

The Duties of Secret Religion



DAVID STURROCK

VITAL GODLINESS SERIES
Private Worship

THE DUTIES OF
SECRET RELIGION

THE DUTIES OF SECRET RELIGION

by
David Sturrock

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PUBLISHER'S PREFACE

THE PHRASE "SECRET RELIGION" is not used much in Christian circles today, except perhaps with reference to some of the strange spiritual rituals that are carried out in secret by cults or other false religions. Yet the term 'secret religion' has not always carried this connotation. In times past, Christians frequently used this phrase to refer to *the spiritual exercises that a person engages in while alone with God*. This includes personal Bible reading, private prayer, meditation, self-examination, and other spiritual duties. In other words, 'secret religion' simply refers to *private worship* or private communion with God – the practice which is now more commonly referred to as one's 'devotions' or 'quiet time.'

Every believer, of course, will acknowledge that private worship is absolutely vital for maintaining a close walk with God. No one questions the importance of such duties as secret prayer and Scripture reading. Yet the low spiritual condition of Christ's church today suggests that all is not well in the secret place of many of its members. It would appear that a large proportion of professing Christians rarely spend any time alone with God at all. And while various reasons might be given – busyness, a lack of time, distractions, tiredness, inability to concentrate, other responsibilities, and the like – the true cause often lies much deeper: We love other things more than communion with Christ.

In *The Duties of Secret Religion*, Mr. David Sturrock urges the Lord's people to give serious attention to various aspects of private worship. He addresses not merely the nature of these duties, but also the manner in which they ought to be performed, and the benefits that come to those who take these du-

ties seriously. Abounding with illustrations, his original work is here presented in a way which we trust will be helpful for modern readers. Every chapter has been divided into smaller sections, each with its own section heading. Long quotations from other authors have been separated from the main text and indented in accordance with modern conventions. Scripture references have also been provided for the numerous Biblical quotations that occur throughout the book. Such changes, we trust, will make it easier to follow the author's arguments, and thereby enable readers to examine the state of their own private worship.

Every believer would likely confess that their times of devotion are not what they ought to be. Sadly, we all fall short in many ways. Yet, our Lord graciously promises that He will certainly draw near to every one who draws near to Him (James 4:8). Dear reader, may this be your own experience as you seek, with His help, to engage in the following duties of secret religion.

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October 2025

THE DUTIES OF SECRET RELIGION

CHAPTER 1 Introduction

*“When thou wast under the fig tree, I saw thee.”
John 1:48*

RELIGION IS NOT ONLY personal, it is also heart work. It does not consist in a speculative acquaintance with divine things, however extensive, nor in gifts, however varied and valuable. It is not confined to those solemn and impressive services which are performed in public, or on fixed and particular occasions. Much of the life of godliness lies in the observance of duties which the merely nominal Christian may regard as of inferior importance, and which he is therefore contented to neglect. If, however, our exercises, in connection with religion, are all of a public character, it is a sure evidence that they are not properly religious exercises at all.

It is a mournful fact that mankind are naturally disposed to separate, in matters of religious duty, between actions and motives – to be satisfied with what is seen of men, and indifferent to what is known only to the great Searcher of hearts – resting in outward conformity, to the neglect of inward homage.

In an age like the present, when many are running to and fro, and knowledge is increased, men are exceedingly ready to deviate

from ordinary duties, and to strike out into new and extraordinary forms. Man is, however, too much seen and too much exalted, and the majesty and spirituality of God too much overlooked, in such concerted and popular modes. And therefore, they can neither be so glorifying to God nor so beneficial to us, as increased diligence and perseverance in the ordinary and soul-nourishing exercises of our holy religion.

Among such exercises, those of *secret* religion have always been found the best means for preparing the Christian for other and more public duties. There is, for example, a close connection between the closet and the family. It cannot be supposed that those who neglect secret religion will either be very regular or very fervent in the discharge of the duties of domestic religion. He is certainly best fitted for guiding the devotions of his family who has come from the soul-sustaining exercise of communion in secret with him who is the God of all the families of Israel. Neglect of, or listlessness in, secret devotion will also invariably be connected with little or no interest in the services of the sanctuary; while he who drinks of the still waters of the closet, will draw with joy from the "*wells of salvation*" in public (Isa. 12:3).

The duties of secret religion are particularly useful in preparing the man of God for being a faithful witness for Christ and his cause in the world; useful in arming the soul against the severest persecution. It was chiefly secret religion that nursed the fortitude of the worthies of former days. And if we, in this luxurious age of evangelical profession, would do anything noble and patriotic and martyr-like, we must be much alone with God and our own hearts. Every intelligent Christian must have been struck with the remarkable spirit of the times at and near the first and second Reformations. These were the times not only of great zeal and activity in diffusing the word of life throughout the land, but also of a more than ordinary spirit of secret religion. The real philanthropist will still look upon the growth of vital godliness as the chief means of exalting mankind, of terminating dissensions,

and of spreading civilization and brotherly-kindness throughout the world. On personal religion the Church must likewise depend for the evidence and the means of the accomplishment of God's promises as to her prosperity, unity, and glory.

It has been said, that "we shall find many persons diligent who are not devout." But in such labours there can be no profit to ourselves, and little can be expected to be derived from them by others. We would not advocate a severe, forbidding sort of religion – a religion of gloom. By no means. Real religion is adapted to make its subjects happy, perfectly happy, in due time. They have God for their present and everlasting portion – the God who made that world from which so many vainly imagine they will derive true peace. We would, however, warn professors against a sickly, sentimental piety – a piety without the sinews of deep and spiritual acquaintance with divine things – a piety connected with a feverish excitement, and which cannot be satisfied with God's truth unless it is presented in circumstances of outward attraction and entertainment. The danger now is that while Christians may seem to flourish in external profession, zeal, and activity, they may be decaying at the root, for want of sufficient attention to their own hearts and to the duties of the closet.

Against the inclination on our part to place what is seen of men, and what is out of the usual course, in the room of secret duty and heart-obedience, God frequently and loudly protests. The most solemn and searching admonitions in the Divine word, relate to those duties of which our fellow-men can neither be witnesses nor judges. To such exercises our heavenly Father is represented as attaching the highest value, not only because they refer to our chief obligations to himself, but also because they are known to be particularly instrumental in preparing his children for the kingdom of glory.

All true religion may be summed up in supreme fear and love of God. This compound principle consists in a high esteem of God – deep impressions of his majesty and glory – gratitude for

his undeserved favours, especially for laying our help upon the Strong One – an ardent desire for fellowship with him, and a continued anxiety to please him. In the exercises of religion in general and of secret religion in particular, love and fear lead the Christian conscientiously to attend upon all the means of grace which are of divine appointment, and in the use of which God has promised to meet with his people and to bless them.

It is this principle which leads the disciple of Christ to *study the Bible*, as it is in it that he receives information about God, and especially about his *gracious* character; and as it is chiefly by means of the word that communion with its Author is commenced and carried on. It is love also, more than any other principle, which raises the soul above things seen and temporal, and draws the heart to *meditation* on things unseen and eternal. It leads to *heart-searching*, so that whatever is contrary to the great object of our affections may be detected and removed. The love and fear of God will naturally lead us to *claim* him as ours, and to *give ourselves* to him in a covenant of duty. The individual who loves and fears the Lord will also wish to dwell in his presence – to live in the atmosphere of *prayer* – to keep near the throne of grace, not only that his soul may be replenished with spiritual and heavenly gifts, but also that there may be a flowing out of devout affections to God, and a growing conformity to his divine image.

These are the distinguishing exercises of secret religion. In the following chapters we propose to treat of them shortly. And as we proceed we shall occasionally refer to the sentiments and experience of Christians who have been at once diligent in the discharge of the duties of the closet, and alive to the public interests of their Lord and Saviour.



CHAPTER 2

Searching the Scriptures

*"They received the word with all readiness
of mind, and searched the Scriptures daily."
Acts 17:11*

HE WHO IS not an atheist must grant that a revelation from the Supreme Being is possible. He who is a Christian, reckons it amongst the greatest of blessings that his heavenly Father has actually *written* to him the great things of his law. By all who are on this side of scepticism, the perusal of the sacred Scriptures must be acknowledged to be a "reasonable service," (Rom. 12:1). And yet, with this acknowledgment made with a readiness and a frequency which, to one ignorant of the real facts of the case, might seem to amount to faith, there are thousands of professing Christians who would feel exceedingly hurt at the imputation of infidelity, who seldom or never engage in the SECRET perusal of their Bible.

There can be no excuse from the word of God itself for neglecting this important duty. For we have what is so loudly demanded by many persons as to every moral and religious duty – the command of God himself in so many words: "Seek ye out of the book of the Lord, and read," (Isa. 34:16). "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom," (Col. 3:16). "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches," (Rev. 2:7). The great Redeemer has enjoined the performance of the duty in these well-known words, "Search the Scriptures," (John 5:39). These precepts are not to be obeyed only, or even chiefly, in social worship, but particularly, considering the nature of the duty, in personal and closet exercises.

In this chapter, it is our design to state a few things with regard to this important duty and the manner in which it ought to be performed.

I. THE EXERCISE OF SEARCHING

A. Reading

As to the exercise itself it necessarily includes: READING. This may appear so obvious a part of the exercise as to lead to the assertion that there was no necessity for its distinct and formal announcement. We would say, however, for the warning and reproof of many professors of religion, that this simple and easy performance is far from being common. This, indeed, is emphatically the age of Bibles and the poorest in the land may easily procure them. But we may stand in doubt, as to many, whether they are diligent in the *secret* reading of God's word. The magazine, the pamphlet, the newspaper, are anxiously looked for and carefully perused, while THE Bible may be allowed to lie for days and weeks unopened. We condemn not – we would rather encourage – a taste for reading. But what we say is that other books, besides the Bible, should neither be exclusively nor chiefly read. While the reading of other books ought not *to be left undone*, the reading of the Bible is what *ought to be done*.

The pious Henry Martyn would never allow himself to peruse a book one moment after he felt it gaining a preference to his Bible. As long as he could turn to his Bible with a superior relish, so long he would continue reading, and no longer. James Meikle of Carnwath, addressing his own soul, said, "Whatever else thou readeest, read a double portion of the Scriptures of truth."

Should it be ascertained that in any district of our land, secret Bible-reading was at all prevalent, much, very much, would be gained. It will have gone far, instrumentally, to lead the mind to thoughtfulness and to quicken it to a holy activity in other de-

partments of Christian duty. *"Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God,"* (Rom. 10:17).

An educated deaf and dumb lady said to a friend a short time ago, that the first time she went to church after her mind had been impressed with the importance of religion, she saw over the pulpit the words, *"Faith cometh by hearing,"* which occasioned her great uneasiness, for she feared that, as she had not hearing, she could not possess faith. But shortly after, finding the passage in her Bible, and that it was followed by the words, *"And hearing by the word of God,"* she clasped the book to her heart, rejoicing that there was yet a way in which faith could reach even her.

True it is, that mere reading will not, of itself, produce believing reliance and hope. Yet it is evidently an indispensable step. None, in ordinary circumstances at least, was ever renewed and sanctified except through means of the *"ingrafted word."*

"Read your Bible," was the exhortation of a good man, "and read till you love to read." Dr. Samuel Johnson gave the following advice to a young man who visited him on his deathbed: "Read the Bible every day of your life." "Cultivate," said Dr. Franklin, in the same solemn circumstances, "an acquaintance with, and a firm belief in, the Holy Scriptures. This is your certain interest."

Reading may be the lowest step in "searching." We cannot, however, ascend in the scale of acquirements or duties until we have taken this step. Large and distinct as are the letters of God's writings, he who runs and readeth not, passeth on and is punished, and that too, in proportion to the greatness of his rejected privileges. How shall we escape if we neglect,

This Book, this holy Book, on every line
Mark'd with the seal of high divinity,
On every leaf bedewed with drops of love
Divine, and with the eternal heraldry
And signature of God Almighty stamped
From first to last.

B. Study or Thought

STUDY or THOUGHT on what is read, is also a necessary part of the duty of searching the Scriptures. When we say that reading is a step, and an indispensable step, it must not be forgotten that it is only a step. For although we should read, yea, read so frequently as to have the whole Bible “by heart,” this would not avail without something more. The eye may dwell on the page, while the *heart* (that is, *love*) may be awanting. And even the *mind* (that is, the understanding) may be unexercised. Many human productions may be read without any great demand either on the head or the heart. God’s book, however, requires the whole soul. The more we ponder on its revelations, the more glory, power and suitableness will be seen in them. If we read the word superficially, without thought, it is as if we read not, and we will read without profit – without finding anything new or engaging. Should we however, fix our minds and intently study its pages, we will find new truths, and new views of truth, rising up before us on every perusal. Every experienced Christian has found this to be the case. He has found that the Bible stands alone in this respect – that there is a depth of meaning in it which he can find nowhere else. How strange then, that those tales which outrage all the probabilities of human life, should occupy MEN’S thoughts – that they will think and think on such things until their very hearts ache with emotion, while the overwhelming realities of God’s own book are not pondered – not regarded! Truly “*the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked,*” (Jer. 17:9). How necessary the caution: “*Take heed how you hear!*” (Luke 8:18). How becoming to be “*MINDFUL of the words spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandments of the apostles of the Lord and Saviour!*” (2 Pet. 3:2).

C. Comparing

COMPARING one part of the Scriptures with another belongs

also to the proper discharge of the duty under consideration. Truth is one, yet there are many portions or departments. We must, therefore, study the proportion, connection, and symmetry of the whole. That which may appear less important in itself, has an inseparable bearing upon other parts of revealed truth. The doctrines of the Bible form a chain, although at first sight they may seem to be an indiscriminate collection of unconnected rings. We have, therefore, to compare one part with another, or in other words, we have to ascertain what is the Bible system. Hence we read of the "*proportion of faith*" (Rom. 12:6), and of "*comparing spiritual things with spiritual*," (1 Cor. 2:13). God has given here a little and there a little, and we have to bring them together in order to a proper understanding of his mind, and that obscurities may be cleared up. The dangerous consequences of neglecting this part of the duty of searching the Scriptures have been frequently and lamentably manifested in almost every period of the Church's history. By isolating the sentences and sections of the Divine Record, we may make it speak any language and bring it forward in support of any creed.

We may illustrate our meaning by a few examples: One part of the Bible commands us to be "*careful for nothing*," (Php. 4:16); while another gives forth the precept, "*Provide things honest in the sight of all men*," (Rom. 12:17). In one place it is said that "*the sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord*," (Prov. 15:8); while in another, they are condemned because they "*do not call upon God*," (Ps. 53:4). Here, we are told that "*God is love*," (1 John 4:8); there, that he is "*angry with the wicked every day*," (Ps. 7:11). In one verse, we are told that Christ is "*the propitiation for the whole world*," (1 John 2:2); in another, that he "*purchased the Church with his own blood*," (Acts 20:28). The Redeemer, on one occasion said, "*Ye will not come unto me, that ye might have life*," (John 5:40); and yet, on another, his language was, "*No man can come unto me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him*." (John 6:44). While

Christ says, in one place, *“My kingdom is not of this world”* (John 18:36), he elsewhere has promised that *“the kingdoms of this world shall become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ,”* (Rev. 11:15). And Paul declares that God the Father *“hath put all things under Christ’s feet, and given him to be head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all,”* (Eph. 1:22). In 2nd Thessalonians we are told that Christ shall destroy that wicked one with the *“brightness of his coming”* (2 Thess. 2:8), while we are informed in the Acts of the Apostles, that *“the heaven must receive Him until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began,”* (Acts 3:21). And in the Epistle to the Hebrews we read, that *“as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after death the judgment; so Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for him shall he appear the SECOND time, without sin unto salvation,”* (Heb. 9:27-28).

These and many other instances might be adduced, in which, if we separate the one part from the other, we make the Bible contradict itself, and we may bring it forward in support of error as well as truth. We must compare Scripture with Scripture, and in doing so we will find that it *“holds a light to itself.”* The Scriptures are to be searched in such a way as to give every part its due weight, and by examining the context, to ascertain the true meaning of individual passages. For it is not by attending to detached fragments, but to the scope of the whole, that a distinct and comprehensive knowledge of the will of God can be readily and successfully attained. No man can honestly search the Scriptures who comes to them with preconceived notions, resolved, at all hazards, to support a favourite system of opinions, or to persist in some sin by which his judgment has been blinded and perverted. When such is the case, we are ready to turn our heavenly Father’s provision into poison and we may die in our sins. We should come to the Bible *for*, and not *with*, our creed – for

antidotes against iniquity, and not for palliatives or excuses for its commission. Our object should not so much be *to have Scripture on our side*, as *to be on the side of Scripture*.

“How few persons there are,” says Anne C. Maurice in her diary,

who take up the Bible to discover what is the *whole* will of God! We hear of such and such a doctrine – of the meaning of such and such a passage. Yet we hear but seldom believers exhorting each other to walk worthy of the vocation wherewith they are called. In general, persons take those directions of God for their rule which best accord with their own inclinations, habits, character, and pursuits.

‘Yes,’ says the zealous man, ‘it is good to be zealously affected in a good thing. I may pursue this measure, which certainly is a good one, with all my energies and devote all my time and labour to promote it.’

‘Ah,’ says the man of cool temper, ‘be sober minded. Let your moderation be known to all men. Why should I madly wear out my strength in promoting that cause, though it be a just one?’

‘Well,’ argues the complainer, ‘every man must please his neighbour, for his good to edification. We are to be all things to all men.’

‘I am justified,’ says the bigot, ‘in refusing, in the least degree, to allow for the prejudices of my neighbours, for he that bid-deth them God-speed, is partaker of their evil deeds.’

This is a specimen of the manner in which many persons profess to follow the Scriptures as their guide. Alas! I manifest too much of the same spirit. But I do desire to take my Bible in my hand, and search out what my Father enjoins his child.

“It is no objection to the truth of Scripture,” writes Thomas Adam,

that so many different sects find their own opinions in it. For, first, if they were all agreed in their sense of it, and submission

to it, the testimony which it brings against the blindness and corruption of mankind would be weakened. Secondly, it is no disparagement to a looking-glass, that all see something in it that is pleasing to themselves. The glass is true, the eye is partial.

“Sometimes,” says Howe,

truths are misplaced, and what belongs to one kind is transferred to another, where it will not fitly match; sometimes falsehood inserted, which shatters or disturbs the whole frame; and what is, with much fruitful pains, done by one hand, is dashed in pieces by another, and it is the work of a following age to sweep away the fine-spun cobwebs of a former.

D. Meditation

MEDITATION is also requisite when we read the Divine word in secret. Having read and studied and compared the several parts of the Bible, we are then prepared for meditating on the truths, promises and precepts which they contain. It is worthy of remark that in all the records of Christian experience, meditation and prayer are found to have been classed together in their secret devotions. Meditation is spiritual digestion. “*Thy words were found, and I did eat them: and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart,*” (Jer. 15:16). Ruminating on divine things is a sign of holiness and health. Feasting by spiritual meditation on the heavenly manna in the Bible, is absolutely necessary, for it is our *life*.

Reading and study are not enough. By study the truth is *known*. But when known, it has to become *part of ourselves* – to be incorporated with our moral constitution. There must be a revolving of it in the mind. It must dwell within us, before it can have any practical or sanctifying influence. Will a bill of fare feed us? Will a sight of the ingredients of a sovereign remedy, yea, a knowledge of their names and natures, cure us? No, verily.

Meditation on what “*proceedeth from the mouth of God*” (Matt. 4:4), is necessary in order to get supplies of spiritual provision and refreshment – soul-health and heart-gladness. The maxim is a sound one, “that he who thinks to become wise by always reading, resembles a person who should think to become healthy by always eating.” Ideas, like food, require to be digested. And the mind, like the body, needs exercise as well as aliment. Reading therefore, in order to be profitable, must *always* be followed by meditation.

Let Christians assert the dignity of their character as children of God, and vindicate the truth of their hopes by setting their affections on things that are above and not on things that are on the earth (Col. 3:2). Let them “*ponder these things in their hearts,*” (Luke 2:19). Meditate on the law of the Lord as the miser on his hoard, the sons of pleasure on their prospects – not their retrospects – as the pilgrim on his shrine, the stranger on his home, the man of science on his problems, the artisan on what grows under his hands, the husbandman on his hopes and the labourer on his hire.

E. Seeking

SEEKING *for some particular objects*, is also included in studying or searching the Scriptures. The word is to be searched as for hid treasures. Its wisdom is to be sought for as silver (Prov. 2:4).

1. For Christ

In all things Christ must have the pre-eminence (Col. 1:18). He is the pearl of great price (Matt. 13:46). The Scriptures testify of him (John 5:39). The testimony concerning him is the Spirit of prophecy (Rev. 19:10). This is the characteristic description of the Bible. It is “*the word of Christ,*” (Col. 3:16). He is both its author and subject. A Bible without Christ would

only be a roll written, within and without, with mourning, lamentation, and woe. It would only be food for despair, not for hope, to perishing sinners. Let us then leave it to the Socinians to speak of a Christless Bible, for they err, not knowing the Scriptures nor the power of God (Matt. 22:29). The gospel is the gospel of the glory of Christ. He is the Alpha and the Omega of divine revelation. All the lines of divine truth centre in him whose name is – *“The Word of God,”* (Rev. 19:13). The Bible is the mine; Christ is the gold. The mystery of God contains the mystery of godliness – God manifest in flesh (1 Tim. 3:16). In the Bible we hear Christ’s voice, we behold Christ’s face and we see Christ’s heart. By nature, we are without Christ. We should, therefore, search the Scriptures, that we may find God in Christ, and have him formed in our hearts the hope of glory (Col. 1:27). We have gone astray. We should, therefore, search for Him who is THE WAY. We are ignorant; He is THE TRUTH. We are dead; He is THE LIFE (John 14:6). We are in an enemy’s country; the word is the sword of the Spirit (Eph. 6:17). There is none like it, and it has often been found that *“It is written,”* hath put Satan to flight, with *“the armies of the aliens,”* (Heb. 11:34).

Are we afflicted? Then the word tells us both what we are to do with trouble, and what trouble is to do for us. *“Thy statutes,”* says David, *“have been my songs in the house of my pilgrimage...Unless thy law had been my delight, I should have perished in mine affliction,”* (Ps. 119:54, 92). We are dying; and the Gospel hath brought life and immortality to light (2 Tim. 1:10). *“All flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as a flower of the field: the grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away; but the word of the Lord endureth for ever,”* (1 Pet. 1:24-25).

“This wisdom,” said the famous Hervey,

whose fruits are peace in life, consolation in death, and everlasting salvation after death; this would I trace, this I would seek, this I would explore through the spacious and delightful fields

of the Old and New Testaments. The Scriptures – and believe me, as I speak from daily experience – are a treasury of comfort. They testify of Christ, they display his almighty power and infinite goodness, the fulness of his grace and the freeness of his merits.

2. *That We May Know God*

We should search the Scriptures, *that we may know God*. In the Bible, and in the Bible alone, can we learn what God has been pleased to reveal. We should search for those discoveries which he has made of HIMSELF, endeavouring to conceive aright of his everlasting being and independence, his uncontrollable power and absolute sovereignty, his inflexible justice, overflowing goodness and tender mercy. The Scriptures are the only means of acquiring a knowledge of all Jehovah's perfections. Well might Sir Isaac Newton exclaim: "I account the Scriptures of God to be the most sublime philosophy." God has exalted his word above all his works. It is emphatically THE REVELATION OF GOD. Nature reveals God, but it neither does nor can reveal him in the same way, nor to the same extent. Although the Bible does not profess to teach men what are called "the sciences," it nevertheless, "teacheth man knowledge" concerning the most high God, possessor of heaven and earth. And this, as being the noblest of all sciences, should be studied – searched out with diligent search.

"Where," asks Dr. William Symington,

shall we find such an impressive exhibition of the nature, the wisdom, the goodness of the Divine Being, as in these three brief statements: 'God is spirit – God is light – God is love?' Such, indeed, we may safely affirm, is the real worth of the Bible, in connection with this first and most important branch of all religious knowledge – the knowledge of God – that by means of it the little Sabbath-school child may acquire juster conceptions of the Great Supreme than any that were ever attained by the greatest of the ancient philosophers, and the illit-

erate peasant may deliver to his family, on a Sabbath evening, more sound and wholesome instruction than ever proceeded from a Plato or a Cicero.

3. *To Know Our Relation to God as Sinners*

We must search the Scriptures, that we may know *our relation to God as sinners*. In importance, the knowledge of ourselves stands next to the knowledge of God. That we are the creatures of God we may be said to know without the Bible. It is, however, very little we can know about our real character and condition, without the light of revelation. The Bible, in its discoveries, proceeds upon the fact of our total depravity and sinfulness in God's sight. We should, therefore, search in order to form a correct estimate of our own character as guilty, condemned, ignorant, helpless and miserable creatures. All who have prayerfully studied the Scriptures have come to the conclusion that they are very wicked by nature.

Thus writes a young surgeon who had, in a foreign land, been "brought to himself" by the grace of God:

The Scriptures have now a meaning to me which I never before saw. They point out the exceeding holiness of God's character, and the extreme depravity of the human heart. They also show to what an immense distance sin removes man from his Maker – a circumstance which fills my mind with fear lest I offend, and sets me to my knees whenever I feel that I have transgressed.

4. *To Know How to be Reconciled to God*

We should search the Scriptures, that we may know *how we may be reconciled to God*. It is only by consulting the word of God that we can understand the plan of redemption, which occupies so large a space in that word, and on which the inspired writers delight so much to dwell. God is in Christ, reconciling

the world unto himself, not imputing unto men their trespasses (2 Cor. 5:19). God is just and the justifier of him who believeth in Jesus (Rom. 3:26). How thankful should we be that there is a way of reconciliation – that we have not to consider which of many and various ways we have to adopt, for there is only one. In Christ’s work the soul finds rest and suitableness, and a supply of all need. He that findeth Christ findeth life, and shall obtain favour of the Lord (Prov. 8:35).

5. *To Know the Duties God Requires of Us*

We should search the Scriptures, that we may know *the duties which the Lord requires of us*. Every renewed, reconciled soul will be disposed to present Paul’s first acceptable prayer: “*Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?*” (Acts 9:6). Now, it is in the Bible, which is “*the Book of the Law*,” that we are furnished with an answer to such a question. What is written, is written that we may learn the WILL of our heavenly Father.

“When the Christian finds it difficult to ascertain the path of duty,” says Dr. Waugh,

he will say, ‘Bring me the Ephod’ – ‘*Rax me the Bible!*’ (referring to the well-known saying of Dr. Erskine in the General Assembly). He will inquire, ‘Which of these two ways would Paul have chosen? Which would our Saviour have recommended?’ He will hear a voice behind him, calling him back, saying, ‘THIS is the way. That is the way which covetousness pursues; that, the way which the lover of the softnesses of life follows; but this is the way, walk ye in it.’ No one can say, ‘I was distressed about the path of duty; and though I sincerely searched my Bible, and earnestly prayed for direction, yet I went wrong!’ The word of God and that alone, is competent to settle every doubt, if we are honest in our inquiry.

6. To Help Stir Our Devotion

We should also search the Bible as a *directory and excitement to devotion*. The whole word of God is of use to direct us in the exercises of devotion – in the exercise of prayer, in all its parts – in praise – in meditation and self-examination. The devotional reading of the Scriptures is, in itself, one great means of producing and maintaining spiritual-mindedness. When we come to the Bible and receive it, as it is in truth the word of God, our minds are solemnized by hearing him speaking directly to us. We will be led to worship God in the Spirit, and to express our devotional feelings in God's own language to us saying, "*Thy face, Lord, will we seek continually,*" (Ps. 27:8).

F. Read All of the Bible

The whole Bible should be read by the Christian in his closet. "*ALL Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works,*" (2 Tim. 3:16-17). No part can be safely omitted – not only because every part is GOD's word, but also because one part throws light upon another. The loss of one chapter of God's book would be greater than that of many volumes of uninspired production, however valuable. It is not only a duty therefore, to read and study *all* the Bible. It is also a great privilege.

It may be said that many portions of it may be safely neglected, if others are carefully studied. Is it thus, we would ask, that we deal with good news from a far country? Will the letter from a friend or relative, at a distance, be only partially or carelessly perused? We "trow not." Why then, should the word of Life, the letter from heaven, the Testament of our reconciled Father be, either in part or in whole, despised or overlooked? Hervey relates

the following anecdote which, he apprehended, shows in a strong light the use of those passages of Scripture which the unthinking are too apt to consider as comparatively useless:

A certain libertine, of a most abandoned character, happened accidentally to stroll into a church, where he heard the 5th chapter of Genesis read over, importing, that so long lived such and such persons, and yet the conclusion was: They died. ‘Enos lived 905 years, and he died; Seth 912, and he died; Methuselah 969 years, and he died.’ The frequent repetition of the words, ‘He died,’ notwithstanding the great length of years they had lived, struck him so deeply with the thought of death and eternity, that it changed his whole frame. He attended the remaining part of the service with the utmost seriousness, went home and prayed to God for forgiveness and the assistance of the Holy Spirit, and became, from a licentious libertine, a most exemplary Christian.

Taken even in a literary point of view, the whole Bible has high claims upon our most profound respect. It is an ancient volume. It is a most comprehensive volume – no other book contains so great a mass of information in so small a space. “I have only one book,” said the poet Collins, “but that is the best.” “Every word and syllable of the Bible,” said Boileau, “ought to be adored. It not only cannot be enough admired, but it cannot be too much admired.” In the blank leaf of Sir W. Jones’ Bible, the following finely conceived description was found written:

I have regularly and attentively perused these Holy Scriptures, and am of opinion that this volume, independently of its divine origin, contains more true sublimity, more exquisite beauty, more pure morality, more important history and finer strains of poetry and eloquence, than can be collected from all other books, in whatever age or language they may have been written. The unstrained application of them to events which took place long after the publication, is a solid ground for belief that they are genuine productions and consequently inspired.

In the information which the Bible communicates we are all deeply interested, and its details are full of lessons of divine wisdom and prudence. Where can a more perfect model of historical description be found than the history of Joseph? Where will a more affecting story, concerning the simplicity of rural life, be met with than that of Ruth? Is it lyric poetry we love? We will be gratified with the song of Moses at the Red Sea, and the odes of David, Asaph, and Heman. Does elegy suit our taste better? Then we can lament with David over Jonathan or with Jeremiah over the ruins of the place of his fathers' sepulchres. In beauty, who can surpass the Evangelical Prophet? In sublimity, who can equal Habakkuk in his devotions? Where will we find proverbs wiser than Solomon's – reasoning more logical than Paul's – lessons for private life more appropriate and particular than those in the Epistles – or more delightful pictures of friendship and genuine touches of nature, than in the account of Lazarus of Bethany, with his sisters Martha and Mary, and the FRIEND that sticketh closer than a brother?

“I have often thought,” said Hervey,

that the Scripture is finely calculated to furnish out the most exquisite entertainment to the imagination, from those principal sources mentioned by Addison, the *great*, the *beautiful*, and the *new*. But what is this compared with that infinitely noble benefit, to impart which is the professed design of the Bible – the benefit of making us wise unto salvation, of making us partakers of a divine nature?

G. Read Both Testaments

Those who love God will read the OLD TESTAMENT as well as the NEW. The lessons of the Old Testament are not the less to be regarded because they happen to be found in the *first*, instead of the *second*, part of our Bibles. The two parts of the revelation of God are inseparably connected. The analogy between them is

obvious. They proceed from the same great Author, and are intended to promote the same great ends.

The writer of “An Advice to a Young Christian,” – who signs himself “A Village Pastor,” has the following remarks on the subject of attending to the whole Bible:

While I would rejoice in the fact of your having, at first, preferred those Scriptures which are more particularly devotional, I must exhort you to go on to perfection. ‘All Scripture is given by inspiration of God,’ and all is, therefore, profitable. In these remarks, I speak from *personal experience*. My attention, for a long time, was confined almost exclusively to the Psalms, the Evangelists, and a few of the plainest of the Epistles. These I perused and re-perused, until much of them was committed to memory, and all were very familiar. I do not, nor shall I ever regret this. But my mistake was in supposing that the historical and prophetical, and some of the doctrinal parts of the Bible, were inapplicable to my circumstances, and therefore, had little claim on my attention. I fear that others have fallen into this mistake. I have since learned that those very Scriptures to which I confined my attention, were greatly elucidated and beautifully explained by other parts of the Bible, which I had thought too deep and too inapplicable for my reading.

In another part of the same work, this author says,

I am convinced of the utility of studying the Bible in course; and I can assure you that my former desultory practice, of opening and reading where the eye chanced to fall, was far from affording equal satisfaction.

In the Old Testament the New lies hid, and in the New Testament the Old is unveiled. We must therefore read the one, in order that we may understand the other. CHRIST is in the one, as well as in the other. When he said, “*Search the Scriptures*” (John 5:39), the New Testament was not in existence. And when he opened the understandings of the disciples going to Emmaus,

and made their hearts burn within them, it was by means of the Old Testament alone. Let us beware of the fashion of the times, which regards no duty as incumbent unless chapter and verse can be produced for it from one particular portion of the Bible; which reclaims against the public exposition of the Old Testament Scriptures, and would plead excuse for the neglect of certain duties and the denial of certain doctrines, because reference may be made, for obligation, to Moses and the Prophets.

II. THE MANNER OF SEARCHING

A. With Reverence and Humility

As to the MANNER in which the Christian ought to discharge the duty of searching the Scriptures in secret, we may observe, that they should be read and searched with REVERENCE and HUMILITY. The Bible is GOD's book – the book of truth, the book of happiness, the book of Heaven. According to the famous sentence of Locke, "It has God for its author, salvation for its object, and truth, without any mixture of error, for its contents." Let us beware as to how we use it, for God's name is in it. His seal is on it. It reflects his holiness and is guarded by his jealousy. The following lines, by Sir Walter Scott, simply and beautifully express the reverence which is due to the Bible, and the awful consequences of irreverence and infidelity:

Within that awful volume lies
The mystery of mysteries!
Happiest they of human race,
To whom God has granted grace,
To read, to fear, to hope, to pray,
To lift the latch, and force the way;
And better had they ne'er been born,
Who read to doubt, or read to scorn.

It would, by all professing Christians, be reckoned shameful not to possess the Bible, and more shameful still to part with it. Many however, honour it with external decoration, and yet neglect to use it according to the commandment of the everlasting God. They may have been proud of it as a gift from some valued relative, and yet have despised it as the “unspeakable gift” of their heavenly Father, to be daily and reverentially perused. It may also be opened by the nominal Christian, whilst a mere desire for uniformity may be the only inducement. And thus, though it is read and its words are, in truth, the words of God, yet not to them the words of eternal life.

It is an unmeaning reverence, surely, which would shrink from trampling on a stray leaf of the Holy Oracles, and yet remain ignorant of their contents. But it is an outrage on all decency to make them the subject of the musical exhibition, the witling’s pun, and the drunkard’s song. Blessed is the man that feareth always – that trembleth at God’s word (Prov. 28:14). “My heart,” said the Psalmist, “*standeth in awe of thy word,*” (Ps. 119:61). Cast thy shoes from off thy feet, O Christian, for it is I AM that speaketh. Shall we not bow with reverence before his voice, who said: Let the world be, and the world was? Does the student of this world’s science open the ancient volume of philosophy with respect, and shall we not regard with reverence, and study with humility, THE WORKS of Him who teacheth man knowledge? It is recorded of M. De Renty, a French nobleman, that he was in the habit of reading three chapters of the Bible every day with his head uncovered and on his bended knees. Let us beware lest familiarity with God’s book should lessen our reverence for him who is our Creator and Sovereign.

Humility and reverence are graces peculiarly necessary when we would learn what the will of the Lord is. It is, however, a spirit utterly at variance with these feelings which is ever dictating the question: “How can these things be?” and dares with the so-called Rationalists at home and abroad, to suggest that here

Luke may have been mistaken, and there Paul may have forgotten the train of his argument! Who art thou, O man, that repliest against God? Let God be true, but every man a liar. Who would think of criticising the sun in the firmament, or of censuring the collocation of the stars of heaven? But we may safely affirm that it is equally foolish and sinful in creatures to question the veracity and wisdom of the Lord Almighty when he speaketh unto the sons of men.

“Propose to me,” says Chillingworth,

anything out of the Bible, and require whether I believe it or not; and seem it ever so incomprehensible to human reason, I will subscribe it with hand and heart; as knowing no demonstration can be stronger than this – ‘God hath said so, therefore it is true.’

All in the Bible is truth – unmixed truth – authoritative truth. “*Thy word,*” says Christ, “*is TRUTH,*” (John 17:17). It is truth in itself, and is the supreme and unerring standard of all religious truth and knowledge. All truth must be consistent, and therefore, there can be no contradictions in the Book of Truth – no contradiction between truth in nature, and truth in revelation. We must bow to the sceptre of truth – receive as an object of rational belief whatever bears the stamp of divine authority, however far removed from the previously adopted sentiments of our own minds, or however humbling to human pride. An anxious inquirer going to his closet, must place himself at the feet of Jesus, and with the Bible in his hand seek his instructions pure from the fountain-head. And he must seek them with simplicity of mind, which is an excellent hand-maid to the understanding in the investigation of divine things. “*The testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple,*” (Ps. 19:7). “*As new-born babes desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby,*” (1 Pet. 2:2).

Reading the Bible as worshippers, we will naturally be dis-

posed to fear the great and dreadful name of the Lord our God, and to exercise implicit faith upon his gracious declaration. Cecil, speaking from personal experience, says:

To recollect a promise of the Bible; this is substance! Nothing will do but the Bible. If I read authors, and hear different opinions, I cannot say this is truth! I cannot grasp it as substance: but the Bible gives me something to hold. I have learned more from it than from all the books I ever read.

B. With Self-Application

The Bible should be read with SELF-APPLICATION. The word is directed to all and every one. All men have a deep personal interest in its contents, and every one is responsible for the use which he makes of the word of salvation which is sent unto him. The Bible is a book written by God *to* men, and *for* men, and *concerning* men. Every one should apply Scripture to *himself*, as if it was written for him only. “The eye of the Bible,” says Mr. Milner, “like that of a portrait, is uniformly fixed upon us, turn where we will.”

The Bible is the Christian’s own book, his every-day book, and he must use it for himself. Self-application or, in other words, faith in revelation, is not a mere general belief in its divinity. It is the exercise of faith in reading it, and upon the particular portion that may be read – earnestly seeking an interest in the promises, accepting the mercies offered and pledging ourselves, through grace, to a present and continual obedience to the divine will. When we “receive” the word, we are not to receive it “*as the word of men, but, as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe,*” (1 Thess. 2:13).

It is a very unprofitable employment, to say the least of it, to be always applying what we read or hear to the case of others. Whereas, from reading or hearing with a present feeling of our

own personal interest in divine things, we will derive important benefits. When we read of Abraham's faith, Joseph's courage, Daniel's godliness, and of Christ, who was the LIVING LAW, we should not only admire, but try to imitate. We should endeavour to know the plague of our own hearts when perusing the details of Israel's rebellion, and the backslidings of the righteous. The recorded prayers of the faithful should be regarded as means and models to teach us to come, and how to come, to the throne of grace, with all our wants and weaknesses, our dangers and temptations. When singing a song of Zion we should make the language our own, in order to express the feelings of gratitude which we ought to cherish for all the goodness and truth which God hath made to pass before us. We should *embrace* the promises, *look* unto Jesus, and remember that there is no part of revelation given only for speculation, but that all the doctrines of the Gospel are "*doctrines according to godliness,*" (1 Tim. 6:3).

All cannot enjoy the beauties of the Bible in a literary point of view, but all have souls to be saved and God to glorify. Let us imitate David when he expresses in the true spirit of devotion, his estimate of the Divine word and the sweet experience which he had of its power and suitableness and glory: "*O, how love I thy law! it is my meditation all the day. Thou through thy commandments hast made me wiser than mine enemies, for they are ever with me,*" (Ps. 119:97-98). He that runs may read, and the way of salvation is plainly revealed.

"Human science," says an anonymous writer,

may improve; but the knowledge which makes wise unto salvation, comes perfect from its divine Author. Everything human requires improvement; but whatever is God's does not admit of it. Journeys are performed now in a few hours, which occupied weeks long ago; so that places which once seemed far away, have been brought almost within call. But who can bring heaven nearer than the Bible has brought it, when it says, "*The kingdom of God is within you?*" and what shorter or easier way

to it can ever be invented, than *“Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved?”*

All the children of God, in all ages, have had great regard to the Bible. They have read it with delight and self-application. Dr. Claudius Buchanan has the following entry in his diary:

I possess two companions of inestimable value; I mean those two books which are written by the finger of God: the book of God’s word, and the book of God’s works. They are treasures which are inexhaustible, and they afford me, in my retirement, pleasure, company, and comfort.

From the Rev. D. Brown’s journal we extract the following resolution:

On my Bible – I am determined, by the grace of God, to prefer this book to all others; to read it daily, and every other in subserviency. Lord, never suffer my taste to be perverted while I am engaged in reading human compositions. May the history, the poetry, the diction, and sentiments of thy book give it the superiority in all my studies and researches!

The Christian in his closet should, by a faith’s application, “receive” the word of life – come and see, come and taste that the Lord is gracious (1 Pet. 2:3). He should peruse the Bible with all solemnity, remembering that THE BOOK, by way of eminence, will be amongst those books which shall be opened at the last day, out of which those who have enjoyed it shall be judged. Everyone must then give account of himself, and of the application and improvement which he has made of the word of eternal life.

C. With Prayer

PRAYER for divine teaching will be presented by those who carefully read their Bibles in secret. It is not profitable reading, and it cannot be devotional reading, without this. *“Open thou*

mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law" (Ps. 119:18), was David's prayer, and it will be the prayer of all who love their Bible.

Divine teaching is not to be expected except through means of the word. But a proper knowledge of the word cannot be obtained without divine teaching. We are naturally indisposed to know, obey, and submit to God's will, not only as manifested to us in providence, but as directly expressed and enjoined in the Sacred Volume. We are spiritually blind. We are also very proud. Our prayer should therefore be for the "*casting down of imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God,*" and for the "*bringing of every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ,*" (2 Cor. 10:5). Paul's prayer for the Ephesians should be the prayer of everyone for himself: "*That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto us the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him: the eyes of our understanding being enlightened; that we may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of his power toward them that believe, according to the working of his mighty power,*" (Eph. 1:17-19). We are so ignorant of the glory and spirituality of divine truth, that our understandings do not only require to be "opened," but the Apostle John speaks of an understanding being "*GIVEN, that we may know Him that is true,*" (1 John 5:20).

An individual who reads and studies the Bible without frequent and fervent prayer for divine illumination must remain ignorant of its spiritual meaning. We should, therefore, not merely consult God's book in the way of careful examination. We should also consult God himself, in the way of earnest and persevering prayer. It is really the privilege of all the readers of the Bible to have freedom of access to its author, in order to ask explanations and get difficulties removed. "*If any of you lack*

wisdom, let him ask of God, who giveth to all men liberally and upbraideth not, and it shall be given him," (James 1:5).

The following anecdote from D'AUBIGNE's *History of the Reformation* will not be inappropriate here:

Spalatin had asked Luther the question, "Which is the best method of studying the Holy Scriptures?"

"Hitherto," replied Luther, "you have asked me, most excellent Spalatin, such things only as were in my power; but to direct you in the study of the Holy Scriptures is above my capacity. If, however you would like to know my own method, I will not conceal it from you. First, it is certain that no man can obtain a thorough knowledge of the Scriptures by mere force of study or of genius. What you have first to do, then, is to commence with prayer. Entreat of God that, of his great mercy, he would give you the true understanding of his word. There is no interpreter of the word of God other than the Author himself of that word, according as it is written, *They shall all be taught of God*. Hope nothing from your labours, nothing from your understanding, but trust wholly to God, and to the influences of his Spirit. *Believe a man who has made the trial.*"

Prayer has solved many difficulties, and led many Christians to hear the voice, and see the face of "*Him that speaketh from heaven,*" (Heb. 12:25). When Daniel understood the visions of the Almighty, we indeed hear of books which he consulted. Prayer and fasting were, however, the grand means which he employed: "*And while I was speaking, and praying, and confessing my sin, and the sin of my people Israel, the man Gabriel informed me, and talked with me, and said, O Daniel, I am come forth to give thee skill and understanding,*" (Dan. 9:21-22). We may read the Scriptures, and acquire an extensive acquaintance with what they contain, but without the divine blessing upon our studies, they will remain a dead letter and cannot make us wise unto salvation. "*The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, neither can he know them, because they are*

spiritually discerned," (1 Cor. 2:14). It is the Holy Spirit alone who can guide into all truth, and render his own word "*powerful, sharper than a two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit,*" (Heb. 4:12). If his assistance is vouchsafed us, we may receive more insight into divine things in a moment than, without it, we could have obtained by the labours of a long lifetime. By his efficacious "*unction,*" we will learn what the human mind never can communicate, and feel what the profane, the thoughtless, and the formalist never can appreciate. It is the Spirit who unites the soul to him who was the Word from the beginning. It is the Spirit who puts the blood and the oil upon the ears of the deaf and careless sinner. It is not by the mere *moral influence* of the cross and the doctrines of the Gospel that sinners are saved, but by the Lord the Spirit. How necessary then, that when reading the word we should earnestly pray for the indwelling of the great Illuminator. And how encouraging are his own declarations: "*Good and upright is the Lord; therefore will he teach sinners in the way,*" (Ps. 25:8). "*If ye, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give his Holy Spirit to them that ask him,*" (Matt. 7:11).

And here we would take occasion to say, that we should not only pray generally for divine tuition, but also pray over that particular portion of the Bible which we may be reading. In this way our prayers will have a more definite object. They will be less formal than they would otherwise be, and there would be no need to have recourse to prescribed forms of prayer. It has been found good for the children of God to draw near to the throne of grace with his word in their hands. If they would be "*mighty in the Scriptures,*" (Acts 18:24), let them often read them on their knees. We would call the attention of professors to *the duty* of reading the Scriptures *in conjunction with* their regular morning and evening approaches to the throne of grace. It will be readily granted by all, that the individual who seldom or never

prays to God in secret cannot, by any possibility, be a Christian. And why should it be thought possible for a man or a woman to be possessed of good hope, through grace, who seldom or never searches the Scriptures in secret – whose knowledge of the Bible has been attained solely, or principally, from *hearing* it in public, or in private, if they are members of families in which the worship of God is observed?

Should it be said that time cannot be found for reading the Bible and praying to God in secret every morning and evening, we would ask, ‘Is there no time for the perusal of other books – is there no time found for amusement – for conversation?’ It is asked by John Angell James,

Have you time to read letters from your friends, and no time to read letters from God? – time to read the newspaper, and not time to read the Bible? Do you not feel ashamed at the idea, especially when actually put into language? You *MUST* find time; and if in no other way, by redeeming it from sleep, business, recreation, conversation and other pursuits! How much time would it take daily to read, even with serious attention, a whole chapter? As to the generality of Christians, how many precious fragments of time may be gathered up from other occupations, which are actually wasted, to be employed in this high and holy engagement.”

In connection with prayer that we may “*be filled with the knowledge of God’s will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding*” (Col. 1:9), we should improve all proper human helps for understanding the meaning of the Lord’s message to us. He who is a *LOVER* of the Bible will derive his principal satisfaction from other writings and pursuits only in so far as they tend to illustrate and establish its genuine meaning and importance, and in as far as they may be the means not only of informing his *mind*, but also of improving his heart. How inconsistent is it then, for professing Christians to feel weariness of spirit, when custom or

a sense of propriety, induces them to open the Sacred Volume, while their hearts flutter with joy and their eyes sparkle with vivacity at the prospect of having the pleasure of perusing some new and popular human production.

“I read other books,” said Philip Henry, “that I may be the better able to understand the Scriptures.”

“I have many books,” said John Newton,

that I can sit down to read. They are, indeed, good and sound, but like halfpence there goes a great quantity to a little amount. There are silver books, and a very few gold books. But I have one book worth them all called The Bible, and that is a book of bank-notes.

There are three means of understanding the Bible which we may mention:

First, Approved commentaries, which are now, like the word itself, very easily procured. Amongst these, taken all in all, Matthew Henry’s is the most useful for the generality of readers.

Second, A diligent attendance on the preaching of the gospel, by means of which its truths are explained and enforced. Forsake not the house of your God. Watch daily at Wisdom’s gates, waiting at the posts of her doors (Prov. 8:34). “*Consider what I say, and the Lord give thee understanding in all things,*” (2 Tim. 2:7).

Third, Much benefit may also be derived from the “fellowship meeting.” Speak one to another, and “*forsake not the assembling of yourselves together, as the manner of some is, but exhort one another: and so much the more as ye see the day approaching,*” (Heb. 10:25). In such meetings we have the advantages arising from reading, prayer and conversation on Bible subjects. In neglecting such opportunities, we do not “*walk together as heirs of the grace of life,*” (1 Pet. 3:7) and lose much, if not all, the benefit arising from “the communion of saints.” It will be said by those only who have no great affection for heavenly things, that they can acquire, by this means, very little additional information

about the meaning of the Divine Record. The tree of LIFE is, however, as important, certainly, as the tree of KNOWLEDGE. “To know but to know,” is a small matter. But “to practise what we know” is the great evidence of having a good understanding. “*Iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend,*” (Prov. 27:17). If *transformation* into the divine image is advanced by fellowship with those who bear that image, this surely is much. And if we hope to worship everlastingly together in heaven, shall we not speak to each other here, about the things that concern the King, and about “*the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth?*” (Luke 4:22). Conversation between Christians is good for warming and enlivening the heart.

“No wonder,” says Dr. Cheever,

where there is so little of it, and so much and constant vain and trifling talk on the vanities of this world, that there should be so much spiritual coldness. Some men are all ear and tongue in earthly things, conversable and social in the highest degree, on the business, arts, and manners of this world. But when it comes to things of spiritual experience, when it comes to that exhortation, ‘*Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt,*’ ah, how little salt is there! ATTIC salt, as the world calls it, there may be plenty of it – that is, wit, and learning, and common gossip, in abundance. But of the salt of grace, hardly enough to keep the talk from the dunghill. This is sad, and yet true. But Christian conversation, warm from the heart, is a precious means of life, and the means, sometimes, of opening the prison doors, and bringing out a sleeper.”

D. By Every Person

The Scriptures should be read and searched, in secret, by EVERY PERSON. The *minister of the gospel* should “*give attendance to reading,*” (1 Tim. 4:13) that his own soul may prosper, and that he may be able rightly to divide the word of life. The Bible should be consulted by the *civil magistrate*, that he may

rule in the fear of the Lord. The *parent* and the *child*, the *husband* and the *wife*, the *master* and the *servant*, will find the Bible to be the most excellent guide-book in the discharge of their reciprocal duties. The *young* should know the Holy Scriptures, that they may be made wise unto salvation; the *old*, that they may be strengthened with strength inwardly; the *poor*, that they may have all precious substance; the *rich*, that they may be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom of heaven; the *learned*, that they may have the wisdom which cometh from above; and the *ignorant*, that they may know the way of God more perfectly.

“That book,” said the youthful monarch of England, Edward VI.,

the Bible, in all right, ought to govern us, who use the sword for the people’s safety. He who rules without the Bible is not to be called God’s minister. Under that we ought to live, to fight, to govern the people, and to perform all our affairs. From that alone we obtain all power, virtue, grace, salvation, and whatsoever we have of divine strength.

Sir Matthew Hale said that if he did not honour God’s word by reading a portion of it every morning, things went not well with him all the day. Lady Jane Grey, the night before she was beheaded, sent a Bible to her sister Catherine, with this high encomium written at the end of it:

I have here sent you, good sister, a book, which, although it be not outwardly trimmed with gold, yet, inwardly, it is of more worth than precious stones. It is the book, dear sister, of the law of the Lord. It is his testament and last will, which he bequeathed unto us wretches, which shall lead you to the path of eternal joy. And if you, with a good mind, read it, it shall bring you to an immortal life. It shall teach you how to live, and how to die. It shall win you more than you should have gained by your father’s lands; for as, if God had prospered him, you should have inherited his lands. So if you apply diligently to this book,

seeking to direct your life after it, you shall be an inheritor of such riches as neither the covetous shall withdraw from you, neither thief shall steal, neither yet the moths corrupt.

The personal word of God himself addresses all and everyone in these terms: *“My son, if thou wilt receive my words, and hide my commandments with thee, so that thou incline thine ear unto wisdom, and apply thine heart to understanding; yea, if thou criest after knowledge, and liftest up thy voice for understanding; if thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasures; then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God. For the Lord giveth wisdom: out of his mouth cometh knowledge and understanding,”* (Prov. 2:1-6).

Let our readers examine whether they have exercised faith on the living Redeemer, which is inseparably connected with a personal interest in those blessings of eternal life which the Bible has revealed. Let us cherish lively gratitude for the external advantages of revelation – be anxious and diligent, according to our means and opportunities, that the six or seven hundred millions of our race who have no Bibles may be furnished with them. Let us be prayerful that those who have them may be led to improve them for eternity. Let all peruse the word of God regularly and frequently. Live as those who have its great and precious promises hid in their hearts – as those who are the living epistles of Christ, and exult in the hope of the vast accessions of knowledge and joy which are reserved for us in heaven, where truth shall be illuminated by that divine radiance which shall beam from the unveiled face of God; where all the clouds of intellectual and moral darkness shall be dispelled; where knowledge, falsely so called, shall vanish away; where that which is perfect shall have come, and where we shall know even as also we are known.



CHAPTER 3

Spiritual Meditation

“My meditation of him shall be sweet.”

Psalm 104:34

AMONG THE EXERCISES of *secret* religion, spiritual meditation occupies a distinguished place. The Bible not only speaks to us of its great importance, the records also of its observance by the people of God in former ages, are very numerous. The influence which is ascribed to it is very powerful. And it is abundantly manifest, from the frequency with which it is enjoined, that it is absolutely necessary in order to constitute a truly religious character. It was practised by Isaac (Gen. 24:63); indulged in, day and night, by the sweet singer of Israel (Ps. 119:97,148); and enjoined upon Timothy, as being necessary to making full proof of his ministry (1 Tim. 4:15). By this exercise Enoch walked with God, and it formed the employment of Elijah in his solitude. Believers, by the observance of it, have their conversation in heaven, and set their affections on things above. It is a requisite part of every good man’s closet exercises. By it the mind is solemnized for prayer and praise – the influence of divine truth, which has been discovered in the Bible, is more and more realized – converse is kept up with God; and sometimes while thus engaged, the saint has found himself, as it were, on the margin of eternity and breathing the atmosphere of the heavenly sanctuary.

Mr. Flavel informs us that, being at one time on a journey, he set himself to improve his time by *meditation*; when his mind grew intent, till at length he had such ravishing tastes of heavenly joy, and such full assurance of his interest therein, that he utterly

lost the sight and sense of this world and all its concerns, so that he knew not where he was. He passed that night without any sleep, the joy of the Lord still overflowing him, so that he seemed an inhabitant of another world. After this, a heavenly serenity and sweet peace long continued with him; and for many years he called that day “one of the days of heaven!” and professed he understood more of the life of heaven by it, than by all the discourses he had heard, or the books he ever read.

Without meditation our religion can scarcely be supposed to exist at all. Meditation supposes that we take an interest in what we have learned from the word of God and that we love to dwell upon it in our thoughts. It is not sufficient to give a momentary assent to any truth, in order to its becoming a principle of spiritual life and health – in order to its having an influence upon our hearts and conduct. We must lay it up in our hearts and think frequently on it. It may float on the surface of the mind, but will never reach the hidden springs of action in the heart, unless we retain it and ponder upon it. Meditation renews, confirms, and enlarges every good impression that may have been already received, and discloses a treasure of instruction from our own reflection which, otherwise, would remain hid and unprofitable.

A few thoughts on the *nature*, *subjects*, and *advantages* of spiritual meditation will occupy the remainder of this chapter.

I. THE NATURE OF MEDITATION

A. It is Thinking

Meditation is THINKING. It is thought *fixed*. It is reason in *exaltation*. It is the soul speaking to itself, or indulging in a holy soliloquy. There is, however, no part of secret religion to which we are naturally more averse than this. It is easier to read, to hear, and easier even to pray, than to think, to reflect, or meditate. Philip Henry has the following note in his diary:

A godly man, a hearer of mine, once said to me, 'I find it easier to go six miles to hear a sermon, than to spend one quarter of an hour in meditating upon it, and praying over it in secret – as I should – when I come home.'

There are, it is to be feared, multitudes in the visible Church, who seldom or never think on divine things. Want of consideration is, in truth, the great bane of our fallen race; hence Jehovah's complaint even against his chosen Israel: "*Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth; for the Lord hath spoken....Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider,*" (Isa. 1:2-3). We have, in our day, much speaking – much reading and outward service; but little spiritual contemplation – little *pondering* of spiritual things in our hearts. One reason is, men are afraid to think. Their peace would, in many cases at least, die before thought. But why should this be? It is a precious gift to be capable of thinking and to have such important subjects of thought as those which God has been pleased to reveal in his word. And, consequently, it is both our shame and our sin not to improve our privileges.

To meditate is to retire into ourselves – to shut the doors of the senses and to enter the closet of our souls. It is a *MINDING* of the things of the Spirit – a *MUSING* on them till the fire of devotion burn within us. It is *to think with self-application* – to commune with our own hearts, to think on the *glory* of God, till our minds are affected by it. [It is to think] on the *will* of God, till we are brought into captivity to the obedience of Christ. [It is to think] on the *grace* of God, till love and gladness spring up in our hearts. [It is to think] on the *truths* of revelation, till they are wrought into our minds – written on the living tablets of our hearts. All the children of God have, in some measure, felt the advantage to be derived from this sweet employment, and have often expressed their earnest desire to have more and more power and delight in the exercise.

For example, in the journal of the Right Honourable Viscountess Glenorchy we find her saying:

I want to know my wants. I want to know more of God, of his perfections, of his glory, as it shines in the person of Jesus Christ our Lord. I want more of the spirit of prayer, and more power to *meditate* and delight in divine things.

On another occasion she complains of deadness and backslidings, and mentions, as one of the reasons, “not persevering in *meditation*.” And she adds: “I intend, through grace, when in health, to rise early, to have two hours before family worship for prayer, reading, and *meditation*.”

B. It is Not Reading

Meditation differs from *reading*. The Bible may be read, and read even with care. But it will remain unproductive of spiritual advantage unless it be accompanied with prayer to the Holy Spirit for his teaching, and followed up by “turning over the subjects in our minds.”

Henry Dorney, whose frequency in meditation was very remarkable, often said, “That soul could not thrive much in grace and holiness, which was not much in meditation.” He was also heard declaring that he, for his own part, preferred a long meditation before a short prayer, to a long prayer with a short meditation. He also found it for his soul’s profit to meditate on a short passage of the Bible, rather than to read a large portion without much thought.

Reading brings the spiritual provision to the palate, but meditation is required to digest it – to hide it in the heart. We should let the words of God “sink down into our ears,” and *take heed* how we hear. We are prone to forget the things of God. We ought, therefore, “to *give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip,*”

(Heb. 2:1). By reading and preaching, the precious seed of the word is scattered. But meditation is very needful to harrow it into the soil of the heart – to give it a permanent place there, that it may grow and bring forth fruit. Without meditation the head may be clear, but the heart will remain cold – the understanding may be enlightened, while the affections are dull and earthly.

C. It is Not Studying

Meditation is also different from *studying*. By study, truth is explored. By meditation, it is felt. By the one, things that differ are discriminated. By the other, what is known is loved and embraced. In the former, theology is regarded as a *science*. In the latter, it is regarded as a *moral instrument*. Those subjects of thought which are presented to us in the Scriptures, may delight the mind, and fire the imagination of the mere speculatist. It is, however, *spiritual* meditation which alone shows the interest which the heart takes in these subjects, and proves itself to be a sanctifying instrument in the hand of the Lord the Spirit. The design of secret meditation is not so much to accumulate knowledge or to please ourselves, as to enlarge the desires of the soul, and to elevate and spiritualize the affections. We should, therefore, carefully distinguish between the mere excitement of natural temperament and the communings of a sanctified mind. They are very different. The one is fleeting and of short duration. The other is a spiritual HABIT, although it may be different in degree in different individuals, and in the same individual at different times. The one has a reference chiefly to our own comfort. The other has a particular respect to the divine authority and glory.

D. It Requires the Indwelling of God's Spirit

Spiritual meditation is the offspring of spiritual-mindedness, and consequently, is an exercise in which the natural man can

take no pleasure. It should, therefore, be remembered that the inhabitation of the great Regenerator and Sanctifier is necessary to form and attune the mind for this hallowed employment; and that, in conducting it properly and profitably, continued communications of divine grace are absolutely necessary. Hence, devotional meditation has, in the exercises of experienced Christians, been connected or mingled with *prayer*. Occasional meditation, in particular, will be almost always connected with ejaculatory prayer.

We are informed that Colonel Gardiner spent two hours every morning in meditation and prayer. "I particularly remember," says his biographer, Dr. Doddridge,

that, when we had once spent a great part of a day in riding together, he made an apology to me for being so absent as he seemed, by telling me, 'that his heart was flown upwards, before he was aware, to Him whom, having not seen, he loved; and that he was rejoicing in him with such joy, that he could not hold it down to creature-converse.'

The bent of the renewed heart is in nothing more observable than in meditation. Outward circumstances and worldly considerations, may lead persons to attend the church and even keep up family worship. But when the soul loves and longs to be with God – when it remembers God upon the bed and meditates on him in the night-watches – this is an evidence of spiritual-mindedness. [It is] an evidence of the growth of those principles and feelings which connect man with eternity, which connect the soul with God, and prepare it for the services of the everlasting Sabbath in heaven. When a man begins to desire God's company, it shows that he is a godly man. When he finds this desire converted into a principle of his existence – when it becomes a habit, the omission of which is felt – when it rises into a passion – when it makes him say, "*With my soul have I desired thee in the night, and with my spirit within me will I seek thee early,*"

(Isa. 26:9); this shows that he is a spiritually devout, growing Christian.

II. THE SUBJECTS OF MEDITATION

As to the SUBJECTS of spiritual meditation, they are very numerous, important, and delightful. Amongst others, we may mention:

A. God Himself

GOD HIMSELF. “*My meditation of HIM shall be sweet: I will be glad in the Lord,*” (Ps. 104:34). God is incomprehensible – who can by searching find him out? (Job 11:7). Every perfection of his nature affords an ample field for meditation. His eternity, infinity, and immutability are pleasing, yet awful, subjects of pious contemplation. Amid the limited, transitory, and changeable comforts to be derived from the creatures, it is delightful to think of the Heritage of Jacob – the Eternal God, who is our refuge. To think of the *wisdom* which planned, and the *power* which created and preserves all things; of the *holiness* which secures a sinless and happy home for all his children; of the *goodness* and *mercy* which follow them all the days of their life on earth; and of the *truth*, which seals for eternity all the sweet promises on which faith leans, and in which hope rejoices, is surely a blessed exercise in the experience of every believing soul.

“I KNOW,” said Mayow,

that it is the greatest pleasure and the greatest indulgence to *think of God*. Think of anything else, and you will find disappointment in it. Whatever you think of long together will at last give you pain. Whatever man you think of, you will find in him some imperfection. Whatever kingdom you think of, you will find it is badly governed. Whatever sense you think of, you will find that you are met by ignorance and imperfection. But if

you think of God, there is no imperfection. He is what he should be – perfectly perfect. He is perfect happiness, and is such a fountain of happiness in himself, that he is enough for all who will seek it. He has so much power, that nothing can resist him. He is so good, that we may be certain everything is for the best. There is no pain in thinking of these things. There is no pain in thinking of everlasting happiness.

“Can I,” asks Featley, “desire larger possessions than immensity, a surer estate than immutability, a longer term than eternity, a fuller portion than JEHOVAH?”

1. *His Omnipresence and Omniscience*

The *omnipresence* and *omniscience* of God have often been delightful subjects of meditation to his afflicted and tempted ones. God is everywhere and knows all things, and therefore we can never be alone. The thought of our being the immediate objects of the divine inspection, is one which ought to be brought home in a realizing form to every heart, and which it will be for our advantage to feel under all conceivable circumstances of our active being. Nothing contributes so much towards a practical, abiding sense of God’s presence. No action, no scene of our whole existence, is beneath God’s notice. Yea, from all eternity he knew all the thoughts of all the rational beings which he has created, or will yet create. How unspeakable the benefit and pleasure arising from the thought that God’s eye is near to witness, and his hand to guide us in all our ways! Wherever we go, there is One who inspects our every step. “*Thou, God, seest me,*” (Gen. 16:13). While this is the sinner’s *beacon*, it is the *motto* of every child of grace. How comforting to think that our heavenly Father hears the groanings which cannot be uttered, knows the way which we take, and cannot be unacquainted with the temptations and dangers to which we are exposed. [How comforting it is to think] that he who has *know-*

ledge sufficient to discern all the circumstances of our earthly pilgrimage, has also power sufficient to protect and deliver in situations the most perilous!

2. *His Patience*

How great is the *patience* of our God! Although he is infinite in power, he nevertheless spares us – bears with our manners in the wilderness and *waits* to be gracious. He exercises great patience towards the unconverted sinner, hears prayers on his behalf and has no pleasure in his death. The children of the kingdom have also much cause to exclaim, *“It is of the Lord’s mercies we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness....The Lord is good unto them that wait for him, to the soul that seeketh him,”* (Lam. 3:22-23, 25). All the people of God have been much in the habit of thinking on God’s patience towards them. They have *“accounted that the long-suffering of God is salvation,”* (2 Pet. 3:15). How feelingly does the Apostle Paul speak of this: *“Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first, Jesus Christ might show forth all long-suffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting,”* (1 Tim. 1:16). The instances of Paul and Bunyan and Newton, may be thought extreme cases. But all who have seen the great evil in sin will be ready to exclaim, *“How good and patient is our God!”*

“I bless the Lord,” said Halyburton,

that though, by many provocations of all sorts, I have given him just ground to abandon me quite, yet he has not so done; nay, even when I was as a beast before him, he held me by the hand, and left me not to run away. O astonishing sovereignty of divine grace!

3. *His Justice*

The Christian, in his retirement, will be strengthened and

encouraged by meditating on the blessed fact, that every one of God's perfections are working for the benefit of his children – working harmoniously and efficaciously. Even his *justice* is arrayed in their behalf. *“There is no condemnation to them who are in Christ Jesus,”* (Rom 8:1). *“Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth,”* (Rom. 8:33). Justice secures the salvation of all those for whom Christ died. Justice would loudly complain were they not all delivered. She could not sit on the throne of heaven and view the punishment of those whose sins were punished in their divine Substitute. Neither is God unrighteous to forget our work of faith and labour of love, for his name's sake (Heb. 6:10). When his people are unjustly accused, he will bring forth their righteousness as the light, and their judgment as the noon-day (Ps. 37:6). The Lord writes a book of remembrance for them that fear him, and that think upon his name (Mal. 3:16). *“And they shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels; and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him. Then shall ye return, and discern between the righteous and the wicked, between him that serveth God and him that serveth him not,”* (Mal. 3:17).

4. *His Triune Nature*

The doctrine of the TRINITY has also been frequently a very comfortable subject of contemplation to the people of God in their seasons of devotion. To think of the Father devising the plan of salvation, of the Eternal Son executing this plan, and of the Holy Spirit applying it to the hearts of all those whom Christ represented – to think of the unpurchased regard of the first person of the Godhead, the matchless condescension and grace of the second, and the love of the third, in taking up his residence in human hearts, must be profitable and delightful indeed. The delight experienced in meditating on the persons of the Godhead

arises, in a particular manner from the fact, that if there had not been a plurality of persons, there could have been no salvation for the fallen children of Adam. Justice behoved to be satisfied by a living person, and that person is Christ. He has two distinct natures in one person. He is God and man, and therefore qualified to be the mediator between God and man. How gladdening the thought that, owing to this blessed union of natures, the divine Saviour can sympathize with us – is afflicted in *all* our afflictions! And it has greatly consoled many a dying saint, when he thought of the human nature of the second person of the Eternal Godhead being in heaven – the man’s very nature living there exalted and glorious; and there too, as the pledge and pattern of that “body of glory” which all Christ’s children shall eternally wear in that happy land.

It is also very pleasant to meditate on the *glory and suitableness of the person and work of the Holy Ghost*. Christ hath told us that the Father himself loveth his people, and we find the Apostle Paul entreating the prayers of the Christians at Rome in his behalf, employing the double plea, “*For the Lord Jesus Christ’s sake, and for the love of the Spirit,*” (Rom. 15:30). The Spirit himself loveth us, and loveth us in a variety of ways. How dutiful and delightful to think of the great advantage of having a teacher who takes up his residence in the hearts of those whom he instructs, and who is able to communicate power to the soul – who is able to convince, convert, and sanctify! As it is not so much the want of knowledge, as the want of life and strength which is our great sin and condemnation – as we may often see and approve what is right, but choose and follow what is wrong – how cheering to think that the blessed Spirit is not only the *enlightener*, but also the *strengtheners*, yea, the *strength* of the soul!

The doctrine of the Trinity, no doubt, is mysterious. But is there anything about God that is not so? This doctrine is revealed to us only in connection with the way of salvation, although the relationship in the Godhead, being eternal, could not originate in

the incarnation and mission of the Son of God. Even the eternity of Christ's sonship, at which so many stumble, is intimately connected with our relation to God. By our union to Christ we become the sons of God: *"Because we are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, Abba, Father,"* (Gal. 4:6) The Holy Spirit is said to be the Spirit of the Father, and the Spirit of the Son. He has the same relation to each of these persons. And as the Spirit did not become incarnate, this without controversy is an eternal relation. Consequently, the relation of the Son to the Father must also be eternal. How deep, yet how blessed, a theme for engaging our meditations! Every part of the character of God – every relation in the Godhead, every attribute of the divine nature, as revealed in Christ, has an inseparable relation to something connected with our salvation.

The learned President Edwards records, in his personal narrative, his own experience of the sweetness of meditation on this glorious doctrine of the Trinity. "Sometimes," says he,

only mentioning a single word, caused my heart to burn within me; or only seeing the name of Christ, or the name of some attribute of God. And God has appeared glorious to me, on account of the Trinity. It has made me have exalted thoughts of God, that he subsists in three persons; Father, Son, and Holy Ghost....Once as I rode out into the woods for my health, in 1737, having alighted from my horse in a retired place, as my manner commonly has been, to walk for divine meditation, I had a view, that for me was extraordinary, of the glory of the Son of God, as mediator between God and man, and his wonderful, great, full, pure, and sweet grace and love, and meek, and gentle condescension....I have, many times, had a sense of the glory of the third person in the Trinity, in his office of Sanctifier – in his holy operations, communicating divine life and light to the soul.

B. God's Works

The Christian will delight in meditating on the WORKS of God. If we are engaged in meditating on God himself, we will naturally be led to think on the operations of his hand.

1. His Creation

We will meditate on the works of *creation*. How great and manifold are God's works of creation! In wisdom has he made them all. The earth is full of his riches (Ps. 104:24). These works show us that his power is infinite, his wisdom unsearchable and his goodness beyond expression. We should look upon the wondrous scenes of nature with the eyes of Christians, and thus we will be led to adore and serve the "*faithful Creator*," (1 Pet. 4:19). If the Christian's eye wanders over the varied landscape – if he traces the beauty or majesty of mountain, rock, river, or flood – if he turns his view to the heavens, when the sun walks abroad in noon-day splendour, or the moon leads forth her train of loveliness, as night's canopy is lit up with its thousand fires – if he admires the flowery graces of summer, or the waving riches of autumn, or hears the voice of winter in the woods repeat its lonely lesson of desolation and change – in all these there speaks to him the voice of a teacher, and he meditates on the perfections of nature's God. "*I will remember the works of the Lord: surely I will remember thy wonders of old. I will meditate also of all thy work, and talk of thy doings,*" (Ps. 77:11). These words, "*My meditation of Him shall be sweet,*" are the concluding expressions of that sublime ode on the works of creation which is contained in the 104th Psalm.

Dr. Cheever, the well-known author of *Lectures on Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress*, has in his work entitled "Wanderings of a Pilgrim," the following beautiful remarks on the spirit with which the genuine Christian will meditate on the works of creation:

He drinks in the spirit of the meadows, the woods, the running streams, and the mountains, going by them and among them as a friend with a friend. He seems to hear the breath of nature in her stillness; and sometimes, when the whole world is hushed, there are murmurs come to him on the air, almost like the distant evening song of angels. Indeed the world of nature is filled with quiet, soul-like sounds, which, when one's attention is gained to them, make a man feel as if he must take his shoes from off his feet and walk barefooted, in order not to disturb them. There is a language in nature which requires not so much a fine ear as a listening spirit; just as there is a mystery and a song in religion that requires not so much a clear understanding as a believing spirit.

Meditation on the works of God in creation is not only a most important duty – a duty which is too much neglected by many Christians – but the practical, religious use of the exercise ought not to be overlooked. It is one of the means of *walking with God*. We obtain more exalted views of the character and glory of our God and Father while we behold the wonders of his power, wisdom, and goodness. “They are the wonderful works of the Deity,” says the mere philosopher. “They are the wonderful works of my heavenly Father,” says the Christian. And as Christ OUR DELIVERER made all things in heaven and in earth, this shows us his omnipotence and love, and affords ample security that what concerneth his people he will make perfect. It shows us that he is ABLE to save to the uttermost – that he is MIGHTY to save. “*HE hath made the earth by his power, HE hath established the world by his wisdom, and hath stretched out the heavens by his understanding. When HE uttereth his voice, there is a multitude of waters in the heavens; and HE causeth the vapours to ascend from the ends of the earth: HE maketh lightnings with rain, and bringeth forth the wind out of HIS treasures,*” (Jer. 10:12-13).

2. *His Providence*

The dispensations of *providence* are also most instructive and interesting subjects of spiritual meditation. How glorious and august does God appear in preserving and governing, according to the counsel of his will – that is, his will guided by his infinite wisdom – all his creatures and all their actions! How delightful, and yet how solemnizing to think of God as superintending alike the fall of the sparrow and the uprooting of empires – making the wrath of man to praise him, and restraining the remainder thereof! We should think of Jehovah's general providence towards the universe at large – of his wisdom and power which guide the spheres as they roll in the vast expanse – conferring on matter its properties, on animals their instincts, and on man his dominion; while he maintains all the movements of our own globe and of other worlds in perfect regularity and harmony.

We should think on God's providential care over ourselves – choosing our inheritance for us, ordering our lot, and often by unforeseen circumstances and events, proving the truth of the prophet's acknowledgment, "*O Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps,*" (Jer. 10:23). How pleasant to meditate on God's dealings towards ourselves, in prosperity and in adversity; towards our families and friends; and to be led to say, "*He hath done all things well,*" (Mark 7:37). Much cause have we to think seriously, frequently, and penitently on our sins and unworthiness – to remember our faults, and to acknowledge that we are less than the least of all God's mercies. But lest we should be driven to "meditate terror" only, God warrants us to adopt the simple but touching language of David: "*I am poor and needy; yet the Lord thinketh upon me,*" (Ps. 40:17).

The information which the Bible, providence, and conscience, communicate concerning ourselves, lays open much matter for serious reflection. Our sins, wants, temptations, and

afflictions; our past history and our future hopes and prospects, should be the subjects of frequent, fixed, and prayerful consideration. *“Commune with your own hearts, and be still,”* (Ps. 4:4) and *“Thou shalt remember all the way which the Lord thy God led thee,”* (Deut. 8:2) are the divine injunctions, and our prayer should be, *“Lead me in truth, teach me....Withhold not thou thy tender mercies from me, O Lord; let thy loving-kindness and thy truth continually preserve me,”* (Ps. 25:5; 40:11).

All God’s children have made it a particular part of their secret exercise to think upon God’s providential dealings towards them. We can scarcely open one of the many diaries and journals which good men have written, without meeting with many devout references to God’s kindness and care towards them in his providential arrangements. The thankful acknowledgment of Augustus H. Francke, will find an echo in the bosom of every child of God, however prosperous in general his condition in this world may have been. “At this time,” says he,

He who is the Father of the fatherless, and who is able to do for us far more than we can ask or think, came to my assistance in a manner that my poor reason could never have anticipated.

God’s special gracious providence towards his own children and his Church is also an appropriate subject for pious contemplation – to think how he found out the prodigals, showing that his time was a time of love (Ezek. 16:8) – bringing the gospel to them with power and demonstration of the Spirit (1 Cor. 2:4) – restoring their souls when they had wandered from his fold (Ps. 23:3) – rebuking the devourer for their sakes (Mal. 3:11) – leading them on the green pastures and by the still waters (Ps. 23:2) – being the uplifter of their heads (Ps. 3:3), and preserving them from danger and death, until the time should come which his word and purpose had determined for their complete release from sin and temptation and sorrow. [Think] how the Church,

though persecuted, has never been forsaken (2 Cor. 4:9) – though often as a besieged city, yet never overthrown, her walls being still salvation and her gates praise (Isa. 60:18) – though deserted by false friends and too much neglected even by real friends, yet still having the everlasting name named upon her – *Jehovah-shammah*, THE LORD IS THERE (Ezek. 48:35).

And how delightful to reflect that there are sure words of prophecy concerning her future extension, purity, and glory! All nations shall yet call the Redeemer blessed (Ps. 72:17). The glory of the Lord shall cover the earth (Hab. 2:41). Babylon shall fall (Rev. 14:8). Unanimity shall prevail more and more amongst Christ's professed followers (Eph. 4:13). Truth shall be regarded as the only safe and honourable basis of peace. In short, all the good words and comfortable words spoken by the angel concerning Zion, shall be accomplished – the zeal of the Lord shall perform them (Isa. 9:7). Let us beware lest, seeing many things, we observe them not – lest we come under the curse of those who “*regard not the works of the Lord, nor the operations of his hand,*” (Ps. 28:5). On the other hand, let us rejoice that “*whoso is wise, and will observe these things, even they shall understand the lovingkindness of the Lord,*” (Ps. 107:43).

3. *His Redemption*

It is upon the work of *redemption* that the believer chiefly meditates. In this work alone *all* God's perfections shine forth. This is the chief of his ways. In it he abounds in all wisdom and prudence. Into it the angels desire to look, and how can it fail to engage the thoughts and call forth the admiration of the saint of God? The wonders which it exhibits are such as are worthy of the loftiest efforts of the imagination and the deepest reverence of the heart. In the other displays which God has made of his character, there is still some attribute of his nature unmanifested – unillustrated. But in redemption his glory is fully exhibited and made

great in the eyes of angels and men. Justice meets with mercy, and righteousness and peace embrace one another (Ps. 85:10).

“See,” says Dr. M‘Crie, in his *Discourses on Unity*,

how it tends to vindicate the authority of the divine law, to assert the honour of the Supreme Lawgiver, and to stamp heaven’s broadest, blackest brand of infamy on sin, at the same time that it provides a way of escape and salvation to the rebellious sinner. See those attributes of Deity, whose claims were apparently conflicting and irreconcilable, harmonizing and conspiring together to promote the gracious design, reflecting lustre upon one another, mingling their rays, and concentrating their lights, until at last they burst forth in one united blaze of glories, more effulgent and overwhelming than is to be seen in all the works of God.

In meditating on this great work, the Divine Saviour occupies many of the believer’s thoughts. His person; his wonderful undertaking in the *eternal covenant of peace*; his mediatory character, offices, and work; the endearing relations in which he stands to his people; his matchless condescension; and the glory of his administration as he now conducts it in heaven as Immanuel, God with us – are high and blessed themes for spiritual contemplation to the Christian. Christ and his sufferings, and the glory that followed are not only wonderful, they are also all our salvation and should be all our desire. What elevated sentiments and calm security are connected with holy thoughts concerning the *completeness* of the redemption purchased by Christ! How fully do Christ and his blessings meet every case! To think of the number, variety, and amplitude of these blessings – to trace them as they fill the mind and engage the power of God, from the “choosing IN Christ,” onward through the calling and justifying and purifying and glorifying of all the members of the now exalted Head – this surely is heavenly work. This is following the example of those higher intelligences who desire to

look into these things, and to whom, by the Church, the manifold wisdom of God is made known (1 Pet. 1:12).

“I take a walk,” said Matthew Henry, “every day, by faith and meditation, to Mount Calvary; there is nothing like it.”

“I derive my whole consolation,” said Cecil, “from meditating on the Godhead and character of Jesus Christ, in whom I place all my confidence.”

We have many instances in the life of Hervey, of his diligence and delight in the exercise of spiritual meditation. And among the subjects which engaged his thoughts, Christ had the pre-eminence. “I could not,” says he, “refrain from tears, while sitting alone in my closet, and thinking on the breadth, and length, and height, and depth of the love of Christ.” On another occasion he thus writes:

By meditation on the joys of an eternal heaven, the infinite love of God even to fallen man, through our Lord Jesus Christ; I say, by frequent meditation on these subjects, I endeavour to be filled with living, lasting, and serenest satisfactions – I endeavour to have my heart enriched with heavenly knowledge, sweetened with divine charity, enlarged with universal goodwill, purified with holy desires, calmed with Christian meekness, fortified against all the attacks of sin and sensuality by a victorious faith – against all the encroachments of sadness and despair, by hopes full of immortality.

4. *His Word*

Meditation on the Redeemer and his work necessarily includes meditation on the *word of God*; or rather, in meditating on the one, we meditate on the other. In the Bible alone is the Saviour made known. Nature is a revelation of God. The Scriptures, however, alone contain a *gracious* revelation of God. The Bible differs from every other revelation of God to man inasmuch as there is always something to be found in it that bears upon our own character and condition, whatever peculiarity

there may be in it. It is God's command, "*Let him that readeth understand,*" (Matt. 24:15). But we cannot do so unless we "give ourselves" to the Bible by serious and prayerful meditation.

Meditation on the word of God has been the practice of all God's people in every age. David meditated on it day and night, and how precious a specimen of this part of his devotions has been transmitted to us by inspiration in the 119th Psalm, in almost every verse of which we find him expressing his ardent attachment to God's holy oracles. In reference to this portion of the Bible, we may mention that Philip Henry advised his children to follow his own example in taking a verse of it every morning to meditate upon during the day, and so go over the psalm twice in the year. And that, said he, will bring you to be in love with the rest of the Scriptures. It was often remarked by the same individual, that "all grace grows, as love to the word of God grows;" and love to the word of God will naturally lead us to meditate much upon it. We ought to search the Scriptures daily, like the Bereans (Acts 17:11), that we may be furnished with suitable subjects on which to meditate. In the Bible we will find all that is necessary for faith and practice. The things which it reveals are great things – things that belong to our peace – to our life, and it is a blessed privilege to be put in trust with them. We are all under obligation to obey the command which God gave to his servant Joshua: "*This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success.*" (Josh. 1:8). The Scriptures are the guide of our way, the charter of our privileges, and the spring of our comfort. "Precious Treasure," shall we not think on thee? Shall we not hunger and thirst after the righteousness and peace which are therein revealed? And receiving them, our hearts shall rejoice, even ours.

It was the daily practice of that eminent physician, Dr. Boerhaave, throughout his whole life, as soon as he arose in the morn-

ing, to retire for an hour for private prayer and meditation on some part of the Scriptures. He often told his friends, when they asked him how it was possible for him to go through so much fatigue, that it was his morning devotion which gave him spirit and vigour in the business of the day. No Christian can thrive in the divine life without frequent meditation on the word of salvation – the word of eternal life. And there is no danger of coming to this well of salvation and finding it empty. If we are straitened, it will be in ourselves, and not in God or the word of his grace.

“The mine of Scripture,” says Schimmelpenninck,

is inexhaustible, and from the time at which it was first opened, until the time when faith shall be exchanged for sight, no one labourer who works therein, even from the most robust to the most feeble, will remain unrewarded by a participation in its wealth.

There may be certain portions of the Bible to which our attention may be directed by providential circumstances, and on which we may be particularly inclined to meditate. But all the Bible should be regularly read through, and we should ponder all God’s sayings in our hearts. Some have, however, found it very beneficial to select a portion or portions of the Scriptures for meditation during the day.

James Hervey was accustomed to do this. For example, we have the following entry in his diary: “I was meditating this day (November 25, 1745) on a most precious promise in the prophecy of Isaiah, *‘I will pour water on the thirsty, and floods on the dry ground.’*” He also mentions the following as affording him, about the same period, matter of pleasant meditation: Isaiah 40:11; 49:15 and Matthew 12:20.

On those subjects which we have enumerated, and others of a kindred character, we should accustom our thoughts daily to dwell. There is no necessity for lingering in the market-place like labourers out of employment, and no necessity for the frivolous

amusements and pernicious practices invented with the avowed design of “killing time,” while there is such abundance of useful, important, and eternal subjects, for the invigorating, comforting, and sanctifying exercises of the human mind. If our reading does not supply us immediately with materials, there are the seasons of the year, the state of the world, the condition of our family, and our own individual circumstances, temporal and spiritual. But there are two subjects always at hand – our own depravity and unworthiness, of which fresh proofs are given every day and every hour; and “*the love of Christ, that passeth knowledge,*” (Eph. 3:19). Let all our readers lay up the things of God in their hearts, and by self-contemplation and a faith’s application of the glorious truths, and good statutes of God’s word, grow in meetness for the inheritance of the saints *in light* (Col. 1:12).

III. THE ADVANTAGES OF MEDITATION

A. Discovers the Excellence of Eternal Realities

The ADVANTAGES to be derived from spiritual meditation are numerous. We may advert to the *discoveries which will be made of the importance and excellency of eternal things*. If we merely take a passing glance at these things, it is impossible that we can perceive their beauty, necessity, and suitableness. We must fix our minds upon them – think seriously and deeply. We must dwell upon them in our minds, and thus endeavour to secure their beneficial effects. We should remember that eternal things are not the things reserved for a future eternity. They signify, indeed, things that shall never end. But they are as important and real at the present moment as they will be when the mystery of God shall be finished on earth. How necessary then, to give them a place, a large place, a frequent place, in our meditations!

By meditation, properly conducted, many things will be discovered in a new light. The world will sink in our esteem – our

spiritual interests will become more and more obvious and important to our souls. Many delusive apprehensions will vanish away, and a sense of the divine presence will guard and calm our spirits. It will always be found that the deeper our acquaintance with true religion becomes, the higher will we value it. And the more we meditate upon religious subjects, their beauties will appear the brighter. If, then, there is any consolation in Christ and the Gospel of his salvation, why should we slightly taste of divine knowledge, and not rather desire to be filled with it more and more?

B. Strengthens the Spirit's Graces

By holy contemplation *the various graces of the Spirit are strengthened*. Love begets love, and it is increased by fond and frequent thoughts of him who loved us and gave himself for us. Meditating on the love of Christ, our hearts will “*burn within us*,” and we will be led to exclaim, “How great is his goodness – how great is his beauty!” This exercise will be connected with unspeakable happiness, consisting as it does in repeating and revolving in our minds the words of Jesus saying, “*It is the voice of my Beloved*,” (Song 2:8). How must it increase our regard to Christ to think of his labours and agonies for us – to think of the double current of affection that flows in his two natures in heaven – to be told by himself that he knows all *the thoughts that he thinks* concerning us, and that they are thoughts of peace and not of evil, that we might have an expected end! (Jer. 29:11). Meditating on the doctrines of the Gospel, and on Him in whom they all centre, our *faith* will be increased, our views will expand, and we will ever find new matter for wonder and praise. Meditating on the vanity of the world, our *affections* will be drawn upward, and we will be led to choose the better part, which shall not be taken from us. Meditating on our own sinfulness, our *humility* will be deepened, and we will be more circumspect in our conduct, and more watchful against tempta-

tion. Meditating on the glory to be revealed, we will anticipate its blessedness, receive the earnest of the Spirit from him who hath wrought us for the self-same thing, and our *hope*, which maketh not ashamed, will be strengthened and animated.

C. Helps the Reading of God's Word

Meditation on the divine word has, in itself, many advantages. Is that word represented as food? – then meditation digests it. Is it a fire? – then meditation brings us near to it, and we are warmed and refreshed. Is it light? – this exercise places it near us, so that we see to walk and to work. Is it a sword? – then by this it is drawn and wielded. Is it a treasure? – by meditation it is opened. We find it, and make it our own.

D. Benefits Private Prayer

How beneficial is this exercise, as preparatory to *prayer*, and especially to *ejaculatory* prayer! Hence the Psalmist, in the 4th Psalm, speaks of prayer under the designation of meditation. The transition from the one to the other is natural and easy. When thinking of God's character, we are led to adore him. When thinking of our innumerable offences, we will, as it were spontaneously, make our confessions. When thinking of our numerous wants and impotency, we will present our supplications to our Father which is in heaven, who is both able and willing to help. And when dwelling in pious contemplation on the numberless and undeserved favours which we have received at his hands, we will say, in the language of thanksgiving, "*What shall I render to the Lord for all his benefits towards me? I will take the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the Lord.*" (Ps. 116:12-13).

E. Benefits Public Ordinances

The Christian will endeavour to engage in the duty under

consideration after he may have been waiting upon God in the public ordinances of his grace, and listening to the preaching of the everlasting gospel. Practice is the great end of preaching, and they will be found to be the best spiritual artists who are the greatest musers.

It is recorded of Lord Harrington, that if, at any time, he happened to be at a distance from a place of public worship, he would ride many miles rather than want an opportunity of hearing the preaching of the gospel; and that he used, immediately after sermon, to retire by himself for an hour, to meditate and apply what he had heard to his own soul.

Mr. John Rowe of Crediton, was a man much given to meditation, and accordingly, whenever he had heard a sermon, he spent a considerable time in meditating on what he had heard. It was a saying of his, that “if he might be in such places where he might have opportunities to hear more frequently, he should not like to hear much, unless he could have liberty to digest it by meditation.”

F. Preserves from the Influence of Sin and Temptation

Meditation *preserves from the influence of sin and temptation*. The human mind must be occupied with something. It is the characteristic description of the enemies of the cross of Christ that they MIND earthly things. When Satan enters, the mind is occupied either with carnal or trifling thoughts.

“A vain thought,” said Fuller,

arose in my heart: instantly my corruption retains itself to be advocate for it, pleading that the worst that could be said against it was this, that it was a vain thought. And is not this the best that can be said for it? Remember, O my soul, the fig tree was charged, not with bearing noxious, but no fruit. Yea, the barren fig tree bore the fruit of annoyance: ‘Cut it down, why cumbereth it the ground?’ Vain thoughts do this ill in my

heart, that they do no good. Besides, the fig tree pestered but one part of the garden; good grapes might grow at the same time in other places of the vineyard. But seeing my soul is so intent on its object, that it cannot attend to two things at once, one tree for the time being is all my vineyard. A vain thought engrosseth all the ground of my heart. Till that be rooted out, no good meditation can grow with it, or by it.

By reading and study and faith, the spiritual armour in which we wrestle with corruption and principalities and powers, is put on. But [it] is successfully wielded only by meditation and prayer. By meditation the wanderings of the heart are called in and prevented, while we pray with the Psalmist, “*UNITE my heart to fear thy name,*” (Ps. 86:11). The conscience is overawed when we think of our relations to God and his undeserved favours. And we are led to join with Joseph in protesting against iniquity, saying, “*How, then, can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?*” (Gen. 39:9).

By self-acquaintance, which is the fruit of patient and frequent thought, we will be enabled to discover those sins into which we are most liable to fall, and by what means they will be either prevented or repressed. Conscience is made tender when, upon thinking of our sins, our hearts have smitten us. And while presenting the prayer, “*Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil*” (Matt. 6:13), we will at the same time endeavour to take the advice of wisdom – “*Enter not into the path of the wicked, and go not in the way of evil men. Avoid it, pass not by it, turn from it, and pass away....PONDER the path of thy feet, and let all thy ways be established. Turn not to the right hand, nor to the left: remove thy foot from evil,*” (Prov. 4:14-15, 26-27).

Tenderness of conscience was a remarkable trait in the character of the late Rev. Robert Murray M’Cheyne. And in keeping with this, we find in his diary the following note: “Private meditation exchanged for conversation. Here is the root of the evil – forsake God, and he forsakes us.”

“Five persons,” says Brooks,

were studying what were the best means to mortify sin. One said, To meditate on death; the second, To meditate on judgment; the third, To meditate on the joys of heaven; the fourth, To meditate on the torments of hell; the fifth, To meditate on the sufferings of Jesus Christ; and certainly they were all good, but the last is the strongest motive of all; for if ever we would cast off our despairing thoughts, we must dwell and muse much upon, and apply Christ’s precious blood to our own souls; so shall sorrow and mourning flee away.

G. Comforts in Seasons of Affliction

Experience will testify to the high advantages to be derived from spiritual meditation, *in those peculiarly solemn circumstances in which every one, at certain periods of his history, is placed*. How comforting and supporting is it to contemplate the loving-kindness of God in Christ, when brought into the deep waters of affliction! When the mind is harassed and perplexed, it is sweet to be able to say: “*In the multitude of my thoughts within me, thy comforts delight my soul,*” (Ps. 94:19). When the body is feeble and diseased, it is both pleasant and profitable to consider him who was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief – to think of that endearing title, “*JEHOVAH-ROPHI, The Lord that healeth thee*” (Exod. 15:26), and who will not try his people more than his grace enables them to bear. When friends and relations depart, and our domestic circles are contracted, it is consoling to think of that Brother who is afflicted in all our afflictions, and to sing, “*The Lord liveth; and blessed be my rock; and exalted be the God of the rock of my salvation,*” (2 Sam. 22:47). We then, by meditation, come to the spirits of the just made perfect, and rejoice in the prospect of that happy land, where no farewells are taken, and no tears flow. If we ourselves “wait” a little longer, the grave is also our house. Then how

should it cheer as to think on him whose name is THE RESURRECTION and THE LIFE, and who declared that he will raise the bodies of his people at the last day!

Dr. Grosvenor, after he had attended the funeral of Dr. Watts, was thus addressed by a friend: "Well, Doctor, you have seen the end of Dr. Watts and must soon follow him. What think you of death?"

"Think of it!" replied he, "when death comes, I shall smile on him, if God smile on me."

Magdalene Rochdale, the mother of Philip Henry, said a little before she died, "My head is in heaven, and my heart is in heaven; it is but one step more, and I shall be there too."

When woes on woes on man descend,
And almost break his heart;
Then Jesus will his own defend,
And ease the keenest smart.

When friends for ever bid farewell,
And, sighing, leave us lone
Then Jesus will our grief dispel,
And say, Not lost, but gone.

When sins appear in dark array,
And threaten with despair;
Then Jesus will the storm allay,
And make the sky look fair.

When soon our bodies fall asleep,
And moulder in the urn;
Then Jesus will them safely keep,
And raise at his return.

H. Possible at Any Time and in Any Situation

While there are particular occasions when spiritual meditation will be indulged in by the Christian, it is one of the advan-

tages connected with the exercise, that we can engage in it at any time and in any situation. The Rev. William Burkitt, the author of a good *Family Commentary* on the New Testament, on one of his birthdays, thus wrote in his private journal: "I engage myself to devote my first waking time to God, and my dressing time to fruitful meditation." Mr. Meikle mentions that he found great pleasure in meditating on divine things when walking alone. The labouring classes would find that indulging in this heavenly exercise would lighten their burdens, and be the means in the hand of the Spirit of love, of calming and establishing their minds.

But while occasional meditation will not be neglected by the man whose soul is prospering, he will, in a more direct and set manner, engage in this duty at particular seasons. It will, for example, be acknowledged by everyone who endeavours to walk with God, that that Sabbath-day will be unprofitably spent in which the Christian does not dwell longer than on other days on the mount of meditation and communion. This is one of the means of leading him to be in the Spirit on the Lord's-day.

"The Sabbath," says John Angell James,

is the liveliest type of heaven; a short abridgment of the everlasting rest which remaineth for the people of God. The work of heaven is a sweet mixture of contemplation and praise.

How precious a means does the day of rest afford for lengthened and pious reflections! The alternation of services prepares for this exercise and assists its performance, the sanctuary furnishing topics for meditation in the sermons which are preached, and the closet giving opportunity to remember, to review, and apply them by contemplation.

Such are some of the advantages to be derived from meditation. Our holiness, comfort and usefulness will be promoted. Our profiting will appear to all, and we will neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Pet. 1:8).

Every duty will be comparatively easy. Our conversation will be heavenly, for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh (Luke 6:45). Our lips will feed many, and our faces will shine with the beauties of holiness when we come down from the mountain of fellowship with the God of heaven. Let all our readers try to govern their thoughts, “*for as a man thinketh in his heart, so is he,*” (Prov 23:7). Let each one ask – Where is my mind? What am I thinking about? Repress the extravagances of a foolish fancy, and remember that God HEARS thoughts. Maintain a good conscience. Perfect holiness in the fear of the Lord (2 Cor. 7:1). Cultivate spirituality of mind, in opposition to worldly-mindedness, which leaves no time, and can be accompanied with no disposition, for spiritual contemplation. Let each be concerned about his own soul and eternity; for it cannot surely be a matter of small importance to any immortal being *where* he shall be, and *how* he shall be, forever. When the things of God are “laid to heart,” they will be thought of. But when laid at a distance, other things will assuredly take possession of our minds. Be diligent in reading and hearing, that you may have matter for thought. Commit much of the Bible to memory, and by meditation let memory be strengthened. Let those things which are known from God’s word, works, and ways, kindle devout affections and aspirations. Think of sin till you hate it – of God till you love him – of heaven till you long for it.

All Christians should have stated times for secret religion, and, among other duties, for that of which we have been treating. But let not occasional opportunities and subjects be neglected. On our beds, in the fields, and especially after we have been reading or hearing the word of God, we should be diligent in obeying the apostolic precept: “*Think on these things,*” (Php. 4:8). It is a bad sign when spiritual thoughts, or thoughts on spiritual subjects, occur only at distant intervals and on particular occasions. They should be the daily, hourly inhabitants of our minds. The scenes of creation, the occurrences around us,

our own occasional thoughts, the sight of the wicked, the conversation of the godly, should be all improved by pious meditation. In this way a habit of spiritual-mindedness will be formed, the complainings of a wandering heart will in a great measure cease, our diligence in duty will increase, the word of God will dwell in us richly, and our souls will be blessed with nearness and conformity to the God of love.

“My weight of business,” said Doddridge,

does, in some measure, rob me of the greatest treasure I have in the world; I mean the hours I would wish to spend in secret devotion; without which there is no sweetness, no calm and serenity of mind, and therefore, very little capacity for managing business. For so it is, though it may seem a riddle, that *when I pray and meditate most, I work most.*

Spiritual meditation is the best employment for our thoughts in the Church below, as it brings the realities of heaven nearer. And our diligence in this duty should continue and increase, inasmuch as the hour is fast approaching when we shall all be ushered into a world of *thought* – either into that world where will be the bitter reflection of the ungodly, which is *their* worm that dieth not; or into that world where God’s redeemed shall think eternally of his sovereign and free grace, serve Him, and see his face.



CHAPTER 4

Self-Examination

“Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?”

2 Corinthians 13:5

KNOWLEDGE IS THE most glorious distinction within the reach of human nature in its fallen state. Even in the lowest depths of savage life, man knows more than the fowls of heaven and the beasts of the field. He is prone to the pursuit of knowledge, and capable of great advances in its attainment. In favourable circumstances, the progress which the human mind has made in worldly science is truly astonishing. When the heart is set upon it, no pains will be spared, and no means left untried. The devotees of science may be said to fall down and worship knowledge as their god. In his unconverted state, however, man seeks the knowledge of things, not that he may be aided in serving the true end of his existence, but that he may gratify his own mind. In this way men may study the works of God, but they do not see God himself – they do not like to retain him in their knowledge (Rom. 1:28).

The knowledge of God in Christ is, however, the noblest of all sciences. Compared with this, all other sciences are worthless. The Scriptures declare that such a knowledge is nothing less than *eternal life* (John 17:3). Who then, would not wish to acquaint himself with God and be at peace with him, for thereby good shall come unto him? Like charity, this knowledge shall never cease, but will be the endless, exhaustless subject of acquisition and source of gladness to the ransomed of the Lord, in the eter-

nal inheritance of the saints in *light*. Next to the knowledge of a reconciled God, must be placed the knowledge of ourselves. Without this species of knowledge, we cannot become acquainted with our own ignorance, nor be convinced that we are naturally without God, without Christ, and without hope in the world. Without this we will be disposed to say to our souls, “Peace, peace,” when there may be no true peace within, and no ground for it whatever (Jer. 6:14).

I. IMPORTANCE OF SELF-KNOWLEDGE

Without self-acquaintance, all other kinds of knowledge will be unavailing – unconnected with spiritual profit. This is also the most interesting part of all knowledge, and that with which every human being is most particularly concerned. If a knowledge of the external world and its various productions be very interesting, a knowledge of our own minds must be much more so. If an acquaintance with the history of nations and the general laws of the human mind be important, an intimate acquaintance with the state and character of our own hearts is of infinitely greater importance, and connected with unspeakably higher advantages.

Self-knowledge, it is true, taken in its largest extent, includes many things which, however important and useful in themselves, it is neither necessary nor possible for all men to be acquainted with – such as the nature of our mental faculties, their relations, and mutual influence and modes of operation. All men are not required to be moral philosophers, and may therefore safely remain ignorant of many of these things. But as to the state of his heart, his relations to God, his feelings towards him, and the prospects he has for eternity, it is of the very highest importance for every one to be well informed.

So important is this kind of knowledge, that without it we cannot know anything spiritual as we ought to know. We cannot know either our own intellectual darkness and *natural* inability

for any righteous performance, or the obstinacy of our wills against the will of God. It is owing to the pride of the human heart, which is the offspring of self-ignorance, that so many claim for our fallen nature a full and unaffected sufficiency of intellectual and natural ability for understanding and relishing spiritual and divine things. In regard to this, it has become common with many to dwell upon the truism, that men could if they would. Whereas the state of our *whole nature* is such, that we neither *will* nor *can* do anything spiritually good till we are renovated and strengthened by divine power. Self-examination would show us that it is no easy matter to renounce our own righteousness – that we, in our natural state, will never be willing to prefer God’s will and the pleasures of godliness to sin and self and the world.

Again, without self-knowledge, we cannot know God in the glory of his attributes, and his unalterable abhorrence of all sin. We cannot know Christ in the glory of his person, nor will we apply to him as the great ransom, nor to his Spirit as the great sanctifier, who by a SUBJECTIVE regeneration of the soul and a gradual but sure process of sanctification, prepares it for eternal glory. We cannot worship God in spirit and in truth while we remain ignorant as to what manner of spirits we are of, or as to what manner of persons we are. We cannot regulate our conduct with any degree of propriety unless we are acquainted with our hearts, from which proceed the *issues* of life – that is, the *actions* of life. In short, without self-acquaintance, we can neither have love to God nor charity to our fellow-men, nor can we resist the temptations of sin, Satan and the world.

“Do but once know yourselves aright,” says Baxter;

know what you are, and what you have done, and what is your danger; and then be prayerless and careless if you can; then but trifle out your time, and make a jest of holy diligence, and put God off with lifeless words and compliments if you can. Men could not think so lightly and contemptuously of Christ, so unworthily and falsely of a holy life, so delightfully of sin, so

fearlessly of hell, so senselessly and atheistically of God, and so disregardfully of heaven, as they now do, if they did but thoroughly know themselves.

II. THE NECESSITY OF SELF-EXAMINATION

The vast importance of self-knowledge shows the necessity and obligation for diligence in the exercise of self-inquiry, which is one of the principal means of acquiring a knowledge of ourselves. The duty of examining ourselves is enjoined by God as an indispensable part of SECRET religion. Hence such commands as these: "*Commune with your own heart*" (Ps. 4:4), "*Keep thy heart with all diligence,*" (Prov. 4:23), "*Let a man examine himself,*" (1 Cor. 11:28).

We are also frequently warned in the divine word against self-deception. Three times, in his first letter to the Corinthians, the Apostle Paul says, "*Be not deceived,*" (1 Cor. 3:18; 6:9; 15:33). In his second letter to them, he thus writes: "*Examine yourselves whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves,*" (2 Cor. 13:5). In writing to the Galatians his language is: "*If any man thinketh himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceiveth himself,*" (Gal. 6:3).

We also find the saints of God often engaged in the exercise of self-examination, and praying to the omniscient God for heart-searching. It is the language of Jeremiah, "*Let us search and try our ways, and turn again to the Lord,*" (Lam. 3:40). "*I thought upon my ways,*" said David, "*and turned my feet unto thy testimonies,*" (Ps. 119:59). "*Examine me, O God, and prove me; try my reins and my heart,*" (Ps. 26:2). "*Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts,*" (Ps. 139:23). But, alas! Far from being of the spirit of the saints of old – far from obeying the injunctions of Scripture as to this duty, numbers of professing Christians altogether neglect it. Instead of examining themselves, they act as if the command were, "Let a

man examine his neighbour.” Instead of looking within, they look without. Let us remember that although no other argument were produced in support of the obligation and necessity of self-inquiry, the command of God is sufficient, and that if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged. This duty is essential to safety.

“They,” said William Wilberforce,

who in a crazy vessel navigate the sea, where are shoals and currents innumerable, if they would keep their course and reach their port in safety, must carefully repair the smallest injuries, and often throw out their line and take their observations. In the voyage of life, also, the Christian who would not make shipwreck of his faith, must make it his express business to look into his state and mark his progress.

“We should,” said Howells,

keep our eyes always in the centre of our hearts; for is it not unreasonable that every body else should know us better than ourselves?

Hervey, who indulged much in fervent, secret devotion, was ever mindful of the work of self-examination. He felt its necessity. Hence we find him saying:

By means of self-examination I feel the pulse of my soul; I discover the sins that most easily beset me, which frequently elude my vigilance, and baffle my resolution; I learn to post my guard, when to exercise the strictest watch, and where to direct the artillery of prayer; and, to sum up all, to know myself – my state, temper, and conduct.

III. REASONS WHY SELF-EXAMINATION IS NEGLECTED

The depravity of the human heart is the great cause of the neglect of self-inquiry. But it may be well to mention a few of

the particular reasons or causes for the general unwillingness of mankind to examine themselves, and of their carelessness when they do attempt the exercise.

“KNOW THYSELF,” was, among the ancient heathens, reckoned a precept of such profound wisdom that they thought it must have come down from heaven. And yet, to know one’s self might appear to be the easiest thing imaginable. We may be ready to think that, while many and great difficulties lie in the way of the attainment of other kinds of knowledge, self-knowledge is open to all, in every corner of the earth, and in every condition of society. Surely then, it may be said, none can be really ignorant of themselves, and of the state and dispositions of their own hearts. And that, if they are thinking beings at all, they must be acquainted with the bent and bias of their desires and inclinations – how they have acted in times past, and how they will act in time to come.

No conclusion can, however, be more erroneous than this. There is nothing so difficult or so rare as for a man to know himself. It is easier to understand the principles of every science, and to practise every art, than to understand our own hearts. Strange as it may seem, yet it is a truth which is attested by all Scripture and experience, that man, however much he may be acquainted abroad and with others, and however ardent his thirst after knowledge in general, is too often a stranger at home – a stranger to himself, and ignorant of the passions and desires, the guile and fraud, which he carries within his own bosom. Nothing but divine grace will lead a man to be self-acquainted, and after he has been brought to see the depth of human depravity, continued communications of the same grace are necessary to keep him vigilant and watchful over his own heart.

“I knew a very vain, proud young man,” said the Rev. William Romaine, referring to himself,

who knew almost everything but himself, and was, therefore,

very fond of himself; he met with many disappointments to his pride, which only made him prouder, till the Lord was pleased to let him see and feel the plague of his own heart.

A. It is Difficult to Do

One reason, therefore, why self-examination is so much neglected is because there are *difficulties* connected with its proper performance. It is difficult to fix the attention on what is spiritual and invisible. There is a degree of abstraction required in order to turn the eye of the mind inward, that it may examine its own state. The mental eye is, in too many cases, like the bodily organ of the same name, which sees all around, but perceives not itself. A strong desire to know ourselves will, however, render the work far easier. And on what subject should we be more anxious to acquire information than about our own souls, *with which*, nay, *in which*, we must live forever? Wandering as our hearts are, it is possible for the worldly student to chain down his thoughts to his favourite subjects. Difficulties are acknowledged and felt, and yet they only lead to greater perseverance and enthusiasm, and they are found not to be altogether insurmountable. Let us, then, *wish* to know ourselves – let us *endeavour* and *strive* to do so. And we may obtain, to say the least, much practical acquaintance with ourselves.

B. It is Hidden from Others

Again, this is a part of knowledge which is so *secret*, and makes so little show, that we are apt to despise it as not worth the trouble which must be taken to acquire it. The great majority of mankind seem, therefore, content to remain without this best of sciences. And even of those who make an attempt to acquire it, too many are easily diverted from the pursuit, and soon find apologies for desisting from it altogether. The heart is unseen and unknown, in a great measure, by our fellow-men. And con-

sequently, we are the more careless as to its state. In other departments of science, men are able to exhibit marks of their proficiency. The poet, the sculptor, and the painter, can display their claims for the admiration or respect of the world. The man, however, who makes his own heart his chief study, has nothing to show which is at all similar to those amusing theories, or glowing descriptions, or splendid exhibitions by which the public are attracted. His knowledge of himself is not to them, *“entertaining knowledge.”*

C. It is Unpleasant to Ourselves

The kind of knowledge of which we speak is not only less attractive to others, it is also too much regarded as an unpleasant and unprofitable employment even by those who profess to follow better things than those which occupy the attention of the mere men of the world. It is more agreeable to corrupt human nature to be known of men, than to be known by ourselves – to know about others, than to be self-inquisitors. It is easier, in regard to religious duties, to hear the preacher in public, than to listen to the voice of conscience – to attend the place of concourse, than to commune with our own hearts and be still, or to cry in earnest, *“Search me, O God, and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting,”* (Ps. 139:23-24).

D. The Results Can Be Fearful

A dread of the result of conscientious self-inquiry may also be another reason why it is so seldom engaged in. We generally fear, and with good reason, that such an inquiry would discover to us too many things which we have no wish to know. There is often a secret consciousness that all is not right; and though just the more necessary on that account, it is the less agreeable to begin a serious and searching inquiry. We suspect that many things

which were apparently good and right, may seem doubtful when more closely examined; and that other things which were doubtful may prove really bad. Like the prodigal spend-thrift, who is afraid to inquire into the true state of his affairs, lest he should find that he is ruined, but who prefers to go on in a state of uncertainty till the catastrophe comes – we feel little inclination to know our real spiritual condition in the sight of God and conscience. This is truly a sad case. We should remember that the longer we defer, the worse will matters become. Every moment that passes before self-examination begins is worse than lost, for it sinks us deeper in guilt, and makes recovery more doubtful.

“Some persons,” said Howels,

postpone self-examination till a distant period, when they hope to be able to examine themselves with satisfaction, namely, when more free from iniquity; acting pretty much in the same manner as the patient who refuses to adopt the prescription of his physician till he is restored to health!

The sooner the truth is known the better because there is the more likelihood of matters being retrieved, whereas delay, even for *a short time longer*, may prove *eternally* ruinous. And how often is it the case, that the greater the danger, the more backward do we become to the work of heart-searching. But know ourselves we must, either here or hereafter. Consequently, it is the very height of folly to procrastinate. The regrets upon the melancholy discoveries made may be bitter, but may they not be beneficial? The probe may be the occasion of pain, but better far to bear it than to allow our wounds to fester and rankle for evermore.

“All moral agents,” said Howels,

must eventually examine themselves. Hell itself is a place of self-examination: sin is there its own biographer. This is an awful thought.

E. Content With Others' Views of Us

An inclination to rest satisfied with the reports of others, as to our character and conduct, is likewise a reason why we are so often drawn off to other pursuits, and away from the duty of self-examination. If our friends praise and the world does not censure us, we flatter ourselves, in our own blinded eyes, that all is well. The “voice of the people” is agreeable to all, but chiefly to those who have either too little religion, or too little resolution to examine their own hearts. If, however, we meet with a friend who has the courage and honesty to tell us our faults, we are ready to excuse ourselves, and often attribute that to envy which may be the effect of the sincerest friendship. If the world should happen to know our failings, and form a right judgment upon them, we are ready to take shelter under the names of the great and the good who have been calumniated and persecuted; or with a spirit still more closely allied to infidelity, to excuse ourselves because many of the saints of God have been chargeable with flagrant transgressions of his holy law. But whatever we may think of ourselves – whatever our fellow-men may think of us, God knoweth our hearts perfectly. Men judge of our hearts by our professions and general deportment. God judgeth both our profession and our conduct by our hearts. For as we are in our hearts so will we be in our lives.

Such are some of the reasons or causes of the infrequency of self-examination. They are forms of the grand, radical cause, *the corruption of the human heart*. There is the deceitfulness of the heart that *cannot be seen*, ignorance that *cannot see*, and pride that *will not see*. By these means we lull ourselves to rest. And if conscience in some moment of reflection or sorrow, should disturb the repose of the natural heart, we are ready to attribute her admonitions rather to the weakness of the body than to the depravity of the mind. But soon, very soon, every excuse will prove

vain. Whether we have omitted the duty of examining ourselves from design or carelessness; whether we have been so much engaged in the busy round of carnal pleasures, or engrossed with what we call “necessary business,” our sins will arise at the hour of death in their blackest colours, before the tribunal of God and conscience. There will then be no time for excusing or defending our neglect. And whether it has originated in the head or the heart, its consequences will be equally alarming, dreadful, and everlasting. If to put off the examination were to put it *past*, there might be some reason for indifference. But examined we *must* be, and by One too, whose wisdom is infinite, whose judgment is infallible, and from whose sentence there is no appeal. *“Be not deceived; God is not mocked; for what a man soweth that shall he also reap,”* (Gal. 6:7). *“All things are naked and open to the eyes of him with whom we have to do,”* (Heb. 4:13). *“I will,”* saith God, *“search Jerusalem with candles, and punish the men that are settled upon their lees; that say in their hearts, The Lord will not do good, neither will he do evil. The great day of the Lord is near, it is near, and hasteth greatly, even the voice of the day of the Lord,”* (Zeph. 1:12).

IV. SUBJECTS FOR SELF-EXAMINATION

A. Our Faith

There are many subjects about which we should examine ourselves. For example, we should examine ourselves as to our FAITH. It is a divine command – *“Examine yourselves whether ye be in the faith,”* (2 Cor. 13:5). If we are so ignorant as not to know the objects of Christian faith, or so skeptical as to explain away the most important of them, we do not require to make any farther inquiry. The case is decided. There is either no pretensions to adherence to the doctrines of the gospel, or there is a

manifest and culpable neglect of those things which are at the foundation of an intelligent profession of faith in Christ.

1. *Not Mere Assent to Truth*

It is too frequently the case, however, that a cold assent may be given to the truths of revelation without any evidence that it is connected with the faith of God's elect. We are not warranted to conclude that we are believers because we may have been taught to consider the Bible as true, and to make a public profession of faith, while it is neither founded on ascertained evidence of the divinity of the Scriptures, in the one case, nor in the other, is the sincerity of the profession rendered credible by a conversation which becometh the Gospel of Christ. None are born Christians, in the usual sense of the expression. For all who are spiritually the children of God must be born *again* or *from above*. None *should* be in full communion with the Church who do not give some evidence of being real disciples of Christ, although many *are in the Church* who give little or no evidence of being "taught of God." For any one to say, then, that because he has been a professor, therefore he has true faith, while his faith has been nothing more than a bare assent to the truths of Christianity, is to say what is not true. Such a person does not *believe*. He merely does not *doubt*. He does not *hope*. He only does not *despair*. He *says*, but *does not*. He acknowledges, perhaps without inquiry, and therefore can yield no "*reasonable service*" to God (Rom. 12:1).

2. *But Active Trust in Christ*

All men, it is true, have not the opportunities requisite for an extensive and careful examination of the external evidences of revelation. But although we should give our assent to its doctrines upon *mature* consideration, this is not all that is included in "precious faith." Believing in the divine origin of Christianity

is a different thing from believing in Christ. If the question were, ‘What is faith?’ the proper answer, no doubt, would be – BELIEF. But if it is asked, ‘What is faith in Jesus Christ?’ the answer should be – “Faith in Jesus Christ is a *saving grace*, whereby we *receive* and *rest* upon HIM *alone* for *salvation*, as HE is offered to us in the Gospel.” A belief in the Bible generally, is an *opinion*. Faith in Christ is an *active principle* of the renewed heart. The one may be produced in every unprejudiced mind by rational arguments. The other is the gift of God and the work of the Spirit dwelling in the soul. The one tells us that there is “*balm in Gilead, and a Physician there*,” (Jer. 8:22); the other receives the medicine and leads us to experience its healing virtue. The one, trying Christ by the law, says, “I find no fault in him.” The other, contemplating his power and grace, under a deep conviction of need, and taking him as its own, exclaims – “*He is the fairest among ten thousand, and altogether lovely*,” (Song 5:10, 16). The one says, with the centurion, “*of a truth this man was the Son of God*,” (Matt. 27:54); the other cries, with the thief on the cross, “*Lord, remember ME*,” (Luke 23:42). In short, the one is a *human* faith; the other is *divine*.

3. Not Human, but Divine in Origin

Saving faith is not a bare assent of the understanding, which we can put forth by an effort of our own free will. For the Bible distinctly teaches us that faith can neither be produced by our own efforts, nor yet by the persuasion of others. Neither is faith a simple assent of the understanding accompanied by trust as its fruit, as some will allow, but still in itself simple assent. For God tells us that with “*the heart man believeth unto righteousness*,” (Rom. 10:10), and Christ says, “*Ye believe in God, believe also in me*,” (John 14:1). The error we refer to is not merely a wrong view of the *nature* of faith – it is also a wrong view of the *origin* of faith. A simple assent we may give to a proposition or fact,

without *gracious* influence from God. But as to saving faith, if we would obtain it, we must get it from the throne of grace. “*By grace are ye saved, through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God,*” (Eph. 2:8). The strength by which we believe must be given from above. It is given in behalf of Christ to believe. “*As many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name,*” (John 1:12). This strength Christ gives. And his Holy Spirit, when he comes, convinces of sin because we believe not in Christ. It is on this point that many are mistaken, and hence the necessity of a careful examination. Many may allow that a divine and gracious energy is required to quicken the dead soul. But, according to the definition of faith which we have been examining and which is adopted by many, there can be no need for this energy in the first act of believing. Besides, if the understanding alone is exercised in believing, then the understanding only can derive benefit. Saving faith is, however, the embracing of Christ as a living person with the *whole* soul.

4. *Receiving Christ in All His Offices*

Others there are who think that faith consists in believing that Christ is able and willing, and offered to save sinners. A person may, however, believe all this about Christ, and yet never COME to Christ as an able, willing, and offered Saviour. We should, therefore, examine whether we have APPROPRIATED Christ – whether we have received a *whole* Christ with our *whole* soul. The truth will not save; not even those truths which are most nearly related to the person and work of the Redeemer. It is a person who alone can save, and the person of Christ we must receive and trust. And we must receive him in ALL his offices. Faith is not merely coming to him as a prophet, or as a priest, or as a king. It is coming to him as at once prophet, priest, and king.

The Rev. W. Howells said he once knew a clergyman, to

whom the following incident happened: One day after preaching, a gentleman followed him into the vestry, and putting a £10 note in his hand, thanked him most energetically for the great comfort he had derived from his sermon. The clergyman was very much surprised at this, but still more so when shortly afterwards the same thing again took place, and he determined to sift the matter to the bottom and find out who this man was that was so comforted by his discourse. He discovered that he was a person at that very time living in the most abominable wickedness. "Certainly," said he to himself, "there must be something essentially wrong in my preaching, when it can afford comfort to such a profligate as this!" He accordingly examined into the matter closely, and he discovered that whilst he had been preaching Christ's sovereignty, he had quite forgotten his legislative glories. He immediately altered the style of his sermons and he soon lost his munificent friend.

5. *Receiving Christ Personally*

We must receive Christ as OUR Saviour. This appropriation is of the essence of faith, and without it there can be no salvation. "*MY Lord, and MY God,*" said Thomas (John 20:28). This *reception* of Christ is frequently spoken of in the Bible, and how suitable is this view of faith to poor, helpless sinners, who have nothing and who can do nothing of themselves that is *spiritually* good! Union to Christ by faith lies at the foundation of the Christian's character and hopes. "*I know WHOM I have believed,*" (2 Tim. 1:12). "*I live by the faith of the Son of God,*" (Gal. 2:20). "*He that eateth me, even he shall live by me,*" (John 6:57). All the children of God have found by experience that a cleaving to Christ's person and doing and dying, has been the great means of comfort and holiness.

The Rev. John Brown of Haddington, once, while exhorting his pupils not to rest satisfied with a mere speculative acquaint-

tance with divine truth, took occasion to mention something of his own experience, of which we are told he was usually very sparing. "I recollect," said he,

that when sitting on the brae of Abernethy, hearing Mr. Wilson of Perth, I got more insight into that marrow of the gospel, 'Thy God and my God,' than ever I got before or since.

Luther, as is well known, regarded the pronoun, MY, as containing the very marrow of the gospel and the essence of believing. We are told that Samuel Rutherford, a little before his death said, "I have been a wicked, sinful man, but I stand at the best pass that ever a man did; Christ is *mine*, and I am *his*."

'Have I a right to take Christ as mine?' is a question which has been asked by many an anxious inquirer. An answer is given in the word of God. "*Come unto me*," is addressed to all without exception and without distinction (Matt. 11:28). "*Whosoever will, let him come*," (Rev. 22:17). There is an unconditional grant or offer of Christ made in the Gospel. Every sinner is warranted to receive him with special application to himself. And let our readers remember that we cannot truly believe in him without confiding in him for salvation – without *trusting* for salvation to ourselves in particular upon the free offer made to us in the Gospel. This is the *assurance* that is in faith – in the direct act of faith, without reflection upon any previous acts or exercises.

It should be remembered however, at the same time, that this is different from the person's knowledge of his being in the faith, or in a gracious state. This farther assurance we must seek to obtain by all means – by the evidences of God's work *in* us, consisting in growing humility, tender walking, and constant *trusting* to the Redeemer's work *outside* us. And supposing that we really have believed to the saving of our souls, nay, are possessed of the "*full assurance of faith*," let us beware of *trusting* to our faith, instead of having a faith which is itself A TRUST in the per-

son and perfect righteousness of our Lord Jesus Christ. Let us examine ourselves whether it be “*the true grace of God wherein we stand.*” All God’s people expect salvation not *for*, but *through* faith in the gracious Redeemer.

“About six months ago,” said Robert Hall,

I was attacked by a violent fever, and in my own apprehensions, for about two days was on the borders of eternity. I never before felt my mind so calm and happy. Filled with the most overwhelming sense of my own unworthiness, my mind was supported merely by faith in Christ crucified. I would not for the world have parted with that text, ‘*The blood of Christ cleanseth from all sin.*’ I never before saw such a beauty and grandeur in the way of salvation through Christ as on that occasion. I am fully persuaded the evangelical doctrines alone are able to support the mind in the near view of death and judgment.

Matthew Henry has this note in his diary: “Christ is a Christian’s all: and he is MY ALL.”

It is of great importance to have correct views on the subjects of faith and the grace that reigns through righteousness. At any time this is important, but never more so than when we proceed to the work of self-examination. The Rev. James M’Gill, in a note appended to his work on Secret Prayer, has the following remark:

Self-examination will neither implant nor cherish the divine life in the soul, nor is it even the proper means employed by the Holy Spirit for these ends. By looking to Christ, and to him alone, we are saved. It is thus that pardon and holiness, love, peace, and joy are obtained. Self-examination is nevertheless a *duty of great practical importance*. Every gracious principle has its counterpart. There is a spurious faith, and a spurious love, and a spurious repentance. And although no one will ever obtain genuine faith and love and repentance by merely looking for these principles in his own bosom, it is of serious importance that their counterfeits should be detected.

B. The Foundation of Our Hope

We should examine the FOUNDATION OF OUR HOPE. No other foundation can sustain the weight of our eternal interests, except that sure foundation which the Lord hath laid in Zion. But, alas! Instead of that ROCK, against which the gates of hell can never prevail, there are many foundations of sand, on which the children of men are ready to build their hopes for eternity.

1. *Is Not God's Uncovenanted Mercy*

Many build their hopes of final happiness on the *uncovenanted mercy of God*. They think he is too merciful ever to see any of his creatures miserable. This, it will easily be perceived, is contrary to fact. Multitudes of creatures, nobler far by nature than we are, have their portion in endless woe.

In the Memoirs of Anne C. Maurice, which have lately been given to the world by the author of *Aids to Development*, we find the following record of her experience, when “feeling after God:”

“I believed God to be a merciful God,” says she in her journal;

too kind to punish for a long continuance any whom he had endowed with life, and ready to accept the prayers and good works of any of his creatures; and on this indulgent Deity I, at this time, relied to save me.

True, it is matter of everlasting praise that God has provided a Saviour. Had he not done so we could have had no hope. A God all mercy were a God unjust. And since we are sinners we can have no hope of mercy being exercised towards us, except in God's own way. Now the Lord has distinctly told us that out of Christ he has no mercy for sinners. All should therefore, examine whether they trust in mercy flowing in the blood of Christ. From God, out of Christ, we can receive no spiritual blessings. Mercy is, indeed, a

large river – a free flowing river. But it should ever be borne in mind that it flows only in the divinely appointed channel.

2. *Is Not Our Own Righteousness*

Some build their hopes of acceptance with God *on their own righteousness*. They expect eternal life by keeping the commandments. This is also a delusion. The law denounces an eternal curse upon everything short of perfect righteousness and purity. And although we could present perfect obedience for the future, this could form no atonement for the sins of the past.

“If God,” says Hooker,

should yield unto us, not as unto Abraham, that if ten good persons could be found in a city, for their sakes the city should not be destroyed; but if he should make unto us an offer thus large: ‘Search all the generations of men since the fall of Adam; find one man that had done one act which passed from him pure, without any stain or blemish at all, and for that one man’s only act neither men nor angels shall feel the torments which are prepared for both;’ – do you think that that ransom could be found to be among the sons of men? The best things that we do, have something in them to be pardoned. How then, can we do anything meritorious or worthy to be rewarded? Wherefore we acknowledge a dutiful necessity of doing well; but the *meritorious* dignity of doing well we utterly renounce.”

“Let others,” said Swartz,

glory in what they please; I will glory in Christ Jesus, the only and perfect author of all happiness. Should I presume to rely on my own virtue, I should despair. Though I heartily wish to obey God, and follow the example of my Saviour; though I will endeavour, by the grace of God, to subdue my inclination to sin; yet in all this there is, and ever must be, imperfection; so that I dare not stand upon so rotten a ground.

Bishop Beveridge expressed his conviction of the impossibility of being justified and saved by his own righteousness, in the following terms: "How can I do good works in order to my justification, when I can do no good works till after I am justified?"

"If I am saved," exclaimed Fuller on his death-bed, "it must be by great, sovereign grace – by great, sovereign grace."

3. *Is Not Works of Faith or Repentance*

Others seek to *compound the matter between grace and works*. In examining themselves they think of their good deeds, not as *evidences* of imparted purity and the fruits of the Holy Spirit, but as *their* works, for which they hope God will be favourable to them, as they are to themselves, when at any time their own hearts may condemn them. They may acknowledge that they are sinners, but they will, say they, repent for the past, and reform in the future. This is also a lying refuge. It is to put the tears of legal contrition in the place of the Saviour's blood. Faith, repentance, and every other grace of the Spirit, so far from *meriting* salvation, is a *part* of salvation, purchased by Christ and given by him to his people. All, therefore, who put penitence in the place of Christ will assuredly repent of their repentance forever and ever.

"If I had," said Hervey,

the meekness of Moses and the patience of Job, the zeal of Paul and the love of John, I durst not advance the least plea to eternal life on that footing: but as for my own beggarly performances, gracious, adorable Immanuel! I am ashamed, I am grieved that I should thrust these into the place of thy divine, thy inconceivably precious obedience! My schemes are altered. I now desire to work in my blessed Master's service, not *for* but *from* life and salvation. I would study to please him in righteousness and holiness, not as a *condition*, but as a *part*, a choice and ines-

timable part, of that complete salvation which Christ hath purchased for me.

4. *Is Not Partly Christ and Partly Self*

But some are not so ignorant as to suppose that they can be saved by anything that they can do or feel. Their “plan of salvation” is to *rely partly on Christ and partly on themselves*. They do as well as they can, and look to Christ to make up the deficiency. This also is self-deception. Christ must be the Alpha and Omega of our salvation. One of the ways in which self-righteousness manifests itself, is by supposing that a person must be possessed of certain qualifications ere he can go to Christ, and receive him as his only Saviour. This idea is not only unsound in itself – it has frequently kept the anxious inquirer away for a long time from the only source of holiness and comfort.

We find Fuller, previous to his conversion, often in a sad case owing to this mistake. “Oh,” said he, “*if I might* only cast myself upon the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation!” He was not at this time aware that any one had a warrant to believe in Christ, without some preparatory qualifications. After he was led to embrace the Saviour his fears gradually gave way, and he found rest to his soul; and he afterwards was of opinion that he would have found it sooner, but for the mistake we have mentioned. It was a saying of John Rowe, “that the highest thing that he had attained unto, was to go quite out of himself, and to roll himself wholly upon the grace of God in Christ.”

We must either rely upon Christ for a salvation full and finished in all its parts, or we must be left to work it out entirely for ourselves, and to perish in the attempt. Has not Christ already given full satisfaction to justice for his people, and thereby “*obtained eternal redemption*” for them? (Heb. 9:12). To make ourselves meritorious agents in our own salvation is to rob him of his glory, and to say that his salvation is only a half salvation – a possible

salvation. A patch-work of human and divine righteousness can never cover guilty sinners. No alloy of imperfect services can be mixed with the precious fine gold of the Redeemer's merit.

Luther, in 1516, thus wrote to a friend:

I desire to know what your soul is doing: whether, wearied at length of its own righteousness, it learns to refresh itself and to rest in the righteousness of Christ. The temptation of presumption in our age is strong in many, and specially in those who labour to be just and good with all their might, and at the same time are ignorant of the righteousness of God which, in Christ, is conferred upon us with a rich exuberance of gratuitous liberality. They seek in themselves to work that which is good, in order that they may have a confidence of standing before God adorned with virtues and merits, which is an impossible attempt. You, my friend, used to be of this opinion, or rather this mistake. So was I. But now I am fighting against the error, but have not yet prevailed.

For some time after his ordination, Mr. Hervey inclined to Arminian sentiments. The state of his mind is illustrated by the following anecdote:

In Hervey's parish there resided a ploughman who attended the ministry of Dr. Doddridge, and was well-informed in the doctrines of grace. Knowing that he was a serious person, Mr. Hervey said to him one morning: "What do you think is the hardest thing in religion?"

To which he replied: "I am a poor illiterate man, and you, sir, are a minister; I beg leave to return the question."

Then said Mr. Hervey, "I think the hardest thing is to deny sinful self," grounding his opinion on that solemn admonition of our Lord: "*If any man will come after me, let him deny himself.*" "I argued," says Mr. Hervey, "upon the import and extent of the duty, showing that merely to forbear the infamous action is little, we *must deny* admittance, deny *entertainment* at least,

to the evil imagination, and quench even the enkindling work of irregular desire. In this way I shot my random bolt.”

The ploughman replied: “There is another instance of self-denial to which the injunction extends, is of great moment, and is the *hardest thing in religion*, and that is to *deny righteous self*. You know I do not come to hear you preach, but go every Sabbath, with my family, to Northampton, to hear Dr. Doddridge. We rise early in the morning, and have family worship before we set out, in which I find pleasure. Walking there and back I find pleasure. Under the sermon I find pleasure. When at the Lord’s-table I find pleasure. We read a portion of the Scriptures, and go to prayers in the evening, and find pleasure. But, to this moment, I find it *the hardest thing* to deny righteous self – I mean the instance of renouncing our own strength, and our own righteousness — not leaning on *that* for holiness, nor relying on *this* for justification.”

In repeating the story to a friend, Mr. Hervey observed, “I then hated the righteousness of Christ; and looked at the man with astonishment and disdain, and thought him an old fool, and wondered at what I then fancied the motley mixture of piety and oddity in his notions. I have since clearly seen who was the fool – not the wise old Christian, but the proud James Hervey. I now discern sense, solidity, and truth in his observations.”

C. Our Convictions and Impressions

We should likewise examine *our convictions and impressions*. The mind is capable of powerful emotion, and of emotion too, which has spiritual things for its object. Many have had strong feelings of a religious kind, from which they have prematurely concluded that they were in a gracious state. Now it is possible that these convictions and impressions may exist in a very strong degree, and yet may not only be temporary, but likewise counterfeited. We may have the natural feelings of the soul awakened, and mistake these for the feelings of a renewed heart. We may have a fear of God, and that fear may be false, like that of those

who feared the Lord and served other gods. We may have zeal for God, and that zeal be false, like that of Jehu, who said, “*Come, see my zeal for the Lord of hosts*” (2 Kings 10:16). [We may have] much joy, and that joy false, like that of the stony-ground hearers, who for a time received the word with joy, and anon, when tribulation came were offended (Mark 4:16-17). [We may have] religious desires, and these desires false, like those of him who said: “*Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his;*” (Numb. 23:10). [We may have] a relish for the word of God, and that relish false, like that of Herod, who heard John gladly, and did many things, but was still unchanged and wicked (Mark 6:20). We may believe and wonder, and yet both may be false, as in the case of Simon Magus, who “*believed and was baptized, and continued with Philip, and wondered, beholding the miracles and signs which were done,*” (Acts 8:13). We may repent, and yet that repentance may be false, like that of Judas who repented and went and hanged himself (Matt. 27:5). How loud the call to self-examination!

1. *True Convictions are from the Spirit by the Gospel*

All impressions made upon the mind which are genuine will have certain qualities. They will be *produced by the Holy Ghost, through means of the Gospel*. All that are produced by mere outward circumstances, such as eloquence and sympathy with others, may be *feelings about religion*, but they are not *religious feelings*. Even that concern for our souls which is produced by the terrors of the law is not of a saving kind – the law being the ministration of condemnation. It is not so much a dread of the consequences of sin as a feeling of the exceeding evil that is *in sin itself*, which characterizes genuine conviction. The Holy Spirit, by the Gospel, shows the abominable nature of sin to the soul. Deep impressions of God’s infinite majesty and holiness are also inseparably connected with genuine convictions.

“Convictions of conscience,” says President Edwards,

through the influences of God’s Spirit, consist in convictions of sinfulness of heart and practice; and of the dreadfulness of sin as committed against a God of terrible majesty, infinite holiness and hatred of sin, and strict justice in punishing it. But some persons have frightful apprehensions of hell – a dreadful pit, ready to swallow them up – flames just ready to lay hold of them, and devils all around ready to seize them who, at the same time, seem to have very little proper light of conscience, really convincing them of their sinfulness of heart and life. The devil, if permitted, can terrify men as well as the Spirit of God.

2. *True Convictions are Permanent*

True impressions which are genuine will also be *permanent*. Many have had their softenings and tremblings and transitory goodness, and yet have like Herod, Felix, and others, returned to take their fill of sin.

Halyburton, in his *Memoirs*, narrates that in 1685, his mother being, by the heat of persecution, obliged to retire to Holland, he went along with her. While they were at sea, being in some real or apprehended danger, his conscience, which had for all the bygone ten years been fast asleep, began to awaken.

“No sooner,” adds he,

was I come to land, and fixed at Rotterdam, but I verified what had been foretold by my mother. I forgot all my promises and resolutions. The unrenewed and corrupt heart, being free from the force put upon it by the natural conscience, under appearance of hazard, took its old course. I returned to former evils, and grew worse. Corruption, that had been dammed in for a little, having easily forced down all these mounds raised to hold it in, ran with the greater violence. At this time I wanted not frequent convictions. But they were only like the starts of a sleeping man, occasioned by some sudden noise. Up he gets, but presently he is down, and faster asleep than before.

He then enumerates *eight* means which he found to get rid of these convictions: He promised them a hearing afterwards; he frightened himself from a compliance by looking to their tendency as they aimed to engage him to holiness; he withdrew from the means; gave his convictions fair promises; contented himself with slothful wishes; when very troublesome to him he endeavoured to meet his convictions of sin with some supposed goodness of heart; sometimes he endeavoured to diminish his sin as much as he could; and lastly he adds: "When these shifts failed, and they were still uneasy, I then betook myself to diversions, and they choked the word and convictions from it."

3. *Sickbed Convictions are Not Always Genuine*

Sickbed impressions have often been very powerful, but they are not always to be depended on. Their sincerity and value must be estimated by the *change* which they produce in the temper and conduct. This, indeed, is the special proof of religious impressions and convictions. It is not so much their overpowering and absorbing nature as their *fruit*, which must determine their real character. There have been many melancholy instances of the spurious and ineffectual nature of death-bed impressions. The author of a work entitled, *The Sick Visitor's Assistant*, records the following truly affecting yet authentic report:

A pious clergyman, for more than twenty years, kept an account of the sick persons he visited during that period. His parish was thickly peopled, and of course many of the parishioners, during his residence, were carried to their graves. A considerable number, however, recovered; and among these, 2,000 who, in immediate prospect of death, gave those evidences of a change of heart which, in the judgment of charity, were connected with everlasting salvation, supposing them to have died under the circumstances referred to. As however, the tree is best known by its fruit, the sincerity of their deathbed repen-

tance was yet to be tried, and all the promises and vows thus made to be fulfilled. Now, out of these 2,000 persons (who were evidently at the point of death, and had given apparent evidence of a sound repentance) – out of these 2,000 who recovered, two, only two, by their future lives, proved that their repentance was sincere, their conversion genuine. 1,998 returned to their former carnality, indifference, and sinfulness; and thus showed how little that repentance is to be depended upon which is merely extorted by the rack of conscience and the fear of death.

“I pay more attention,” says Mr. Booth,

to people’s lives than to their deaths. In all the visits I have paid to the sick during the course of a long ministry, I never met with *one* (who was not previously serious) that ever recovered from what he supposed the brink of death, who afterwards performed his vows and became religious, notwithstanding the very great appearance there was in their favour when they thought they could not recover.

D. Our Practices

The examination of our PRACTICE should also form part of our secret religion. It is indeed exceedingly improper and dangerous to judge of our state merely by our conduct, without looking into the heart. Undoubtedly, the conduct is an evidence of the state of the heart, as the fruit is of the tree. And it is only by the external department that others can form their judgment concerning us, because they can go no farther, neither have they any right to go farther. Yet, although this is the only method of judging left to others, we *ourselves* must not stop here. “*Know ye not your own selves?*” (2 Cor. 13:5). If, however, our hearts are in reality right with God, they will be sound in his statutes. Actions are the true indices of the nature and movements of the inner man.

“There is,” says the Rev. W. Reid,

no truth in the Bible more evident than that a man’s outward conduct and inward state always correspond – that the purity of our sayings and doings is just in proportion to the purity of our thinking and feeling....Spirituality of mind is not mere silent meditation. It is holy thinking, producing spiritual feeling, and leading to holy action. If I regard the things of eternity as of more value than the things of time, I cannot but labour for them more. If I believe that God’s eye is ever on me, marking my thoughts, and actions, and motives, I cannot but be circumspect in my entire behaviour.

1. *Absence of Gross Sin is Insufficient*

In examining our practice we ought to beware of *mistaking the mere absence of glaring vices for positive Christian obedience*. Some make it their boast that they are correct in their morals, and do harm to none. They congratulate themselves on this, that none can lay any great crime to their charge; and they speak with horror of those who indulge in fraud or oppression, intemperance or profanity. Even granting these negative claims, they are not enough. But is it the fact that there are any who are free from sin—who “do no harm?” What saith the Bible? “*If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves*” (1 John 1:8), and “*There is no man that liveth and sinneth not,*” (Eccl. 7:20). And, even supposing it were the case that we were free from sin, this could not afford any ground of confidence before God, when we consider that we were sent into the world not merely to avoid doing harm, but to do good – to glorify God in our souls, bodies, and spirits, which are his (1 Cor. 6:20). The slothful servant is considered as having wasted his Lord’s goods, and has his portion with hypocrites and unbelievers. “To do no harm,” says Baxter, “is a praise more fit for a stone than a man.”

2. *Sincerity Alone is Insufficient*

Some again, plead that they are *sincere* and *wish to do well*. We may however, be sincere in error, and then sincerity is only the greater sin. Sincerity is worth nothing, unless it extend to our profession of supreme love to God; unless we are sincere in the hatred of all sin – sincere in renouncing self-righteousness – sincere in counting all things but loss and dung for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ (Php. 3:8) – sincere in giving God our hearts, and walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless (Luke 1:6).

3. *Circumstances are No Excuse for Sin*

Many also, in examining themselves as to their conduct, consider that some parts of it which they acknowledge to be wrong are nevertheless *excusable, on account of certain circumstances*. For example, it may be said that were we rigidly to abstain from some vices and punctually observe certain duties, our worldly prosperity would be injured and we would be exposed to much loss, inconvenience and reproach. This is pleading for what we may denominate *professional sins*. Considering, say some, the necessity of the case, and seeing that others in the same situation make no scruple upon the subject, we freely acquit ourselves of any great blame. It should be remembered however, that God's holy, just and good law is not to be thus modified or cast into the mould of our circumstances. No situation can excuse the commission of any sin. If we habitually indulge in any one sin or habitually neglect any known duty, and even go the length of trying to defend ourselves, we manifest a spirit at variance with genuine religion and are not Christians.

4. *What Motives Govern Our Conduct?*

We should try the *motives* that influence our practice. In our

external obedience it is possible that pride, a fear of public censure, the force of custom, a spirit of legality, and other improper motives, may be the ruling motives of our conduct. In this way it is possible that we may perform the very best actions so as to change entirely their moral character – in fact, to *change them into sins*. The great motives to evangelical obedience are *heart-love to God* and *a regard to his glory*. True faith worketh by love (Gal. 5:6). It moves the affections by a powerful and constraining influence. The views which it has got of the glory and suitableness of the Saviour kindle gratitude, admiration and love. Love is the fulfilling of the law in both its great commandments.

We would do well, then, to ask ourselves, “Is this the ruling principle of our conduct?” We are so to love God as to feel that our great business on earth and in heaven, is to delight in obeying, serving and pleasing him. And we are to regard no measure of service sufficient short of absolute perfection, which although not attainable in this world, is ever to be aimed at and attempted. The genuine follower of Christ, the prosperous believer, will never rest satisfied short of perfection – never be perfectly happy while there is one trait of the moral character of God the image of which his heart and conduct do not exhibit.

“We should,” says John Angell James, “not only be pious on the whole, but be wholly pious.” The same writer remarks that “it is a fearful problem for any man to attempt to solve, to try with how *little* religion he may be a real Christian, and go to heaven.”

We should try ourselves by such questions as the following: ‘Is the law of God delighted *in*, meditated *upon* and submitted *to*?’ ‘Is every appearance of evil shunned, and every opportunity of receiving and doing good anxiously improved?’ ‘Is the company of the ungodly avoided, and are we the companions of the excellent ones of the earth?’ ‘Are we faithful in the discharge of relative duties?’ ‘Are we directed by the *golden rule* in all our worldly transactions?’ ‘Is Christ’s example our model, his precepts our rule, his Spirit our guide, his love our motive, his

promises our joy, his ordinances our delight, and his cross our glory?’ Of what avail are mere opinions which touch not the heart, which move not the springs of action? The truth itself cannot save us. And in order to its being useful as an instrument, it must not only be known, but embraced, loved and practised. “Ye *KNOW these things; happy are ye if ye DO them,*” (John 13:17). Let the advocates for salvation by grace be consistent. Antinomianism can never be the result of a justification which is not simply a free pardon and acceptance to us, but a justification which is, in the very highest sense, a *legal* justification, solely on the ground of the perfect righteousness of the King of Glory.

Marshall, the well-known writer of a treatise on sanctification, has the following remark:

Holiness in this life is absolutely necessary to salvation, not only as means to the end, but by a nobler kind of necessity, as a part of the end itself. Though we are not saved *by* good works as procuring causes, yet we are saved *to* good works, as fruits and effects of saving grace, which God hath prepared that we should walk in them.

V. THE STANDARD OF SELF-EXAMINATION

A. The Word of God

The word of God is the great *standard* or *rule* by which we are to examine ourselves. Self-examination is just a comparing of our hearts and conduct with the Bible. The Bible is a revelation *of* God as well as *from* God, and the Christian’s great aim should be conformity to the divine image. To the law and the testimony we must go to be judged, and if our faith, hopes and experiences be not in accordance with these, there is no good in them. They are mere delusion in the sight of God who searcheth the heart.

Is self-examination a spiritual anatomy? Then the word is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. Is it a searching? Then the word is the candle of the Lord. Is it a proving of our own selves? Then the Bible is the great touchstone. Is it a weighing of our meditations? Then the Scriptures are the balances of the sanctuary. The word is the rule and reason and measure of duty.

“The moral law,” says M‘Gill,

whether considered as contained in the Ten Commandments, or as more fully explained by the many precepts, promises, and threatenings, intermingled with every part of Scripture, or as illustrated by the example of our blessed Lord, is the standard by which we shall at last be judged, and by which, therefore, it is wise to try ourselves now. Besides, there are, in the divine word, short summaries both of doctrine and duty, which are peculiarly adapted to self-examination. For example, the sum of the Ten Commandments, requiring us to love the Lord our God with all our heart, and our neighbour as ourselves; the Lord’s Prayer, with its preface, six petitions, and conclusion; and almost all the psalms seem given to us for this, among other reasons, that we might behold in them, as in a glass, our true character.

Many, however, when they do enter upon the work of examining themselves, set up other standards, and prescribe other rules to themselves than the word or God.

B. Not Other People Generally

For example, *they compare themselves with some others*, and thinking that they are no worse than those are, conclude that they are quite safe. This may, indeed, be said to be a very low standard. But low as it is, and perhaps it is the lowest, yet many are found judging themselves by it, to the exclusion of the *legal* standard of heaven. They may allow that they are sinners in

common with the rest of mankind. Yet they consider this rather as their misfortune than their crime, and therefore they think that God will not deal worse with them than with others. Such persons should remember that self-examination is not between ourselves and other men, but between ourselves and God. Men are divided into two classes – those who are united to Christ and renewed by the Spirit, and those who are in a state of spiritual death. If those with whom we compare ourselves belong to the latter class, whatever may be their outward profession, they can have no well-founded hope of salvation. If we, therefore, content ourselves with being no worse than they are, it will appear in the end that we have deceived ourselves, and that it was the omniscient God, and not man, with whom we had to do.

C. Not Ourselves

Many err, in this duty, by *comparing themselves with themselves*. They are, perhaps, changed from what they once were – so much so that even the men of the world may congratulate them on their happy reformation, when alas! it may only be a mere outward change. Let it be granted that a man is much better than he once was, it by no means follows that he has come up to the imperial standard. It is quite possible for a person to cease from sins of one kind, only to fall into sins of another kind. He may cease outwardly from many sins, not because the grace of God has taught him to deny all ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly; but because age and experience have incapacitated him *for*, and disgusted him *with*, his former follies.

“Satan,” said Howels,

labours with great success to deceive mankind into the idea that the adoption of one sin or vice is pardoned, or at least excused, if they refrain from others. In this way did he work upon Herod who, though living in incest, yet was very tender and

scrupulous about an oath! ‘Nevertheless for his oath’s sake!’
Oh! what a conscientious king!

“*They that judge themselves by themselves,*” says the infallible God, “*and compare themselves with themselves are not wise,*” (2 Cor. 10:12). Past, present and future conduct must all be judged by the same divine rule.

D. A Perfectly Holy Standard

When changes have taken place in the life, we can only ascertain whether they are genuine by inquiring whether they spring from a change of heart. Nor is it enough that there has been *some* change in the inner man. For we must ascertain whether it has been produced *by*, and can be traced *to*, the truths of the word and the power of the Holy Ghost. God’s test is the best. And his test is: That wherever a change of heart is real, it will lead to a universal change in conduct. While all the actions of the regenerated will no doubt be marked with imperfection, they will nevertheless aim at carrying their religion through and through their whole life – they will aim to be the same in public, private, and secret. PERFECTION IS THE RULE OF OUR DUTY.

It is related of Mr. Dunn of Portsea, that when he was asked whether he thought a state of sinless perfection attainable in this life? he replied, “Let us, my friend, seek after it as eagerly as if it were attainable.”

“It is holiness,” said Howels, “that makes the difference between angels and devils. Angels, however, possess a stronger intellect than devils, for sin weakens the intellect.”

E. Not Those Who are Worse Than Ourselves

Multitudes err in the work of self-examination by *comparing themselves with those they think much worse than they are*. This is a very unsafe way of judging ourselves. WE may think that we

are *better* than others, and yet, in the eye of GOD and the eyes of every *impartial observer*, we may really be worse. Do we found our claim of superiority over our brother because he is guilty of many flagrant iniquities from which we are free? Then we may have secret sins which, unseen to men, are even more abominable in the sight of God. Do we found it on the circumstance that we perform many duties which he neglects? Then we should consider that if he be a despiser, we may be hypocrites. If he be indifferent, we may be cold and formal.

“The greatest imperfection,” says Sir Thomas Brown,

is in our inward sight; that is, to be ghosts unto our own eyes, and while we are so sharp-sighted as to look through others, to be invisible unto ourselves; for the inward eyes are more fallacious than the outward. The vices we scoff at in others laugh at us within ourselves.

On this part of our subject it should be observed that the difference between an unbeliever and a believer is not a difference in *degree*, but a difference in *nature* and *character*. What saith the word of God? “*If any man be in Christ Jesus, he is a new creature*,” (2 Cor. 5:17). “*One thing I know, that whereas I was blind now I see*,” (John 9:25).

The Rev. G. Trosse said,

Though I cannot tell the minister or sermon whereby I was converted, yet, I bless God, I can say I am what I was not; I am quite contrary to what I was in the past years of my life, both in judgment, heart and conversation.

Without a radical change there can be no fruit unto holiness, although, in many things, we may seem to excel those that are real saints. In everything that is merely seen of men, we may outstrip the saint and yet be nothing. The question, then, is not simply, ‘Is our *life* better than that of others?’ but, ‘Is our *nature* better?’

To be lifted up with a sense of our superiority to others, so far from being a proof of saintship, is a proof of the contrary. For he that has been made a partaker of divine grace, and seen the wickedness of his own heart, knows far more evil of himself than he can know of any other besides. “The chief of sinners,” is the language of every self-acquainted soul.

“I think I am somewhat poorer than I was,” was one of John Newton’s declarations concerning his spiritual and growing humility. He once exclaimed: “They are poor saints indeed who do not feel that they are great sinners.”

The late Dr. Lawson of Selkirk was thus accosted by an admirer: “I do not think you would need to fear much, though your thoughts were laid open.” Dr. Lawson replied, “I could not bear that the course of my thoughts, *even for one hour*, should be exposed. Most needful is the prayer, ‘Cleanse thou me from secret faults, keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins.’”

Walker of Truro, when one present, as he drew near death, rejoiced over his apparent ripeness for heaven, said to him, “Nay, my friend, the body of sin is not yet done away. I shall continue a sinner to the very last gasp.”

F. Not Public Opinion

Among the professors of religion there are many who *try themselves by the standard of public opinion concerning them*. Now of all rules of judging, this is the most uncertain. Men may be completely in error as to their estimate of our character. Allowing them to be sincere in their expressions – which however, is not always the case – may there not be others, who may be as judicious and yet entertain a very different opinion of us? We should remember that it is impossible for men to tell with certainty whether we be saints or not. There is a far better way of attaining a knowledge of our state than by having the opinion of

the whole world. It is to be able to say, “*Herein do I exercise myself, to have a conscience void of offence towards God, and towards men,*” (Acts 24:16). Instead of examining our character and conduct by the rules of decency and respectability which are received in the world, we should inquire how far they correspond with the holiness of the Divine Pattern, remembering that we are, in reality, just what we are in the sight of God, and according to the letter and spirit of his word. To have the testimony of conscience, which is the candle of the Lord – conscience enlightened by the Holy Spirit – and that testimony confirmed by the tenor of our life, is the best evidence of the possession of real religion which can be attained.

“A decent observance of moral duties,” writes William Wilberforce in his journal,

more especially of such as are of the negative sort, is deemed a necessary ingredient in a good character. But then the defective interior, the false principle within, betrays its spurious nature whenever the religious or moral duty does not happen to coincide with the world’s standard of morality. But Christianity is a system of a far higher order. It requires that its throne should be set up in the heart, whence it shall prompt and control all the various movements of the entire machine. Its very essence and being is the formation of a peculiar character.

The same individual, manifesting his desire to have a conscience void of offence, has this note in his diary: “How careful ought I to be that I may not disgust men by an inconsistency between the picture of a Christian I draw, and what I exhibit!” – referring to his popular work, *A practical view of the prevailing religious system of professed Christians in the higher and middle classes of society, contrasted with real Christianity*. “How else,” he adds, “can I expect the blessing of God on my book? May his grace quicken me!”

VI. THE MANNER OF SELF-EXAMINATION

A. With Patience and Perseverance

As to the *mode* or *manner* in which self-examination should be conducted, it may be remarked that *patience* and *perseverance* are very necessary. No man can attain a thorough knowledge of any subject without patient and long-sustained scrutiny. This is more particularly the case with respect to an acquaintance with our own hearts and characters. There are so many windings and foldings in our evil, wayward hearts, that it requires great care lest we should allow some sin to escape detection, or some duty to be overlooked. Heart anatomy needs not only a skilful hand, but also great painstaking, so that our most secret faults may be brought to light and the peculiarities of our individual character and dispositions may be minutely examined. Born as we are with hearts so disordered and deceitful, surrounded as we are with so many blandishing allurements and powerful temptations, nursing as we do within our own bosoms, so many sinful appetites and passions – we assuredly will be miserably deceived if we think we are safe, without diligent search.

Nor is it only to attain to some good ground for believing that we are really the children of God that we should thus examine ourselves. We must continue in the exercise every day, as new temptations arise and new duties call for our attention. Even in those who have attained the highest measures of holiness there are still many and great imperfections. The apostle of the Gentiles, when he had nearly finished his course, had a great fight of affliction as he exclaimed: “*O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from this body of sin and death?*” (Rom. 7:24). It is undoubtedly of great importance to ask the question, ‘Am I a child of God by regenerating grace?’ But it is of no less importance to ask, ‘Am I advancing or declining in the divine life?’

In the diary of Anne C. Maurice, to which we have already referred, we find the following:

Having examined my state a few days ago, I found that I was declining in the spiritual life. I had become cold and formal in prayer, dissipated during reading the Scriptures, light and trifling in my thoughts, and culpably neglectful of evening devotion. These things had crept in unawares. But at length I was, by the mercy of God, made sensible of them. All this had been going on without any outward declension. Alas! how far may we backslide from God without any mortal discovering that we have made one slipping step. I was grieved when I found it out, and coolly examined my real state, for I did not enjoy nearness to God. It was not so much an apprehension of danger that alarmed me, but grief that a distant sort of intercourse was going on between me and my best Friend. I reflected what was best to do, and resolved on an immediate application to the cross of Christ, since delay was but adding to my crime.

B. Always, Not Occasionally

Self-inquiry is an exercise in which we must persevere *at all times, even to the end of our lives*. The heathens themselves could speak of the advantages to be derived from questioning themselves as to their minds and actions. Hence we find one of their philosophers advising his pupils to examine themselves three times, before retiring to rest, as to their hearts and conduct during the day. It were well if professing Christians should follow this advice, especially when we consider the superior advantages which we enjoy, and consequently, the greater aggravations connected with our forgetfulness.

“I remember,” says the biographer of Mr. John Rowe,

that he told me, what I hope I shall never forget, ‘that it was his course every day to examine what had been God’s carriage towards him, and what had been his carriage towards God.’ [This is] a golden rule for heart examinations.

This exercise may justly be ranked among the most powerful means of promoting our spiritual improvement. He therefore, who altogether neglects it or performs it in a careless manner, will not make much progress in the divine life. All who require to pray, viewed either as a privilege or a duty; all for whom others need to pray; all who are not entirely free from sin, and beyond the reach of temptation; all, in short, who have anything to do, or fear, or suffer on earth, require to be daily and diligently engaged in this duty. It is not, properly speaking, an *occasional* duty. We are indeed commanded to examine ourselves before every approach that we make to the Lord's table, but it should also be interwoven with all our reading and hearing – with all our praying and acting.

It is recorded of Lord Harrington, that in view of observing the ordinance of the supper, he spent the preceding day in prayer and self-examination, observing what progress he had made in piety, and what victory he had gained over his corruptions. He also, at the same time, read over his diary for the time which had elapsed between his several approaches to the table of the Lord.

Among President Edwards' "Seventy Resolutions" we find the following:

Resolved, to inquire every night, as I am going to bed, wherein I have been negligent, what sin I have committed, and wherein I have denied myself; also, at the end of every week, month, and year.

He was too well acquainted with human weakness, even where the intentions are most sincere, to enter on any resolutions rashly, or from a reliance on his own strength. He, therefore, prefaced his resolutions with these words:

Being sensible that I am unable to do any thing without God's help, I do humbly entreat him, by his grace, to enable me to keep these resolutions, so far as they are agreeable to his will;

for Christ's sake. Remember to read over these resolutions once a-week.

C. Particularly, Not Generally

We should be very *particular* in the discharge of the duty of self-examination. We must not merely glance at our character in general. We must come to particulars. As it would be improper to come to a favourable conclusion as to whether we are really the children of God, upon a partial survey of ourselves, so it will be found very disadvantageous to be afterwards content with inferring from our state *in general* that our souls are prospering. The very same reasons that render it necessary to endeavour to ascertain whether we “be in the faith,” render it necessary to inquire what progress we are making in holiness. It is necessary, that we may be led to our watchtower, quickened to diligence, and stimulated to new exertions. But in order to succeed, we must descend to particulars and examine our principles, our feelings, and dispositions separately.

Let us take any particular disposition or grace, and examine whether it has become weaker or stronger. For example, it will be profitable to ask ourselves if we have a deeper sense of the exceeding sinfulness of sin – whether we hate sin more as sin – as against the nature and law of God, as well as destructive to our own comfort and usefulness. “Have I,” the child of God will again ask, “a stronger desire for conformity to the image of Christ? Do I think of heaven not merely as a place of happiness, but as a place of holiness; and do I rejoice to think that there I will sin no more and serve God perfectly? Do I also find a growing pleasure in the exercises of devotion? Is my Bible dearer to me the longer I enjoy it? Is prayer in the Holy Ghost a delightful employment? Is self-examination less a task, and more a matter of conscientious, regular, and profitable duty? Do I delight to go from my knees to the church, and from the church to my

knees? Do I feel my resignation to the will of God becoming more childlike, more perfect – trusting him with my all; more patient under affliction, and more ready to say, in all circumstances, My Father's way is the best?"

If any are disposed to ask, "Why all this particularity?" and to insinuate that it is unnecessary, we do not reply, "It is because you are utterly unacquainted with yourselves." But we do say, that *in itself*, an indifference to this duty can be no sign of discipleship, and that the wonder expressed in the above question is at once a proof that with many professors the exercise of regular examination is rare, and that with the saints of God it is, in many cases, neither very frequent nor very particular. All should try to prove the truth of our statement, when we say that self-examination is both an evidence and a means of self-improvement. If we are Christians indeed, our aim will be improvement and perfection. And none who are really anxious to improve will allow much time to pass without endeavouring to ascertain whether they are improving or not, or without adopting those measures which will, as instruments, most effectually promote their advancement in a life of conformity to the Son of God.

The standard by which we are to try ourselves is very particular and very precise. God searches particularly and perfectly, and we should not content ourselves with generalities.

"I have read of an author," says Mr. Ashburner,

who, while he was writing a book he was about to publish, would every now and then look back to the title, to see if his work corresponded thereto, and if it answered the expectation raised thereby. Now the use I would make hereof myself, and would recommend to you, is, for thee, O sinner, to look back every now and then, and consider for what thou wast created; and for thee, O saint, to look back every now and then, and consider for what thou wast redeemed.

“I have a *precise* God to deal with,” was the reply of one who had been accused of “carrying things too far.”

While William Wilberforce travelled in 1785 on the Continent, the Dean of Carlisle, Dr. Isaac Milner, was his companion in the same carriage. And here these highly-gifted friends discussed various interesting topics together. Religion was of the number, and on one occasion Mr. Wilberforce having expressed respect for a pious clergyman, but added, that he “carried things too far,” his friend pressed him upon this point. What did he mean by carrying things too far, or being too strict? On what ground did he pronounce this to be the case? When we talked of going *too far*, some *standard* must necessarily be referred to. Was the standard of the Bible exceeded? Or could any other be satisfactorily adopted and maintained? Perhaps it would easily be shown that where things were carried, as was alleged, *too far*, they were carried only beyond what was usually practised and approved among men? Mr. Wilberforce endeavoured to explain and defend his position, but he was dissatisfied himself with what he had to offer. Matter for serious thinking and heart-searching was suggested, and his thoughts could find no rest till they found it from the word of God, and the adoption of the holy law of God, by which to form his judgments, and regulate all his conduct.

D. With Seriousness and Solemnity

We should examine ourselves with *seriousness* and *solemnity*. This exercise is not the result of mere curiosity, as is frequently the case in the unprofitable work of examining our neighbours. Our *souls*, our *selves*, their state, and prospects for eternity, are solemn subjects of inquiry. The law of God is infinite in holiness. The eye of God is over all at one and the same instant, and looks into every bosom. He that judgeth us is the Lord. Christ’s eyes are “as a *flame of fire*,” (Rev. 1:14). How solemn a matter is it, then, to place ourselves under his immediate inspection – to ask the only,

wise God to search us! How serious ought we to be when asking ourselves such questions as these: ‘Have I any evidence of being a child of God, and an heir of glory?’ ‘How stands my heart with respect to the honour of Him who made me and fashioned me – with respect to Him who died that I might live – to Him who will be grieved if I defile his temple?’ These, and other kindred questions, are unusually momentous. We should ponder them frequently, deeply and solemnly. Let them take hold upon our minds, and let our minds take hold upon them. There is, indeed, gladness that grows in the heart of the upright when they see the grace of God there. But it is solemn gladness – that state of mind which the excellent Henry Martyn preferred above all others, and what he called “a sweet and holy seriousness.” Although we are not to be melancholy, yet we are to be meditative – to join trembling with our mirth, remembering the solemn caution, “*Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall,*” (1 Cor. 10:12).

All well-exercised Christians have felt it to be no trifling matter to place themselves in the light of God’s word, and to examine their hearts. They have generally connected the exercise with solemn prayer and fasting, at least on particular occasions. Halyburton, for example, thus writes in his *Memoirs*:

Solemn self-examination – Jan. 1708. I looked up to God, and reviewed the state of my soul. The following queries had not been, alas! suitably regarded as they should: Queries to be considered as to my private case: 1. Are daily sins, sins of infirmity, searched, observed, weighed, mourned for? 2. Is there care taken to exercise faith distinctly in order to the pardon of them? 3. Is peace taken, when not powerfully by the Lord spoken? 4. Does the impression of the necessity and excellency of Christ’s blood decay? 5. Are the experiences of its use and efficacy distinct as before? 6. Am I formal in worship, duties secret, private, craving a blessing to meat, returning thanks, prayer, meditation and reading, &c.? 7. Is there due care of educating my family? 8. Are rods observed and suitably im-

proved? Is the voice of the rod heard calling to deniedness to relations, the dearest; deniedness to the world, to life; preparation for death; spirituality in duty?"

E. With Impartiality

We should examine ourselves *impartially*. This is very difficult, yet very necessary. Self-love is ready to overlook many faults and to palliate many crimes – ready to take credit for piety, which may be only selfishness in the attire of grace. Instead of being our own *judges*, we are extremely apt to become our own *advocates*, and exert all our ingenuity to see what we can plead in our own defence. But when the same individual is at once criminal, advocate and judge, it is always easy to see how the trial will end. When we examine ourselves with partiality, we are more prone to flatter ourselves than to discover our real state before God – more eager to extenuate our faults than to seek proofs of our faith – more anxious to disguise the features of the old man than to discover the lineaments of the new man. The result of such examination is always favourable and flattering. We are thereby led to believe that all is well, because we may have never seen, or seen only to disguise, indwelling sin.

Some one may ask, "How may I know if I am impartial?" Impartiality indicates itself by showing a desire to examine strictly and correctly. "Not," says one, quaintly,

like a swallow, which merely skims the surface; but you should enter into the deep recesses of the heart. This cannot be done without the light of the Spirit of God; for man is too great a coward ever to go there in the dark.

The following extract, from the diary of Anne C. Maurice, discovers much ingenuousness and impartiality in the work of self-examination:

I have lately made an important discovery, which has grieved me much: When I have been imagining that I was a great proficient in self-knowledge, I find that I scarcely know anything of myself. I can say that I am utterly depraved; but I have, alas! very faint conceptions wherein that depravity consists. What can be a greater proof of depravity than this only one thing – that I am so unconcerned about it?

Men are very unwilling to believe anything to the prejudice of their *hearts*. They will far more readily acknowledge faults in their practice. For as self is an idol that is universally worshipped, so it is regarded as something very like sacrilege to charge the heart, which is the temple of self, with anything bad or polluting. To say of an individual that he has a good heart is, with many, an ample apology for a wicked or careless conduct. But the heart, and the language, and the whole life, should be brought under the strictest examination. We should be anxious to know the worst, as well as the best, concerning our hearts and conduct. We should not, in partiality and self-love, ask concerning some besetting sin, “Is it not a little one?” We should wish that all our heart-idols were brought forth and cast away – all our beloved lusts apprehended and crucified. We are exceedingly prone to deny or excuse those sins which may arise from constitutional temperament, surrounding circumstances, and professional pursuits and temptations; and ready to condemn in others those very sins of which all, except ourselves, are convinced that we are as guilty, if not more so.

Impartiality will also lead us to detect our omissions of duty, as well as our positive violations of the divine law. We are very ready to say in our hearts, and too often even with our lips, that this or that which we may have neglected, is but a trifling matter; while, on the other hand, we may, like the Pharisees of old, “*pay tithe of mint, and anise, and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith*” (Matt.

23:23), strain out a gnat, and swallow a camel; and point to the mote in our brother's eye, while we think not of the *beam* that may be in our own eye (Matt. 7:3-5).

The exercise of judgment and impartiality in examining ourselves will likewise lead us to ascertain what situations it will be necessary for us to avoid – what temptations we ought chiefly to guard against – what are the feelings we require particularly to cultivate – what are the considerations, the precepts, the threatenings or promises, that it will be most proper for us habitually to impress upon our minds. As an experienced physician will inquire into his patient's age, temper, habits, and mode of living, before he prescribe for him; so, by an intimate acquaintance with the distinguishing peculiarities of our own character, we will be enabled, in some measure at least, to deal wisely and impartially with ourselves. In connection with this part of our subject, we would quote the following valuable directions for conducting the duty of self-examination generally, and for engaging in it with impartiality in particular:

“Think not,” says Marshall,

you must begin this work with doubting whether God will extend mercy to you, and that you may leave that question wholly under debate until you have found out how to resolve it by self-examination. You should rather begin the work with the assurance of faith, that though you may find your hearts never so wicked – as many of God's choicest children have found – yet the door of mercy is open for you, and that God will certainly save you, if you put your trust in his grace through Christ. If we begin the work with this confidence, *it will make us impartial*, and not afraid to find out the worst of ourselves, and willing to judge that our hearts are deceitful; and if we have any holy qualifications, this confidence will preserve them in their vigour and brightness. Mis-spend not your time, as many do, in poring upon your hearts to find *whether you be good enough* to trust in Christ for your salvation, before you dare to

exercise faith in him. But know that though you cannot find that you have any faith or holiness, yet, if you will now believe on Him that justifieth the ungodly, it shall be accounted to you for righteousness.

As it is often the case that we judge too harshly of our fellow-men, so it is also possible to overlook those evidences which may be favourable in our own case. And although this may not be so frequent an error as an overweening confidence in our own goodness, it may nevertheless distract the exercise and mar the peace of the children of God. Impartiality will prevent us from judging so as to despise the day of small things. If our hearts condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God. Despondency is a sin. It relaxes the tone of the mind, and is a great drawback in the duty of self-examination. We cannot exceed in the feeling of deep unworthiness, but we may err in thinking too much about ourselves and our sins, and too little about the Saviour. If we can say, "*Lord, thou knowest all things, thou knowest that I love thee*" (John 21:17), or "*The desire of our soul is to thy name, and to the remembrance of thee*" (Isa. 26:8), we ought not to conclude that we have neither part nor portion with the people of God, although many iniquities testify against us. It is, indeed, a difficult part of spiritual learning to be able to distinguish between the suggestions of the tempter and the corruptions of our own hearts. We are not ignorant of his devices. He may lead the regenerated, as well as the unregenerated, to say "*Peace, peace,*" on very slight grounds. And he may also trouble the genuine disciple by denying or darkening his evidences of faith and love. When he winnows us, we may be so tossed to and fro as to exclaim: "*The Lord hath forsaken me, and my Lord hath forgotten me,*" (Isa. 49:14). But if our Master pray for us, that our faith fail not, he will also take our feet from the snare of the fowler and we shall escape. We are not to dishonour our free grace by overlooking those evidences of its power upon

our souls, the existence of which we can scarcely venture to deny, and which self-examination may have brought to light. We should, however, diligently seek increase of grace and strength. We should be thankful as well as watchful, saying, "*By the grace of God I am what I am*," (1 Cor. 15:10). We must praise God for former manifestations of his love, make a prudent and scriptural use of past experiences, and examine both as to our gratitude for, and improvement of, his gracious benefits. If we have grace to be grateful, it will go a great way to keep us watchful, lest we should provoke the Lord to depart from us; of which departure there is not a stronger evidence than carelessness in examining whether he is vouchsafing the light of his countenance, and whether we are abiding in him.

F. With Prayer

We should engage in the duty of self-examination *with earnest prayer to God for his teaching and searching*. Without the assistance of him who "*searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God*" (1 Cor. 2:10), we will make little or no progress in this duty. David was aware of this, hence his earnest supplications: "*Search me, O God – Judge me, O Lord – Examine me, O Lord, and prove me; try my reins and my heart*," (Ps. 26:2). He had, no doubt, frequently engaged in the work of heart-searching. But the oftener he had done so, the greater would be his feeling of his own insufficiency. The heart is deceitful and God alone claims a perfect acquaintance with it. How needful then, when we look *inward* to look also *upward*. We ought to beware of engaging in this duty in our own strength, either natural or spiritual. We should earnestly pray for the Holy Spirit as our guide into all the truth about ourselves, saying, "*O send forth thy light and thy truth*" (Ps. 43:3), that is, the light of the Spirit, to accompany the truth of the word. Without giving "attendance" to prayer, all our endeavours to obtain a knowledge of our hearts will prove

unavailing. As God's word is the standard by which we are to try ourselves, so the Holy Ghost, by whom that word was dictated, must direct us in making a proper application of it to our own souls. That man whose heart is in the work, will despise no means that are likely to promote his success. And no means will be found *equal to*, or succeed *without*, particular, fervent, and believing prayer.

Self-examination and prayer have also a reciprocal influence. Without examining ourselves – our sins, our wants, and the calls of the word and Providence of God as to those duties which are incumbent on us – we cannot know what we should pray for as we ought. And then, without prayer for divine teaching, we will not be able to feel the importance of these subjects. Without prayer we will not ascertain what are the precise motives of our conduct: whether we hate sin, as sin – whether we have come in faith for the supply of our wants, and been diligent in the way and work of the Lord. Self-examination will also enable us to know what blessings are most suitable to our present circumstances and necessities, and what iniquities we require especially to have subdued. And then, it will lead us to the throne of grace for the purpose of supplicating these blessings, confessing these sins, and pleading for grace to “*mortify our members which are upon the earth*,” (Col. 3:5). We should not forget, that it is only by divine grace and renewed pardon, received through faith and prayer, that we can derive those important benefits which result from self-examination properly conducted. Have we detected many “secret faults” and open transgressions? Then they can only be pardoned and purged by the blood of our great High Priest and Intercessor and it is only by God's grace, asked and received, that we can “*go and sin no more*.” Have we observed many omissions of duty? Then it is only by the supplicated strength of him through whom his people can do all things, that the neglected duty can be performed. Are our graces found to be in a weak and languishing condition? Then they can only be es-

tablished in answer to such a prayer as this: “*The God of Jacob send thee help from the sanctuary, and strengthen thee out of Zion,*” (Ps. 20:1-2).

Let all be diligent in the work of self-examination. Its advantages are manifold. In all other duties, especially the duties of the closet, we will find it to be highly beneficial. It is indeed indispensable. In reading the Bible, we will derive advantage from it when we compare our lives with its dictates. In confession, we are ingenuous when, through means of the exercise of self-inquiry, we know the plagues of our own hearts. In supplication, we can descend to particulars, having ascertained our present necessities. In praise, we find matter for gratitude, when we have seen the grace of God within us. In meditation, we will be glad in the Lord, when we have seen the long-suffering and tender mercy of our God. Having examined our hearts, and found their natural waywardness, as well as the evidences of God’s grace having, in some measure, conquered them, we will be led to devote ourselves to the Lord, feeling that we cannot be in more tender and faithful hands, and that we cannot bind ourselves too closely to his service.

Reader, it is a most *reasonable* duty to which we have been calling your attention. Are the men of the world diligent in examining their secular affairs looking into their books – reforming their bills, and giving increased attention to their business? And shall not the man of God cast accounts for eternity – attend to the records of conscience, and apply the touchstone of the Bible to his principles and practice? We conclude with the following serious questions, proposed by Joseph Alleine to his flock at Taunton:

Do you not put off God with the world’s leaving, and serve him when you are at leisure? Must God stand by while the world is first served? And are your souls the least of your cares,

and put off with some by-scraps and ends of your time? Is religion your trade, and is your conversation in heaven? Do you walk with God? Or have you only, now and then, a turn with him? When you have ended your prayers, is there an end of your religion till you come to them again? Or, do you carry on a design of religion throughout your whole course? Have you religion woven into the heart and life – into your discourses, and trades, and tables? Is it the chief care of your lives that God be served and your souls saved?



CHAPTER 5

Personal Covenanting

“I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground; I will pour my Spirit upon thy seed and my blessing upon thine offspring. And they shall spring up as among the grass, as willows by the water-courses. One shall say, I am the Lord’s; and another shall call himself by the name of Jacob; and another shall subscribe with his hand unto the Lord, and surname himself by the name of Israel.”

Isaiah 44:3-5

A PERSONAL ACCEPTANCE of the Lord Jesus Christ lies at the foundation of all our duties, enjoyments, and hopes. By nature we are sinful and weak – unable to please God or to serve him. While we remain in this condition our best actions must be offensive to his infinite majesty and holiness. The gospel, however, proclaims glad tidings of great joy to all people, informing us that God so loved the world as to give his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life (John 3:16). Christ’s work of obedience and suffering is sufficient for all who come to him for salvation. In him there is a fulness of which all are invited to receive, even grace for grace (John 1:16). And all, whatever is, or may have been, their character, views, and feelings, are commanded to believe in him; and without a single portion of trust or confidence in the deeds of the law, to cast themselves simply and unreservedly into the arms of his mercy.

In the act of closing with Christ, and with God in him, as our own God and portion, there is necessarily involved a dedication of ourselves to him and to his service forever. In the day of power, when the Holy Spirit makes the soul willing to receive

Christ and all his spiritual benefits, there is also a willingness to devote ourselves, in soul, body, and spirit, to the Lord. But, in addition to this, there is an explicit, formal avouching of the Lord to be our God. This duty does not consist merely in an acquiescence in God's covenant with our hearts and souls. It is also an *expression* of this in a positive, distinct service.

In this chapter we shall confine ourselves to a few remarks on the nature of this duty, and the manner in which it ought to be performed.

I. THE NATURE OF PERSONAL COVENANTING

A. An Approval of Salvation Through Christ

As to the nature of this duty, it may be observed *that it is an approval of the way of salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ*. In every religious exercise, an approval of this only method of reconciliation with God is implicitly given. In personal covenanting however, it is most explicitly intimated, "*Behold, we come unto thee; for thou art the Lord our God. Truly in vain is salvation hoped for from the hills, and from the multitude of mountains; truly in the Lord our God is the salvation of Israel,*" (Jer. 3:22-23). With Jacob, the person who engages in this solemn service says, "*The Lord shall be my God*" (Gen. 28:21) and with David, "*He hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure; for this is all my salvation, and all my desire,*" (2 Sam. 23:5). God is a covenant-keeping God, and his language is, "*I will be your God, and ye shall be my people*" (Lev. 26:12). And the soul, relying on the divine faithfulness, sets to its seal by declaring, "*Lord, I am thine, save thou me. O Lord, truly I am thy servant: I am thy servant, and the son of thine handmaid: thou hast loosed my bonds,*" (Ps. 116:16).

The people of God have all seen that the way of salvation is entirely of grace through the work of Christ. We can scarcely

open any of the numerous memoirs and diaries of departed saints, but we will meet with an expression of their acquiescence in this only and sufficient way. For example, Dr. Claudius Buchanan, in his Last Will and Testament, thus expresses himself:

I commit my soul and body to Jesus Christ, the Saviour of lost sinners, of which sinners I am one, the chief of sinners; but I trust I have obtained mercy; and look for eternal life through the obedience of Christ unto death, even the death of the cross. I account the origin of my salvation to be the love of God the Father, who loved my soul in Christ, its head, before the foundation of the world. I renounce all works as a claim of merit. All my works have been mixed and sullied with sin and imperfection. What has been acceptable to God is his own, even the work of his Holy Spirit; it is not mine.

B. An Acceptance of Christ and All Redemption's Benefits

Personal covenanting includes *an acceptance of God in Christ, and all the benefits of redemption*. “O my soul, thou hast said unto the Lord, Thou art my Lord,” (Ps. 16:2). In receiving Christ, we receive the other persons of the Godhead. We receive the Father as our God in covenant; and we receive the Spirit as the Spirit of the Father and of the Son – as the Spirit of promise. The consequence is that all things are ours and we are Christ’s, and Christ is God’s. There is an acceptance of, and an interest in, God the *Father*, as pacified towards us, and as having justified us, and adopted us into his blessed family; an acceptance of God the *Son* as our Redeemer, Prophet, Priest, and King; of God the *Holy Ghost*, as the Strengtheners, Illuminator, Remembrancer, and Comforter. And thus, in faith and hope, we receive all that free sovereign grace has done for us, or wrought in us, or has promised to accomplish in our behalf.

The Honourable and Rev. W. B. Cadogan, in his memoir of the well-known Romaine, says:

It were to be wished, for the sake of posterity, that a man whose heart was so whole with God, and whose very soul was in the work of Christ, had kept a diary, or committed more of his thoughts and the occurrences of his life to writing. But among all his papers, only one of this sort has been found.

In this pretty long paper we find the following passages:

It was sovereign love which brought me to know myself, and to know Jesus Christ. His own Holy Spirit began and carried on the work. He opened mine eyes to understand the Scriptures. He gave me to believe their truth and to feel their power; and now I set my seal to every word in them; finding God to be true and faithful – true in the promise, faithful in the fulfilment. *Receive Chr.* – one with him, live by him, live on him, worship him, do all on earth as well as I can, till he enable me to do it better in heaven. In this believing view of things, I acknowledge that I have lived to a blessed time. All that is worth enjoying has been freely given to me. By the quickening grace of the Spirit, brought into oneness with Christ, and to partake of the Father's love in him, all is mine. Glory be to Father, Son, and Spirit, in the highest, the covenanting Trinity is mine!

In a work by Dr. Brownlee of New York, entitled, *Lights and Shadows of Christian Life*, we are told that Jeanie Craig of Glengeel left a “personal covenant,” in which she,

surrenders herself, and all her hopes and prospects, to the Lord her God; taking God the Father, to be her Father and God; Christ the Redeemer, to be her Redeemer and Lord; the Holy Ghost, the comforter and sanctifier, to be her guide, sanctifier, and comforter – to be her covenant God, wholly, only, and for ever! So help me, my God. Amen!

C. A Renunciation of the Devil, the World and the Flesh

This exercise includes *a renunciation of the devil, the world, and the flesh*. The moment that Christ is received by faith, in the

day of divine power, there is a renouncing of all rivals. Satan is cast out. The Strong One hath spoiled him of his goods, and the lawful captive is delivered. At the same time the believer renounces Satan's claim to his service, and ever after through grace, continues to resist him. And when there is, at any future period, a formal renewal of his engagement to be the Lord's, there is a protest taken, in the court of the believer's conscience, against all and everything that would oppose the dominion of his Saviour and Lord. His language then is: "*O Lord our God, other lords beside thee have had dominion over us; but by thee only will we make mention of thy name,*" (Isa. 26:13).

The Rev. William Grimshaw, after enumerating many previous instances of his personal covenanting, says:

And now once more and forever, I most solemnly give up, devote, and resign all I am, spirit, soul, and body, to thee, and to thy pleasure and command, in Christ Jesus my Saviour, this 4th of December, 1752....From this day, I solemnly renounce all former lords, world, flesh, and devil, in thy name. No more, directly or indirectly, will I obey them. I renounced them many years ago, and I renounce them forever.

John Newton, who wrote Mr. Grimshaw's memoirs, prefaces the record of the personal covenant from which the above is extracted, with the following remarks:

Every true believer, of course, ought to devote himself to the service of the Redeemer, yea, he must, and will; for he is constrained by love. He will do it not once only, but daily. And many who have done it in writing can look back upon the transaction with thankfulness to the end of life, recollecting it as a season of peculiar solemnity and impression, accompanied with emotions of heart neither to be forgotten nor recalled.

Those who are God's servants, and "*devoted to his fear,*" (Ps. 119:38) tell all his and their enemies that they belong to the King

of Glory – that they have no more to do with idols, and no more to say to them; neither will they say any more to the work of their hands, “Ye are our gods,” (Hos. 14:3). And what a source of gladness, to think that the world’s trinity have no longer a dominion or a claim; yea, that they are afraid of the image of Christ, which is reflected from the redeemed and regenerated children of heaven. A renewed exercise of faith in God’s promise of supporting grace in the midst of temptations, is the great means of keeping us from being overcome.

Mr. Stockton thus writes in his journal:

May 2, 1666. – After renewing my covenant with God, I quickly found my treacherous heart departing from God, and relapsing into sin. Yet still God comforted me with his word: ‘He shall be holden up; for God is able to make him stand.’

Joseph Alleine, the author of *The Alarm to the Unconverted*, having had a sore conflict with temptations when near death, uttered these memorable words:

Away! thou foul fiend, thou enemy of all mankind, thou subtil sophister! Art thou come now to molest me, now I am just going – now I am so weak, and death upon me? Trouble me not, for I am none of thine! I am the Lord’s; Christ is mine, and I am his; his by covenant. I have sworn myself to be the Lord’s, and his I will be; therefore begone.

“These last words,” says his biographer, “he repeated often, which I took much notice of, that his covenanting with God was the means he used to expel the devil and all his temptations.”

The opinions, maxims, customs, and example of the world are renounced. They are no longer to be the guides of the renewed soul, and a special, formal abandonment is declared. This is to be done especially in circumstances of temptation or when the “evil heart of unbelief” would lead the soul astray from the living God (Heb. 3:12). The Christian covenants that in all

things he will study to be conformed to the divine will, and not to be guided by prevalent opinions and practices which may be inconsistent with the honour and love of his God and portion. God's will, whether expressed in direct language or in providential intimations, has become practically, and in reality, the law of his actions, the rule of his conduct, and the standard to which his whole character is to be conformed.

Our sins are to be covenanted against, not merely as fancied pleasures which we can no longer consistently enjoy, but as abominations which our souls abhor. Our language to every sin, to our besetting sin, should be: "Get thee hence." The temple of God can have no agreement with idols. There can be no fellowship between Christ and sin. In Mrs. Boston's personal covenant we find the following:

With my whole heart I give up myself, soul and body, to be the Lord's for ever: my soul going out after Christ in his kingly office as much as in the rest, for the sanctification of my nature, and subduing of my strong corruptions, without reserve – especially my predominant, which I saw head and shoulders above the rest; being sincerely desirous, in the sight of God, never to entertain peaceably, but through his covenant grace, to war against every lust whatsoever, though a right hand or right eye.

The renunciation of *self* enters particularly into the solemn transaction of which we are speaking. There is not only an abjuring of all sin, of all self-righteousness, but self as a supreme object, is in every view of it renounced. The person who "stands to the covenant" has no right to ask what he will do with himself, or on what he will bestow himself, or how he will employ himself. He is now to say, in humble submission, "Lord, how thou wilt; what thou wilt; when thou wilt; only let me glorify thee." Self being the very citadel of Satan, it is difficult to reduce it to the obedience of Christ; but as his rival it must be vowed against, fought against, crucified.

In writing to a friend, Romaine has these words:

Self, proud self, is such a dull scholar, and has such a bad memory, that though I am satisfied today Christ must do all for me, and all in me, and all by me too, yet I soon forget, and soon want to be something in the work myself. But I do know, and blessed be the name of Jesus! I do experience that his grace is sufficient for me; chiefly in the pulling down of my pride, and in making me willing to be nothing, that Christ may be ALL. May he pour out upon you and me more of his Spirit, to lay self very low, and to exalt the Saviour!

D. Self-Dedication to the Lord

Personal covenanting includes *self-dedication to the Lord*. Man is not his own, but God's by the right of creation. God hath made our bodies and our souls. Our moral constitution – our intellectual faculties – our susceptibilities of pleasure and pain – all our endowments of whatever nature, are his gifts. And the life which he originally gave he daily sustains. We are the objects of *his* daily care, loaded with *his* benefits, and enriched with *his* blessings. Believers are God's. And why? Not only according to the right of creation, but also by the right of redemption. "*Thus saith the Lord that created thee, O Jacob, and he that formed thee, O Israel, Fear not, for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine,*" (Isa. 43:1). Believers are not their own. But why not? Because they are bought with a price. And what is the price? Not silver and gold, but the precious blood of Christ (1 Pet. 1:18-19). Neither their souls nor their bodies are their own, for Christ purchased the one as well as the other. He gave body for body, and soul for soul. All true believers are God's, not only by the right of creation, preservation, and redemption. They are also his by voluntary dedication. "*One shall say, I am the Lord's,*" (Isa. 44:5).

If Christ has purchased our whole persons, it is both our

duty and interest to place ourselves in his hand, and at his disposal. Christ is anxious that his purchase should be delivered over to him in the day of believing, and we honour him when we “yield” ourselves to him in a covenant never to be forgotten. The members of the body are to be presented to God a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable; which is our reasonable service (Rom. 12:1). Our *hearts* are to be dedicated to God, according to his own call: “*My son, give me thine heart....Love the Lord thy God with all thine heart,*” (Prov. 23:26; Deut. 6:5). Our *understandings* must be given to him. We are to love him “*with all our mind,*” (Matt. 22:37). The understanding is to be employed in the study of his truth and the praise of his name. It must submit to the mind of God and learn to know his will. Our *wills* are to be God’s. They are no longer to be used as our natural, perverted judgments would dictate. Our language must be: “*Not my will, but thine be done,*” (Luke 22:42).

In short, there must be a hearty, unreserved devotion of the members of our body and the faculties and affections of our souls to the Lord, to be wholly guided by his providence and ruled by his law. Our persons, talents, gifts, graces, wealth, time, services, and influence are all to be voluntarily and cheerfully devoted to God, while we say, with David, “*of thine own have we given thee,*” (1 Chr. 29:14).

Every power, faculty, feeling, sentiment and exertion will, by the real Christian, be devoted to the Saviour’s cause. No longer his own, he will feel that Christ’s interest in him is precious as the love which he showed him, and deep as the anguish which he endured for him. From Christ, therefore, the believer will keep nothing back which gratitude, love, and obedience can claim or bestow. His talents he will consecrate to Christ’s service, his example to adorn the gospel, and his influence to the advancement of the cause of truth and righteousness in the earth. All that saints are in time, and all that they hope to be through eternity, they will commit into God’s hands. No reserve will with-

hold, no concealment disguise, no selfish feeling retain, what ought to be most justly and entirely the Lord's. They will feel that until they have placed everything that concerns them into his keeping, they can have no true peace, and that until they surrender themselves wholly to his service, they can be performing no duty. By an act of self-dedication, entire, unreserved, uncompromising and perpetual, they will give themselves to the Lord.

In the words of Dr. Doddridge,

The surrender will be as entire as it is cheerful and obedient. All you are, and all you have, and all you can do – your time, your possessions, your influence over others – will be devoted to him, that for the future it may be employed entirely for him and to his glory. You will desire to keep nothing back from him, but will seriously judge that you are then in the truest and noblest sense your own when you are most entirely his. You are also on this great occasion to resign all that you have to the disposal of his wise and gracious providence – not only owning his power, but consenting to his undoubted right to do what he pleases with all that he has given you, and declaring a hearty approbation of all that he has done, and of all that he may farther do.

Dr. Doddridge followed the advice which he thus gives to others. One of the resolutions which he wrote at the beginning of his Bible was:

Let my first thoughts be devout and thankful; let me rise early, immediately return God most solemn thanks for the mercies of the night, *devote myself to him*, and beg his assistance in the intended business of the day.

The following are two of Edwards' seventy resolutions:

Resolved, Frequently to renew the dedication of myself to God which was made at my baptism, which I solemnly renewed when I was received into the communion of the Church, and

which I have solemnly remade this 12th day of January 1723. Resolved, Never, henceforward till I die, to act as if I were any way my own, but entirely and altogether God's, agreeably to the above.

E. A Promise to Perform All Commanded Duty

Personal covenanting includes a *promise made to God for the performance of all commanded duty*. The exercise itself is an act of obedience to the divine will. “Vow, and pay to the Lord thy God; he hath commanded his covenant for ever,” (Ps. 76:11). “Thou shalt fear the Lord thy God; him shalt thou serve, and to him shalt thou cleave, and swear by his name,” (Deut. 10:20). As a *disciple* of Christ, the believer confesses him. As a *servant*, he serves the living and true God. As a *soldier* of the cross, he offers himself willingly, and engages to follow him who is the Leader and Commander of the people. As a *subject*, he promises fidelity. And as a *worshipper*, he, in compliance with the call, “Obey my voice, and I will be your God, and ye shall be my people” (Jer. 11:4), takes hold of God’s covenant. And in commemorating this solemn transaction, he says with the Psalmist in language strongly expressive of reverence and appropriation, “I trusted in thee, O Lord: I said, Thou art my God,” (Ps. 31:4).

All God’s people regard all his commandments in all things to be right; and consequently they will engage, in his strength, to obey him in every precept of his law and in every call of his providence. They will engage to cultivate personal, secret religion in all its parts. Bible-reading – “I will not forget thy word” (Ps. 119:16); spiritual meditation – “I will meditate also of all thy work” (Ps. 77:12); self-examination – “Let us search and try our ways, and turn again to the Lord” (Lam. 3:40); prayer and praise – “I will call upon the Lord, who is worthy to be praised.... Evening, morning, and at noon, will I pray and cry aloud, and he shall hear my voice” (Ps. 18:3; 55:17); and personal covenanting

– “*So shall I keep thy law continually, for ever and ever,*” (Ps. 119:44). We should promise to observe all God’s precepts in regard to domestic and civil society: “*At the same time, saith the Lord, will I be the God of all the families of Israel, and they shall be my people,*” (Jer. 31:1). “*Jehoiada made a covenant between the Lord and the king, and the people; between the king also and the people,*” (2 Kings 11:17).

We are to promise to observe the divine injunctions as to our duty to the Church. We are to wait on all the means of grace. [We are] to support divine ordinances, by giving for that purpose as the Lord hath prospered us. [We are] to maintain the rights and privileges of the Church against all that would infringe them in any way. [We are] to endeavour to unite the various sections of the visible Church, by using all lawful means to produce uniformity, as there cannot be union in anything or in any Church, except in as far as there is uniformity. [We are] to endeavour to extend the Church, to promote her purity and the efficiency of her ordinances, to maintain the whole truth, and to oppose every form of error and immorality. We are to pledge ourselves to use all the means of grace, to be diligent in the exercise of all the graces of the Spirit, and to engage in positive benevolent or religious services, according to the calls of Providence. And we should not only promise to perform these duties, we should also strenuously endeavour to perform them, remembering the divine commands: “*Hear ye the words of the covenant, and do them....Keep, therefore, the words of this covenant, and do them, that ye may prosper in all that ye do.*” (Jer.11:2; Deut. 29:9).

In almost all the personal covenants into which the people of God have entered, a promise to appear for Christ’s honour and to obey all his commandments, holds a prominent place. It would be inexpedient to produce many testimonies of this. We shall therefore content ourselves by giving the following extract from the “Covenant Engagement” of Janet Hamilton, lady of

Alexander Gordon of Earlstoun. After having enumerated many instances of God's goodness, she thus proceeds:

And now, O Lord, out of the sense of all these thy loving-kindnesses towards thy poor handmaid, I desire, in thy strength, to renew former engagements, and solemnly anew to enter in covenant with thee. O Lord, help me to go sincerely about it, and let thy presence go along with the duty.

O Lord, I here desire to enter solemnly in covenant with thee, taking thee for my lord and master, and accepting thee on thy own terms; taking thee for my king, priest, and prophet, and in my station, through thy grace, to stand by truth and cheerfully to take on thy yoke and follow thee. Lord, thou knowest my weakness. I desire to believe that thou wilt be a present help in the day of need to me, according to thy promise; and I, in the faith of this, do go on.

I here give my hearty consent to thy coming and taking possession in my soul, and to thy casting out of all there that stands in opposition to thee. Come, Lord Jesus, subdue all my corruptions, and bring them under thy feet, that I may be, through thee, a conqueror over them. I desire here to take thee for my all, to be ruled and governed by thee, acquiescing to whatsoever shall be thy way of dealing with me. Give me thyself, and this shall be all my desire.

I desire to enter my protestation at the throne of grace against all principalities and powers in me that stand out against thee, and shall endeavour, in thy strength, to war against them; for they are as a tyrant, not having consent.

Whatever I have been, I do here accept of the offer of peace through Christ, and do make a sure covenant with thee this day never to be reversed, hoping thou wilt make all forthcoming unto me, both on thy part and mine. I desire here to own all the controverted truths that are founded on thy holy word; which word I desire to be my rule, and to confess thee before men, that thou mayest confess me before thy Father. Lord, give me it in that hour, if I shall be brought before great ones for thy name's sake.

I desire to adhere to all the articles of the covenants, national and solemn league, to which I stand engaged; only I disown the king's part of it, he having unkinged himself by the breach of covenants, and by making our land a land of graven images that was so solemnly given up to God. I desire in weakness to adhere unto it, although burnt by the hand of the hangman, and now buried by the hand of those that better things were expected of.

O Lord, I desire to close all by giving myself up to thee, and all mine. Accept, Lord Jesus Christ, and help to perform, and own me as thy covenanted child; protesting humbly, that failing on my part (against which I resolve, as thou knowest) shall not make void this covenant, I having accepted of thy offer on thy own terms, and will henceforth wait for what is good, that when thou comest I may rejoice in thee, crying, 'This is my God, and I have waited for him.'

As witness my hand, at Blackness Castle, December, 1687.
JANET HAMILTON."

II. THE MANNER OF PERSONAL COVENANTING

A. Intelligently

As to the manner in which we should perform the duty of self-dedication, it may be noticed, that it must be done *intelligently*. Any act of religious worship, in order to its being acceptable to God, must be performed with knowledge and understanding. When the apostle beseeches believers, by the mercies of God, to present their bodies a living sacrifice, he declares that it is a "*reasonable service*," (Rom. 12:1). It is not simply what is God's due and our duty, and therefore highly proper. The phrase also implies that it must be the deliberate act of the mind – an intelligent service or devotion. Whatever is done acceptably in the divine service must be warranted by God's authority. Sincerity of heart and purity of intention, commendable and excellent as they are in themselves, will never consecrate or sanction

anything in the worship of God that does not bear upon it the image and superscription of God's authority. Will-worship will ever be met by the silencing inquiry, "*Who hath required this at your hands?*" (Isa. 1:12), and by the no less unequivocal expression of disapprobation, "*In vain do you worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men,*" (Matt. 15:9).

In performing the duty under consideration, we must know that it is commanded, and we must know how matters stand between God and us. We must, at least, know that by nature we are revolvers from God, and have robbed him of his glory – that there is a way opened up for our return to him, and that we are warranted and invited to say, "*Behold, we come unto thee; for thou art the Lord our God,*" (Jer. 3:22). In coming back to God, and in giving him our own selves in a covenant of duty, we "judge," or rationally conclude, "*that if one died for all, then were all dead,*" or, then all died; and "*that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him that died for them, and rose again,*" (2 Cor. 5:14-15).

God's ancient people were reprov'd for offering the lame and the blind as sacrifices. We should, therefore, calmly and deliberately consider the import of what we engage to, and solemnly think of the glory of him who has condescended to receive us into his love and service. To receive God in Christ and to give ourselves away to him forever, is an exercise that requires the whole soul. To resolve to abandon sin, self and the service of Satan, entails most important consequences, and therefore should not be engaged in ignorantly or rashly. "*Thou shalt swear, The Lord liveth, in judgment....It is a snare to the man who devoureth that which is holy, and after vows to make inquiry,*" (Jer. 4:2; Prov. 20:25).

B. In Faith

We must engage in the exercise *in faith*. Without faith it is

impossible to please God in any duty (Heb. 11:6). And it is not only faith in the divine warrant, but faith in God who instituted the ordinance. Personal covenanting or self-dedication, is the exercise of faith in God as our covenant God. It is a taking hold of the faithfulness in the promise which he has given, that his grace shall be sufficient for us in the performance of that promise of service to him which we may have made. In this duty we *commit* ourselves to God in Christ, after the example of Paul, who said, *“I know WHOM I have trusted, and that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him,”* (2 Tim. 1:12). We must accept of Christ’s mediation, not merely because compelled to do so by the immediate appointment of God, but heartily approving of it and rejoicing in it, as infinitely worthy of God and suitable to our condition.

Our confidence must be taken off our own doings, from a deep conviction that they cannot sustain it, and transferred to the perfect righteousness of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. *“Surely, shall one say, in the Lord have I righteousness and strength....I trusted in thee, O Lord: I said, Thou art my God,”* (Isa. 45:24; Ps. 31:14). We find many of the divine promises expressed in the form of an offer on the part of God to enter into a covenant with his people. And faith accepts the offer, acceding to the call, *“Incline your ear, and come unto me; hear, and your soul shall live; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David,”* (Isa. 55:3).

In the “Bond of the Covenant” sworn by the Original Seceders from the Established Church of Scotland in 1743, we find the following sentence:

We all, and every one of us, though sensible of the deceitfulness and unbelief of our own hearts, and however frequently perplexed with doubts and fears anent our actual believing, yet desiring to essay, in the Lord’s strength, and in obedience to his command, to glorify God by believing his word of grace con-

tained in his covenant of promise, and in the faith of his promise, to devote ourselves to the Lord in a covenant of duty; we do, with our hands lifted up to the most high God, hereby profess, and before God, angels, and men, solemnly declare, that, through the grace of God, and according to the measure of his grace given to us, we do, with our whole hearts, take hold of the Lord Jesus Christ, as the only propitiation for our sins; his righteousness as the only foundation of our access to and acceptance with God; his covenant of free and rich promises, as our only charter for the heavenly inheritance; his word for our perfect and only rule of faith and practice; his Spirit for our alone guide, to lead us into all truth revealed in his holy word, unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit or traditions of men.

C. Sincerely and Heartily

We must dedicate ourselves to the Lord *sincerely and heartily*. God's denunciations against insincerity are very numerous and awful. Perjury, even among men, is reckoned exceedingly criminal. The people of God swear "*The Lord liveth – in truth, in righteousness, and in judgment,*" (Jer. 4:2). He who covenants with God in secret worship should say, "*I have sworn, and I will perform it, that I will keep thy righteous judgments,*" (Ps. 119:106). The character of the true Christian is, "*He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart; who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully,*" (Ps. 24:4). Unless the heart be engaged, there can be no religious worship. The soul of every duty is the soul in the duty. If the affections are sanctified, they will rise up to God in every religious service, and especially in devoting ourselves to him in a covenant of duty – a covenant which justice, gratitude, interest and especially love, demand from us. All Judah *rejoiced* at the oath; for they had sworn *with all their hearts* (2 Chr. 15:15). God's promise to his people is that "*he will give them an heart to know him, that he is the Lord; and*

they shall be my people, and I will be their God; for they shall return unto me with their whole heart,” (Jer. 24:7).

D. With Reverence and Humility

We should engage in this duty with the deepest *reverence and humility*. God, who is one of the parties in this solemn transaction, is glorious in holiness – the great God – the mighty and the terrible God. We should, therefore, sanctify the Lord of hosts himself; and let him be our fear, and let him be our dread. Self-dedication is an act of divine worship, and it were well if it were connected with penitence and confession.

Boston of Ettrick, in one of his personal covenants, begins thus:

O Lord, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, I confess, from my heart, that I am by nature a lost and undone sinner, wholly corrupted, and laid under the curse, in Adam, through the breach of the covenant of works; and have ruined myself more and more by my innumerable actual transgressions, whereby my whole life appears in mine eyes this day a heap of vanity, sin, and foolishness. I am fully convinced, and do from my heart acknowledge, that I am utterly unable to help myself, in whole or in part, out of this gulf of sin and misery into which I am plunged; and that it is beyond the reach of the whole creation to help me out of it; so that I must inevitably perish for ever, if thine own strong hand do not make help to me.

It has been a common practice with those who have formally dedicated themselves to the Lord, to connect personal fasting with this duty. This was the constant practice of Boston, and he recommends that the two exercises should always be conjoined. The duty of secret, personal fasting is one which may not be so prevalent in the present day. But the observance of it by God's people has been connected in their sweet experience with en-

largement of heart, and they have been prepared by means of it for those seasons of fellowship with their God which they have enjoyed. It is promised by God, that *“In those days, and in that time, the children of Israel shall come, they and the children of Judah together, going and weeping: they shall go and seek the Lord their God. They shall ask the way to Zion with their faces thitherward, saying, Come, and let us join ourselves to the Lord, in a perpetual covenant that shall not be forgotten,”* (Jer. 50:4-5).

The exercise of personal covenanting, if properly engaged in, not only includes the acknowledgment that we are guilty sinners, and that our hope of salvation depends on free and sovereign grace, but it proceeds on the supposition that we cannot engage in this duty in a becoming manner, except through the strength of the Holy Ghost. To engage to do certain things is not all that is included in the exercise; nor is it in our own strength that we make promise to the Lord.

Some may be disposed to think that covenanting with God is calculated to encourage a legal spirit, and that their guilt would be increased. In reply to this we would say, in the language of M’Gill, in his work on Secret Prayer, formerly referred to:

The objection is not a solid one....If good for any thing, this objection might, with equal propriety, be urged against every kind of religious exercise whatever.

In regard to the second part of the objection, the same writer has the following remark, to which we would solicit the attention of our readers:

When the exercise consists merely of a promise to perform certain duties, in this case the most important part of the work is left undone. The covenant transaction of which we speak includes the embracing of Christ, and the receiving, through him, of strength to perform duty, as well as an engagement that the duty shall be performed. The error here, therefore, lies in

covenanting being made simply a work of PROMISING, instead of being at the same time a work of RECEIVING.

E. Distinctly and Formally

This duty should be engaged in *distinctly and formally*. Covenanting is a distinct ordinance of divine worship. It is expressly enjoined in the Bible and consequently has been marked as a separate act of homage to God in the Confessions of all Evangelical Churches; for example, in the Westminster Confession, ch. xx., which is part of the principles of all the professedly Presbyterian bodies in Scotland. Personal covenanting has been practised by the people of God in all ages. The more distinctly it is done the better is it for us, in the way of reference in the hour of trial and temptation, and the more will we feel that it infers many and important obligations. It may be done by simply registering the vow in our hearts and memories. It has often been done by uttering our words before the Lord: *“One shall say, I am the Lord’s; and another shall call himself by the name of Jacob,”* (Isa. 44:5). When Jacob entered into a personal covenant with God, he took his pillow of stone and set it up for a pillar – a memorial of the solemn transaction (Gen. 28:18). It would be well should some deed be drawn up to which we may refer in after times: *“And another shall subscribe with his hand to the Lord.” “Because of all this we make a sure covenant, and WRITE it; and our princes, Levites, and priests, SEAL unto it.”* (Isa. 44:5; Neh. 9:38).

“Do it,” says Dr. Doddridge,

in express words, and it may be in many cases most expedient, as many pious divines have recommended, to do it in writing. Set your hand and seal to it, ‘that on such a day of such a month and year, and at such a place, on full consideration and serious reflection, you came to this happy resolution, that whatever others might do, you would serve the Lord.’

He then proceeds, in his well-known work, *The Rise and Progress of Religion in the Soul*, to give “an example of self-dedication, or a solemn form of renewing our covenant with God.” Mr. Orton, his biographer, informs us “that this example,” which is too long for insertion here, “was that adopted by Doddridge himself.”

F. Frequently

It is not enough that we perform this duty once, we should do it *frequently*. Implicit covenanting or self-dedication is an exercise which runs through the whole of religion. “Every act of religious worship,” says M‘Gill,

implies the principle of self-dedication – every prayer, every confession, every song of praise and thanksgiving, is the sign and pledge of solemn covenant engagement.

If we look into the records of Christian experience, we will find that men of God have frequently renewed their engagement to be the Lord’s. A distinction is observable in these records, between what may be called self-dedication as a part of daily worship and explicit formal covenanting. For example, while Dr. Doddridge had the following, amongst other rules, always lying on his desk, “Each day, remember special hints, then pray, renew my covenant with God, read the Scriptures,” – we also find him referring to certain more explicit engagements. For instance, we meet with the following entry in his journal:

Jan. 1, 1727-8. – I have been reviewing and renewing the surrender I made of myself to God this day twelve-month. I have formed my rules for devotion, self-examination, and a pious life, in a more particular manner than I had before done; and I do by this writing solemnly renew my covenant with God.

Many of God’s people have devoted their birthday to a

solemn review of their hearts and lives, and followed this up with an explicit dedication of themselves and all connected with them to the Lord. In reference to such a day, Philip Henry says:

Remember, O my soul, such a day, as a day of more than ordinary engagements entered into, and strong resolutions taken up for closer walking, and more watchfulness. O my God, undertake for me.

We give another extract from his diary:

This day fourteen years the Lord took my first-born son from me, the beginning of my strength, with a stroke. In remembrance whereof my heart melted this evening:

I begged pardon for the Jonah that raised the storm. I blessed the Lord that spared the rest. I begged mercy for every one of them, and absolutely and unreservedly devoted and dedicated them, myself, my whole self, estate, interest, life, to the will and service of that God from whom I received all.

In the memoirs of his son, Matthew Henry, we often read of personal covenanting in which he engaged. Many of those deeds or instruments in which he formally devoted himself to God bear date on New-Year's days.

Reader, would you obey the command of God and imitate those who have had good hope through grace? Would you have comfort and growing holiness? Then give yourself to the Lord. May you be enabled to surrender yourself in faith, in gratitude, and in holy obedience, to the keeping of our covenant God from whom all spiritual blessings flow! And if you thus give yourself to him, showing that his cause is yours, his honour dear to your heart, his salvation your confidence, and his law your delight, manifesting the effects of your self-dedication in the openness of your profession, in your zeal for the influence of the gospel, and in your desire to advance the improvement and the happiness of

your fellow-men; then rest assured that your Lord and Saviour has a power, a faithfulness, and a love, in which you may place a full and unfaltering confidence; and that he will most certainly perform all things for you, and keep what you commit to him until that day. If there is one who, in reading these pages, is conscious that he has never given himself to the Lord – never received him by faith, we would ask, in the language of Howe,

What! Hast thou been treating with the great God, the God of thy life, and not agreed? What, man! Did he demand of thee an unreasonable thing? ‘Only to yield myself.’ Why, that was in all the world the most reasonable thing. Wretched creature, whither now wilt thou go? What wilt thou do with thyself? Where wilt thou lay thy hated head? But if you can say, ‘Blessed be God, I gladly agreed to the proposal – he gave me grace not to deny him;’ then may it be said, This was a good day’s work, and you will have cause to bless God for this day as long as you have a day to live.



CHAPTER 6

Secret and Ejaculatory Prayer

“Then the king said unto me, For what dost thou make request? So I prayed to the God of heaven. And I said unto the king, If it please the king, and if thy servant have found favour in thy sight, that thou wouldest send me unto Judah, unto the city of my fathers’ sepulchres, that I may build it.”
Nehemiah 2:4-5

THE PRINCIPLE OF prayer is found in the relation which exists between God and man, and the revelation which God has been pleased to make of his own character and will. God is not *necessarily* the hearer of prayer. He has, however, condescended to become so through the obedience, death, and intercession of his own Son. Prayers from the fallen angels he could not listen to, for to them there is no Saviour, no Intercessor. To the sons of men this is Christ’s invitation: “Ask, and ye shall receive; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened,” (Matt. 7:7).

Prayer has generally been treated under four heads or divisions, namely, public prayer, social prayer, family prayer, and secret prayer. It is to the last of these, and more especially to a particular form of it – that is, ejaculatory prayer – to which we would, in this chapter, draw the attention of our readers.

I. SECRET OR PRIVATE DEVOTION

Every duty has its season, and it is only when performed at the time and in the manner which God has enjoined, that it can be acceptable to him and profitable to ourselves. No man liveth

to himself, and therefore he is not to confine his religion to his closet – to pray only for himself, and to make religion exclusively a personal concern. Yet no man can either live to God, or for the good of others, without secret, unseen fellowship with his Father in heaven.

A. Requires Solitude and Retirement

Retirement is necessary to the well-being, if not to the very existence, of religion. The Christian's great business is with his God, and this cannot be conducted exclusively, or even chiefly, in company with his fellow-men. Friendship deals much in secrecy, and what passes between friends is not for the crowd, but for the closet. Our Lord's command to each individual is: "*Thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father who is in secret,*" (Matt. 6:6). We are to retire to our Father, who *is in secret* – who knows the heart, and follows us wherever we go, and sees whatever we do. Secret religion is something more than a *form*, and hence the necessity for retirement. "*Through desire, a man, having separated himself, seeketh and intermeddleth with all wisdom,*" (Prov. 18:1). All God's children are in the habit of going to him privately to disburden their souls. All Christ's disciples learn on their knees.

"I would not," says Mrs. Berry, in her diary,

be hired out of my closet for a thousand worlds. I never enjoy such hours of pleasure, and such free and entire communion with God, as I have here; and I wonder that any can live prayerless, and deprive themselves of the greatest privilege allowed to them.

B. Involves Earnest Prayer

We have various duties to perform in secret. We have to search the Scriptures, which we cannot do except in secret. We

have to examine our hearts and conduct – to meditate on spiritual and divine subjects – to devote ourselves to God and his service, and to pour out our hearts to the Lord in prayer.

Prayer is a special part of the believer's secret employment. The spirit of *supplication* is inseparably connected with the spirit of *grace*. Without prayer the Christian cannot live. It is the *breathing out* of the soul to God. He esteems it a high privilege, and although it were no duty, he would naturally "*give himself*" to secret prayer. Whatever difficulty he may feel in fixing his mind on proper subjects for meditation; however much he may be at a loss in determining, on self-examination, the amount of his progress in the divine life, he can be at no loss, surely, for petitions to present at the throne of grace. If we really wish to have spiritual blessings from God, we can surely tell him so, and we should tell him first. It says little for the wisdom and reverence of those who would dissuade men from praying to God, and urge them to go and unfold their case first to a man like themselves, before they must venture to apply to the omniscient and merciful God. The following anecdote will illustrate what we mean by saying that none can be at a loss for petitions to present to God. A number of friends once met together, and before they separated they asked one of their party to pray.

"I cannot pray," was his reply.

"Try," said they.

To this his answer was, as before, "I cannot pray."

"Well," said his friends, "tell God so."

He immediately fell down upon his knees and said: "God, thou knowest that I cannot pray." The Lord took compassion on his infirmity, the Spirit opened his mouth, and his heart was poured forth in prayer.

C. Neglect May Indicate a Graceless State

We may well conclude, that he is a graceless person who is a

prayer-less person – a person who never, or only on rare occasions, goes to be with God in secret. No wonder though wickedness abounds, when so many neglect secret devotion – when, as we have every reason to believe, multitudes of those who belong to the visible Church, and are reckoned respectable in the eyes of the world, never bend a knee before God in secret.

The following solemn observation we would, in all earnestness, call upon our readers to consider:

It is impossible for a man to BE godly who neglects secret devotion; and next to impossible that he should ever BECOME so. You may as well talk of a wise fool, a wicked saint, a sober drunkard, or an honest thief, as of a prayerless Christian.

If we live in the neglect of secret prayer, we in reality neglect all the worship of God. “He that prays only when he prays with others,” says President Edwards,

would not pray at all, were it not that the eyes of others are upon him. He that will not pray where none but God seeth him, manifestly doth not pray at all out of respect to God, or regard to his all-seeing eye; and, therefore, doth in effect cast off all prayer – casts off all the worship of God. Now, what a miserable saint is he who is no worshipper of God!

However much the true Christian may value *public* ordinances – and he who is most devout in secret will value them most – he will nevertheless feel that these do not meet the extent of his case and necessities. There is not one of the children of God who has not many wants to express – some affliction or temptation over which to implore consolation, or some spiritual deliverance to acknowledge, with which his fellow men can have little sympathy, and which is too sacred to be uttered but to his God. The God of all comfort is ever ready to listen to his children, and he rejoices over them in secret to do them good.

“Believing prayer to be an instituted way of communion with

God,” says Matthew Henry in his diary, “I have comfort in it daily; my daily prayers are the sweetest of my daily comforts.”

D. Allows Great Freedom of Expression

There is also a freedom enjoyed in secret which we cannot warrantably employ in social or public prayer. It is only in our closets that we can imitate the exercise of Israel at Peniel, when he *wrestled* with the angel, and said: “*I will not let thee go except thou bless me,*” (Gen. 32:26). Here we may, *with strong crying and tears*, make supplication to him who is able to save us from the things which we fear, without running the risk of being branded as enthusiasts and hypocrites. In secret we may speak to God of our besetting sins, our peculiar circumstances and fears and afflictions, with a freedom which, to say the least, it would be imprudent to use in the presence even of our dearest and nearest on earth. Let those “stand in doubt” of themselves who have nothing to say to God, except what they could say before others, and who do not feel their hearts drawn upwards on various occasions, besides those of the “morning and evening sacrifice.”

“I think,” said Hervey,

we are extremely mistaken, and sustain a mighty loss in our most important interests, by reading so much and praying so little. Were I to enjoy Hezekiah’s grant, and have fifteen years added to my life, I would be more frequent in my applications to the throne of grace.

His importunity in prayer is illustrated by the following anecdote: His servant, sleeping in a room immediately above that of his master, one night, long after the family had retired, awoke, and hearing the groans of Mr. Hervey, who seemed to be in great distress, he went down immediately and opened the door of his master’s room. But instead of finding him in his bed, as he expected, he saw him prostrate on the floor, engaged in earnest

prayer to his God. Like Jacob, he wept and made supplication. Disturbed with the unseasonable appearance of his servant, Mr. Hervey, with his usual mildness, only said, "John, you should not have entered the room unless I had rung the bell."

E. Occurs Frequently

With respect to the frequency of secret prayer, much, it is true, will depend on those circumstances in which we are, by providence, placed. But whatever be our situation, if we have praying hearts we will find both a time and a place for the hallowed exercise. David prayed to the Lord seven times a day (Ps. 119:164). Daniel, in very peculiar circumstances, went into his chamber three times a day to make his confessions and supplications (Dan. 6:10).

All the people of God have been "men of prayer." Who has not heard of Welsh's prayers? According to his biographer, when he was a young, unmarried minister in Selkirk, he tabled himself in the house of one Mitchelhill, whose young son, to his dying day, retained both a respect to Mr. Welsh and his ministry, from the impression Mr. Welsh's behaviour made upon his apprehension, though but a child.

His custom was, when he went to bed at night, to lay a Scottish plaid above his bed-clothes, and when he went to his night prayers, to sit up and cover himself negligently therewith, and so to continue. For, from the beginning of his ministry to his death, he reckoned the day ill spent if he stayed not seven or eight hours in prayer; and this the boy would never forget even to hoary hairs.

We are informed that Meikle, the pious surgeon at Carnwath, performed the duty of secret prayer four times every day, and we find the following advice addressed to himself in his diary: "Be much with God in secret, so shall God be with thee in public."

There must be stated times. Method, proverbially styled “the soul of business,” cannot exist without such times or seasons. “No business,” says Dwight,

demands more regularity and method than prayer. There is in all men, naturally, a strong indisposition to pray. Stated seasons, therefore, are peculiarly necessary....He who prays at accidental seasons only, will first neglect, then hate, and finally desist from this duty.

There can be no seasons more natural for secret prayer than at the commencement and the close of each day. “*In the morning my prayer shall prevent thee,*” (Ps. 88:13). “*It is a good thing to show forth thy loving-kindness in the morning, and thy faithfulness every night,*” (Ps. 92:1-2). “*My voice shalt thou hear in the morning, O Lord; in the morning will I direct my prayer unto thee, and will look up.*” (Ps. 5:3).

F. Includes Praise to God

And here we would take occasion to drop a hint as to another duty which is equally incumbent and equally delightful with that of prayer, namely, *praising God* in secret.

“There is,” says M’Cheyne, “perhaps none of the means of grace which is so much neglected by believers in the present day, as that of singing the praises of God.” That psalmody is intended by God to be one of the believer’s private and personal enjoyments, is manifest from such a precept as this: “*SPEAKING TO YOURSELVES in psalms, and hymns, and spiritual songs – singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord,*” (Eph. 5:19). One of Doddridge’s rules for his secret devotion was, “Each day renew my covenant with God, read the Scriptures, and sing a psalm.” There may be peculiar situations in which it is only practicable to “*make melody in our hearts;*” and accordingly, some have followed the plan of reading a psalm in the me-

tre version along with prayer, and the reading of another portion of the Bible in their secret devotions. Mr. Meikle informs us that this was his regular practice. Joseph Alleine delighted much in singing of psalms, and he daily engaged in it alone, as well as in his family.

Prayer and praise are by no means inconsistent. Prayer should lead to praise, and is most perfect when combined with praise. The most of pious families are in the habit of joining praise with reading and prayer in their social worship, and why not follow the same rule in secret? With regard to the seasons for both, it is very proper that a time in the morning, as early as possible, and in the evening, a time not very late, should be fixed upon.

“God,” said Philip Henry, “who *is* the first and best, should *have* the first and best. Let prayer be the key of the morning and the bolt of the evening.” Another of the sayings of this godly man we would all do well to remember: “Apostasy generally begins at the closet door.”

Although no definite rule can be given for the frequency and the length of our secret devotions, yet the thriving Christian knows experimentally what is meant by “*praying always, with all prayer and supplication in the spirit*” (Eph. 6:18); “*praying without ceasing*” (1 Thess. 5:17); “*continuing instant in prayer*” (Rom. 12:12); and “*watching unto prayer*” (Eph. 6:18). All kinds of prayer are intimately connected, and we may safely conclude that domestic and public prayer will not be neglected if secret prayer, in the Holy Ghost, is regarded as a privilege as well as a duty. And we may with confidence add, that ejaculatory prayer will also naturally form no inconsiderable portion of the religious exercises of every heaven-born soul. When the Christian’s soul “*prospereth, and is in health*” (3 John 2), he will cultivate habitually a devotional temper, and almost every hour of the day he will be presenting fervent ejaculations to his heavenly Father. Without attention to this kind of prayer, our praying

morning, evening, and at noon, looks rather like a formal visit than that WALKING with God, and that continued and delightful converse with him, which it is both the happiness and the honour of God's children to enjoy.

II. EJACULATORY PRAYER

We shall now advert to the *nature*, the *obligation and necessity*, and the *advantages* of ejaculatory prayer.

A. Its Nature

By this kind of prayer is meant that which is not offered up on any stated occasion, and as the result of a previous determination; but that which is drawn from the heart by some unforeseen circumstance of perplexity, danger, temptation, or deliverance. It is a spontaneous betaking of ourselves to God in the season of need, or under a feeling of gratitude – a familiar correspondence with Him who knows our lying down and rising up, and who is acquainted with all our ways.

More generally, it may be said to originate in a habitual sense of our manifold wants. It proceeds upon a settled conviction of our utter incompetency to do or think anything in a proper manner without God. In short, ejaculatory prayer is just the expression of the continual impression of God on the mind of the individual.

1. *Same in Essence as Other Prayer*

Between this kind of prayer and others there is no *essential* difference. It is the *prayer of the heart* – it is the heart speaking, and engaged in a dialogue with the God of heaven. All prayer must, in order to be acceptable, be *heart prayer* – the prayer of desire; although, as in this kind of prayer, it is often unuttered

desire. God heareth the heart without the mouth, but never heareth the mouth acceptably without the heart.

It is, like other kinds of prayer, *the fruit of the Spirit*. As it is only the spiritually-minded that will engage in this exercise, or at least persevere in it, so it is only when our ejaculations are dictated by the Spirit – when we come to God under a sense of need or gratitude, that we can be said to pray in reality, or “*in the Holy Ghost*.”

Neither can our occasional aspirations be heard and answered, unless they are sent upwards *in the name of the Lord Jesus*. All acceptable prayer is the prayer of faith. There must be more than a mere verbal reference to Christ. There must be the look and the cry of faith directed to the great intercessor. In ejaculatory prayer, there may be words uttered, but they are emphatically winged words, and there are thoughts and desires more winged than words. Yet, in order that either the one or the other may come up with acceptance before God, there must be a presenting of them on Christ’s part, and on our part a present dependence of the heart upon him and his work. It is one of Matthew Henry’s advices, that when we send our prayers to heaven, we should be sure to direct them to the care of the Redeemer, and then they will never miscarry.

2. *Same Parts as Other Prayer*

The *various parts of prayer may be included* in our occasional ejaculations. When we engage, for example, in meditation upon the wonders of creation, providence, and grace, we will be disposed to *adore* the great name of our God in ejaculatory praise. When examining our hearts and lives, and seeing so many sins both of omission and commission, how natural for the spiritually-minded man to cry out, “*I have sinned*.” When difficulties are in our way, and we feel our manifold wants, our ejaculations will assume the form of *petitions* to Him who hath delivered, is

delivering and will deliver, and who hears all faithful applicants for grace in the time of need. And as we are daily loaded with his benefits, we will, if our hearts are right with God, exclaim, “*Bless the Lord, O my soul....Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift,*” (Ps. 103:1-2; 2 Cor. 9:15).

3. *Different Circumstances From Other Prayer*

Ejaculatory prayer differs, however, from other kinds in several external circumstances. The Christian may engage in it without separating himself from other religious duties, or even from his ordinary worldly avocations. It can be engaged in without any particular note of preparation. It is only necessary that the individual should offer up the *desires* of his heart. And consequently, this duty may be performed in a becoming manner even amidst the business and changes of the day. This exercise has its rise, as it were, *unsought* – the soul seizing the opportunities which pious vigilance may have found out.

Ejaculatory prayer is also shorter, and more comprehensive than solemn set acts of devotion. It is a word sent in haste to the King of heaven, and has been often known to speed well in the sweet experience of God’s dear, tempted and troubled children.

B. Its Obligation and Necessity

1. *Commanded in Scripture*

As to the *obligation and necessity* of this part of secret religion, it may be observed, that the spirit, if not the very letter, of many exhortations in Scripture to prayer in general, implies a command to engage in this kind of prayer in particular. The exhortations to pray without ceasing (1 Thess. 5:17), and to pray with all prayer and supplication (Eph. 6:18), if they imply an obligation to engage in prayer at all, must bind us to the observance of this kind of prayer.

2. *Many Examples in Scripture*

Besides these direct precepts, we have many examples of this exercise in the practice of those saints whose history is recorded in the Bible. When the Israelites were afraid, as they drew near to the Red Sea, and were chiding Moses, the servant of the Lord, because he had carried them forth out of Egypt, we know that his heart was earnestly engaged in prayer to God. We learn this from Jehovah's address to him: "*Wherefore criest thou unto me? Speak to the people of Israel that they go forward,*" (Exod. 14:15). In the peculiar circumstances in which he was placed, Moses could not have commanded either leisure or retirement for a formal secret prayer; but his soul darted like an arrow to heaven, and the voice of his spirit reached the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth.

While Eliezer, the servant of Abraham, was standing at the well, without the city of Nahor, with his master's camels, he was engaged in lifting an ejaculatory prayer to heaven for success in the business on which he had been sent: "*And he said, O Lord God of my master Abraham, I pray thee send me good speed this day, and show kindness unto my master Abraham,*" (Gen. 24:12). The Lord made his journey prosperous, and we find him saying, on reflecting on his prayer and the gracious answer he received: "*Blessed be the Lord God of my master Abraham, who hath not left destitute my master of his mercy and his truth: I being in the way, the Lord led me to the house of my master's brethren,*" (Gen. 24:27).

Jacob, when he was blessing his children before his death, broke out into the following ejaculation: "*I have waited for thy salvation, O Lord,*" (Gen. 49:18). Here the dying patriarch finds ease, as it were, and gets a breathing amid the bodily fatigue he was undergoing in pronouncing, by inspiration, the prophetic blessing on his offspring. And, whether we regard the exclamation as referring to the Shepherd and Stone of Israel, or to the redemption which he was to purchase for his people in the latter

days, and for the full possession of which Israel now longed, it shows the natural tendency of a renewed heart to throw itself upward and homeward in holy meditation and prayer.

Again: Nehemiah, while standing before the Persian monarch, prayed to the God of heaven (Neh. 2:4). In his circumstances it is highly probable that he would present some such short and fervent petition as that which he elsewhere records: "Remember me, O my God, for good." It is worthy of remark, here, that in the 1st chapter of the book which bears his name, we are told that he fasted and prayed certain days. We have also, in the same chapter, the record of a long, direct, and solemn prayer which he presented on that occasion, showing us that those who are conscientious in the observance of the one kind of prayer, will not habitually neglect the other.

Many other instances might be referred to as confirming the necessity and obligation for ejaculatory prayer. For example, Elisha, when in Dothan, and surrounded by his enemies, prayed thus for his servant, who was greatly afraid: "*Lord, open his eyes.*" The prayer was answered, for the Lord "*opened the eyes of the young man, and he saw; and, behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha,*" (2 Kings 6:17). Some, at least, of the psalms of David must be classed amongst the sudden ejaculations of his mind, when in company, or encompassed by his enemies; such as the 54th and 142nd. The 34th, in particular, has for its title: "*A Psalm of David when he changed his behaviour before Abimelech.*" Our Lord Jesus Christ also, who continued whole nights in prayer, was often engaged in ejaculatory prayer; as when he said, at the grave of Lazarus, "*Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me*" (John 11:41); which evidently supposes that he had been, amidst the crowd of spectators, presenting a heart-supplication to his God and Father. The Great Pattern has also hallowed this exercise to all posterity by his fervent ejaculation on the cross, "*Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do,*" (Luke 23:34).

3. *Our Dependence Upon God*

In addition to these commands and examples, our *continued dependence* on, and our relations to God, may be mentioned as obvious reasons for conversing with him by short and frequent ejaculations. We are commanded to acknowledge God in all our ways, and he hath promised to direct our steps (Prov. 3:6). In God we live, and move, and have our being (Acts 17:28); we are as dependent upon his providence as we are upon his grace, and therefore it is highly reasonable, as well as profitable, to be often lifting up our souls to him.

The genuine Christian will not trust himself far from the throne of grace. The *spirit* of prayer will be like a part of himself, and will follow him everywhere, and into everything. We should undertake nothing without God, or without sending a cry to him for direction and support. It may, indeed, be said that the believer will not forget this in his regular secret devotions. But it should be remembered that in these we cannot anticipate the occurrences of a moment in the future, far less of a day.

We have a remarkable instance of this in a portion of the history of David. He had solemnly set apart a certain time to address God concerning the conspiracy of his son Absalom. But the unexpected accession of Ahithophel to the ranks of his enemies led him to cry in haste to his God, that he would either defeat the counsel of this man, or turn it to foolishness (2 Sam. 15:31).

4. *Our Carnal Hearts*

Our hearts are exceedingly carnal, and we require such an exercise as this to keep up, instrumentally, any degree of spirituality in them. David found that praying seven times a day was all too little to preserve a devotional temper. And we have reason to believe that these would be formal, regular applications to the throne of grace, in addition to his frequent ejaculations in the

intervals. That man's state is to be suspected who knows little or nothing of going to God from a feeling of need, if not with a desire and hope for sweet fellowship, with somewhat of the spontaneity with which he recurs to the food which supports his body. The saints of God have all felt the need of this sweet employment, and have been diligent in its performance.

In that list of rules which Doddridge drew up for himself, to which we have already referred, we have this: "Grace, dependence upon it to be earnestly sought, to awaken holy affections, through Christ, by the Spirit; frequent ejaculations." On New Year's day, 1726-7, we find among his resolutions the following sentence:

I will labour after greater ardour in devotion, and use all proper means to attain it; especially preparing my heart, praying for the Spirit, keeping up ejaculatory prayer, and using the assistance of Scripture.

"Besides secret, solemn prayer, I would accustom myself," said Hervey,

to short, but devout and fervent, ejaculations all the day long, that I may fulfil the divine command of praying always – praying without ceasing – watching unto prayer; in this way deriving continued fresh supplies of wisdom and strength from the all-sufficient and inexhaustible, though overflowing, source; and blessed, for ever blessed be God, this may be done in the midst of business, without hindering it; in the midst of a journey, without retarding it; and in the midst of company, without alarming it.

"I do not refer," he again says,

to the ceremony of the knee, but to the devotion of the heart, which neglects not any business, but mingles prayer with all; which, in every place, looks unto the Lord, and on every occasion lifts up an indigent, longing soul for the supplies of his

grace. This is the prayer which brings down somewhat of heaven into the heart, in which I myself would desire to abound, and would earnestly recommend to all my friends.

5. *Many Opportunities*

The obligation to the performance of the duty of which we are speaking, is strengthened from the consideration that *opportunities* for it can never be wanting. God, the HEARER of prayer, is always near; and what is passing within us and around us, will give numberless errands to his throne. There is no difficulty, at least outwardly, in this exercise – a praying frame, or spiritual-mindedness, naturally leading to engage in it. We do not require to interrupt our secular employments in order to present occasional and ejaculatory supplications. To indulge in this kind of prayer is one of the best means of “*abiding with God*” in our callings. To keep the eye turned to heaven will lighten our labour, and lead us to do civil things in a religious spirit.

We ought to beware of thinking that a holy walking with God cannot consist with worldly business. Religion makes us spiritual in common actions; and there is not a single action in our life in which we may not labour to make it a religious act, by looking to God’s word, and regarding God’s glory in the performance. We are informed that Brown of Haddington was continually breaking forth, amid the ordinary details of life, in ejaculations of prayer and thanksgiving. It would be for the temporal and eternal advantage of servants, and the families in which they are placed, should the example we are now to mention be imitated in its spirit:

A number of persons were assembled for religious conversation, and a question was started as to the meaning of that command, “Pray without ceasing.” They all acknowledged that it was difficult to understand the passage. A female servant, who

had overheard the conversation, said it was one of the easiest texts in the Bible.

“Let us know how you understand it,” said they. “Can you pray all the time?”

“O yes,” said she.

“What!” said they, “when you have so many things to do?”

“Why, the more I have to do the more I can pray,” was her reply.

“Indeed; well, Mary, do let us know how it is; for most people think otherwise.”

“Well,” said the girl, “when I first open my eyes in the morning, I pray, Lord, open the eyes of my understanding; and while I am dressing, I pray that I may be clothed with the robe of righteousness; and when I have washed me, I ask for the washing of regeneration; and as I begin work, I pray that I may have strength equal to my day; when I begin to kindle up the fire, I pray that God’s work may revive in my soul; and as I sweep out the house, I pray that my heart may be cleansed from all its impurities; and while preparing and partaking of breakfast, I desire to be fed with the hidden manna, and the sincere milk of the word; and as I am busy with the little children, I look up to God as my Father, and pray for the spirit of adoption, that I may be his child, and so on all day. Everything I do furnishes me with a thought for prayer.”

C. Its Advantages

The *advantages* of prayer, in general, are very great. We may appeal to the experience of God’s people in every age. Prayer, like faith, has, as a means, done many wonders. It is not only a duty, therefore, to draw near to God, it is also *good for us* so to do. Ejaculatory prayer, while it participates in the advantages arising from other kinds of prayer, has, in addition to these, sev-

eral special advantages which either more or less particularly result from, and accompany this spiritual and delightful exercise.

1. *Helps Maintain a Spiritual Frame*

We have already seen that our carnality forms a strong reason why we should “*watch unto prayer*,” and it may now be added that ejaculatory prayer has a tendency to *keep the mind fixed, and in a holy, spiritual frame*. The truth is, that spiritual-mindedness and this kind of prayer have a decidedly reciprocal influence upon one another. There can be no real happiness without attention to spiritual and eternal realities; and as it is spirituality of mind that leads to this, so it is, in a great measure, owing to frequent communion with God by heart-ejaculations, that this attention is kept up, and supplies of grace received from the great Fountain of holiness and felicity.

Who, then, that professes to be a member of Christ’s body, would not wish to be more and more a present “*partaker of the glory to be revealed?*” (1 Pet. 5:1). Who would not desire to be conformed to the image of Him who lived on earth a life of constant fellowship with his heavenly Father? All the children of God have anxiously striven to keep up a spiritual frame of mind, and have mourned on account of their deadness and carnality. To give only one example, we may mention the deep concern for growth in grace manifested by Lady Glenorchy, in the following extract from her diary, in which she bewails her negligence in regard to that kind of prayer of which we are treating:

“I sought,” says she,

to know the reasons of past deadness and backslidings, and they appear to be the following: Not persevering in meditation and self-examination; not observing opportunities given through the day for prayer; and, when in company, not using ejaculatory prayer, &c.

2. *Helps Prevent Sin*

Spiritual ejaculations to God are most excellent means for *preventing the commission of iniquity*. The unadvised word, the sudden ebullition of passion, the sensual and wicked thought, may have been often prevented by a sudden knock at the gate of heaven. Had David been drawing near to his God, we have no reason to think that he would have pronounced such a hasty sentence on Nabal and his household, nor been chargeable with such glaring offences in the case of Uriah the Hittite. How beneficial would the adoption of Joseph's exclamation be to many professors, both young and old, when exposed to temptation: "*How, then, can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?*" (Gen. 39:9). "I love prayer," said Matthew Henry; "it is that which buckles on the Christian's armour."

Amid the business and bustle, the sin and temptation, of a present evil world, it is good for the heir of glory to ascend, by fervent ejaculations, to the calmness and gladness which dwell around the hill of holiness – the mountain of communion. Like those adventurous travellers, when ranging over the summits of the lofty mountains, they will often breathe a sweet atmosphere, and gaze on a shining sky, while the world beneath is wrapped in clouds, and thunder-bolts burst beneath their feet. By having "*our conversation in heaven*," in the frequent observance of this duty, our hatred to all sin will be increased and deepened; our conscience will be kept the more tender, and our perception of the vileness of sin and the beauty of holiness will be rendered clearer and clearer.

3. *Helps Other Religious Duties*

This exercise has often been very beneficial to the Christian in the *performance of other religious duties*. Wandering thoughts, in the various acts of divine worship, are frequent subjects of complaint by those who, in any measure, "*care for the things of*

the Lord, that they may be holy both in body and spirit;" (1 Cor. 7:34) and, therefore, they will be ready to adopt any proper means for attaining fixedness of heart. In closet prayer, when we are ready to be carried away to vain objects, or straitened in our desires and expressions, it is of great importance to throw in an ejaculation to the Hearer of prayer for more spirituality and enlargement. In this case it has also been found highly beneficial to make our deadness and wandering the direct and immediate subject of our supplications.

"Let me," says Doddridge, "be often lifting up my heart to God in the intervals of secret worship, repeating those petitions which are of the greatest importance, and a surrender of myself to his service."

These expresses to the court above, when we are in the sanctuary, either for the servants of the most high God who show unto us the way of salvation, or for ourselves and others, who are to take heed how we hear, will be found very valuable, as a means of leading to mix faith with the hearing of the word, and thus rendering it profitable. Either in reading or hearing the word of God, how becoming to go to him with these short prayers: "Open mine eyes, fix my heart, and strengthen my memory."

We are informed that Phillip Henry, when he was engaged in hearing the word, used to send up such short ejaculations as those we have now mentioned. It is also recorded of Professor Moncrieff of Kilfargie, that when prevented by company from enjoying his hour of retirement at noon, he betook himself to ejaculatory prayer.

"He would, for an instant," says a friend of his,

take a step or two across the room, or retire for a brief space to the window, as if looking out, to take an opportunity, without any one observing him, of pouring out, in the fulness of his soul, the tender overflowings of his love to his Father in heaven.

It was his habit, also, in the pulpit, and in the professorial chair, to pause a few moments in the midst of his discourse, while his hearers were hanging on his eloquent and pious lips, in order to lift up his soul to God for wisdom and counsel. "Such instances," says his biographer, "are, alas! very rare in these *superficial times*."

We should suppose that there are few, if any of God's people, who have not found great benefit from the exercise under consideration, when they have been *at the communion table*. Such Scripture prayers as the following have often been presented and answered while commemorating the Saviour's dying love: "*Quicken thou me, according to thy word*," (Ps. 119:25); "*Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?*" (Acts 9:6); "*We would see Jesus*," (John 12:21); "*Awake, O north wind; and come thou south: blow upon my garden, that the spices thereof may flow out. Let my Beloved come into his garden, and eat his pleasant fruits*," (Song 4:6) Some, in answer to such aspirations, have heard Christ replying: "*I am come into my garden, my sister, my spouse: I have gathered my myrrh with my spice; I have eaten my honeycomb with my honey; I have drunk my wine with my milk. Eat, O friends; drink, yea, drink abundantly, O beloved*," (Song 5:1). They have sometimes, also, had occasion to say: "*Or ever I was aware, my soul made me like the chariots of Amminadib*," (Song 6:12) – that is, of a willing people.

How appropriate an occasion, again, for this exercise, is the administration of *the other seal* of God's covenant! How becoming in the congregation, who are not mere spectators in such a case, to cast the eye of faith and the heart of prayer up to him who alone can give efficacy to his own institutions – seeking that they themselves, as well as others, may be baptized with the Holy Ghost, and with fire; and be led to remember that the vows of God are upon them. And how solemn and important an occasion must it be to believing parents! With their offspring in their arms, we may naturally expect that their hearts would be plead-

ing with Abraham: “*O that Ishmael might live before thee,*” (Gen 17:18); or like Israel who said: “*God, before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac did walk, the God which fed me all my life long unto this day, the Angel which redeemed me from all evil, bless the lads,*” (Gen. 48:15-16).

None can engage to any advantage, or with any prospect of success, in the exercises of Bible-reading, heart-searching, and devout meditation, without interlacing them with many ejaculations to God for his grace and Spirit. In this way our communion with our God in Christ in every ordinance will be the more readily maintained, and the more richly enjoyed – our minds will be kept in a calm, sweet frame in all duties, whether secular or sacred.

4. *Helps When Unexpected Duties Arise*

This kind of prayer is very profitable when we may have some very important yet *unexpected duty to perform*. Many are the emergencies of the present life, and many are the unexpected demands upon our time, thoughts, and exertions, for which we are but ill prepared, if we do not carry about with us a heavenly, praying disposition, and if we are not familiar with heart outgoings to him who, on a throne of grace, and through the great High Priest, is ever ready to attend to the calls of his children. These calls can never be unexpected to him, for he knows the end from the beginning, takes the number of our wanderings, and bottles our tears.

“If I had no anxieties,” said Melancthon,

I should lose a powerful incentive to prayer; but when the cares of life impel to devotion, the best means of consolation, a religious mind cannot do without them. Thus trouble compels me to prayer, and prayer drives away trouble.”

When unlooked-for emergencies arise, aid is at hand; and that God who said “*that men ought always to pray, and not to faint,*”

(Luke 18:1) hath abounded towards us in all wisdom and prudence, by appointing this duty, which gives a completeness to the believer's privileges.

"When I would have any great things to be accomplished," said Dr. Preston, "my best policy is to work by an engine which the world sees nothing of." The same individual, when any unexpected occurrence happened, or when he heard tidings of a sorrowful or joyous nature, usually said: "Let us turn it into prayer." God will keep him in perfect peace whose mind is staid on him, trusting in him (Isa. 26:3). "Prayer is the *peace of our spirit*," says Jeremy Taylor, "the stillness of our thoughts, the evenness of recollection, the seat of meditation, *the rest of our cares, and the calm of our tempest.*"

5. *Helps During Times of Trial and Distress*

A time of *trial and distress* is a time when great comfort may be derived from those "*groanings which cannot be uttered*," (Rom. 8:26). It has often been said by Christians on their sick-beds and death-beds, that the short supplicatory portions of the Bible were particularly sweet and suitable to their souls. "*I am oppressed, Lord; undertake for me*," (Isa 38:14). "*Lord, be merciful to me, a sinner*," (Luke 18:13). "*Remember me, and visit me*," (Ps. 106:4). "*Lord Jesus, receive my spirit*," (Acts 7:59). "*Into thine hand I commit my spirit: thou hast redeemed me, O Lord God of truth*," (Ps. 31:5). The promises of the word, the plain promises, are, in these solemn circumstances, often exceedingly pleasant to the dying saint, and they have often been repeated, in the form of ejaculations in the very article of death.

Dr. Watts, on his death-bed observed that he remembered an aged minister used to say, that the most learned and knowing Christians, when they come to die, have only the same plain promises of the Gospel for their support as the common and unlearned; "And so," said he,

I find it. They are the plain promises of the Gospel which are my support; and I bless God they are plain promises, which do not require much labour or pains to understand them; for I can do nothing new but look into my Bible for some promise to support me, and live upon that.

By short and fervent petitions the soul holds fellowship with the God of salvation. For prayer in general, and ejaculatory prayer in particular, has not only an elevating, expanding, and comforting influence on the mind, or an indirect influence, but is also the instrument of direct communion with God, and in this way many have had cause to say, *“Verily, God hath heard me; he hath attended to the voice of my prayer. Blessed be God, who hath not turned away my prayer nor his mercy from me.”* (Ps. 66:19-20)

On one occasion, Henry Martyn exclaimed,

How sweet is prayer to my soul at this time! I seem as if I could never be tired, not only of spiritual joys, but of spiritual employments, since these are now the same.

In all circumstances, we will find advantage from ejaculatory prayer. It may be engaged in at any time, and in any place, and according to a homely but expressive figure, “A golden thread of heart-prayer ought to run through the whole web of a good man’s life.” This command is *not grievous*. On the contrary, obedience to it is very pleasant – being, if we may be allowed the expression, an instinct of the new nature. We find the pious Dr. Payson marking the following circumstance in his journal, with great thankfulness and delight: “I rode out this morning, and found much sweetness in lifting up my heart to God in fervent ejaculations.”

D. Exhortations Concerning This Duty

Reader, if God had bid thee do some great thing, wouldst

thou not have done it? Why shouldst thou, then, not delight to obey the kind and condescending call: "See that thou call upon me." When he says, "*Seek ye my face;*" why should we not reply, with our whole hearts, "*Thy face, Lord, will we seek continually;*" (Ps. 27:8).

1. It Must Be Grounded in Love to God

This duty may not make such a fair show as some others. It may have more self-denial in it. But this will only prove that it is an evidence of greater love to God and godliness, for their own sakes. Indeed, if it is not the hypocrite's mantle we have put on – if our ejaculations are not similar to the careless and profane language of many, when they irreverently exclaim, "Lord, bless us," – "Lord, have mercy upon us," – "Lord, preserve us," – then we cannot but be in love with this duty, regarding it as an unspeakable privilege. In love with it we cannot be, however, unless we are in love with the ever-living and glorious Intercessor within the veil. It is emphatically the fruit of love, and is more like a free-will offering than some other services.

Let all our readers examine themselves as to the bent of their minds in regard to this matter – of the heaven-bestowed naturalness of their forth-goings to Him whose they are, and with whom they expect to walk forever in eternal fellowship. In order to prove the genuineness of our feelings in this case, we should consider, that although we may sometimes be *driven* to this exercise by circumstances in providence, we will, if our hearts are in it, be still more frequently *drawn* to it by affection. "I was taught to pray," said Meikle, "and prayed when I knew not what prayer was; but now, I would not give over prayer for the universe."

2. Beware of Irreverence

While all should guard against the sinful ejaculations and minced oaths of many, even of those who are called Christians,

they should likewise beware of that familiarity in their addresses to the great God which bespeaks too little reverence for his character and glory. His name of old was – “*THE FEAR of Isaac*,” (Gen. 31:42); and the divine caution is, “*He is thy LORD, and worship thou him*,” (Ps. 45:11). God is JEALOUS, and among the first, if not the very first time, that his jealousy is mentioned in the Bible, it is in connection with the manner in which we ought to worship him. Adoration is a duty as well as supplication, and confession as well as thanksgiving. Although, therefore, we may be often called upon to pray in haste, we are, nevertheless, to take great care lest we go without due solemnity into the presence of the most high God, possessor of heaven and earth.

3. *It Must Not Replace Other Kinds of Prayer*

Let none put ejaculatory prayer in the place of the other kinds of prayer to God. No duty can be acceptable to him, which appears before him stained with the murder of another duty. To be plain, let none content themselves with a wish and a word after they have retired for the night, to the neglect of the Saviour’s command, “*Enter into thy closet*,” (Matt. 6:6). It should not be forgotten that ejaculatory prayer is only the hand-maid to those more solemn and stated seasons of devotion which are the scenes of the sweetest fellowship with God, and of the strongest emotions of a spiritual kind, which were ever enjoyed or felt on this side eternity.

Let all engage frequently in this and in the other kinds of prayer. It is a bad sign when men seldom call upon God. It is said of the hypocrite, that he will not always call upon God. Not to have our conversation in heaven, prayerfully and by meditation, shows that we are either altogether dead to divine things, or in a cold, distant, drowsy frame of mind. The one is an extremely dangerous state; the other is very unworthy of the Christian’s prospects. To live in the spirit of prayer is to breathe the

pure air of heaven, and to be ready for a sudden call to enter into the joy of our Lord. We should, then, be frequent in our supplications in private and in public – in the closet, in the family, and in the sanctuary; – in the lonely walk, when silent nature calls us to hold fellowship with him who made earth and heaven, the sea and the dry land; – and among the busy throng, where so many are panting after earthly gains, then let the soul breathe forth her longings after a higher heritage – a perfect world, where even prayer shall be no longer needed, but where every heaven-born wish shall be fully anticipated, and fully realized.

When one who holds communion with the skies,
Has fill'd his urn where these pure waters rise,
And once more mingles with us meaner things,
'Tis e'en as if an angel shook his wings;
Immortal fragrance fills the circuit wide,
That tells us whence his treasures are supplied.

Reader, in conclusion, we would ask you these questions, Are you attending to the duties which we have been endeavouring to illustrate? You have seen, by the references we have made to the sentiments and experience of God's children in all ages, ranks, and conditions, that they have, one and all, set a high value upon the exercises of secret religion – that they have always enjoyed themselves best, and been best fitted for the duties and the trials of life, when they have glorified and enjoyed God most in their secret communion with him. Are you diligent in digging into the precious mine of revelation – delighting in meditation on divine things – daily making it a matter of duty, and finding it very profitable, to examine your heart and conduct? Have you received God in Christ as your portion and devoted yourself unreservedly and perpetually to him and his service? Are you attending to the duty of prayer?

Consider well what your answer is to be. It will avail you nothing to deceive men – to deceive yourself – God you cannot

deceive. At his judgment-seat you are soon to appear. Where will be your excuses then? Want of time – the encroachments of pleasure, and the business and cares of this mortal life – a dread of seeing your true state – a vague doubt as to the reality and necessity of heart-religion: will these things be pleaded on that eventful day? Oh, no! The eye of your Judge, like the lightning before the thunder-peel, will flash very different convictions on your soul. Is it not right, then, to inquire, to examine, and to decide? Time is short, and very uncertain. You dwell in a tabernacle of *clay*, whose *foundation* is in the dust. Many who lived without prayer, without thought, without Christ, and died as they lived, can now tell that it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

If you are a Christian indeed, and often in your closet, and your heart often in heaven, when the world knoweth it not – are diligent in those duties on which we have been addressing you; then, go on, making mention of the Saviour's righteousness, and you shall assuredly find that it is no vain and unprofitable exercise, thus to hold fellowship with God in Christ.



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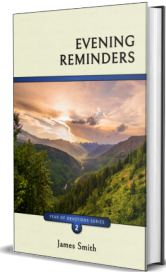
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