other designs in this; and among the rest, this is the first: that they may afresh be *made partakers of refreshing, comforting pledges of the love of God in Christ*, and thereby of their adoption, of the pardon of their sins, and acceptance of their persons. According to how they meet with these things in the duties of holy worship, public or private, they will love, value, and adhere to them. Some men are full of other thoughts and affections; thus these things are not their principal design or desire. Or they are contented with that measure of them which they think they've attained, or at least they're not sensible of their need for fresh communications of them to their souls; they suppose they can do well enough without a renewed sense of divine love every day. Some are so ignorant of what they *ought* to design or look for in the duties of gospel worship, that it is impossible for them to *have* any real design in them. Many of the better sort of professors are too negligent in this matter. They don't long and pant in the inward man for renewed pledges of the love of God; they don't consider how much need they have of them, so that they may be encouraged and strengthened for all other duties of obedience; they don't prepare their minds to receive them, nor come with any expectation of their communication to them; they don't rightly fix their faith on this truth: namely, that these holy administrations and duties are appointed by God in the first place, as the ways and means of conveying His love and a sense of it to our souls.

From this springs all that lukewarmness, coldness, and indifference in and toward the duties of holy worship, that are growing among us. For if men have lost the principal design of faith in them, and disesteem the chief benefit to be obtained by them, from where should zeal for them, delight in them, or diligence in attendance to them, arise? Let not anyone please themselves under the power of such decays; they are infallible indications of their inward frame! Such persons will grow cold, careless, and negligent as to the duties of public worship. They won't be charged nor troubled about them. Every occasion of life diverts them, and is readily entertained in their minds. And when they *do* attend to them, it's with great indifference and lack of concern. Yet would they have it thought that all is as well within, as it ever was; they have as good a respect for religion as any! But these things clearly reveal an ulcerous disease in the very souls of men; it is as evident as if written on their foreheads. Whatever they pretend to the contrary, they are under the power of woeful decays from all due regard for spiritual and eternal things. And I would avoid the society of such persons, as those who carry an infectious disease about them, unless it were to further their cure.

But affections that are spiritually renewed, manifest themselves in *this*: When we delight in and value the duties of God's worship, because we find by experience that they are and have been means of communicating to us a sense and renewed pledges of the love of God in Christ, with all the benefits and privileges which depend on it. *Then* our affections are renewed in and by the Holy Ghost.

(2.) *They come for supplies of internal, sanctifying, strengthening grace.* This is the second great design of believers in their approaches to God in his worship. They find and are sensible of the lack of it in themselves, as to measures and degrees,. Yes, in *this* lies the great burden of the souls of believers in this world. All that we do in the life of God may be referred to two heads:

- [1.]** *The observance of all duties of obedience; and,*
- [2.]** *The conflict with and conquest over temptations.*

We are continually exercised about these things. Hence the great thing which we desire, labor for, and pant after, is spiritual strength and ability to discharge ourselves in a due manner with respect to these things. This is what every true believer groans after in the inward man, and which he prefers infinitely above all earthly things. He desires nothing more in this world, so he

may have sufficient grace in any competent measure for these ends, whatever befalls him. God in Christ is the only fountain of all this grace; there's not one dram of it to be obtained apart from Him alone. And just as He communicates it to us of his own sovereign goodness and pleasure, so the ordinary way and means by which he does that, are the duties of his worship:

Isa 40:28-31, "Have you not known? have you not heard, that the everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth, does not faint, nor is weary? There is no searching of his understanding. He gives power to the faint; and to those who have no might, he increases strength. Even the youths will faint and be weary, and the young men will utterly fall: but those who wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; they shall walk, and not faint."

All grace and spiritual strength is originally seated in the nature of God, verse 28. But what relief can that afford us who are weak, feeble, and fainting? He will act suitably to His nature in the communication of this grace and power, verse 29. But how will we have an interest in this grace, in these operations? Wait on him in the ordinances of his worship, verse 31. The word as preached is the food of our souls, by which God administers growth and strength to them, Joh 17.17. He says, "Desire the sincere milk of the word, that you may grow thereby." But what encouragement have we to do so? "If you have tasted that the Lord is gracious," 1Pet 2.2,3. If, in and by the dispensation of this word, you have experienced the grace, goodness, and kindness of God to your souls, you cannot help but desire and delight in it; otherwise you will not do so. When men have sat a good while under the dispensation of the word, and in the enjoyment of other ordinances, without tasting *in* and *by* them that "the Lord is gracious," they will grow weary of both it and them. Wherefore, prayer is the way of his appointment for the application of our souls to Him to obtain participation in all needful grace; which he has therefore proposed to us in the promises of the covenant, so we may know what to ask for, and how to plead for it. In the sacraments, the same promises are sealed to us, and the grace represented in them is effectually exhibited. Meditation confirms our souls in the exercise of faith about it, and it is the especial opening of the heart to receive it. By these means, I say, God communicates all supplies of renewing, strengthening, and sanctifying grace to us, that we may live to Him in all holy obedience, and be able to get the victory over our temptations. Under this apprehension, believers approach God in the ordinances of His worship. They come to them as the means of God's communication to their souls. Hence they cling to them with delight, so far as their affections are renewed. So the spouse testifies of herself, "I sat down under his shadow with great delight," Song 2.3. In these ordinances, is the protecting, refreshing presence of Christ. *This* [the Bride] rested in with great delight.

3. As they come to them with these designs and expectations, so they have experience of the spiritual benefits and advantages which they receive by them, which more and more engages them to them in their affections with delight. Those who have a change wrought in their affections, but not a spiritual renovation, are strangers to all these things. They have neither the design in coming to them, mentioned before, nor the experience of this efficacy which is now proposed in their attendance to them. But these benefits are great. For instance, when men find the worth of the word preached, in its effect on their souls, in its enlightening, refreshing, strengthening, transforming power; when they find their hearts warmed, their graces excited and strengthened, the love of God improved, their desponding spirits under trials and temptations relieved, their whole soul gradually conformed more and more to Christ; when they find themselves extricated out of snares, doubts, fears, temptations, and brought to sanctification and rest by it — they cannot help but delight in its dispensation, and rejoice in it as food for their souls. And it is a great hindrance to the increase of spiritual life, and an obstruction to fruitfulness, thankfulness, and consolation, when we are negligent in our meditation about the benefits that we receive by the word, and the advantages which we have by it. For while it is so with us, we can neither value the grace of God in granting this inestimable privilege, nor perform any duty with

respect to it in a right manner. This renders it an especial object of our affections as they are spiritually renewed. That secret love for, and heavenly delight in the statutes and testimonies of God, which David expresses in Psalm 119, arose from the spiritual benefit and advantage which he received by them, as he constantly declares.

And the sole reason, on the other hand, why men grow so careless, negligent, and cold in their attendance to the preaching of the word, is because they have no experience of any spiritual benefit or advantage by it. They've been brought to it by one means or another — mostly by conviction of their duty; their mind has been variously affected by it, unto a joy in hearing it and a readiness for sundry duties of obedience. But after a while, when a sense of those temporary impressions has worn off, finding no real spiritual benefit by it, they lose all delight in it, and become very indifferent as to its enjoyment. The frame which such persons at length arrive to, is described in Mal 1.13, and 3.14.¹ None can give any greater evidence of the decay of all manner of grace in them, or of their being destitute of all saving grace, than when they apostatize away from some degree of zeal for, and delight in the dispensation of the word of God, into such a cursed indifference as many are overtaken with. It cannot be otherwise; for seeing this is a way and means of the *exercise of all grace*, it won't be neglected except where there is a *decay of all grace*, no matter how men may please themselves with other pretenses. And when they are thus ensnared, every foolish prejudice, every provocation, every wanton opinion and imagination, will confirm them in, and increase their gradual backsliding.

And as it is with believers as to *hearing the word* in general, so it is as to *the degrees of advantage* which they find by it. Once men have enjoyed the dispensation of the word in a special manner, both spiritual and effectual, if they can then be content to forego it for what is colder and lifeless, provided it takes the same time and outward form as the other, that's no great evidence that their souls prosper. Therefore, it is those alone who have a sense of the efficacy of the word on their souls and consciences as to all its holy ends, who cling to it with spiritual love and delight. They continually remember what holy impressions it has made on them, what engagements it has brought their souls into, what encouragements to faith and obedience it has furnished them with; and so they long for a renewed sense of its enjoyment. When we don't find in ourselves this foundation of spiritual delight in the dispensation of the gospel, we can have no great evidence that our affections are renewed.

So it is in the duties of *prayer and meditation* also. When the soul of a believer has experienced communion with God in them, or either of them — of the spiritual refreshment it had from them; of the benefits and mercies which are obtained by them, in recovery from temptations, snares, and despondencies, in victory over sin and Satan, in spiritual impressions, working it into a holy, watchful frame which has abode in it in other ways and occasions; and like advantages with which fervent and effectual prayer and sincere heavenly meditation are accompanied — it cannot help but love them and delight in them. But if indeed we have no experience of these things, if we don't find these advantages in and by these duties, they cannot be anything but a burden to us; nor do they serve any other end than to satisfy our convictions.

Someone who had the benefit of a serene and wholesome air in recovering from many diseases and distempers, with the preservation of his health so obtained, will love it and prize it. And so will someone love and prize these duties, who has been partaker of any of those saving mercies and privileges with which they are accompanied. Some have been delivered from *the worst of temptations*, and their nearly prevailing (so as to destroy them), by a sudden remembrance of the frame of their souls, and the intimations of God's love in some particular prayer, at such a time.

¹ **Mal 1:13** You also say, 'Oh, what a weariness!' And you sneer at it," Says the LORD of hosts. "And you bring the stolen, the lame, and the sick; Thus you bring an offering! Should I accept this from your hand?" Says the LORD. **Mal 3:14** You have said, 'It is useless to serve God; What profit is it that we have kept His ordinance, And that we have walked as mourners Before the LORD of hosts?'

Some have had the same deliverance from temptations to sin, when they have been carried away under the power of their corruptions, and all circumstances have concurred under the apprehensions of it — and a sudden thought of such a prayer or meditation, with the engagement they made of themselves in it to God, has caused all the weapons of sin to fall out of its hands, and all the beauties of its allurements to disappear. When others have been under the power of such despondencies and disconsolations, that no present tenders of relief can approach them, they have been suddenly raised and refreshed by the remembrance of the intimate love and kindness between Christ and their souls that has evidenced itself in former duties. Multitudes, in fears, distresses, and temptations, have found relief for their spirits and encouragement to their faith in the remembrance of the responses they have had to former supplications in like distresses. *These* are grounds of spiritual delight in these duties.

Heartless, lifeless, wordy prayers, the fruit of convictions and gifts, or of custom and outward occasions, however multiplied, and whatever devotion they seem to be accompanied with, will never engage spiritual affections for them. When these things are absent, when the soul has no experience of them, prayer is but a lifeless form, a dead carcass; that would be a torment for a soul that is spiritually alive, to be tied to it. There may be a season, indeed, when God seems to hide himself from believers in their prayers, such that they neither find that life in themselves which they have found formerly, nor are they sensible of any gracious communications from Him. But this is done only for a time, and principally to stir them up to that fervency and perseverance in prayer which may recover them into their former, or a *better* estate than they have yet attained to. The same may be said concerning all other duties of religion or ordinances of divine worship.

4. Believers, whose affections are spiritually renewed, delight greatly in the duties of divine worship, because *they are the great instituted way by which they may give glory to God*. This is the first and principal end of all duties of religion as they respect divine appointment — namely, to ascribe and give to God the glory that is his due; for in them all acknowledgment is made of all the glorious excellencies of the divine nature, our dependence on Him and relation to him. And this is what, in the first place, believers design in all their duties of divine worship. And the pattern set for us by our blessed Savior, in the prayer he taught his disciples, directs us to this. All its first requests immediately concern the glory of God, and the advancement of it; for in this is included all the blessedness and safety of the church. Those who fail in this design, err in all that they do; they never tend to the mark proposed to them. But this is what principally animates the souls of those who believe, in all their duties. Their universal relation to him, and their love in that relation, makes this necessary. That's why that way and means by which they may directly and solemnly ascribe and give glory to God, is precious and delightful to them; and such are all the duties of divine worship.

These are some of the things in which the respect of affections spiritually renewed, to the ordinances and duties of divine worship, differs from the actings of affections toward the *same* object, which are not thus sanctified and renewed.

There are yet other things, accompanied with the same evidence of the difference between affections spiritually renewed and those which have only a general change wrought in them by convictions and some outward occasions, which must be insisted on in one or two more instances, with the consideration of those cases that derive from them. For my design in this is not only to declare *when* our minds are spiritually renewed, but also *what* is the nature and operation of our affections by which we are constituted and termed “spiritually minded” — which is the subject of our whole inquiry. In this, then, we will proceed.

CHAPTER 16. ASSIMILATION OF SPIRITUAL THINGS BY FAITH.

Assimilation of things heavenly and spiritual, in affections that are spiritually renewed – This assimilation is the work of faith; how, and by what – Reasons for the lack of growth in our spiritual affections as to this assimilation.

WHEN affections are spiritually renewed in their exercise, or fixing themselves on spiritual things, *there is an assimilation wrought in them and in the whole soul, to those spiritual and heavenly things, by faith.* But when there is a change in them only from other causes and occasions, and not from renewing grace, *there is an assimilation effected of spiritual and heavenly things themselves to those affections, only by imagination.*

This must be spoken to somewhat at large, as that which gives the most eminent distinction between the various frames of mind whose difference we inquire into. And to that end we will cast our consideration of it into the ensuing observations:

1. Affections spiritually renewed, in all their actings, in their whole exercise, are under the guidance and conduct of faith. It is faith which, in its spiritual light, leads the soul in the whole life of God. We live here by *faith, just as hereafter we will live by sight.* If our affections deviate or decline in the least from the guidance of the faith, they degenerate from their spirituality, and give themselves up to the service of superstition. Next to corrupt secular interest in the management of crafty, selfish seducers, this has been the great inlet of all superstition and false worship into the world. *Blind affections* groping in the dark after spiritual things, not having the saving light of faith to conduct them, have seduced the minds of men into all manner of superstitious imaginations and practices, continuing to do so at this present day. And wherever they lead the way, when faith doesn't go before them to discover both the way and the end, those that lead and the mind that is led, must fall into one snare and pit or another.

That's why affections that are spiritually renewed, don't move, and don't act, except as faith discovers their object and directs them to it. It is faith that works by love. We can *love nothing sincerely with divine love* except what we *believe savingly with divine faith.* Let our affections for any spiritual thing be ever so vehement, if they don't spring from faith, if they're not guided by it, they are neither accepted with God, nor will they promote the interest of spirituality and holiness in our own souls, Heb 11:6; Mat 6:22,23.¹ And this is the reason we often see great and plausible appearances of spiritual affections, which yet endure only for a season. They have been awakened, excited, and acted by one means or another, outward or inward. But not having the light of faith to guide them to their proper object, they either wither and die as to any appearance of spiritual motions, or else they keep the mind tossed up and down in perpetual disquietude, without rest or peace. "The foolish man wearis himself because he cannot find the way to the city." Ecc 10:15 So was it with those who, on account of their attendance to the doctrine of Christ, are called his disciples, John 6. Having preached to them about the bread which came down from heaven and gives life to those who feed, they were greatly affected with it, and cried out, "Lord, give us this bread evermore," verse 34. But when he proceeded to declare the mystery of it, they didn't have faith to discern and apprehend it, so their affections immediately decayed, and they abandoned both him and his doctrine, verse 66.

We may consider one especial instance of this nature. Persons every day fall under great and *effectual convictions of sin*, and thus of their danger or certain misery. This stirs up and acts all their affections, especially their fears, hopes, desires, sorrow, and self-revenge, as their condition calls for. Hence they sometimes grow restless in their complaints, and turn every way for relief,

¹ **Heb 11:6** But without faith *it is impossible to please Him*, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and *that* He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him. **Mat 6:22** "The lamp of the body is the eye. If therefore your eye is good, your whole body will be full of light. ²³ But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in you is darkness, how great is that darkness!"

like men who are off the highway and bewildered in the night. But in this state and condition, tell them of the only proper way and means of their relief— which, let the world say what it will, is *Christ and his righteousness alone*, with the grace of God in him — and they quickly discover that the means are strange to them, ones they don't understand, nor indeed approve. They cannot see them; they cannot discern them, nor any beauty in them for which they should be desired. Isa 53.2

Therefore, after their affections have been tossed up and down for a season under the power and torment of this conviction, they come to one or the other of these results. For either they utterly decay, and the mind loses all sense of any impressions from them, so that they wonder why they were so foolish as to be tossed and troubled with such melancholy fancies, and prove to be as bad a sort of men as live upon the earth; or else they take up a formal, legal profession, and never attain to being spiritually minded. This is the best end that our affections towards spiritual things come to, if not guided by the light of faith.

2. Faith has a clear prospect into and apprehension of spiritual things, as they are in themselves and in their own nature. It is true, the light of it cannot fully comprehend the nature of all those things which are the objects of its affections. For they are infinite and incomprehensible, as are the nature of God and the person of Christ; and some of them, such as future glory, are not yet clearly revealed. But it discerns them all in a due manner, so that they may be the objects of our affections *in themselves*, and not in any corrupt representation or imagination of them. They are, as the apostle says, “spiritually discerned,” 1Cor 2:14. This is the reason why the natural man cannot receive them — namely, because he doesn't have the ability spiritually to discern them. This is the principal end of the renovation of our minds, the principal work and effect of *faith* — namely, the communication to our minds, and the acting in us, of a spiritual saving light by which we may see and discern spiritual things as they are in their own nature, kind, and proper use.

Eph 1:17-19, “That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him: the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of his calling, and what are the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of his mighty power.”

2Cor 4:6, “God shines in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of his glory in the face of Jesus Christ.”

The end God designs is to draw our hearts and affections to himself. And to this end He gives us a glorious internal light, by which we may be enabled to discern the true nature of the things that we are to cling to with love and delight. Without this, we have nothing but false images of spiritual things in our minds; not always as to the truth or doctrine concerning them, but as to their reality, power, and efficacy. This is one of the principal effects of faith, as it is the principal part of the renovation of our minds — namely, to reveal in the soul and represent to the affections, things spiritual and heavenly in their nature, beauty, and genuine excellency. This attracts them if they are spiritually renewed, and causes them to cling with delight to what is so proposed to them. Whoever believes in Christ in a due manner, and thereupon discovers the excellency of his person and the glory of his mediation, will both love him, and “rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory.” So it is in all other instances. The steadier our view by faith of spiritual things, the firmer and more constant our affections will be in clinging to them. And wherever the mind is darkened about them, by temptation or seduction from the truth, there the affections will be quickly weakened and impaired. Therefore —

3. Affections thus led to and fixed on spiritual and heavenly things, under the light and conduct of faith, are more and more renewed, or made more spiritual and heavenly in themselves. They are, in their clinging to them and delight in them, continually changed and assimilated to the things themselves, becoming more and more what *they* are — namely, spiritual and heavenly.

This transformation is wrought by faith, and it's one of its most excellent faculties and operations. See 2Cor 3.18.¹ And the means by which it works in these, are our *affections*. In them, as we are carnal, we are conformed to this world; and by them, as we are sanctified, we are "transformed by the renewing of our mind," Rom 12.2. This transformation is the introduction of a new form or nature into our souls, diverse from what we were endued with before, as described in Isa 11.6-9.² They were changed into a *spiritual nature*. And this is twofold:

First, it is *original* and radical as to the substance or essence of it, which is the effect of the first act of divine grace upon our souls when we are made new creatures. Our affections are passive in this; they don't transform us, but are *transformed*.

Secondly, it is *gradual* as to its increase; and faith works in this, in and by the *affections*.

Whenever the affections cling intensely to any object they receive an impression from it — as wax does from the seal when applied to it — which changes them into its own likeness. So the apostle affirms about sensual, unclean persons: they "have eyes full of adultery," 2Pet 2.14. Their affections are so wholly possessed and filled with their lustful objects, that they have produced their own likeness upon their imaginations. That blots out all others, and leaves them no inclinations except what their affections stir up in them. When men are filled with the "love of this world," which carries along with it all their other affections — their hopes, fears, and desires — to a constant exercise about the same object, they become *earthly minded*. Their minds are so changed into the image of the things themselves, by the effectual working of the corrupt principles of sin, self-love, and lust, it's as though they were made up of the earth; and therefore have no savor of anything else.

In like manner, when by faith men come to embrace heavenly things, through the effectual working of a principle of spiritual life and grace in them, they are made more and more heavenly every day: "The inward man is renewed day by day." Love is more sincere and ardent, delight is more ravishing and tangible, desires are more enlarged and intense, and by all, a taste and relish of heavenly things is heightened into refreshing experience. See Rom 5.2-5.³

This is the way by which one grace is added to another in degrees, 2Pet 1.5-7.⁴ Great is the assimilation between *renewed affections* and their *spiritual objects*, that may be attained by this means.

The mind hereby becomes the temple of God, in which He dwells by the Spirit; Christ also dwells in believers, and they in him: "God is love; and he that dwells in love dwells in God, and God in him," 1Joh 4.16.

Love in its proper exercise gives a mutual inhabitation to God and believers. In brief, the one whose affections are set upon heavenly things in a due manner, will be heavenly minded; and in the due exercise of them, that heavenly mindedness will be increased. The transformation and

¹ **2Cor 3:18** But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.

² **Isa 11:6** "The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, The leopard shall lie down with the young goat, The calf and the young lion and the fatling together; And a little child shall lead them. ⁷ The cow and the bear shall graze; Their young ones shall lie down together; And the lion shall eat straw like the ox. ⁸ The nursing child shall play by the cobra's hole, And the weaned child shall put his hand in the viper's den. ⁹ They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain, For the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD As the waters cover the sea.

³ **Rom 5:2** through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. ³ And not only *that*, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; ⁴ and perseverance, character; and character, hope. ⁵ Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.

⁴ **2Pet 1:5** But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, ⁶ to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, ⁷ to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love.

assimilation that is wrought is not in the objects or spiritual things themselves; they are not changed either in themselves or in the representation made of them to our minds. The change is in our *affections*, which are made like them.

Two cases deriving from this principle and consideration may and will be spoken to here — the first in this chapter, the other in the following. The one concerns the slowness and imperceptibility of the growth of our affections in their assimilation of heavenly things, with the causes and reasons for it. The other is the decays that frequently befall men in their affections for spiritual things, instead of growing and thriving in them, with the causes and reasons for it.

1. The progress and growth of our affections into spirituality and heavenliness, into conformity to the things they're set upon, is often very *slow, and sometimes imperceptible*; indeed, for the most part, it's a hard thing to find it satisfactorily in ourselves or others. Our affections stand like shrubs in the wilderness, which when growth comes, aren't seen; they're not like plants in an enclosed garden, which are watered every day. But this isn't so, without our *folly* and our *sin*.

(1.) The *folly* that keeps many in this condition consists in this: *most Christians are contented with their present measures, and design little more than not to lose the ground they've gained*. This is a pernicious folly that both ruins the glory of religion, and deprives the souls of men of peace and consolation. But so it is. Men have some grounds of persuasion, or at least they hope and suppose they have such grounds, that they have "passed from death to life," that they are in a state of grace and acceptance with God. They will endeavor to preserve this state by a diligent performance of the duties it requires, and the avoidance of those sins by which they might forfeit it. But as for earnest, watchful endeavors and diligence to *thrive* in this state, to *grow* in grace, to be *changed* from glory to glory into the image of Christ, to *press forward* towards the mark of their high calling — and after perfection, to lay hold upon eternal life, to be more holy, more humble, more righteous, more spiritually minded, to have their affections more and more transformed into the likeness of things above — there are but few who sincerely and diligently apply themselves to this endeavor, or to the means of these things. The measures which they have attained to, give satisfaction to the church, and their reputation in the world, that they are professors; and some thus speak peace to their own souls. To be more holy and heavenly, to have their affections more taken up with the things above, they suppose to be somewhat inconsistent with their present occasions and affairs. By this means, religion has lost much of its glory, and the souls of men have been deprived of the principal advantages of it in this world.

Such persons are like men who live in a country in which they are not only pressed with poverty and all sorts of misery, but also liable to grievous punishments, even death itself, if they are taken in it. In this condition, they are told and assured of *another* country in which, as soon as they have arrived, they will be freed from all fear of danger or punishment. And if they pass further into it, they will meet with riches, plenty, and a fair inheritance provided for them. Upon this, they begin their voyage to an entrance to it and possession of it. But no sooner do they come within its borders, and so are freed from danger, or fear of punishment and death, than they sit down, and will go no further to enjoy the good things of the country into which they have come. And it happens with many of them, that through their sloth, negligence, and ignorance, they come short of the true bounds and limits of the country of liberty and peace which they aimed at; and so danger and death surprise them unawares. This ruin could not have befallen them, if they had industriously endeavored to enter into the heart of the country, and possessed the good things there. At best, being only on the borders, they lead a poor life all their days, exposed to wants and danger.

So it is in this case. Men falling under the power of convictions, and those restless fears which accompany them, will stir themselves up and inquire how they may "flee from the wrath to come,"³⁻⁷ how they may be delivered from the state of sin, and the eternal misery which will immediately ensue.

In the gospel, not only mercy and pardon are proposed to them upon their *believing*, which is the first entrance into the heavenly country; but peace, joy, and spiritual strength, upon their *admission* into it, and then *progress* made in it by faith and obedience. But once they attain so far as to have some hopes of pardon and freedom from the curse, so as to deliver them from their tormenting fears, many will endeavor to preserve those hopes, and keep that state. But they won't pass on to a full enjoyment of the precious things of the gospel, by *growth in grace and spiritual affections*. How many of them fall under woeful mistakes! For, supposing they're in a gospel state, the issue (the outcome) proves that they never entered it. They were, perhaps, "not far from the kingdom of heaven,"³⁴ in the same sense it was said of someone who never came there. There is no way to secure an interest in the gospel (as to pardon and mercy, safety and deliverance), but by *growth* in grace, holiness, and spirituality. *This* is what gives an entrance into the choicest mercies and privileges of it.

This folly of men in taking up their measures, endeavoring only to *maintain* that state and condition which they hope they have attained, is the great reason why their affections don't daily grow up into spirituality, through an assimilation of heavenly things. And it is a folly attended with innumerable aggravations; for instance —

[1.] It is contrary and destructive to the genuine and principal property of gospel grace; for our Savior compares it everywhere to things which, from small seeds and beginnings, grow by a continual increase to large measures — such as a grain of mustard seed, a little leaven, and the like. That grace in whose nature it is *not* to thrive and grow, may justly be suspected, and should be diligently examined by those who take care of their own souls, and would not be eternally deceived.

[2.] It is contrary to the most excellent or invaluable *evangelical promises* recorded in the Old Testament and New, which are among the principal supports of the faith, hope, and comfort of believers. God has given them to us to encourage us to expect such supplies of grace that will cause us to thrive and grow against all opposition, to the utmost of our continuance in this world. And they are so multiplied that there is no need to mention any of them in particular. God evidences by these how great and precious is the grace which he so often promises, and of what consideration it is to us. See Psa 92:13-15; Isa 40:28-31.¹ Thus, the folly of being content with present measures of grace, holiness, and spirituality, is attended with two unspeakable evils:

1st, A *signal contempt* of the love, grace, faithfulness, and wisdom of God, in giving us such promises of grace, to make us to *increase, thrive, and grow*. How can it be done more effectually than by such a neglect of his promised grace?

2dly, An *evidence* that such persons don't love or care for grace and holiness for their own sake, but merely to serve their turn at present, as they suppose; nor do they desire the least grace or privilege by Christ, without which they can have any hopes to get to heaven. This sufficiently reveals men to be wholly under the power of self-love, and to center in this; for if they may have enough grace and mercy to save them, they don't care for more.

[3.] It is repugnant to the *honor of gospel grace*, as though it would carry us so far, and no farther, on the way to glory. For it must be known that this sort of persons, who sit down in

¹ **Psa 92:13** Those who are planted in the house of the LORD Shall flourish in the courts of our God.¹⁴ They shall still bear fruit in old age; They shall be fresh and flourishing.¹⁵ To declare that the LORD is upright; *He is my rock, and there is no unrighteousness in Him.* **Isa 40:28** Have you not known? Have you not heard? The everlasting God, the LORD, The Creator of the ends of the earth, Neither faints nor is weary. His understanding is unsearchable.²⁹ He gives power to the weak, And to *those who have* no might He increases strength.³⁰ Even the youths shall faint and be weary, And the young men shall utterly fall,³¹ But those who wait on the LORD Shall renew *their* strength; They shall mount up with wings like eagles, They shall run and not be weary, They shall walk and not faint.

their present measures and attainments, either really have no true grace at all, or it is of the lowest, meanest, and most imperceptible size and degree. For if anyone has attained any considerable growth in faith and love, in the mortification of sin, in heavenly mindedness, it is utterly impossible for him, ordinarily, not to press forward towards further attainments and further degrees of spiritual strength in the life of God. So the apostle declares it in his own example, Phi 3:12-14.¹ What thoughts can these persons have concerning the glory, power, and efficacy of gospel grace, which they suppose they have received? If they measure them by the effects which they find in themselves — either as to the mortification of sin, or strength and delight in duties of holiness, or as to spiritual consolation — they can see no excellency nor beauty in them; for they don't manifest themselves except in their success as they transform the soul daily into the image of Christ.

[4.] *It is that which has lost the reputation and glory of religion in the world*, and thus the honor of the gospel itself. For most professors adopt those measures which put no lustre on the Gospel, and give no commendation to the religion they profess. For their measures allow them such a conformity to the world — in their ways, words, and actions, in their gestures, apparel, and attire — that they are in no way to be visibly distinguished from the world. Indeed, the ground and reason why most rest in their present measures, is because they would not be further differenced from the world. This has greatly lost the glory, honor, and reputation of religion among us. And on the other side, if all visible professors would endeavor to continually grow and thrive in spirituality of mind and heavenliness of affections, with fruits that are suited to that, it would bring a conviction on the world that there is a secret invisible power accompanying the religion they profess, transforming them daily into the image and likeness of God.

[5.] Whatever is pretended to the contrary, *it is inconsistent with all solid peace of conscience*; for no such thing is promised to any who live in such a contempt of divine promises, nor is it attainable except by the diligent exercise of all those graces which lie neglected under this frame. Few men are able to judge whether they have real, internal, abiding peace or not, unless it is in case of trials and temptations. At other seasons, general hopes and confidences may supply the lack of it in their minds; but when any fear, danger, trial, or word of conviction, befalls them, they cannot help but inquire and examine how it is with themselves. And if they find their affections are cold, dead, earthly, carnal, withering, not spiritual or heavenly, there will be an end of their supposed peace, and they will fall into woeful disquietudes. And they will then find that the root of all this evil lies in this frame and disposition: They have been so far satisfied with their present measures or attainments in religion, that the utmost of their endeavors has been but to preserve their station, or not to forfeit it by open sins; to keep their souls alive from the severe reflections of the world, and to keep their reputation fair in the church of God. But to *thrive* spiritually, to *prosper* in their souls, to grow fat and flourishing in the inward man, to bring forth more fruit as age increases, to press towards perfection — these are things they have not designed nor pursued.

This is why so many among us are visibly at an unthrifty standstill in the world — that where they were one year, there they are still in another, like shrubs in the wilderness; not like plants in the “garden of God,” not like vines planted in “a very fruitful hill.” Isa 5:1 Indeed, though many sense that they are cold, lifeless, and fruitless, they won’t be convinced that there is a necessity to make daily progress in spirituality and heavenly mindedness, so that the inward man may be renewed day by day, and grace may be augmented with the increase of God. This is work,

¹ **Phi 3:12** Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. ¹³ Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing *I do*, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, ¹⁴ I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

they suppose, for those who have nothing else to do. But it's not consistent with their own business, callings, and occasions; it's not necessary to their salvation, they hope; nor, maybe, is it to be attained by them if they were to set themselves about it. In many, this apprehension or imagination, at the beginning of the declension and decay of Christian religion, casts holiness and devotion onto that sort of men who undertook to utterly retire from the world; those among whom the substance of religion was quickly lost, and a cloud or meteor of superstition was embraced in its place. This folly is ominous to the souls of men.

Those who have made the greatest progress in conforming their affections to things spiritual and heavenly, know most of its necessity, excellency, and desirableness — indeed, without some progress in it, these things will *not* be known. These men will testify that the more they attain in this, the more they see there is *yet* to be attained, and the more they desire what was attained before. Forgetting those things which are behind, they reach forth to the things that are yet before them, like men running in a race, whose prize and reward is yet before them, Phi 3.13, 14. It is a beautiful thing to see a Christian weaned from the world, minding heavenly things, green and flourishing in spiritual affections; and it is even lovelier because it is so rare. Most of them take up with those measures which neither glorify God nor bring a durable peace to their own souls.

What men pretend and complain about in this, is *the difficulty of the work*. They suppose they can preserve their present station; but to press forward, to grow in grace, to thrive in their affections, this is too hard for them. This complaint is unequal and unjust, and adds to the guilt of their sloth. It reflects negatively on the words of our Savior, that “his yoke is easy and his burden light,” Mat 11.30 that “his commandments are not grievous.” 1Joh 5.3 It expresses unbelief in the promises of God tendering such supplies of grace as to render all the ways of Wisdom easy, indeed, the ways of mercy and peace. It is contrary to the experience of all who have engaged in the ways of gospel obedience with any sincerity and diligence. And the whole cause of the pretended difficulty lies in themselves alone, which may be reduced to these two heads:

1st, *A desire to retain some thing (or things) that is inconsistent with such progress*; for unless the heart is ready on all occasions to esteem everything “as loss and dung, that we may win Christ,” the work will be accompanied with insuperable difficulties. This is the first principle of religion, of gospel obedience: that *all things* are to be despised for Christ. But this difficulty doesn't arise from the thing itself, but from our indisposition to it and unfitness for it. What is an easy, pleasant walk to a sound and healthy man, is a toilsome journey to someone diseased and infirm. In particular, while men retain an inordinate respect for the world, the vanities, the pleasures, the profits, the contentments of it; while self-love clings to us, putting an undue valuation on our persons, our relations, our enjoyments, and our reputations — we will labor in the fire when we engage in this duty; or rather, we won't sincerely engage in it at all. That's why the apostle tells us that in this case, we must cast off every weight, and the sin that so easily besets us, if we intend to run with joy the race that is set before us, Heb 12.1.

2dly, *It is because men dwell continually at the entrances of religion, in the first and lowest exercise of grace*. Some are always *beginning* at religion, and the beginning of things is always difficult. They intend *not* to be complete in the whole will of God, nor to grant all graces their perfect work. With use, they don't habituate grace to a readiness in all the actings of grace, which the apostle commands in those who are “perfect” or complete, Heb 5.14.¹ Hence he calls such persons “babes and carnal,” compared to those who are “strong men and spiritual.” Such persons don't oblige themselves to the whole work and all the

¹ **Heb 5:14** But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, *that is*, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.

duties of religion, but only to what they judge necessary for them in their present circumstances. In particular, they don't attempt a thorough work in the mortification of any sin, but they hew and hack at it as their convictions are urgent, or abate; the wounds from this in the body of sin are quickly healed. They don't grant any grace its perfect work, but are always making mere attempts; and so they give up.

So long as it is this way with any, they will be deluded with apprehensions of insuperable difficulties as to the growth of their affections in spirituality and heavenliness. Remove these things out of the way, as they *ought* to be removed, and we'll find that all the paths in which we are to walk towards God, are pleasantness and peace.

This is the first cause why there may be affections that are truly spiritual and graciously renewed in some persons, who yet don't thrive in an assimilation and conformity to heavenly things. Men keep to their present measures, and thereupon pretend there is either a necessary occasion, or discouragements from difficulties, hindering their attempts at spiritual growth in the inward man. But as they bring no honor to Christ, they may thank themselves if they have no solid peace in their own souls.

(2.) Just as the evil proceeds from *folly*, so it is always the consequent of *sin*, of *many sins*, and of various sorts. Let's not dwell on heartless complaints that we don't find our affections lively and heavenly, or that we don't find the inward man thriving or growing. Let's not hearken after this or that relief or comfort under this consideration, as many things are usually insisted on to this purpose. They may be of use when persons are under temptations and not able to make a right judgment of themselves; but in the course of our ordinary walking with God, they are not to be attended or resorted to.

The general reason for this evil state is our own sinful carelessness, negligence, and sloth, with perhaps an indulgence of some known lust or corruption. In vain we seek refreshing cordials, as though we were only spiritually *faint*, when in fact we stand in need of lancing and burnings, being near comatose. It would take too long to give instances of those sins which effectually obstruct the thriving of spiritual affections. But in general, when men are careless as to the continual watch they should keep over their hearts; while they are negligent in holy duties, either as to their seasons or the manner of their performance; when they are strangers to holy meditation and self-examination; while they inordinately pursue the things of the world, or are so tender and delicate that they won't undergo the hardship of a heavenly life, either as to the inward or outward man; and much more, when they are vain in their conversation, and corrupt in their communication, especially if they're under the predominant influence of any particular lust — it is vain to think of thriving in spiritual affections. And yet this is how it is with all those who ordinarily and in their constant course, are careless in this.

CHAPTER 17. DECAYS IN SPIRITUAL AFFECTIONS.

Decays in spiritual affections, with the causes and danger of them — Advice to those who are sensible of the evil of spiritual decays.

2. It must be acknowledged that there's something still worse than what we've insisted on so far, and more opposite to the *growth of affections* in conformity to heavenly things, which is the proper character of those who are spiritually renewed. And this something is their *spiritual decay*, manifesting itself in tangible and visible effects. There are some (indeed many) who upon a profession of their conversion to God, have made a great appearance of vigorous, active, spiritual affections. Indeed, it is so with most, maybe all, who are really so converted. *God takes notice of the love of the young ones among His people, of the love of their espousals.*

In some, this vigor of spiritual affections is from the real power of grace, exerting its efficacy on their hearts and in their minds. In others, it is from *other* causes — for instance, relief from conviction, by spiritual illumination, will produce this effect. And it is to the advantage of such persons, that generally a change is wrought in their *younger* days; for then their affections in their natural powers are active, and bear great sway in the whole soul. That's why the change that is made, is most eminent in them, whatever it may be. But as men increase in age, and thereon grow up in carnal wisdom, and a great valuation of earthly things, with their care about them and converse in them, they abate and decay in their spiritual affections every day. They will abide in their profession, but have *lost their first love*.

It's a shame and an unutterable folly that it should be this way with any who profess that religion in which there are so many incomparable excellencies to endear and engage them to it more and more. But why should we hide what experience makes manifest in the sight of the sun, and what multitudes proclaim concerning themselves? That's why I look at it as a great evidence — if not absolute evidence of the sincerity of grace, yet of the life and growth of it — when men grow in age, they also grow in their undervaluation of present things, in contempt of the world, and in duties of charity and bounty, and they don't decay in any of them. But I say it is usual that upon men's profession of religion and conversion to God, it is attended with vigorous, active affections towards spiritual things. Of those who really and *sincerely believed*, it is said that upon their believing “they rejoiced with joy unspeakable and full of glory;” ^{1Pet 1.8} and of those who had only a work of *conviction* on them, improved by *temporary faith*, that “they received the word with joy, and did many things gladly.” ^{Luk 8.13}

Many abide and thrive in this state, until their affections are wholly transformed into the image and likeness of things above. But with many, of all sorts, this isn't so. They fall into woeful decays as to their affections about spiritual things. And consequently, in their whole profession and conversation, their moisture becomes like a summer drought. They have no experience of the life and actings of these spiritual affections in themselves, nor any comfort or refreshment from them. They don't honor the gospel with any fruits of love, zeal, or delight, nor are they in any way useful to others by their example. Some of them have had seeming recoveries, and are yet they are again taken into a lifeless frame. Warnings, afflictions, sicknesses, the word, have awakened them, but they have fallen back into a dead sleep, such that they seem to be “trees whose fruit withers, without fruit, *twice* dead, plucked up by the roots.” ^{Jud 1.12}

Some things must be said about this woeful condition in general, as that which is directly opposite to the grace and duty of being spiritually minded, and contrary to and obstructive of the growth of spiritual affections in an assimilation of heavenly things. And what is said may be applied to all the degrees of these decays, though all of them are not alike dangerous or perilous.

(1.) There may be a *time of temptation*, in which a soul may apprehend in itself not only a decay in spiritual affections, but an utter loss of all, when it is not so. As believers may apprehend and judge that the Lord has forsaken and forgotten them when He hasn't, Isa 49.14,15, so they may,

under their temptations, apprehend that they have forsaken God, when they haven't. It's like a man in the night may apprehend he has lost his way, and be in great distress, when he is on the right road; for temptation brings darkness and shock, and leads us into mistakes and a false judgment in all things. Maybe they don't find grace working in love, joy, and delight, as it did formerly, nor do they find that same activity of heart and mind in holy duties which spiritual affections gave them. Yet it may be that the same grace works in godly sorrow — by mourning, humiliation, and self-abasement — no less effectually, and no less acceptably to God. I separate such things as these from our present consideration.

(2.) There may be a *decay in affections themselves* as to their actings towards any objects whatever, at least as to their outward symptoms and effects; and on this ground, their operations toward spiritual things may be less tangible. So men in their younger days may be readier to express their sorrow by tears, and to express their joy by tangible exultation and motion of their spirits, than those in riper years. And this may be true when there's no decay of grace in their renewed affections. But —

[1.] When this is so, it's a *burden* to those in whom it is found. They can only mourn and have a godly jealousy over themselves, lest the decays they find are not only in the outward but the inward man, not only in the natural but the spiritual man; and they labor that in all duties, at all times, it may be with them now as in days of old, even if they cannot attain that strength in them, that vigor of spirit, that life, joy, peace, and comfort, which many have experienced.

[2.] There will be no *decays in holiness* of life in such persons, nor less diligence in all their religious duties. If the decay is really of grace in the *affections*, it will be accompanied with a proportional decay in all other things in which the life of God is concerned; but if it is only as to the tangible actings of *natural* affections, no such decay will ensue.

[3.] Grace in this case will more vigorously act itself in the other faculties and powers of the soul, such as the *judgment* and the *will*, in their approval of and firm adherence to spiritual things. But —

When men find their affections are still quick, active, and intent on other things, such as the lawful enjoyments and comforts of this life, it is in vain to relieve themselves by thinking the decays they find are in their *natural* affections, and not (as they ought to be) *gracious*. If we see a man in his old age grow more in love with the things of this world, and less in love with the things of God, it is not through the weakness of nature, but through the strength of sin.

On these, and maybe some other like occasions, there may be an apprehension of a decay in spiritual affections when it may not be so, at least not to the *degree* that is apprehended. But when it is so *really*, as it evidently is with many, I almost said *with most* these days, it is a woeful frame of heart, and never enough to be lamented. It is what lies in direct contradiction to that spiritual mindedness which is life and peace. It is a consumption of the soul, which threatens it with death every day.

It doesn't belong to my design to treat this in particular, yet I cannot let it pass without some remarks on it, for it's an evil that is almost epidemic among professors, and prevalent in some to such a degree that they seem to be utterly forsaken of all powers of spiritual life.

Now, besides all that *folly* and *sin* which we revealed before as the causes of the lack of the growth of our affections in spirituality and heavenliness, which are more abominable in this case of their decay, there is a multiplication of evils which accompany this state of heart and mind; for —

(1.) Of all things, the Lord Christ is most displeased with this in *churches* or professors. He pities them in their temptations, he suffers with them in their persecutions, he intercedes for them on their surprisal, but he threatens them under their spiritual decays, Rev 2.4,5; 3.1-3.

He cannot bear with this, because it both reflects dishonor upon himself, and he knows it is ruinous to those in whom it exists. He will bear longer with those who are utterly dead, than with those who abide under these decays, Rev 3:15,16.¹ This is the only case (unless it is that of false worship and idolatry) in which he threatens to reject and cast off a professing church, and to take away his candlestick. He that spoke this way to the churches of old, now speaks the same way to us; for he lives forever, and is always the same, and his word is living and unchangeable. There is not one of us under this frame, that the Lord Christ, by his word and Spirit, does not testify of His displeasure against us; and if *He* is against us, who will plead *for* us? Consider what he says in this case, Rev 2:5, 3:3.² Oh! who can stand before these dreadful intimations of His displeasure? The Lord help us to mind it, lest He in whom we profess to place our only trust, is found to be our greatest enemy! Take heed of those sins which Christ himself, our only Advocate, has put a mark upon, as those which he will not save us from.

(2.) It is that with which *the Holy Spirit is grieved* above all things. His work is to give grace an increase and progress in our souls; he begins it, and he carries it on. And there can be no greater grief to a wise and gracious worker than to have his work decay and go backward under his hand. This is the occasion of those complaints of God which we find in the Scripture, of the unprofitableness and backsliding of men after the use of means and remedies for their fruitfulness and cure. “What more,” He asks, “could I have done for my vineyard than I have done? Why, then, when I looked for grapes, did it bring forth wild grapes?” Isa 5:4 Can anything else be apprehended, that is such a just matter for grief and complaint by the Holy Spirit, as this? To find those whom He had once raised up to holy and heavenly affections — such that their delights were in, and their thoughts were much upon, the things that are above — have become earthly or sensual, and have no tangible actings of any of His graces in them? This is the state of those who are under the power of spiritual decays, And this is the only case in which God speaks to men in the way of complaint and expostulation, and uses all sorts of arguments to convince them of their folly in this.

When a wise, tender, and careful parent has been diligent in the use of all means for the education of his child, and for some time he has had good hopes for him, finds the child is slack in his diligence, careless in his calling, and delights in evil company — how solicitous his heart is about him! How much he is grieved and affected with this miscarriage! The heart of the Spirit of God is infinitely more tender towards us than the most affectionate parent can be towards an only child. And when with cost and care He has nourished and brought us up to some growth and progress in spiritual affections, in which all his concerns in us lie, for us to then grow cold, dull, and earthly minded, to cling to the pleasures or lusts of this world — how grieved He is! How provoked He is! It may be that this consideration of grieving the Holy Spirit has no great weight with some; they might have little concern in it if they could well free themselves in other respects. But let such persons know that it is impossible for them to give greater evidence of a profligate hardness in sin.

(3.) This is what, in an especial manner, provokes *the judgments of God against any church*, as intimated before. When any church has a good reputation in the order of its profession and worship, but the power of grace acting in the affections is *dead* — when it is not so cold as to forsake the external institutions of worship, nor so hot as to enliven their duties with spiritual

¹ **Rev 3:15** “I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. ¹⁶ So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth.”

² **Rev 2:5** “Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place— unless you repent. **Rev 3:3** “Remember therefore how you have received and heard; hold fast and repent. Therefore if you will not watch, I will come upon you as a thief, and you will not know what hour I will come upon you.”

affections — the Lord Christ will not long bear with them. Indeed, judgment will suddenly break out towards such a house of God.

(4.) It is absolutely inconsistent with all *comfortable assurance of the love of God*. Whatever persons under the power of such a frame pretend to of that kind, it is sinful security, *not* gracious assurance or peace. And as professors grow cold and decay in their spiritual affections, stupidity of conscience and security of mind also grow upon them constantly. It is so, I say, unless they are surprised or overtaken sometimes with some *greater sin*, which reflects severely on their consciences, and casts them for a time under troubles and distresses. But to think that peace with God, and a comfortable assurance of salvation, are consistent with a habitual decay in grace — especially in those graces which should act themselves in our affections — is contrary to the whole tenor and testimony of the Scripture; and supposing it would be consistent, is the bane and poison of religion. I'm not saying that our assurance and peace with God arise wholly from the actings of grace in us; there are other causes of them, into which they are principally resolved. But I say this, that under a habitual declension or decay of grace in the spirituality of our affections, no man can keep or maintain a gracious sense of the love of God, or of peace with him. And therefore, no duty is to be more severely pressed on all believers these days, than a diligent examination and trial of the *grounds* of their peace, lest it be with any of them as it was with Laodicea,^{Rev 3:14f} who was satisfied in her good state and condition, when it was most miserable and almost desperate. Yes, I must say that it is impossible that many professors whom we see and converse with, would thus have any solid peace with God. “Do men gather grapes from thorns, or figs from thistles?”^{Luk 6:44} It is a fruit that will not grow on a vain, earthly, selfish frame of mind and conversation. And therefore such persons, whatever they may pretend, are either asleep in sinful security, or live on most uncertain hopes which probably deceive them. Nothing can be so ruinous to our profession, as to once suppose this decay is an easy matter of course to maintain our peace with God. God forbid that our utmost diligence and continued endeavors to thrive in every grace, were not required for this! The whole beauty and glory of our religion depends on it. “To be spiritually minded is life and peace.”^{Rom 8:6}

(5.) Such a decay as that described, is a dangerous symptom of an *evil state and condition*, and those in whom it continues will at last be found to be but hypocrites. I know such persons will or may have pretended evidences to the contrary, and they are well enough satisfied with their own sincerity in many things, that it is impossible to fix on them the sense and conviction of being but hypocrites. But this apprehension arises from a *false notion of hypocrisy*. No man, they suppose, is a hypocrite, unless he generally or universally *pretends* in religion to be what he is not, and what he *knows* himself not to be, or at least might easily do so. It's true that this is the broadest notion of pharisaic hypocrisy. But take a hypocrite for someone who, under light, profession, gifts, and duties, habitually and willingly fails in any point of *sincerity*, and he is no less a perishing hypocrite than the former; and it may alter the case with them. I don't say that everyone in whom there is this prevalent decay in spiritual affections is a hypocrite; God forbid! I only say that when it continues *without remedy*, it is such a symptom of hypocrisy that the one who is wise and cares for his soul, won't rest until he has searched it to the bottom.

For it seems this way with such persons: they have had a false or imperfect work in that conversion to God which they have professed. It is made up of conviction of sin, communication of spiritual light and gifts, alteration upon the affections, change of society and conversation. Now, it is the nature of such a work to greatly flourish for a season, in all the principal parts and duties of profession; but in its nature, it is also to gradually decay until it is quite withered away. In some, it is lost by the power of some vigorous temptations, and particular lusts that are indulged, ending in worldliness and sensuality; but in most it decays gradually until it has lost

all its savor and sap. See Joh 15.5.¹ Therefore, so long as men find this decay in themselves — unless they have fallen under the power of a destructive security, unless they are hardened through the deceitfulness of sin — they cannot help but think it their duty to examine how things stand with them. Did they ever effectually close with Christ, and have the faith of God's elect, which works by love, seeing it's as though they had only a work of another nature. For a *saving* work, in its own nature and in the diligent use of means, thrives and grows, as the whole Scripture testifies; but it is this false and imperfect working that has no root, and is thus subject to withering. Mat 13.21

(6.) Persons in such an estate are apt to deceive themselves with *false hopes and notions*, by which the deceitfulness of sin exerts its power to harden them to their ruin. There are **two ways** by which this pernicious effect is produced — the *one* by the prevalence of a particular lust or sin; the *other* by a neglect of spiritual duties, and a vain conversation in the world, under which the soul pines away and is consumed. As to the first of these, there are *three false notions* by which the deceitfulness of sin deludes the souls of men:

[1.] The first notion is that it is this *one sin alone* in which they would be indulged. Let them be spared in this *one thing*, and in all others they will be exact enough. This is the mixture that Naaman would have made in matters of religion, 2Kng 5.18, and it is that which many trust to. Hence, by the event of it, it appears that some persons have lived long in the practice of some gross sin, and yet all the while used *a semblance of great diligence* in other duties of religion. This is a false notion by which poor sinners delude their own souls. For suppose it were possible for a man to give himself up to any lust, or be under its power, and yet observe all other duties — this would give him no relief as to the eternal condition of his soul. The rule is peremptory to this purpose, Jas 2.10,11.² One sin *willingly* lived in, is as able to destroy a man's soul as a thousand. Besides, it is *false in practice*. There is no man who lives in any one known sin, who doesn't really live in more, even though that one bears the chief sway. With some persons these sins appear to others, who observe their frame and spirit, even if they don't appear to themselves; in some they are manifest in themselves, even if hidden from others, 1Tim 5:24.³ But let no man relieve himself with thoughts that it is *but one sin*, while that one sin keeps him in a constant neglect of God. Hence —

[2.] They deceive themselves by this notion. For they judge that although they cannot as yet *shake off their sin*, yet they will still continue to love God and abound in the duties of his worship. They won't for all the world become haters of God and his ways, and persecutors; and therefore they hope that, notwithstanding this one Zoar,^{Gen 19.20} this *lesser sin*, which their constitution and their circumstances engage them in, it may be well with them at the last. This also is a *false notion*, a mere instrument in the hand of sin to act its deceit by. For no man who willingly lives in any sin, can love God at all, as evident in that rule, 1Joh 2:15.⁴ It is but a false pretense of love to God that any man has who lives in any known sin. Where God is not loved *above all*, he is not loved *at all*; and he is not so loved where men will not part with one cursed lust for His sake. Don't let your light deceive you, nor your gifts, nor your duties, nor your profession — if you live in sin, you don't love God.

¹ **Joh 15:5** “I am the vine, you *are* the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.

² **Jas 2:10** For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one *point*, he is guilty of all. ¹¹ For He who said, “Do not commit adultery,” also said, “Do not murder.” Now if you do not commit adultery, but you do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law.

³ **1Tim 5:24** Some men's sins are clearly evident, preceding *them* to judgment, but those of some *men* follow later.

⁴ **1Joh 2:15** Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.

[3.] They determine that at *some season or time*, after such satisfaction is given to their lusts or pleasures, they will utterly give over, so that iniquity won't be their ruin. But this is a false notion also, an effectual instrument of the deceitfulness of sin.^{Heb 3:13} Someone who won't *now* give over, who won't *immediately* upon the discovery of the prevalence of any sin, and a warning about it, endeavor sincerely and constantly to relinquish it — say what he will and pretend what he will, he never *intends* to give it up, nor is it probable, in an ordinary way, that he *ever will*.

When men's decays are from the prevalence of particular sins, by these and like false notions, they harden themselves to their ruin.

For those who are pining away under a hectic consumption, a *general* decay of the vital spirits of religion, they also have false notions by which they deceive themselves; such as —

[1.] That although they have some cause to *mistrust themselves*, yet indeed their condition is not so bad as some may apprehend it, or as they are warned it is. And this arises from thinking that they have not as yet been overtaken with any enormous sin which has filled their consciences with terror and disquietude. But this is a false notion also; for every decay is dangerous, especially one which the mind is ready to plead for and countenance itself in.

[2.] They are prone to suppose that this decay doesn't arise from *themselves and the evil of their own hearts*, but from their circumstances, businesses, present occasions, and state of life. When they are freed from these, they think, they will at least return to their former love and delight in spiritual things. But this is a false notion also, by virtue of that rule, Heb 3:12.¹ Let men's circumstances and occasions of life be what they will, all their departures from God are from "an evil heart of unbelief."

[3.] They judge it no hard matter to retrieve themselves from this state, which they can easily do *when there is an absolute necessity for it*. But this is a false notion also. Recovery from backsliding is the hardest task in Christian religion, and few make either comfortable or honorable work of it.

In this state, I say, men are apt to deceive themselves by such false reasonings, to their eternal ruin; which makes the consideration of it even more necessary.

Lastly, I therefore say on the whole, that whoever is under the power of this wretched frame, whoever is sensible in themselves, or at least make it evident to others, that they are decaying in their spiritual condition, if they *rest* in that state, without groaning, laboring, or endeavoring for deliverance from it, they can have no well-grounded hopes of life and immortality. Yes, they are in those "paths which go down to the chambers of death."

I cannot let this pass without some advice to those who find themselves under such decays, are sensible of them, and would be delivered from them. And I will give it in a few words.

FIRST, *Remember former things*; call to mind how it was with you in the spring and vigor of your affections, and compare your present state, enjoyment, peace, and quiet, with what they were then. This will be a great principle of return to God, Hos 2:7.² And to put a little weight on it, we may consider —

First, God makes it, *on His part*, a ground and reason for his return to us in a way of mercy, and of the continuance of His love, Jer 2:2.³ Even when a people are under manifold decays,

¹ **Heb 3:12** Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God;

² **Hos 2:7** She will chase her lovers, But not overtake them; Yes, she will seek them, but not find *them*. Then she will say, 'I will go and return to my first husband, For then *it was* better for me than now.'

³ **Jer 2:2** "Go and cry in the hearing of Jerusalem, saying, 'Thus says the LORD: "I remember you, The kindness of your youth, The love of your betrothal, When you went after Me in the wilderness, In a land not sown."

while they are yet within the bounds of God's covenant and mercy, he will remember their first love, with the fruits and actings of it in trials and temptations. This moves his compassion towards them. And the way to have God thus remember it, is for us to remember it with delight, and a longing of soul that it would be with us as it was in those days of old, when we had the love of espousals for God in Christ, Jer 31:18-20.¹

Secondly, It is the way by which the saints of old have refreshed and encouraged themselves under their greatest despondencies. So the psalmist says in many places; for instance, Psa 42.6, "O my God, my soul is cast down within me: therefore will I remember you from the land of Jordan, and of the Hermonites, from the hill Mizar." David in the time of his persecution by Saul, when he wandered up and down in deserts, wildernesses, and solitudes, had under his fears, distresses, and exercises, great, holy, spiritual communion with God; as many of his psalms composed on such occasions testify. And the greater his distresses, the more fervent were his affections in all his addresses to God. And he was never in greater distress than when he escaped out of the cave at Adullam, and went from there to Mizpah of Moab, to get shelter for his parents, 1Sam 22.3. Then he was in the land of the Hermonites, the hill Hermon being the boundary eastward of the Israelites' possession next to Moab, Deu 3.8,9. There, no doubt, David had a blessed exercise of his faith and of all his affections towards God, in which his soul found great refreshment. Being now in great distress and disconsolation of spirit, and among other things, being under a sense that God had forgotten him, Psa 42.9,² he calls to mind the blessed experience he had of communion with God in the land of the Hermonites, in which he now found support and refreshment. So too at other times he called to remembrance "the days of old," and in them his "songs in the night," or the sweet refreshment he had in spiritual converse with God in former times. I have known one in the depth of distress and darkness of mind, who, going through temptation to destroy himself, was relieved and delivered in the instant of ruin by a sudden remembrance that at such a time, and in such a place, he had prayed fervently with the engagement of all his affections unto God.³

Therefore, you who are sensible of these decays, or should be, take the advice of our Savior, "Remember from where you have fallen." Rev 2.5 Call to mind the former days. Consider if it wasn't better with you then than now, when in your lying down and your rising up you had many thoughts of God and of the things of God, and they were sweet and precious to your souls; when you rejoiced at the remembrance of his holiness; when you had zeal for his glory, delight in his worship, and were glad when they said, "Let us go to the house of God together;" Psa 122.1 when you poured out your souls with freedom and enlarged affections before him, and were sensible of the visits and refreshments of His love. Remember what peace, what tranquility of mind, what joy you had while it was so with you; and consider what you have gotten since you have forsaken God, in any measure or degree. Dare to deal plainly with yourselves. Isn't all of what you now deal with God, either form, custom, and selfishness, or attended with trouble, disquietude, and fears? Do you truly know either how to live, or how to die? Aren't you sometimes a terror to yourselves? It must be so, unless you are hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. What have all your lovers done for you, that you have entertained in the place of God in Christ, and spiritual things? Speak plainly; haven't they defiled you, wounded you, weakened you, and brought you into such a condition that you don't know what you are, nor to whom you belong? What are your thoughts when you are

¹ **Jer 31:18** "I have surely heard Ephraim bemoaning himself: 'You have chastised me, and I was chastised, Like an untrained bull; Restore me, and I will return, For You are the LORD my God.' ¹⁹ Surely, after my turning, I repented; And after I was instructed, I struck myself on the thigh; I was ashamed, yes, even humiliated, Because I bore the reproach of my youth.' ²⁰ Is Ephraim My dear son? Is he a pleasant child? For though I spoke against him, I earnestly remember him still; Therefore My heart yearns for him; I will surely have mercy on him, says the LORD.

² **Psa 42:9** I will say to God my Rock, "Why have You forgotten me? Why do I go mourning because of the oppression of the enemy?"

³ As in chapter 7, and in his preface, Owen is perhaps referring to himself here. – WHG

most awake, when you are most yourselves? Don't you sometimes pant within yourselves, and say, "O that it was with us now as it was in former days."

And if you can in no way be affected with *the remembrance of former things*, then you are certainly under one of these two great evils — for either,

1. You never had *a true and real work* on your souls, whatever you professed, and so you never had true and real communion with God in any duties. You had only a temporary work, which excited your affections for a season; now that it has worn off, it leaves no sweet remembrance of itself upon your minds. Had your faith and love been sincere in what you did, it would be impossible that the remembrance of their actings in some especial instances, would not be sweet and refreshing to you. Or else,

2. You are *hardened through the deceitfulness of sin*, and there is no way left to give a sense or impression of spiritual things upon your minds. You have truly nothing left in religion but the fear of hell and trouble of duties. I am not speaking to such persons at present.

As for those to whom this frame is a burden, there is no more effectual means to stir them up to endeavors for deliverance, than a continual remembrance of former things, and experiences they had of holy intercourse and communion with God. This will revive, quicken, and strengthen the things that are ready to die, and beget a self-abhorrence in them in consideration of that woeful frame and temper of mind which, by their sins and negligence, they have brought themselves into.

SECONDLY, Consider that as there are many things dreadfully pronounced in the Scripture against backsliding and backsliders in heart, as it is with you, yet there are also especial calls and promises given and proposed to those who are in your condition; know assuredly that your everlasting blessedness or woe depends on your compliance or non-compliance with them.

Consider both call and promise in that word of God's grace, Jer 3.12-14, "Go and proclaim these words toward the north, and say, Return, you backsliding Israel, says the LORD; and I will not cause my anger to fall upon you: for I am merciful, says the LORD, and I will not keep my anger forever. Only, acknowledge your iniquity — that you have transgressed against the LORD your God, and have scattered your ways to the strangers under every green tree, and you haven't obeyed my voice, says the LORD. Turn, O backsliding children, says the LORD; for I am married to you. And I will take one of a city, and two of a family, and I will bring you to Zion." Add to this blessed promise here, Hos 14.4, "I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely: for my anger is turned away from him."

If you design to live and not die, it must be by yielding obedience to this call, and pleading this promise before God, mixing it with faith. Your return must be by the word, Isa 57.18,19.¹ Here lies your great encouragement and direction; in this lies your only relief. If you value your souls, don't defer the duty that you are called to, even one moment. You don't know how soon you may be beyond the reach of calls and promises. Whoever can hear them, without stirring himself in sincerity to comply with them, has already made great progress towards that deadly end.

THIRDLY, As for those who, on these and like considerations, not only desire but also endeavor to retrieve themselves from this condition, I will give no advice at present except this: *Be in good earnest*. As the prophet says in another case, if you will return, "return and come," make thorough work of it. You must do so at one time or another, or you will perish. Why not *now*? Why, isn't *this* the best season? Who knows if it isn't the only time you will have for it? It would be easy to multiply all sorts of arguments to this purpose. Trifling endeavors, occasional resolutions and attempts, like the early cloud and morning dew, shifting with warnings and convictions, by

¹ **Isa 57:18** I have seen his ways, and will heal him; I will also lead him, And restore comforts to him And to his mourners. ¹⁹ "I create the fruit of the lips: Peace, peace to *him who is* far off and to *him who is* near," Says the LORD, "And I will heal him."

CHAPTER 17. DECAYS IN SPIRITUAL AFFECTIONS.

renewed duties, until their impressions are worn out, will ruin your souls. Unless there is universal diligence and permanence in your endeavors, you are undone. “Then you will know the LORD, if you follow on (press on) to know him.” Hos 6:3

But now to return. I say, these things may befall us as to our spiritually-renewed affections, through our sloth, negligence, and sin. Their progress in conformity to spiritual and heavenly things may be slow, imperceptible, even totally obstructed for a season. And not only so, but they may fall under decays, and in this, the soul may be guilty of backsliding from God. But *this* is what they are capacitated for by their renovation; *this* is what the grace with which they are renewed leads to; this is what, in the diligent use of means, they will grow up to, upon which our comfort and peace depend — namely, a holy assimilation of those spiritual and heavenly things which they are set and fixed on, in which they are renewed and made more spiritual and heavenly every day.

CHAPTER 18. THE STATE OF SPIRITUAL AFFECTIONS.

It remains only, as to this head now spoken to, that we briefly consider what is the state of spiritual affections that are thus daily exercised and improved. And this we will do by showing — first, What is their pattern; secondly, What is their rule; thirdly, What is their measure, or to what they may attain.

FIRST, The *pattern* which we should continually bear in our eyes, to which our affections should be conformed, is Jesus Christ and the affections of his holy soul. The mind is the seat of all our affections; and this is what we should continually design and endeavor: namely, that the “same mind be in us that was in Christ Jesus,” Phi 2.5. To have our minds so affected with spiritual things as was the mind of Christ, is the principal part of our duty and grace. Nor do I think that any man can attain any considerable degree in spiritual mindedness, who does not much contemplate the same mind in Christ, 2Cor 3.18.¹ To this purpose, we should furnish our minds with instances of the holy affections that were in Christ, and their blessed exercise on all occasions. The Scripture makes a full representation of them to us, and we should be conversant in our meditations on them. What glorious things are spoken of his love to God, and his delight in Him, from which he also “delighted to do his will, and his law was in the midst of his heart,” Psa 40.8 — seated in the throne of his affections! What pity and compassion he had for the souls of men, even for the whole of humankind, in all their sufferings, pains, and distresses! How all his affections were always in perfection of order, under the conduct of the spirit of his mind! From this came his self-denial, his contempt of the world, his readiness for the cross, to do or suffer according to the will of God. If this pattern is continually before us, it will exert a transforming efficacy to change us into the same image. When we find our minds liable to any disorders — clinging inordinately to the things of this world, moved with intemperate passions, vain and frothy in conversation, darkened or disturbed by the fumes of distempered lusts — let us call things to an account, and ask of ourselves whether this is the frame of mind that was in Christ Jesus. This, therefore, is an evidence that our affections are spiritually renewed, and that they have had some progress in an assimilation of heavenly things — namely, when the soul is delighted in making Christ their pattern in all things.

SECONDLY, The *rule* of our affections in their utmost spiritual improvement is the *Scripture*. And two things are respected in them: — their *internal actings*; and their *exercise in outward ways and means, by which they are expressed*. The Scripture is the entire rule of them both:

1. And with respect to the former, it gives us one general law or rule that is comprehensive of all others — namely, “That we love the LORD our God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength.” The acting of all our affections towards God in the utmost degree of perfection is required of us; that in all instances we prefer and value Him above all things; that we inseparably cling to Him, and do nothing whatever at any time that is not influenced and directed by the love of God. This perfection, as we will see immediately, is not attainable absolutely in this life; but it is proposed to us as that which the excellency of God’s nature requires, and which the faculties and powers of our nature were created for, and which we should design and aim at in all things. But the indispensable obligation of this rule is that we should always be in a sincere endeavor to cling to God continually in all things, to prefer Him above all, and delight in Him as our chief good. When this frame and disposition is habitually fixed in our minds, it will declare and act itself in all instances of duties, on all occasions of trial, when other things bid for a predominant interest in our affections, as they do every day. And if it is not so with us, we will be at a continual loss in all our ways. This is what makes us lifeless and heartless in duties, careless in temptations or the occasions of them, and forgetful of God: when it is impossible to be preserved from sin without a

¹ **2Cor 3:18** But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.

due remembrance of his holiness. In brief, the lack of a predominant love of God, continually exercised, is the spring of all that unprofitable profession of religion that the world is filled with.

2. There are *outward ways and duties* by which our spiritual affections are expressed. Their rule also is the Scripture. The way marked out in it is the only channel in which the stream of spiritual affections takes its course to God. The graces required in it are acted by the affections; the duties it prescribes are those which they stir up and enliven; the religious worship it appoints is that in which they have their exercise. Where this rule has been neglected, men's religious affections have grown irregular, indeed, wild and ungovernable. All the superstitions that the world is filled with owe their origin principally to men's affections set loose from the rule of the word. There is nothing so silly, absurd, and foolish, as what they have enslaved the souls of men to, nothing so horrid and difficult but what they have engaged them in. And having once taken this liberty to themselves, the corrupt minds of men are a thousand times more satisfied than in their regular exercise according to the word of God. Hence they rejoice in those penances which are not without their austerities; in such outward duties of devotion as are troublesome and chargeable; in everything that has only a *show of wisdom* in will-worship, humility, and neglect of the body. ^{Col 2.23} Hence all their affections will be more sensibly moved by images and pictures, and a melting devotion will be more stirred up in them, than by all the motives and incentives which God proposes to them to draw their affections to Himself. Nothing is more extravagant than the affections of men, tinctured with some devotion, if they forsake the rule of the Scripture.

THIRDLY, consider *the measure of their attainments*, or what their affections may be raised to through due exercise and holy diligence. Now, this is not absolute perfection: "Not as though I had already attained, nor am already perfected, but I follow after," as the apostle says, Phi 3.12. But there is something attainable by those who pretend highly to perfection, which they seem to be strangers to. And the state of our affections under a due exercise on heavenly things, and in their assimilation of them, may be fixed on these three things:

1. *A habitual suitableness to spiritual things upon their proposal.* The ways by which spiritual things are proposed to our minds are various. They are proposed directly in all ordinances of divine worship — indirectly and in just consequence by all the especial providences in which we are concerned; by our own thoughts and stated meditations; by the motions of the Holy Spirit, when he causes us to "hear a word behind us saying, 'This is the way, walk in it;'" ^{2Joh 1.6} by holy converse with others; by all sorts of occurrences. And as the *ways* of their proposal are various, so the *times and seasons* in which they are represented to us, comprehend them all — at least, they don't exclude any times and seasons of our lives. Whatever the way of their proposal, and whenever its season, if our affections are duly improved by spiritual exercises, they are suited to them, and will be ready to entertain them. For lack of that exercise, on the other hand, we see equivocations and shiftings in duties, proneness to comply with diversions, all to keep the mind away from closing with and receiving those spiritual things which it is not suited to. Therefore, because the solemn way of proposing spiritual things to our minds, is in and by the ordinances of divine worship, when men have a prevalent loathness to engage in them, or when they are satisfied with an outward attendance to them, but not enabled to a vigorous stirring up of the inward man to a holy, affectionate converse with spiritual and heavenly things — it is because they are carnal. When men can receive the fiery darts of Satan's temptations in their bosoms, and allow them to abide there, or even foster and cherish them in thoughts of the lusts they kindle — but they quickly quench the motions of the Spirit that stir them to embrace heavenly things — they are carnal, and carnally minded. When providences of concern — in afflictions, trials, and deliverances — don't engage the mind in thoughts of spiritual things, and excite the affections to entertain them, then men are carnal and earthly. When every lust, corruption, or passion — such as anger, envy, or displeasure at this or that person or thing — can divert our mind from compliance with the proposal of spiritual things made to it, we are carnal.

It is otherwise when our affections are conformed to things spiritual and heavenly. Upon every proposal of these, the mind finds it suitable, like that which a well-disposed appetite finds for savory food. As “the full soul loathes a honeycomb,”¹ so a mind under the power of carnal affections has an aversion to all spiritual sweetness. But spiritualized affections desire them, have an appetite for them, and readily receive them on all occasions, as those which are natural to them, as milk is to new-born babes.

2. Affections so disposed constantly find *a gusto, a pleasant taste, a relish*, in spiritual things. In them they “taste that the Lord is gracious,”² 1Pet 2.3. To taste of God’s goodness, is to have an experience of a savory relish and sweetness in converse and communion with Him. And persons whose affections are thus renewed and thus improved, taste a sweet savor in all spiritual things. Some affections, such as a sense of the love of Christ, are sometimes too hard for them as it were, and overpower them, until they are “sick of love,”³ Song 5.8 and “rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory.”⁴ 1Pet 1.8 Nor are there any, however seasoned with afflictions or mortifications, that [God’s goodness] is not sweet to them, Pro 27.7.⁵ Everything that is wholesome food, that is good nourishment, though it is but bitter herbs, is sweet to someone who is hungry. And when by our affections, we have raised up in us a spiritual appetite for heavenly things, however bitter any of them may be to flesh and blood in their own nature or in their dispensation — as are all the doctrines of the cross — they are all *sweet* to us, and we can taste how gracious the Lord is in them. When the soul is filled with earthly things — with the love of this world, or when the appetite is lost by spiritual sickness, or vitiated and corrupted by any prevalent sin — heavenly things become unsavory and sapless; or as Job says, they are “like the white of an egg, in which there is no taste.” In the dispensation of the word, there may be a taste or pleasing relish given to the fancy; and maybe to the notional understanding, when the affections find no contentment in the things themselves. But for those who are spiritually minded to the degree intended, these are *all* sweet, savory, and pleasant — the affections taste them immediately, as the palate does food.

3. They are a *just repository of all graces*, and in this, they are the treasury of the soul. There are graces of the Spirit whose formal direct residence is in the understanding and the will, as with faith itself; and in this, all other graces are radically comprised; they grow from that root. However, most of them have their principal residence in the affections. They are preserved secure and ready in them, for exercise on all occasions. And when they are duly spiritual, there is nothing that tends to their growth or improvement, to their cherishing or quickening, which they stand in need of continually, and which God has made provision for in his word, that they will not readily receive it, lay it up, keep and preserve it. By this they come to be filled with grace, with *all* graces — for there is room in the affections for all the graces of the Spirit to inhabit — and they readily comply with the light and direction of faith for their exercise. When faith discerns and determines that there is anything to be done or suffered in a way of duty to the glory of God, the affections thus disposed don’t shut up or stifle the graces that are in them, but carefully offer them for their proper exercise.

These are some of those things which our affections, conformed to heavenly things, will attain to. And thus it is with affections that are spiritually renewed. By being fixed on things spiritual and heavenly, they are more and more conformed to them, made like them, and become more spiritual and heavenly themselves.

It is not thus with those whose affections have *only an occasional change* wrought upon them by the means described before, but are not spiritually *renewed*. On the contrary, such persons design to debase spiritual things, to bring down heavenly things into a conformity with their affections which, however changed, are not spiritual, but carnal. To evince this we may observe,

¹ **Pro 27:7** A satisfied soul loathes the honeycomb, But to a hungry soul every bitter thing is sweet.

1. Their affections are *under the light and conduct of such notions in the mind and understanding* that they don't give a clear, distinct representation of them in their own nature to the affections. For where they are not themselves spiritually renewed, the mind itself is carnal and unrenewed; and such a mind "does not perceive the things of God, nor can it do so, because they are spiritually discerned." ^{1Cor 2.14} They cannot be rightly discerned in their own beauty and glory, but in and by a spiritual, saving light, which the mind is devoid of. And where they are not thus represented, the affections cannot receive or cling to them as they should, nor will they ever be conformed to them.

2. Those notions in such persons are oftentimes *variously influenced and corrupted by fancy and imagination*. They are merely "puffed up by their fleshly minds;" that is, they are filled with vain, foolish, proud imaginations about spiritual things, as the apostle declares, Col 2.18,19. And the work of fancy, in a fleshly mind, is to raise up such images of spiritual things, as may render them suitable to natural, unrenewed affections.

3. This, in its progress, produces *superstition*, false worship, and idolatry. For all of these are an attempt to represent spiritual things in a way suited to carnal, unrenewed affections. Hence men suppose themselves to be excited by them to love, joy, fear, and delight in the things themselves, when indeed they all respect that false representation of them by which they are suited to them as carnal. These have been the spring of all false worship and idolatry in the Christian world:

(1) The mind and affections have been changed and tinctured with *devotion* by some of the means we insisted on before. In this, one way or another, they will be exercised about spiritual things, and ready to receive impressions from anything that superstition can impose on them.

(2) They are, by error and false information, set at liberty from *the only rule* of their actings and exercise — that is, the word of God. Men satisfied themselves that their affections were engaged in things spiritual and heavenly; it was no matter at all whether the *way* of their exercise was directed by the Scripture or not. Having thus lost their guide and their way, every "*ignis fatuus*," every wandering meteor, allures them to follow its conduct into foolish superstitions. Almost nothing is so ridiculous, nothing so horrid and difficult, that they will not embrace under the notion of things spiritual and heavenly.

(3) The carnal minds of men, having no proper, distinct apprehensions and notions of spiritual things in their own nature, endeavor to represent them under *such notions and images* as may suit them to their carnal, unrenewed affections; for it is implanted almost indelibly upon them, that the end of all knowledge of spiritual things, is to propose them to the embraces of the affections.

It would be easy to manifest that from these three corrupt springs, arose that flood of idolatry and false worship which spread itself over the church of Rome, and with whose machinations the minds of men are still too replenished.

4. Where it is not thus, carnal affections still variously *debase spiritual things*, to conform them to themselves; and this may proceed so far, until men think wickedly that God is altogether like themselves. ^{Psa 50.21} But I won't insist on these things any further.

LASTLY, Where affections are spiritually renewed, *the person of Christ is the center of them*; but where they are only changed, they tend to end *in self*. Where the "new man" is put on, "Christ is all, and in all," Col 3.10,11. He is the spring, by his Spirit, that gives them life, light, and being; and he is the ocean that receives all their streams. God, even the Father, doesn't present *Himself* in his beauty and amiableness as the object of our affections, but *as he is in Christ*, acting his love in him, 1Joh 4.8,9.¹ As for all other spiritual things, renewed affections cling to them as they derive

¹ **1Joh 4:8** He who does not love does not know God, for God is love. ⁹ In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him.

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from Christ and lead to him; for to them he is “all, and in all.” It is he whom the souls of his saints love for himself, for his own sake, and all other things of religion in and for him.

The air is pleasant and useful; without it, we cannot live or breathe. But if the sun didn’t enlighten it and warm it with its beams, if it were always one perpetual night and cold, what refreshment could be received by it? Christ is the “Sun of Righteousness,” and if his beams don’t quicken, animate, and enlighten, the *best*, the most *necessary* duties of religion, nothing desirable would remain in them. This is the most certain character of affections that are spiritually renewed: they can rest in nothing but in Christ; they fix on nothing but what is amiable by a participation of his beauty; and in whatever he is, in this they find contentment. It is otherwise with those whose affections may be *changed*, but are not *renewed*. The truth is — and it may be made good by all sorts of instances — that Christ, in the mystery of his person and in the glory of his mediation, is the only thing that they dislike in religion. They may embrace and delight in false representations of him by images and pictures; false notions of his present glory, greatness, and power may affect them; they may give him a worship of their own devising, and please themselves in it; corrupt opinions concerning his office and grace may possess their minds, and they may contend for them. But those who are not spiritually renewed, cannot love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity. Indeed, they have an inward, secret aversion to the mystery of his person and his grace. It is *self* which all their affections center in, the ways of which are too long to be declared here.

This is the first thing that is required to render our affections in such a state and condition that from them and by them, we may be spiritually minded — namely, that they themselves are spiritually and savingly renewed.

I suppose the things that remain will allow for a speedy dispatch.

CHAPTER 19. THE TRUE NOTION OF SPIRITUAL THINGS.

II. THE second thing required, so that we may be spiritually minded as to the interest of our affections in it, is *the object about which they are conversant, and to which they adhere*. What this is materially, or what are the spiritual things which our affections are to be set upon, has been declared already, under the consideration of the objects of our thoughts and meditations; for they are the same. As intimated, fixing our affections on them is the spring and cause of our thoughts about them. What we will now inquire into is *the true notion and consideration of spiritual and heavenly things*, which renders them the formal, proper object of spiritual affections, and is the reason for our affections' adherence to them. For as intimated earlier, men may have false notions of spiritual things, under which they may like them, and embrace them, even with *unrenewed* affections. Therefore we will inquire into some of those considerations of heavenly things under which *affections spiritually renewed*, satisfactorily cling to them with *delight and complacency*.

1. And the first is that, as they comprehend God in Christ, and all other things as deriving from Him and tending to Him, they have *an infinite beauty, goodness, and amiableness in them, which are powerfully attractive to spiritual affections*. These alone are able to fill them, satisfy them, and give them rest and acquiescence. Love is the most ruling and prevalent affection in the whole soul; but it cannot be fixed on any object without an apprehension, whether true or false, of an amiableness and desirableness in it, from a goodness that is suitable to all its desires.

Our fear, so far as it is spiritual, has *divine goodness* for its object, Hos 3.5.¹ Unless this is what draws our hearts to God and the things of God, in all pretense of love to him, men but frame idols for themselves "according to their own understanding," as the prophet says, Hos 13.2. Therefore, that our affections may cling to spiritual things in a due manner, three things are required:

(1.) That we apprehend and find a *goodness, a beauty*, and from there *an amiableness* and desirableness in them, Zec 9.17.² Many pretend to love God and spiritual things, but they don't know why. Why they love *other* things they know well enough, but why they love *God* they cannot tell. Many are afraid of Him, and suppose they *ought* to love him, and therefore they pretend so to do, even though they know that they don't. They but flatter him with their lips, when their hearts are far from him. Isa 29.13 Some are greatly affected by the benefits and mercies they receive from him, and suppose they love him on that account. But this love is none other than what the devil falsely charged Job with, chap. 1.8-11. Some take delight in the outward modes and rites of divine worship, with which they satisfy themselves that they love God and spiritual things, when indeed they only please their own imaginations and carnal minds. Many have a traditional apprehension that they *ought* to love God; they know of no reason why they shouldn't; they know it will be bad for them if they don't; and so these take it for granted that they do. How few there are who have that spiritual discerning and apprehension of the divine excellencies, that view of the excellency of the goodness and love of God in Christ, as to be drawn to Him, and delight in Him, for that alone! And yet, *this* is the ground of all sincere, real love to God. Two things are required that we may apprehend an amiable goodness in anything, and cling to it with sincere affection:

[1.] *A real worth or excellency in itself;*

[2.] *A suitableness in it to our condition, state, and desires for rest and blessedness.*

The first of these is in God, from what he is *in himself*; the latter is from what he is *to us* in Christ — from both, He is the only suitable object for our affections. Under this apprehension, we love

¹ **Hos 3:5** Afterward the children of Israel shall return and seek the LORD their God and David their king. They shall fear the LORD and His goodness in the latter days.

² **Zec 9:16** The LORD their God will save them in that day, As the flock of His people. For they *shall be like* the jewels of a crown, Lifted like a banner over His land — ¹⁷ For how great is its goodness And how great its beauty!

God for himself, or for his own sake, but not exclusively for our own advantage in it. For a desire for union and enjoyment, which is our only advantage, is inseparable from this love.

It may be that some cannot say that a distinct apprehension of these things was the first foundation and cause of their love to God; yet are they satisfied that they do love him in sincerity, with all their souls. And I say, *it may be so*. God sometimes throws the skirt of his own love over the heart of a poor sinner, and efficaciously draws it to himself, without a distinct apprehension of these things, by a mere sense of the love it has received. So Elijah passed by Elisha, and threw his mantle upon him as a transient act; but there was such a communication of virtue by it, that he ran after him, and would not be deferred, even though Elijah said, “Go back; for what have I done to you?” 1Kng 19.19,20. When God has so thrown his love upon any soul, it follows after Him with all its affections. And though God may seem sometimes to say, “Go back; for what have I done to you?” the soul’s answer is, “Lord, where shall I go? I cannot leave you; my heart is surrendered to you, and shall never be taken from you.”

But I say to them, and to all others, that if we would have refreshing evidences that our love to God is *sincere*, if we would have it *thrive* and *flourish*, be *fervent* and *constant*, we are to exercise ourselves to contemplate the divine goodness, and the suitableness of it to our souls, in and by Jesus Christ. Nor can we cling with sincere affection to any spiritual thing whatever, except under these notions of it: — first, That it has a *real worth or excellency* in itself; secondly, That it is *suitable and desirable* to us. It is to be bewailed to see how many walk at random in their profession, who know neither what they do, nor where they’re going.

(2.) As we must see *a goodness and profitableness* in spiritual things *absolutely*, so that we may fix our affections on them in a due manner, so we must see it *comparatively* with respect to all other things, which gives them a preference in our affections before and above them all. The trial of love lies in its *prevailing degree* — being more or less. If we love other things — father, mother, houses, lands, possessions — more than Christ, then we don’t love Him at all. Nor is there any equality allowed in this matter, that we may equally love both *temporal* and *spiritual* things. If we don’t love Christ more than all these things, then we don’t love him at all. Therefore, that our affections may cling to them in a due manner, we must see an excellency in things spiritual and heavenly, rendering them more desirable than *all other things* whatever.

With what loving countenances men look upon their temporal enjoyments! With what tenacious embraces they cling to them! They see in them what is amiable, what is desirable and suitable to their affections. Let them pretend what they please, if they don’t see a greater goodness that is more amiable, more desirable in spiritual things, then they don’t love them in a due manner; it is *temporal* things that rule their affections.

One psalmist prefers “Jerusalem above his chief joy,” Psa 137.6. Another affirms that “the law of God’s mouth was better to him than thousands of gold and silver,” Psa 119.72. “More to be desired are the statutes of the LORD than gold, yea, than much fine gold: sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb,” Psa 19.10. “For wisdom is better than rubies; and all the things that may be desired are not to be compared to it,” Pro 8.11.

This is the only stable foundation of all divine affections. A spiritual view, and a judgment of a goodness, of an excellency in them that is incomparably above whatever is in the most desirable things of this world, are required for such a foundation. And if the affections of many who pretend highly to them, were to be weighed in this balance, I fear they would be found light and wanting. However, it is the duty of those who would not be deceived in this matter — which is of eternal importance — to examine what is that goodness and excellency in spiritual things, which they *desire* in them, on account of which they sincerely value and esteem them above all things in this world whatever. Let no one deceive themselves with vain words and pretences. While their esteem and valuation of present enjoyments evidently engages all their affections,

their care, their diligence, their industry, so that a man of a discerning spirit may even feel his affections turned in toward *self* — while they are cold, formal, and negligent about spiritual things — we must ask, “How does the love of God dwell in them?” Much more we must ask, when we see men not only giving the whole of their time and strength with the vigor of their spirits, but also sacrificing their conscience to attaining dignities, honors, preferments, wealth, and ease in the world. They know in their own hearts that they perform religious duties with respect to temporal advantages. I cannot conceive, then, how it is possible that they should discern and approve of a goodness and excellency in spiritual things *above* all others.

(3.) A due consideration is required for this, that all *spiritual things proceed from and are resolved into an infinite Fountain of goodness*, so that our affections may absolutely come to rest and complacency, and find full assured satisfaction in them. As to all temporal things, it is otherwise. Men would very gladly have them be such that they might give absolute rest and satisfaction to all their affections; but every one of them are so far from it, that all of them *together* cannot compose their minds in rest and peace for even one hour. They sometimes give a transport of affections, and seem for a season to have filled the whole soul, such that it has no leisure to consider their emptiness and vanity. Just a little composure of men’s thoughts shows that they are but a diversion in a journey or labor; these temporal things are no rest. Hence they are called “broken cisterns, that can hold no water.” *Jer 2.13* Let a man prize them at the highest price possible to seduce a rational creature into thoughts of it (of which there have been prodigious instances); let him possess them in abundance, beyond what any man ever enjoyed in this world or his own imagination could conceive; let him be assured of the utmost peaceable continuance in the enjoyment of them that his and their natures are capable of — he wouldn’t dare pretend that all his affections were filled and satisfied by them, or that they afforded him perfect rest and peace. If he did, the working of his mind every day would convince him of his falsehood and folly.

Rather, all spiritual things derive from and lead to what is infinite; what is therefore able to fill all our affections, and give them full satisfaction with rest and peace. They all lead us to the Fountain of living waters, the eternal Spring of goodness and blessedness. I don’t say that our affections attain to this full rest and satisfaction in this life; but what they come short of doesn’t arise from any defect in the things themselves to give this rest and satisfaction, as it is with the whole world — but from the weakness of our affections themselves, which are renewed only in part, and cannot take in the full measures of divine goodness, which they will receive in another world. But while we are here, the more we receive them in our minds and souls, the more firmly we adhere to them, the nearer approaches we make to our rest and center.

2. Spiritual things are to be considered as they are *filled with divine wisdom*. I’m not speaking of God himself, whose essential wisdom is one of the most amiable excellencies of his holy nature, but of all the effects of his will and grace by Jesus Christ. I now intend all spiritual truths, all spiritual and heavenly things by which God reveals and communicates himself to the souls of men, and all the ways and means of our approach to him in faith and obedience through Christ Jesus. All these are filled with divine wisdom. See *1Cor 2.7; Eph 3.10, 1.8,9.*¹ Now, wisdom in itself and in all its effects, is attractive to rational affections. Most men are brutish in them and in their actings, for the most part pouring them out on fleshly, sensual, and carnal things; but where they are at all reduced under the conduct of reason, nothing is so attractive to them, so suited to them, which they so delight in, as that which has at least an *appearance* of wisdom. *A wise and good man* commands the affections of others, unless it is in their interest to hate and oppose him, as it

¹ **1Cor 2:7** But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden *wisdom* which God ordained before the ages for our glory; **Eph 3:10** to the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly *places*; **Eph 1:8** which He made to abound toward us in all wisdom and prudence, ⁹ having made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself;

commonly is. And where there is true wisdom in the conduct of civil affairs, sober men cannot help but approve of it, like it, delight in it; and men of understanding bewail the loss of it, since craft, falsehood, treachery, and all sorts of villainy, have driven it out of the world. So divine wisdom is attractive to divine, gracious affections. The psalmist declares his admiration of and his delight in the works of God, because he has “made them all in wisdom,” Psa 104.24. Those characters of divine wisdom which are upon them, which they are filled with, draw the souls of men into a delightful contemplation of them. But all the treasures, all the glory of this wisdom are laid up and laid forth in the great spiritual things of the gospel, in the mystery of God in Christ, and the dispensation of his grace and goodness to us by Him. The consideration of this fills the souls of believers with holy admiration and delight, and thereupon they cling to them with all their affections. When we see there is light in them, and all other things are in darkness; when we see that wisdom is in them alone, and all other things are filled with vanity and folly; then our souls are truly affected with them, and rejoice in them with joy unspeakable and full of glory.

To most, this wisdom of God is foolishness. It was so of old, as the apostle testifies, 1Cor 1.23,24; and so it continues to be.¹ And therefore the mystery of the gospel is despised by them; they can see neither form nor beauty in it for which it should be desired. Nor will any man ever have sincere spiritual affections for spiritual things, who has no spiritual view of the wisdom of God in them.

This is what attracts our souls by holy admiration, to unspeakable delight. The reason why men so generally decline from any love for the gospel, and lose all satisfaction in the mystery of it, is because they are not able to discern that infinite wisdom which is the spring, life, and soul of it. When our minds are raised to admire this wisdom in divine revelations, our affections will cling to the things that are revealed.

3. The acting of our affections in their adherence to spiritual things is *perfective of our present state and condition*. Of all other things, what most debases the nature of man, in which it makes the nearest approaches to brutality, yes, by which it becomes in some respects *viler* than the nature of beasts, is surrendering the affections to things sensual, unclean, base, and unworthy of its more noble principles. Hence men are said to “debase themselves to hell,” Isa 57.9. And their affections become so vile, that being under their power is an effect of revenging justice, punishing men for the worst of sins, Rom 1.26. There is nothing viler, nothing more contemptible, nothing more like beasts in baseness, and to hell in punishment, than the condition of those who have enslaved their nature to brutish, sensual affections. I say, vile affections, fixed on and clinging to sensual objects, debase the nature of man, and both corrupt and enslave all its more noble faculties; the very consciences and minds of men are defiled by them. If you see a man whose affections are set inordinately on anything here below, it is easy to discern how he departs from his native worth, and debases himself in it.

But fixing spiritual affections on spiritual objects is perfective of our present state and condition — not that we can attain perfection by it, but that in this our souls are progressing towards perfection. This may be granted. Look, how much vile affections, fixed on and furiously pursuing things carnal and sensual, debase our nature beneath its rational constitution, and make it degenerate into bestiality. But spiritual affections, fixed on and clinging to spiritual and heavenly things, so exalt our nature above its mere natural capacity, they make an approach to the state of angels and of just men made perfect. Heb 12.22 Brutish affections, when they have the reins on their necks, as they say, and are pursued with delight and greediness, darken the mind, and disturb all the rational powers of the soul (for “whoredom and wine and new wine take away the heart,” as the prophet says,^{Hos 4.11} and wickedness alters the understanding). So holy affections fixed on spiritual things, elevate, raise, and enlighten the mind with true wisdom and understanding; for the “fear of the LORD, that is wisdom, and to depart from iniquity, that is understanding.” Job 28.28

¹ **1Cor 1:23** but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness, ²⁴ but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.

And again, the power of vile affections fills the soul and conscience with tumult, disorder, fear, and shame, where men are not utterly profligate, so that the minds, thoughts, and consciences of persons under their power is a very hell for confusion and troubles. So spiritual affections, duly exercised on their proper objects, preserve all things in order in the whole soul; they are life and peace. All things are quiet and secure in the mind; there is order and peace in the whole soul, in all its faculties and all their operations, while the affections are in a due prevailing manner fixed on the things that are above. Hence many persons, after great turmoils in the world, after they have by all means endeavored to come to rest and satisfaction in it, have utterly renounced all concern in earthly things, and turned to the contemplation of things above, and that only. Many of them, I confess, were mistaken as to the practical part of their devotions, having various superstitions imposed on their minds by the craft of others. But they didn't miss it in the principle that tranquility of mind was attainable only in setting our affections on things above. Jas 4.1, "Where do wars and fights among you come from? Don't they come from this, even your lusts that war in your members?"

"Where do all the disorders in your minds come from, your vexations and disquietudes, your passions, breaking out sometimes into unseemly brawls? Aren't they from here?" (the question is put to yourselves and your own consciences) "namely, from your lusts — that is, the disorderly affections that stir tumultuously in you? But search yourselves, and you will quickly see where all your troubles and disquietudes arise from. Your lusts, or corrupt and inordinate affections, war in you, continually inclining you to things that are earthly or sensual." Hence many are best and quietest when they are in the world, worst when at home in their families; but *never* are they in such confusion as when they are forced to retire into themselves.

The due exercise of our affections on heavenly things has quite another tendency and effect. It so *unites the mind to them*, it so brings them to it, and gives them such a subsistence in it, that all its powers and faculties progress towards their perfection. See 2Cor 7.1.¹ True wisdom and understanding, with soundness of judgment in eternal things in the mind, holiness in the affections themselves, liberty in the will, power in the heart, and peace in the conscience, in their measures all ensue on this. Whatever tastes we may have of these things, whatever temporary experience we have of them, they will not flourish in us, they will not abide with us in any constancy, unless we are thus spiritually minded.

4. Our eternal blessedness consists in the future enjoyment of the present objects of our spiritual affections. All men who are convinced of a future eternal condition desire, when they depart from here, to enter into blessedness and glory. However, what that blessedness is, even as to its general nature, they know nothing at all; and if they did, they wouldn't know how to desire it. For heaven or blessedness is nothing but the full enjoyment of what we are *here* to love and delight in above all, of that which is the object of our affections *as spiritually renewed*. In this they have neither interest nor concern. But this is what which gives life to the affections of believers. They know that their eternal blessedness consists in the enjoyment of God in Christ. How this is their happiness and glory, how it will give them an everlasting, overflowing satisfaction and rest, they understand in the firstfruits of it which they receive *here*. This is the ultimate object of their affections in this world, and they proceed to all other spiritual things in order from that. The more, therefore, their affections are fixed on them, the more they are kept to that due exercise, the nearer approaches they make to this blessed state. When their minds are possessed with this persuasion, when it is confirmed in them by daily experience of that sweetness, rest, and satisfaction which they find in clinging to God with fervent love and delight, any other objects rise up in vain to compete with or draw them away to themselves. The more we love God, the more alike we are to Him, and the nearer our enjoyment of him.

¹ **2Cor 7:1** Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.

CHAPTER 20. APPLYING THE SOUL TO SPIRITUAL OBJECTS.

III. HAVING considered the nature of spiritual affections as renewed by grace, and those notions of their objects under which they cling to them, it remains only that we inquire into *the way of the soul's application of itself to those objects by its affections*, which also belongs to being spiritually minded. I will give an account of this in a few particulars, with brief observations on them:

1. It is required that our adherence to all spiritual things *with love and delight, be firm and stable*. The affections are the powers and instruments of the soul, by which it makes application to anything outside itself, and clings to it. This is their nature and use with reference to things spiritual. Transient thoughts of spiritual things, with vanishing desires, may rise out of present convictions, as they did with those who cried out to our Savior, "Lord, give us this bread evermore," and immediately left him. Such occasional thoughts and desires are common to all sorts of men, even the worst of them: "Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my end be like his!"^{Num 23:10} Fading satisfaction, with joy and delight, often befall men in their attendance to the word, who yet never come to have it rooted in their hearts.

There are sundry things lacking for the sincerity of these affections:

(1.) Those in whom they are lacking, never *had a clear spiritual view of the things themselves* in their own nature which they pretend to be affected with.

(2.) They don't have a *sincere love* for them nor delight in them for their own sakes, but are only affected with some outward circumstances and concerns of them.

(3.) They don't find a *suitableness* in them to the ruling principles of their minds. They don't practically, and cannot truly say, "The yoke of Christ is easy, and his burden is light; his commandments are not grievous;" or, with the psalmist, "O how love I your law!"

(4.) Their affections are *transient*, unstable, vanishing as to their exercise and operations. They are on and off; now pleased and shortly displeased; earnest for a little while, and then cold and indifferent. Hence the things which they seem to affect have no transforming efficacy upon their souls; they don't dwell in them *in their power*.

But where our affections for spiritual things are sincere, where they are the true, genuine *application* of the soul to them, and *adherence* to them, they are firm and stable; love and delight are kept up to such a constant exercise that it renders them immovable. This is what we are exhorted to in 1Cor 15:58, "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, for you know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord." Transient affections, with their occasional operations, deceive multitudes. Oftentimes they are as pregnant in their actions as those that are most sincere; and they will produce many effects, in joys, mournings, and complaints, especially when excited by any outward affliction, sickness, and the like — but their goodness is like the early cloud or morning dew. Let none, therefore, please themselves with the operations of transient affections with respect to spiritual things, however urgent, or pleasant, or frequent in their returns. Those that are *sincere* are at all times firm and stable.

2. It is required that the soul *finds a spiritual relish and savor in the things* which it so adheres to. The affections are the palate of the soul, by which it tastes of all things which it receives or refuses, and it will not long cling to anything in which they don't find a savor and relish. Something was said earlier of that sweetness which is in spiritual things, and that the taste of them consists in a gracious sense of their suitableness to the affections, inclinations, and dispositions of the mind. Hence they have no relish to men of carnal minds. Whoever, therefore, would know whether his affections sincerely adhere to spiritual things, let him examine what relish, what sweetness, what savor he finds in them. When he is pleased with them, as the palate is pleased with suitable

and proper food, when he finds that he receives nourishment by them in the inward man, *then* he adheres to them in a due manner.

This spiritual taste is the ground of all experience. It is not only what we have heard or understood, but what we have tried and tasted, of which we have *experience*. This makes us long for what we have formerly enjoyed, and strengthens faith as to what we pray for and expect.

In every darkness, in every dampening of spirit, under every apprehension of deadness, or the withdrawing of the sense of divine love, the soul *knows* what it wants, and what it desires. “Oh!” says such a one, “that it were now with me as in former days. I know that the One who then gave me such refreshing tastes of his own goodness, who made everything of himself sweet and pleasant to me, can renew this work of his grace towards me; he can give me a new spiritual appetite and relish; he can make all spiritual things savory to me again.”

A man under a languishing sickness, or when he is chastened with strong pain, such that his soul abhors bread and his daily food, can remember what an appetite he had, and with what gusto and relish he usually took his food in the days of his health. This is what lets him know that there is such a condition, and gives him a desire to return to it. So it is with a sin-sick soul. He can find no relish, no gusto, no sweetness in spiritual things; he finds no savor in the bread of the word, nor any refreshment in the ordinances of the gospel, which in themselves remain daily food, “a feast of fat things, and of wine well refined.” Isa 25:6 Yet it remembers former days, when all these things were sweet to him. And if he has any spark of spiritual life yet remaining, it will stir him up to seek with all diligence for a recovery. How is it with you who are now under spiritual decays, who find no taste or relish in spiritual things, to whom the word is not savory, nor are other ordinances powerful? Call to mind how it has been with you in former days, and what you found in these things. The apostle says, “*If* you have tasted that the Lord is gracious.” If you have *not*, it is to be feared that you haven’t yet had the least sincere love for spiritual things; for where *that* is, it will give a spiritual relish of them. If you *have* tasted, then how is it you can give yourselves rest for even one moment, without an endeavor for the healing of your blacksliding?

3. It is required that our affections be so set on spiritual things as to be *a continual spring of spiritual thoughts and meditations*. No man can be so forsaken of reason as to suppose that he has any sincere affection for what he doesn’t think about a little, or not at all, or that he can have a true affection for any thing which will not stir up and ingenerate in him continual thoughts about it. Let men test themselves as to their relations, or their enjoyments, or the objects of their predominant lusts, and they will find how things are stated in their own minds. And therefore, though all men may pretend to love God, and Christ, and the ways of God, and yet they know in their own hearts that they think or meditate upon them very little, both their pretense and their religion is vain. Where our affections are duly placed on heavenly things, such that we are indeed spiritually minded, they will be a constant spring of spiritual thoughts and meditations. But this also has been spoken to before.

4. When our affections are thus applied to spiritual things, they will be *prevalent and victorious* against solicitations to the contrary, or allurements to draw them away to any other objects. The work of all our spiritual adversaries is to solicit and tempt our affections, to divert them from their proper object. There are some temptations of Satan that make an immediate impression on the mind and conscience. Such are his injection of diabolical, blasphemous thoughts concerning God, his being, nature, and will — and the distresses which Satan reduces men to in their consciences through darkness and misrepresentations of God and his goodness. But the high road and constant practice of all our spiritual adversaries, is by the solicitation of our affections to objects that are — in themselves, or in the degree of our affection towards them — evil and sinful. Of the first kind are all sensual pleasures of the flesh, such as drunkenness, uncleanness, gluttony, chambering, and wantonness, with all sorts of sensual pleasures. Of the latter kind is all our inordinate love for self, our families, and the whole world, or the things of the world. To this end,

everything in the whole world that may make provision for lust is made use of. In this consists the nature and efficacy of most of those temptations which we have to conflict with. They are solicitations of our affections, to draw them away from things spiritual and heavenly, and to divert them to other things. By this our enemies endeavor to beguile us, as the serpent beguiled Eve with fair and false representations of other beloveds, so that our hearts are not preserved as a chaste virgin in all their affections for Christ.

And it is almost incredible how apt we are to be beguiled by the specious pretenses with which we are solicited.

To suppose our affections, in the degree addressed — say of love for the world and the things of it — are lawful and allowable, is one of the sophisms and artifices with which many are deluded. On this supposition, provided that our affections don't run into scandalous excesses, they approve of themselves in such a worldly frame of mind, and acting according to it, that it renders them fruitless, useless, and senseless. And it is inconsistent with that prevailing adherence of affections to spiritual things that *ought* to be in us. Others are deluded by a pretense that it is only in this one instance they want to be spared; it is but to this or that object they would give the embraces of their affections, but in all other things they will be entire for God. We spoke to the vanity of this pretense before. Others are ruined by giving way to their solicitations with respect to any one affection; suppose it is that of fear. In times of danger for their profession, multitudes have lost all their affection for spiritual things through a fear of losing what is temporal, such as their lives, their liberties, their goods, and the like. Once Satan and the world have gotten, as it were, the mastery of this affection, or a prevalent interest in it, they will not fail to draw all others into a defection from Christ and the gospel. “He that loves his life shall lose it.” ¹Joh 12.25

Therefore, it is no ordinary or easy thing to preserve our affections pure, entire, and steady, in their vigorous adherence to spiritual things, against all these solicitations. Watchfulness, prayer, faith in exercise, and a daily examination of ourselves, are required for it. For lack of a due attendance to these things, and with respect to this end — namely, the preservation of our spiritual affections in their integrity — many, even before they are aware, die away as to all power and vigor of spiritual life.

5. Affections thus fixed upon things spiritual and heavenly will give great *relief against the remainders of that vanity of mind* with which believers themselves are oftentimes perplexed. Indeed, I don't know any thing that is a greater burden to them, nor which they more groan for deliverance from. The instability of the mind, its readiness to receive impressions from things that are vain and useless, the irregularity of their thoughts, are a continual burden to many. Nothing can give the soul any relief in this, nothing can give bounds to the endless variety of foolish imaginations, nothing can dry up the springs from which they arise, or render the soil in which they grow, barren as to their production and maintenance — except the growth of spiritual affections, with their continual vigorous actings on heavenly things. For by this, the heart and mind will be so united to them (as the psalmist prays for, Psa 86.11),¹ that they will not be ready to depart from them, and entertain vain, empty, foolish imaginations. Thoughts of other things, greater and better than what this world can contain, will be continually arising in the mind, not to be laid aside by any solicitations of vanity. For the one who is wise cannot help but know and consider that the spiritual things which it exercises its thoughts about have substance in them; they are durable, profitable, and always the same; that the advantage, peace, rest, riches, and reward of the soul lies in them — but *other* imaginations which the foolish mind is apt to entertain, are vain, empty, fruitless, and such that end in shame and trouble.

Again, the vanity of the mind that indulges foolish imaginations, arises from or is animated and increased by that gusto and relish which it finds in earthly things and the enjoyment of them,

¹ **Psa 86:11** Teach me Your way, O LORD; I will walk in Your truth; Unite my heart to fear Your name.

whether lawful or unlawful. Hence on all occasions, even in holy duties, it will be ready to turn aside and take a taste of them, and sometimes take up with them. It's like a tippling traveler who, though engaged in a journey on the most earnest occasion, cannot help but imbibe here and there as he passes by. And maybe at length, before he comes to his journey's end, he lodges himself in a nasty alehouse. When men are engaged in important duties, and yet they always carry with them a strong gusto and relish for earthly things, they'll divert to them sooner or later in their thoughts, either to those real objects they are accustomed to; or to whatever present circumstances minister to their corrupt affections; or to what they fancy and create in their own minds. Sometimes, it may be, after they have made a few short visits, they take up with them, and wholly lose the work they were engaged in. As said earlier, nothing will give relief in this, except the vigorous and constant exercise of our affections on heavenly things. For this will insensibly reduce that gusto and relish which the mind has found in things present, earthly, and sensual, and make them like a sapless thing to the whole soul. They will so place the cross of Christ, in particular, on the heart, that the world will be crucified to it, losing all that brightness, beauty, and savor which it made use of to solicit our minds to thoughts and desires about it.

Moreover, this frame of spirit alone will keep us on our watch against all those ways and means by which the vanity of the mind is excited and maintained. Such are *the wandering and roving of the outward senses*. The senses, especially the eyes, are ready to become purveyors to make provision for the vanity and lusts of the mind. Hence the psalmist prays, "Turn away my eyes from beholding vanity." ^{Psa 119:37} If the eyes rove after vain objects, the mind will ruminate upon them. And another affirms that he had "made a covenant with his eyes," ^{Job 31:1} to preserve them from fixing on those objects that might solicit lust or corrupt affections. And it would be a useful labor, if this place allowed for it, to reveal the ready serviceableness of the outward senses and members of the body to sin and folly, if not watched against, Rom 6:13,19.¹ Of the same nature is the incessant working of the fancy and imagination, which of itself is evil continually and all day long. This is the food of a vain mind, and the vehicle or means of conveyance for all temptations from Satan and the world. Besides, sundry occasions of life and conversation are usually turned or abused to the same end, exciting and exercising the vanity of the mind. Wherever our affections are fixed on spiritual things, our mind will constantly be under a warning or charge to keep diligent watch against all those things by which that vanity is maintained and excited, which it so abhors, and which it is so burdened with. Nor will a work of mortification ever be carried on in the soul, without this prevalence in the mind, Col 3:2, 4, 5.²

¹ **Rom 6:13** And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God. **Rom 6:19** I speak in human *terms* because of the weakness of your flesh. For just as you presented your members as slaves of uncleanness, and of lawlessness *leading to more* lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves of righteousness for holiness.

² **Col 3:2** Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. ³ For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. ⁴ When Christ *who is* our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory. ⁵ Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.

CHAPTER 21. HOW SPIRITUAL MINDEDNESS IS LIFE AND PEACE.

HAVING declared in what this duty of being “spiritually minded” consists, what remains, in compliance with the text from where the whole is educed, is to manifest how it is “life and peace,” which is affirmed by the apostle.¹ This will be done with all brevity, having passed through what was principally designed.

And there are two things we inquire into:

- I. *What is meant by “life and peace.”*
- II. *In what sense to be “spiritually minded” is both of them.*

I. What is meant by “life and peace.”

1. That *spiritual life* of which we are made partakers in this world is threefold, or there are three gospel privileges or graces so expressed:

(1.) There is *the life of justification*. The just shall live in it by faith, freed from the condemnatory sentence of the law. So “the righteousness of one comes” to all who believe “unto justification of life,” Rom 5.18. It gives believers a right and title to life; for “those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness shall reign in life by one, Christ Jesus,” verse 17. This is not the life *here* that is intended, for *this* life depends solely on the sovereign grace of God by Jesus Christ, and the imputation of his righteousness to us, unto pardon, the right to life, and salvation.

(2.) There is *a life of sanctification*. As *life* in the foregoing sense is opposed to *spiritual death*, as to the guilt of it and the condemnatory sentence of death which accompanied it, so in this sense, it is opposed to it as to its internal power on and efficacy in the soul — to keep it impotent as to all acts of spiritual life, indeed, in enmity against them. This is that life with which we are “quickened” with Christ Jesus, when before we were “dead in trespasses and sins,” Eph 2.1-5. The apostle directly addresses this life in Romans 8. For in the first four verses of the chapter, having declared the life of justification in its nature and causes, in the following verses he contrasts *spiritual death* in sin, with the *life of sanctification*, by which we are freed from it.

To be *spiritually minded*, is this *life of sanctification* in a double sense:

[1.] It is the principal *effect and fruit of that life*. The life itself consists in the infusion and communication of a principle of life — that is, of faith and obedience — into all the faculties and powers of our soul, enabling us to live to God. To be spiritually minded cannot be this life *formally*. For it is a grace to which many duties concur, not only as to the actings of all grace in them, but as to the degree of their exercises. Rather, it is that in which the power of this principle of life exerts itself in the first and chief place. All actings of grace, all duties of obedience, both internal and external, proceed from this spring and fountain. Nothing of that kind is acceptable to God, except what is influenced by it, and is an effect of it. But it principally exerts its virtue and efficacy in rendering our minds *spiritual*. If it doesn’t effect this, it doesn’t work at all — that is, we are utterly destitute of it. The next and immediate work of the principle of life in our sanctification, is to *renew* the mind: to make it spiritual, and then to gradually carry it on to that *degree* which is called *being spiritually minded*.

[2.] It is the proper *adjunct and evidence of sanctification*. How would anyone know whether he is spiritually alive to God, with the life of sanctification and holiness? The communication of this life to him is by an almighty act of creating power, Eph 2.10.² Thus, it is not easily discernible, so as to help us make a right judgment about it from its *essence or form*. But

¹ Rom 8:6 For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace.

² Eph 2:10 For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works;

where things are indiscernible of themselves, we may know them from their proper and inseparable adjuncts. They are therefore called by the *essence* or the *form* itself. Such is “being spiritually minded” with respect to the life of sanctification. It is an inseparable property and adjunct of it, by which it infallibly evidences itself to those in whom it is [infused].

In these two respects, it is the *life of sanctification*.

(3.) “Life” is taken for *the comforts and refreshments of life*. So the apostle says in 1The 3.8, “Now we *live*, if you stand fast in the Lord;”— In other words, “Now our life will do us good; we have the comforts, the refreshments, and the joys of it.” *Non est vivere, sed valere vita.* The comforts and *satisfactions* of life are more life, than life itself. It is “life;” that is, that which makes life to be so — bringing in that satisfaction, and those refreshments for it, which make it pleasant and desirable. And I suppose this is what is principally intended in the words of the apostle. It is “life,” a cheerful joyous life, a life worth the living. In explication and confirmation of this, it is added that it is “peace” also.

2. “Peace” is twofold:

(1.) It is general and absolute; that is, peace with God through Jesus Christ, which is celebrated in the Scripture, and which is the only original spring and fountain of all consolation for believers. It contains in it virtually everything that is good, useful, or desirable to them. But it is not what is precisely intended here. It is not the *immediate ground and cause* of it, which is our justification, not our sanctification: Rom 5.1, “Being justified by faith, we have peace with God.” So Christ alone is “our peace,” as the one who has “made peace through the blood of his cross,” Eph 2.14,15, Col 1.20. Our being spiritually minded is in no way the cause or reason for this; it is only an evidence and pledge of it, as we will see. Nor is it the *formal nature of it*. Peace with God through the blood of Christ is one thing, and peace in our minds through a holy frame in them is another. The former is communicated to us by an immediate act of the Holy Spirit dwelling in us, Rom 5.5; the latter is an effect on our minds, begun and gradually carried on by the duties we declared at large before. The immediate actings of the Holy Spirit, in sealing us, witnessing to our adoption, and being an earnest of glory, are required for the former; our own sedulity and diligence in duties, and in the exercise of all grace, are required for the latter.

(2.) “Peace” is taken for *a particular fruit of the Spirit*, consisting in a gracious quietness and composure of mind in the midst of difficulties, temptations, troubles, and other things which are apt to fill us with fears, despondencies, and disquietudes. This peace is what *keeps the soul in its own power*, free from transports by fears or passions, on all the abiding grounds of gospel consolation. For although this is a peculiar especial grace, it is that which is influenced and kept alive by the consideration of all the love of God in Christ, and all the fruits of it.

And whereas “peace” includes, in the first notion of it, an inward freedom from oppositions and troubles, which those in whom it exists are outwardly exposed to, there are two things from which we are secured by this peace, which is an effect of being spiritually minded:

[1.] The first is *offenses*. There is nothing of whose danger we are more warned in the gospel than of offenses. “Woe to the world,” says the Savior, “because of offenses!”⁷ Mat 18.7 All ages, all times and seasons, are filled with them, and they prove pernicious and destructive to the souls of many. Such are the scandalous divisions among Christians. The endless differences of opinions and diversity of practices in religion and the worship of God; the falls and sins of professors, the fearful end of some of them; the reproaches that are cast on all who engage into any peculiar way of holiness and strictness of life; with other things of a like nature — by which the souls of innumerable persons are disquieted, subverted, or infected — are to be reckoned under this head. We are secured by this peace, against any hurtful or noxious influence on our minds from these things, against disquietudes, dejections of spirit, and

disconsolations. So the psalmist assures us: Psa 119.165, “Great peace have those who love Your law: and nothing shall offend them.”

The law, or the word of God, is the only way of the revelation of God and His will to us, and it is the only outward way and rule of our converse and communion with him. Therefore, to love the law is the principal part of being heavenly minded, and virtually that which comprehends the whole. To those who do so, nothing — *none* of those things mentioned before, nor anything of a like nature — will be an offense, a stumbling-block, or a cause of falling into sin. And the reason is because they have such an experience of the truth, power, efficacy, and holiness of the gospel, that the miscarriages of men under a profession of it, will never be an occasion of falling for them, nor of being offended at Christ. I look at it as a sign of a very evil frame of heart, when men are concerned in the miscarriages of some who have made a profession, by which they are perhaps damaged in their outward concerns, such that they are surprised into negative reflections on that religion which they profess, professing the same themselves.

[2.] The second is *afflictions, persecutions, and sufferings* of all sorts. It is known by all (it would be better if not so well known) what disquietudes, dejections, and disconsolations, these things are apt to fill the minds of men with — what fears, troubles, and sorrows, they reflect upon them. This intended peace gives us security against all these effects. It makes us preserve a peaceable, indeed, a *joyous* life in our conflict with them. See Joh 16.33.¹

Both these, as joined together here, “life and peace,” comprise a holy frame of heart and mind, in which the souls of believers find rest, quietness, refreshment, and satisfaction in God, in the midst of temptations, afflictions, offenses, and sufferings. It is the soul’s composure of itself in God, in his love in Christ Jesus, so as to not be greatly put out of order, nor cast down with anything that may befall it; but it affords men cheerfulness and satisfaction, though they sometimes walk in the valley of the shadow of death. Such persons have abiding in them, that which will give them life and peace under all occurrences.

II. Our next inquiry is, how this “spiritual mindedness” is “life and peace,” or what it contributes to these, how it produces the frame of heart and mind so expressed. It does this in several ways:

1. It is the only means on our part of *retaining a sense of divine love*. The love of God, in a gracious sense of it, as shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost, is the first and only foundation of all durable comforts that will support and refresh us under all oppositions and distresses — that is, of retaining life and peace in our souls, in any condition. God communicates this by an act of sovereign grace, for the most part without any preparation for it in ourselves: “He creates the fruit of the lips; Peace, peace.” Isa 57.19 But although divine love is in itself unchangeable and always the same, this sense of it may be lost, as it was in David, when he prayed that God would “restore to him the joy of His salvation,” Psa 51.12; and so many others have found it by woeful experience. To insist upon all that is required on our part, so that we may retain a gracious, refreshing sense of divine love once it is granted to us, doesn’t belong to my present purpose. But I say this, that there is nothing in which we are more concerned to be careful and diligent, than what belongs to that end. For men who, by a *mere act of sovereign grace*, have tasted of the goodness of God in this, who have had the consolation and joys of it, to then be negligent in keeping and preserving it in their souls, is a provocation they will be sensible of at one time or other. Nothing more grieves the Holy Spirit than to have his especial work, by which He seals us unto the day of redemption, neglected or despised. And it argues for a mighty prevalence of some corruption or temptation that causes men to willingly, and by their own sloth, forfeit so inestimable a grace, mercy, and privilege. And few of us have no reason to bewail our folly in doing so. Every intimation of divine

¹ **Joh 16:33** “These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.”

love is an inestimable jewel which, if safely treasured up in our hearts, adds to our spiritual riches. And being lost, it will at one time or another affect us with sorrow.

I am afraid that many of us are very negligent in this, to the great prejudice of our souls and spiritual state. Many such intimations are given to us by the Holy Ghost through the word, which we take little notice of. Either we don't know the voice of Christ in them, or we don't hearken to him in a due manner, or we refuse compliance with him, when we cannot help but know that He speaks to us. See Song 5.2,3.¹ Or if we receive any impressions of a gracious sense of divine love in them, we quickly lose them, not knowing how much the life of our souls is concerned in them, and what use we may have of them in our subsequent temptations, trials, and duties.

Now, the great means of retaining a sense of the love of God, which is the only spring of life and peace to our souls, is this grace and duty of being *spiritually minded*. This is evident from the very nature of the duty. For,

(1.) It is the soul's preserving of itself *in a frame fit to receive and retain this sense of God's love*. What other way can there be on our part, but that our minds, which are to receive and retain it, are spiritual and heavenly, always prepared for that holy converse and communion with Himself which he is pleased to grant us through Jesus Christ. And —

(2.) It will fix *our thoughts and affections upon the grace and love of God*, in communicating such an inestimable mercy to us as a sense of his love; this is the only means for the preservation of a relish of it in our hearts. Whoever is in this frame of mind will remember, cull over, and ruminate upon, all such gracious pledges of divine favor, as David often remembered and culled over what he received in such places as in the "land of the Hermonites and at the hill Mizar," Psa 42.6. This is the great way by which this treasure may be preserved.

(3.) A person who is so minded, and he alone, will have a *due valuation* of such intimations and pledges of divine love. Those who are full of other things, whose affections cling to them, never esteem heavenly mercies and privileges as they should. "The full soul loathes a honey-comb." God is as well pleased when a high valuation is put upon his kindness, as he is greatly provoked by the contrary frame which, indeed, nothing but infinite patience could bear with. It is a high provocation of God, when men are regardless of and unthankful for outward, temporal mercies — when they receive them and use them as if they were their own; as if they were lords of them, at least that these things are due them. He is much more provoked with our disregard of the least of those mercies which are the peculiar purchase of the blood of his Son, and the effects of his eternal love and grace. He alone who is spiritually minded, will value, prize, and store up these inestimable jewels in a due manner.

(4.) Such persons alone know *how to use and improve* all communications of a sense of divine love. These things are not granted to us to lie beside us unused. They are gracious provisions which we are furnished with, to enable us for all our other duties, conflicts, and trials. On all occasions, they are to be culled over for our spiritual relief and encouragement. By this they are safely retained. For in their due improvement, they grow brighter in our minds every day, and are ready for use; in which posture they are safely preserved. But these things will be further manifested in the instances that ensue.

2. This frame of mind *casts out all principles* and causes of trouble and disquietude, which are inconsistent with life and peace. There are principles of contrariety and opposition to spiritual life and peace, that are in us *by nature*, with sundry things whose abode and prevalence in us is inconsistent with them. I will give only one or two instances of it:

¹ **Song 5:2** THE SHULAMITE I sleep, but my heart is awake; *It is* the voice of my beloved! He knocks, *saying*, "Open for me, my sister, my love, My dove, my perfect one; For my head is covered with dew, My locks with the drops of the night." ³ I have taken off my robe; How can I put it on *again*? I have washed my feet; How can I defile them?

(1.) Spiritual mindedness will cast out all “*filthiness and overflow of naughtiness*” from our minds. Without this, we can receive no benefit by the means of grace, nor perform any duty in a right manner, Jas 1.27.¹ This filthiness stands in direct, immediate opposition and contrariety to our being spiritually minded, such that they cannot consistently reside in the same person; they expel one another like heat and cold. And where there is this “*filthiness and overflow of naughtiness*,” there is neither life nor peace. Unclean lusts of the flesh or of the spirit, working, creating tumult, acting in the minds of men, will not allow either the life of holiness to flourish in them, or any solid peace to abide with them. The soul is weakened by them as to all spiritual actings, and made like “*the troubled sea, that cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt.*” Where they are absolutely predominant, there is a *hell within* of darkness, confusion, and enmity against God, preparing men for a hell of punishment *without*, unto eternity. And to the extent they remain or have any prevalence in us, spiritual life and peace are impaired and obstructed by them. Now, the very nature of this grace and its universal exercise, is suited to casting out all the relics of this “*filthiness and overflow of naughtiness*.” It brings a principle into the mind that is directly contrary to that from which they proceed. All its actings which we have described, lie in direct tendency to the extirpation of these causes of filthiness which ruin life and peace; nor will they be cast out by any other way. If the mind is not spiritual, it will be carnal; if it doesn’t mind things above, it will fix itself inordinately on things below.

(2.) That *disorder* which is in the affections and passions of the mind *by nature*, which is directly opposite to spiritual life and peace, is cast out or cured by this. It is a blessed promise of the times of the New Testament, of the kingdom and rule of Christ, that through the efficacy of gospel grace, “*the wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid,*” Isa 11:6. Persons of the most intemperate and outrageous passions will be made meek and lowly. Where this is not effected in some measure, according to the degrees of the prevalence of such passions in us, we haven’t been made partakers of evangelical grace. It would be an easy task to demonstrate how the disorder of our affections and passions is destructive of spiritual life and peace. The contrariety that is in them, and their contradiction to one another — their violence, impetuosity, and restlessness, their readiness to receive and take in provocations on all occasions, and frequently upon no provocation at all except what imagination presents to them — are sufficient evidences of it.

Can we think that life and peace inhabit that soul in which anger, wrath, envy, excessive love for earthly things, dwell and exert themselves on all occasions — where there is continual tumult, fighting, and rebellion, as there is where the passions of the mind are not under the conduct of reason or of grace?

The nature and principal effect of this spiritual mindedness is to bring all the affections and passions of our minds into that holy order in which they were created. This was that uprightness in which God made us — namely, the whole blessed order of all the powers, faculties, and affections of our souls, in all their operations, in order for living to God. And this is restored to us by this *grace*, by this *duty* of being spiritually minded. And where it falls short of that perfection which we had originally (for the remainders of that disorder which befell us by sin will still continue in part), it is recompensed by the actings of that new principle of gospel grace which is exercised in it. For every act of our affections towards God in the power of grace, exceeds and is of another nature, *above* what we could do or attain in the state of uncorrupted nature. By this, life and peace are brought into our souls, and preserved in them.

3. It is that by which *our hearts and minds are taken off the world*, and all inordinate love for it. Where this [love of the world] exists in a prevalent degree, there is neither life nor peace. Every excess in it, both weakens spiritual life and disturbs, even *destroys*, all solid spiritual peace. I have

¹ **Jas 1:27** Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world.

occasionally spoken of this before, and also of the way by which minding things above in a due manner, delivers and preserves our souls from its snares. If we diligently examine ourselves, we will find that our inordinate affections, and clinging to these things, are the principal causes why we don't thrive more in the power of spiritual life, and why we meet with so many disquietudes and dejections of spirit, to the disturbance of our peace and rest in God. For there is no grace which isn't impaired by this love in its *nature*, or not obstructed by it in its *exercise*. Therefore, "to be spiritually minded is life and peace," because it subdues and expels that inordinate love for present things which is destructive of them both, and inconsistent with them.

4. It preserves the mind in *a due and holy frame in the performance of all other duties*. This also is indispensably required for the preservation of life and peace, especially for their improvement. They will not abide, much less thrive and flourish, in any persons who are negligent in holy duties, or who don't perform them in a due manner. And there are four things which impede or hinder us from such an attendance to holy duties that may be advantageous to our souls, and against all of which we have relief by being spiritually minded: — *Distractions; Despondencies; Weariness; and Unreadiness to exercise grace.*

(1.) *Distraction of mind and thoughts* has this evil effect. Many complain of it, but few take the right way of deliverance from it. For this evil will not be cured by attendance to any *particular directions*, without a change of *the whole frame* of our minds. Nothing can give us relief in this but a prevalent delight in being exercised about things spiritual and heavenly; for all our distractions arise from this. The lack of fixing our minds on spiritual things with delight, makes us liable to be diverted from them on all occasions, or even to seek occasions for such diversions. It is this frame alone — namely, of spiritual mindedness — that will give us this delight. For the soul is transformed by this into the likeness of spiritual things, such that they are suited to it and pleasant to our affections. The mind and the things themselves are thereby so fitted for each other, that on every occasion they are ready for mutual embraces, and not easily drawn away by any cause or means of the distractions complained of. Indeed, they will all be *prevented* by it.

(2.) *Despondencies in duties* arise from the frequent incursions of *the guilt of sin*. The remembrance of this guilt frequently solicits the minds of persons upon their first entrance into duty — unless they are under especial actings of grace, stirring them up to earnestness and fervency in what they undertake. At other seasons, it renders men lifeless and heartless, such that they don't know whether it's best to pray or not, when duty and opportunity call them to it. We have shown in many instances, that being spiritually minded is the great preservative against these disheartening incursions of sin. It is the soul's watch and guard against them, from wherever they arise or proceed. No lust or corruption can be prevalent in a spiritual mind; and this is the principal cause of such incursions of sin that affect the soul with a disheartening sense of guilt. No affections can abide in any sinful disorder where the mind is so affected. This also gives sin an entrance to a distracting sense of guilt. But the sole cure for it lies in this grace and duty. The same may be said of all other ways, means, and occasions of such incursions of sin.

(3.) *Weariness in, and weariness of spiritual duties* abates their tendency to improve life and peace in us. This evil arises from the same cause as that of distraction, mentioned before. And it is oftentimes increased by the weakness and indispositions of the flesh, or of the outward man. Sometimes the spirit is willing, but through the weakness of the flesh, it is disappointed. The principal cure for this lies in that delight which spiritual mindedness gives the soul in spiritual things. For where there is a constant delight in anything, there will be no weariness, at least not such that it will hinder anyone from clinging firmly to the things in which he delights. Therefore, while we are exercised in a delight in spiritual things, weariness cannot prevalently assault the mind. It is the only relief against that weariness which proceeds from the indispositions of the outward man. For it will preserve the mind from attending too much to their solicitations, *crying*, "Spare yourself," by filling and possessing the thoughts with other things. And so it will

offer holy violence to the complaints of the flesh, silencing them with a sense of, and a delight in holy duties.

(4.) *Unreadiness for the due and proper exercise of grace* is another thing which denies us the benefit of holy duties. The seasons for these duties have come, and a sense of duty carries men to attend to them and their performance. But when they should enter upon them, those graces of faith, love, fear, and delight — in which the soul and their being consist — are out of the way, unready for due exercise. Men must then take up and satisfy themselves with the mere outward performance of them. The heart and mind have been taken up with other things; due preparation has been lacking; men come to them reeking with thoughts of earthly occasions. It is no easy matter in such a frame, or directly out of such a frame, to stir up grace to a due exercise. But the very life of being spiritually minded lies in this. The nature of it consists in keeping and preserving all grace in a readiness for its exercise as occasions require. And this is an effectual way by which this grace comes to be “life and peace;” for they cannot be attained, they cannot be preserved, without that constancy and spirituality in all holy duties, which we will never arrive at unless we are spiritually minded.

Lastly, This frame of mind brings the soul to, and keeps it at *its nearest approaches to heaven and blessedness*, in which lie the eternal springs of life and peace. According to the degrees of this grace in us, such are those degrees of our approaches to God. Nearness to Him gives us our initial conformity to him, by the renovation of his image in us; just as our presence with Him will give us perfection in this. For when we see him, we shall be like him. ^{1Joh 3.2} He alone, therefore, as he is in Christ, being the fountain of life and peace, by our drawing near to him and by our likeness of him, [these eternal springs] will thrive and flourish in our souls.