A TREATISE

CONCERNING

RELIGIOUS AFFECTIONS.

IN THREE PARTS.

BY

JONATHAN EDWARDS

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Edwards’ archaic use of “discoveries” is modernized as “revelations.”

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Editor’s Comments

Jonathan Edwards was a brilliant man, a Renaissance man. His interests involved every aspect of the human condition, and every area of science. But his primary passion was to speak the truth of God, and to have that truth not only govern his own life, but the life of the church. The church is the Body of Christ, living in this world; it testifies to what Christ has done, and what he continues to do as Savior, Redeemer, Intercessor, and King. He is at work in every believer by his Spirit, both individually, and corporately. And so Edwards prayed ardently for a revival in America, because he heard magnificent things had happened during the revivals in England. And yet, when the Great Awakening arrived on American shores, something foreign was afoot. The externals may have been present, but the corresponding change of heart, grounded in Scriptural truth, was sadly lacking. Sincere love and genuine belief was being mimicked; false conversions were making a mockery of the true faith, and of faithful believers. It seemed to Edwards that the devil was at work in some of this, despite all the outward trimmings of religion.

But it wasn’t just the mimicking that troubled him. It was also the disdain of many in the church for any spiritual experience, as if nothing could be experienced of God beyond the written text of Scripture. Such a cold, dry, intellectual understanding was as reprehensible to Edwards, as this other boisterous and ungrounded celebration of things religious. If the Gospel truth and the love of God’s inherent loveliness and holiness, are the initial and primary stimuli of a strong emotional response in the hearts of believers, then, says Edwards, such a lively and gracious affection must not be dismissed or denigrated.

So, in the tradition of Joseph Alleine’s work, Alarm to the Unconverted, and Thomas Shepard’s work, Parable of the Ten Virgins, Edwards challenged the church to take stock of itself, of its beliefs and practices, individually and corporately. Rather than merely castigate what he perceived as false professions of faith in Christ, or unfounded assessments of them, this treatise provides tests for truly gracious affections and religious experiences. Edwards exhorts believers to examine themselves, and to judge what they have placed their faith in. He weighs the subtle differences between true and false professions in the scales of God’s word. All believers would do well to examine their faith and practice against the biblical standards he lays out here.

Two source texts were used for this modernized version. Previous editors removed some archaic words and syntax. But this present edition is probably closer to a paraphrase. Words have been substituted and added, parallelism has been employed, run-on sentences have been broken into several sentences for easier reading, and pronouns with no reference are now referenced. Unnecessary and duplicative words that obscured the meaning and impact of Edwards’ observations have been removed. The syntax has been simplified by removing parenthetical statements, and rearranging misplaced clauses. However, his entire treatise is here. Hopefully, what is missing will not be missed. You are, of course, welcome to read his original treatise if a paraphrase seems somehow irreverent. I pray that no substantive errors in this edition belie my intent to remain faithful to the original work. I also pray that you find it useful to draw you nearer to Christ, to correct your walk, and to affirm your faith. This work is in the public domain (you may copy it freely); but you may not sell, modify, or claim this modernization as your own. I reserve those and all other rights to myself.

William H. Gross

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INTRODUCTION.

THERE is no question of greater importance to mankind, or more concerns every individual person, that is to be well-resolved than this: What are the distinguishing qualifications of those who are in favor with God and entitled to his eternal rewards? Or this question, which comes to the same thing: What is the nature of true religion? And what are the distinguishing marks of that virtue and holiness which are acceptable in the sight of God? But though it is of such importance, and though we have clear and abundant light in the word of God to direct us in this matter, yet there is no one point in which professing Christians differ more from one another. It would be endless to calculate the variety of opinions on this point, opinions that divide the Christian world. This makes manifest the truth of that declaration of our Savior, “Narrow is the gate and difficult is the way that leads to life, and there are few who find it.” Mat 7:14

The consideration of these things has long engaged me to attend to this matter with the utmost diligence and care, and with the utmost exacting search and inquiry that I have been capable of. It is a subject on which my mind has been particularly intent since I first entered the study of divinity. But as to the success of my inquiries, it must be left to the judgment of the reader of the following treatise.

I am aware that it is much more difficult to impartially judge the subject of this discourse in the midst of the dust and smoke — this land now being in such a state of controversy about things of this nature. Just as it is more difficult to write about it impartially, so it is more difficult to read about it impartially. Many will probably be hurt in their spirits to find that so much of what pertains to religious affection is condemned here. And perhaps indignation and contempt will be induced in others by finding that so much of it is justified and approved here. And it may be that some will be ready to charge me with inconsistency in approving some things so much, and condemning others so much. I find this has always been objected to by some, ever since the beginning of our recent controversies about religion. It is a hard thing to be a hearty zealous friend of what has been good and glorious in the recent extraordinary appearances,¹ and to greatly rejoice in it; and at the same time to see the evil and pernicious tendency of what has been bad, and to earnestly oppose it. Yet I am humbly but fully persuaded that we shall never be in the way of truth, or go on in a way that is acceptable to God, and tends to advance Christ’s kingdom, till we do so. There is indeed something very mysterious in it, that so much good and so much bad should be mixed together in the church of God. Because it is a mysterious thing, what has puzzled and amazed many a good Christian is that what is so divine and precious (such as the saving grace of God, and the new and divine nature) should dwell in the same heart with so much corruption, hypocrisy, and iniquity in a particular saint. Yet neither of these is more mysterious than real. And neither of them is a new or rare thing. It is not a new thing that so much false religion prevails at a time when there is a great reviving of true religion, or that at such a time multitudes of hypocrites spring up among true saints. It was so in that great reformation and revival of religion that arose in Josiah’s time, as appears by Jer. 3:10² and 4:3-4;³ and also by the great apostasy that was in the land so soon after his reign. It was so in that

¹ He is speaking of the emotionality of Revivalism in Europe that began to appear in America circa 1730, Victor Shepherd writes, “Affection is a felt response to an object called forth by an understanding of the nature of the object. Plainly, where there’s no understanding there can be no affection, regardless of how much emotion is present.” Affections differ from passions in that they do not overpower and captivate the will. “Whereas passion enslaves the will, affection is an exercise of the will.” (see the Appendix) – An affection is not only what affects us, but what we willfully have an affection for; it holds our heart and directs our steps, for better or worse. Edwards’ goal is to help us rightly distinguish spiritual affections from natural affections. – WHG.

² Jer 3:10, “And yet for all this her treacherous sister Judah has not turned to Me with her whole heart, but in pretense,” says the LORD.

³ Jer 4:3-4 For thus says the LORD to the men of Judah and Jerusalem: "Break up your fallow ground, And do not sow among thorns. 4 Circumcise yourselves to the LORD, And take away the foreskins of your hearts, You men of
great outpouring of the Spirit on the Jews in the days of John the Baptist. This appears from the
great apostasy of that people so soon after a widespread awakening, and after the temporary
religious comforts and joys of so many: John 5:35, “You were willing for a season to rejoice in
his light.” It was so in those great commotions among the multitude occasioned by the preaching
of Jesus Christ. Many were called, but few were chosen. The multitude were roused and affected
by his preaching, and at one time or other many appeared mightily engaged; they were full of
adoration for Christ and elevated with joy. But few were true disciples who stood the shock of
the great trials that came afterwards, and who endured to the end. Many were like the stony
ground, or thorny ground; and comparatively few were like the good ground. Of the whole heap
that was gathered, a great part of it was chaff that the wind afterwards drove away; and the heap
of wheat that was left was comparatively small. This is made abundantly apparent by the history
of the New Testament. This is how it was in that great outpouring of the Spirit in the apostles’
days, as it appears in Matt. 24:10-13, Gal. 3:1 and 4:11, 15; Phil. 2:21 and 3:18-19, and in the two
epistles to the Corinthians, and in many other parts of the New Testament. And so it was in the
great reformation from Popery.4 In times of the great reviving of religion, it occasionally was the
same in the visible church of God as it is with fruit trees in the spring: a multitude of blossoms
all appear fair and beautiful, and there is a promising appearance of young fruits; but many of
them do not continue to grow; they soon fall off and never come to maturity.

I suppose it will always be so; for in this world there will never be entire purity, either in
particular saints being perfectly free from corruption, or in the church of God first avoiding a
mixture of hypocrites with saints, or secondly, escaping the counterfeit religion and false
appearances of grace that are mixed with true religion and real holiness. Yet it is evident that
there will come a time of much greater purity in the church of God than there has been in ages
past. It is made plain by many texts of Scripture.5 One great reason for it will be that, at that
time, God will give much greater light to his people to distinguish between true religion and its
counterfeits. Mal. 3:3, “And he shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver: and he shall purify
the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, so that they may offer to the Lord an offering in
righteousness.” In ver. 18, there is a continuation of the prophecy of the same happy times.
“Then you shall return, and discern between the righteous and the wicked, between the one who
serves God, and the one who does not.”

Up until now, the devil has had his greatest advantage against the cause and kingdom of Christ,
when the mixture of counterfeit and true religion has not been discerned and distinguished. It is
principally by this means that he has prevailed against all revivals of religion that have been seen
since the first founding of the Christian church. By this, he hurt the cause of Christianity in and
after the apostolic age – much more than by all the persecutions of both Jews and Heathens.
The apostles in all their epistles show themselves much more concerned with the former
mischief of a mixture of corruption in the saint, than with the latter mixture of counterfeit
religion in the church. By this latter mischief, Satan prevailed against the reformation begun by
Luther, Zwinglius, et al. By this he was able to put a stop to its progress, and bring it into
disgrace; it was ten times more successful than all those bloody, cruel, and previously unheard
of persecutions of the church of Rome. By this, principally, he prevailed against the revivals of
religion that arose in our nation since the reformation. By this he prevailed against New England
to quench the love and to spoil the joy of her espousals, about a hundred years ago. And I think I
have had opportunity enough to plainly see that, by this, the devil has prevailed against the late
great revival of religion in New England that was so happy and promising in its beginning. By

Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem, Lest My fury come forth like fire, And burn so that no one can quench it,
Because of the evil of your doings.”

4 The Protestant Reformation of the 1500’s under Luther, Calvin, and Zwingli. – WHG
5 Isa. 52:1; Ezek. 44:6-7; Joel 3:17; Zech. 14:21; Psa. 69:32, 35, 36; Isa. 35:8, 10; chap. 4:3-4; Ezek. 20:38; Psa. 37:9-
10, 21, 29.
Introduction

this, Satan has most evidently had the main advantage against us; by this he has foiled us. It is by this means that the daughter of Zion in this land now lies on the ground in such piteous circumstances, as we now behold her. Her garments are rent, her face disfigured, her nakedness exposed, her limbs broken, and she is weltering in the blood of her own wounds. In no way is she able to arise, and this was done so quickly after her late great joys and hopes. Lam. 1:17, “Zion spreads forth her hands, and there is none to comfort her; the Lord has commanded concerning Jacob that his adversaries shall surround him: Jerusalem is like a menstruous woman among them.” I have seen the devil prevail the same way against two great revivals of religion in this country. Satan goes on with mankind as he began with them. He prevailed against our first parents and threw them out of paradise. He suddenly brought all their happiness and glory to an end by appearing to be a friend to their happy paradisal state, and by pretending to advance it to higher degrees. So the same cunning serpent that beguiled Eve through his subtlety, has suddenly prevailed to deprive us of that fair prospect we had a little while ago, of a kind of paradisal state of the church of God in New England, by perverting us from the simplicity that is in Christ.

After religion has revived in the church of God, and enemies appear, people who are engaged to defend its cause are commonly most engaged where they sense danger. While they are wholly intent upon the opposition that appears openly before them, to make headway against that, they neglect to carefully look all around them. The devil comes up behind them and gives them a fatal stab, unseen. He has opportunity to give a more internal stab, and wound them deeper, because he strikes them at his leisure, according to his pleasure, unobstructed by any guard or resistance.

So it is likely to be in the church whenever religion revives remarkably, till we have learned well to distinguish between true and false religion, between saving affections and experiences, and those various fair shows and glistening appearances by which they are counterfeited. The consequences, when they are not distinguished, are often inexpressibly dreadful.

- By this means, the devil gratifies himself by bringing it to pass that what is offered to God by multitudes, thinking that their service to him is pleasing and acceptable, is in fact abominable to him above all things.
- By this means, he deceives great multitudes about the state of their souls. He makes them think they are something, when they are nothing; Gal 6:3 and so he eternally undoes them; and not only that, but he establishes many in a strong confidence of their eminent holiness, when in God’s sight, they are some of the vilest of hypocrites.
- By this means, he dampens and wounds religion in the hearts of the saints in many ways. He obscures and deforms it by corrupt mixtures. He causes their religious affections to woefully degenerate and sometimes (for a considerable time) to be like the manna that bred worms and stank. He dreadfully ensnares and confounds the minds of other saints and brings them into great difficulties and temptation; and he entangles them in a wilderness out of which they cannot extricate themselves.
- By this means, Satan mightily encourages the hearts of open enemies of religion. He strengthens their hands and puts weapons in them, and makes their fortresses strong; at the same time, religion and the church of God lie exposed to them, like a city without walls.
- By this means, he causes men to work wickedness under a notion of doing service to God; and so they sin without restraint, indeed with earnest forwardness and zeal, many with all their might.
• By this means, he enlists even the friends of religion to unwittingly do the work of its enemies by destroying religion in a far more effectual manner than open enemies can do: under the notion of advancing it.

• By this means, the devil scatters the flock of Christ, and sets them against one another with heated spirit – under the notion of having a zeal for God. Religion, by degrees, degenerates into vain jangling. During the strife, Satan leads both parties far from the right way, driving each to great extremes, one on the right hand, and the other on the left, according to what he finds they are most inclined towards, or most easily moved and swayed by – till the right path in the middle is almost wholly neglected.

And in the midst of all this confusion, the devil has great opportunity to advance his own interest, and make it strong in innumerable ways, and get the government of all into his own hands, and work his own will. What is seen in the terrible consequences of this counterfeit religion, when it is not distinguished from true religion, is that God’s people generally have their minds unhinged; they become unsettled in the things of religion. They don’t know where to set their foot, or what to think or do; and many doubt whether there is anything worthwhile in religion. And so heresy, infidelity, and atheism greatly prevail.

Therefore it greatly concerns us to use our utmost endeavors to clearly discern what true religion consists of, and to have it well settled and established. Till this is done, it may be expected that great revivals of religion will be short-lived. Till this is done, there is little good to be expected of all our heated debates in conversation and from the press, not knowing clearly and distinctly what we ought to contend for.

My design is to contribute my two cents, and use my best (however feeble) endeavors to this end in the ensuing treatise. It must be noted that my design somewhat varies from the design of what I formerly published, which was to show the distinguishing marks of a work of the Spirit of God, including both his common and saving operations. What I aim at now, is to show the nature and signs of the gracious operations of God’s Spirit, and by which things they are to be distinguished from all other things that the minds of men may have, and which are not of a saving nature. If I have succeeded in this aim in any tolerable measure, I hope it will tend to promote the interest of religion. Whether I have succeeded in bringing any light to this subject or not, and however my attempts may be reproached in these captious6 and censorious7 times, I hope in the mercy of a gracious God, that he will accept the sincerity of my endeavors. I also hope for the candor and prayers of the true followers of the meek and charitable Lamb of God.

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6 Fault-finding.
7 Harshly critical.
RELIGIOUS AFFECTIONS.\(^1\)

PART I.

CONCERNING THE NATURE OF THE AFFECTIONS
AND THEIR IMPORTANCE IN RELIGION.

\(Whom\ having\ not\ seen,\ you\ love;\ in\ whom,\ though\ now\ you\ do\ not\ see\ him,\ yet\ believing,\ you\ rejoice\ with\ joy\ unspeakable\ and\ full\ of\ glory.\ 1\text{Peter}\ 1:8\)

In these words, the apostle represents the state of the minds of the Christians he wrote to under the persecutions of which they were then the subjects. These persecutions are what he refers to in the two preceding verses when he speaks of the trial of their faith, and of their being in heaviness through various temptations.

Such trials have a threefold benefit to true religion. By this, the truth of religion is manifested, and it appears to be true religion indeed. Above all other things, trials have a tendency to distinguish between true religion and false, and to cause the difference between them to plainly appear. Hence they are called “trials” in the verse immediately preceding the text (1Pet 1:7), and in numerous other places. They test what sort of faith and religion these professors of Christ have, just as what appears to be gold is tried in the fire; thereby it is manifested whether it is true gold or not. The faith of true Christians, thus tried and proved to be true, is “found unto praise, honor, and glory,” as in that preceding verse.

Then these trials are of further benefit to true religion. They not only manifest the truth of it, but they also make its genuine beauty and amiableness remarkably appear. True virtue never appears so lovely as when it is most oppressed; and the divine excellence of real Christianity is never exhibited with such advantage as when it is under the greatest trials. Then that true faith appears more precious than gold! And on this account it is “found unto praise, honor, and glory.”

Again, another benefit such trials have to true religion, is that they purify and increase it. They not only manifest it to be true, but they also tend to refine it, and deliver it from those mixtures of falsehood which encumber and impede it, so that nothing may be left but what is true. They tend to cause the amiableness of true religion to appear to its best advantage, as observed before. And not only that, but they tend to increase its beauty by establishing and confirming it, and making it more lively and vigorous, and purifying it from those things that obscured its luster and glory. Gold that is tried in the fire is purged from its alloy, and from all remainders of dross, and it comes forth more solid and beautiful. So too, true faith, being tried like gold is tried in the fire, becomes more precious; and thus it is also “found unto praise, honor, and glory.” The apostle seems to refer to each of these benefits in the verse preceding the text, so that persecutions are seen as part of true religion.

In the text, the apostle observes how true religion operated in the Christians he wrote to. Under their persecutions, these benefits of persecution became apparent in them; or it became apparent what manner of true religion operated in them, by which their religion was manifested to be true religion. It eminently appeared in the genuine beauty and amiableness of true religion. It also appeared to be increased and purified; and so it was likely to be “found unto praise, honor, and glory, at the appearing of Jesus Christ.” In the text, the apostle notices in

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1 See footnote 1 for Edwards’ understanding of “affections” (he defines them himself on page 9 below). The great accusation against revivalism is that it is merely emotional, and therefore invariably transient. Yet cold intellectualism is just as deadly to the church. In this treatise, Edwards addresses emotionalism in the context of revivalism; he seeks a test to distinguish between the emotional passions of false religion, and the willful affections of true religion. Which aspects of revivalism are merely psychological, and which are the result of the activities of the Holy Spirit? - WHG
them two kinds of operation, or exercises, of true religion under their sufferings, in which these benefits appeared.

1. **Love for Christ**: “Whom having not yet seen, you love.” The world was ready to wonder what strange principle influenced them to expose themselves to such great sufferings, and to forsake the things that were seen, and to renounce all that was dear and pleasant to their senses. They seemed to the men of the world around them as though they were beside themselves, and acted as though they hated themselves. There was nothing visible that could induce them to suffer in this way, and to support them under such trials, and to carry them through. But although nothing was seen that influenced and supported them in this way, nothing that the world saw or that the Christians themselves ever saw with their bodily eyes, yet they had a supernatural principle of love for something unseen: they loved Jesus Christ; for they spiritually saw the one whom the world did not see, and whom they themselves had never seen with bodily eyes.

2. **Joy in Christ**. Though their outward sufferings were very grievous, yet their inward spiritual joys were greater than their sufferings; and these supported them, and enabled them to suffer with cheerfulness. There are two things which the apostle notes in the text concerning this joy.

   1. **The manner in which it arises**; the way in which Christ, though unseen, is the foundation of joy, which is by faith. Faith is the evidence of things not seen. Heb 11:1, “In whom, though you do not see him now, yet believing, you rejoice.”

   2. **The nature of this joy**; it is “unspeakable and full of glory.” It is unspeakable in its kind; it is very different from worldly joys and carnal delights; it is of a vastly more pure, sublime, and heavenly nature, being something supernatural, truly divine, and so ineffably excellent; there were no words to present the sublimity and exquisite sweetness of it. It is unspeakable also in its degree; it pleases God to give them this holy joy with a liberal hand, and in large measure in their state of persecution.

   Their joy was full of glory. Although the joy was unspeakable, and no words were sufficient to describe it, yet something might be said of it; and no words were more fitting to represent its excellence than these: that it was full of glory; or, as it is in the original, glorified joy. In rejoicing with this joy, their minds were filled, as it were, with a glorious brightness; and their natures were exalted and perfected. It was a most worthy and noble rejoicing that did not corrupt and debase the mind, as many carnal joys do. Rather, it greatly beautified and dignified it; it was a pre-libation of the joy of heaven, which raised their minds to a degree of heavenly blessedness; it filled their minds with the light of God’s glory, and it made them shine with a communication of that glory. Hence the proposition or doctrine that I would raise from these words is this:

   **DOCTRINE.** True religion, in great part, consists in holy affections.

We see that the apostle observed and remarked about the operations and exercises of religion in the Christians to whom he wrote; and their religion appeared to be true and of the right kind when it had its greatest trial (of whatever sort it was). It was being tried by persecution, just as gold is tried in the fire. When their religion was not only proved true, but was most pure, and cleansed from its dross and mixtures of what was not true, and when religion most appeared in them in its genuine excellence and native beauty, it was “found unto praise, honor, and glory.” In making these observations and remarks, he singles out the religious affections of love and joy that were being exercised in them. These are the exercises of religion he takes notice of, the ones in which their religion appeared true and pure, and in its proper glory.

Here, I would (1) show what is meant by the affections; and (2) observe some things which make it evident that a great part of true religion lies in the affections.
The Nature And Importance Of The Affections In Religion

1. The Affections of the Mind

It might be asked, what are the affections of the mind? I answer that the affections are none other than the more vigorous and tangible exercises of the inclination and will of the soul.

God has endued the soul with two faculties: one enables perception and speculation, by which the soul discerns, views, and judges things; we call this the “understanding”. The other faculty in some way inclines the soul towards or away from the things it views or considers. This is the faculty by which the soul does not behold things as an indifferent and unaffected spectator; rather, it causes the soul to like or dislike them; to be pleased or displeased by them; to approve or reject what it views and considers. This faculty is called by various names; it is sometimes called the inclination: as it affects the actions that are determined and governed by it, it is called the will; and the mind, with regard to the exercises of this faculty, is often called the heart.

The exercise of this faculty has two sorts: either those by which the soul is carried out towards the things that are in view, in approving them, being pleased with them, and inclined towards them; or else those in which the soul opposes the things that are in view, in disapproving them, and being displeased with them, averse to them, and rejecting them.

Just as the exercises of the inclination and the will of the soul are varied in their kinds, so they are much more varied in their degrees. There are some exercises of pleasure or displeasure, inclination or disinclination, in which the soul is carried only a little past a state of indifference. There are other degrees above this, in which the approbation or dislike, pleasure or aversion, are stronger, in which we may rise higher and higher, until the soul comes to act vigorously and sensibly. At this point, the actions of the soul have such strength that (through the laws of the union which the Creator has fixed between soul and body) the motion of the blood and animal spirits begins to be sensibly altered. From this often arises some bodily sensation, especially about the heart and vitals, that are the fountain of the fluids of the body. From this it comes to pass that the mind, with regard to the exercises of this faculty, perhaps in all nations and ages, is called the heart. And the more vigorous and tangible exercises of this faculty are called the affections.

The will, and the affections of the soul, are not two faculties; the affections are not essentially distinct from the will; nor do they differ from the mere actings of the will and the inclination of the soul; but they are only differ in the liveliness and tangibleness of their exercise.

It must be confessed, that language is somewhat imperfect here, and the meanings of words in a considerable measure are loose and unfixed; they are not precisely limited by custom (which governs the use of language). In some sense, the affection of the soul does not differ at all from the will and inclination. And in any exercise of the will, it is never further exercised than it is affected; it is not moved out of a state of perfect indifference in any way other than as it is affected one way or other. Yet there are many actings of the will and inclination that are not commonly called affections. In everything we do voluntarily, there is an exercise of the will and inclination. It is our inclination that governs us in our actions; but all the actings of the inclination and will, in all our common actions of life, are not ordinarily called affections. Yet, what we call affections are not essentially different from the will and inclination, except in the degree and manner of their exercise. In every act of the will, the soul either likes or dislikes what is in view; it is either inclined or disinclined towards it.

These are not essentially different from the affections of love and hatred. Liking (or the inclination of the soul towards a thing), if it is to a high degree, and it is vigorous and lively,
The Nature And Importance Of The Affections In Religion

the very same thing as the affection of love. Disliking (or the disinclination towards a thing), if to a greater degree, is the very same thing as hatred. In every act of the will for or towards something that is not present, the soul is in some degree inclined towards that thing. And that inclination, if it is to a considerable degree, is the same as the affection of desire. In every degree of the act of the will, in which the soul approves of something present, there is a degree of being pleased; and that pleasure, if it is in a considerable degree, is the very same as the affection of joy or delight. If the will disapproves of what is present, the soul to some degree is displeased; and if that displeasure is great, it is the same as the affection of grief or sorrow.

Such seems to be our nature, and such are the laws of the union of soul and body, that there is never any lively and vigorous exercise of the will, or inclination of the soul, without producing some effect upon the body, some alteration of the motion of its fluids, and especially of the animal spirits. On the other hand, from the same laws of the union of the soul and body, the constitution of the body and the motion of its fluids may promote the exercise of the affections. Yet it is not the body but the mind alone that is the proper seat of the affections. The body of man is no more capable of being the actual source of love or hatred, joy or sorrow, fear or hope, than the body of a tree; nor is that same body capable of thinking and understanding. Just as it is the soul alone that has ideas, so it is the soul alone that is pleased or displeased with its ideas. Just as the soul alone thinks, so the soul alone loves or hates, rejoices or is grieved, by what it thinks of. Nor are these motions of the animal spirits and fluids of the body anything which properly belong to the nature of the affections, though they always accompany them in the present state. They are only the effects or concomitants of the affections that are entirely distinct from the affections themselves; they are in no way essential to them. Thus an unembodied spirit may be just as capable of love and hatred, joy or sorrow, hope or fear, or other affections, as one that is united to a body.

The affections and passions are frequently spoken of as being the same. Yet in the more common use of speech, there is a difference in some respect. “Affection” ordinarily means something more extensive than passion. It is used for all vigorous lively actings of the will or inclination. But passion is used for those that are more sudden, and whose effects on the animal spirits are more violent; the mind is more overpowered, and less under its own command.

Just as all the exercises of the inclination and will either approve and like, or disapprove and reject, so the affections are of two sorts; they are those by which the soul is carried towards what is in view, clinging to or seeking it; or those by which it is averse to and opposing it.

Of the former sort are love, desire, hope, joy, gratitude, and complacence. Of the latter kind are hatred, fear, anger, grief, and such; it is not necessary to define these now in particular.

There are some affections in which there is a composition of each of the aforementioned kinds of actings of the will. For example, in the affection of pity, there is something of the former kind towards the person suffering, and something of the latter kind towards what he suffers. And so in zeal, there is high approbation of some person or thing, together with vigorous opposition to what is conceived to be contrary to it.

There are other mixed affections that might also be mentioned, but I hasten on.

2. Evidence that true religion, in great part, consists in the affections

The second thing proposed, is to observe some things that make it evident that true religion, in great part, consists in the affections. And here,

1. What has been said of the nature of the affections makes this evident, and it may be sufficient without adding anything further to put this matter out of doubt; for who will deny that true religion consists in great measure, in vigorous and lively actings of the inclination and will of the soul, or in the fervent exercises of the heart?
The religion which God requires and accepts does not consist in weak, dull, and lifeless wishes, that raise us but a little above a state of indifference. God, in his word, greatly insists that we be good in earnest, “fervent in spirit,” and that our hearts be vigorously engaged in religion: Rom. 12:11, “Be fervent in spirit, serving the Lord.” Deut. 10:12, “And now, Israel, what does the Lord your God require of you, but to fear the Lord your God, to walk in all his ways, and to love him, and to serve the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul?” and chap. 6:4, 6, “Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord: And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your might.” Such a fervent vigorous engagement of the heart in religion that is the fruit of a real circumcision of the heart, or true regeneration, and it has the promises of life; Deut. 30:6, “And the Lord your God will circumcise your heart, and the heart of your seed, to love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, that you may live.”

If we are not in good earnest in religion, and if our wills and inclinations are not strongly exercised, then we are nothing. The things of religion are so great that there can be no suitableness in the exercises of our hearts, as to their nature and importance, unless they are lively and powerful. Nothing is so requisite in religion as vigor in the actings of our inclinations; and nothing is so odious as lukewarmness. True religion is evermore a powerful thing; and the power of it appears, in the first place, in the inward exercises of it in the heart where it has its principal and original seat. Hence, true religion is called the power of godliness – in distinction from its external appearances which are its form. 2Tim. 3:5: “Having a form of godliness, but denying its power.” The Spirit of God, in those that have sound and solid religion, is a spirit of powerful holy affection; and therefore God is said to have given “the Spirit of power, and of love, and of a sound mind,” 2Tim. 1:7. And when such persons receive the Spirit of God in his sanctifying and saving influences, they are said to be “baptized with the Holy Ghost, and with fire;” by reason of the power and fervor of those exercises which the Spirit of God excites in their hearts, and by which their hearts, when grace is exercised, may be said to “burn within them;” as it is said of the disciples in Luke 24:32.

The business of religion is, from time to time, compared to those exercises in which men are used to having their hearts and strength greatly exercised and engaged: such as running, wrestling; or agonizing for a great prize or crown; or fighting with strong enemies that seek their lives; or warring, such as those who take a city or kingdom by violence. Mat 11:12

Though true grace has various degrees, and there are some who are only babes in Christ, and in whom the exercise of the inclination and will towards divine and heavenly things is comparatively weak – yet everyone who has the power of godliness in his heart, has his inclinations and heart exercised towards God and divine things. And this is with such strength and vigor that these holy exercises prevail in him above all carnal or natural affections; they are effectual to overcome them. For every true disciple of Christ “loves him above father or mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, houses and lands – yes, more than his own life,” Luke 14.26. From this it follows that wherever true religion is found, there are vigorous exercises of the inclination and will towards divine objects; but by what was said before, the vigorous, lively, and tangible exercises of the will are none other than the affections of the soul.

2. The Author of the human nature has not only given affections to men, but He has made them very much the spring of men’s actions. Just as the affections not only necessarily belong to the human nature, but are a very great part of it – so holy affections not only necessarily belong to true religion, but are a very great part of it (inasmuch as, by regeneration, persons are renewed in the whole man, and sanctified throughout). Just as true religion has a practical nature, and God has so constituted the human nature that the affections are very much the spring of men’s actions, this also shows that true religion must consist very much in the affections.

Such is man’s nature that he is very inactive unless he is influenced by some affection, whether love, hatred, desire, hope, fear, or some other affection. These affections we see are the springs
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that set men going in all the affairs of their life, and which engage them in all their pursuits. These are the things that push men forward, and carry them along in all their worldly business. Men are especially excited and animated by these in all affairs in which they are earnestly engaged, and which they pursue with vigor. We see that the world of mankind is exceedingly busy and active; and the affections of men are the springs of their motion. Take away all love and hatred, all hope and fear, all anger, zeal, and affectionate desire, and the world would be, in great measure, motionless and dead. There would be no activity among mankind, nor any earnest pursuit of anything whatever. It is affection that engages the covetous man in his pursuits, and the greedy man in his pursuit of worldly profits. It is by the affections, that the ambitious man is driven in pursuit of worldly glory. And it is also the affections that actuate the voluptuous man in his pursuit of pleasure and sensual delights. The world continues, from age to age, in a continual commotion and agitation in pursuit of these things. But take away all affection, and the spring of all this motion would be gone; the motion itself would cease. Just as in worldly things, worldly affections are very much the spring of men’s motion and action – so in religious matters, the spring of their actions is very much religious affection. One that has only doctrinal knowledge and speculation, without affection, is never engaged in the business of religion.

3. Nothing is more manifest than that the things of religion take hold of men’s souls no further than they affect them. There are multitudes that often hear the word of God; and in it they hear of those things that are infinitely great and important, and that most nearly concern them. And yet all that is heard seems to be wholly ineffectual on them; it does not alter their disposition or behavior; and the reason is that they are not affected by what they hear. There are many that often hear of the glorious perfections of God, his almighty power and boundless wisdom, and his infinite majesty. They hear of the holiness of God by which he is of purer eyes than to behold evil, and cannot look on iniquity; the heavens are not pure in his sight. And they hear of God’s infinite goodness and mercy, and of the great works of God’s wisdom, power and goodness, in which the admirable manifestations of these perfections appear. They hear particularly of the unspeakable love of God and Christ, and of the great things that Christ has done and suffered, and of the great things of another world, of eternal misery in bearing the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God, and of endless blessedness and glory in the presence of God, and the enjoyment of his dear love. They also hear the peremptory commands of God, and his gracious counsels and warnings, and the sweet invitations of the gospel. I say, they often hear these things and yet they remain as they were before, with no tangible alteration in them, either in heart or practice. This is because they are not affected by what they hear; and they will remain so till they are affected. I am bold to assert that there was never any considerable change wrought in the mind or in the conversation of any person, by anything of a religious nature, which he ever read about, heard, or saw, that did not first move his affections. Never was a natural man engaged to earnestly seek his salvation, nor brought to cry for wisdom, and lift up his voice for understanding, and wrestle with God in prayer for mercy – never was anyone humbled, and brought to the foot of God, by anything he ever heard or imagined about his own unworthiness, or about deserving God’s displeasure – nor was anyone ever induced to flee to Christ for refuge – while his heart remained unaffected. Nor was there ever a saint awakened out of a cold, lifeless flame, or recovered from a declining state in religion, and brought back from a lamentable departure from God, without first having his heart affected. In a word, nothing considerable was ever brought to pass in the heart or life of any man living, by the things of religion, unless his heart was first deeply affected by these things.

4. The holy Scriptures everywhere place religion very much in the affection: such as fear, hope, love, hatred, desire, joy, sorrow, gratitude, compassion, and zeal.

The Scriptures place much of religion in godly fear – so much so, that it is often spoken of as the character of those who are truly religious persons: they tremble at God’s word; they fear
before him; their flesh trembles for fear of him; they are afraid of his judgments; his excellency makes them afraid; his dread falls upon them, and the like. An appellation often given the saints in Scripture is “God-fearers,” or “those who fear the Lord.” And because the fear of God is a great part of true godliness, true godliness in general is commonly called the fear of God; as everyone knows who knows anything about the Bible.

So too hope in God and in the promises of his word is often spoken of in the Scripture as a very considerable part of true religion. It is mentioned as one of the three great things of which religion consists, 1Cor. 13:13. Hope in the Lord is also frequently mentioned as the character of the saints: Psa. 146:5, “Happy is he that has the God of Jacob for his help, whose hope is in the Lord his God.” Jer. 17:7, “Blessed is the man that trusts in the Lord, and whose hope is the Lord.” Psa. 31:24, “Be of good courage, and he shall strengthen your heart, all you that hope in the Lord,” and many other similar places. Religious fear and hope are, once and again, joined together, as jointly constituting the character of true saints; Psa. 33:18, “Behold, the eye of the Lord is upon those who fear him, upon those who hope in his mercy.” Psa. 147:11, “The Lord takes pleasure in those who fear him, in those that hope in his mercy.” Hope is so great a part of true religion, that the apostle says, “we are saved by hope,” Rom. 8:24. And this is spoken of as the helmet of the Christian soldier. 1Thess. 5:8, “And for a helmet, the hope of salvation;” and it is spoke of as the sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, which preserves it from being tossed away by the storms of this evil world. Heb. 6:19, “Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which enters into that within the veil.” It is spoken of as a great fruit and benefit which true saints receive by Christ’s resurrection. 1Pet. 1:3, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which, according to his abundant mercy, has begotten us again to a lively hope, by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.”

The Scriptures place religion very much in the affection of love: in love towards God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, and love towards the people of God, and towards mankind. The texts in which this is manifest, both in the Old and New Testaments, are numerous. But more of this later.

The contrary affection of hatred also, having sin for its object, is spoken of in Scripture as no inconsiderable part of true religion. It is spoken of as that by which true religion may be known and distinguished. Prov. 8:13, “The fear of the Lord is to hate evil.” Accordingly, the saints are called upon to give evidence of their sincerity by this. Psa. 97:10, “You that love the Lord, hate evil.” And the Psalmist often mentions it as evidence of his sincerity. Psa. 101:2, “I will walk within my house with a perfect heart. I will set no wicked thing before my eyes; I hate the work of those who turn aside.” Psa. 119:104, “I hate every false way.” So also in verse 127, and again in Psa. 139:21, “Do I not hate those, O Lord, who hate you?”

So also holy desire, exercised in longings, hungerings, and thirstings after God and holiness, is often mentioned in Scripture as an important part of true religion; Isa. 26:8, “The desire of our soul is for your name, and the remembrance of you.” Psa. 27:4, “One thing have I desired of the Lord, and that will I seek after, that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in his temple.” Psa. 42:1, 2, “As the hart pants for the water brooks, so my soul pants for you, O God; my soul thirsts for God, for the living God: when will I come and appear before God?” Psa. 63:1, 2, “My soul thirsts for you, my flesh longs for you, in a dry and thirsty land, where there is no water; to see your power and your glory, just as I have seen you in the sanctuary.” Psa. 84:1, 2, “How amiable are your tabernacles, O Lord of hosts! My soul longs, indeed, even faints for the courts of the Lord: my heart and my flesh cries out for the living God.” Psa. 119:20, “My soul breaks for the longing that it has for your judgments at all times.” So also Psa. 73:25; 143:6-7; 130:6; Cant. 3:1-2 and 6:8. Such a holy desire and thirsty soul is mentioned as one thing which renders or denotes a man truly blessed. Look at the beginning of Christ’s sermon on the mount. Matt. 5:6: “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness; for they shall be filled.” And this holy thirst is spoken of as
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a condition to participate in the blessings of eternal life; Rev. 21:6, “To him that is thirsty, I will freely give from the fountain of the water of life.”

The Scripture speaks of **holy joy**, as a great part of true religion. And as an important part of religion, it is often exorted to and pressed with great earnestness; Psa. 37:4, “Delight yourself in the Lord; and he shall give you the desires of your heart.” Psa. 97:12, “Rejoice in the Lord, you righteous.” Psa. 33:1, “Rejoice in the Lord, O you righteous.” Matt. 5:12, “Rejoice, and be exceedingly glad.” Phil. 3:1, “Finally, brothers, rejoice in the Lord.” And chap. 4:4, “Rejoice in the Lord always; and again I say, Rejoice.” 1Thess. 5:16, “Rejoice evermore.” Psa. 149:2, “Let Israel rejoice in him that made him; let the children of Zion be joyful in their king.” This is mentioned among the principal fruits of the Spirit of grace; Gal. 5:21, “The fruit of the Spirit is love,” etc. The Psalmist mentions his holy joy as evidence of his sincerity. Psa. 119:14, “I have rejoiced in the way of your testimonies, as much as in all riches.”

Religious **sorrow**, mourning, and brokenness of heart, are also frequently spoken of as a great part of true religion. These things are often mentioned as distinguishing qualities of true saints, and a great part of their character. Matt. 5:4, “Blessed are those who mourn; for they shall be comforted.” Psa. 34:18, “The Lord is near to those who have a broken heart; and saves those who have a contrite spirit.” Isa. 61:1-2, “The Lord has anointed me to bind up the broken-hearted, to comfort all that mourn.” This godly sorrow and brokenness of heart is often spoken of, not only as a great thing in the distinguishing character of the saints, but it is that thing in them which is uniquely acceptable and pleasing to God. Psa. 51:17, “The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.” Isa. 66:2, “I will look at this man, even at the one who is poor and has a contrite spirit.”

Another affection often mentioned, in which much of true religion appears in its exercise, is **gratitude**; especially as exercised in thankfulness and praise to God. Because this is spoken of in the book of Psalms so much, and in other parts of the holy Scriptures, I need not mention particular texts.

Again, the holy Scriptures frequently speak of **compassion** or **mercy** as a very great and essential thing in true religion, such that good men in Scripture are characterized by it. A merciful man and a good man are equivalent terms in Scripture; Isa. 57:1, “The righteous perishes, and no man takes it to heart; merciful men are taken away.” The Scripture selects this quality by which, in a unique way, a righteous man is deciphered; Psa. 37:21, “The righteous shows mercy, and gives;” and ver. 26, “He is ever merciful, and lends.” Prov. 14:21, “One who honors the Lord, has mercy on the poor.” Col. 3:12, “As the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on compassionate mercy,” etc. This is one of those great things by which those who are truly blessed are described by our Savior; Matt. 5:7, “Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.” And Christ also speaks of this as one of the weightier matters of the law; Matt. 23:23, “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, for you pay a tithe of mint, and anise, and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith.” Mic. 6:8 is given to the same purpose, “He has shown you, O man, what is good: and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and love mercy, and walk humbly with your God?” Also Hos. 6:6 “For I desired mercy, and not sacrifice.” This seems to have been a text greatly delighted in by our Savior, who cited it once in Matt. 9:13, and again in 12:7.

**Zeal** is also spoken of as an essential part of the religion of true saints. It is spoken of as a great thing which Christ had in view, in giving himself for our redemption; Tit. 2:14, “Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify for himself a special people,
zealous for good works.” This is spoken of as the great thing lacking in the lukewarm Laodiceans, Rev. 3:15-16, 19.

I have mentioned only a few texts out of a multitude all over the Scripture, which place religion very much in the affections. But what has been observed may be sufficient to show that those who would deny that much of true religion lies in the affections, and who maintain the contrary, must throw away what we would own for our Bible, and get some other rule by which to judge the nature of religion.

5. The Scriptures represent true religion as being summarily comprehended in love, the chief of the affections, and the fountain of all other affections.

Our blessed Savior represents the matter as such, in his answer to the lawyer who asked which was the greatest commandment of the law. Matt. 22:37-40, “Jesus said to him, you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it, you shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.” The last words signify that these two commandments comprehend all the prescribed duty and religion taught in the law and the prophets. The apostle Paul from time to time makes the same representation of the matter. Rom. 13:8, “He that loves another, has fulfilled the law.” Verse 10, “Love is the fulfilling of the law.” Gal. 5:14, “For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even this, that you shall love your neighbor as yourself.” So likewise in 1Tim. 1:5, “Now the end of the commandment is charity from a pure heart,” etc. So the apostle speaks of love as the greatest thing in religion, and as the vitality, essence, and soul of it. Without it, the greatest knowledge and gifts, and the most shining profession, and everything else that pertains to religion, are vain and worthless. He represents it as the fountain from which all that is good proceeds: 1Cor. 13. What is rendered charity in that chapter, is αγαπη (agape) in the original, for which the proper English is love.

Now the love which is spoken of in this way, includes the whole of a sincerely benevolent propensity of the soul towards God and man. Yet, from what was observed before, this propensity or inclination of the soul, when it is tangibly and vigorously exercised, evidently becomes affection; and it is none other than affectionate love. Surely it is such a vigorous and fervent love which Christ speaks of as the sum of all religion, when he speaks of loving God with all our hearts, with all our souls, and with all our minds, and loving our neighbor as ourselves; such love is the sum of all that was taught and prescribed in the law and the prophets.

When this affection of love is spoken of here and in other Scriptures as the sum of all religion, it cannot be supposed, that what is meant is merely the act, exclusive of the habit; or that the exercise of the understanding is excluded, even though it is implied in all reasonable affection. Doubtless it is true and evident from these Scriptures, that the essence of all true religion lies in holy love. And the whole of religion consists in this divine affection, in a habitual disposition towards it, and towards the light which is its foundation, and towards those things which are its fruits.

From this it clearly and certainly appears that a great part of true religion consists in the affections. For love is not only one of the affections, but it is the first and chief of the affections; and it is the fountain of all the affections. From love arises hatred of those things which are contrary to what we love, or which oppose and thwart us in those things that we delight in. And from the various exercises of love and hatred, according to the circumstances of the objects of these affections, whether they are present or absent, whether they are certain or uncertain, whether they are probable or improbable, arise all those other affections of desire, hope, fear, joy, grief, gratitude, anger, etc. From a vigorous, affectionate, and fervent love towards God will necessarily arise all other religious affections. From this love will arise an intense hatred and abhorrence of sin, fear of sin, and a dread of God’s displeasure; gratitude will arise towards God.
for his goodness; complacence and joy in God will arise when God is graciously and sensibly present; grief will arise when he is absent; and a joyful hope will arise when a future enjoyment of God is expected; and also a fervent zeal for the glory of God. In like manner, from a fervent love towards men, all other virtuous affections towards men will arise.

6. The account we have in the Scripture of the religion of the most eminent saints, much of it consisted in holy affections.

I will take particular notice of three eminent saints who have expressed the frame and sentiments of their own hearts, and thus described their own religion and the manner of their intercourse with God in the writings which they left us, and which are a part of the sacred canon.

The first instance I will note is David, the “man after God’s own heart;” he has given us a lively portrait of his religion in the book of Psalms. The holy songs that he left us there are nothing but the expressions and breathings of devout and holy affections: such as a humble and fervent love towards God; admiration of his glorious perfections and wonderful works; earnest desires, thirstings, and pantings of his soul after God; delight and joy in God; a sweet and melting gratitude towards God for his great goodness; a holy exultation and triumph of his soul in the favor, sufficiency, and faithfulness of God; his love towards and delight in the saints; the excellence of the earth; his great delight in the word and in the ordinances of God; his grief for his own sins and others’ sins; his fervent zeal for God; and his fervent zeal against the enemies of God and his church. These expressions of holy affection, which David’s psalms are full of, are more to our present purpose, because those psalms not only express the religion of so eminent a saint, that God speaks of him as a man after his own heart; but they were also, by the direction of the Holy Ghost, penned for the use of the church of God in its public worship – not only in that age, but in subsequent ages. This is because they are fit to express the religion of all saints, in all ages, as well as the religion of the Psalmist. Moreover, it is to be observed that David, in the book of Psalms, speaks not as a private person, but as the Psalmist of Israel, as the subordinate head of the church of God, and as a leader in their worship and praises. In many of the psalms, he speaks in the name of Christ, portraying him in these expressions of holy affection; and in many other psalms that he speaks in the name of the church.

Another instance I will observe is the apostle Paul. In many respects, he is the chief of all the ministers of the New Testament. Above all others, he was a chosen vessel for Christ to bear his name before the Gentiles; and he was made a chief instrument of propagating and establishing the Christian church in the world, and of distinctly revealing the glorious mysteries of the gospel for the instruction of the church in all ages. As some have not improperly thought, he was the most eminent servant of Christ that ever lived, received to the highest rewards in the heavenly kingdom of his Master. By what is said of him in the Scripture, he appears to have been a person that was full of affection. It is manifest that the religion he expresses in his epistles consisted very much in holy affections. This is apparent from all the expressions he uses about himself: that in the course of his life, he was inflamed, actuated, and entirely swallowed up by a most ardent love towards his glorious Lord; he esteemed all things loss compared to the excellency of the knowledge of his Lord; he esteemed those things but dung that he might gain Christ. 

He represents himself as overpowered by this holy affection and, as it were, compelled by it to go forward in his service through all difficulties and sufferings, 2Cor. 5:14-15.4

His epistles are also full of expressions of an overpowering affection towards the people of Christ. He speaks of his dear love towards them, 2Cor. 12:19; Phil. 4:1; 2Tim. 1:2; of his “abundant love,” 2Cor. 2:4; and of his “affectionate and tender love,” like a nurse towards her

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4 2 Corinthians 5:14 For the love of Christ compels us, because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died; 15 and He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again.
children, 1Thess. 2:7-8: “But we were gentle among you, even as a nurse cherishes her children; so, being affectionately desirous of you, we would have imparted to you, not only the gospel of God, but also our own souls, because you were dear to us.” So also he speaks of his “tender mercies,” Phil. 1:8; Phm. 5, 12, and 20. So he speaks of his “earnest care” for others, 2Cor. 8:16, and of his “compassionate pity,” or mercy towards them, Phil. 2:1; and of his concern for others, even with an anguished heart, 2Cor. 2:4: “For out of much affliction and anguish of heart, I wrote to you with many tears; not that you should be grieved, but that you might know the love which I have more abundantly for you.” He speaks of the great conflict of his soul for them, Col. 2:1. He speaks of great and continual grief that he had in his heart from compassion for the Jews, Rom. 9:2. He speaks of “his mouth being opened, and his heart enlarged” towards Christians, 2Cor. 6:11: “O you Corinthians, our mouth is open to you, our heart is enlarged.” He often speaks of his “affectionate and longing desires,” 1Thess. 2:8, Rom. 1:11, Phil. 1:8, and chap. 4:1, 2Tim. 1:4.

The same apostle in his epistles, often expresses the affection of joy, 2Cor. 1:12 and chap. 7:7, and ver. 9, 16; Phil. 1:4, and chap. 2:12, and chap. 3:3; Col. 1:34; 1Thess. 3:9. He speaks of his “rejoicing with great joy,” Phil 4:10; Phm. 1:7; of his “joying and rejoicing,” Phil. 2:1, 7, and he “rejoiced exceedingly,” 2Cor. 7:13, was “filled with comfort, and exceeding joyful,” 2Cor. 7:4. He speaks of himself as “always rejoicing.” 2Cor. 6:10. So he speaks of the triumphs of his soul, 2Cor. 2:14, and of his glorying in tribulation,” 2Thess. 1:4, and Rom. 5:3. He also expresses the affection of hope; in Phil. 1:20, he speaks of his “earnest expectation, and his hope.” He likewise expresses an affection of godly jealousy, 2Cor. 11:2-3. And it appears by his whole history after his conversion in the Acts, and also by all his epistles and the accounts he gives of himself there, that the affection of zeal for the cause of his Master, and the interest and prosperity of his church, was mighty in him, continually inflaming his heart. It strongly engaged him in those great and constant labors he went through, instructing, exhorting, warning, and reproving others, “travailing in birth with them;” contesting with those powerful and innumerable enemies who continually opposed him; wrestling with principalities and powers; Eph 6.12 not fighting as one who beats the air, 1Cor 9.26 running the race set before him, Heb 12.1 continually pressing forwards through all manner of difficulties and sufferings – so that others thought he was quite beside himself. And how full he was of affection, further appears by being so full of tears: in 2Cor. 2:4, he speaks of his “many tears;” so too in Acts 20:19; and of his “tears that he shed continually night and day,” ver. 31.

Now if anyone can consider these accounts given in the Scripture of this great apostle, and which he gives of himself, and yet not see that his religion consisted much in affection, he must have a strange faculty of managing his eyes to shut out the light which shines most fully in his face.

The other instance I shall mention is of the apostle John. He was that beloved disciple, who was the nearest and dearest to his Master of any of the twelve. He was admitted by Christ to the greatest privileges of any of them. He was one of the three admitted to be present with him on the mount at his transfiguration, and at the raising of Jairus’ daughter. Christ took John with him when he was in his agony; and he was one of the three spoken of by the apostle Paul as the three main pillars of the Christian church. But he was also favored above all in being admitted to lean on his Master’s bosom at his last supper, and in being chosen by Christ as the disciple to whom he would reveal his wonderful dispensations towards his church to the end of time. We have his account in the Book of Revelation by which he closed the canon of the New Testament, and of the whole Scripture. He was preserved much longer than all the rest of the apostles, to set all things in order in the Christian church after their death.

It is evident by all his writings (as generally observed by divines) that he was a person who was remarkably full of affection. The way he addressed others was inexpressibly tender and
sympathetic, breathing nothing but the most fervent love, as though he were made of sweet and holy affection. The proofs of this cannot be given without disadvantage, unless we were to transcribe his entire collection of writings.

7. God sent the Lord Jesus Christ into the world to be the light of the world, the head of the whole church, and the perfect example of true religion and virtue for imitation by all. He is the Shepherd whom the whole flock should follow wherever he goes. And he was a person of a remarkably tender and affectionate heart. His virtue was expressed very much in the exercise of holy affections.

He was the greatest instance of ardent, vigor, and strength of love, towards both God and man, who ever was. It was these affections which got the victory in that mighty struggle and conflict of his affections; “in his agonies, he prayed more earnestly,” Luk 22:4 “with loud cries and tears;” Heb 5:7 he wrestled in tears and in blood. Such was the power of the exercises of his holy love, that they were stronger than death. And in that great struggle, he overcame those strong exercises of the natural affections of fear and grief when he was sorely distressed, and his soul was exceedingly sorrowful, even unto death. Mar 14:33-34 He also appeared to be full of affection in the course of his life. We read of his great zeal, fulfilling what we read in the 69th Psalm, “The zeal of your house has eaten me up,” John 2:17. We read of his grief for the sins of men. Mark 3:5, “He looked around at them with anger, being grieved for the hardness of their hearts.” He broke down in tears and exclamations, from considering the sin and misery of ungodly men, and at the sight of the city of Jerusalem which was full of such inhabitants. Luke 19:41-42, “And, when he came near, he beheld the city, and wept over it, saying, if only you had known, at least in your day, the things which belong to your peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes.” With chap. 13:34, “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, which kills the prophets, and stones those who are sent to you; how often I would have gathered your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you would not have it!” We read of Christ’s earnest desire in Luke 22:15: “I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer.” We often read of the affection of pity or compassion in Christ, Matt. 15:32, and 18:34; Luke 7:13; and of his “being moved with compassion,” Matt. 9:36; 14:14, and Mark 6:34. We read how tender his heart appears on the occasion of Mary’s and Martha’s mourning for their brother, and coming to him with their complaints and tears! Their tears soon drew tears from his eyes; he was affected by their grief and wept with them, even though he knew their sorrow would so soon be turned into joy, when their brother would be raised from the dead; see John 11. How ineffably affectionate was that last and dying discourse which Jesus had with his eleven disciples the evening before he was crucified. He told them he was going away, and foretold the great difficulties and sufferings they would meet with in the world once he was gone. He comforted and counseled them as his dear little children. He bequeathed his Holy Spirit to them, and his peace, comfort, and joy, as if it were his last will and testament in the 13th through 16th chapters of John. And then he concluded the whole with that affectionate intercessory prayer for them, and for his whole church, in chapter 17. Of all the discourses ever penned or uttered by the mouth of any man, this seems to be the most affectionate and affecting.

8. The religion of heaven consists very much in affection.

There is doubtless true religion in heaven, and true religion in its utmost purity and perfection. But according to the Scripture representation of the heavenly state, the religion of heaven consists chiefly in holy and mighty love and joy, and in the expression of these in most fervent and exalted praises. Therefore the religion of the saints in heaven consists in the same things as the religion of the saints on earth which is spoken of in 1Pet. 1:8: love, and “joy unspeakable and full of glory.” Now it would be very foolish to pretend that, because the saints in heaven are not united to flesh and blood, and have no animal fluids to be moved by those great emotions of their souls (through the laws of the union of soul and body), that their exceeding love and joy are
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Therefore not affections. We are not speaking of the affections of the body, but of the affections of the soul, the chief of which are love and joy. When these are in the soul, whether in the body or out of it, the soul is affected and moved. When they are in the soul, in the kind of strength they have in the saints in heaven, the soul is mightily affected and moved, or it has great affections, which is the same thing. It is true, we do not experientially know what love and joy are in a soul that is out of a body, or in a glorified body; i.e., we have not experienced love and joy in a soul in these circumstances. But the saints on earth know what divine love and joy in the soul are, and they know that their love and joy are the same kind of love and joy that are in heaven, in individual souls there. The love and joy of the saints on earth, is the beginning and dawning of the light, life, and blessedness of heaven; it is like their love and joy there; or rather, it is the same in nature, though not the same in degree and circumstances. This is evident by many Scriptures, such as Prov. 4:18; John 4:14; 6:40, 47, 50-51, 54, 58; 1John 3:16; 1Cor. 13:8-12.

Therefore, it is unreasonable to suppose that the love and joy of the saints in heaven, not only differ in their degree and circumstances from the holy love and joy of the saints on earth, but they are so entirely different in nature that they are not affections. Nor is it reasonable to suppose they are not affections, merely because they have no blood and animal spirits to be set in motion by them. The motion of the blood and animal spirits is not the essence of these affections in men on earth; rather, it is the effect of them – although by their reaction, they may make some circumstantial difference in the sensation of the mind. There is a sensation of the mind which loves and rejoices, and which is antecedent to any effects on the fluids of the body. This sensation of the mind, therefore, does not depend on these motions in the body; and so it may be in the soul without the body. Wherever there are exercises of love and joy, there is a sensation of the mind, whether in the body or out; and that inward sensation, or kind of spiritual sense or feeling, and motion of the soul, is what is called affection. The soul, when it feels this way (if I may say so), and is thus moved, is said to be affected, especially when this inward sensation and motion are to a very high degree, as they are in the saints in heaven. If we can learn anything of the state of heaven from the Scripture, the love and joy that the saints have there is exceedingly great and vigorous, impressing the heart with the strongest and most lively sensation of inexpressible sweetness. They mightily move, animate, and engage them, making them like a flame of fire. If such love and joy are not affections, then the word affection is of no use in our language. Will anyone say that the saints in heaven, in beholding the face of their Father, and the glory of their Redeemer, and contemplating his wonderful works, and particularly laying down his life for them, have nothing moved or affected in their hearts by all they behold or consider?

Hence, therefore, the religion of heaven, which consists chiefly in holy love and joy, consists very much in affection. Therefore, undoubtedly, true religion consists very much in affection. The way to learn the true nature of anything is to go where that thing is to be found in its purity and perfection. If we would know the nature of true gold we must view it, not in the ore, but when it is refined. If we would learn what true religion is, we must go where there is true religion, and nothing but true religion, in its highest perfection, without any defect or mixture.

All who are truly religious are not of this world; they are strangers here, and they belong to heaven; they are born from above; heaven is their native country, and the nature which they receive by this heavenly birth is a heavenly nature; they receive an anointing from above. That principle of true religion which is in them, is a communication of the religion of heaven; their grace is the dawn of glory; and God fits them for that world by conforming them to it.

9. This appears from the nature and design of the ordinances and duties which God has appointed as means and expressions of true religion.
An instance is the duty of prayer. It is obvious that we are not appointed in this duty to declare
God’s perfections, his majesty, holiness, goodness, and all-sufficiency, and our own meanness,
emptiness, dependence, and unworthiness, and our wants and desires – in order to inform God
of these things, or to incline his heart and prevail with him to be willing to show us mercy.
Rather, prayer suitably affects our own hearts with the things we express. And so it prepares us
to receive the blessings we ask for. Such gestures and manner of external behavior in the
worship of God, which custom has made into signs of humility and reverence, are only useful in
that they have some tendency to affect our own hearts, or the hearts of others.

The duty of singing praises to God seems to be appointed wholly to excite and express religious
affections. No other reason can be assigned for why we should express ourselves to God in verse,
rather than in prose, and do it with music – except that such is our nature and frame, that these
things have a tendency to move our affections.

The same thing appears in the nature and design of the sacraments which God has appointed.
Considering our frame, God not only appointed that we should be told of the great things of the
gospel, and of the redemption of Christ, and be instructed in them by his word, but also that
they should be, as it were, exhibited to our view in tangible representations – in the sacraments
– to more affect us by them.

Impressing divine things on the hearts and affections of men is evidently one great and main
end for which God has ordained that his word, delivered in the Holy Scriptures, should be
opened, applied, and driven home to men in preaching. Therefore it does not fulfill the aim
which God had in this institution of preaching, merely for men to have good commentaries and
expositions on the Scripture, and other good books of divinity. This is because, although these
may serve as well as preaching to give men a good doctrinal or speculative understanding of the
things of the word of God, yet they do not have an equal tendency to impress them on men’s
hearts and affections. God has appointed a particular and lively application of his word to men
in the preaching of it, as a fit means to affect sinners with the importance of the things of
religion; and with their own misery; and with the necessity of a remedy; and with the glory and
sufficiency of the remedy that has been provided. Preaching stirs up the pure minds of the
saints, and quickens their affections by repeatedly bringing the great things of religion to their
remembrance, and setting them before them in their proper colors – even though they know
them, and have been fully instructed in them already, 2Pet. 1:12-13. And particularly, preaching
promotes those two affections in them which are spoken of in the text: love and joy. “Christ gave
some to be apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and
teachers; so that the body of Christ might be edified in love,” Eph. 4:11-12, 16. The apostle in
instructing and counseling Timothy concerning the work of the ministry, informs him that the
great end of that word which a minister is to preach, is love or charity, 1Tim. 3:5. God has
appointed preaching as a means to promote another affection in the saints: joy; and therefore
ministers are called “helpers of their joy,” 2Cor. 1:24.

10. The Scriptures everywhere evidence that true religion, or holiness of the heart, lies very
much in the affection of the heart; and the sin of the heart lies very much in hardness of heart. It
was hardness of heart which excited grief and displeasure in Christ towards the Jews. Mark 3:5,
“He looked around at them with anger, being grieved for the hardness of their hearts.” It is
because men have such a heart as this, that they treasure up wrath for themselves. Rom. 2:5,
“After your hardness and impenitent heart, store up for yourself wrath against the day of wrath,
and the revelation of the righteous judgment of God.” The reason given why the house of Israel
would not obey God was that they were hardhearted. Ezekiel 3:7, “But the house of Israel will

5 2Peter 1:12-13 For this reason I will not be negligent to remind you always of these things, though you know and
are established in the present truth. 53 Yes, I think it is right, as long as I am in this tent, to stir you up by reminding
you...
not listen to you; for they will not listen to me: for all the house of Israel are impudent and hard-hearted.” The wickedness of that perverse rebellious generation in the wilderness, is ascribed to the hardness of their hearts. Psa. 95:7-10, “Today, if you would hear His voice, do not harden your hearts, as in the provocation at Meribah, as in the day of temptation at Massah in the wilderness, when your fathers tested Me; they tried Me, though they had seen My work. For forty years I loathed that generation, and said they are a people who err in their heart,” etc. This is spoken of as what prevented Zedekiah’s turning to the Lord. 2Chron. 36:13, “He stiffened his heart, and hardened his heart from turning to the Lord God of Israel.” From this principle, men lose the fear of God, and they depart from God’s ways: Isa. 63:17, “O Lord, why have you made us err from your ways and hardened our heart from your fear?” Men’s rejection of Christ, and their opposition to Christianity, is laid to this principle. Acts 19:9, “But some were hardened, and did not believe, but spoke evil of that way before the multitude.” When God abandons men to the power of sin and corruption of the heart, it is often expressed as God hardening their hearts. Rom. 9:18, “Therefore he has mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardens.” John 12:40, “He has blinded their minds, and hardened their hearts.” And the apostle seems to speak of “an evil heart that departs from the living God, and a hard heart,” as the same thing. Heb. 3:8, “Do not harden not your heart, as in the provocation,” etc.; ver. 12-13, “Take heed, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God: but exhort one another daily, while it is called today; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.” And that great work of God in conversion, which consists in delivering a person from the power of sin, and mortifying corruption, is expressed time and again by God’s “taking away the heart of stone, and giving a heart of flesh,” Ezek. 11:19, and chap. 36:26.

Now by a hard heart is plainly meant an unaffected heart, or a heart that is not easily moved with virtuous affections. It is like a stone: insensitive, stupid, unmoved, and hard to be impressed. Hence the hard heart is called a stony heart, as opposed to a heart of flesh that has feeling, and is sensibly touched and moved. We read in Scripture of a hard heart and a tender heart; and doubtless we are to understand these as contrary to one another. But what is a tender heart, if not a heart which is easily impressed with what ought to affect it? God commends Josiah because his heart was tender. It is evident by the things mentioned as expressions and evidences of this tenderness of heart, that they meant his heart was tender; it was easily moved with religious and pious affection. 2Kings 22:19, “Because your heart was tender, and you humbled yourself before the Lord when you heard what I spoke against this place, and against its inhabitants, that they would become a desolation and a curse, and because you have torn your clothes and wept before me, I also have heard you, says the Lord.” It is necessary to “become as little children in order to enter into the kingdom of God;” Mat 18:3, our hearts should be tender and easily affected and moved in spiritual and divine things, just as little children have theirs moved in other things.

It is very plain in some places, in the texts themselves, that hardness of heart means a heart void of affection. So, to signify an ostrich without natural affection towards her young, it is said in Job 39:16, “She hardens her heart against her young ones, as though they were not hers.” So a person whose heart is unaffected in time of danger, is described as having a hard heart: Prov. 28:14, “Happy is the man that fears always; but he that hardens his heart shall fall into mischief.”

Now therefore, since it is so plain that a hard heart in Scripture means a heart destitute of pious affections, and since the Scriptures also frequently attribute the sin and corruption of the heart to hardness of heart – it is evident that the grace and holiness of the heart, on the contrary, must in a great measure consist in having pious affections, and being easily susceptible to such affections. Divines are generally agreed that sin radically and fundamentally consists in what is negative, or privative, having its root and foundation in a lack of holiness. Therefore,
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undoubtedly, if it is so that sin greatly consists in hardness of heart, and thus in the lack of pious affections of the heart, then holiness consists very much in those pious affections.

I am far from supposing that all affections show a tender heart: hatred, anger, conceit, and other selfish and self-exalting affections, may greatly prevail in the hardest heart. Yet it is evident that hardness of heart, and tenderness of heart, are expressions that relate to the affection of the heart. They denote a heart that is susceptible to or shut off from certain affections. I will have occasion to speak more of this afterwards.

On the whole, I think it is clearly and abundantly evident, that true religion lies very much in the affections. It is not that I think these arguments prove that religion in the hearts of the truly godly, is ever in exact proportion to the degree of affection, and in proportion to the present emotion of the mind. For undoubtedly, there is much affection in true saints which is not spiritual. Their religious affections are often mixed; all is not from grace – much is from nature. And though the affections do not have their seat in the body, yet the constitution of the body may very much contribute to the present emotion of the mind. The degree of religion is to be judged more by the fixedness and strength of the habit that is exercised in affection, and by which holy affection becomes habitual, than by the degree of its present exercise. The strength of that habit is not always in proportion to its outward effects and manifestations, or in its inward effects – such as hurry and vehemence, or in sudden changes of the course of thoughts in the mind. Yet it is evident that religion consists so much in affection, that without holy affection there is no true religion. No light in the understanding is good which does not produce holy affection in the heart; no habit or principle in the heart is good which does not have an exercise of affection; and no external fruit is good which does not proceed from such exercises of affection.

Having thus considered the evidence of the proposition laid down, I proceed to some inferences.

1. We learn from this how great the error is of those who would discard all religious affections, as having nothing solid or substantial in them.

There seems to be too much of such a disposition that prevails in this land at this time. Many in the recent extraordinary season of revival appeared to have great religious affections, and yet they did not manifest a right temper of mind. They ran into many errors during their affections, and during the heat of their zeal. And because the high affections of many seemed to quickly come to nothing, and because some who seemed to be mightily raised and swallowed up with joy and zeal for awhile, seem to have returned like the dog to his vomit – for these reasons, religious affections in general have lost credit with great numbers of people, as though true religion did not at all consist in these things. Thus we easily and naturally run from one extreme to the other. A little while ago we were in the other extreme. There was a prevalent disposition to look at all highly religious affections as eminent exercises of true grace, without inquiring much into the nature and source of those affections, or the manner in which they arose. If persons appeared to be moved and raised, even by so much as to be full of religious talk, and if they expressed themselves with great warmth and earnestness, and if they were filled or full, as the phrases were used at the time – then too often it was the way of those times, without further examination, to conclude such persons were full of the Spirit of God, and that they had an eminent experience of his gracious influences. This was the extreme which was prevailing three or four years ago. But as of late, instead of esteeming and admiring all religious affections without distinction, it is much more prevalent to reject and discard all religious affections without distinction. The subtlety of Satan appears in this. He saw that affections were much in vogue; he knew that the greater part of the land was not versed in such things, and did not experience much of great religious affections, so as to enable them to judge them well, and to distinguish between true and false. Satan therefore knew he could best play his game by sowing tares among the wheat, and mingling false affections with the works of God’s Spirit. He knew...
this was a likely way to delude and eternally ruin many souls, and to greatly wound religion in the saints, and entangle them in a dreadful wilderness; and then, by and by, he could bring all religion into disrepute.

But now, when the ill consequences of these false affections appear, and it has become very apparent that some of those emotions which made a glaring show, and were greatly admired by many, were in reality nothing – then the devil sees it is in his interest to work another way. He endeavors to his utmost to propagate and establish a persuasion that all affections and sensitive emotions of the mind, in things of religion, are nothing to be regarded at all. Rather, they are to be avoided, and carefully guarded against, as things of a pernicious tendency. He knows this is the way to bring all religion to a mere lifeless formality, and to effectually shut out the power of godliness, and everything which is spiritual, and to have all true Christianity turned out of doors. For although there must indeed be something to true religion besides affection, yet true religion consists so much in the affections, that there can be no true religion without them. He who has no religious affection is in a state of spiritual death; he is wholly destitute of the powerful, quickening, saving influences of the Spirit of God upon his heart. Just as there is no true religion where there is nothing else but affection, so there is no true religion where there is no religious affection. Divine knowledge requires that there be light in the understanding, as well as an affected fervent heart. For where there is heat without light, there can be nothing divine or heavenly in that heart. So too, on the other hand, where there is a kind of light without heat, and a head filled with notions and speculations, with a cold and unaffected heart, there can be nothing divine in that light. Such knowledge is not true spiritual knowledge of divine things. If the great things of religion are rightly understood, they will affect the heart. The reason why men are not affected by such infinitely great, important, glorious, and wonderful things, as they often hear and read of in the word of God, is undoubtedly because they are blind. If they were not so, it would be impossible, and utterly inconsistent with human nature, that their hearts should be otherwise than strongly impressed and greatly moved by such things.

This manner of slighting all religious affections is the way to exceedingly harden the hearts of men, and to encourage them in their stupidity and senselessness. It keeps them in a state of spiritual death as long as they live, and brings them at last to eternal death. The prevailing prejudice against religious affections in the land at this day, apparently has the awful effects of hardening the hearts of sinners, and dampening the graces of many of the saints. It stuns the life and power of religion, and precludes the effect of ordinances, and holds us down in a state of dullness and apathy. It undoubtedly causes many persons to greatly offend God, by entertaining mean and lowly thoughts of the extraordinary work he has recently wrought in this land.

To despise and decry all religious affections, is the way for some to shut all religion out of their own hearts, and to make a thorough work of ruining their souls.

Those who condemn high affections in others, are certainly not likely to have high affections themselves. Let it be considered that those who have but little religious affection, certainly have but little religion. Those who condemn others for their religious affections, and have none themselves, have no religion.

There are false affections, and there are true. Having much affection does not prove that a man has any true religion. But if he has no affection, it proves that he has no true religion. The right way is not to reject all affections, nor to approve all affections, but to distinguish between affections – approving some, and rejecting others – separating the wheat from the chaff, the gold from the dross, and the precious from the vile.

2. If it is so, that true religion lies much in the affections, then from this we may infer that such means are to be desired that have a strong tendency to move the affections. Such books, and such a way of preaching the word, and administering the ordinances, and such a way of
worshipping God in prayer, and singing praises, are much to be desired – for these have a
tendency to deeply affect the hearts of those who attend these means.

These kinds of means would formerly have been highly approved of and generally applauded by
the people of the land as most excellent and profitable; as having the greatest tendency to
promote the ends of the means of grace. But lately, the prevailing taste seems to be strangely
altered. That passionate manner of praying and preaching which would formerly have been
admired and extolled (because it had such a tendency to move the affections), it now
immediately excites disgust in great multitudes, and it moves no other affections than those of
displeasure and contempt.

Perhaps formerly, most people were in the extreme of looking too much for a passionate address
in public performances. But now the majority of the people seem to have gone too far in a
contrary extreme. Indeed there may be means that have a great tendency to stir up the passions
of weak and ignorant persons, and yet they have no great tendency to benefit their souls. For
although they may have a tendency to excite affections, they have little or none to excite
gracious affections, or any affections tending towards grace. But undoubtedly, if the things of
religion, in the means used, are treated according to their nature, and exhibited truly – so that
they tend to convey fitting apprehensions, and a right judgment of them – then the more they
will tend to better move the affections.

3. If true religion lies much in the affections, from this we may learn what great cause we have to
be ashamed and confounded before God, that we are not more affected by the great things of
religion. It appears from what has been said, that this arises from having so little true religion.

God has given affections to mankind for the same purpose for which he has given all the
faculties and principles of the human soul: so that they might be subservient to man's chief end,
and the great business for which God has created him – that is, the business of religion. And yet
how common it is among mankind, that their affections are much more exercised and engaged
in other matters, than in religion! In things which concern men's worldly interest – their
outward delights, their honor and reputation, and their natural relations – their desires are
eager, their appetites vehement, their love warm and affectionate, and their zeal ardent. In these
things, their hearts are tender and sensitive, easily moved, deeply impressed, much concerned,
very sensibly affected, and greatly engaged. They are greatly depressed with grief at worldly
losses, and elated with joy at worldly successes and prosperity. But how insensitive and
unmoved most men are about the great things of another world! How dull their affections are!
How heavy and hard their hearts are in these matters! Here their love is cold, their desires
languid, their zeal low, and their gratitude small. They can sit and hear of the infinite height,
depth, length, and breadth of the love of God in Christ Jesus, of giving his infinitely dear Son to
be offered up as a sacrifice for the sins of men. They can hear of the unparalleled love of the
innocent, holy, and tender Lamb of God, manifested in his dying agonies, his bloody sweat, his
loud and bitter cries, and his bleeding heart. They can hear that all of this was for his enemies, to
redeem them from deserved and eternal burnings, and to bring them to unspeakable and
everlasting joy and glory – and yet they can be cold, and heavy, insensitive, and disregarding!
Where are the exercises of our affections proper, if not here? What is it that requires them more
than here? And what can be a more fitting occasion for their lively and vigorous exercise, if not
one such as this? Can anything be set in our view that is greater and more important? Is
anything more wonderful and surprising, or that more nearly concerns our interest? Can we
suppose the wise Creator implanted principles in the human nature such as these affections, to
be used by us and exercised on other proper occasions, and yet have them lie still on an occasion
such as this? Can any Christian who believes the truth of these things, entertain such thoughts?

If we ever ought to exercise our affections at all, and if the Creator has not unwisely constituted
the human nature in making these principles a part of it, and if they are not vain and useless,
then they ought to be exercised about those objects which are most worthy of them. But are there any things which Christians can find in heaven or earth that are so worthy to be the objects of their admiration and love, their earnest and longing desires, their hope and their rejoicing, and their fervent zeal, as those things that are held out to us in the gospel of Jesus Christ? In the gospel, not only are things declared that are most worthy to affect us, but they are exhibited in the most affecting manner. The glory and beauty of the blessed Jehovah, which is most worthy in itself to be the object of our admiration and love, is exhibited there in the most affecting manner that can be conceived of. It appears, shining in all its luster, in the face of an incarnate, infinitely loving, meek, compassionate, dying Redeemer. All the virtues of the Lamb of God – his humility, patience, meekness, submission, obedience, love, and compassion – are exhibited to our view in a manner that tends to move our affections more than anything that can be imagined. They all had their greatest trial, and their highest exercise, and so their brightest manifestation, when he was in the most affecting circumstances – even when he was under his last sufferings, those unutterable and unparalleled sufferings that he endured from his tender love and pity for us. There too, the hateful nature of our sins is manifested in the most affecting manner possible. We see their dreadful effects in that our Redeemer, who undertook to answer for us, suffered for them. And there we have the most affecting manifestation of God’s hatred of sin, and his wrath and justice in punishing it; we see his justice in the strictness and inflexibleness of it; and his wrath in the terribleness of it – in so dreadfully punishing our sins in the one who was infinitely dear to him, and infinitely loving towards us. God has so disposed things in the affair of our redemption, and in his glorious dispensations revealed to us in the gospel, that it looks as though everything was purposely contrived to have the greatest possible tendency to reach our hearts, in the most tender part, and to move our affections the most sensibly and strongly. We have much cause, therefore, to be humbled to the dust. How can we not be more affected than we are?
PART II.

SHOWING WHAT ARE NO CERTAIN SIGNS THAT RELIGIOUS AFFECTIONS ARE GRACIOUS, OR NOT GRACIOUS.¹

Someone reading what has just been said, might be ready to acquit himself and say, “I am not one of those who have no religious affections; I am often greatly moved with the consideration of the great things of religion.” Let him not be content that he has religious affections. For as we observed before, just as we should not reject and condemn all affections, as though true religion did not at all consist in affection, so on the other hand, we ought not to approve all affections, as though everyone that is religiously affected has true grace, or as though the subject of the saving influences of the Spirit of God is affections themselves. The right way, is to distinguish between one sort of religious affections and another. Therefore, let us now endeavor to do this. And in order to do it, I would do two things.

1. I would mention some things which are not signs, one way or the other, that affections are what true religion consists in, or what it does not consist in. Then we may guard against judging affections by false signs.

2. I would observe some things in which those affections which are spiritual and gracious, differ from those which are not; and thus show how they may be distinguished and known.

First, I would note some things which are not signs as to whether affections are gracious or not.

1. It is no sign one way or the other, that religious affections are very great, or raised very high.

Some are ready to condemn all high affections. If persons appear to have religious affections raised to an extraordinary pitch, they are prejudiced against them; they conclude that they are delusions, without further inquiry. But if, as was proved, true religion lies very much in religious affections, it would follow that if there is a great deal of true religion, then there will be great religious affections; and if true religion in the hearts of men is raised to a great height, then divine and holy affections will be raised to a great height as well.

Love is an affection. But will any Christian say that men ought not to love God and Jesus Christ to a high degree? Will anyone say that we should not have a very great hatred of sin, and a very deep sorrow for it? Or that we should not exercise a high degree of gratitude to God for the mercies we receive from him, and for the great things he has done for the salvation of fallen men? Or that we should not have very great and strong desires after God and holiness? Is there anyone who will profess that his affections in religion are great enough? Would he say, “I have no cause to be humbled just because I am not more affected by the things of religion than I am; I have no reason to be ashamed that I have no greater exercises of love towards God, and sorrow for sin, and gratitude for the mercies which I have received, than I do.” Who is there that will bless God that he is affected enough by what he has read and heard of the wonderful love of God towards worms and rebels, in giving his only begotten Son to die for them, and of the dying love of Christ. Who will pray that he may not be affected by them to any higher degree, because high affections are improper and unlovely in Christians, being overly enthusiastic and ruinous to true religion?

Our text plainly speaks of great and high affections when it speaks of “repining with joy unspeakable, and full of glory.” Here the most superlative expressions are used that language

¹ “Gracious” – as used here, it means, “produced by the saving grace of God.” Edwards is saying that religious affections or emotional responses, of themselves, are not indications that the person is either saved, or not saved. - WHG
will afford. And the Scriptures often require us to exercise very high affections. Thus in the first
and great commandment of the law, there is an accumulation of expressions, as though words
were lacking to express the degree to which we ought to love God: “You shall love the Lord your
God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.” So the
saints are called upon to exercise high degrees of joy: “Rejoice,” says Christ to his disciples, “and
be exceedingly glad,” Matt. 5:12. So it is said, Psalm 68:3, “Let the righteous be glad: let them
rejoice before God: yes, let them exceedingly rejoice.” In the book of Psalms, the saints are often
called upon to shout for joy; and in Luke 6:23, to leap for joy. So they are abundantly called
upon to exercise high degrees of gratitude for mercies, to “praise God with all their hearts, with
hearts lifted up in the ways of the Lord, and their souls magnifying the Lord, singing his praises,
talking of his wondrous works, declaring his doings, etc.”

We find the most eminent saints in Scripture often professing high affections. Thus the Psalmist
speaks of his love of the law as if it were unspeakable; Psa. 119:97, “O how I love your law!” And
he expresses a great degree of hatred for sin, Psa. 139:21, 29: “Do I not hate those, O Lord, who
hate you? Am not I grieved with those who rise up against you? I hate them with perfect hatred.”
He also expresses a high degree of sorrow for sin: he speaks of his sins going over his head like a
heavy burden that was too heavy for him; Psa 38:4 and of groaning all day, Psa 6.6 and his drying up
like a summer drought, Psa 32:4 and his bones being broken with sorrow. Psa 51:8 So he often
expresses great degrees of spiritual desires, in a number of the strongest expressions which can
be conceived of; such as his longing, his soul’s thirsting as in a dry and thirsty land, Psa 63:1 where
there is no water, his panting, his flesh and heart crying out, his soul’s breaking for the longing it
has, Psa 69:20 etc. He expresses the exercises of great and extreme grief for the sins of others. Psa.
119:136, “Rivers of water run down my eyes, because they do not keep your law.” And verse 53,
“Horror has taken hold of me, because of the wicked that forsake your law.” He expresses high
exercises of joy, Psa. 21:1: “The king shall joy in your strength; and in your salvation how greatly
he shall rejoice.” Psa. 71:23 “My lips shall greatly rejoice when I sing to you.” Psa. 63:3-7,
“Because your loving kindness is better than life, my lips shall praise you; Thus will I bless you,
while I live: I will lift up my hands in your name. My soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and
fatness; and my mouth shall praise you with joyful lips when I remember you upon my bed, and
meditate on you in the night watches. Because you have been my help, therefore I will rejoice in
the shadow of your wings.”

The Apostle Paul expresses high exercises of affection. He expresses pity and concern for others’
good, even to the anguish of his own heart; a great, fervent, and abundant love, and earnest and
longing desires, and exceeding joy; and he speaks of the exultation and triumphs of his soul, and
his earnest expectation and hope, and his abundant tears, and the travails of his soul, in pity,
grief, earnest desires, godly jealousy, and fervent zeal, in many places which have been cited
already, and therefore which I need not repeat. John the Baptist expressed great joy, John 3:39.
Those blessed women who anointed the body of Jesus, are represented as highly exercised in
religious affection at Christ’s resurrection. Matt. 28:8: “And they departed from the sepulcher
with fear and great joy.”

It is often foretold of the church of God, in her future happy seasons here on earth, that they
shall exceedingly rejoice: Psa. 89:15-16, “They shall walk, O Lord, in the light of your
countenance. In your name they shall rejoice all the day: and in your righteousness they shall be
exalted.” Zech. 9:9, “Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold
your King comes,” etc. The same thing is represented in numerous other places. And because
high degrees of joy are the proper and genuine fruits of the gospel of Christ, therefore the angel
calls this gospel, “good tidings of great joy, that shall be to all people.” Luke 2:10

The saints and angels in heaven, who have religion in its highest perfection, are exceedingly
affected by what they behold and contemplate of God’s perfections and works. They are all like a
pure heavenly flame of fire in their love, and in the greatness and strength of their joy and
gratitude. Their praises are represented, “as the voice of many waters and as the voice of a great
thunder.” Rev 19:6. Now the only reason why their affections are so much higher than the holy
affections of saints on earth, is that they see the things they are affected by, more according to
their truth; and they have their affections more conformed according to the nature of things.
Therefore, if religious affections in men here below have the same nature and kind as theirs,
then the higher they are, and the nearer they are to theirs in degree, the better – because in this,
they will be so much more conformed to the truth, as theirs are.

From these things, it certainly appears that if religious affections have a very high degree, then it
is no evidence that they are not of the nature of true religion. Therefore, those who condemn
others as enthusiasts, merely because their affections are very high, greatly err in doing so.

On the other hand, it is no evidence that religious affections are of a spiritual and gracious
nature just because they are great. It is manifest in the holy Scripture, which is our sure and
infallible rule to judge things of this nature, that there are religious affections which are very
high, and yet which are not spiritual and saving. The Apostle Paul speaks of affections in the
Galatians, which had been exceedingly elevated, yet he feared they were vain, and had come to
nothing. Gal. 4:15, “Where is the blessedness you spoke of? For I bear you record, that if it had
been possible, you would have plucked out your own eyes, and given them to me.” And in the 11th
verse, he tells them he was afraid for them, that perhaps he had “labored over them in vain.” So
the children of Israel were greatly affected by God’s mercy towards them, when they had seen
how wonderfully he worked for them at the Red Sea. There they sang God’s praise, though they
soon forgot his works. So they were greatly affected again at mount Sinai, when they saw the
marvelous manifestations that God made of himself there. They seemed mightily engaged in
their minds, and answered with great forwardness when God proposed his holy covenant to
them. They said, “All that the Lord has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient.” But how
soon an end came to all this mighty forwardness and engagement of affection! How quickly they
were turned aside after other gods, rejoicing and shouting around their golden calf! So too, great
multitudes who were affected by the miracle of raising Lazarus from the dead, were elevated to a
high degree, and they made a mighty commotion when Jesus shortly after entered into
Jerusalem. They magnified Christ, as though the ground were not good enough for the donkey
he rode to tread upon. Therefore they cut branches of palm trees, and strewed them in the way.
Indeed, they pulled off their garments and spread them in the way; and they cried out with loud
voices, “Hosanna to the Son of David, blessed is he that comes in the name of the Lord, hosanna
in the highest.” It made the whole city ring again, and put everyone into an uproar. We learn by
the evangelist John, that the reason why the people made this commotion was because they
were affected by the miracle of raising Lazarus, John 12:18. Here was a vast multitude crying
Hosanna on this occasion, so that it gave occasion to the Pharisees to say, “Behold, the world has
gone after him,” John 12:19. But Christ had few true disciples at that time. And how quickly this
commotion ended! All of this nature is quelled and dead when this same Jesus stands bound,
with a mock robe and a crown of thorns – to be derided, spit upon, scourged, condemned, and
executed. Indeed, there was a great and loud outcry concerning him among the multitude then,
just as there was before; but it was of a very different kind. It was not then Hosanna, hosanna –
but Crucify, crucify!

It is the concurring voice of all orthodox divines, that there may be religious affections which are
raised to a very high degree, and yet there is nothing in them of true religion.3

2. It is no sign that affections have the nature of true religion, or that they do not, just because
they have great effects on the body.

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2 See the footnote about ‘enthusiasm’ on page 37. – WHG
3 Mr. Stoddard observes, “That common affections are sometimes stronger than saving.”— Guide to Christ, p. 2.
All affections whatever, have in some respect or degree, an effect on the body. As was observed before, such is our nature and such are the laws of the union of soul and body, that the mind can have no lively or vigorous exercise without having some effect upon the body. So subject is the body to the mind, and so much do its fluids, especially the animal spirits, attend the motions and exercises of the mind, that there cannot be so much as an intense thought without having an effect on them. Indeed, it is questionable whether an embodied soul so much as thinks one thought, or has any exercise at all, that there is not some corresponding motion or alteration of motion, to some degree, of the fluids in some part of the body. Universal experience shows that the exercise of the affections has, in a special way, a tendency towards some tangible effect upon the body. If this is so, that all affections have some effect upon the body, then we may well suppose that the greater those affections are, and the more vigorous their exercise (other circumstances being equal) the greater will be the effect on the body. Hence it is not to be wondered at, that very great and strong exercises of the affections would have great effects on the body. Seeing there are great affections, both common and spiritual, it should not be wondered at that great effects on the body would arise from both kinds of affections. Consequently, these effects are not signs that the affections from which they arose are of one kind or the other.

Great effects on the body are certainly not sure evidences that affections are spiritual. For we see that such effects often arise from great affections about temporal things, when religion is in no way concerned in them. If great affections about secular things, which are purely natural, may have these same effects, then I do not know by what rule we would determine whether high affections about religious things, likewise arise merely from nature.

Nor, on the other hand, do I know of any rule to determine whether gracious and holy affections, if raised just as high as natural affections, having equally strong and vigorous exercises, cannot also have a great effect on the body. No such rule can be drawn from reason. I know of no reason why being affected by a view of God’s glory should not cause the body to faint, just as it might be affected by a view of Solomon’s glory. No such rule has yet been produced from the Scripture, nor has one been found in all the recent controversies about things of this nature. There is a great power in spiritual affections. We read of the power which works in Christians, and of the Spirit of God being a Spirit of power in them, and of the effectual working of his power in them. But man’s nature is weak. Flesh and blood are represented in Scripture as exceedingly weak, particularly with respect to its unfitness for great spiritual and heavenly operations and exercises. The text we are looking at speaks of “joy unspeakable, and full of glory.” Considering the nature of man, and the nature of the affections, who can reasonably doubt that such unutterable and glorious joys may be too great and mighty for weak dust and ashes, so as to considerably overbear it in this way? It is evident by the Scripture that true divine revelations, or ideas of God’s glory, when given to a great degree, have a tendency (by affecting the mind) to overbear the body. This is because the Scripture teaches us often, that if these ideas or views are given to the degree they are given in heaven, the weak frame of the body could not subsist under it. It teaches that no man can, in that manner, see God and live. The knowledge which the saints have in this world of God’s beauty and glory, and those holy affections that arise from it, are of the same nature and kind as what the saints in heaven have; it differs only in degree and circumstances. What God gives them here is a foretaste of heavenly happiness, and an earnest of their future inheritance. And who shall limit God in giving this earnest, or say that he shall give only so much of the inheritance, and only such a portion of the future reward as an earnest, and

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4 Eph. 3:7.  
5 2Tim. 1:7.  
7 Matt. 26:41, 1Cor. 15:43, and 50  
8 1Pet 1.8
no more? Seeing that God has taught us in his word that the whole reward is such that it would immediately destroy the body, is it not overly bold for us to set bounds on the sovereign God – as if saying to Him that, in giving the earnest of this reward in this world, he should never give enough to diminish the strength of the body in the least – when God has not, anywhere, limited himself in this way?

The Psalmist, speaking of the vehement religious affections he had, speaks of an effect in his flesh or body that is separate from the effect in his soul. He expressly distinguishes one from the other, time and again. Psa. 84:2, “My soul longs, indeed, even faints for the courts of the Lord: my heart and my flesh cry out for the living God.” Here is a plain distinction between the heart and the flesh, as each being separately affected. So too in Psa. 63:1, “My soul thirsts for you, my flesh longs for you, in a dry and thirsty land, where there is no water.” Here is an evident and intended distinction between the soul and the flesh.


It is evident that such ideas of God’s glory, as sometimes given in this world, have a tendency to overburden the body, because the Scripture gives us such an account. This has sometimes been the actual effect of those external manifestations that God has made of himself to some of the saints. They were made to that end: to give them an idea of God’s majesty and glory. We have such instances in the prophet Daniel, and the apostle John. Daniel gave a personal account of an external representation of the glory of Christ to him. Dan. 10:8, “And no strength remained in me; for my healthy appearance was turned into deathly pallor, and I retained no vigor.” And the apostle John, gave an account of the manifestation that was made to him. Rev. 1:17, “And when I saw him, I fell at his feet, as if dead.” It is in vain to say here, that these were only external manifestations or symbols of the glory of Christ which these saints beheld. For though it is true that they were outward representations of Christ’s glory which they beheld with their bodily eyes – yet the end and use of these external symbols, as representations, was to give these prophets an idea of the thing represented. And the thing represented was the true divine glory and majesty of Christ, which is his spiritual glory. They were used only as significations of this spiritual glory, and thus these men undoubtedly received them, and made use of them, and were affected by them. According to the end for which God intended these outward signs, what they received by them was a great and lively apprehension of the real glory and majesty of God’s nature. And thus they were greatly affected by them; their souls were swallowed up, and their bodies were overborne by them. I think it would be very bold and daring to say that God cannot, or shall not, give the same clear and affecting ideas and apprehensions, of the same real glory and majesty of his nature, to any of his saints, without the intervention of any such external shadows of it.

Before I leave this topic, I would further observe it is plain that the Scripture often makes use of bodily effects to express the strength of holy and spiritual affections – such as trembling,9 groaning,10 being sick,11 crying out,12 panting,13 and fainting.14 Now if it is supposed that these are only figurative expressions, to represent the degree of affection, I still hope that all will allow that they are fitting and suitable figures to represent the high degree of those spiritual affections

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10 Rom. 8:36.
11 Cant. 2:5 and 5:8.
12 Psa. 84:2.
14 Psa. 84:2 and 119:81
which the Spirit of God makes use of. I do not see how it would be suitable, if these spiritual affections, however high their degree, had no such tendency. These affections are opposite to the proper effects and the sad tokens of false affections, and of the delusion of the devil. I cannot think that God would commonly make use of things – which are so alien from spiritual affections, and which are the shrewd marks of the hand of Satan, and which smell strongly of the bottomless pit – as beautiful figures to represent the high degree of holy and heavenly affections.
3. Being zealous about religious things is no sign of gracious affections

It is no sign that affections are or are not truly gracious affections, just because they cause those who have them to be fluent, fervent, and abundant, in talking about the things of religion.

There are many persons who, if they see this in others, are greatly prejudiced against them. For such persons, others being so full of talk is sufficient ground to condemn them as Pharisees, and as ostentatious hypocrites. On the other hand, there are many who, if they see this effect in anyone, are ignorantly and imprudently eager to at once conclude that they are true children of God, and they are under the saving influences of his Spirit. They speak of it as great evidence of a new creature. They say, “such a person’s mouth is now opened. He used to be slow to speak, but now he is full and free. He is free now to open his heart, and to tell of his experiences, and to declare the praises of God. It flows from him freely, like water from a fountain;” and so on. They are confident and fully persuaded that people are savingly worked upon, if they are not only free and abundant in their speech, but very affectionate and earnest in it.

However, this is the fruit of little judgment, and a scanty and short experience, as recent events abundantly show. It is a mistake persons often run into, by trusting their own wisdom and discernment, and making their own notions their rule, instead of trusting the holy Scripture. The Scripture is full of rules as to how we should judge our own state, and what should conduct our opinion of others. Yet we have no rule anywhere by which to judge whether ourselves or others are in a good estate, based on any such effects. For this is but the religion of the mouth and of the tongue. It is what the Scripture represents by the leaves of a tree: though the tree should not be without them, leaves are nowhere given as evidence of the goodness of the tree.

When people are disposed to abundantly talk about the things of religion, it may be from a good cause, or it may be from a bad one. It may be that their hearts are full of holy affections; “for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.” Or it may be that their hearts are full of religious affection which is not holy. For either way, out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks. It is very much the nature of the affections, of whatever kind they may be, and whatever objects they are exercised about, that if those affections are strong, they will dispose persons to speak extensively about what they are affected by. This is not only to speak extensively of these things, but to speak earnestly and fervently about them. Therefore, persons who talk abundantly and fervently about the things of religion, give evidence of no more than this: that they are very greatly affected by the things of religion. But this affection may be present (as already shown) and yet there may be no grace. What men are greatly affected by while the high affection lasts, they will be earnestly engaged about; and they will likely show their earnestness in their talk and in their behavior. The greater part of the Jews in all Judah and Galilee did this for awhile about John the Baptist’s preaching and baptism. For a season, they were willing to rejoice in his light; a mighty commotion was made all over the land, among all sorts of persons, about this great prophet and his ministry. In the same way, the multitude often manifested a great earnestness and a mighty engagement of spirit in everything that was external about Christ and his preaching, and about his miracles. They were “astonished at his doctrine,” Mat 7:28 “briefly receiving the word with joy.” Luk 8:13 Sometimes they followed him night and day, leaving food, drink, and sleep to hear him. Once they followed him into the wilderness, fasting three days as they were going to hear him. Sometimes they cried out to the clouds about him, saying, “Never did a man speak like this man!” They were fervent and earnest in what they said. But what did these things come to in most of them?

A person may be overfilled with talk of his own experiences – often focusing on it everywhere and in all companies. And when it is so, it is a dark sign rather than a good one. Just as a tree that is overfull of leaves seldom bears much fruit; or as a cloud which appears pregnant and full
of water, if it brings too much wind, then it seldom provides much rain for the dry and thirsty earth. Several times, the Holy Spirit makes use of this very image to represent a great show of religion with the mouth, but without any corresponding fruit in the life. Prov. 25:14, “Whoever falsely boasts of giving a gift, is like clouds and wind without rain.” And the apostle Jude spoke of some in olden times, who crept in unawares among the saints; having a great show of religion, they were not suspected for a while. “These are clouds (he says) without water, carried about by winds,” Jude ver. 4 and 12. The apostle Peter, speaking of the same thing, says in 2Pet. 2:17, “These are clouds without water, carried with a tempest.”

False affections, if they are equally strong, are much more eager to declare themselves than true ones – because it is the nature of false religion to make a show of it for observation, as it was with the Pharisees.¹

¹ That famous experiential divine, Mr. Shepherd, says, “A Pharisee’s trumpet shall be heard to the town’s end; when simplicity walks through the town unseen. Hence a man will sometimes covertly commend himself (and myself ever comes in), and tells you a long story of conversion; and a hundred to one if some lie or other slip not out with it. Why, the secret meaning is, I pray admire me. Hence complain of wants and weaknesses: Pray think what a broken-hearted Christian I am.” Parab. of the Ten Virgins. Part I. pages 179, 180. And holy Mr. Flavel says thus: “O reader, if your heart were right with God, and you did not cheat yourself with a vain profession, you would have frequent business with God, which you would be loth your dearest friend, or the wife of your bosom should be privy to. Non est religio, ubi omnia patent. Religion does not lie open to all, to the eyes of men. Observed duties maintain our credit; but secret duties maintain our life. It was the saying of a heathen, about his secret correspondence with his friend, What need the world be acquainted with it? you and I are theatre enough to each other. There are enclosed pleasures in religion, which none but renewed spiritual souls feelingly understand.” Flavel’s Touchstone of Sincerity, Chap. II. Sect. 2.
4. Externally-induced affections are not necessarily gracious

It is no sign that affections are gracious, or otherwise, if persons did not produce these affections by themselves, nor excite them by their own contrivance and their own strength.

There are many these days who condemn all affections which are excited in a way that their subjects can give no account for. These subjects say their affections do not seem to be the fruit of their own endeavors, or the natural consequence of the faculties and principles of human nature, that might be expected in such circumstances and under such means. Instead, they say these affections come from the influence of some extrinsic and supernatural power upon their minds. The doctrine of the inward experience, or the tangible perception of the immediate power and operation of the Spirit of God, has been greatly reproached and ridiculed by many of late! They say God’s Spirit co-operates in a silent, secret, and indiscernible way with the use of means and with our own endeavors, so that we cannot sensibly distinguish between the influences of the Spirit of God, and the natural operations of the faculties of our own minds.

It is true: it is an unreasonable presumption for anyone to expect to receive the saving influences of the Spirit of God while they neglect a diligent improvement of the appointed means of grace. To expect the Spirit of God to savingly operate on their minds, without the Spirit making use of means that are subservient to the effect, is overly enthusiastic. It is also undoubtedly true that the manner and circumstances of the Spirit’s operations is varied; sometimes he operates in a way that is more secret and gradual, and proceeds from smaller beginnings, than at other times.

But if there is indeed a power that is entirely different from and beyond our power, or the power of all means and instruments, and above the power of nature – and this power is requisite to produce saving grace in the heart, according to the general profession of the country – then certainly it is not unreasonable to suppose that this effect would frequently be produced in such a manner as to make its effect manifest, apparent, and tangible. If grace is indeed owing to the powerful and efficacious operation of an extrinsic agent, or a divine efficient that is outside of ourselves, then why is it unreasonable to suppose it would seem to be this way for those who are its subjects? Is it a strange thing that it should seem to be as it is? When indeed grace in the heart is not produced by our strength, and is not the effect of the natural power of our own faculties, and is not of our own means or instruments, but is properly the workmanship and production of the Spirit of the Almighty – then is it a strange and unaccountable thing, that it would seem to those who are its subjects, that their experience agrees with the truth, and is not contrary to it? So if persons tell of effects that they are conscious of in their own minds, that seem to them from the natural power or operation of their minds, but from the supernatural power of some other agent, then why should it at once be looked at as sure evidence of their being under a delusion, just because things seem to them to be as they are?

For this is the objection which is made about it: it is seen as clear evidence that the apprehensions and affections that many persons have, are not really from such a cause, just because they seem to those persons to be from such a cause. Those persons are merely declaring that what they are conscious of, seems to them, is evidently not from themselves, but from the mighty power of the Spirit of God. And from this, others condemn these persons. They conclude that what these persons have experienced is not from the Spirit of God, but from themselves, or from the devil. Multitudes are unreasonably treated this way today by their neighbors.

The Scripture abundantly teaches that grace in the soul is so much the effect of God’s power, that it is fittingly compared to those effects which cannot be attributed to any strength in the subject – such as regeneration, or being begotten, or resurrection, or being raised from the dead, or creation, or being brought out of nothing into being. If indeed it is so, that it is an effect in which the mighty power of God is greatly glorified, and the exceeding greatness of his power is manifested, Eph. 1:17-20. then what account can be given for it, that the Almighty, in so great a work
of his power, would so carefully hide his power, so that its subjects would not be able to discern anything of it? Or what reason or revelation does anyone have to determine that he does so? If we may judge by the Scripture, this is not agreeable to God’s manner in his operations and dispensations. On the contrary, it is God’s manner, in the great works of his power and mercy which he works for his people, to order things so as to make his hand visible, and his power conspicuous, and men’s dependence on him most evident, so that no flesh should glory in his presence, 1Cor. 1:27, 28, 29 and so that God alone might be exalted, Isa. 2:11-17 and so that the excellency of the power might be of God and not of man, 2Cor. 4:7 and so that Christ’s power might be manifested in our weakness, 2Cor. 12:9 and none might say ‘my own hand has saved me,’ Judg. 7:2.

So it was in most of those temporal salvations which God wrought for Israel of old, which were types of the salvation of God’s people from their spiritual enemies. So it was in the redemption of Israel from their Egyptian bondage. He redeemed them with a strong hand, and an outstretched arm. And so that his power might be more conspicuous, he first allowed Israel to be brought into the most helpless and forlorn circumstances. So it was in the great redemption by Gideon. God wanted his army diminished to a handful, and to be without any arms other than trumpets, lamps, and earthen pitchers. So it was in the deliverance of Israel from Goliath, by a using a stripling boy with a sling and a stone. So it was in that great work of God, calling the Gentiles and converting the Heathen world after Christ’s ascension, and after the world by its own wisdom did not know God. For many ages, all the endeavors of philosophers proved in vain to reform the world. So it became abundantly evident that the world was utterly helpless without the mighty power of God. And this is what we see in most of the conversions of particular persons that we have an account of in the history of the New Testament: they were not worked on in that silent, secret, gradual, and insensitive manner which is now insisted on; but with those manifest evidences of a supernatural power, wonderfully and suddenly causing a great change, which in these days are looked upon as certain signs of delusion and enthusiasm. 1

The Apostle, in Eph. 1:18-19, speaks of God enlightening the minds of Christians, and so bringing them to believe in Christ – the end is that they might know the exceeding greatness of his power towards those who believe. The words are, “The eyes of our understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of his calling, and what are the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of his power towards us who believe, according to the working of his mighty power,” etc. Now when the apostle speaks of saints being the subjects of his power in this way, in their enlightening and effectual calling, to the end that they might know what his mighty power was towards those who believe, he can only mean, “that they might know by experience.” But if the saints know this power by experience, then they feel it, and discern it, and are conscious of it. It is sensibly distinguishable from the natural operations of their own minds. This is not agreeable to a notion that God operates so

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1 Enthusiasm is meant in a derogatory sense, as literally, “God-within-ism,” the immanent God in opposition to the transcendent God. In an article titled “Reformed and Always Reforming (Always Reformed, ed. R. Scott Clark and Joel E. Kim, Westminster Seminary CA, 2010) pp. 117-119, Michael Horton relates that John Calvin “complained of being assaulted by ‘two sects’ – ‘the Pope and the Anabaptists’ – which, though quite different from each other, ‘boast extravagantly of the Spirit’ in order to distort or distract from the word of God.” Horton writes, “The legacy of enthusiasm has found fertile soil in American religious experience, particularly in the history of revivalism. Alexis de Tocqueville observed that Americans wish ‘to escape from imposed systems’ of any kind, ‘[to] seek by themselves and in themselves for the only reason for things, looking to results without getting entangled in the means toward them.’ They do not need external guidance to discover truth, ‘having found it in themselves.’ …The effect of pietism… was to shift the emphasis away from ‘collective belief, adherence to creedal standards and proper observance of traditional forms, to the emphasis on individual religious experience.’ The effect of the Enlightenment was to shift ‘the ultimate authority in religion’ from the church to ‘the mind of the individual.’ …Yet this inner spark, inner light, inner experience, and inner reason that guides mysticism, rationalism, idealism, and pragmatism in all ages is precisely that autonomous self which, according to the New Testament, must be crucified and buried with Christ in baptism, so that one can be raised with Christ as a denizen of the new age.” Yet Edwards affirms religious experience against those who dismiss it. – WHG

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secretly and indiscernibly, that it cannot be known that they are the subjects of the influence of any extrinsic power at all, other than as they may argue it from the assertions of Scripture; which is different from knowing it by experience.

So it is most unreasonable and unscriptural to conclude that affections are not from the gracious operations of God’s Spirit, just because these affections do not sensibly proceed from the persons themselves who are the subjects of those operations.

On the other hand, it is no evidence that affections are indeed gracious, just because they are not produced by their subjects, or because they arise in their minds in a way they cannot account for.

There are some who make this an argument in their own favor. When speaking of what they have experienced, they say, “I am sure I did not make it myself; it was a fruit of no contrivance or endeavor of mine; it came when I thought nothing of it; if I could gain the world for it, I cannot make it happen again when I please.” Hence, they conclude that what they experienced must be from the mighty influence of the Spirit of God, and that it is of a saving nature. But they do so ignorantly, and without grounds. What they have been the subjects of may indeed not be from themselves directly, but it may be from the operation of an invisible agent, from some spirit besides their own – but it does not follow from this that it was from the Spirit of God. There are other spirits who have influence on the minds of men besides the Holy Ghost. We are directed not to believe every spirit, but to test the spirits, whether they are of God. 1Joh 4.1 There are many false spirits that are exceedingly busy with men, who often transform themselves into angels of light. In many wonderful ways, and with great subtlety and power, they mimic the operations of the Spirit of God. Many of Satan’s operations are distinguishable from the voluntary exercises of men’s own minds. They present themselves in those dreadful and horrid suggestions and blasphemous injections with which he hounds many persons. They present themselves in vain and fruitless frights and terrors, which Satan is the author of. The power of Satan may be as immediate and as evident in false comforts and joys, as it is in terrors and horrid suggestions; and it is often so in fact. It is not in men’s power to put themselves in raptures such as the Anabaptists in Germany have, or which many other raving enthusiasts like them have.

Besides these arguments, consider that some persons may have impressions on their minds which may not be of their own producing, nor are they from an evil spirit, but from the Spirit of God – and yet they still may not proceed from any saving influence, but from a common influence of the Spirit of God. The subjects of such impressions may be among those we read about in Heb. 6:4-5. They “have once been enlightened, and tasted of the heavenly gift, and are made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and have tasted the good word of God, and the power of the world to come;” and yet they may be wholly unacquainted with those “better things that accompany salvation” spoken of in ver. 9.

Where neither a good nor evil spirit has an immediate hand in it, some may still have strange apprehensions and imaginations, with strong affections attending them. These unaccountably arise; they are not voluntarily produced. This happens especially in those with a weak and nervous habit of body, or where the brain is weak and easily susceptible to impressions. We see that such persons are liable to impressions about temporal things; and there is equal reason for them to be liable to impressions about spiritual things. Just as a person who is asleep has dreams of which he is not the voluntary author, so may such persons, in a similar way, have involuntary impressions when they are awake.
5. Facile recollection of Scripture is not a sign of true religious affections

It is no sign that religious affections are truly holy and spiritual, or that they are not, just because they are accompanied by texts of Scripture, remarkably brought to the mind.

It is no sign that affections are not gracious, just because they are occasioned by Scriptures coming to mind in this way; provided it is the Scripture itself, or the truth which that Scripture contains and teaches, that is the foundation of their affection, and not merely, or mainly, the sudden and unusual manner of its coming to mind.

On the other hand, neither is it any sign that affections are gracious, that on occasion some Scriptures are brought suddenly and wonderfully to mind – whether those affections are fear or hope, joy or sorrow, or any other affection. Some seem to look at this as good evidence that their affections are saving, especially if the affections that are excited are hope or joy, or any other affection that is pleasing and delightful. They will mention it as evidence that all is right, that their experience came with the word. They will say, “There were such and such sweet promises brought to my mind: they came suddenly, as if they were spoken to me. I had no hand in bringing such a text to my own mind. I was not thinking about anything leading to it. It came all at once, so that I was surprised by it. I had not thought of it for a long time; I did not know at first that it was Scripture; I did not remember that I had ever read it.” And it may be, they will add, “One Scripture came flowing in after another, and so did texts from all over the Bible, the most sweet and pleasant, and the most apt and suitable which could be devised. It filled me as full as I could hold. I could only stand and admire; the tears flowed; I was full of joy, and could not doubt any longer.” Thus they think they have indisputable evidence that their affections must be from God, and they are of the right kind, and their state is good. But they think so without any grounds for it. How did they come by any such rule, that if any affections or experiences arise with promises, and with comforting texts of Scripture that are unaccountably brought to mind, without their recollection, or if a great number of sweet texts follow one another in a chain, that this is certain evidence that their experiences are saving? Where is any such rule to be found in the Bible, that great and only sure directory in things of this nature?1

What deceives many who are less understanding and thoughtful, in this matter, seems to be this: that the Scripture is the word of God, and it has nothing in it which is wrong; it is pure and perfect. Therefore, those experiences which come from the Scripture must be right. But then it should also be considered that affections may arise on occasion from the Scripture, and yet not properly come from the Scripture, as its genuine fruit by a right use of it; rather they come from an abuse of it. All that can be argued from the purity and perfection of the word of God, with respect to religious experiences, is that those experiences which agree with the word of God are right, and they cannot be otherwise; but it cannot be argued that those affections must be right, just because they arise on an occasion when the word of God comes to mind.

What evidence is there that the devil cannot bring texts of Scripture to mind, and misapply them to deceive persons? There seems to be nothing in this which exceeds the power of Satan. It is not such a work of mighty power, to bring sounds or letters to a person’s mind, that we must suppose nothing short of Omnipotence can be sufficient for it. If Satan has power to bring any words or sounds at all to a person’s mind, then he may have power to bring words contained in

1 Keep in mind that Edwards’ concern is to assess the effects of the Great Awakening (1730’s and 40’s), whether what was being seen was purely emotional, or a work of the Holy Spirit. In his day, most of those responding to evangelists like George Whitefield had been raised in Christian communities, and instructed in the churches as children; thus familiarity with Scripture was not ‘miraculous’, nor is it surprising they thought they were ‘saved’ because of their experience – rather than Christ being the sole object of their faith. Remember, Satan also has a “facile recollection” of Scripture (Mat 4.6; Jas 2.19). – WHG
the Bible. There is no higher sort of power required in men to make the sounds which express the words of a text of Scripture, than to make the sounds which express the words of an idle story or a song. And so the same power in Satan, which is sufficient to renew one of those kinds of sounds in the mind, is sufficient to renew the other. The different signification, which depends wholly on custom, does not alter the case, as to his ability to make or revive the sounds or letters. Or will anyone suppose that texts or Scriptures are such sacred things, that the devil dares not abuse them, or touch them? If they do, they are also mistaken. Anyone bold enough to lay hold on Christ himself, and carry him here and there, into the wilderness, and onto a high mountain, and to a pinnacle of the temple, is not afraid to touch the Scripture, and abuse it for his own purpose. He showed at the same time that he was bold with Christ in this way, when he brought one Scripture after another, to deceive and tempt him. And if Satan presumed, and was permitted to put Christ himself in mind of texts of Scripture to tempt him, what reason do we have to conclude that he dare not or will not be permitted, to put wicked men in mind of texts of Scripture to tempt and deceive them? And if Satan may thus abuse one text of Scripture, so he may abuse another. Being an excellent passage of Scripture, or a comforting and precious promise, does not alter the case as to Satan’s courage or ability. If he can bring one comforting text to mind, so he can bring a thousand; and he may choose Scriptures which most tend to serve his purpose. He may heap up Scripture promises, wonderfully tending to remove any rising doubts, and to confirm the false joy and confidence of a poor deluded sinner, according to the perverse application for which he makes of them.

We know that the devil’s instruments, corrupt and heretical teachers, can and do pervert the Scripture to their own and others’ damnation, 2Pet. 3:16. We see they have the free use of Scripture, in every part of it. There is no text so precious and sacred that they are not permitted to abuse it, to the eternal ruin of multitudes of souls. There are no weapons they make use of that could lead to more executions. And there is no manner of reason to determine that the devil is not permitted to use the Scripture, as well as his instruments, in this way. For when the latter do it, they do it as his instruments and servants, and they do it through his instigation and influence. Doubtless he does the same thing that he instigates others to do. The devil’s servants only follow their master, and they do the same work that he does himself.

Just as the devil can abuse the Scripture to deceive and destroy men, so may men’s own folly and corruptions destroy them. The sin which is in men acts like its father. Men’s own hearts are deceitful like the devil, and they use the same means to deceive.

So it is evident that anyone may have high affections of hope and joy, arising on occasion with texts of Scripture, indeed precious promises of Scripture, that come suddenly and remarkably to their minds as though they were spoken to them; indeed, a great multitude of such texts may follow one another in a wonderful manner; and yet all this is not an argument that these affections are divine, or that they are anything other than the effects of Satan’s delusions.

I would further observe that persons may experience raised and joyful affections, which may be accompanied by the word of God or which come from the word, and yet those affections may not be from Satan, or from the corruptions of their own hearts, but from some influence of the Spirit of God with the word. Yet they still may have nothing of the nature of true and saving religion in them. Thus, the stony-ground hearers had great joy from the word. This is represented in this parable as arising from the word, as growth from a seed. In their appearance, the affections of the seed on stony ground, exactly resembled the affections of the seed that grew on good ground.

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2 Matt 4, Mark 1, and Luke 4 – the temptation of Christ in the desert.
3 Jer 17.9
4 Mark 4.16
The difference between them did not appear until it was revealed by the result, during a trial. Yet there was no saving religion in those resembling affections.⁵

⁵ Mr. Stoddard in his Guide to Christ, speaks of it as a common thing, for persons while in a natural condition, and before they have ever truly accepted Christ, to have Scripture promises come to them with a great deal of refreshing; which they take as tokens of God's love, and hope that God has accepted them; and so are confident of their good estate. Pages 8, 9. Impression anno 1735.
6. Religious affections are not saving because love appears in them

It is no evidence that religious affections are saving, or that they are otherwise, because there is an appearance of love in them.

There are no professing Christians who pretend that this is an argument against the truth and saving nature of religious affections. On the other hand, there are some who suppose it is good evidence that such affections are from the sanctifying and saving influences of the Holy Ghost. Their argument is that Satan cannot love; this affection is thus directly contrary to the devil, whose very nature is enmity and malice. It is true, that nothing is more excellent, heavenly, and divine, than a spirit of true Christian love towards God and men. It is more excellent than knowledge, prophecy, miracles, or speaking with the tongue of men and angels. It is the chief grace of God’s Spirit, and it is the life, essence, and sum of all true religion. It is love by which we are most conformed to heaven, and made most contrary to hell and the devil. Yet in arguing from this, that there are no counterfeits of it, it may be observed that the more excellent anything is, the more counterfeits there will be of it. Thus, there are many more counterfeits of silver and gold, than there are of iron and copper. There are many false diamonds and rubies; who would counterfeit common stones? The more excellent things are, the more difficult it is to make anything like them, in their essential nature and internal virtues. Even so, there will be more counterfeits, the more that art and subtlety can make an exact imitation of outward appearance. Thus there is the greatest danger of being cheated in buying medicines that are of the most excellent and sovereign qualities, even though it is very difficult to imitate them with anything of similar value and virtue. It is nonetheless possible, yet their counterfeits are good for nothing when we buy them. So it is with Christian virtues and graces. The subtlety of Satan and men’s deceitful hearts want chiefly to counterfeit those that are in highest repute. So there are perhaps no graces that have more counterfeits than love and humility – these are virtues in which the beauty of a true Christian especially appears.

But with respect to love, it is plain from Scripture, that persons may have a kind of religious love, and yet have no saving grace. Christ speaks of many professing Christians that have such love, whose love will not continue, and so they will fail in salvation, Matt. 24:12-13: “And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold. But the one who endures to the end will be saved.” The latter words plainly show that those spoken of before, whose love will not endure to the end but will wax cold, would not be saved.

Persons may seem to have love towards God and Christ – indeed, to have very strong and violent affections of this nature – and yet have no grace. This was evidently the case with many graceless Jews, such as those who shouted so loud after Jesus, following him day and night, without food, drink, or sleep – those who said, “Lord, I will follow you wherever you go,” and cried, “Hosanna to the Son of David.”

The apostle seems to intimate that there were many in his day that had a counterfeit love towards Christ, as in Eph. 6:24: “Grace be with all those who love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity.” The last word, in the original, signifies incorruption; which shows, that the apostle was aware that there were many who had a kind of love towards Christ, whose love was not pure and spiritual.

So also, Christian love towards the people of God may be counterfeited. It is evident by the Scripture that there may be strong affections of this kind, without saving grace. This was true of

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1 Agreeable to this, Mr. Stoddard observes in his Guide to Christ, that some sinners have pangs of affection, and give an account that they find a spirit of love towards God, and of their aiming at the glory of God, having that which has a great resemblance of saving grace; and that sometimes their common affections are stronger than saving. And supposes, that sometimes natural then may have such violent pangs of false affection to God, that their may think themselves willing to be damned. Pages 21, and 65.
the Galatians in their love towards the Apostle Paul, when they were ready to pluck out their eyes and give them to him; yet the apostle expresses his fear that their affections had come to nothing, and that he had labored over them in vain, Gal. 4:11, 15.²

² **Galatians 4:11** I am afraid for you, lest I have labored for you in vain. **Galatians 4:15** What then was the blessing you enjoyed? For I bear you witness that, if possible, you would have plucked out your own eyes and given them to me.
7. Having a variety of religious affections does not make them gracious

Persons having religious affections of many kinds, accompanying one another, is not sufficient to determine whether they have any gracious affections or not.

Though false religion is prone to be maimed and monstrous, and not to have that wholeness and symmetry of parts which is to be seen in true religion, yet there may be a great variety of false affections combined with them that may resemble gracious affections.

It is evident that there are counterfeits of all kinds of gracious affections, such as love towards God, and love towards the brothers, as just observed; so too of godly sorrow for sin, as we see in Pharaoh, Saul, and Ahab, and the children of Israel in the wilderness; and of the fear of God, as in the Samaritans, “who feared the Lord, and served their own gods at the same time,” 2Kings 17:32-33; and those enemies of God we read of in Psa. 66:3, who “through the greatness of God’s power, submit themselves to him,” or, as it is in the Hebrew, “lie to him,” i.e., yield a counterfeit reverence and submission. So too of a gracious gratitude, as in the children of Israel who sang God’s praise at the Red Sea, Psa. 106:12; and Naaman the Syrian, after the miraculous cure of his leprosy, 2Kings 5:15, etc.

So too of spiritual joy, as in the stony-ground hearers, Matt. 13:20, and particularly many of John the Baptist’s hearers, John 5:35. So too of zeal, as in Jehu, 2Kings 10:16, and in Paul before his conversion, Gal. 1:14. Phil. 3:6, and the unbelieving Jews, Acts 22:3, Rom. 10:2. So too graceless persons may have earnest religious desires, which may be like Baalam’s desires, which he expressed under an extraordinary view that he had been given of the happy state of God’s people, which distinguished them from the rest of the world, Num. 23:9-10. They may also have a strong hope of eternal life, as the Pharisees had.

Just as men, while in a state of nature, are capable of resembling all kinds of religious affections, so nothing hinders them from having many of them together. What appears in fact, abundantly evinces that this is very often so. It seems common that when false affections are raised high, many false affections attend each other. The multitude of people that attended Christ into Jerusalem, following that great miracle of raising Lazarus, seem to have been moved by many religious affections at once – and all of them to a high degree. They seem to have been filled with admiration; and there was a show of a high affection of love; and also of a great degree of reverence in laying their garments on the ground for Christ to tread on; and also great gratitude towards him for the great and good works he had wrought, praising him with loud voices for his salvation. There were earnest desires of the coming of God’s kingdom, which they supposed Jesus was about to set up. They showed great hopes and raised expectations of it, expecting that it would immediately appear. From this, they were filled with joy by which they were so animated in their acclamations, as to make the whole city ring with the noise of them. They appeared great in their zeal and eagerness to attend Jesus, and to assist him to set up his kingdom without further delay, during the great feast of the Passover.

It is easy from nature, and from the nature of the affections, to give an account as to why it is that when one affection is raised very high, it excites others. This is especially true if the affection which is raised high, is counterfeit love, as it was in the multitude who cried ‘Hosanna.’ This will naturally draw many other affections after it. For as observed before, love is the chief affection, and the fountain of the others. Suppose there is a person who, for some time, has been greatly exercised with terror by his fear of hell; his heart is weakened with distress and with dreadful apprehensions; he is upon the brink of despair – and all at once, he is made to firmly believe, through some delusion of Satan, that God has pardoned him, and that God accepts him

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as the object of his dear love, and that God promises him eternal life. Suppose this happens through some vision, or a strong idea or imagination that is suddenly excited in him, of a person with a beautiful countenance who smiles at him with open arms, and with blood dripping down. And this man thinks the person he sees is Christ – all of this without any other enlightening of his understanding. There is no view of the divine spiritual excellency of Christ and of his fullness; there is no view of the way of salvation revealed in the gospel. Or perhaps some voice or words come, as if spoken to him, such as, “Son, be of good cheer, your sins are forgiven you;” or, “Fear not, it is the Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.” And he takes this as being immediately spoken to by God, even though there was no preceding acceptance of Christ, nor any closing of his heart with Christ. I say, if we were to suppose such a case, what various passions would naturally crowd at once, one after another, into such a person’s mind!

It is easy, from mere principles of nature, to account for a person’s heart on such an occasion. He is raised to the skies with transports of joy. He is filled with fervent affection towards that imaginary God or Redeemer whom he supposes has rescued him from the jaws of such dreadful destruction that his soul was terrified by fear of it. This redeemer has received him with such endearment as his particular favorite. The man is now filled with admiration and gratitude. His mouth is opened, and he is full of talk about what he has experienced. For awhile he thinks and speaks of scarcely anything else, and he seems to magnify God who has done so much for him. He calls upon others to rejoice with him, and he has a cheerful countenance, and talks with a loud voice about how, before his deliverance, he was full of quarrels against the justice of God; but now it is easy for him to submit to God, and admit his unworthiness, and cry out against himself. He appears to be very humble before God; he lies at his feet, tame as a lamb. He now confesses his unworthiness, and cries out, “Why me? Why me?” (This is like Saul, who when Samuel told him that God had appointed him to be king, answered, “Am I not a Benjamite, of the smallest of the tribes of Israel, and my family the least of all the families of the tribe of Benjamin? Why then do you speak this way to me?” It is the language of David, the true saint, 2Sam. 7:18, “Who am I, and what is my father’s house, that you have brought me to this?”)

Nor is it any wonder, that now he would delight to be with those who acknowledge and applaud his happy circumstances – or that he would love all those who esteem and admire him and what he has experienced. He is violently zealous against all those who would make nothing of such things. He would be disposed to openly separate from, and proclaim war against, all who are not of his new party. He would now glory in his sufferings. He would condemn and censure all who seem to doubt or make any objections about these things. And while the warmth of his affections lasts, is it any wonder that he would be eager to take pains, and to deny himself, in order to promote the interest of the party which he imagines favors such things. He seems to earnestly desire to increase their number, just as the Pharisees compassed sea and land to make one proselyte. And so I might go on and mention many other things which would naturally arise in such circumstances. Someone who thinks that things such as these cannot arise in this way, without any supernatural interposition of divine power, has lightly considered human nature.

Just as all Christian affections flow from true divine love, so in the same way, other false affections flow naturally from a counterfeit love. In both cases, love is the fountain, and the other affections are the streams. The various faculties, principles, and affections of human nature are, as it were, many channels from one fountain. If there is sweet water in the fountain, then sweet water will flow from there out into those various channels; but if the water in the fountain is poisonous, then poisonous streams will also flow out into all those channels. So the channels and streams will be alike, corresponding one with another; but the great difference will

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2 “Associating with godly men does not prove that a man has grace: Ahithophel was David’s companion. Sorrows for the afflictions of the church, and desires for the conversion of souls, do not prove it. These things may be found in carnal men, and so they can be no evidence of grace.” Stoddard’s Nature of Saving Conversion, p. 82.
lie in the nature of the water. Or, man’s nature may be compared to a tree with many branches coming from one root: if the sap in the root is good, there will also be good sap distributed throughout the branches; and the fruit that is brought forth will be good and wholesome. But if the sap in the root and stock is poisonous, then it will be poisonous in the many branches (as in the other case), and the fruit will be deadly. The tree in both cases may appear alike; there may be an exact resemblance in shape; but the difference is found only in eating the fruit. It is often this way (in some measure at least) between saints and hypocrites. There is sometimes a great similarity between true and false experiences, and in their appearance, and in what is expressed and related by their subjects. The difference between them is much like the difference between the dreams of Pharaoh’s chief butler and baker. They seemed to be much alike. Yet when Joseph interpreted the chief butler’s dream, he would be delivered from his imprisonment, and restored to the king’s favor and to his honorable office in the palace. Because of that favorable interpretation, the chief baker had raised hopes and expectations. And so he related his dream also; but he was woefully disappointed – though his dream was so much like the happy and well-boding dream of his companion, yet it was quite contrary in its outcome. Gen 40
8. Attack of conscience leading to comfort or joy is no sign of gracious affections

Nothing can certainly be determined concerning the nature of the affections by this: that comforts and joys seem to follow awakenings and convictions of conscience in a certain order.

Many persons seem prejudiced by divines, against affections and experiences that come in a way that has been insisted on: first there are awakenings, fears, and awful apprehensions; these are followed by legal humblings, in the sense of recognizing their total sinfulness and helplessness; and then, such and such a light and comfort will come. They look at all such schemes, and laying down such methods and steps, as things of men’s devising, particularly if high affections of joy follow great distress and terror. Many make this an argument against those affections. But such prejudices and objections are without reason or Scripture. Surely it cannot be unreasonable to suppose that before God delivers anyone from a state of sin and exposure to eternal destruction, he would give them a considerable sense of the evil he delivers them from, so that they may be delivered sensibly, and understand their own salvation, and know something of what God does for them. Men that are saved are in two very different states: first in a state of condemnation, and then in a state of justification and blessedness. In the work of the salvation of mankind, God deals with them suitably to their intelligent rational nature. So it seems reasonable, and agreeable to God’s wisdom, that men who are saved would be in these two states sensibly. First, they are aware of their state of condemnation, and thus they are in a state of woeful calamity and dreadful misery; and second, afterwards, they are aware that they are in a state of deliverance and happiness. They should first be aware of their absolute extreme necessity; and afterwards they should be aware of Christ’s sufficiency and God’s mercy through him.

That is God’s manner of dealing with men, to “lead them into a wilderness, before he speaks comfortably to them.” Hos 2:14 It is abundantly manifested by the Scripture that, to order it, they are brought into distress, and made to see their own helplessness and absolute dependence on God’s power and grace, before God appears to work any great deliverance for them. God is then prone to “relent for his professing people, when their strength is gone, and there is none shut up or left.” They are brought to see that their false gods cannot help them, and that the rock in whom they have trusted is vain, Deut. 32:36-37. Before God delivered the children of Israel out of Egypt, they were prepared for it by being made to “see that they were in an evil situation,” and “to cry to God, because of their hard bondage,” Exod. 2:23, and 5:19. And before God wrought that great deliverance for them at the Red Sea, they were brought into great distress – the wilderness had shut them in; they could not turn to the right hand or the left; the Red Sea was before them, and the great Egyptian host behind. They were brought to see that they could do nothing to help themselves; and that if God did not help them, they would immediately be swallowed up. Then God appeared, and turned their cries into songs. So before they were brought to their rest, to enjoy the milk and honey of Canaan, God “led them through a great and terrible wilderness, so that he might humble them and teach them what was in their heart, and thus do them good in the end,” Deut. 8:2, 16.

The woman that had the issue of blood for twelve years was not delivered until she first “spent all her living on earthly physicians, and could not be healed by any;” and so she was left helpless, having no more money to spend. Then she came to the Great Physician, without any money or price, and was healed by him, Luke 8:43-44. Before Christ would answer the request of the woman of Canaan, he first seemed to utterly deny her; he humbled her, and brought her to admit that she was worthy to be called a dog. And then he showed her mercy, and received her as a dear child, Matt. 15:22, etc. The Apostle Paul, before a remarkable deliverance, was “pressed out of measure, above strength, so that he despained even of life; he had the sentence of death on him, so that he might not trust in himself, but in God that raises the dead,” 2Cor. 1:8-10. There was first a great tempest, and the ship was covered with the waves and about to sink, before we
No Certain Signs That Religious Affections Are Gracious

find the disciples were brought to cry out to Jesus, “Lord save us, we perish;” and then the winds and seas were rebuked, and there was a great calm, Matt. 8:24-26. The leper, before he was cleansed, had his mouth stopped by a covering on his upper lip. He had to acknowledge his great misery and utter uncleanness by rending his clothes, and crying, “Unclean, unclean,” Lev. 13:45. Backsliding Israel, before God healed them, were brought to “acknowledge that they have sinned, and have not obeyed the voice of the Lord,” and to see that “they lie down in their shame, and that confusion covers them,” and “that salvation is hoped for in vain from the hills, and from the multitude of mountains,” and that only God can save them, Jer. 3:23-25. Joseph, who was sold by his brothers, and thus was a type for Christ, brings his brothers into great perplexity and distress; He brought them to reflect on their sin, and to say, “We are truly guilty.” At last they resigned themselves entirely into his hands as slaves; and then Joseph revealed himself to them, as their brother and their savior.

If we consider those extraordinary manifestations which God made of himself to saints of old, we will find that usually he manifested himself first in a way which was terrible, and then by those things that were comfortable. So it was with Abraham: first, a horror of great darkness fell upon him; and then God revealed himself to him in sweet promises, Gen. 15:12-13. So it was with Moses at Mount Sinai: first, God appeared to him in all the terrors of his dreadful Majesty, so that Moses said, “I exceedingly fear and quake.” Then God made all his goodness pass before Moses as He proclaimed his own name, “The Lord God, gracious and merciful,” etc. It was this way with Elijah: first, there was a stormy wind, and earthquakes, and devouring fire; and then there was a still, small, sweet voice, 1Kings 19. So it was with Daniel: he first saw Christ’s countenance as lightning that terrified him and caused him to faint away; then he was strengthened and refreshed with such comforting words as these, “O Daniel, a man greatly beloved,” Dan. 10. So it was with the apostle John, Rev. 1. There is an analogy to be observed in God’s dispensations and deliverances which he works for his people, and in the manifestations which he makes of himself to them, both ordinary and extraordinary.

But there are many things in Scripture which more directly show that this is God’s ordinary way of working salvation for the souls of men, and of manifesting himself and his mercy in Christ. It is the ordinary way God works his grace on the hearts of sinners. The servant that owed his prince ten thousand talents is first held to his debt; and the king pronounces sentence of condemnation upon him; and the king commands him to be sold along with his wife and children; and that payment is to be made. Thus he humbles the servant, and brings him to own the whole of the debt as just – and then the king forgives him all. The prodigal son spends his entire inheritance, and is brought to see himself in extreme circumstances, and to humble himself, and to own his unworthiness, before he finds relief and is feasted by his father, Luke 15.

Old inveterate wounds must be searched to the bottom in order to be healed: the Scripture compares sin to a wound of the soul,¹ and it speaks of it as vain and deceitful to heal this wound without first examining it. Christ, in the work of his grace on the hearts of men, is compared to rain on new-mown grass, grass that is cut down with a scythe, Psa. 72:6. This represents his refreshing, comforting influences on the wounded spirit. Our first parents, after they sinned, were terrified by God’s majesty and justice. Before they were assured by the promise of the seed of the woman, they had their sin with all its aggravations set before them by their Judge. Christians are spoken of as those “who have fled for refuge to lay hold on the hope set before them,” Heb. 6:18. This representation implies great fear; a sense of danger preceded it. To a similar purpose, Christ is called “a hiding place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest, like rivers of water in a dry place, and the shadow of a great rock in a weary land,” Isa. 32:2. It seems to be the natural import of the word gospel, “glad tidings”, that it is news of deliverance and salvation, following great fear and distress. There is also reason to suppose that God deals

¹ Jer 6:7; 1Cor 8:12 (correction to verse originally cited).
with particular believers as he dealt with his church. First he made them hear his voice in the
law, with terrible thunder and lightning; he kept her under that schoolmaster to prepare her for
Christ. **Gal 3.24** Then he comforted her with the joyful sound of the gospel from Mount Zion. So
likewise, John the Baptist came to prepare the way for Christ, and to prepare men’s hearts for
his reception by showing them their sins, and by bringing the self-righteous Jews away from
their own righteousness. He told them they were “a generation of vipers;” he told them of their
danger in “the wrath to come;” and told them that “the axe was laid at the root of the trees,” etc.

If it is indeed God’s manner (as I think the foregoing considerations show it undoubtedly is),
that before he gives men the comfort of a deliverance from their sin and misery, he gives them a
considerable sense of the greatness and dreadfulness of those evils, and of their extreme
wretchedness because of them – then surely it is not unreasonable to suppose that men often,
while under these views of their sin, would have great distress and terrible apprehensions. This
is especially true if it is considered what these evils are that they have a view of. They are none
other than views of the great and manifold sins they have committed against the infinite majesty
of the great Jehovah, and of suffering the fierceness of his wrath to all eternity. This is more so
when we have many plain instances in Scripture of those who have actually been brought into
great distress by such convictions. It was before they received saving consolations. This was the
multitude at Jerusalem who were “pricked in their heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the
apostles, Men and brothers, what shall we do?” And the apostle Paul, who trembled and was
astonished before he was comforted. And the jailer when “he called for a light and sprang in, and
came trembling; he fell down before Paul and Silas, and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved?”

From these things, it appears quite unreasonable for professing Christians to object to the truth
and spiritual nature of the comfortable and joyful affections which anyone may have, that these
affections follow such awful apprehensions and distresses as those mentioned.

On the other hand, it is no evidence that comforts and joys are right, just because they follow
great terrors, and amazing fears of hell. This seems to be what some persons lay great weight
on. They consider great terrors to be evidence of the great work of the law wrought on the heart,
preparing well the way for solid comfort. But they do not consider that terror, and a conviction
of conscience, are two different things. For though convictions of conscience often cause terror,
they do not consist in it; terrors often arise from other causes. Convictions of conscience, when
they come through the influences of God’s Spirit, consist in a conviction of the sinfulness of our
heart and practices; and of the dreadfulness of sins committed against a God of terrible majesty
and infinite holiness; and a view of God who hates sin, and imposes strict justice in punishing it.
But some have frightful apprehensions of hell, of a dreadful pit ready to swallow them up, of
flames ready to lay hold of them, and of devils around them that are ready to seize them; yet at
the same time, their conscience seems to have little enlightenment to really convince them of the
sinfulness of their heart and life. The devil, if permitted, can terrify men just as well as the Spirit
of God can. It is a work that is natural to him, and he has many ways of doing it, in a manner
that tends to no good.

He may frighten persons exceedingly by impressing images and ideas on them of many external
things: of a frowning countenance, a drawn sword, black clouds of vengeance, gaping hell, devils
coming, words pronounced of an awful doom, and the like. This is not to convince them of

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2 **Mat 3.10**
3 Mr. Shepard speaks of “men’s being cast down as low as hell by sorrow and lying under chains, quaking in
apprehension of terror to come, and then raised up to heaven in joy, not able to live; and yet not rent from lust: and
such are objects of pity now, and are likely to be the objects of terror at the great day.” **Parable of the Ten Virgins,**
4 “The way of the Spirit’s working when it does convince men, is by enlightening natural conscience. The Spirit does
not work by giving a testimony, but by assisting natural conscience to do its work. Natural conscience is the
things that are true, and that are revealed in the word of God, but to lead them to vain and
groundless determinations that their day of redemption is past; that they are reprobates; that
God is implacable; that he has come to a resolution to cut them off immediately, etc.

The terrors which some persons have, are owing to their constitution and temper. Nothing is
more obvious than that some persons, more than others, have a temper and frame such that
their imaginations are more strongly impressed with everything that affects them. The
impression on their imagination reacts on their affection, and it raises that still higher; and so
affection and imagination act reciprocally, one on the other, till their affection is raised to a vast
height, and the person is swallowed up, and loses possession of himself.5

Some speak of greatly seeing their own wickedness; but when the matter is well-examined and
thoroughly weighed, they are found to have little or no convictions of conscience. They tell of a
dreadfully hard heart, and how their heart lies like a stone; when truly, they have none of those
things in their minds or thoughts, where the hardness of men's hearts really originates. They tell
of a dreadful load and sink of sin, a heap of black and loathsome filthiness within them. But if
the matter is carefully inquired into, they do not have in view anything in which the corruption
of nature truly consists; nor do they have thoughts of any particular thing in which their hearts
are sinfully defective, or in which they fall short of what ought to be in them, or of any exercises
at all of corruption in them. Many think they have great convictions of their actual sins, when
they truly have none. They tell how their sins are set in order before them; they see their sins
standing around them in a line, with a dreadfully frightful appearance. But really, they do not
have in mind so much as one of the sins they have been guilty of in the course of their lives — not
one that affects them by its aggravations.

If some have had great terrors which really arose from the awakening and convicting influences
of the Spirit of God, then it does not follow from this that their terrors necessarily issue in true
comfort. The unmortified corruption of the heart may quench the Spirit of God 1Thes 5.19 (after he
has been striving) by leading men to presumptuous and self-exalting hopes and joys, and in
other ways. Not every woman who is really in travail brings forth a child; it may be a deformed
issue, without any of the form or properties of human nature belonging to it. Pharaoh's chief
baker, after lying in the dungeon with Joseph, had a vision that raised his hopes; he was lifted
out of the dungeon, as well as the chief butler; but he was to be hanged.

Comforts and joys not only follow great terrors and awakenings, but preparatory convictions
and humiliations as well. And they are brought about very distinctly in such steps, and in such a
way, that has been frequently observed in true converts. Yet, this is still not a certain sign that
the light and comforts which follow the affections are true and saving, and for the following
reasons:

First, Just as the devil can counterfeit all the saving operations and graces of the Spirit of God,
so he can counterfeit those operations that are preparatory to grace. If Satan can counterfeit
those effects of God's Spirit which are special, divine and sanctifying, so that what can be
observed by others bears a great resemblance to it, then he may much more easily imitate those
works of God's Spirit which are common. These works are no more above Satan than the other.
There are no works of God that are so high and divine, and so above the powers of nature, and
out of the reach of the power of all creatures, as those works of his Spirit by which he forms the
creature into his own image, and by which he makes the creature a partaker in the divine nature.

5 The famous Mr. Perkins distinguishes between “those sorrows that come through convictions of conscience, and
melancholic passions arising only from mere imagination, strongly conceived in the brain; which, he says, usually
come on a sudden, like lightning into a house.” – Vol. I. of his works, page 385.
But if the devil can imitate such as these, then without a doubt he can imitate those of an inferior kind. It is abundantly evident, in fact, that there are false humiliations and false submissions, as well as false comforts. Even though Saul was a very wicked man, and had a haughty spirit, and was a great king, he was brought by a conviction of his sin, to fall down in tears, weeping aloud before David, his own subject (and one that he had for a long time mortally hated, and openly treated as an enemy). He was brought to condemn himself before David, crying out, “You are more righteous than I: for you have rewarded me good, whereas I have rewarded you evil!” And at another time he cried, “I have sinned, I have played the fool, I have erred exceedingly,” And yet Saul seems to have had very little of the influences of the Spirit of God then – it was after God’s Spirit had departed from him, and had given him up, and an evil spirit from the Lord troubled him. If this proud monarch, in a pang of affection, was brought to humble himself so low before a subject whom he hated, and yet he still continued to be an enemy to David, then doubtless men may appear to have great conviction and humility before God, while they still remain his enemies, and continue to be so. Men who are terrified through fears of hell, often have great appearances of being pulled off their own righteousness, when they are not pulled from it in all ways – only in the more plain and visible ways. They have only exchanged some ways of trusting in their own righteousness, for others that are more secret and subtle. Often, a great degree of discouragement in many of the things they used to depend on, is taken for humility. What may be called “submission to God,” is not absolute submission. Instead, it has some secret bargain in it that is hard to discover. Secondly, If the operations and effects of the Spirit of God are sophisticated, in the convictions and comforts of true converts, then the order of them may be imitated. If Satan can imitate the things themselves, he may easily put them one after another in a certain order. If the devil can make A, B, and C, it is as easy for him to put A first, and B next, and C next, as it is to arrange the items in a contrary order. The nature of divine things is harder for the devil to imitate than their order. He cannot exactly imitate divine operations in their nature, though his counterfeits may be very much like them in external appearance; but he can exactly imitate their order. When counterfeits are made, there is no divine power necessary to place one of them first, and another last. And therefore the order, or the method of operations and experiences, is not a certain sign of their divinity. The only thing that can be trusted as a certain evidence of grace, is what Satan cannot do, and what is impossible to bring to pass by anything short of divine power. Thirdly, We have no certain rule to determine how far God’s own Spirit may go in those operations and convictions (which in themselves are not spiritual and saving), and yet have the person who is the object of those activities not be converted, but fall short of salvation in the end. There is no necessary connection in the nature of things, between anything that a natural man may experience while in a state of nature, and the saving grace of God’s Spirit. And if there is no connection in the nature of things, then there can be no known and certain connection at all, unless it is by divine revelation. But there is no revealed and certain connection between a state of salvation, and anything that a natural man can be the subject of, before he believes in Christ. God has revealed no certain connection between salvation, and any qualifications in men, except grace and its fruits. Therefore we do not find mentioned even once in the Scripture, that a certain method or order must occur in any legal convictions, or in any comforts subsequent to these legal convictions, as certain signs of grace, or as unique to the saints – although we do find gracious operations and effects themselves are mentioned thousands of

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6 The venerable Mr. Stoddard observes, “A man may say that now he can justify God however he deals with him, and not be brought away from his own righteousness; and that some men do justify God from a partial conviction of the righteousness of their condemnation; conscience takes notice of their sinfulness, and tells them that they may be righteously damned; as Pharaoh, who justified God, Exod. 9:27. And they give some kind of consent to it but many times it does not continue; they have only a pang upon them, that usually dies away after a little time.” Guide to Christ, p. 71.

7 1Sam. 24:16-17, and chap. 26:21.
times. This should be enough for Christians who will have the word of God be their sufficient and sure guide in things of this nature, rather than their own philosophy, experiences, and conjectures,

Fourthly, Experience greatly confirms that persons seeming to have convictions and comforts following one another in the method and order frequently observed in true converts, is not a certain sign of grace. I appeal to all those ministers in this land, who had occasion to deal with souls in the late extraordinary season, whether there were many who did not persevere in the faith, who nonetheless gave a fair account of their experiences, and seemed to be converted according to rule – that is, their convictions and affections succeeded one another distinctly and exactly in the order normally observed in the operations of the Spirit of God in true conversion.

Seeming to have this distinctness (as to steps and method) is no certain sign that a person is converted. So too, being without it is no evidence that a person is not converted. It is evident on Scripture principles, that a sinner cannot be brought to heartily receive Christ as his Savior, if he is not convinced (1) of his sin and misery, and (2) of his own emptiness and helplessness, and (3) that he justly deserves eternal condemnation; and (4) that such convictions must therefore be implied in some way by what is wrought in his soul – yet nothing proves it to be necessary. All those things which are implied or presupposed in an act of faith in Christ, must be plainly and distinctly wrought in the soul, in so many successive and separate works of the Spirit, that each one shall be plain and manifest in all those who are truly converted. But (as Mr. Shepard observes), sometimes the change made in a saint at first, is like a confused chaos – so that the other saints do not know what to make of it. The manner of the Spirit’s proceeding in those who are born of the Spirit is very often exceedingly mysterious and unsearchable. We hear the sound of it – its effect is discernible – but no man can tell where it came from, or where it went to.

It is often just as difficult to know the way of the Spirit in the new birth, as it is in the first birth; Eccl. 11:5, “You do not know what is the way of the Spirit, or how the bones grow in the womb of a woman with child; even so you do not know the works of God, who works all things.” In-generating a principle of grace in the soul, seems in Scripture to be compared to conceiving Christ in the womb, Gal. 4:19. Therefore the Church is called Christ’s mother, Cant. 3:11. So is every particular believer, Matt. 12:49-50. The conception of Christ in the womb of the blessed virgin, by the power of the Holy Ghost, seems designed to resemble the conception of Christ in the soul of a believer, by the power of the same Holy Ghost. And we do not know the way of the Spirit, nor how the bones grow, either in the womb, or in the heart that conceives this holy child. The new creature may aptly use the language of Psa. 139:14-15, “I am fearfully and wonderfully made; marvellous are your works, and that my soul knows right well. My substance was not hidden from you, when I was made in secret.”

Concerning the generation of Christ, both in his person, and also in the hearts of his people, it may be said, as in Isa. 53:8, “Who can declare his generation?” We do not know the works of God who works all. “It is the glory of God to conceal a thing” (Prov. 25:2), and to have “his path as it were in the mighty waters, so that his footsteps may not be known.” This is especially true in the works of his Spirit on the hearts of men, which are the highest and chief of his works. And therefore it is said, Isa. 40:13, “Who has directed the Spirit of the Lord, or who being his counselor has taught him?” It is to be feared that some have gone too far towards directing the Spirit of the Lord, and marking out his footsteps for him, and limiting him to certain steps and methods. Experience plainly shows that God’s Spirit is unsearchable and untraceable in the method of his operations in the conversion of some of the best of Christians. Nor does the Spirit

8 Mr. Stoddard, who had much experience of things of this nature, long ago observed, that converted and unconverted men cannot be certainly distinguished by the account they give of their experience; the same relation of experiences being common to both. And many persons have given a fair account of a work of conversion, that have carried well in the eye of the world for several years, but have not proved well at last. – Appeal to the Learned, pp. 75-76.

9 That is, in the recent period of revival. – WHG
of God proceed discernibly in the steps of a particular established scheme, half as often as it is imagined. A scheme of what is necessary, and according to a rule already received and established by common opinion, has a vast (though to many a very intangible) influence in forming a person’s notions of the steps and method of his own experiences. I know very well what their way is; for I have had many opportunities to observe it. Very often, at first, their experiences appear like a confused chaos, as Mr. Shepard expresses it. But then those passages of their experience are picked out, which most appear to be the particular steps that are insisted on. These are dwelt on in their thoughts, and told of from time to time when they relate their experience. These parts grow brighter and brighter in their view; and others, being neglected, grow more and more obscure. What they have experienced is insensibly strained to bring all of it to exactly conform to the scheme that is established. And so it becomes natural for ministers, who have to deal with them, and to direct those who insist on distinctness and clearness of method, to do so too. Yet so much has been seen of the operations of the Spirit of God lately, that those who had much to do with these souls, and who are not blinded by a seven-fold veil of prejudice, must know that the Spirit is exceedingly varied in the manner of his operating, so that in many cases, it is impossible to trace him or discover his way.

What we have to deal with principally in our inquiries into our own state, or in the directions we give to others, is the nature of the effect that God has brought to pass in the soul. As to the steps which the Spirit of God took to bring that effect to pass, we may leave those to him. We are often expressly directed in Scripture to test ourselves by the nature of the fruits of the Spirit; but nowhere are we directed to test ourselves by the Spirit’s method of producing them.10 Many greatly err in their notions of a clear work of conversion. They call it a clear work where the successive steps of influence and the method of experience are clear. But indeed the clearest work is not where the order of doing is clearest, but where the spiritual and divine nature of the work done, and effect wrought, is most clear.

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10 Mr. Shepard, speaking of the soul’s closing with Christ, says, “As a child cannot tell how his soul comes into it, nor it may be when; but afterwards it sees and feels that life; so that he would be as bad as a beast, that should deny an immortal soul; so here.” Parable of the Ten Virgins, Part II. p. 171. “If the man does not know the time of his conversion, or his first closing with Christ, the minister may not draw any peremptory conclusion from this, that he is not godly.” Stoddard’s Guide to Christ, p. 83. “Do not think there is no compunction, or sense of sin, wrought in the soul, because you cannot so clearly discern and feel it, nor the time of the working, and first beginning of it. I have known many that have come with their complaints, that they were never humbled, they never felt it so; yet there it has been, and many times they have seen it, by the other spectacles, and blessed God for it. Shepard’s Sound Believer, page 38. The late impression in Boston.
9. External religious duties are not a sign of religious affections

It is no certain sign that religious affections have the nature of true religion in them, or that they do not, just because they dispose a person to spend a lot of time in religion, and to be zealously engaged in the external duties of worship.

Lately, and unreasonably, this has been looked at as an argument against the religious affections which some have had – that they spend so much time in reading, praying, singing, hearing sermons, and the like. It is plain from the Scripture, that it is the tendency of true grace to cause persons to delight in such religious exercises. True grace had this effect on Anna the prophetess. Luke 2:27, “She did not depart from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day.” Grace had this effect on the primitive Christians in Jerusalem. Acts 2:46-47, “And continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their meals with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God.” Grace made Daniel delight in the duty of prayer, and to solemnly attend to it three times a day; grace also did this with David. Psa. 55:17, “Evening, morning, and at noon I will pray.” Grace makes the saints delight in singing praises to God. Psa. 135:3, “Sing praises to his name, for it is pleasant.” And Psa 147:1, “Praise the Lord; for it is good to sing praises to our God; for it is pleasant, and praise is attractive.” It also causes them to delight to hear the word of God preached. It makes the gospel a joyful sound to them, Psa. 89:15, and it makes the feet of those who proclaim these good tidings, beautiful. Isa. 52:7, “How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that brings good tidings!” etc. It makes them love God’s public worship. Psa. 26:8, “Lord, I have loved the habitation of your house, and the place where your honor dwells.” And Psa 27:4, “One thing have I desired of the Lord, that I will seek after, that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in his temple.” Psa. 84:1-2, etc. “How lovely are your tabernacles, O Lord of hosts! My soul longs, yes, it even faints for the courts of the Lord. Indeed, the sparrow has found a house and the swallow a nest for herself where she may lay her young, at your altars, O Lord of hosts, my King and my God. Blessed are those who dwell in your house: they will continue praising you. Blessed is the man in whose heart are the ways to Zion, who passing through the valley of Baca go from strength to strength, every one of them appearing before God in Zion.” Ver. 10, “A day in your courts is better than a thousand elsewhere.” This is the nature of true grace.

On the other hand, being disposed to abound and be zealously engaged in the external exercises of religion, and to spend a lot of time in them, is no sure evidence of grace, because such a disposition is found in many who have no grace. So it was with the Israelites of old, whose services were abominable to God. They attended the “new moons, and Sabbaths, and the calling of assemblies; they spread forth their hands, and made many prayers,” Isa. 1:12-15. So it was with the Pharisees. They “made long prayers, and fasted twice a week.” False religion may cause persons to be loud and earnest in prayer: Isa. 58:4, “You shall not fast as you do this day, to cause your voice to be heard on high.” Religion which is not spiritual and saving, may still cause men to delight in religious duties and ordinances. Isa. 58:2, “Yet they seek me daily, and delight to know my ways, as if they were a nation that did righteousness, and did not forsake the ordinance of their God; they ask me for ordinances of justice; they delight in approaching God.” It may cause them to take delight in hearing the word of God preached, as it was with Ezekiel’s hearers. Ezek. 33:31-32. “And they come to you as the people come, and they sit before you as my people, and they hear your words – but they will not do them; for with their mouth they show great love, but their heart goes after their covetousness. Look, to them you are like a lovely song sung by someone with a pleasant voice, who can play well on an instrument – for they hear your words, but they do not do them.” So it was with Herod. He heard John the Baptist gladly, Mark 6:20. So it was with others of John’s hearers, “for a season they rejoiced in his light,” John 5:35. So the stony-ground hearers heard the word with joy.
Experience shows that persons, from false religion, may be inclined to be over-abundant in the external exercises of religion. Indeed, they surrender themselves and devote almost their whole time to them. Formerly, recluses were very numerous in the Romish church; they forsook the world and utterly abandoned the society of mankind. In order to spend all their days in the exercise of devotion and converse with God, they shut themselves up close in a narrow cell, with a vow never to stir out of it, nor to see the face of anyone any more (unless to be visited in case of sickness). There were also in olden times, great multitudes called Hermits and Anchorites that left the world to spend all their days in lonesome deserts, and to give themselves up to religious contemplations and exercises of devotion. Some of them had no dwellings except the caves and vaults of the mountains; they had no food except for the spontaneous productions of the earth. I once lived for many months next door to a Jew (our houses adjoined one another), and had many opportunities to observe him daily. He appeared to me to be the most devout person I ever saw in my life. A great part of his time was spent in acts of devotion at his eastern window, which opened next to mine. He seemed to be most earnestly engaged, not only in the daytime but sometimes whole nights.
10. Praising and glorifying God is no clear sign of religious affections

Nothing can be certainly known of the nature of religious affections by someone being greatly disposed to praise and glorify God with their mouths. This indeed is implied in what was just observed about abounding and spending a lot of time in the external exercises of religion; and it was also hinted before. But I thought it deserved particular consideration, because many seem to consider it bright evidence of gracious affection, when people appear to be greatly disposed to praise and magnify God, and to have their mouths full of his praises, and to affectionately call on others to praise and extol him.

No Christian will make it an argument against someone, that he seems to have such a disposition. Nor is it evidence for someone, if those things previously observed and proved, are duly considered. First, that people without grace may still have high affections towards God and Christ. Second, their affections, being strong, they may be inclined to speak a lot and very earnestly about the things they are affected by. And third, there may be counterfeits of all kinds of gracious affection. It will appear more evidently and directly that this behavior is no certain sign of grace, if we consider what instances the Scripture gives us of gracious affections in those who were indeed graceless. We have a number of accounts of this, in the multitude that were present when Christ preached and wrought miracles. Mark 2:12, “And immediately he arose, took up his bed, and went out before them all, so that they were all amazed, and glorified God, saying, We never saw it done in this fashion.” So also Matt. 9:8 and Luke 5:26. Matt. 15:31, “So that the multitude wondered when they saw that the dumb spoke, the maimed were made whole, the lame walked, and the blind saw: and they glorified the God of Israel.” We see the same thing when Christ raised the son of the widow of Nain. Luke 7:16, “Fear came upon all: and they glorified God, saying, ‘great prophet has risen up among us;’ and ‘God has visited his people.’”

Thus we read of them glorifying Christ, or speaking very highly of him in Luke 4:15. “And he taught in their synagogues, being glorified by all.” And how they praised him with loud voices, crying, “Hosanna to the Son of David; hosanna in the highest; blessed is he that comes in the name of the Lord,” and they did this a little before he was crucified! After Christ’s ascension, when the apostles healed the impotent man, we are told that all men glorified God for what was done, Acts 4:21. When the Gentiles in Antioch of Pisidia heard from Paul and Barnabas that God would reject the Jews, and take the Gentiles to be his people instead, they were affected by the goodness of God to the Gentiles, “and glorified the word of the Lord.” But all that did so were not true believers; only a certain elect number of them were, as intimated in the account we have of it. Acts 13:48, “And when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord; and as many as were ordained to eternal life, believed.” So it was of old. The children of Israel at the Red Sea “sang God’s praise, but soon forgot his works.” And the Jews in Ezekiel’s time, “showed much love with their mouth, while their heart went after their covetousness.” It is foretold about false professors and real enemies of religion, that they show an eagerness to glorify God. Isa. 66:5, “Hear the word of the Lord, you that tremble at his word. Your brothers who hated you, who threw you out for my name’s sake, said, ‘Let the Lord be glorified.’”

It is no certain sign that a person is graciously affected if, in the midst of his hopes and comforts, he is greatly affected by God’s unmerited mercy towards someone who is so unworthy, and if he seems to greatly extol and magnify free grace. Those who still have unmortified pride and enmity against God may, when they imagine they have received extraordinary kindness from God, cry out about their unworthiness, and magnify God’s undeserved goodness to them. This is done, not from their conviction of their ill deservings, nor from any higher principle than Saul had. Though a king, and while he remained unsubdued in his pride and enmity against David, he was brought to acknowledge his unworthiness and to cry out, “I have played the fool, I have erred exceedingly.” He did so with great affection and admiration, to magnify and extol David’s
unmerited and unexampled kindness to him, 1Sam. 25:16-19, and 26:21. And he did it from no higher principle than that from which Nebuchadnezzar was affected by God’s dispensations – he saw them and was the subject of them. And so he praises, extols, and honors the King of heaven. Both he and Darius in their high affections call upon all nations to praise God, Daniel 3:28-30, 4:1-3, 34-37, and 6:25-27.
11. Confidence in divine experiences is not a sign of religious affections

It is no sign that affections are right, or that they are wrong, just because they make persons who have them exceedingly confident that what they experience is divine, and that they are in a good estate.

It is an argument made by some, that persons are deluded if they pretend to be assured of their good estate, and are absolutely convinced of the favor of God. Such critics suppose that no such thing as a full and absolute assurance of hope is to be expected in the church of God, except in some very extraordinary circumstances, such as martyrdom. They claim it is contrary to the Protestant doctrine which has been maintained by their most celebrated writers against the Papists; and it is contrary to the plainest Scripture evidence.

Yet it is manifest, that it was a common thing for those saints, of whom we have a history or a particular account in Scripture, to be assured. God, in the plainest and most positive manner, revealed and testified of his special favor towards Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Daniel, and others. Job often speaks of his sincerity and uprightness with the greatest imaginable confidence and assurance, often calling God to witness to it. And he says plainly, “I know that my Redeemer lives, and that I shall see him for myself, and not another,” Job 19:25, etc. David, throughout the book of Psalms, almost everywhere, speaks without any hesitancy, and in the most positive manner, of God as his God, glorying in him as his portion and heritage; his rock and confidence; his shield; his salvation and high tower; and the like. Hezekiah appeals to God, as one who knew that he had walked before God in truth and with a perfect heart, 2 Kings 20:3. Jesus Christ, in his dying discourse with his eleven disciples, in the 14th, 15th, and 16th chapters of John (which was, as it were, Christ’s last will and testament to his disciples, and to his whole church), often declares his special and everlasting love towards them in the plainest and most positive terms. He promises them a future participation with him in his glory, in the most absolute manner; and he tells them at the same time that he does so to the end that their joy might be full. John 15:11, “These things I have spoken to you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full.” See also the conclusion of his discourse. John 16:33, “These things I have spoken to you, that in me you might have peace. In the world you shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.” Christ was not afraid of speaking too plainly and positively to them. He did not desire to hold them in the least suspense. And he concluded that last discourse of his with a prayer in their presence, in which he speaks positively to his Father of those eleven disciples. He says all of them savingly know him, and believed in him; and they received and kept his word; and they were not of the world; and for their sakes he sanctified himself; and his will was that they should be with him in his glory. And he tells his Father that he spoke those things in his prayer, to the end that his joy might be fulfilled in them, verse 13. By these things, it is evident that it is agreeable to Christ’s designs, and the planned ordering and disposition that Christ makes of things in his church, that there should be sufficient and abundant provision made, so that his saints might have full assurance of their future glory.

The Apostle Paul, through all his epistles speaks in an assured strain; he ever speaks positively of his special relation to Christ, his Lord, and Master, and Redeemer, and his interest in and expectation of the future reward. It would be endless to note all the places in Scripture that might be enumerated. I will mention only three or four: Gal. 2:20, “Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me;” Phil. 1:21, “For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain;” 2 Tim. 1:12, “I know whom I have believed, and I am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed to him against that day;” 2 Tim. 4:7-8, “I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I
have kept the faith. Finally, there is reserved for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give me at that day.”

And the nature of the covenant of grace, and God’s declared ends in the appointment and constitution of things in that covenant, plainly show it is God’s design to make ample provision for the saints to have an assured hope of eternal life while living here on earth. For all things are so ordered and contrived in that covenant, that everything might be made sure on God’s part. “The covenant is ordered in all things and sure.” 1 the promises are most full, and very often repeated, and exhibited in various ways. There are many witnesses, and many seals; and God has confirmed his promises with an oath. God’s declared design in all this is that the heirs of the promises might have an undoubting hope and full joy, in an assurance of their future glory. Heb. 6:17-18, “In which God, willing more abundantly to show to the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath: that by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold on the hope set before us.” But all this would be in vain to any such purpose as the saints’ strong consolation, and hope of their obtaining future glory, if their interest in those sure promises in ordinary cases was not ascertainable. For God’s promises and oaths, no matter how sure they are, cannot give strong hope and comfort to any particular person, any further than that person can know that those promises are made to him. Provision made in Jesus Christ, that believers might be perfect as pertaining to the conscience (as signified in Heb. 9:9), 2 would be made in vain if assurance of freedom from sin’s guilt is not attainable.

It further appears that assurance is not only attainable in some very extraordinary cases, but that all Christians are directed to give all diligence to make their calling and election sure, and they are told how they may do it, 2Pet. 1:5-8. 3 It is unbecoming to Christians, and something to be blamed for, if they do not know whether Christ is in them or not. 2Cor. 13:5, “Do you not know yourselves that Jesus Christ is in you, unless you are reprobates?” And it is implied that it is blamable negligence in Christians, if they practice Christianity in such a way as to remain uncertain of the reward. 1Cor. 9:26, “Therefore I do not run uncertainly.” To add no more, it is manifest that Christians may ordinarily attain knowledge of their interest in the saving benefits of Christianity, because the apostle tells us by what means Christians (not only the apostles and martyrs) should know this. 1Cor. 2:12, “Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us by God.” And 1John 2:3, “And by this we know that we know him, if we keep his commandments.” And verse 5, “By this we know that we are in him.” Chap. 3:14, “We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brothers.” Verse 19, “By this we know that we are of the truth, and will assure our hearts before him.” Verse 24, “By this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit which he has given us.” So too 1John 4:13; 5:2, and 5:19. 4

Therefore it must be unreasonable to conclude that persons are hypocrites, and their affections are wrong, just because they seem to have no doubt of their own salvation, and the affections that they have, seem to banish all fears of hell.

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1 2Sam 23:5
2 Heb 9:9 It was symbolic for the present time in which both gifts and sacrifices are offered which cannot make him who performed the service perfect in regard to the conscience...
3 2Pe 1:5-8 But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love. For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.
4 1John 4:13 By this we know that we abide in Him, and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit. 1John 5:2 By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey his commandments. 1John 5:19 We know that we are of God, and the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one.
On the other hand, it is not a sufficient reason to conclude that men are saints, and that their affections are gracious, just because the affections they have are attended by an excessive confidence that their state is good, and their affections are divine.\(^5\) Nothing can be certainly argued from their confidence, however great and strong it seems to be. A man may boldly call God his Father, and commonly speak in the most bold, familiar, and appropriating language in prayer. “My Father, my dear Redeemer, my sweet Savior, my Beloved,” and the like. It may be a common thing for him to use the most confident expressions before men about the goodness of his state, such as, “I know certainly that God is my Father; I know so surely that there is a God in heaven, and that he is my God; I know I will go to heaven as well as if I were there; I know that God is now manifesting himself to my soul and is now smiling upon me.” He may seem to be done forever with any inquiry or examination into his estate, as something that is sufficiently known and out of doubt. He may contemn anything that so much as intimates or suggests that all that it is indeed so, no matter how confident he may be of it.\(^6\) Such an overbearing, high-handed, and violent sort of confidence as this, and being so aroused to declare itself with a most glaring show in the sight of men, is something which is seen in many. But it does not have the countenance of a true Christian assurance. It savors more of the spirit of the Pharisees, who never doubted that they were saints – and the most eminent of saints – and they were bold to go to God, and to come near to him, and lift up their eyes and thank him for the great distinction he had made between them and other men. Christ intimated that they were blind and graceless, and he despised their suggestion. John 9:40, “And some of the Pharisees which were with him, heard these words, and said to him, Are we blind also?” If they had more of the spirit of the publican with their confidence, who sensed his exceeding unworthiness, and stood afar off, and dared not so much as lift his eyes to heaven, but struck his breast, and cried out that he was a sinner, then their confidence would have more of the aspect of the confidence of someone who humbly trusts and hopes in Christ, and has no confidence in himself.

If we just consider what the hearts of natural men are like, and what principles they are under the dominion of, and what blindness and deceit exists there, what self-flattery, self-exaltation, and self-confidence reign there, then we need not wonder at all that their high opinion of themselves, and their confidence of their happy circumstances, are as high and strong as mountains, and as violent as a tempest. Their conscience is blinded and their convictions of sin are killed by false high affections. Those aforementioned principles are let loose, fed, and prompted by false joys and comforts. They are excited by some pleasing imaginations, impressed on them by Satan, who is transforming himself into an angel of light.

\(^5\) “O professor, look carefully to your foundation: ‘Do not be high minded, but fear.’ You have, it may be, done and suffered many things in and for religion; you have excellent gifts and sweet comforts; a warm zeal for God, and high confidence of your integrity: all this may be right, for all that I, or (it may be) you know: Yet, it is possible it may be false. You have sometimes judged yourselves and pronounced yourselves upright; but remember, your final sentence is not yet pronounced by your Judge. And what if God weighs you over again, in his more equal balance, and He should say, Mene Tekel, ‘You are weighed in the balance, and are found wanting?’ What a confounded man you will be under such a sentence! Quae splendent in conspectu homini s, sordent in conspectu judicis; things that are highly esteemed of men, are an abomination in the sight of God: He does not see as men sees. Your heart may be false, and you not know it: indeed, it may be false, and you are strongly confident of its integrity.” – Flavel’s Touchstone of Sincerity, chap. 2. Sect. 5. “Some hypocrites are a great deal more confident than many saints” – Stoddard’s Discourse on the Way to know Sincerity and Hypocrisy, p. 128.

\(^6\) “Does the work of faith, in some believers, bear upon its top branches the full ripe fruits of a blessed assurance? Look what strong confidence, and what high-built persuasions of an interest in God, have sometimes been found in unsanctified ones! Indeed, so strong may this false assurance be, that they dare to boldly venture to the judgment seat of God, and there defend it. Does the Spirit of God fill the heart of the assured believer with joy unspeakable, and make it full of glory, giving him through faith a prelibation or foretaste of heaven itself, in those first fruits of it? How near to this comes what the Apostle supposes may be found in apostates!” – Flavel’s Husbandry Spiritualized, chap. 12.
Once a hypocrite is thus established in a false hope, he does not have those things to cause him to question his hope, that often are the occasion for true saints to doubt; such as,

- **First**, he lacks a cautious spirit, a great sense of the vast importance of a sure foundation, and a dread of being deceived. The comforts of true saints increase their awakening and caution, and give them a lively sense of how great a thing it is to appear before an infinitely holy, just, and omniscient Judge. But false comforts put an end to these things, and they dreadfully stupify the mind.

- **Secondly**, the hypocrite lacks the knowledge of his own blindness, and the deceitfulness of his own heart, and that mean opinion of his own understanding that the true saint has. Those that are deluded with false revelations and affections, are evermore highly conceited about their own light and understanding.

- **Thirdly**, the devil does not assault the hope of the hypocrite, as he assaults the hope of a true saint. The devil is a great enemy to a true Christian hope, not only because it tends to greatly comfort the one that has it, but also because it is a thing of a holy and heavenly nature. It greatly tends to promote and cherish grace in the heart; and it is a great incentive to strictness and diligence in the Christian life. But the devil is no enemy to the hope of a hypocrite; above all things, the devil establishes his interest in the hypocrite who has such hope. A hypocrite may retain his hope without opposition as long as he lives; the devil never disturbs it or attempts to disturb it. But there is perhaps no true Christian who does not have his hope assaulted by the devil.

- **Fourthly**, the one who has a false hope lacks that sight of his own corruptions which the saint has. A true Christian has ten times as much to do with his heart and its corruptions, as a hypocrite does. And the sins of his heart and practice appear to him in all their blackness; they look dreadful. It often appears a very mysterious thing that any grace can be consistent with such corruption, or that grace should be found in such a heart. But a false hope hides such corruption; it covers it all over. And therefore the hypocrite looks clean and bright in his own eyes.

There are two sorts of hypocrites: those that are deceived with their outward morality and external religion (many of whom are professed Arminians in the doctrine of justification); and those that are deceived with false revelations and elevations. The latter often decry works, and men’s own righteousness, and talk much about free grace. But at the same time, they make a righteousness of their revelations and of their humility; they exalt themselves to heaven with them. Mr. Shepard distinguishes these two kinds of hypocrites in his exposition of the Parable of the Ten Virgins. He names them legal and evangelical hypocrites. He often speaks of the latter as the worst. It is evident that the latter are commonly and by far the most confident in their hope, and they are brought from it only with the most difficulty. I have scarcely known any such person that has been undeceived. The chief grounds of the confidence of many of them are the very same kind of impulses and supposed revelations (sometimes with texts of Scripture, and sometimes without) that so many of late have had concerning future events. They have these impulses about their good estate, and the witness of the Spirit. But they entirely misunderstand the nature of the witness of the Spirit, as I will show shortly.

Of those that have had visions and impulses about other things, it has generally been to reveal those things which they are most desirous and fond of. It is no wonder that persons who give heed to such things, have the same sort of visions or impressions about their own eternal salvation. Such impulses reveal to them that their sins are forgiven, that their names are written
in the book of life, that they are in high favor with God, etc. This is especially true when they earnestly seek, expect, and wait for evidence of their election and salvation in this way, as the surest and most glorious evidence of it. Nor is it any wonder that when they have such a supposed revelation of their good estate, it raises in them the highest degree of confidence in it. It is found by abundant experience, that those who are led away by impulses and imagined revelations, are extremely confident. They suppose that the great Jehovah has declared these and those things to them; and having his immediate testimony, a strong confidence is the highest virtue to them. Hence they are bold to say, “I know this or that – I know certainly – I am as sure as I have being,” and the like; and they despise all argument and inquiry into their case. Above all other things, it is easily accounted for, that impressions and impulses about what is so pleasing, and so suitable to their self-love and pride – such as being the dear children of God, and being distinguished from most in the world by God’s favor – that these things should make them strongly confident. This is especially so when, along with their impulses and revelations, they have high affections, which they take to be the most eminent exercises of grace. I have known of several persons that have had a fond desire for something of a temporal nature. Through a violent passion that possessed them, they have been earnestly pursuing the thing which they desired to come to pass; and they met with great difficulty and many discouragements in it. But at last, they had an impression or supposed revelation, that they would obtain what they sought. They looked at it as a sure promise from the Most High. This revelation made them ridiculously confident, against all reason to convince them to the contrary, and despite all events that worked against them. There is nothing to hinder it. Persons who are seeking their salvation may be deceived by similar delusional impressions, and they may be just as confident of it, in the same way.

The confidence of many of this sort of hypocrite, what Mr. Shepard calls evangelical hypocrites, is like the confidence of some madmen who think they are kings. They maintain it against all manner of reason and evidence. In one sense, it is much more immovable than a truly gracious assurance. True assurance is not upheld unless the soul is kept in a holy frame, and grace is maintained in lively exercise. If the actings of grace in the Christian decay much, and he falls into a lifeless frame, he loses his assurance. But this kind of confidence in hypocrites will not be shaken by sin. At least some of them will maintain their boldness in their hope, despite the most corrupt frames and wicked ways; this is sure evidence of their delusion.7

Here I can only observe that there are certain doctrines, often preached to the people, which need to be delivered with more caution and explanation than they frequently are. For, as they are understood by many, they greatly tend to establish this delusion and this false confidence of hypocrites. The doctrines I speak of are, “Christians live by faith, not by sight; give glory to God by trusting him in the dark; live upon Christ and not upon experiences; do not make good frames8 the foundation of their faith.” These are excellent and important doctrines indeed, rightly understood; but they are corrupt and destructive, as many understand them. The Scripture speaks of living or walking by faith, and not by sight, only in these ways:

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7 Mr. Shepard speaks of it, as a “presumptuous peace, that is not interrupted and broke by evil works.” And says, that the “sprit will sigh, and not sing in that bosom, whence corrupt dispositions and passions break out.” And that “though men in such frames may seem to maintain the consolation of the Spirit, and not suspect their hypocrisy, under pretense of trusting the Lord’s mercy; yet they cannot avoid the condemnation of the world”; Parable of the Ten Virgins, Part I. p. 139. Dr. Ames speaks of it as a thing, by which the peace of a wicked man may be distinguished from the peace a godly man, “that the peace of a wicked man continues, whether he performs the duties of piety and righteousness or no; provided those crimes are avoided that appear horrid to nature itself.” Cases of Conscience, Lib. III. Chap. vii.

8 “Good frames” refers to sound doctrine, described as “light” in the next paragraph. Believing we are saved because we feel like we’re saved, yet not having Christ as the object of our faith, and his crucifixion as the ground of our faith, is not saving faith, it’s unscriptural. Thinking we can be saved without repentance and godly living, is not saving faith either. – WHG
being governed by a respect to eternal things that are the objects of their faith, and which are not seen; and not being governed by a respect to temporal things, which are seen;

believing things that are revealed, but are never seen with our bodily eyes;

living by faith in the promise of future things, without yet seeing or enjoying the things that are promised, or knowing how they can be fulfilled.

This will be easily evident to anyone who looks over the Scriptures, which speak of faith in opposition to sight; as 2Cor. 4:18, and 5:7, Heb. 11:1, 8, 13, 17, 27, 29, Rom. 8:24, John 20:29.

But this doctrine, as it is understood by many, is that Christians ought to firmly believe and trust in Christ, without having any spiritual sight or light; and even though they remain in a dark dead frame; and despite, for the present, having no spiritual experiences or revelations. It is truly the duty of those who are thus in darkness, to come out of darkness into the light and believe. But suggesting that they should confidently believe and trust, while they remain without any spiritual light or sight, is an anti-scriptural and absurd doctrine. The Scripture is devoid of any faith in Christ, by the operation of God, that is not founded in a spiritual sight of Christ. Believing on Christ, which accompanies a title to everlasting life, is “seeing the Son, and believing on him,” John 6:40. True faith in Christ is never exercised any further than persons “behold, as in a mirror, the glory of the Lord, and have the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ,” 2Cor. 3:18, and 4:6. Those into whose minds “the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, does not shine, do not believe,” 2Cor. 4:5. That faith which lacks spiritual light, is not the faith of the children of the light and of the day. Instead, it is the presumption of the children of darkness. Therefore, to press and urge them to believe, without having any spiritual light or sight, greatly tends to promote the delusions of the prince of darkness. Not only can men not exercise faith without some spiritual light, but they can exercise faith only in such proportion as they have spiritual light. Men will trust in God no further than they know him; and they cannot exercise faith in him one ace further than they have a sight of his fullness and faithfulness in that exercise. Nor can they exercise trust in God any further than they are in a gracious frame. Those who are in a dead and carnal frame, doubtless ought to trust in God; because that would be the same thing as coming out of their bad frame and turning to God. But to exhort men to confidently trust in God, and thus buttress their hope and peace, even though they are not in a gracious frame, and they continue without grace, is the same as exhorting them to confidently trust in God, but not with a gracious trust – and what is that but a wicked presumption? It is just as impossible for men to have a strong or lively trust in God when they have no lively exercises of grace, nor tangible Christian experiences, as it is for them to be in the lively exercises of grace, without first having grace exercised upon them.

It is true that it is the duty of God’s people to trust in him when they are in darkness, and though they still remain in darkness. This is true in the sense that they ought to trust in God when the aspects of his providence are dark, and it looks as though God has forsaken them, and did not hear their prayers. Many clouds gather, and many enemies surround them with a formidable face, threatening to swallow them up. All the events of providence seem to be against them, and circumstances seem to render the promises of God difficult to be fulfilled. And so God must be trusted out of sight – that is, when we cannot see how it is possible for God to fulfill his word. Everything but God’s mere word makes it look unlikely, so that, if persons believe, they must hope against hope. Thus the ancient Patriarchs, Job, the Psalmist, Jeremiah, Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, and the Apostle Paul, gave glory to God by trusting God in darkness. We have many instances of such a glorious victorious faith in the eleventh chapter of Hebrews. But how different this is from trusting in God without spiritual sight, and while still in a dead and carnal frame!
There is also such a thing as spiritual light being let into the soul one way, and not another. So there is such a thing as the saints trusting in God, and also knowing their good estate, when they are destitute of some kinds of experience. For instance, they may have clear views of God’s sufficiency and faithfulness; and so they confidently trust in him, and they know that they are his children. At the same time, they do not have those clear and sweet ideas of his love as they do at other times. It was this way with Christ himself in his last passion. Saints may have views of much of God’s sovereignty, holiness, and all sufficiency that enable them to quietly submit to him, and exercise a sweet and most encouraging hope in God’s fullness – even when they are not satisfied about their own good estate. But how different these things are from confidently trusting in God without spiritual light or experience!

Those who insist that persons live by faith, when they have no experience of grace, and though they continue to live in very bad frames, are also absurd in their notions of faith. What they mean by faith is believing that they are in a good state. From this, they consider it a dreadful sin for anyone to doubt their estate, whatever frames they are in, and whatever wicked things they do, because such doubt is the great and heinous sin of unbelief. The best man, they assert, is the one who puts most honor upon God by maintaining his hope of his good estate, and by being the most confident and immovable in his hope, when he has the least light or experience – that is, when he is in the worst and most wicked frame and way. This is because, they claim, it is a sign that he is strong in faith, and he is giving the most glory to God, because against hope he believes in hope. But from what Bible do they learn this notion of faith – that it is confidently believing that he is in a good estate? If this is faith, then the Pharisees had faith in an eminent degree, some of whom, Christ teaches, committed the unpardonable sin against the Holy Ghost. The Scripture presents faith as that by which men are brought into a good estate; and therefore it cannot be the same thing as believing that they are already in a good estate. To suppose that faith consists in persons believing that they are in a good estate, is in effect supposing that faith consists in a person believing that he has faith, or believing that he believes!

Indeed, when persons doubt their good estate, in several respects it may arise from unbelief. It may either be from unbelief, or it may be because they have so little faith, or so little evidence of their good estate. If they had more experience of the actings of faith, and more experience of the exercise of grace, then they would have clearer evidence that their state was good; and so their doubts would be removed. Doubting their state may arise from unbelief when, even though there are many things that are good evidences of a work of grace in them, yet they doubt very much whether they are really in God’s favor, because they are so unworthy, and they have done so much to provoke God’s anger against them. Their doubts in such a case arise from unbelief, because they lack a sufficient sense of, and reliance on, the infinite riches of God’s grace and the sufficiency of Christ for the worst of sinners. When they doubt their state, it may also arise from unbelief because of the mystery of God’s dealings with them. They are not able to reconcile such dispensations with God’s favor towards them. Or they doubt whether they have any part in the promises because the promises, from the aspect of providence, appear so unlikely to be fulfilled; the difficulties in the way of God’s favor are so many and so great. Such doubting arises from their lack of dependence upon God’s almighty power, and not trusting that his knowledge and wisdom are infinitely above theirs. Yet in such persons, their unbelief, and merely doubting their state, are not the same thing – even though one arises from the other.

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9 Men do not know that they are godly by believing that they are godly. We know many things by faith, Heb 11:3. ‘By faith we understand that the worlds were made by the word of God.’ Faith is the evidence of things not seen, Heb. 11:1. Thus men know the Trinity of persons of the Godhead; that Jesus Christ is the Son of God; that he that believes in him will have eternal life; the resurrection of the dead. And if God should tell a saint that he has grace, he might know it by believing the word of God. But it is not this way, that godly men know they have grace. It is not revealed in the word, and the Spirit of God does not testify of it to particular persons.’ Stoddard’s Nature of Saving Conversion, pp. 83-84.
Persons may be greatly to blame for doubting their state on such grounds as these last mentioned. And they may be to blame that they have no more grace, and no more of the present exercises and experiences of it, that would evidence to them the goodness of their state. Men are doubtless to blame for being in a dead, carnal frame. But when they are in such a frame, and they have no tangible experience of the exercises of grace, but on the contrary, they are under the influence of lusts and an unchristian spirit, then they are not to blame for doubting their state. It is impossible, in the nature of things, for a holy and Christian hope to be kept alive in its clearness and strength, in such circumstances. It is just as impossible as it is to keep the light in the room when the candle is put out; or to maintain bright sunshine when the sun has gone down. Distant experiences, when darkened by present prevailing lust and corruption, never keep alive a gracious confidence and assurance. Instead, assurance sickens and decays as necessarily as a little child sickens and decays by repeated blows on the head with a hammer. Nor is it at all to be lamented that persons doubt their state in such circumstances. On the contrary, it is desirable and in every way it is best that they should. That it should be so, agrees with that wise and merciful constitution of things which God has established. For God has so planned and constituted things in his dispensations towards his own people, that fear should arise when their love decays, and the exercises of it fails or becomes weak. For then they need it to restrain themselves from sin, and excite themselves to care for the good of their souls, and so stir themselves up to watchfulness and diligence in religion.

But God has so ordered that, when love rises and is in vigorous exercise, then fear should vanish and be driven away. 1John 4:18 For then they do not need it, having a higher and more excellent principle being exercised in them to restrain them from sin, and to stir them up to their duty. There are no other principles, which human nature is under the influence of, that will ever make men conscientious except one of these two: fear or love. And therefore, if one of these does not prevail as the other decays, then when God’s people have fallen into dead and carnal frames, and when love is asleep, they will be lamentably exposed indeed. Therefore God has wisely ordained that these two opposite principles of love and fear should rise and fall, like two opposite scales of a balance: when one rises the other sinks. Light and darkness necessarily and unavoidably succeed each other. To the extent that light prevails, darkness ceases; and if light decays, so much more does darkness prevail. So it is in the heart of a child of God. If divine love decays and falls asleep, and lust prevails, then the light and joy of hope go out; dark fear and doubting arise. If, on the contrary, divine love prevails and comes into lively exercise, this brings in the brightness of hope, and it drives away black lust, and fear with it. Love is the spirit of adoption, or the childlike principle. If it slumbers, then men fall under fear, which is the spirit of bondage, or the servile principle. And the contrary is so. If love, or the spirit of adoption, is carried to a great height, it quite drives away all fear, and gives full assurance. This agrees with the apostle, 1John 4:18, “There is no fear in love, but perfect love drives out fear.” These two opposite principles of holy love and lust, bring hope and fear into the hearts of God’s children, in proportion to the one which prevails – that is, when they are left to their own natural influence, without something adventitious or accidental intervening (things such as depression, doctrinal ignorance, prejudices of education, wrong instruction, false principles, specific temptations, etc.).

Fear is driven out by the Spirit of God only when love prevails; nor is fear ever maintained by his Spirit except when love is asleep. At such a time, all the saint's self-examinations, and poring over his past experiences in order to establish his peace, and to get assurance, will be in vain. For it is contrary to the nature of things, as God has constituted them, that he should have assurance at such a time.

Therefore, those who exhort others to be confident in their hope when they are living in dead frames; and who do so under a notion of “living by faith and not by sight, and trusting God in the dark, and living on Christ and not on experiences;” and who warn others not to doubt their
good estate lest they be guilty of the dreadful sin of unbelief, directly thwart God’s wise and gracious constitution of things. Such instruction has a direct tendency to establish the most presumptuous hypocrites, and to prevent them from ever calling their estate into question – however much wickedness may rage and reign in their hearts, and prevail in their lives. They do so under a notion of honoring God by hoping against hope, and confidently trusting in God when things look very dark. Doubtless the mischief done by this has been vast.

Persons cannot be said to forsake Christ, and live on their experiences of the exercises of grace, merely because they take and use them as evidences of grace; for there are no other evidences that they can or ought to take. But then persons may be said to live upon their experiences when they make them into their own righteousness, instead of keeping their eye on God’s glory and Christ’s excellency. If they do, they take their eyes off these external objects, and put their eyes onto themselves. They entertain their minds by viewing their own attainments and high experiences, and the great things they have met with. They are bright and beautiful in their own eyes, and they are rich and increased with goods in their own perception. They believe that God admires and esteems them as much as they do themselves, and for the same reasons. This is living on experiences, and not on Christ. It is more abominable in the sight of God than the gross immoralities of those who make no pretenses to religion. But this is a far different thing than merely improving our experiences as evidences of an interest in a glorious Redeemer.

But to turn from this digression, I would mention one more thing under the general topic that I am addressing.
12. Appearing holy and religious is no sign of religious affections

Nothing can be certainly concluded concerning the nature of religious affections from the fact that their outward manifestations, and the conveying of such experiences, are very affecting and pleasing to the truly godly; nor that the charity of the godly is gained and their hearts are won.

True saints do not have such a spirit of discernment that they can certainly determine who is godly, and who is not. For though they know experientially what true religion is in its internal exercise, yet they can neither feel nor see these in the heart of another. There is nothing in others that comes within their view except outward manifestations and appearances. But the Scripture plainly intimates that judging what is in men by outward appearances, is at best uncertain, and liable to deceit. 1Sam. 16:7, “The Lord does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.” Isa. 11:3, “He shall not judge by the sight of his eyes, nor reprove by the hearing of his ears.” People are usually poor judges and dangerous counselors in soul cases, if they are quick and peremptory when determining the state of a person. They vaunt themselves in their extraordinary faculty for discerning and distinguishing in these great affairs, as though everything was open and clear to them. They betray one of three things about themselves: that they have little experience; or they are persons of weak judgment; or that they have a great degree of pride and self-confidence – and so they are ignorant of themselves. Wise and experienced men will proceed with great caution in such an affair.

When there are many probable appearances of piety in others, it is the duty of the saints to receive them cordially into their charity, and to love them and rejoice in them as their brothers in Christ Jesus. Yet the best of men, when their appearances seem exceedingly fair and bright to the godly, may only be trying to gain their charity and conquer their hearts. It has been a common thing in the church of God, for such bright professors who are received as eminent saints among the saints, to fall away and come to nothing. And we need not wonder at this, if we consider the things that have been already observed: the things which may appear in men who are altogether graceless. Nothing hinders us except that all these things which follow may meet together in men, and yet these men are without a spark of grace in their hearts:

- they may have religious affections of many kinds combined;

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1 Men may have knowledge of their own conversion, but the knowledge that other men have of it is uncertain, because no man can look into the heart of another and see the workings of grace there.” Stoddard’s *Nature of Saving Conversion*, chap. 15 at the beginning.

2 Mr. Stoddard observes, that “all visible signs are common to converted and unconverted men; and a relation of experiences are among the rest.” *Appeal to the Learned*, p. 75. “O how hard it is for the eye of man to discern between chaff and wheat! And how many upright hearts are now censured, whom God will clear! How many false hearts are now approved whom God will condemn! Men ordinarily have no convincing proofs, but only probable symptoms; which at most produce but a conjectural knowledge of another’s state. And those who peremptorily judge either way, may possibly wrong the generation of the upright, or on the other side, absolve and justify the wicked. And truly, considering what has been said, it is no wonder that dangerous mistakes are so frequently made in this matter.” – *Flavel’s Husbandry Spiritualized*, chap. 12.

3 “Do not be offended, if you see great cedars fall, stars fall from heaven, great professors die and decay: do not think they are all such: do not think that the elect shall fall. Truly, some are such that when they fall, one would think a truly sanctified man might fall away, as the Arminians think: 1John 2:19, “They were not of us.” I say this because the Lord is shaking; and I look for great apostasies: for God is trying all his friends, throughout all the Christian world. In Germany what profession was there! Who would have thought it? The Lord, who delights to manifest openly what was hidden secretly, sends a sword and they fall.” – *Shepard’s Parable*. Part 1. p. 118-119. “The saints may approve you and God condemn you. Rev. 3:1, “You have a reputation that you live, and yet you are dead.” Men may say, There is a true Nathanael, and God may say, There is a self-deceived Pharisee. Reader, you have heard of Judas and Demas, of Ananias and Sapphira, of Hymeneus and Philetus, once renowned and famous professors; and you have heard how they proved at last.” – *Flavel’s Touchstone of Sincerity*, Chap. 2. Sect. 5.
they may have a sort of affection towards God that bears a great resemblance to dear love towards him, and also a kind of love towards the brothers;

they may appear to greatly admire God's perfections and works;

they have sorrow for sin, and reverence, submission, self-abasement, gratitude, joy, religious longings, and zeal for religion and for the good of souls.

dependence, joined with the delusions of Satan, and a wicked and deceitful heart. To which, I may add this: all these things may be attended by a sweet natural temper; a good doctrinal knowledge of religion; a long acquaintance with the saints' way of talking about and expressing their affections and experiences; and a natural ability and subtlety in accommodating their own expressions and manner of speaking to the dispositions and notions of those who hear them. They take on decency in their expression and behavior, formed by a good education. How great the resemblance may be, therefore, as to all their outward expressions and appearances, between a hypocrite and a true saint! Doubtless it is the glorious prerogative of the omniscient God, as the great searcher of hearts, to be able to separate sheep and goats. What an indecent self-exaltation and arrogance it is in poor, fallible, dark mortals, to pretend they can determine who are really sincere and upright before God, and who are not!

Many seem to lay great weight on that outward manifestation. They suppose it can be used to determine real piety when someone not only tells a plausible story, but in giving an account of their experiences, they present it in such a way, and speak in such a way, that the listener can “feel their talk.” That is to say, when what is told seems to harmonize with the listener's own experience, and his heart is touched and affected and delighted by what he hears the other say. As a result, the listener is drawn out by it, in dear love towards the speaker. But certainty in such things, the full dependence we would place on them, is not what many imagine. A true saint greatly delights in holiness; it is a most beautiful thing in his eyes. And God's work, in savingly renewing and making holy and happy, a poor and previously perishing soul, appears to him a
most glorious work. It is no wonder, therefore, that his heart is touched and greatly affected, when he hears another give a probable account of this work, wrought on his own heart; and when he sees in him probable appearances of holiness, whether those pleasing appearances have anything real to correspond to them or not. And if this person uses the same words which are commonly used to express the affections of true saints; and if he tells of many things following one another in a particular order that agrees with the experience of the one who hears him; and if he also speaks freely and boldly, and with an air of assurance – then it is no wonder that the other thinks his experiences harmonize with his own.

If besides all this, in relating his experiences, he speaks with great affection; and above all, if in speaking he seems to show great affection for the one to whom he speaks – such an affection as the Galatians showed towards the Apostle Paul – then these things will naturally have a powerful influence. They will affect and draw out his hearer’s heart, and open wide the doors of the hearer’s charity towards him. David speaks as one who felt Ahithophel’s talk, and had at once a sweet savor and relish of it. Therefore his surprise and disappointment was exceedingly great when Ahithophel betrayed him; it was almost too much for him. Psa. 55:12-14, “It was not an enemy – then I could have borne it – but it was you, a man, my equal, my guide, and my acquaintance: we took sweet counsel together, and we walked to the house of God in company.”

It is with professors of religion, especially those who become professors during an outpouring of the Spirit of God, as it is with blossoms in the spring. There are vast numbers of them on the trees which all look fair and promising; yet many of them never come to anything. And many of those which remain, will in a short time wither, drop off, and rot under the trees. Yet for awhile they look as beautiful and gay as the others; and not only so, but they smell sweet, and put out a pleasant odor. So that we cannot, by any of our senses, certainly distinguish those blossoms which have in them that secret virtue which will afterwards appear in the fruit, and which have that inward solidity and strength which will enable them to bear, and cause them to be perfected by the same hot summer sun that will dry up the others. It is the mature fruit which comes afterwards that we must judge by, and not the beautiful colors and smell of the blossoms. So new converts (professedly so), in their talk about religious things, may appear fair, and be very savory, and the saints may think they talk with feeling. The saints may relish their talk, and imagine they perceive a divine savor in it – and yet all of it may come to nothing.

It is strange how men are rarely content with the rules and directions Christ has given them, and must go by other rules of their own counsel. I know of no directions or counsels which Christ ever delivered more plainly than the rule he gave to guide our judgment of others’ sincerity: that we should judge the tree chiefly by the fruit. Yet somehow this will not do; but other ways are discovered which are imagined to be more distinguishing and certain. Woeful have been the mischievous consequences of arrogantly setting men’s wisdom above the wisdom of Christ. I believe many saints have gone far out of the way of Christ’s word in this respect. Some of them have been chastised with whips, and (I almost said) scorpions, to bring them back again. But many things which have recently appeared may convince us that ordinarily, those who have gone furthest in this direction, and were most conceited about their faculty of discernment, and appeared most eager to peremptorily and suddenly determine the state of men’s souls, have been hypocrites, who have known nothing of true religion.

In the parable of the wheat and tares, it is said, Matt. 13:26, “When the blade was sprung up, and brought forth fruit, then the tares also appeared.” As though the tares were not discerned or distinguishable from the wheat until then, as Mr. Flavel observes. He mentions it as an

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4 A time of outpouring of the Spirit of God, reviving religion, and producing the pleasant appearances of it, in new converts, is in Scripture compared to this very thing, viz., the spring season, when the benign influences of the heavens cause the blossoms to put forth. Cant. 2:11, 12.

5 Husbandry Spiritualized, Chap. 12.
observation of Jerome’s that “wheat and tares are so much alike, until the blade of the wheat comes to bring forth the ear, that it is next to impossible to distinguish them.” And then Mr. Flavel adds, “However difficult it is to discern the difference between wheat and tares, yet doubtless the eye of sense can much easier discriminate them, than the most quick and piercing eye of man can discern the difference between special and common grace. For all saving graces in the saints have their counterfeits in hypocrites. There are similar works in those, which a spiritual and very judicious eye may easily mistake for the saving and genuine effects of a sanctifying spirit.”

As it is the ear of the fruit which distinguishes the wheat from the tares, so the one who stands as judge at the passages of the Jordan, makes use of the Shibboleth to distinguish those that will pass over Jordan into the true Canaan, from those who should be slain at the passages. For the Hebrew word Shibboleth signifies an ear of corn. And perhaps the fuller pronunciation of Shibboleth by Jephthah’s friends, may represent a full ear with fruit in it, typifying the fruits of the friends of Christ, the antitype of Jephthah. The leaner pronunciation of the word by the Ephraimites, his enemies, may represent their empty ears, typifying the show of religion in hypocrites, who are without substance and fruit. This agrees with the doctrine we are abundantly taught in Scripture, that the one who is set to judge those who pass through death, whether they have a right to enter into the heavenly Canaan or not, or whether they should be slain, will judge every man according to his works.

We seem to be taught the same things by the rules given a priest for discerning leprosy. In many cases it was impossible for the priest to determine whether a man had leprosy, or whether he was clean, even by the most narrow inspection of the appearances that were on the person – until the priest waited to see what the appearances would come to. The person who showed himself to the priest was shut up for two consecutive periods of seven days. The priest was to examine the hair that grew out of the spot shown to him. It was, as it were, the fruit that was brought forth. Lev 13

Here, before I finish what I have to say under this subject, I would say something about a strange notion that some have recently been led away with. The notion is that the good estate that others are in can be certainly known by their love flowing out to others in an extraordinary manner (as though it were directly revealed to these others from heaven). They argue that, because their love is very tangible and great, it may be certainly known to be a true Christian love by those who feel it. And if it is true Christian love, then the Spirit of God must be the author of it. The Spirit of God knows certainly whether others are the children of God or not, and he is a spirit of truth. He is pleased, by an uncommon influence upon believers, to cause their love to flow out in an extraordinary manner, towards another child of God. It must be that this infallible Spirit, who deceives none, knows that this other person is a child of God. But such persons might be convinced of the falseness of their reasoning if they would consider what God requires of them. Is it their duty to love those as the children of God whom they think are the children of God, and whom they have no reason to think otherwise of (from all that they can see in them), even though God, who searches the hearts, knows they are not his children?

If it is their duty, then it is good, and the lack of such love is sin. Therefore, surely the Spirit of God may be its author. The Spirit of God, without being a spirit of falsehood, may in such a case assist a person to do his duty, and keep him from sin. But then they argue from the uncommon degree and special manner in which their love flows out towards the other person, which they think the Spirit of God never would cause if he did not know the object of their love was a child of God. But then I would ask them whether or not it is their duty to love all those they are bound to think are the children of God, from all that they can see in them, to a very great degree – even though God, from other things which he sees that are out of sight to them, knows they are not His children. It is men’s duty to love all those whom they are bound in charity to look upon as
the children of God, with a vastly dearer affection than they commonly do. As we ought to love Christ to the utmost capacity of our nature, so it is our duty to love those whom we think are so near and dear to him as his members, with an exceedingly dear affection, just as Christ loved us. Therefore it is sin in us not to love them so. We ought to pray to God that by his Spirit he would keep us from sin, and enable us to do our duty. May not his Spirit answer our prayers, and enable us to do our duty, in a particular instance, without lying? If he cannot, then the Spirit of God is bound not to help his people do their duty in some instances, because he cannot do it without being a spirit of falsehood. But surely God is so sovereign, that he may enable us to do our duty when he pleases, on whatever occasion he pleases. When persons think others are His children, God may have other ends in causing their exceedingly endeared love to flow out to them, besides revealing to them whether their opinion of them is right or not. He may have a merciful end in it, to enable them to know their duty, and to keep them from that dreadful infinite evil, sin. Will they say that God will not show them mercy in such a case? If I am away from home, and I hear that in my absence my house is burnt down, but my family has escaped the flames in an extraordinary way; and everything in the circumstances of the story, as I hear it, makes it appear very credible; then it would be sin in me, in such a case, not to feel a great degree of gratitude to God, even if the story is not true. And is not God so sovereign that he may, if he pleases, show me mercy on that occasion, and enable me to do my duty to a much further degree than I used to do it, and yet I would not incur the charge of deceitfulness by confirming a falsehood?

It is obvious that error or mistake may be the occasion for a gracious exercise, and consequently, a gracious influence of the Spirit of God. Rom. 14:6: “He that eats to the Lord, eats and gives God thanks; and he that does not eat to the Lord does not eat and give God thanks!” The apostle is speaking of those, who through erroneous and needless scruples, avoided eating legally unclean meats. By this it is very evident that there may be true exercises of grace, a true respect to the Lord, and particularly, a true thankfulness, which may both be occasioned by an erroneous judgment and practice. Consequently, an error may be the occasion for those true holy exercises that come from the infallible Spirit of God. If so, it is certainly too much for us to determine to how great a degree the Spirit of God may, on such an occasion, give this holy exercise.

This notion of certainly discerning another’s state by the love flowing out towards him, is not only not founded on reason or Scripture, but is anti-scriptural. It is against the rules of Scripture which do not say a word about any such way of judging the state of others, but direct us to judge chiefly by the fruits that are seen in them. It is against the doctrines of Scripture, which plainly teach us that the state of others’ souls towards God cannot be known by us, as we find in Rev. 2:17: “To him who overcomes I will give some of the hidden manna to eat. And I will give him a white stone, and on the stone a new name written which no one knows except him who receives it.” And Rom. 2:29, “He is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit and not in the letter, whose praise is not from men, but from God.” By this last expression, “whose praise is not from men, but from God,” the apostle refers to the insufficiency of men to judge concerning another, whether he is inwardly a Jew or not (as they could easily see by outward marks, whether men were outwardly Jews). It would signify that it belongs to God alone to give a determining voice in this matter. This is confirmed by the same apostle’s use of the phrase, in 1Cor. 4:5: “Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord comes, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the heart.” Then every man will have praise from God. The apostle, in the two foregoing verses, says, “But with me it is a very small thing that I be judged by you, or by any man’s judgment: indeed, I do not judge myself. For I know nothing by myself, yet am I not justified by this; but he that judges me is the Lord.” This is further confirmed, because the apostle, in this second chapter to the Romans (2:17-20), directs his speech especially to those who had a high conceit about their
own holiness, who made their boast about God, and were confident of their own discernment, and that they knew God’s will, and they approved the things which were excellent, or tried the things that differ. Rom. 2:19-20: “And they were confident that they were guides of the blind, a light to those who are in darkness, instructors of the foolish, teachers of babes;” and so they took it upon themselves to judge others.6

How arrogant is the notion that these people have, who imagine they can certainly know others’ godliness, when that great Apostle Peter does not pretend to say any more concerning Sylvanus, than that he considered him a faithful brother! (1Pet. 5:12) Even though Sylvanus appears to have been an eminent minister of Christ, an evangelist and famous light in God’s church in that day, and an intimate companion of the apostles. See 2Cor. 1:19, 1 Thess. 1:1 and 2Thess. 1:1.8

6 Romans 2:1 Therefore you are inexcusable, O man, whoever you are who judge, for in whatever you judge another you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things.
7 1Pe 5:12 By Silvanus, our faithful brother as I consider him...
8 Silvanus is also known as Silas. Edwards is saying that, despite Silas being a key leader in the early church, Peter did not exalt him, as if he knew Silas’ heart – which only God could know; he simply called him a faithful brother – which he had seen. The citations listed here are the introductions in some of Paul’s letters, indicating they came equally from Paul and Silas. - WHG
Distinguishing Signs of Truly Gracious and Holy Affections

PART III.

SHOWING WHAT ARE DISTINGUISHING SIGNS OF TRULY GRACIOUS AND HOLY AFFECTIONS.

I COME now to the second thing pertaining to the trial of religious affections which was proposed: to notice some things in which those affections that are spiritual and gracious differ from those that are not.

But before I proceed directly to the distinguishing characteristics, I would mention beforehand some things which I desire to be observed concerning the marks I lay down.

1. I am far from undertaking to give those signs of gracious affections which are sufficient to enable anyone to certainly distinguish true affection from false affection in others, or to positively determine which of their neighbors are true professors and which are hypocrites. If I were to do so, I would be guilty of that arrogance which I have been condemning. It is plain that Christ has given rules to all Christians to enable them to judge professors of religion with whom they are concerned so far as is necessary for their own safety, and to prevent them from being led into a snare by false teachers and false pretenders to religion. It is also beyond doubt that the Scriptures abound with rules which may be very serviceable to ministers in counseling and conducting souls committed to their care, in things pertaining to their spiritual and eternal state. Yet it is also evident that it was never God’s design to give us any rules by which we may certainly know which of our fellow professors are his, and to make a full and clear separation between sheep and goats. On the contrary, it was God’s design to reserve this to himself as his prerogative. And therefore no such distinguishing signs that would enable Christians or ministers to do this, are ever to be expected to the world’s end. For no more is ever to be expected from any signs that are found in the word of God, or gathered from it, than Christ designed them for.

2. No such signs should be expected that are sufficient to enable saints to certainly discern their own good estate if they are very low in grace, or have greatly departed from God, and have fallen into a dead, carnal, and unchristian frame. It does not agree with God’s design (as already observed), that such persons should know their good estate, nor is it desirable. On the contrary, it is best in every way that they should not. We have reason to bless God that he has made no provision that such persons should certainly know the state they are in by any way other than first coming out from their ill frame and the way they are in. Indeed, properly speaking, it is not because of any defect in the signs that are given in the word of God, that any living saint cannot certainly know his good estate by them, whether that saint is strong or weak, or in a bad frame or otherwise. For the rules in themselves are certain and infallible. Every saint has, or had in the past, those things in himself which are sure evidences of grace; for every act of grace, even the least act of grace, is an evidence. But it is because of his defect that the signs are given to him. There is a twofold defect in that saint who is very low in grace, or in an ill frame, which makes it impossible for him to certainly know that he has true grace, even by the best signs and rules which can be given to him. First, there is a defect in the object or the qualification that is to be viewed and examined. I do not mean an essential defect, because I assume the person is a real saint – but a defect in degree. Grace, if it is very small, cannot be clearly and certainly discerned and distinguished from the absence of grace.

Things that are very small cannot be clearly discerned in their form, nor distinguished one from another. Though, as they are in themselves, their form may be very different. There is doubtless a great difference between the body of a man, and the bodies of other animals, as they are first conceived in the womb. Yet if we were to view the different embryos, it might not be possible for us to discern the difference, because of the imperfect state of the object. But as it comes to
greater perfection, the difference becomes very plain. The difference between creatures of very
counter-contrary qualities is not so plainly seen while they are very young. They may not be plainly seen
even after they are actually brought forth, in their more perfect state. The difference between
doves and ravens, or doves and vultures, when they first come out of the egg, is not so evident. But as they grow towards their perfection, the difference becomes great and obvious. Another
defect attending the grace of those of whom I am speaking, is that is mingled with so much
corruption which clouds and hides it; that makes it impossible to be certainly known. Although
different things that are before us may have many marks in themselves which thoroughly
distinguish them one from another, yet if we see them only in a thick smoke, it may nevertheless
be impossible to distinguish them. A fixed star is easily distinguishable from a comet in a clear
sky. But if we view them through a cloud, it may be impossible to see the difference. When true
Christians are in an ill frame, guilt lies on the conscience which will bring fear; and so it prevents
the peace and joy of an assured hope that would otherwise be seen.

Secondly. There is, in such a case, a defect in the eye. Just as the feebleness of grace and the
prevalence of corruption obscure the object, so it enfeebles the sight. It darkens the sight as to
all spiritual objects, of which grace is one. Sin is like some diseases of the eye that make things
appear to differ in color from those which properly belong to them. It is like many other diseases
which disable the tongue from properly tasting, and from distinguishing good and wholesome
food from bad, and thus everything tastes bitter.

Men in a corrupt and carnal frame have their spiritual senses put in a poor plight for judging
and distinguishing spiritual things.

For these reasons, no signs that can be given will actually satisfy persons in such a case. No
matter how good and infallible the signs are that are given, and how clearly they are laid down,
they will not serve them. It is like giving a man rules to distinguish visible objects in the dark.
The things themselves may be very different, and their differences may be very well and
distinctly described to him – yet it is all insufficient to enable him to distinguish them, because
he is in the dark. Therefore many persons in such a case spend time in a fruitless labor, in poring
over past experiences, and examining themselves by signs they hear laid down from the pulpit,
or that they read in books. If there is other preparatory work for them to do, then as long as they
neglect that work, all their self-examinations are likely to be in vain, no matter how much time
they spend in them. The accursed thing is to be destroyed from their camp, and Achan is to be
slain; until this is done, they will continue to be in trouble. It is not God's design that men
should obtain assurance in any other way than by mortifying their corruption, and increasing in
grace, and obtaining its lively exercises. Although self-examination is a duty of great use and
importance, and by no means is it to be neglected, yet it is not the principal means by which the
saints are satisfied as to their good estate.

Assurance is not to be obtained so much by self-examination, as by action. The Apostle Paul
sought assurance chiefly in this way, even by “forgetting the things that were behind, and
reaching forth to those things that were before, pressing towards the mark for the prize of the
high calling of God in Christ Jesus; if by any means he might attain to the resurrection of the
dead.” It was by this means that he chiefly obtained assurance. 1Cor. 9:26, “I therefore run, not
as uncertainly.” He obtained assurance of winning the prize more by running than by
considering. The swiftness of his pace did more towards his assurance of a conquest, than the
strictness of his examination. Giving all diligence to grow in grace by adding to faith, virtue, etc.
(2Pet. 1:5-11), is the direction that the Apostle Peter gives us for “making our calling and election
sure, and having an entrance into Christ's everlasting kingdom provided to us abundantly.”

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1 The way to know your godliness is to renew the visible exercises of grace. The more the visible exercises of grace are
renewed, the more certain you will be. The more frequently these actings are renewed, the more abiding and
confirmed your assurance will be. The more men's grace is multiplied, the more their peace is multiplied; 2Pet. 1:2,
This signifies to us that, without this, our eyes will be dim and we will be like men in the dark who cannot plainly see things past, or things to come – we cannot see either the forgiveness of our past sins, or the promise of our heavenly inheritance that is future, and far off.

Therefore, though good rules to distinguish true grace from counterfeit may tend to convince hypocrites, and they may be of great use to the saints in many respects, and may be among other benefits that are very useful to remove many needless doubts, and to establish their hope – yet I am far from pretending to lay down any such rules that would be sufficient of themselves, without other means, to enable all true saints to see their good estate. Nor do I assume they would be the principal means of their satisfaction.

3. Nor is there much encouragement in the experience of present or past times to lay down rules or marks to distinguish between true and false affections, in hopes of convincing the sort of hypocrites who have been deceived with great false revelations and affections; who have settled into a false confidence; and who have a high conceit about their own supposed great experiences and privileges. Such hypocrites are so conceited about their own wisdom; and so blinded and hardened with self-righteousness (but it is subtle and secret, hidden under the guise of great humility); and have so invincible a fondness for their pleasing conceit about their great exaltation – that it usually means nothing to lay before them the most convincing evidences of their hypocrisy. Their state is indeed deplorable; it is next to those who have committed the unpardonable sin. Some of this sort seem most out of the reach of these means of conviction and repentance. Yet laying down good rules may be a means to prevent such hypocrites, and to convince many other kinds of hypocrites. Yet God is able to convince even this kind. His grace is not to be limited, nor are his means to be neglected. And besides, such rules may be of use to true saints to detect false affections which they may have mingled with true affections; and it may be a means for their religion to become purer, like gold tested in the fire.

Having premised these things, I now proceed directly to note those things in which true religious affections are to be distinguished from false.

“Grace and peace be multiplied to you, through the knowledge of God and Jesus Christ our Lord.” Stoddard’s Way to know Sincerity and Hypocrisy, p. 139 and 142.
Distinguishing Signs of Truly Gracious and Holy Affections

1. Gracious Affections arise from supernatural influences on the heart

Affections that are truly spiritual and gracious, arise from those influences and operations on the heart which are spiritual, supernatural, and divine.

I will explain what I mean by these terms, from which will appear their usefulness to distinguish between those affections which are spiritual, and those which are not.

We find that true saints, or those persons who are sanctified by the Spirit of God, are called spiritual persons in the New Testament. Being spiritual is spoken of as their unique character; it is what distinguishes them from those who are not sanctified. This is evident, because those who are spiritual are set in opposition to natural and carnal men. Thus the spiritual man and the natural man are set in opposition one to another. 1Cor. 2:14-15, “The natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. But he that is spiritual judges all things.” By a natural man, the Scripture means an ungodly man, or someone that has no grace. Thus the Apostle Jude, speaking of certain ungodly men that crept in unawares among the saints, ver. 4, of his epistle, says in 5:19, “These are sensual, not having the Spirit.” The apostle gives this as a reason why they behaved themselves in such a wicked manner as he described. Here the word translated sensual, in the original is ψυχικοι [psychikoi], which is the same word used in 1Cor. chapter 2 that is translated natural. In the same way, and in the continuation of the same discourse in the next verse (except for one), spiritual men are opposed to carnal men. The connection plainly shows that the two terms mean the same as spiritual men and natural men, as in the foregoing verses. “And I, brothers, could not speak to you, as to spiritual, but as to carnal;” i.e., as unsanctified in great measure. By carnal, the apostle means corrupt and unsanctified. This is abundantly evident by Rom. 7:25, 8:1, 4-9, 19, and 13; Gal. 5:16 to the end; and Col. 2:18. Therefore, if natural and carnal in these texts is intended to mean unsanctified, then doubtless spiritual, which is opposed to them, means sanctified and gracious.

Just as the saints are called spiritual in Scripture, we also find that there are certain properties, qualities, and principles that have the same epithet given to them. We read of a “spiritual mind,” Rom. 8:6-7, and “spiritual wisdom,” Col. 1:9, and “spiritual blessings,” Eph. 1:3.

Now it may be observed, that the epithet spiritual, in these and other parallel texts of the New Testament, is not used to signify any relation of persons or things to the spirit or soul of man – for example, the spiritual part of man in opposition to the body, which is the material part. Qualities are not said to be spiritual because they have their seat in the soul and not in the body. For there are some properties that the Scripture calls carnal or fleshly, which have their seat as much in the soul as those properties that are called spiritual. It is this way with pride and self-righteousness, and trusting to our own wisdom, which the apostle calls fleshly, Col. 2:18. Nor are things called spiritual because they are familiar with things that are immaterial, and not corporeal. For the wise men and princes of this world were familiar with spirits and immaterial beings, yet the apostle speaks of them as natural men, totally ignorant of those things that are spiritual, 1Cor. chap. 2. But it is in their relation to the Holy Ghost, or the Spirit of God, that persons or things are termed spiritual in the New Testament. Spirit, as the word is used to signify the third person in the Trinity, is the substantive, from which is formed the adjective spiritual in the holy Scriptures. Thus Christians are called spiritual persons, because they are born of the Spirit, and because of the indwelling and holy influences of the Spirit of God in them. And things are called spiritual as related to the Spirit of God. 1Cor. 2:13-14, “The things of which we speak are not in the words which man’s wisdom teaches, but which the Holy Ghost teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual. But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God.” Here the apostle himself expressly signifies that “spiritual things” means the things of the Spirit of God, and things which the Holy Ghost teaches. The same thing is more apparent by viewing the whole context. Again, Rom. 8:6, “To be carnally minded is death; to be
spatially minded is life and peace” The apostle explains what he means by being carnally and spiritually minded in what follows in the 9th verse; and he shows that by being spiritually minded, he means having the indwelling and holy influences of the Spirit of God in the heart. “But you are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if any man does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his.” The same is evident by the context. But time does not permit me to produce all the evidence there is of this in the New Testament.

It must be observed here, that although it is with relation to the Spirit of God and his influences that persons and things are called spiritual, not all those persons who are subject to any kind of influence of the Spirit of God are ordinarily called spiritual in the New Testament. Those who have only the common influences of God’s Spirit are not called spiritual in the places cited above, but only those who have the special, gracious, and saving influences of God’s Spirit. This is evident because it has been already proved that “spiritual men” means godly men, in opposition to natural, carnal, and unsanctified men. It is most plain that when the apostle uses “spiritually minded,” Rom. 8:6, he means graciously minded. And though the extraordinary gifts of the Spirit which natural men might have are sometimes called spiritual, because they are from the Spirit, yet natural men, whatever gifts of the Spirit they may have, were not called spiritual persons in the usual language of the New Testament. For it was not by having the gifts of the Spirit that they were called spiritual, but by having the virtues of the Spirit. This is apparent by Gal. 6:1: “Brothers, if any man is overtaken in a fault, you which are spiritual, restore such a one in the spirit of meekness.” Meekness is one of those virtues which the apostle had just spoken of in the preceding verses, showing what the fruits of the Spirit are. Those qualifications which are said to be spiritual in the language of the New Testament, are those which are truly gracious and holy, and unique to the saints.

Thus, when we read of spiritual wisdom and understanding (as in Col. 1:9, “We desire that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will, in all wisdom and spiritual understanding”), what is intended is that wisdom which is gracious, and which comes from the sanctifying influences of the Spirit of God. For, doubtless, spiritual wisdom is opposite to what the Scripture calls natural wisdom; just as the spiritual man is opposed to the natural man. Therefore, spiritual wisdom is doubtless the same as that wisdom which comes from above, that the Apostle James speaks of in Jam. 3:17: “The wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle,” etc. The apostle opposes this to natural wisdom in ver. 15: “This wisdom does not descend from above, but is earthly, sensual” – the last word in the original is the same word translated natural in 1Cor. 2:14.

Natural men may be the subjects of many influences of the Spirit of God, as evidenced by many Scriptures, such as Num. 24:2, 1Sam. 10:10, 11:6, and 16:14; 1Cor. 13:1-3, Heb. 6:4-6, and many others. Yet they are not, in the sense of the Scripture, spiritual persons. Nor are any of those effects common gifts, qualities, or affections that come from the influence of the Spirit of God on them, called spiritual things. The great difference lies in these two things:

1. The Spirit of God is given to true saints to dwell in them, as his proper lasting abode; and to influence their hearts as a principle of new nature, or as a divine supernatural spring of life and action. The Scriptures represent the Holy Spirit not only as moving and occasionally influencing the saints, but as dwelling in them as his temple, his proper abode and everlasting dwelling place, 1Cor. 3:16, 2 Cor. 6:16, John 14:16-17. And he is represented as being so united to the faculties of the soul, that he becomes a principle or spring of new nature and life.

So the saints are said to live by Christ living in them, Gal. 2:20. Christ by his Spirit not only is in them, but he lives in them so that they live by his life. Thus his Spirit is united to them as a principle of life in them. They not only drink living water, but this “living water becomes a well or fountain of water,” in the soul, “springing up into spiritual and everlasting life,” John 4:14. Thus it becomes a principle of life in them. This living water, John explains, means the Spirit of
God, chap. 7:38-39. The light of the Sun of righteousness not only shines upon them, but it is so communicated to them that they also shine, and become little images of that Sun which shines upon them. The sap of the true vine is not only conveyed into them, as the sap of a tree may be conveyed into a vessel, but it is conveyed as sap from a tree is conveyed into one of its living branches where it becomes a principle of life. The Spirit of God is thus communicated and united to the saints. For this reason they are properly denominated by it, and they are called spiritual.

On the other hand, though the Spirit of God may in many ways influence natural men, yet because it is not thus communicated to them as an indwelling principle, they do not derive any denomination or character from it – because there is no union, it is not their own. The light may shine upon a body that is very dark or black. That body is the subject of the light; yet because the light does not become a principle of light in it so as to cause the body to shine, that body does not properly receive its denomination from the light so as to be called a body of light. So the Spirit of God which acts only upon the soul, without communicating itself as an active principle in it, cannot denominate it as being spiritual. A body that continues to be black, may be said not to have light, even though the light shines on it. So natural men are said “not to have the Spirit,” Jude 19; thus they are sensual or natural (as the word is rendered elsewhere).

2. Another reason why the saints and their virtues are called spiritual (which is the principal thing), is that the Spirit of God is dwelling as a vital principle in their souls. There it produces those effects in which he exerts and communicates himself in his own proper nature. Holiness is the nature of the Spirit of God; therefore he is called the Holy Ghost in Scripture. Holiness, which is the beauty and sweetness of the divine nature, is as much the proper nature of the Holy Spirit as heat is the nature of fire, or sweetness was the nature of holy anointing oil – this was the principal type of the Holy Ghost in the Mosaic dispensation. Indeed, I may say that holiness is as much the proper nature of the Holy Ghost, as sweetness was the nature of the sweet odor of that ointment. The Spirit of God so dwells in the hearts of the saints, that as a seed or spring of life, he exerts and communicates himself in this, his sweet and divine nature. He makes the soul a partaker of God’s beauty and Christ’s joy, so that the saint truly has fellowship with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ, in thus having the communion or participation of the Holy Ghost. The grace that is in the hearts of the saints is of the same nature as divine holiness, as much as it is possible for that holiness to be the same when it is infinitely less in degree. This is like the brightness in a diamond which the sun shines on it; the diamond is of the same nature as the brightness of the sun, except that it is nothing like it in degree. Therefore, Christ says in John 3:6, “What is born of the Spirit, is spirit.” That is, the grace that is generated in the hearts of the saints is of the same nature as that Spirit; so it is properly called a spiritual nature, in the same way that what is born of the flesh is flesh, or what is born of a corrupt nature is corrupt.

But the Spirit of God never influences the minds of natural men in this way. Though he may influence them many ways, yet in any of his influences, he never communicates himself to them in his own proper nature. Indeed he never acts disagreeably to his nature, either on the minds of saints or sinners. But the Spirit of God may act on men agreeably to his own nature, and yet not exert his proper nature in the acts and exercises of their minds. The Spirit of God may act so that his actions may be agreeable to his nature, and yet he may not at all communicate himself in his proper nature in the effect of that action. Thus, for instance, the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters, and there was nothing disagreeable to his nature in that action. Yet he did not at all communicate himself in that action – there was nothing of the proper nature of the Holy Spirit in that motion of the waters. And so he may act upon the minds of men in many ways, and yet not communicate himself any more than when he acts on inanimate things.

Thus the way the Spirit operates in the saints – such as dwelling in them, or being an abiding principle of action in them – is different than the way the Spirit operates on sinners. Not only
that, but the influence and operation itself is different, and the effect wrought in them is exceedingly different. So that not only are the persons called spiritual, as having the Spirit of God dwelling in them, but those qualifications, affections, and experiences that are wrought in them by the Spirit, are also spiritual. And in these things they differ vastly in their nature and kind from all that a natural man can be the subject of while he remains in a natural state; and also from all that men or devils can be the authors of. It is a spiritual work in this high sense, and therefore above all other works, it is unique to the Spirit of God. There is no work so high and excellent as this, for there is no work in which God so much communicates himself, and in which the mere creature has a participation of God in so high a sense. So Scripture expresses it as the saints “being made partakers of the divine nature,” 2Pet. 1:4, and “having God dwelling in them, and they in God,” 1John 4:12, 15-16, and chap. 3:21; “and having Christ in them,” John 17:21, Rom. 8:10; “being the temples of the living God,” 2Cor. 6:16; “living by Christ’s life,” Gal. 2:20; “being made partakers of God’s holiness,” Heb. 12:10; “having Christ’s love dwelling in them,” John 17:26; “having his joy fulfilled in them,” John 17:13; “seeing light in God’s light, and being made to drink of the river of God’s pleasures,” Psa. 36:8-9; and “having fellowship with God, or communicating and partaking with him” [as the word signifies], 1John 1:3.

It is not that the saints are made partakers of the essence of God, and so are godded with God, and christed with Christ, according to the abominable and blasphemous language and notions of some heretics. But, to use the Scripture phrase, they are made partakers of God’s fullness, Eph. 3:17-19, John 1:16. That is, they are made partakers of God’s spiritual beauty and happiness according to the measure and capacity of a creature; this is evident from what the word fullness signifies in Scripture language. Therefore, grace in the hearts of the saints being the most glorious work of God, in which he communicates the goodness of his nature, it is doubtless his unique work; and in an eminent manner it is above the power of all creatures. The influences of the Spirit of God are in this, being thus unique to God, and being those in which God communicates himself in so high a manner, and in which he makes the creature a partaker of the divine nature (the Spirit of God communicating itself in its own proper nature) – this is what I mean by those influences that are divine, when I say that “truly gracious affections arise from those influences that are spiritual and divine.”

True saints only have what is spiritual; others have nothing which is divine in the sense that has been spoken of. They not only do not have these communications of the Spirit of God in as high a degree as the saints, but they have nothing of that nature or kind. For the Apostle James tells us that natural men do not have the Spirit; and Christ teaches the necessity of a new birth, or being born of the Spirit. From this it may be surmised that one who is born of the flesh, has only flesh, and no spirit, John 3:6. They do not have the Spirit of God dwelling in them in any degree; for the apostle teaches that all who have the Spirit of God dwelling in them are his, Rom. 8:9-11. And having the Spirit of God is spoken of as a certain sign that persons will have the eternal inheritance; for it is spoken of as the earnest of it, 2Cor. 1:29, and 5:5, Eph. 1:14. Having anything of the Spirit is mentioned as a sure sign of being in Christ, 1John 4:13: “By this we know that we dwell in him, because he has given us of his Spirit.” Ungodly men not only do not have so much of the divine nature as the saints, but they are not partakers of it. This implies that they have nothing of it; for being a partaker of the divine nature is spoken of as the unique privilege of true saints, 2Pet. 1:4.

Ungodly men are not “partakers of God’s holiness,” Heb. 12:10. A natural man has no experience of any of those things that are spiritual. The apostle teaches us that he is so far from it, that he knows nothing about them; he is a perfect stranger to them; the talk about such things is all foolishness and nonsense to him; he does not know what it means. 1Cor. 2:14, “The natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness to him: nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.” And for a similar purpose, Christ teaches us that the world is wholly unacquainted with the Spirit of God, John 14:17: “Even the Spirit of truth,
whom the world cannot receive, because it does not see him or know him.” It is further evident
that natural men have nothing in them of the same nature as the true grace of the saints,
because the apostle teaches us that those who go furthest in religion have no charity or true
Christian love, 1Cor. chap. 13. So Christ elsewhere reproves the Pharisees, those high pretenders
to religion, that they “did not have the love of God in them,” John 5:42. Hence natural men have
no communion or fellowship with Christ, or participation with him (as these words signify), for
this is spoken of as the unique privilege of the saints, 1John 1:3, together with ver. 6–7, and 1Cor.
1:8–9. The Scripture speaks of the existence of an actual gracious principle in the soul (though in
its first beginning it is like a seed planted there), as being inconsistent with being a sinner, 1John
3:9. Natural men are represented in Scripture as having no spiritual light, no spiritual life, and
no spiritual being. Therefore conversion is often compared to opening the eyes of the blind,
raising the dead, and being a work of creation (in which creatures are made entirely new), and
becoming new-born children.

From these things it is evident that those gracious influences of the saints, and the effects of
God’s Spirit which they experience, are entirely above nature. They are altogether of a different
kind from anything that men find within themselves by nature, or by the mere exercise of
natural principles. No improvement of those qualifications or natural principles, no advancing
or exalting of them to higher degrees, and no re-composition of them, will ever bring men to
these things. This is because they not only differ from what is natural, and from everything that
natural men experience in degree and circumstances, but they also differ in kind. They are of a
vastly more excellent nature. This is what I mean when I say that gracious affections arise from
supernatural influences.

From this it follows that, in those gracious exercises and affections which are wrought in the
minds of the saints through the saving influences of the Spirit of God, there is a new inward
perception or sensation of their minds. It is entirely different in its nature and kind from
anything that their minds were ever the subjects of before they were sanctified. If God, by his
mighty power produces something that is new, not only in degree and circumstances, but in its
whole nature – something that could not be produced by exalting, varying, or compounding
what was there before, nor by adding anything of a similar kind to it – if God thus produces
something new in a mind, that is a perceiving, thinking, and conscious thing, then doubtless
something entirely new is felt, perceived, or thought. To say the same thing, there is some new
sensation or perception of the mind, which is entirely of a new sort, and it could not be produced
by exalting, varying, or compounding the same kind of perceptions or sensations which the
mind had before. There is what some metaphysicians call a new simple idea. In the sense I just
described, if grace is an entirely new kind of principle, then its exercises are also entirely new. If
there is in the soul a new sort of exercises which it is conscious of, and which the soul knew
nothing of before, and which no improvement, composition, or management of what it was
conscious or aware of before could produce, or anything like it – then it follows that the mind
has an entirely new kind of perception or sensation. And here the mind has, as it were, a new
spiritual sense, or a principle of a new kind of perception or spiritual sensation, which is
different in its whole nature from any former kinds of sensation of the mind, just as tasting is
different from any of the other senses.

Something is perceived by a true saint, in the exercise of this new sense of mind, in spiritual and
divine things, that is as entirely different from anything that is perceived by natural men, just as
the sweet taste of honey is different from the ideas men have of honey only by looking at it and
feeling it. The spiritual perceptions which a sanctified and spiritual person has are not different
from all that natural men have, only in the way that the ideas or perceptions of the same sense
may differ from one another, but rather as the ideas and sensations of different senses differ.
Hence, the work of the Spirit of God in regeneration is often compared in Scripture to giving a
new sense, giving eyes to see, and ears to hear, unstopping the ears of the deaf, and opening the
eyes of those who were born blind, and turning from darkness to light. Because this spiritual sense is immensely the most noble and excellent of senses, and without which all other principles of perception and all our faculties are useless and vain – therefore giving this new sense, with its blessed fruits and effects in the soul, is compared to a raising the dead, and to a new creation.

This new spiritual sense, and the new dispositions that attend it, are not new faculties; they are new principles of nature. I use the word *principles* for lack of a word of a more determinate meaning. By a “principle of nature” here, I mean that foundation which is laid in nature, either old or new, for any particular manner or kind of exercise of the faculties of the soul. It is a natural habit or foundation for action, giving a person ability and disposition to exert the faculties in exercises of a certain kind. For someone to exert his faculties in this kind of exercises, may be said to be “his nature.” This new spiritual sense is not a new faculty of understanding. Rather, it is a new foundation that is laid in the nature of the soul, for a new kind of exercises of the *same* faculty of understanding. So that the new holy disposition of heart that attends this new sense, is not a new faculty of will, but a foundation that is laid in the nature of the soul, for a new kind of exercises of the same faculty of will.

In all his operations on the minds of *natural* men, the Spirit of God only moves, impresses, assists, improves, or in some way acts upon *natural* principles; but he does not give them any new spiritual principle. Thus when the Spirit of God gives a natural man visions, as he did Balaam, he only impresses a natural principle, such as the sense of seeing, immediately stimulating ideas in him by that sense; but he does not give him a new sense. Nor is there anything supernatural, spiritual, or divine in it. So if the Spirit of God impresses on a man’s imagination, either in a dream or when he is awake, any outward ideas of any of the senses, whether voices, or shapes and colors, it is only stimulating ideas of the same kind that he has by natural principles and senses. So if God reveals to any natural man any secret fact – for instance, something that he will later see or hear – this is not infusing or exercising any new spiritual principle in him, or giving him ideas from any new spiritual sense. It is only impressing, in an extraordinary manner, the ideas that will later be received by sight and hearing. So too, in the more ordinary influences of the Spirit of God on the hearts of sinners, he only assists natural principles to do the same work to a greater degree, which they themselves do by nature. Thus the Spirit of God may assist men’s natural ingenuity by his common influences. Just as he assisted Bezaleel and Aholiab in the exacting works of the tabernacle, so he may assist men’s natural abilities in political affairs, and improve their courage and other natural qualifications – as he is said to have put his spirit on the seventy elders, and on Saul, so as to give him another heart. So God may greatly assist natural men’s reason in their reasoning about secular things, or about the doctrines of religion. And he may greatly advance the clearness of their apprehensions and their notions of the things of religion in many respects, without giving any spiritual sense of them. In those awakenings and convictions that natural men may have, God only assists their conscience, which is a natural principle, to do that work which it naturally does, but to a further degree. Conscience naturally gives men an apprehension of right and wrong, and it suggests the relation between right and wrong, and the need for retribution. The Spirit of God assists men’s consciences to do this to a greater degree; he helps conscience against the stupifying influence of worldly objects and their lusts. Many other ways might be mentioned in which the Spirit acts upon, assists, and moves natural principles in natural men. But in the end, it is no more than nature that is moved, acted, and improved upon; there is nothing supernatural and divine in it. But the Spirit of God, in his spiritual influences on the hearts of his saints, operates by infusing or exercising new, divine, and supernatural principles – principles which indeed consist in a new and spiritual nature, and principles that are vastly more noble and excellent than anything in natural men.
Distinguishing Signs of Truly Gracious and Holy Affections

From what has been said, it follows that all spiritual and gracious affections are attended by and arise from some apprehension, idea, or sensation of mind which is different in its whole nature, indeed exceedingly different, from all that is or can be in the mind of a natural man. The natural man discerns nothing of them, and (as in 1Cor. 2:14) he has no idea of them. He cannot conceive of them any more than a man without the sense of taste can conceive of the sweet taste of honey, or a man without the sense of hearing can conceive of the melody of a tune, or a man born blind can have any notion of the beauty of a rainbow.

But here two things must be observed in order to have the right understanding of this.

1. On the one hand, it must be observed that not everything which in any respect pertains to spiritual affections is new and entirely different from what natural men can conceive of and actually experience. Some things are common between gracious affections and other affections; many circumstances, appendages, and effects are common. Thus, a saint’s love towards God has a great many things pertaining to it which are common to a man’s natural love towards a near relation. Love towards God makes a man desire to honor God and please him; so a natural man’s love towards his friend makes him desire to honor and please him. Love towards God causes a man to delight in thoughts of God, and in the presence of God, and he desires conformity to God, and he desires to have the enjoyment of God; so it is with a man’s love towards his friend. Many other things might be mentioned which are common to both. Yet that idea which the saint has of the loveliness of God, and that sensation and kind of delight which he has in that view of God which is, as it were, the marrow and quintessence of his love for God, is unique and entirely different from anything that a natural man has, or can have any notion of. Even in those things that seem to be common, there is something unique; both spiritual and natural love cause desires after the object that is beloved; but they are not the same sort of desires. There is a sensation of soul in the spiritual desires of the one that loves God, which is entirely different from all natural desires. Both spiritual love and natural love are attended by delight in the object that is beloved; but the sensations of delight are not the same; they are entirely and exceedingly different. Natural men may have conceptions of many things about spiritual affections; but there is something in them which is, as it were, the nucleus or kernel of them, things that they have no more conception of than one who is born blind has a conception of colors.

It may be clearly illustrated by this: suppose there are two men; one is born without the sense of taste, while the other has it; the latter loves honey, and he greatly delights in it because he knows its sweet taste. The other loves certain sounds and colors. The love of each has many things that pertain to it and which are held in common. Their love causes both to desire and delight in the object that is beloved, and it causes grief when that object is absent, etc. Yet that idea or sensation which the one who knows the taste of honey has, of its excellency and sweetness, and which is the foundation of his love for it, is entirely different from anything the other one has or can have. And that delight which he has in honey is wholly different from anything that the other man can conceive of, even though they both delight in their beloved objects. So too both these persons may in some respects love the same object: the one may love a delicious kind of fruit which is beautiful to the eye and delicious to the taste; not only because he has seen its pleasant colors, but he knows its sweet taste. The other man, perfectly ignorant of this taste, loves it only for its beautiful colors. There are many things which, in some respect, are common to both. Both love, both desire, and both delight; but the love, desire, and delight of the one are altogether different from those of the other. The difference between the love of a natural man and the love of a spiritual man are similar to this; but it must be observed, that in one respect the love is vastly greater in the other. The different kinds of excellency that are perceived in spiritual objects by these different kinds of persons, are vastly more diverse than the different kinds of excellency that are perceived in delicious fruit by a man who can taste it, and by a man who cannot. Yet, in another respect, the difference may not be so great – for the spiritual man
may have a spiritual sense or taste to perceive that divine and most distinct excellency, but his sense of taste has only a small beginning, and it extends only to an imperfect degree.

2. On the other hand, it must be observed that a natural man may have those religious apprehensions and affections which may, in many respects, be very new and surprising to him – he did not conceive of them before. And yet, what he experiences is nothing like the exercises of the principle of a new nature, or the sensations of a new spiritual sense. His affections may be very new because they move natural principles extraordinarily, to a new degree, and with many new circumstances. The co-operation of natural affections is new, and the composition of ideas is new. This may be from some extraordinarily powerful influence of Satan, and some great delusion – but it is nothing more than nature being extraordinarily acted out. It is like a poor man who always dwelt in a cottage, and never looked beyond the obscure village where he was born. What if he were, in jest, taken to a magnificent city, and into a prince’s court. There he was arrayed in princely robes and set on the throne, with the royal crown on his head; peers and nobles bowed before him, and he was made to believe that he was now a glorious monarch. The ideas he would have, and the affections he would experience, would in many respects be very new – ones he never imagined before. But all this is no more than extraordinarily raising and stimulating his natural principles; it is newly exalting, varying, and compounding the same sort of ideas he has by nature. This is nothing like giving him a new sense, or a new nature.

On the whole, I think it is clearly manifest that all truly gracious affections arise from special and peculiar influences of the Spirit. The Spirit works that tangible effect or sensation in the souls of the saints which is entirely different from all that is possible for a natural man to experience – not only different in degree and circumstances, but different in its whole nature. So that a natural man cannot experience what is individually the same, nor can he experience anything except what is exceedingly different and immensely below it in kind. The power of men or devils is not sufficient to produce anything like its kind or nature.

I have insisted largely on this matter, because it is of great importance and useful to discover and demonstrate the delusions of Satan that are evident in many kinds of false religious affections which multitudes are deluded by, and probably have been deluded by in all ages of the Christian church. And it is of great importance and use to settle and determine many articles of doctrine concerning the operations of the Spirit of God, and the nature of true grace.

Now, therefore, to apply these things to the purpose of this discourse.

From this it appears that impressions which have been made on the imagination of some, or the imaginary ideas which they have of God, Christ, heaven, or anything pertaining to religion, have nothing spiritual in them, nor are they of the nature of true grace. Though such things may attend what is spiritual, and may be mixed with it, yet in themselves they have nothing that is spiritual in them; nor are they any part of a gracious experience.

Here, for the sake of ordinary people, I will explain what is intended by impressions on the imagination and imaginary ideas. The imagination is that power of the mind by which it can have a conception, or an idea, of things of an external or outward nature (that is, of the sort of things that are the objects of the outward senses) when those things are not present, and are not perceived by the outward senses. It is called imagination from the word “image,” because by the imagination, a person can have an image in his mind of some external thing, when that thing is not present in reality, nor is anything like it present. All those things we perceive by our five external senses (seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, and feeling) are external things. And when a person has an idea or an image of any of these sorts of things in his mind, when they are not there, and when he does not really see, hear, smell, taste, or feel them, then he imagines them; and these ideas are imaginary ideas. When these kinds of imaginary ideas are strongly impressed upon the mind, and the image of them is very lively in the mind, almost as if one saw
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them, or heard them, etc., then that is called an *impression* on the imagination. Thus colors, shapes, and a form of countenance are outward things; this is because they are the sort of things which are the objects of the outward sense of seeing. Therefore, when any person has in his mind a lively idea of any shape, or color, or form of countenance, then he has an imagination of those things.

If he has an idea of a sort of light or darkness, such as he perceives by his sense of seeing, then he has an idea of an outward light, and so it is an imagination. If he has an idea of any marks made on paper – suppose they are letters and words written in a book – then that is to have an external and imaginary idea of the kind of things we sometimes perceive by our bodily eyes. And when we have the ideas of those kinds of things which we perceive by any of the other senses, such as sounds, voices, or spoken words, this is only to have ideas of outward things – of those things perceived by the external sense of hearing – and so that also is imagination. And when these ideas are lively impressed, almost as if they were really heard with the ears, this is to have an *impression* on the imagination. And I might go on in this way to give instances of the ideas of things pertaining to the other three senses of smell, taste, and feeling.

Many who have had such imaginations, have ignorantly supposed them to be of the nature of spiritual revelations. They have had lively ideas of some external shape, and beautiful form of countenance; and they call this *spiritually* seeing Christ. Some have had ideas impressed on them of a great outward light; and they call this a *spiritual revelation* of God’s or Christ’s glory. Some have had ideas of Christ hanging on the cross, and of his blood running from his wounds; and they call this a *spiritual sight* of Christ crucified, and of the way of salvation by his blood. Some have seen him with his arms open, ready to embrace them; and they call this a *revelation of the sufficiency of Christ’s grace and love*. Some have had lively ideas of heaven, and of Christ on his throne there, and shining ranks of saints and angels; and they call this *seeing heaven opened* to them. Some, from time to time, have had a lively idea of a person of a beautiful countenance smiling at them; and they call this a *spiritual sight of Christ crucified* to their souls, and *tasting the love of Christ*. They look upon it as sufficient evidence that these things are spiritual revelations, and that they see them spiritually, because they say they do not see these things with their bodily eyes but in their hearts; for they can see them when their eyes are shut. And in the same manner, the imaginations of some have been impressed with ideas of the sense of hearing. They have had ideas of words, as if they were spoken to them. Sometimes they are the words of Scripture and sometimes other words. They have had ideas of Christ speaking comfortable words to them. These things they have called having the *inward call* of Christ, *hearing the voice* of Christ spiritually in their hearts, having the *witness of the Spirit*, and the *inward testimony* of the love of Christ, etc.

Ordinary, less thoughtful, and less perceptive sorts of people, are more easily led into apprehensions that these things are spiritual things, because spiritual things are invisible. They are not things that can be pointed at with the finger. And so we are forced to use figurative expressions in speaking of them, and to borrow names from external and tangible objects to represent them by. Thus we describe a clear apprehension of spiritual things as *light*; and apprehending this or that as *seeing* such things; and the conviction of the judgment, and the persuasion of the will by the word of Christ in the gospel, we designate as spiritually *hearing* the call of Christ. The scripture itself abounds with similar figurative expressions. Persons hear these terms used often, and they have pressed upon them the necessity of having their *eyes opened*, and having a *revelation* of spiritual things, and *seeing* Christ in his glory, and having the *inward call*, and similar phrases. So they ignorantly look and wait for such external revelations and imaginary views as mentioned. When they have them, they are confident that now their eyes are opened; now Christ has revealed himself to them; and they are his children. Hence they are exceedingly affected and elevated by their deliverance and happiness, and many kinds of affections are at once violently set into motion in them.
But it is very apparent that such ideas have nothing which is spiritual and divine in them, in the sense it has been demonstrated that all gracious experiences are spiritual and divine. These external ideas are not of that sort in any way. They are entirely different in nature from all that men naturally have. They are perfectly different from, and vastly above, any sensation which it is possible for a man to have by any natural sense or principle. In order to have these gracious experiences, or any sensations of that sort, a man must have a new spiritual and divine sense given to him. This is far from having ideas of the sort which come by the external senses, and that come from the inferior powers of human nature. Those are merely ideas of external objects or ideas of that nature. They are of the same outward, sensory kind. They are the same sort of sensations of mind that we have by the five external senses, or natural principles, which are common to both man and beasts. They do not differ in degree, but only in circumstances. This is a low and miserable notion of a spiritual sense, to suppose that it is only a conception or an imagination of the sort of ideas which we gain by our animal senses; the beasts have these as greatly perfected as we do. To equate the two would be turning Christ, or the divine nature in the soul, into a mere animal. The soul has everything needed, in its natural state, to render it capable of being the subject of all these external ideas, without requiring any new principles. A natural man is as capable as a regenerate man of having a lively idea of shapes, colors, and sounds when they are absent; so there is nothing supernatural in having them. And it is known by abundant experience, that it is not the advancing or perfecting of human nature which makes persons more capable of having such lively and strong imaginary ideas. On the contrary, weakness and infirmities of the body and mind, make persons much more susceptible to such impressions.\(^1\)

As for a truly spiritual sensation, not only is the manner of that sensation coming into the mind extraordinary, but the sensation itself is totally different from all that men have, or can have, in a state of nature, as has been shown. But as to these external ideas, though the way of their coming into the mind is sometimes unusual, yet the ideas in themselves are no better for it; they are still of no different sort from what men have by their external senses. They are not of a higher kind, nor are they a whit better. For instance, the external idea a man has now of Christ hanging on the cross, and of shedding his blood, is no better in itself, than the external idea that the Jews had—and they were Christ’s enemies, who stood round his cross, and saw this with their bodily eyes. The imaginary idea which men have now of an external brightness and glory of God, is no better than the idea the wicked congregation in the wilderness had of the external glory of the Lord at Mount Sinai, when they saw it with their bodily eyes. Nor is it any better than that idea which millions of cursed reprobates will have of the external glory of Christ at the Day of Judgment, who shall see, and have a very lively idea of, ten thousand times greater external glory of Christ than was ever conceived in any man’s imagination.\(^2\) Indeed, the image of Christ which men conceive in their imaginations is not, in its own nature, any superior to the idea which the Papists have of Christ, represented by the beautiful and affecting images of him which they see in their churches (though the way they receive the idea may not be so bad). Nor

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\(^1\) Conceits and whimsies abound most in men of weak reason and children; those who are cracked in their understanding have most of them. Strength of reason banishes them, as the sun banishes mists and vapors. But now, the more rational any gracious person is, the more he is fixed and settled, and satisfied in the grounds of religion; indeed, there is the highest and purest reason in religion; and when this change is wrought upon men, it is carried on in a rational way. Isa. 1:18, John 19:9.” – Flavel’s *Preparation for Sufferings*, Chap. vi.

\(^2\) “If any man should see, and behold Christ really and immediately, this is not the saving knowledge of him. I know the saints know Christ as if immediately present; they are not strangers by their distance: if others have seen him more immediately, I will not dispute it. But if they have seen the Lord Jesus as immediately as if here on earth, yet Capernaum saw him so; no, some of them were disciples for a time, and followed him, John 6. And yet the Lord was hidden from their eyes. No, all the world shall see him in his glory, which shall amaze them; and yet this is far short of having the saving knowledge of him, which the Lord communicates to the elect. So that, though you see the Lord really, and as you become familiar with him, yet, Luke 13:26: ‘Lord did we not eat and drink,’ etc. and so perish.” Shepard’s *Par. of the Ten Virgins*, Part I. p. 197, 198.
are the affections they have, if they are built primarily on such imaginations, any better than the affections raised in ignorant people by the sight of those images, which are often very great – especially when these images, through the craft of the priests, are made to move, speak, weep, and the like. The way persons merely receive these imaginary ideas, does not alter the nature of the ideas themselves; however they are received, they are still only external ideas, or ideas of outward appearances, and so they are not spiritual. Indeed, if men were actually to receive such external ideas by the direct power of the most high God upon their minds, they would still not be spiritual; they would be no more than a common work of the Spirit of God. This is evident in the instance of Balaam, who had impressed on his mind, by God himself, a clear and lively outward representation or idea of Jesus Christ, as “the Star rising out of Jacob, when he heard the words of God, and knew the knowledge of the Most High, and saw the vision of the Almighty, falling into a trance,” Num. 24:16-17. Yet he had no kind of spiritual revelation of Christ; that Day Star never spiritually rose in his heart, for he was but a natural man.

Again, these external ideas have nothing divine or spiritual in their nature, and nothing that natural men are incapable of, without any new principles. There is nothing in their nature which requires a unique, inimitable and unparalleled exercise of God’s power to produce them, which it has been shown is required in the production of true grace. There appears to be nothing in their nature which is above the power of the devil. It is certainly not above the power of Satan to suggest thoughts to men, because otherwise he could not tempt them to sin. And if he can suggest any thoughts or ideas at all, doubtless they are imaginary ones, or ideas of external things, and are not above his power; for the external ideas men have are the lowest sort of ideas. These ideas may be raised merely by impressions made on the body, by moving the animal spirits, and by impressing the brain. Abundant experience certainly shows that alterations in the body will excite imaginary or external ideas in the mind, as this is often the case during a high fever, in melancholy, etc. These external ideas are as much below the intellectual exercises of the soul, as the body is less noble than the soul.

Not only is there nothing in the nature of these external ideas, or imaginations of outward appearances, to suggest they are above the power of the devil, but it is certain that the devil can and often has excited such ideas. He excited external ideas in the dreams and visions of the false prophets of old who were under the influence of lying spirits; we often read of these in Scripture, as in Deut. 13:1., 1Kings 22:22, Isa. 33:7, Ezek. 13:7. And he often excited external ideas in the minds of the heathen priests, magicians, and sorcerers in their visions and ecstasies; and he excited external ideas in the mind of Christ Jesus when he showed him all the kingdoms of the world with their glory, and when those kingdoms were not really in sight.

If Satan or any created being has power to impress the mind with outward representations, then no particular sort of outward representations can be evidence of a divine power. Almighty power is no more requisite to represent the shape of man to the imagination, than the shape of anything else. There is no higher kind of power necessary to form in the brain one bodily shape or color than another. It needs no more glorious power to represent the form of the body of a man, than the form of a chip or a block – even though it is the shape of a very beautiful human body, with a sweet smile in his countenance, or open arms, or blood running from the hands,

3 Satan is transformed into an angel of light: and hence we have heard that some have heard voices; some have seen the very blood of Christ dripping on them, and his wounds in his side: some have seen a great light shining in the chamber, some have been wonderfully affected by their dreams; some in great distress have had inward witness, 'Your sins are forgiven;' and hence such liberty and joy that they are ready to leap up and down in the chamber. O adulterous generation! this is natural and usual with men, they would willingly see Jesus, and have him present to give them peace; and hence Papists have his images. Woe to those who have no other Christ, manifested except such a one. Shepard’s Parable of the Ten Virgins, Part I, p. 198.

4 Consider how difficult, yes and impossible it is to determine that such a voice, vision, or revelation is of God, and that Satan cannot feign or counterfeit it: seeing he has left no certain marks by which we may distinguish one spirit from another. Flavel’s Causes and Cures of Mental Terrors, Cause 14.
feet, and side. That sort of power which can represent black or darkness to the imagination, can also represent white and shining brightness. The power and skill which can well and exactly paint a straw or a stick of wood on a piece of paper or canvas, will be sufficient to paint the body of a man with great beauty and in royal majesty; or a magnificent city paved with gold, full of brightness, and a glorious throne, etc. So it is no more than the same sort of power that is requisite to paint one as to paint the other on the brain. The same sort of power that can put ink on paper, can put leaf gold on it. If we suppose that it is in the devil's power to make any sort of external representation at all on the mind's fancy (and undoubtedly it is), then I say it is demonstrably evident that a created power may account for all kinds of external appearances and ideas in the mind. From this it again clearly appears that none of these things have anything in them that is spiritual, supernatural, and divine – in the sense in which it has been proved that all truly gracious experiences have. Through a man's makeup and frame, external ideas ordinarily attend spiritual experiences to some degree; yet these ideas are not part of his spiritual experience – no more than the motion of his blood and the beating of his pulse are part of his spiritual experience. Undoubtedly, through men's infirmity in their present state, and especially through the weak constitution of some persons, very strong gracious affections will excite lively ideas in the imagination. Yet it is also undoubted that when a person's affections are founded on imaginations, which is often the case, those affections are merely natural and common. This is because they are built on a foundation that is not spiritual; and so they are entirely different from gracious affections which, as it has been proved, evermore arise from those operations that are spiritual and divine.

These imaginations often raise the carnal affections of men to an exceedingly great height. When those who have them also have an ignorant but undoubting persuasion, it is no wonder

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5 There is a remarkable passage of Mr. John Smith, in his discourse on the shortness of a Pharisaic righteousness, p. 370, 371, of his select discourses, describing that sort of religion which is built on such a foundation as I am speaking of here. I cannot forbear transcribing the whole of it. Speaking of a sort of Christian whose life is nothing but a strong energy of fancy, he says: "Lest their religion might too grossly reveal itself to be nothing but a piece of art, there may sometimes be such extraordinary motions stirred up within them, which may prevent all their own thoughts, that they may seem to be a true operation of the divine life, when all this is nothing but the energy of their own self-love touched with some fleshly apprehensions of divine things, and excited by them. There are such things in our Christian religion – when a carnal, unhallowed mind takes the chair and gets them expounded to them – that may seem very delicious to the fleshly appetites of men. Some doctrines and notions of free grace and justification, the magnificent titles of sons of God and heirs of heaven, ever-flowing streams of joy and pleasure that blessed souls shall swim in to all eternity, a glorious paradise in the world to come, always springing up with well-scented and fragrant beauties, a new Jerusalem paved with gold, and bespangled with stars, comprehending in its vast circuit such numberless varieties, that a busy curiosity may spend itself about them to all eternity. I do not doubt that sometimes the most fleshly and earthly men, who fly in their ambition to the pomp of this world, may be so ravished with the conceits of such things as these, that they may seem to be made partakers of the powers of the world to come. I do not doubt that they might be greatly exalted with them, as the souls of crazed or distracted persons seem to be sometimes, when their fancies play with those quick and nimble spirits which a diseased frame of body, and unnatural heat in their heads, beget within them. Thus may these blazing comets rise up above the moon, and climb higher than the sun, which yet, because they have no solid consistence of their own, and are of a base and earthly alloy, will soon vanish and fall down again, being entirely borne up only by external force. They may seem to themselves to have attained higher than those noble Christians that are gently moved by the natural force of true goodness: they seem to be pleniiores Deo (i.e., more full of God) than those that are really informed and actuated by the divine Spirit, and move on steadily and constantly in the way towards heaven. As the seed that was sown in stony ground grew up and lengthened out its blade faster than what was sown in the good and fruitful soil; and as the motions of our sense, and fancy, and passions, while our souls are in this mortal condition, sunk down deeply into the body, are many times more vigorous, and make stronger impressions upon us than those of the higher powers of the soul – which are more subtle and remote from these mixed animal perceptions: that devotion which is seated there, may seem to have more energy and life in it than what gently and with a more delicate kind of touch spreads itself upon the understanding, and from there mildly diffuses itself through our wills and affections. But however the former may be more boisterous for a time, yet this is of a more consistent, spermatic, and thriving nature. For what indeed proceeds from nothing but a sensual and fleshly apprehension of God and true happiness, is but of a flitting and fading nature. As the sensible powers and faculties grow more languid, or the sun of divine light shines more brightly upon us, these earthly devotions, like our culinary fires, will abate their heat and fervor. But a true celestial warmth will never be
that these become “divine manifestations” which the great Jehovah directly makes to their souls, thus giving them extraordinary testimonies of his high and special favor.

Again, from what has been observed and proved of the manner in which gracious operations and effects in the heart are spiritual, supernatural, and divine, it is evident that there is nothing spiritual in having words of Scripture come immediately to mind. I had occasion to say something about this already; and what has been said may be sufficient to evince it. But if the reader bears in mind what has been said concerning the nature of spiritual influences and effects, it will be more abundantly manifest that this is not a spiritual effect. I suppose no person of ordinary understanding would deny that whatever words may be brought to mind, it is only an effect of the mind of a natural man – as long as he remains in a natural state (or anything like it). He would not say that it requires any new divine sense in the soul. He would not say that bringing sounds or letters to the mind is an effect of so high, so holy, and so excellent a nature, that it is impossible for any created power to be its cause.

Suggesting words of Scripture to the mind, is only stimulating ideas in the mind of certain sounds or letters. It is only one way of stimulating ideas in the imagination, for sounds and letters are the external objects of the external senses of hearing and seeing. Ideas of certain marks on paper, such as the letters of the alphabet, or ideas of the sounds of the voice, are as much external ideas as ideas about any other shapes or sounds. Therefore, by what has already been said concerning these external ideas, it is evident that they are not spiritual. If at any time the Spirit of God suggests these letters or sounds to the mind, this is an ordinary operation, and not a special or gracious influence of that Spirit. Therefore, it follows from what has been already proved, that affections which have this effect as their foundation, are not spiritual or gracious affections. When Scripture words come to mind in an immediate and extraordinary way, and this excites the affections, and properly forms their foundation, then these affections are not spiritual.

It may be that persons have gracious affections accompanying Scriptures which come to their minds; and the Spirit of God may make use of those Scriptures to excite them. This happens when their affections are excited by some spiritual sense, taste, or relish they have of the divine and excellent things contained in those Scriptures – and not merely the extraordinary and sudden way that words are brought to their minds. They are affected by the instruction they receive from the words; and the view they gain of the glorious things of God or Christ; and the things pertaining to these which the words contain and teach. It is not because the words came suddenly, as though some person had spoken them to them, and from which they conclude that God directly spoke to them. Persons are often exceedingly affected on this basis. The words of some great and high promises of Scripture came suddenly to their minds, and they look upon these words as directed immediately by God to them, as though the words at that moment proceeded out of the mouth of God and were spoken to them. So they take it as a voice from God, immediately revealing to them their happy circumstances, and promising great things to them: this is what affects and elevates them.

extinguished, because it is of an immortal nature. Being once seated vitally in the souls of men, it will regulate and order all the motions of it in a due manner – the natural heat, radicated [i.e. rooted] in the hearts of living creatures, has the dominion and economy of the whole body under it. True religion is no piece of artifice; it is no boiling up of our imaginative powers, nor the glowing heats of passion – though these are too often mistaken for it, when in our jugglings in religion we cast a mist before our own eyes. Rather it is a new nature informing the souls of men; it is a Godlike frame of spirit revealing itself most of all in serene and clear minds, in deep humility, meekness, self-denial, universal love towards God and all true goodness, without partiality, and without hypocrisy, whereby we are taught to know God – and knowing him, to love him, and conform ourselves as much as may be possible to all that perfection which shines in him.
But there is no new spiritual understanding of the divine things contained in the Scripture; there is no new spiritual sense of the glorious things taught in that part of the Bible, which precedes their affection as its foundation. All the new understanding they have, or think they have, as the foundation of their affection, is this: that the words were spoken to them because they came so suddenly and extraordinarily. And so this affection is wholly built on the sand! This is because it is built on a conclusion for which they have no foundation. As shown, having words suddenly coming to their minds is not evidence that this was from God. And if it was true that God brought the words to their minds, and they certainly knew it, that still would not be spiritual knowledge, because it may happen without any spiritual sense. Balaam might know that the words which God suggested to him were indeed suggested to him by God; and yet he had no spiritual knowledge. Affections which are built on the notion that texts of Scripture are sent immediately from God, are not built on a spiritual foundation; they are vain and delusive. Persons who have their affections raised in this way, if asked whether they have a new sense of the excellency of things contained in those Scriptures, would probably say, Yes, without hesitation. But it is only true in this way: they have the notion that these words were spoken directly to them by God, and this is what makes the words seem sweet to them; and this is why they own the things which these Scriptures say to them as excellent and wonderful things.

Suppose, for instance, that the words which were suddenly brought to their minds were these, Fear not, it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Having confidently taken up the notion that these words were directly spoken from heaven to them, and that this was an immediate revelation that God was their Father and had given the kingdom to them, they are greatly affected by it. The words seem sweet to them. And, oh, they say, “they are excellent things that are contained in those words!” But the reason why the promise seems excellent to them is only because they think it was made to them directly; the only sense they have of any glory in them is from self-love, and from their own imagined interest in the words. It is not that they had any view or sense of the holy and glorious nature of the kingdom of heaven, and of the spiritual glory of God who gives it, and of his excellent grace to sinful men in offering and giving them this kingdom, of his own good pleasure. This did not precede their imagined interest in these things, nor were they affected by them, nor were these things the foundation of their affection, and of their hope of having an interest in them. On the contrary, they first imagine they are interested by it; and then they are highly affected by it; and then they own these things to be excellent. So the sudden and extraordinary way that the Scripture came to their mind is plainly the first foundation of the whole; this is clear evidence of the wretched delusion they are under.

The first comfort of many persons, and what they call their conversion, is this: after awakening and terror, some comfortable sweet promise comes suddenly and wonderfully to their minds; and the manner of its coming makes them conclude it comes from God to them. This is the entire foundation of their faith, hope, and comfort. From this, they take their first encouragement to trust in God and in Christ because they think that God, by some Scripture brought to mind in this way, has already revealed to them that he loves them, and has already promised them eternal life. This is absurd! For everyone with an ordinary knowledge of the principles of religion, knows that it is God’s manner to reveal his love towards men, and their interest in the promises, after they have believed, and not before. This is because they must first believe before they have any interest in the promises that are to be revealed. The Spirit of God is a Spirit of truth, and not of lies. He does not bring Scriptures to men’s minds to reveal to them that they have an interest in God’s favor and promises, when they have none, having not yet believed. Yet that would be the case if God brought texts of Scripture to men’s minds to reveal to them that their sins were forgiven, or that it was God’s pleasure to give them the kingdom, or anything of that nature – and such revelation preceded and was the foundation of their first faith. No promise of the covenant of grace belongs to any man until he has first believed in...
Christ; for it is by faith alone that we gain an interest in Christ, and in the promises of the new covenant made in him. Therefore, whatever spirit applies the promises of that covenant to a person who has not first believed, must be a lying spirit. And thus the faith which is built first on such an application of promises is built upon a lie. It is not God's way to bring comforting texts of Scripture to assure men of his love, and to assure them that they will be happy, before they have a faith of dependence.6

If the Scripture which comes to a person's mind is not so much a promise, as it is an invitation, and yet he makes the sudden or unusual manner in which this invitation comes to his mind, the ground on which he believes that he is invited, then it is not true faith. This is because it is not built on the true ground of faith; true faith is not built on a precarious foundation. Instead, he has determined that the words of such a particular text were suggested to his mind at such a time, by the immediate power of God, as though they were spoken and directed by God to him. It is a wholly uncertain and precarious determination, as shown. Therefore it is a false and sandy foundation for faith, and accordingly, the faith which is built upon it is false. The only certain foundation which any person has to believe that he is invited to partake of the blessings of the gospel, is that the word of God declares to such persons that they are invited, and that God who declares it is true and cannot lie. Once a sinner is convinced of the veracity of God, and that the Scriptures are God's word, he will need nothing more to convince and satisfy him that he is invited. For the Scriptures are full of invitations to sinners, to the chief of sinners, to come and partake of the benefits of the gospel. He will not want God to speak to him any further; what he has spoken already will be enough for him.

Because the first comfort of many persons are built on such false grounds as those mentioned, and their affections at the time of their supposed conversion are also built on false grounds, so their subsequent joys, hopes, and other affections are built on false grounds. They often have particular words of Scripture, sweet declarato ns and promises suggested to them, which by their subsequent joys, hopes, and other affections are built on false grounds. They often have particular words of Scripture, sweet declarations and promises suggested to them, which by reason of the manner of their coming to mind, they think these words are directly sent from God to them at that time. They look upon these as their warrant to take them, and to actually make them the main ground of appropriating these words to themselves, and to make them the ground of the comfort they take in them, and the confidence they receive from them. Thus they imagine a kind of conversation is carried on between God and them. They imagine that God,

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6 Mr. Stoddard in his Guide to Christ, p. 8, says that "sometimes men, after they have been in trouble awhile, have some promises come to them with a great deal of refreshing; and they hope God has accepted them:" and he says that, "In this case, the minister may tell them that God never gives a faith of assurance, before he gives a faith of dependence; for he never manifests his love until men are in a state of favor and reconciliation, which is by a faith of dependence. When men have comfortable Scriptures come to them, they are apt to take them as tokens of God's love. But men must be brought into Christ by accepting the offer of the gospel, before they are fit for such manifestations. God's method is first to make the soul accept the offers of grace, and then to manifest his good estate to him." On p. 76, he speaks of those "that seem to be brought to lie at God's foot, and that give an account of their closing with Christ, and that God has revealed Christ to them, and drawn their hearts to him, and they accept Christ." Of these he says: "In this case, it is best to examine whether by that light that was given him, he saw Christ and salvation offered to him, or whether he saw that God loved him, or pardoned him – for the offer of grace and our acceptance of it goes before pardon, and therefore, much more before the knowledge of it." Mr. Shepard, in his Parable of the Ten Virgins, Part II. p. 15, says, that "Grace and the love of Christ (the fairest colors under the sun) may be pretended; but if you receive under this appearance, that God witnesses his love first by an absolute promise, then take heed there; for under this appearance you may as well bring in immediate revelations, and from there come to forsake the Scriptures." And in Part I. p. 86, he says, "Is Christ yours? Yes, I see it. How? By any word or promise? No; this is delusion." On p. 136, he speaks of those who have no solid ground of peace, whom he reckons as "those that contend themselves with the revelation of the Lord's love without the sight of any work, or are not looking to it." He says shortly after, "The testimony of the Spirit does not make a man more a Christian, but only evidences it; as it is the nature of a witness not to make a thing to be true, but to clear and evidence it." On p. 140, he speaks of those who say they have the witness of the spirit, which distinguishes them from hypocrites. He says, "the witness of the Spirit does not make the first difference: for first a man is a believer, and in Christ, and justified, called and sanctified, before the spirit witnesses to it; otherwise the spirit would witness to an untruth and a lie."
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from time to time, directly speaks to them, and satisfies their doubts, and testifies of his love
towards them, and promises to support and supply them, and give them his blessing in various
cases; and he clearly reveals to them their interest in eternal blessings. Thus they are often
raised, and have a course of sudden and tumultuous joys, mingled with a strong confidence,
and a high opinion of themselves. But indeed, the main ground of these joys, and this
confidence, is nothing contained in these words, or taught by the Scriptures, but only the
manner in which they came to them. This is certain evidence of their delusion. There is no
particular promise in the word of God that is the saint’s promise, or that is made to him, or
spoken to him, unless all the promises of the covenant of grace are his, and are made to him,
and spoken to him. Still, it is true that some of these promises may be more specially adapted to
his case than to others; and that God by his Spirit may enable him to better understand some
than others; and to have a greater sense of the preciousness, glory, and suitableness of the
blessings that are contained in them.

But here some may be ready to say, “What, is there no such thing as any particular spiritual
application of the promises of Scripture by the Spirit of God?” I answer that doubtless there is
such a thing as a spiritual and saving application of the invitations and promises of Scripture to
the souls of men. But it is also certain, that the nature of it is wholly misunderstood by many
persons, to the great ensnaring of their own souls. And it gives Satan a vast advantage against
them, and against the interest of religion, and against the church of God. The spiritual
application of a Scripture promise does not consist in it being directly suggested to the thoughts
by some extrinsic agent, and being borne into the mind with this strong apprehension, as if
particularly spoken and directed to them at that time. There is nothing of the evidence of the
hand of God in this effect, as events have proved in many notorious instances. And it is a mean
notion of a spiritual application of Scripture. There is nothing in the nature of it that is at all
beyond the power of the devil to produce, if he is not restrained by God. For there is nothing in
the nature of the effect that is spiritual, or that implies any vital communication from God.

A truly spiritual application of the word of God is of a vastly higher nature. It is far above the
devil’s power, such as it is, to apply the word of God to a dead corpse so as to raise it to life; or to
apply it to a stone so as to turn it into an angel. A spiritual application of the word of God
consists in applying it to the heart in spiritually enlightening and sanctifying influences. A
spiritual application of an invitation or offer of the gospel, consists in giving the soul a spiritual
sense or relish of the holy and divine blessings that are offered; and of the sweet and wonderful
grace of the offerer in making so gracious an offer; and of his holy excellency and faithfulness to
fulfill what he offers; and of his glorious sufficiency for all of it – thus leading and drawing forth
the heart to embrace the offer, giving the man evidence of his title to the thing that is offered.
And so a spiritual application of the promises of Scripture, for the comfort of the saints, consists
in enlightening their minds to see the holy excellency and sweetness of the blessings that are
promised, and also the holy excellency of the Promiser, and of his faithfulness and sufficiency.
Thus it draws forth their hearts to embrace the Promiser, and the thing promised. And by this
means, it gives the tangible actings of grace, enabling the saints to see their grace, and thus to
see their title to the promise. An application that does not consist in this divine sense and
enlightening of the mind, but consists only in the word being borne into the thoughts, as if

7 Mr. Shepard, in his Sound Believer, p. 159, the recent printing at Boston, says, “Embrace in your bosom, not only
some few promises, but all.” And then he asks the question, “When may a Christian take a promise, without
presumption, as spoken to him?” He answers, “The rule is very sweet, but certain: when he takes all the scripture, and
embraces it as spoken to him, he may then take any particular promise boldly. My meaning is this: it is when a
Christian takes hold, and wrestles with God for the accomplishment of all the promises of the New Testament, and
when he sets all the commands before him as a compass and a guide to walk after, and when he applies all the
threatenings to drive him nearer to Christ and their ends. This no hypocrite can do; this the saints shall do; and by
this they may know when the Lord speaks in particular to them.”
directly spoken, believing that the promise is theirs with no other foundation, is a blind
application of the word. And so it belongs to the spirit of darkness, and not of light.

When someone has his affections raised in this manner, those affections are not really raised by
the word of God; the Scripture is not their foundation; it is nothing contained in those
Scriptures which comes to their minds, and that raises their affections. But truly, the effect
comes from the strange way in which the word has been suggested to their minds. It is a
proposition from this that is taken up by them, which indeed is not contained in that Scripture,
nor in any other – such as, his sins are forgiven him, or that it is the Father’s good pleasure to
give him in particular the kingdom, or the like. There are propositions to be found in the Bible,
declaring that qualified persons are forgiven and beloved by God. But there are no propositions
to be found in the Bible declaring that particular persons, independent on any previous
knowledge of the qualifications for salvation, are forgiven and beloved by God. Therefore, when
any person is comforted and affected by any such proposition, it is by another word, a word that
is newly coined; it is not by any word of God contained in the Bible. Thus many persons are
vainly affected and deluded.

Again, it plainly appears from what has been demonstrated, that no revelation of secret facts by
immediate suggestion, is anything spiritual and divine, in that sense in which gracious effects
and operations are spiritual and divine.

By “secret facts,” I mean things that have been done, or have come to pass, or will come to pass
later, which are secret in the sense that they do not appear to the senses; nor are they known by
argumentation, or by any evidence to their reason; nor by any other way, but only by immediate
suggestion of the ideas to their mind. Thus for instance, say it was revealed to me that next year
this land would be invaded by a fleet from France, or that such and such persons would then be
converted, or that I myself should then be converted – and I was not able to argue that these
things would come to pass from anything which now appears in providence. Rather, the idea or
apprehension of these facts was immediately suggested to and impressed upon my mind in an
extraordinary manner, which I had no hand in myself. This is a revelation of secret facts. Or say
it were revealed to me that there is a battle being fought today between the armies of such and
such powers in Europe; or that a particular prince in Europe was converted this day, or was
converted formerly, or that one of my neighbors is converted, or that I myself am converted –
and it is not by having any evidence of these facts from which I argue them. Rather, it is by an
immediate and extraordinary suggestion or excitation of these ideas, and a strong impression of
them made upon my mind. This is a revelation of secret facts by immediate suggestion, as if the
facts were future. But whether the facts are past, present, or future, it does not alter the case, as
long as they are secret and hidden from my senses and reason. They are not spoken of in
Scripture, or known by me in any other way than by immediate suggestion. If I have it revealed
to me, that such a revolution is coming to pass this day in the Ottoman Empire, it is the very
same sort of revelation that it would be if it were revealed to me that such a revolution would
come to pass twelve months from now. This is because, although one is present and the other is
future, yet both are equally hidden from me, except by immediate revelation. Samuel told Saul
that the donkeys which he went to seek were found, and that his father had stopped caring for
the donkeys and sorrowed for him; this was by the same kind of revelation as the one by which

8 Some Christians have rested on a work without Christ, which is abominable: but after a man is in Christ, not to
judge by the work, is first not to judge from a word. For though there is a word which may give a man a dependence
on Christ, without feeling any work – no, when he feels none are absolute promises – yet no word gives assurance but
that which is made to some work – he that believes, or he that is poor in spirit, etc. – until that work is seen, he has no
assurance from that promise.” Shepard’s Parable of the Ten Virgins, Part I. p. 86.

If God were to tell a saint that he has grace, he might know it by believing the word of God: but it is not in this way
that godly men know that they have grace: it is not revealed in the word, and the Spirit of God does not testify of it to
particular persons.” Stoddard’s Nature of Saving Conversion, p. 84, 85.
he told Saul that three men going up to God at Bethel would meet him in the plain of Tabor (1Sam. 10:2-3) – even though one of these things was future, and the other was not. So when Elisha told the king of Israel the words that the king of Syria spoke in his bed-chamber, it was the same kind of revelation as the one by which he foretold many future things.

It is evident that this revelation of secret facts by immediate suggestions has nothing of the nature of a spiritual and divine operation in the sense mentioned. There is nothing in the nature of the perceptions or ideas that are excited in the mind which is divinely excellent, or too far above all the ideas of natural men, even though the manner of stimulating the ideas is extraordinary. In those things which are spiritual, as shown, not only is the manner of producing the effect divine, but the effect that is wrought is divine, and it is vastly above all that can be wrought in an unsanctified mind. Now simply having an idea of facts, setting aside the manner of producing those ideas, is not beyond what the minds of wicked men are susceptible to – minds which are without any goodness in them. All of them either have or will have the knowledge of the truth of the greatest and most important facts that have been, or are, or will be.9

As for the extraordinary manner of producing the ideas or perception of facts, even by immediate suggestion, there is nothing in it that is beyond what the minds of natural men are capable of. This is manifest in Balaam and others that are spoken of in Scripture. Therefore it appears there is nothing spiritual pertaining to this immediate suggestion of secret facts, in the sense in which it has been proved that gracious operations are spiritual. If there is nothing in the ideas themselves which is holy and divine, and nothing beyond what may be found in an unsanctified mind, then God can put them into the mind by immediate power without sanctifying it. There is nothing in the idea of a rainbow that is of a holy and divine nature; and so nothing hinders an unsanctified mind from receiving that idea. And so, if and when God pleases, he may immediately and in an extraordinary manner excite that idea in an unsanctified mind. So also, there is nothing in the idea, or knowledge, that particular persons are forgiven and accepted by God, and are entitled to heaven, beyond what unsanctified minds may and will have concerning many at the Day of Judgment. So God can, if he pleases, extraordinarily and immediately suggest this to and impress it upon an unsanctified mind now. There is no principle lacking in an unsanctified mind that makes it capable of receiving such a suggestion or impression; nor is there anything in it to exclude or necessarily prevent such a suggestion.

And if these suggestions of secret facts are attended by texts of Scripture, immediately and extraordinarily brought to mind, about some other facts that seem similar in some respects, this does not make the operation spiritual and divine in nature. For the suggestion of the words of Scripture is no more divine than the suggestion of the facts themselves, as just demonstrated. Two effects together, neither of which are spiritual, cannot make one complex spiritual effect.

Hence, it follows from what has already been shown and often repeated, that those affections which are founded on an immediate suggestion of secret facts, or supposed suggestions of them, are not gracious affections. Not that it is impossible for such suggestions to be the occasion or accidental cause of gracious affections; for a mistake or delusion may also be their cause. But it is never properly the foundation of gracious affections. For gracious affections, as shown, are the effects of an influence and operation which is spiritual, supernatural, and divine. But there are many affections which some may have, high affections, that have these kinds of suggestions or revelations as their foundation. They look upon these as spiritual revelations, which is a gross delusion; and this delusion is truly the spring from which their affections flow.

9 Phil 2:9-11 Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.
Here it may be proper to observe that it is exceedingly manifest from what has been said, that what many persons call the witness of the Spirit that they are the children of God, has nothing in it that is spiritual and divine. Consequently, any affections built upon it are vain and delusive. What many call the witness of the Spirit – that they are converted, or they have been made the children of God, or that their sins are pardoned, or that God has given them a title to heaven – is nothing more than an immediate suggestion and impression of a fact which otherwise would be secret. Knowing that a certain person is converted, and delivered from hell, and entitled to heaven, is not a divine sort of knowledge in itself. This sort of fact requires no higher or more divine kind of suggestion to impress it on the mind, than any fact which Balaam had impressed on his mind. Having the apprehension of his own conversion impressed upon him, requires no higher sort of idea or sensation for a man, than to have the apprehension of his neighbor’s conversion impressed on him. Yet if God pleased, he might impress on him the knowledge that God forgave his neighbor’s sins, and gave him a title to heaven, as well as any other fact, and do so without communicating any of his own holiness. The excellency and importance of the facts do not hinder a natural man’s mind from having an immediate suggestion and impression of it.

Balaam had facts impressed on his mind that were just as excellent, important, and glorious as the coming of Christ, and setting up his glorious kingdom, and the blessedness of spiritual Israel in his special favor, and their happiness in living and dying – it was done immediately and without any gracious influence. Indeed, Abimelech, king of the Philistines, had God’s special favor towards Abraham revealed to him, Gen. 20:6-7. It seems that God revealed to Laban his special favor towards Jacob, Gen. 31:24 and Psa. 105:15. If a truly good man similarly had an immediate revelation or suggestion from God concerning God’s favor towards his neighbor or towards himself, it would not be a higher kind of influence than that. It would be no more than a common sort of influence of God’s Spirit, as are the gift of prophecy, and all revelation by immediate suggestion (see 1Cor. 13:2). Though it is true that it is not possible for a natural man to have a particular suggestion from the Spirit of God that he is converted (because it is not true), yet that does not arise from the nature of the influence, or because that kind of influence which suggests such excellent facts to him, is too high for him. It arises purely from the defect of the fact that is revealed. The influence which immediately suggests this fact, when it is true, is no different from the influence which immediately suggests other true facts. And so the kind and nature of the influence is not above what is common to natural men and good men.

But it is a mean and ignoble notion of the witness of the Spirit of God given to his dear children, to suppose that there is nothing in the kind and nature of that influence, in imparting this high and glorious benefit, except what is common to natural men; or to suppose that men are capable of it who meantime are altogether unsanctified and the children of hell; or to suppose that therefore the benefit or gift itself has nothing of the holy nature of the Spirit of God in it, and nothing of a vital communication of that Spirit. This notion greatly debases that high and most exalted kind of influence and operation which is in the true witness of the Spirit. What is called the witness of the Spirit in Rom. 8, is elsewhere in the New Testament called the seal of the

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10 The late venerable Stoddard, in his younger time, falling in with the opinion of some others, received this notion of the witness of the Spirit by way of immediate suggestion; but, in the latter part of his life, when he had more thoroughly weighed things, and had more experience, he entirely rejected it; as appears from his treatise of the Nature of Saving Conversion, p. 84: “The Spirit of God does not testify to particular persons that they are godly. Some think that the Spirit of God does testify to some; and they ground it on Rom. 8.16, ‘The Spirit itself bears witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God.’ They think the Spirit reveals it by giving an inward testimony to it; and some godly men think they have experienced it: but they may easily mistake when the Spirit of God eminently stirs up the spirit of faith, and sheds abroad the love of God in the heart – it is easy to take it for a testimony. And that is not the meaning of Paul’s words. The Spirit reveals things to us by opening our eyes to see what is revealed in the word; but the Spirit does not reveal new truths that are not revealed in the word. The Spirit reveals the grace of God in Christ, and thereby draws forth special actions of faith and love which are evident; but it does not work by way of testimony. If God but helps us to receive the revelations in the word, we shall have comfort enough without new revelations.”
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Spirit, 2Cor. 1:22, Eph. 1:13, and 4:13. It alludes to the seal of princes, which is associated with the instrument by which they advanced any of their subjects to some high honor and dignity, or imparted some unique privilege in the kingdom as a token of their special favor. This is evidence that, in sealing his favorites, the influence of the Spirit, of the Prince of princes, is far from common. There is no effect of God’s Spirit whatever, which is more divine in its nature; nothing that is more holy, unique, inimitable and distinguishing of divinity than this – just as nothing is more royal than the royal seal, for nothing is more sacred that belongs to a prince, and nothing more uniquely denotes what belongs to him. The very end and design of it is to have it be the most unique stamp and confirmation of royal authority, and to mark a great note of distinction. It identifies what proceeds from the king, or belongs to him, so that it may be known from everything else. Therefore, undoubtedly the seal of the great King of heaven and earth, stamped upon the heart, is something high and holy in its own nature. It is an excellent communication from the infinite fountain of divine beauty and glory. It is not merely making known a secret fact by revelation or suggestion – which is the sort of influence that the Spirit of God often has on the children of the devil. Rather, the seal of the Spirit is the effect of the Spirit of God on the heart. Natural men, while they remain such, have no capacity to be the subjects of it; nor can they have any notion or idea of it. This agrees with Rev. 2:17: “To him that overcomes I will give of the hidden manna to eat, and I will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name shall be written, which no man knows except the one that receives it.” There is every reason to suppose that what is spoken of here, is the same mark, evidence, or blessed token of special favor, which is elsewhere called the seal of the Spirit.

What has misled many in their notion of the influence of the Spirit of God that we are speaking about, is the word witness, it being called the witness of the Spirit. Hence they have taken it not to be any effect or work of the Spirit upon the heart, giving evidence from which men may argue that they are the children of God. Instead, they perceive it as an inward immediate suggestion, as though God inwardly spoke to the man, and testified to him, and told him that he was his child by a kind of a secret voice or impression. But this is not observing the manner in which the word witness, or testimony, is often used in the New Testament. Such terms often signify there, not only a mere declaration and assertion that a thing is true, but they signify presenting evidence from which a thing may be argued and proved to be true. Thus in Heb. 2:4, God is said to “bear witness with signs and wonders and various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost.” Now these miracles that are spoken of here, are called God’s witness, not because they are of the nature of assertions, but because they are evidences and proofs. So in Acts 14:3, “Therefore they stayed a long time speaking boldly in the Lord, which gave testimony to the word of his grace, and granted signs and wonders to be done by their hands.” And John 5:36, “But I have greater witness than that of John: for the works which the Father has given me to finish, the same works that I do, bear witness of me, that the Father has sent me.” Again, chap. 10:25, “The works that I do in my Father’s name bear witness about me.” So too the water and the blood are said to bear witness, 1John 5:8 – not that they spoke or asserted anything; but they were proofs and evidences. So God’s works of providence, in rain and fruitful seasons, are spoken of as witnesses of God’s being and of his goodness; i.e., they are evidences of these things.

And when the Scripture speaks of the seal of the Spirit, it is an expression which properly denotes, not an immediate voice or suggestion, but some work or effect of the Spirit that is left as a divine mark upon the soul; it is evidence by which God’s children might be known. The seals of princes were the distinguishing marks of princes; and thus God’s seal is spoken of as God’s mark. Rev. 7:3, “Do not hurt the earth, the sea, or the trees, till we have sealed the servants of our God on their foreheads;” together with Ezek. 9:4, “Set a mark on the foreheads of the men that sigh and that cry for all the abominations that are done in their midst.” When God sets his seal on a man’s heart by his Spirit, there is some holy stamp, some image impressed and left upon the heart by the Spirit, just as the seal leaves an impression on the wax. And this holy
stamp, or impressed image, exhibits clear evidence to the conscience that the subject of it is the child of God. It is the very thing which in Scripture is called the seal of the Spirit, and the witness, or the evidence of the Spirit. This image stamped by the Spirit on the hearts of God’s children, is his own image; that is the evidence by which they are known to be God’s children. They have the image of their Father stamped upon their hearts by the Spirit of adoption. Seals ancienly had two things engraved on them: the image and the name of the person whose seal it was.

Therefore, when Christ says to his spouse, Cant. 8:6, “Set me as a seal upon your heart, as a seal upon your arm,” it is the same as saying, ‘let my name and image remain impressed there.’ The seals of princes bore their image so that what they set their seal and royal mark upon, had their image left on it. It was the manner of princes of old to have their image engraved on their jewels and precious stones. The image of the emperor Augustus, engraved on a precious stone, was used as the seal of the Roman emperors in Christ’s and the Apostle’s times. The saints are the jewels of Jesus Christ, the great potentate, who has possession of the empire of the universe; and these jewels have his image stamped upon them by his royal signet, which is the Holy Spirit. This is undoubtedly what the Scripture means by the seal of the Spirit; especially when it is stamped in so fair and clear a manner, as to be plain to the eye of conscience. This is what the Scripture calls “our spirit.” This is truly an effect that is spiritual, supernatural, and divine. This in itself is of a holy nature; it is a communication of the divine nature and beauty. That kind of influence of the Spirit which gives and leaves this stamp upon the heart, is such that no natural man can be the subject of anything like it. This is the highest sort of witness of the Spirit that it is possible for the soul to have. If there were any such thing as a witness of the Spirit by immediate suggestion or revelation, this other witness of the seal would be vastly more noble and excellent than that; it would be as much above it as the heaven is above the earth. The devil cannot imitate it. But as for imitating an inward suggestion of the Spirit of God, by a kind of secret voice

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11 See Chamber’s Dictionary, under the word “Engraving.”
12 Mr. Shepard is abundant in militating against the notion of men’s knowing their good estate by an immediate witness of the Spirit, without judging by any effect or work of the Spirit wrought on the heart, as an evidence and proof that persons are the children of God. Parable. P. I. p. 134-135, 137, 176-177, 215-216. P. II. 168-169. Again, in his Sound Believer, there is a long discourse of sanctification as the chief evidence of justification, from p. 221, for many pages following; I shall transcribe but a very small part of it. “Tell me, how you will know that you are justified. You will say, by the testimony of the Spirit. And cannot the same Spirit shine upon your graces, and witness that you are sanctified, as well? 1 John 4.13, 24. 1Cor. 2.12. Can the Spirit make the one clear to you, and not the other? Oh beloved, it is a sad thing, to hear such questions, and such cold answers also, that sanctification may possibly be an evidence. May be! Is it not certain?” Mr. Flavel also greatly opposes this notion of the witness of the Spirit by immediate revelation. Sacramental Meditations, med. 4. Speaking of the sealing of the Spirit, he says, “In sealing the believer, he does not make use of an audible voice, nor the ministry of angels, nor immediate and extraordinary revelations; but he makes use of his own graces, implanted in our hearts, and his own promises, written in the Scripture: and in this method, he usually brings the doubting, trembling heart of a believer to rest and comfort” Again, ibid. “Assurance is produced in our souls by the reflexive acts of faith: the Spirit helps us to reflect upon what has been done by him formerly upon our hearts; hereby we know that we know him, 1John 2.3. To know that we know, is a reflex act. Now it is impossible there should be a reflex, before there has been a direct act. No man can have the evidence of his faith, before the habit is infused, and the vital act is performed. The object matter, to which the Spirit seals, is his own sanctifying operation.” Afterwards, ibid, he says, “Immediate ways of the Spirit’s sealing are ceased. No man may now expect, by any new revelation, or sign from heaven, by any voice, or extraordinary inspiration, to have his salvation sealed; but he must expect such mercy in God’s ordinary way and method, searching the Scriptures, examining our own hearts, and waiting on the Lord in prayer. The learned Gerson gives an instance of one that had been long upon the borders of despair, and at last sweetly assured and settled: he answered, Non ex nova aliqua revelatione; not by any new revelation, but by subjecting my understanding to, and comparing my heart with, the written word. And Mr. Roberts, in his treatise of the covenants, speaks of another, who so vehemently pantet after the sealings and assurance of the love of God to his soul, that for a long time he earnestly desired some voice from heaven; and sometimes, walking in the solitary fields, earnestly desired some miraculous voice from the trees or stones there. This was denied him; but in time, a better one was afforded, in a scriptural way.” Again, ibid. “This method of sealing, is beyond all other methods in the world. For in miraculous voices and inspirations, it is
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speaking, and by directly asserting and revealing a fact – the devil can do that. It is a thousand times so like this, that he can imitate that holy and divine effect, the work of the Spirit of God, which has been spoken of.

Another thing which is a full proof that the seal of the Spirit is not a revelation of any fact by immediate suggestion, but is grace itself in the soul, is that the seal of the Spirit is called in the Scripture, the 

earnest of the Spirit. It is very plain that the seal of the Spirit is the same thing as the earnest of the Spirit. 2Cor. 1:22, “Who has also sealed us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts;” and Eph. 1:13-14, “In whom, after you believed, you were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance, until the redemption of the purchased possession to the praise of his glory.” Now the earnest is part of the money agreed to, given in hand as a token of the whole that to be paid in due time. It is a part of the promised inheritance that is granted now, in token of the full possession of the whole later on. But surely that kind of communication of the Spirit of God which is of the nature of eternal glory, is the highest and most excellent kind of communication. It is something that in its own nature is spiritual, holy, and divine, and far from anything that is common. Therefore it is high above the nature of inspiration, or the revelation of hidden facts by the suggestion of the Spirit of God, which many 

natural men have had. What is the earnest and the beginning of glory but grace itself, especially in the more lively and clear exercises of it? It is not prophecy, or tongues, or knowledge, but that more excellent and divine thing: “charity that never fails.” This is an appetizer and the beginning of the light, sweetness, and blessedness of heaven – that world of love or charity. It is grace that is the seed of glory, and the dawning of glory in the heart. And therefore it is grace that is the earnest of the future inheritance. What is the beginning or earnest of eternal life in the soul, but spiritual life; and what is that life, but grace? The inheritance that Christ has purchased for the elect is the Spirit of God – not in any extraordinary gifts, but in his vital indwelling in the heart, exerting and communicating himself there in his own proper, holy, and divine nature. This is the sum total of the inheritance that Christ purchased for the elect.

For things are so constituted in the affair of our redemption, that the Father provides the Savior or purchaser; and the purchase is made by him; and the Son is both the purchaser and the price paid; and the Holy Spirit is the great blessing or inheritance that is purchased, as intimated in Gal. 3:13-14. Hence the Spirit is often spoken of as the sum of the blessings promised in the gospel, Luke 24:49, Acts 1:4, and chap. 2:38-39, Gal. 3:14, Eph. 1:13. This inheritance was the grand legacy which Christ left his disciples and the church in his last will and testament, John chapters14-16. This is the sum of the blessings of eternal life which shall be given in heaven. 
(Compare John 7:37-39 and John 4:14, with Rev. 21:6 and 22:1, 17.) It is through the vital communication and indwelling of the Spirit that the saints have all their light, life, holiness, beauty, and joy in heaven. It is through the vital communications and indwelling of the same Spirit, that the saints have all light, life, holiness, beauty and comfort on earth; only it is communicated in lesser measure. And this vital indwelling of the Spirit in the saints, in this lesser measure and small beginning, is “the earnest of the Spirit, the earnest of the future inheritance, and the first fruits of the Spirit,” as the apostle calls it in Rom. 8:22. There, by “the first fruits of the Spirit,” the apostle undoubtedly means the same vital, gracious principle that he speaks of in all the preceding part of the chapter, which he calls Spirit, setting it in opposition to flesh or corruption. Therefore, this earnest of the Spirit, and the first fruits of the Spirit, which has been shown to be the same as the seal of the Spirit, is the vital, gracious, and sanctifying

impossible there may subesse falsum, be found some cheat, or impostures of the devil: but the Spirit’s witness in the heart, suitable to the revelation in the Scripture, cannot deceive us.”

13 Galatians 3:13 Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree ”), 14 that the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles in Christ Jesus, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.
communication and influence of the Spirit. It is not an immediate suggestion or revelation of facts by the Spirit.\textsuperscript{14}

When the apostle speaks of the Spirit bearing witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God (Rom. 8:16), he sufficiently explains himself, if only his words were attended to. What is expressed here is connected with the two preceding verses, resulting from what the apostle said there, as every reader may see. The three verses together are thus:

“For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God: for you have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but you have received the spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father: the Spirit itself bears witness with our spirits that we are the children of God.”

What the apostle says here, if we take it together, plainly shows that what he refers to when he speaks of the Spirit giving us witness or evidence that we are God’s children, is his dwelling in us, and his leading us, as a spirit of adoption, or as the spirit of a child. This disposes us to behave towards God as we would to a Father. This is the witness or evidence which the apostle speaks of: that we are children, that we have the spirit of children, or the spirit of adoption. And what is that, but the spirit of love? There are two kinds of spirits the apostle speaks of: the spirit of a slave or of bondage (that is,\textit{fear}); and the spirit of a child or of adoption (that is,\textit{love}). The apostle says we have not received the spirit of bondage, or of slaves, which is a spirit of fear; but we have received the more ingenuous noble spirit of children, a spirit of love, which naturally disposes us to go to God as children go to a father, and to behave towards God as children. This is the evidence or witness which the Spirit of God gives us that we are his children. This is the plain sense of the apostle. And so undoubtedly he is speaking here of the very same way of casting out doubt and fear and the spirit of bondage, which the Apostle John speaks of in 1John 4:18: by the prevailing of love, that is, the spirit of a child. The spirit of bondage works by fear because the slave fears the rod. But love cries, “Abba, Father.” It disposes us to go to God, and to behave towards God like children. It gives us clear evidence of our union to God as his children; and so love casts out fear. Thus it appears that the witness of the Spirit which the apostle speaks of is far from being a whisper, or an immediate suggestion or revelation. It is the gracious and holy effect of the Spirit of God in the hearts of the saints. It is the disposition and temperament of children appearing in sweet childlike love towards God – love which casts out fear, or casts out the spirit of a slave.

And the same thing is evident from the greater context. It is plain that the apostle speaks of the Spirit over and over again, as dwelling in the hearts of the saints as a gracious principle, and as set in opposition to the flesh or corruption. Paul affirms this in the words that introduce the passage we are on. Rom 8:13, “For if you live after the flesh, you shall die: but if you mortify the deeds of the flesh, through the Spirit, you shall live.”

Indeed, it is past doubting with me, that the apostle especially refers to the more lively actings of the spirit of grace, or the spirit of love, or the spirit of a child. For it is perfect love, or strong love only, which so witnesses or evidences that we are children, that it casts out fear and wholly delivers us from the spirit of bondage. The strong and lively exercises of a spirit of childlike, evangelical, humble love towards God, give clear evidence of the soul’s relation to God as his child. This greatly and directly satisfies the soul. It is far from true that the soul, in this case, judges only by an immediate witness, without any sign or evidence – for it judges and is assured by the greatest sign, and the clearest evidence. Yet in this case, the saint does not stand in need of multiplied signs, or of long reasoning based on them. Though the sight of his relative union

\textsuperscript{14} “After a man is in Christ, not to judge the work, is not to judge by the Spirit. For the apostle makes the earnest of the Spirit to be the seal. Now earnest is part of the money bargained for, the beginning of heaven, of the light and life of it. He that does not see that the Lord is his by that, sees no God of his at all. Oh, therefore, do not look for a Spirit, without a word to reveal it, nor a word to reveal it, without first seeing and feeling some work. I thank the Lord, I do but pity those that think otherwise. If a sheep of Christ, Oh, wonder not.”\textit{Shepard’s Par.} Part I. p. 26.
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with God, and being in God's favor, is not without a medium (because he sees it by that medium, which is his love), yet his sight of the union of his heart to God is immediate. Love, which is the bond of union, is seen intuitively. The saint plainly sees and feels the union between his soul and God. It is so strong and lively that he cannot doubt it. Hence, he is assured that he is a child. How can he doubt whether he stands in a childlike relation to God, when he plainly sees a childlike union between God and his soul, and from which he boldly, and naturally, and necessarily cries, Abba, Father?

The apostle says, the Spirit bears witness with our spirits. The term “our spirit” here, means our conscience, which is called the spirit of man. Prov. 20:27, “The spirit of man is the candle of the Lord, searching all the inward parts of the belly.” Elsewhere we read of the witness of this spirit of ours. 2Cor. 1:12, “For our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience.” And 1John 3:19-21: “Hereby we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before him. For if our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and knows all things. Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, then we have confidence towards God.” When the Apostle Paul speaks of the Spirit of God bearing witness with our spirit, he is not to be understood as speaking of two spirits that are two separate, collateral, independent witnesses; but it is by one spirit that we receive the witness of the other. The Spirit of God gives the evidence by infusing and shedding abroad the love of God, the spirit of a child, in the heart; and our spirit, or our conscience, receives and declares this evidence for our rejoicing.

Many mishiefs have arisen from that false and delusive notion of the witness of the Spirit, that it is a kind of inward voice, suggestion, or declaration from God to man, that he is beloved by him, and pardoned, elected, or the like – sometimes with and sometimes without a text of Scripture. The false and vain (though very high) affections that have arisen from this have been many. It is to be feared that multitudes of souls have been eternally undone by it. I have therefore insisted longer on this topic. But I proceed now to a second characteristic of gracious affections.

2. The ground of gracious affections is the objective nature of divine things

The first objective ground for gracious affections is the transcendently excellent and amiable nature of divine things as they are in themselves; and not in any conceived relation they bear to the self, or to self-interest.

I say that the supremely excellent nature of divine things is the first, primary, and original objective foundation of the spiritual affections of true saints. I do not suppose that the mutual relation which divine things have, and their individual interest, is wholly excluded from influencing the gracious affections of the saints. For this may have, and indeed has, a secondary and consequent influence in affections that are truly holy and spiritual, as I will show shortly.

It was observed before that the affection of love is the fountain of all affection; and specifically, Christian love is the fountain of all gracious affections. Now the divine excellency and glory of God, and of Jesus Christ, of the word of God, of the works of God, and of the ways of God, etc., are the primary reasons why a true saint loves these things – it is not any supposed interest that he has in them, or any conceived benefit that he has received or will receive from them, or any such imagined relation which they bear to his interest. And thus, self-love cannot properly be said to be the first foundation of his love towards these things.

Some say that all love arises from self-love. They say it is impossible in the nature of things for any man to have any love towards God, or any other beings, unless love towards himself is the foundation of it. But I humbly suppose it is for lack of consideration that they say so. They argue that whoever loves God and thus desires his glory, or desires the enjoyment of God, must desire
these things for his own happiness. The glory of God, or beholding and enjoying his perfections, are agreeable to him, and they tend to make him happy. Therefore, they say, he places his happiness in them, and he desires them as things which (if they were obtained) would be delightful to him, or they would fill him with delight and joy, and thus make him happy. And so, they say, it is only out of his self-love, or a desire for his own happiness, that he desires God to be glorified. But then they ought to consider a little further, and inquire how the man came to place his happiness in God’s glory, and in contemplating and enjoying God’s perfections. There is no doubt that after God’s glory, and beholding his perfections, have become agreeable to him, that he would place his highest happiness in these things, and then he would desire them, as he desires his own happiness.

But how did these things become so agreeable to him that he esteems it his highest happiness to glorify God, etc.? Is this not the fruit of love? A man must first love God, or have his heart united to him, before he will esteem God’s good as his own, and before he will desire glorifying and enjoying God as his own happiness. It is not a strong argument to say, after a man has his heart united to God in love, that as a fruit of this he desires God’s glory and enjoyment as his own happiness; and that therefore a desire for this happiness of his own must be the cause and foundation of his love. It is like arguing that a father begat a son, and therefore his son certainly begat him. If after a man loves God, and his heart is so united to God as to look upon him as his chief good, and to look upon God’s good as his own good, then the consequence and fruit of this self-love, or this love for his own happiness, will cause him to desire to glorify and enjoy God. It will not follow from this that this exercise of self-love preceded his love for God, and that his love for God was a consequence and fruit of that self-love. Something else entirely distinct from self-love might be the cause of it. It might be a change in the views of his mind, or the relish of his heart, by which he apprehends a beauty, glory, and supreme good in God’s nature in itself. This may be the thing that first draws his heart to God, and causes his heart to be united to God, prior to all considerations of his own interest or happiness – although after this, and as a fruit of it, he necessarily seeks his own interest and happiness in God.

There is a kind of love or affection that a man may have towards persons or things which properly arises from self-love. His affection may wholly arise from a preconceived relation to himself, or some respect that is manifested towards him by another, or some benefit that has already been received or depended on from another – and this is truly the first foundation of his love. It precedes any relish of or delight in the nature and qualities that are inherent in the one who is beloved, such as being beautiful and amiable. When the first thing that draws a man’s benevolence towards another is beholding those qualifications and properties which appear to him to be lovely in themselves, and on this account the person himself is worthy of esteem and good will, then his love for that person arises in a different way than when it arises from some gift that is bestowed by another, or depended on from him – as when a judge loves and favors a man that has bribed him; or when love arises because a man looks upon another as his child. When love towards another arises in this way, then it truly and properly arises from self-love.  

The kind of affection towards God or Jesus Christ which arises from self-love in this way, cannot be a truly gracious and spiritual love. This is apparent from what has already been said. Self-love is an entirely natural principle; it is as much in the hearts of devils as of angels. Surely nothing that is the mere result of such self-love can be supernatural and divine in the manner described. Christ plainly speaks of this kind of love as not beyond the love of wicked men. Luke 6:32, “If you love those who love you, what thanks do you have? For sinners also love those that

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15 That is, when the loves arises from a benefit received from another, or because of a beneficial relation with another, instead of arising from the inherent qualities in the other, then it arises from self-love. – WHG
16 “There is a natural love towards Christ, as towards someone who does you good, and for your own ends; and spiritual, for himself [i.e. Christ], whereby only the Lord is exalted.” Shepard’s Par. of the Ten Virgins, Part I. p. 25.
love them.” The devil himself knew that this kind of mercenary respect towards God, which was only for benefits received or depended on (which is the same thing), is worthless in the sight of God. Otherwise he would never have used such a slander against Job, as in Job 1:9–10: “Does Job serve God for nothing? Have you not made a hedge around him and around his house?” Nor would God have implicitly allowed the objection as being good, in case the accusation had been true, by allowing the matter to be tried. He let Job be dealt with in such a way that it might be made apparent whether Job’s respect towards God was mercenary or not. The proof of Job’s sincerity and the goodness of his respect was put at issue.18

It is unreasonable not to think that the first foundation of a true love towards God is that he is lovely in himself, or worthy to be loved, or that true love for him is founded on the supreme loveliness of his nature. This is certainly what makes God chiefly amiable. What chiefly makes a man or any creature lovely is his excellency. And so what chiefly renders God lovely, and what must undoubtedly be the chief ground of true love, is his excellency. God’s nature or divinity is infinitely excellent. Indeed, it is infinite beauty, brightness, and glory in itself. But how can it be true love of this excellent and lovely nature, if it is not built on the foundation of its true loveliness? How can it be true love of beauty and brightness, if it is not for beauty’s and brightness’ sake? How can it truly prize what is infinitely worthy and precious in itself, if it is not for the sake of its worthiness and preciousness? This infinite excellency of the divine nature, as it is in itself, is the true ground of all that is good in God in any respect. But how can a man truly and rightly love God without loving him for that excellency in him which is the foundation of all that is good or desirable in him in any respect? Those whose affection towards God is founded first on his profitableness to them, have an affection that begins at the wrong end. They regard God only as far as the stream of divine good touches them and meets their interest. They have no respect for that infinite glory of God’s nature which is the original good, the true fountain of all good, the first fountain of all loveliness of every kind, and thus is the first foundation of all true love.

Therefore, a natural principle of self-love may be the foundation of great affections towards God and Christ, without seeing anything of the beauty and glory of the divine nature. There is a certain gratitude that is a mere natural thing. Gratitude is one of the natural affections of the soul of man, as well as anger. And there is a gratitude that arises from self-love, in very much the same way that anger does. Anger in men is an affection excited against another, or in opposition to another, for something in him that crosses self-love. Gratitude is an affection one has towards another for loving him, or gratifying him, or for something in him that suits self-love. And there may be a kind of gratitude, without any true or proper love, just as there may be anger without any proper hatred – as in parents that may be angry towards their children, and yet at the same time, they have a strong habitual love towards them. This gratitude is the principle which is exercised in wicked men, and which Christ declares concerning them in the 6th chapter of Luke where he says that sinners love those that love them; he declares this same thing concerning tax collectors, who were some of the most carnal and profligate sort of men, Matt. 5:46. This is the very principle that is at work in bribery, and in unjust judges; it is a principle that even the brute beasts exercise. A dog will love his master that is kind to him.

17 The verse cited does not address our love to God, but to men. It is not wrong to love God for His lovingkindness towards us; in fact, it is expected. 1Jo 4:10, “In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.” 1John 4.19, “We love Him because He first loved us.” Edwards addresses this point on page 112. – WHG

18 Job’s trial did not suggest that Job was wrong to love God for His blessings; it tested whether his love for God would change in adversity. In all this, Job did not sin (1.22; 2.10). In the end, Job proved he loved and feared God for His excellency, as Edwards emphasizes. But one aspect of God’s excellency is His unmerited favor towards us in Christ. – WHG
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We see in numerous instances that mere nature is sufficient to excite gratitude in men, or to affect their hearts with thankfulness towards others for kindnesses received; and sometimes towards others who are their habitual enemies. Thus Saul was time and again greatly affected and even dissolved with gratitude towards David for sparing his life; yet he remained a habitual enemy to David. As men from mere nature may be thus affected towards men, so they may be affected towards God. There is nothing to hinder that same self-love from working in the same manner towards God as towards men. We have manifest instances of it in Scripture. Indeed, the children of Israel, who sang God's praises at the Red Sea, soon forgot God's works. Naaman the Syrian was greatly affected by the miraculous cure of his leprosy, so as to have his heart engaged from then on to worship only the God that had healed him – except when it would expose him to ruin in his temporal interest. 2Kings 5:15-18 Nebuchadnezzar was greatly affected by God's goodness to him in restoring him to his reason and kingdom after dwelling with the beasts, Dan 4:34-37

Gratitude thus being a natural principle, it renders ingratitude so much more vile and heinous. This is because it shows a dreadful prevalence of wickedness when it overbears and suppresses even the better principles of human nature. It is mentioned as evidence of the high degree of wickedness in many of the heathen, that they were without natural affection, Rom. 2:31.19 Although a lack of gratitude or natural affection is evidence of a high degree of vice, it is no argument that all gratitude and natural affection have the nature of a virtue or of saving grace.

Self-love, through the exercise of mere natural gratitude, may in many ways be the foundation of a sort of love towards God. A kind of love may arise from a false notion of God that men have been educated in, or have imbibed in some way – as though God were only goodness and mercy, and not revenging justice; or as though the exercises of his goodness were necessary, and not free and sovereign; or as though his goodness was dependent on what is in them, and as though it was constrained by them. On such grounds as these, men may love a god formed in their own imaginations, while they are far from loving the God who reigns in heaven.

Again, self-love may be the foundation of an affection in men towards God, because they are greatly insensible as to their state with regard to God; and because their conscience lacks the conviction needed make them aware of how dreadfully they have provoked God to anger. They have no sense of the heinousness of sin against God, and of the infinite and terrible opposition of the holy nature of God against sin. And so, having formed in their minds a god that suits them, and thinking that God is like themselves, who favors and agrees with them, they may like him quite well. They may feel a sort of love towards him, when indeed they are far from loving the true God. Men's affections may be moved towards God from self-love by some remarkable outward benefits that are received from God. This is how it was with Naaman, Nebuchadnezzar, and the children of Israel at the Red Sea.

Again, a very high affection towards God may, and often does, arise in men from an opinion of the favor and love that God has towards them; and it is the first foundation of their love towards him. After awakenings and distress, through fears of hell, they may suddenly get a notion that God loves them. They get it through some impression on their imagination, or by an immediate suggestion (with or without texts of Scripture), or by some other means. They may imagine that he has forgiven their sins and made them his children. And this is the first thing that causes their affections to flow towards God and Jesus Christ. After this, and based on this foundation, many things in God may appear lovely to them, and Christ may seem excellent. If such persons were asked whether God appears to them to be lovely and amiable in himself, they would perhaps readily answer, yes. But if the matter is strictly examined, this good opinion of God was purchased and paid for before they could afford it. It is based in the distinguishing and infinite benefits they imagined they received from God. They admit that God is lovely in himself only

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19 No such verse reference exists; it is unclear which verse Edwards refers to in support of his statement. (Rom 2.24?) – WHG
because he has forgiven them, and accepted them, and loves them above most in the world; and he has engaged himself to apply all his infinite power and wisdom in preferring, dignifying, and exalting them; and he will do for them just as they want him to do. Once they are firm in this apprehension, it is easy to admit that God and Christ are lovely and glorious, and to admire and extol them. It is easy for them to admit that Christ is a lovely person, and the best in the world. But this is only when they are first firm in believing that although he is Lord of the universe, he is captivated with love towards them; and his heart is swallowed up in them; and he prizes them far beyond most of their neighbors; and he has loved them from eternity; and he died for them; and he will make them reign in eternal glory with him in heaven. When this is the case with carnal men, it is their lusts that make God seem lovely. Pride itself will prejudice them in favor of what they call Christ. A selfish and proud man will naturally call anything lovely, if it greatly contributes to his own interest, and if it gratifies his own ambition.20

As this sort begins, so they go on. Their affections are raised from time to time, but primarily on this foundation of self-love and a conceit about God’s love towards them. Many have a false notion of communion with God, as though it were carried on by impulses, whispers, and external representations made directly to their imagination. They often have these things which they take as manifestations of God’s great love towards them, and as evidences of their high exaltation above others of mankind. And so their affections are often repeatedly set to going.

By contrast, the exercises of true and holy love in the saints arise another way. They do not first see that God loves them, and then see that he is lovely. Rather, they first see that God is lovely, and that Christ is excellent and glorious, and then their hearts are captivated with this view. The exercises of their love towards God tend to begin here; and they arise primarily from these views of him. Then, consequentially, they see God’s love and great favor towards them.21 The saint’s affections begin with God; self-love has a hand in these affections only consequentially and secondarily. False affections begin with self, and then they acknowledge an excellency in God, and are affected with it; but the affection is only consequential – it is dependent on self. In the love of the true saint, God is the lowest foundation. The love of the excellency of God’s nature is the foundation of all the affections which come afterwards, and in which self-love is a handmaid. The hypocrite, to the contrary, lays himself at the bottom of it all, as the first foundation; and then he lays God on top as the superstructure. Even his acknowledgment of God’s glory will depend on his regard for his own private interest.

Self-love may not only influence men so as to cause them to be affected by God’s kindness to them separately, but also with God’s kindness to them as parts of a community. A natural principle of self-love, without any other principle, may be sufficient to make a man concerned for the interest of the nation to which he belongs. For instance in the present war,22 self-love may make natural men rejoice at the successes of our nation, and sorry for their disadvantages, as concerned members of the body. The same natural principle may extend further, even to the world of mankind. It might be affected by the benefits that the inhabitants of the earth have beyond those of the inhabitants of other planets (if we knew that there were such inhabitants, and how it was for them). This principle may cause men to be affected by the benefits that

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20 This can be a troubling paragraph because God has indeed loved us with an everlasting love (Jer 31.3). What then is Edwards’ point? The problem is not that we first perceive God’s love for us, and then discover its basis. What Edwards condemns is an ego-centric love of God, in which we think God is compelled to love us for something that is inherent in us. Such a love belies God’s grace, and His unmerited favor towards us. If we don’t see God’s love as unwarranted, and the cross as a necessary means and expression of God’s love towards us, then it is self-love amplified by a fancy that God loves us as we love ourselves. That would be self-centered love, not God-centered. The love of God must begin with a view towards God’s excellence, not our own.

21 “There is a seeing of Christ after a man believes, which is Christ in his love, etc. But I speak of that first sight of him that precedes the second act of faith; and it is an intuitive or real sight of him as he is in his glory.” Shepard’s Par. of the Ten Virgins, Part I. p. 74.

22 Probably referring to the English Civil War (1642-1746). – WHG
mankind has received beyond the fallen angels. Hence, from this principle men may be greatly affected by the wonderful goodness of God towards mankind, his great goodness in giving his Son to die for fallen man, and the marvellous love of Christ in suffering such great things for us. They may be affected by the great glory they hear God has provided for us in heaven – they look at themselves as concerned and interested persons, and highly favored as a species of creatures. The same principle of natural gratitude may influence men here, as it does in the case of personal benefits.

But what I have said by no means implies that all gratitude to God is merely a natural thing, and that there is no such thing as a spiritual gratitude, which is a holy and divine affection. It implies only that there is a gratitude which is merely natural. This natural gratitude arises when persons have affections towards God which are only or primarily for benefits received. There is doubtless such a thing as a gracious gratitude which greatly differs from that gratitude which natural men experience. It differs in the following respects:

1. True gratitude or thankfulness to God for his kindness to us, arises from a foundation, laid before, of love towards God for what he is in himself; whereas a natural gratitude has no such antecedent foundation. The gracious stirrings of grateful affection to God for kindness received, are always from a stock of love which is already in the heart, and established in the first place on other grounds, such as God's own excellency. Hence the affections are disposed to flow out on the occasions of God's kindness. Having seen the glory of God, and being overcome by it and captivated with love towards God because of it, the saint and his heart become tender and easily affected by the kindnesses received. If a man has no love towards another, gratitude may still be moved by some extraordinary kindness; as in Saul towards David's kindness. But this is not the same kind of gratitude as a man may have towards a dear friend, for whom his heart previously had a close esteem and love. Self-love is not excluded from a gracious gratitude. The saints love God for his kindness to them, Psa. 116:1, “I love the Lord, because he has heard the voice of my supplication.” But something else is included; another love prepares the way, and it lays the foundation for these grateful affections.

2. In a gracious gratitude, men are affected by the attribute of God's goodness and free grace, not only as they are concerned with it, or as it affects their interest, but as part of the glory and beauty of God's nature itself. That wonderful and unparalleled grace of God which is manifested in the work of redemption, and which shines forth in the face of Jesus Christ, is infinitely glorious in itself; and it appears so to the angels. It is a large part of the moral perfection and beauty of God's nature. This would be glorious whether it was exercised towards us or not. The saint who exercises a gracious thankfulness for it, sees it as glorious, and he delights in it as such, even though his concern serves more to engage his mind, and to raise his attention and affection. Self-love here assists as a handmaid. It is subservient to higher principles, in order to lead the mind towards the view and contemplation of them, and to engage and fix the attention, and to heighten the joy and love. God’s kindness to them is a mirror that God sets before them, in which they may behold the beauty of the attribute of God's goodness. The exercises and displays of this attribute by this means are brought near to them, and set right before them. So that, in holy thankfulness to God, the first foundation of our interest or concern in God's goodness, is not how we are being affected by it; that was laid in the heart beforehand, in that stock of love towards God for his excellency in himself. This is what makes the heart tender and susceptible to such impressions: from his goodness towards us. Our own interest, or the benefits we have received, are poor. The chief objective ground of the present exercises of this affection, is God's goodness, as part of the beauty of his nature – even though the manifestations of that lovely attribute, set immediately before our eyes in its exercises for us, are the special occasion for the mind’s attention toward that beauty. And this serves to fix the attention, and to heighten the affection.
Some may perhaps be ready to object against everything that has been said, using 1 John 4:19: “We love him, because he first loved us,” as though this implied that God’s love towards true saints was the first foundation of their love towards him.

In answer to this, I would observe, that the apostle’s drift in these words, is to magnify the love that God has towards us from this: that he loved us while we had no love towards him. This will be manifest to anyone who compares this verse and the two which follow it, with the 9th-11th verses. The apostle proves that God loved us when we had no love towards him, using this argument: that God’s love towards the elect is the ground of their love towards him. This is proved three ways.

1. The saints’ love towards God is the fruit of God’s love towards them, because it is the gift of that love. God gave them a spirit of love towards him, because he loved them from eternity. In this respect, God’s love towards his elect is the first foundation of their love towards him – just as it is the foundation of their regeneration and the whole of their redemption.

2. The exercises and revelations that God has made of his wonderful love towards sinful men by Jesus Christ in the work of redemption, is one of the chief manifestations which God has made of the glory of his moral perfection to both angels and men; and so it is the one main objective ground of the love of both angels and men to God. This is consistent with what was said before.

3. God’s love towards a particular elect person, revealed by his conversion, is a great manifestation of God’s moral perfection and glory to him. And it is a proper occasion for the excitation in him of the love of holy gratitude; this is agreeable to what was said before.

The saints in these respects love God because he first loved them. This fully corresponds to the design of the apostle’s argument in that passage. So no good argument can be drawn from that against a spiritual and gracious love in the saints which arises primarily from the excellency of divine things in themselves, and not from any conceived relation they bear to their own interest.

As it is with the love of the saints, so it is with their joy, spiritual delight, and pleasure. The first foundation of it is not any consideration or conception of the saints’ interest in divine things; rather, it primarily consists in the sweet entertainment their minds have in contemplating the divine and holy beauty of these things, as they are in themselves. This is indeed the main difference between the joy of the hypocrite, and the joy of the true saint. The former rejoices in himself – self is the first foundation of his joy. But the latter rejoices in God. The hypocrite has his mind pleased and delighted, in the first place, with his own privilege, and with the happiness which he supposes he has attained, or will attain. True saints have their minds, in the first place, inexpressibly pleased and delighted with the sweet ideas of the glorious and amiable nature of the things of God. This is the spring of all their delights, and the cream of all their pleasures. It is the joy of their joy. The sweet and ravishing entertainment they have in their view of the beautiful and delightful nature of divine things, is the foundation of the joy that they have afterwards – in considering that these things are theirs. But the dependence of the affections of hypocrites is in a contrary order: they first rejoice and are elevated with the idea that they are made so much of by God; and then, on that basis, God seems lovely to them.

The first foundation of the delight that a true saint has in God, is God’s own perfection; and the first foundation of the delight that he has in Christ, is Christ’s own beauty. Christ appears, in

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23 1Jo 4:19-21 We love Him because He first loved us. 20 If someone says, “I love God,” and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen? 21 And this commandment we have from Him: that he who loves God must love his brother also.

24 1Jo 4:9-11 In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. 10 In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. 11 Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.
himself, the chief among ten thousand, and altogether lovely. Song 5.10, 16. The way of salvation by Christ is a delightful way to the saint, because of the sweet and admirable manifestations of the divine perfections in it: the holy doctrines of the gospel by which God is exalted and man is abased; the holiness that is honored and promoted, the sin which is greatly disgraced and discouraged; and the free and sovereign love manifested in him. These are glorious doctrines in his eyes, and sweet to his taste, and they exist prior to any conception of his interest in these things. Indeed, the saints rejoice in their interest in God, and that Christ is theirs, and so they have great reason to rejoice. But this is not the first spring of their joy. They first rejoice in God as glorious and excellent in himself; and then secondarily they rejoice that so glorious a God is theirs. They first have their hearts filled with sweetness from the view of Christ’s excellency, and the excellency of his grace, and the beauty of the way of salvation that comes by him; and then they have a secondary joy that so excellent a Savior, and such an excellent grace are theirs. But the true saint’s superstructure is the hypocrite’s foundation. When hypocrites hear of the wonderful things of the gospel, of God’s great love in sending his Son, of Christ’s divine love towards sinners, and of the great things which Christ has purchased and promised to the saints – and they hear these things lively and eloquently set forth, they may bear it with a great deal of pleasure, and be lifted up by what they hear. But if their joy is examined, it will be found to have no other foundation than this: that they look upon these things as theirs. All this exalts them; they love to hear of the great love of Christ that so vastly distinguishes some from others. Self-love, and even pride itself, makes them affect a great distinction from others. No wonder, in this confident opinion of their own good estate, they feel good under such a doctrine; and they are pleased to the highest degree to hear how much God and Christ make of them. Thus their joy is really a joy in themselves, and not in God.

And because the joy of hypocrites is in themselves, it comes to pass that in their rejoicings and elevations, they are prone to keep their eye on themselves. Having received what they call spiritual revelations or experience, their minds are taken up with these things, admiring their own experiences. What they are principally taken and elevated with, is not the glory of God, or the beauty of Christ, but the beauty of their own experiences. They keep thinking to themselves, “What a good experience this is! What a great revelation this is! What wonderful things I have met with!” And so they put their experiences in place of Christ, and of his beauty and fullness. Instead of rejoicing in Christ Jesus, they rejoice in their admirable experiences. Instead of feeding and fasting their souls in the view of what is outside themselves (the innate, sweet refreshing amiableness of the things exhibited in the gospel), their eyes are taken off these things, or at least they view them only sideways. But the object that fixes their contemplation is their own experience. They feed their souls and feast on a selfish principle, with a view toward their revelations. They take more comfort in their revelations, than in Christ who is revealed. This is the true notion of living upon experiences and frames of mind, and not using experiences as reliable signs and evidences of their good estate. Some call this ‘living on experiences.’ It may

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25 Dr. Owen, *On The Spirit*, p. 199, speaking of a common work of the spirit, says, “The effects of this work on the mind, which is the first subject affected by it, does not proceed so far as to give delight, complacency and satisfaction in the lovely spiritual nature and excellency of the things revealed to it. The true nature of saving illumination consists in this: that it gives the mind such a direct intuitive insight and prospect into spiritual things, as that in their own spiritual nature they suit, please, and satisfy it; so that it is transformed into them, cast into the mould of them, and rests in them. Rom. 6.17; 12.2; 1Cor. 2.13-14; 2Cor. 3.18; 4.6. This work we have insisted on, does not extend to this. For notwithstanding any revelation that is made of spiritual things to the mind, it does not find an immediate, direct, spiritual excellency in them; but only with respect to some benefit or advantage, which is to be attained by means of it. It will not give such a spiritual insight into the mystery of God’s grace by Jesus Christ, called his glory shining in the face of Christ, 2Cor. 4.6, as that the soul, in its first direct view of it, should, for what it is in itself, admire it, delight in it, approve it, and find spiritual solace, with refreshment, in it. But such a light, such a knowledge, it communicates so that a man may like it well in its effects, as a way of mercy and salvation.”

26 Luke 18:11 “The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, ‘God, I thank You that I am not like other men—extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector.”
be observed that some who do so, are notorious for living on experiences according to this true notion of it.

The affections of hypocrites very often follow this pattern: first they are greatly affected by some impression on their imagination, or some impulse which they take to be an immediate suggestion or testimony from God – of his love and their happiness, and of their high privileges in some respect. This is done either with or without a text of Scripture. They are mightily taken with this as a great revelation, and high affections arise from this. When their affections are raised, then they focus on those high affections; they call them great and wonderful experiences. They have a notion that God is greatly pleased with their affections; and this affects them even more; and so they are affected with their affections. Thus their affections rise higher and higher until they are completely swallowed up in them. Self-conceit and a fierce zeal rise; and all of it is built, like a castle in the air, on nothing but imagination, self-love, and pride.

As their thoughts are, so is their talk; for out of the abundance of their heart their mouth speaks. As in their high affections they keep their eye on the beauty of their own experiences, and on the greatness of their attainments, so in their speech they are great talkers about themselves. The true saint, when he is under great spiritual affections from the fullness of his heart, is ready to speak much of God, of his glorious perfections and works, of the beauty and amiableness of Christ, and of the glorious things of the gospel. But hypocrites, in their high affections, talk more about the revelation than about the thing revealed; they are full of talk about the great things they have encountered, the wonderful revelations they have had, how sure they are of the love of God, how safe their condition is, and how they know they will go to heaven, etc.

A true saint, when he enjoys true revelations of the sweet glory of God and Christ, has his mind too captivated and engaged by what he views outside himself, to take time to view himself and his own attainments. It would be a diversion and a loss he could not bear: to take his eye off the ravishing object of his contemplation, to survey his own experience, and to spend time in thinking about himself, or about what a high attainment this is, or what a good story he has to tell others. Nor does the pleasure and sweetness of his mind at that time, arise primarily from the consideration of the safety of his state, or the consideration of anything he has in the way of his own qualifications, experiences, or circumstances. Rather, the divine and supreme beauty of the object which he views outside himself, sweetly entertains and strongly holds his mind.

Just as the love and joy of hypocrites flow from their self-love, so it is with their other affections: their sorrow for sin, their humiliation and submission, their religious desires and zeal. Everything is, as it were, paid tail beforehand.27 God has highly gratified their self-love and their lusts by making so much of them, and by exalting them so highly, at least as things exist in their own imagination. Their nature, being as corrupt as it is, is under the notion that they are already one of the highest favorites of heaven; they have a God who protects them and favors them in their sins. It is easy to love this imaginary God which suits them so well, and to extol him, and submit to him, and be fierce and zealous for him. The high affections of many are built on the supposition that they are eminent saints. If this high opinion which they have of themselves were taken away, and if they thought they were one of the lower forms of saints (still supposing they are real saints), their high affections would fall to the ground. If they only saw a little of the sinfulness and vileness of their own hearts and their deformity, in the midst of their best duties and their best affections, it would knock their affections on the head. Their affections are built upon self, and thus self-knowledge would destroy them.

27 That is, they’re “putting the cart before the horse.” They’re allowing their religious experience to drive their understanding of God (and their relation to Him), instead of allowing their understanding of God to drive their religious experience. – WHG
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But as for truly gracious affections, they are built elsewhere. They have their foundation outside of self; it is laid in God and Jesus Christ. And therefore a revelation of themselves, of their own deformity, and the meanness of their experiences, though it will purify their affections, it will not destroy them. In some respects, it will sweeten and heighten their affections.

3. Gracious Affections are founded on the moral excellence of divine things

Those affections that are truly holy, are primarily founded on the loveliness of the moral excellency of divine things. Or (to express it another way) a love towards divine things for the beauty and sweetness of their moral excellency is the beginning and spring of all holy affections.

Here, for the sake of the less literate reader, I will explain what I mean by the moral excellency of divine things.

It may be observed that the word *moral* is not to be understood here according to the ordinary and everyday use of the word when men speak of morality and moral behavior. In that use, it means an outward conformity to the duties of the moral law, and especially the duties of the second tablet; 28 or intending no more than those seeming virtues which proceed from natural principles. This is in opposition to those virtues which are more inward, spiritual, and divine. For example, honesty, justice, generosity, good nature, and public spirit are called *moral virtues* by many of the heathen – as distinct from the holy faith, love, humility, and heavenly-mindedness of true Christians. The word *moral* is not to be understood in any of these ways here.

In order to have a right understanding of what is meant by *moral*, it must be observed that divines commonly make a distinction between *moral good* and *evil*, and between *natural good* and *evil*. By *moral evil*, they mean the evil of *sin* – or evil which is against duty, and contrary to what is right and ought to be done. By *natural evil*, they do not mean evil which is opposed to duty; but evil which is contrary to mere nature, without any reference to a rule of duty. So the evil of *suffering* is called *natural evil* (such as pain, torment, disgrace, and the like). These things are contrary to mere nature; they are contrary to the nature of both bad and good; they are as hateful to wicked men and devils, as they are to good men and angels. Likewise, natural *defects* are called *natural evils*, as when a child is born disfigured or is a natural fool. These are *natural evils*, but they are not *moral evils*, because they do not have as their nature the evil of *sin*. On the other hand, by moral evil, divines mean the evil of *sin*, or what is contrary to what is right. So by *moral good*, divines mean what is contrary to *sin*. It refers to that good in those who have will and choice, by which, as voluntary agents, they are and they act as becomes them, or as is most fitting, suitable, and lovely. By *natural good*, they mean that good which is entirely different from holiness or virtue: it perfects or suits their nature, where nature is considered abstractly, not by holy or unholy qualifications, nor with reference to any rule or measure of right and wrong.

Thus pleasure is a natural good; so are honor, strength; speculative knowledge, human learning, and policy. Thus there is a distinction to be made between the *natural good* that men are possessed of, and their *moral good*. And there is also a distinction between the natural and moral good of angels in heaven – the great capacity of their understandings, their great strength, and the honorable circumstances they are in as the great ministers of God’s kingdom, and for which they are called thrones, dominions, principalities, and powers. This is the *natural good* which they are possessed of. But their perfect and glorious holiness and goodness, their pure and flaming love towards God, and towards the saints and one another, is their *moral good*.

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28 The two tablets of the Ten Commandments. The second tablet contains commandments 5-10, man’s duty to men. – WHG
Divines make a distinction between the *natural* and *moral perfections* of God. By the moral perfections of God, they mean those attributes which God exercises as a moral agent, or by which the heart and will of God are good, right, and infinitely attractive and lovely – such as his righteousness, truth, faithfulness, and goodness; or in one word, his holiness. By God’s *natural attributes* or perfections, they mean those attributes in which consists, according to our way of conceiving of God, not the holiness or moral goodness of God, but his greatness – such as his power, his knowledge by which he knows all things, his eternal being from everlasting to everlasting, his omnipresence, and his awful and terrible majesty.

The moral excellency of an intelligent voluntary being is more immediately seated in the heart or in the will of moral agents. That intelligent being, whose will is truly right and lovely, is morally good or excellent.

This moral excellency of an intelligent being, when it is true and real (and not just external, seeming, and counterfeit), is holiness. Therefore holiness comprehends all the true moral excellency of intelligent beings. There is no other true virtue, but real holiness. Holiness comprehends all the true virtue of a good man. His love towards God; his gracious love towards men; his justice, charity, and deep-felt mercies; his gracious meekness and gentleness; and all other true Christian virtues that he has, belong to his holiness. So the holiness of God in the more extensive sense of the word, and the sense in which the word is commonly, if not universally used concerning God in Scripture, is the same as the moral excellency of the divine nature. It is his purity and beauty as a moral agent, comprehending all his moral perfections, his righteousness, faithfulness, and goodness. As in holy men, their charity, Christian kindness, and mercy, belong to their holiness; so in a holy God, his kindness and mercy belong to his holiness. Holiness in man is but the image of God’s holiness; more virtues do not belong to the image than are found in the original. Derived holiness does not have more in it than the holiness from which it is derived as its fountain. No more grace exists in the image than what corresponds to the grace of the original.

There are two kinds of attributes in God according to our way of conceiving of him: his *moral attributes* which are summed up in his holiness; and his *natural attributes* of strength, knowledge, etc., which constitute the greatness of God. Likewise, there is a twofold image of God in Man: his *moral or spiritual image* which is his holiness – this is the image of *God’s moral excellency* (the image which was lost by the fall); and there is *God’s natural image*, consisting in man’s reason and understanding, his natural ability, and his dominion over the creatures – this is the image of *God’s natural attribute*.

From what has been said, it may be easily understood what I mean when I say that a love towards divine things, for the beauty of their moral excellency, is the beginning and spring of all holy affections. It has been already shown under the former heading, that the first objective ground of all holy affections is the supreme excellency of divine things as they are in themselves, or as they are in their own nature. I now proceed further, and say more particularly, that the kind of excellency of the nature of divine things which forms the first objective ground of all holy affections, is their *moral excellency* – or their *holiness*. Holy persons, in the exercise of holy affections, love divine things primarily for their holiness. They love God, in the first place, for the beauty of his holiness or moral perfection, as being supremely amiable in itself. It is not that the saints, in the exercise of their gracious affections, love God only for his holiness – *all* his attributes are amiable and glorious in their eyes. They delight in *every* divine perfection. The contemplation of the infinite greatness, power, knowledge, and terrible majesty of God is pleasant to them. But their love towards God for his holiness is what is most fundamental and essential in their love. Here it is that true love towards God begins; all other holy love towards divine things flows from this. It is the most essential and distinguishing thing that belongs to a holy love towards God with regard to its foundation. A love towards God for the beauty of his
moral attributes leads to, and necessarily causes, a delight in God for all his attributes. For his moral attributes cannot exist without his natural attributes: infinite holiness supposes infinite wisdom, and an infinite capacity and greatness. All the attributes of God imply one another.

The true beauty and loveliness of all intelligent beings primarily and most essentially consists in their moral excellency or holiness. The loveliness of the angels consists in this. Without holiness, and despite all their natural perfections, strength, and knowledge, they would have no more loveliness than devils. It is moral excellency alone that, in itself and on its own account, is the excellency of intelligent beings. It is this that gives beauty to, or rather that is the beauty of their natural perfections and qualifications. Moral excellency is the excellency of natural excellencies. Natural qualifications are either excellent or they are not, according to whether they are joined with moral excellency. Without holiness, strength and knowledge do not render a being lovely; they render it more hateful; they render it more lovely when they are joined with holiness. Thus the elect angels are more glorious for their strength and knowledge, because these natural perfections of theirs are sanctified by their moral perfection. But though the devils are very strong and of great natural understanding, they are not more lovely for it: they are more terrible; and they are not more amiable for it, but more hateful. The holiness of an intelligent creature is the beauty of all his natural perfections. And this is how it is in God, according to our way of conceiving of the divine Being: holiness in a unique way is the beauty of the divine nature. Hence we often read of the beauty of holiness, Psa. 29:2, Psa. 96:9, and 110:3. This renders all God’s other attributes glorious and lovely. It is the glory of God’s wisdom that it is a holy wisdom, and not a wicked craftiness. What makes his majesty lovely, and not merely dreadful and horrible, is that it is a holy majesty. It is the glory of God’s immutability that it is a holy immutability, and not an inflexible obstinacy in wickedness.

Therefore it must be that a sight of God’s loveliness must begin here. A true love towards God must begin with a delight in his holiness, and not with a delight in any other attribute. For no other attribute is truly lovely without this, and in no other way than as (according to our way of conceiving of God) it derives its loveliness from this. Therefore it is impossible that other attributes should appear lovely, in their true loveliness, until this holiness is seen. And it is impossible that any perfection of the divine nature should be loved with true love until this holiness is loved. If the true loveliness of all of God’s perfections arises from the loveliness of his holiness, then the true love of all his perfections arises from the love of his holiness. Those who do not see the glory of God’s holiness, cannot see anything of the true glory of his mercy and grace. They see nothing of the glory of those attributes as any excellency of God’s nature, as it is in itself – even though they may be affected by them, and love them as concerns their own interest. For these attributes are only part of the excellency of God’s nature, as excellent in itself, and as they are more largely included in his holiness; or as they are part of his moral perfection.

Just as the beauty of the divine nature primarily consists in God’s holiness, so does the beauty of all divine things. The beauty of the saints consists in this: that they are saints, or holy ones. It is the moral image of God in them which is their beauty, and that is their holiness. The beauty and brightness of the angels of heaven consists in that they are holy angels, and so they are not devils. The beauty of the Christian religion, above all other religions, consists in that it is so holy a religion. The excellency of the word of God consists in that it is so holy. Psa. 119:140, “Your word is very pure, therefore your servant loves it.” Ver. 128, “I esteem all your precepts concerning all things to be right; and I hate every false way.” Ver. 138, “Your testimonies that you have commanded are righteous, and very faithful.” And 172, “My tongue shall speak of your

29 Psa 29:2 Give unto the LORD the glory due to His name; Worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness. Psa 96:9 Oh, worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness! Tremble before Him, all the earth. Psa 110:3 Your people shall be volunteers In the day of Your power; In the beauties of holiness, from the womb of the morning, You have the dew of Your youth.

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word; for all your commandments are righteousness.” And Psa. 19:7-10, “The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple. The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart: the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes. The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever: the judgments of the Lord are true, and righteous altogether. They are more to be desired than gold, indeed, than much fine gold: sweeter also than honey, and the honeycomb.”

The amiableness and beauty of the Lord Jesus, by which he is the chief among ten thousands and altogether lovely, consists primarily in this: that he is the holy one of God, Acts 3:14; and God’s holy child, Acts 4:27; and that he is holy, and that he is true, Rev. 3:7. All the spiritual beauty of his human nature, consisting in his meekness, lowliness, patience, heavenliness, love towards God, love towards men, condescension to the mean and vile, and compassion towards the miserable, etc., is all summed up in his holiness. The beauty of his divine nature, of which the beauty of his human nature is the image and reflection, also primarily consists in his holiness. The glory of the gospel consists primarily in this: that it is a holy gospel, and that it is so bright an emanation of the holy beauty of God and of Jesus Christ. The spiritual beauty of its doctrines, consists in this: that they are holy doctrines, or doctrines according to goodness. The spiritual beauty of the way of salvation by Jesus Christ, consists in this: that it is so holy a way. The glory of heaven consists chiefly in this: that it is the holy city, the holy Jerusalem, the habitation of God’s holiness, and so of his glory, Isa. 63:15. All the beauties of the new Jerusalem, as it is described in the two last chapters of Revelation, are but various representations of this holiness.31

Therefore it is primarily on account of this kind of excellency that the saints love all these things. Thus they love the word of God because it is very pure. It is on this account that they love the saints; and it is chiefly on this account that heaven is lovely to them, and those holy tabernacles of God are amiable in their eyes. It is on this account that they love God; and it is primarily on this account that they love Christ, and that their hearts delight in the doctrines of the gospel, and that they sweetly acquiesce in the way of salvation that is revealed in it.32

Under the heading of the first distinguishing characteristic of gracious affections, I observed that a new supernatural sense is given to the regenerated, a certain divine spiritual taste which is different in its whole nature from any former kinds of sensation of the mind – just as tasting is different from any of the other five senses. Something entirely different is perceived in spiritual and divine things by a true saint in the exercise of this new sense of mind, from anything that is perceived by natural men – just as the sweet taste of honey is different from the ideas men get of honey by looking at it or feeling it. Now what I have been speaking of, the beauty of holiness, is that thing in spiritual and divine things, which is perceived by this spiritual sense, and that is so different from all that natural men perceive in them. This kind of beauty is the quality that is the immediate object of this spiritual sense. This is the sweetness that is the proper object of this spiritual taste. The Scripture often represents the beauty and sweetness of holiness as the grand object of a spiritual taste and spiritual appetite. This was the sweet food of the holy soul of Jesus Christ. John 4:32, 34, “I have food to eat that you know nothing of – My food is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work.”

31 See Rev. chap. 21:2, 10, 11, 18, 21, 27, chap. 22:1, 3.
32 “To rightly close with Christ’s person, this is always required, to taste the bitterness of sin as the greatest evil: otherwise a man will never close with Christ, for his holiness in him and from him, as [being] the greatest good. For we told you that that is the right closing with Christ for himself: when it is for his holiness. For ask a whorish heart, what beauty he sees in the person of Christ; he will, after he has looked over his kingdom, his righteousness, and all his works, see a beauty in them, because they serve his turn, to comfort him only. Ask a virgin, and he will see his happiness in all of it; but what makes the Lord amiable is his holiness, which is in him to make him holy too. As in marriage, it is the personal beauty that draws the heart. Hence I thought it reasonable that he that loves the brothers for a little grace, will love Christ much more.” Shepard’s Parable, Part I. p. 84.
I know of no part of the holy Scriptures, where the nature and evidences of true and sincere godliness are of such set purpose, and so fully and largely insisted on and delineated, as the 119th Psalm. The Psalmist declares his design in the first verses of the Psalm, and he keeps his eye on this design all along, pursuing it to the end. But in this Psalm, the excellency of holiness is represented as the immediate object of a spiritual taste, relish, appetite, and delight of God’s law. That grand expression and emanation of the holiness of God’s nature, and the prescription of holiness to the creature, is all along represented as the food and entertainment of the gracious nature. It is the great object of the love, appetite, complacence, and rejoicing of that nature. It prizes God’s commandments above gold, indeed, the finest gold, sweeter than the honey and honeycomb. That is on account of their holiness, as I observed before. The same Psalmist declares that this is the sweetness that a spiritual taste relishes in God’s law. Psa. 19:7-10, “The law of the Lord is perfect; the commandment of the Lord is pure; the fear of the Lord is clean; the statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the judgments of the Lord are true, and altogether righteous; they are more to be desired than gold, indeed, than much fine gold; sweeter also than honey, and the honeycomb.”

A holy love has a holy object. The holiness of love consists especially in this: that it is the love of what is holy, as holy, and for its holiness, so that the holiness of the object is the quality on which it fixes and terminates. In holy things, a holy nature must love chiefly what is most agreeable to itself. But surely in divine things, what is agreeable to a holy nature above all other things, is holiness. This is because holiness is most agreeable to holiness. Nothing can be more agreeable to any nature, than itself; and thus a holy nature must above all things be agreeable to a holy nature. So the holy nature of God and of Christ, and of the word of God, and of other divine things, must be agreeable to the holy nature in the saints, above all other things.

Again, a holy nature doubtless loves holy things, especially on account of that for which a sinful nature has enmity against them. But what a sinful nature is chiefly at enmity against in holy things, is their holiness. It is for this that the carnal mind is at enmity against God, and against the law of God, and against the people of God. Now this is just arguing from contraries; from contrary causes to contrary effects; from opposite natures to opposite tendencies. We know that holiness has a directly contrary nature to wickedness; therefore it is the nature of wickedness to chiefly oppose and hate holiness. So it must be the nature of holiness chiefly to tend towards and to delight in holiness.

The holy nature in the saints, and in the angels in heaven (where the true tendency of it best appears), is principally engaged by the holiness of divine things. This is the divine beauty which chiefly engages the attention, admiration, and praise of the bright and burning seraphim. Isa. 6:3, “One cried to another, and said, Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts, the whole earth is full of his glory.” And Rev. 4:8, “They do not rest day or night, saying, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come.” So the glorified saints cry in chap. 15:4, “Who shall not fear you, O Lord, and glorify your name? For you alone are holy.”

And the Scriptures represent the saints on earth as adoring God primarily on this account, and admiring and extolling all God’s attributes, either as deriving loveliness from his holiness, or as being part of it. Thus when they praise God for his power, his holiness is the beauty that engages them. Psa. 98:1, “O sing to the Lord a new song, for he has done marvellous things: his right hand, and his holy arm has gotten him the victory.” So too when they praise him for his justice and terrible majesty. Psa. 99:2-3, “The Lord is great in Zion, and he is high above all people. Let them praise your great and terrible name; for it is holy.” Ver. 5, “Exalt the Lord our God, and worship at his footstool; for he is holy.” Ver. 8-9, “You were a God that forgave them, though you took vengeance on their inventions. Exalt the Lord our God, and worship at his holy hill: for the Lord our God, is holy.” So too when they praise God for his mercy and faithfulness. Psa. 97:11-12, “Light is sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart. Rejoice in the Lord,
you righteous; and give thanks at the remembrance of his holiness.” 1Sam. 2:2, “There is none as holy as the Lord: for there is none besides you; nor is there any rock like our God.”

By this, therefore, all may test their affections, and particularly their love and joy. Various kinds of creatures show the difference in their natures very much in the different things they relish as their proper good: one delights in what another abhors. There is such a difference between true saints and natural men. Natural men have no sense of the goodness and excellency of holy things, at least as to their holiness. They have no taste for that kind of good, and so they may be said not to know divine good, or not to see it; it is wholly hidden from them. But the saints, by the mighty power of God, have it revealed to them. They have that supernatural, most noble, and divine sense given to them by which they perceive it. This is what captivates their hearts and delights them above all things. It is the most amiable and sweet thing to the heart of a true saint that is to be found in heaven or earth. Above all other things, it attracts and engages his soul. It is what he places his happiness in above all things, and which he bets on for solace and entertainment – both for his mind in this world, and for full satisfaction and blessedness in another. By this you may examine your love towards God, towards Jesus Christ; towards the words of God; and towards his people. By this you may examine your desires after heaven, whether they are from a supreme delight in this sort of beauty, without being primarily moved by your imagined interest in them, or your expectations from them. There are many high affections, great seeming love and rapturous joys, which have nothing of this holy relish belonging to them.

Particularly, you may test your discoveries of the glory of God’s grace and love, and your affections arising from them. The grace of God may appear lovely in two ways: either as bonum utile, a profitable good to me – what greatly serves my interest, and so it suits my self-love; or as bonum formosum, a beautiful good in itself – it is part of the moral and spiritual excellency of the divine nature. In this latter respect, true saints have their hearts affected by, and love captivated by, the free grace of God in the first place.

Thus it appears that if persons have a great sense of the natural perfections of God, and they are greatly affected by them, or if they have any other sight or sense of God than what consists in or implies a sense of the beauty of his moral perfections, then it is not a certain sign of grace. Though men may have a great sense of the awful greatness and terrible majesty of God, this is only God’s natural perfection. Men may see this and yet be entirely blind to the beauty of God’s moral perfection; they may see this and yet have nothing of that spiritual taste which relishes this divine sweetness.

It has been shown already, in what was said about the first distinguishing mark of gracious affections, that what is spiritual is entirely different in its nature from anything that is possible for a graceless person to have while he continues graceless. But it is still possible for those who are wholly without grace to have a clear sight and a very great and affecting sense of God’s greatness, mighty power, and awful majesty. For this is what the devils have, even though they have lost the spiritual knowledge of God which consists in a sense of the amiableness of his moral perfections. They are perfectly destitute of any sense or relish of that kind of beauty; and yet they have a very great knowledge of the natural glory of God (if I may put it that way) – that is, of his awful greatness and majesty. They behold this, and are affected by the apprehensions of it, and therefore they tremble before him. All shall behold this glory of God at the Day of Judgment; God will make all rational beings behold it to a great degree indeed – whether angels and devils, or saints and sinners. Christ will manifest his infinite greatness and his awful majesty to everyone, in a most open, clear, and convincing way, and in a light that none can resist. “He shall come in the glory of his Father, and every eye shall see him;” they will cry to the mountains to fall on them, to hide them from the face of Him that sits on the throne. They are represented as seeing the glory of God’s majesty, Isa. 2:10, 19, 21. God will make all his enemies behold this,
and they will live in a most clear and affecting view of it, to all eternity, in hell. God has often declared his immutable purpose to make all his enemies know him in this respect.

So often he adds these words to the threats which he denounces against them: “And they shall know that I am the Lord.” Indeed, he has sworn that all men shall see his glory in this respect. Num. 14:21, “As truly as I live, all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the Lord.” This kind of manifestation of God is often spoken of in Scripture as being made in the sight of God’s enemies in this world. 33 This was a manifestation which God made of himself in the sight of that wicked congregation at Mount Sinai, deeply affecting them with it, so that all the people in the camp trembled. Wicked men and devils will see and have a great sense of everything that pertains to the glory of God, except the beauty of his moral perfection. They will see his infinite greatness, majesty, and power, and they will be fully convinced of his omniscience, eternity, and immutability. They will even see everything pertaining to his moral attributes, except their beauty and amiableness. They will see and know that he is perfectly just, righteous, and true; and that he is a holy God of purer eyes than to behold evil, who cannot look on iniquity. And they will see the wonderful manifestations of his infinite goodness and free grace towards the saints. Nothing will be hidden from their eyes except the beauty of these moral attributes, and the beauty which arises from His other attributes. And so natural men, while they are in this world, are capable of having a very affecting sense of everything that pertains to God, except this. Nebuchadnezzar had a great and very affecting sense of the infinite greatness and awful majesty of God, of his supreme and absolute dominion, and his irresistible power and high sovereignty. He saw that he, and all the inhabitants of the earth, were as nothing before God. He had a great conviction in his conscience of God’s justice, and an affecting sense of God’s great goodness, Dan. 4:1-3,34-35, 37. The sense that Darius had of God’s perfections seems to be very much like Daniel’s, Dan. 6:25-27.

But saints and angels behold the beauty of God’s holiness. Only this sight will melt and humble the hearts of men, wean them from the world, draw them to God, and effectually change them. A sight of the awful greatness of God may overpower men’s strength, and be more than they can endure; but if the moral beauty of God is hidden, the enmity of the heart will remain in its full strength. No love will be kindled. The will, instead of being effectually gained, will remain inflexible. Yet the first glimpse of the moral and spiritual glory of God shining into the heart, produces all these effects with a power which nothing can withstand.

The sense that natural men may have of the awful greatness of God, may affect them in various ways. It may not only terrify, but elevate them, and raise their joy and praise. This will be the natural effect of it under the real or supposed receipt of some extraordinary mercy from God, as produced by the influence of mere principles of nature. It has already been shown that the receipt of kindness may, by the influence of natural principles, affect the heart with gratitude and praise to God. But if a person, at the same time, has a sense of God’s infinite greatness, and that he is nothing in comparison to God, then surely this will naturally raise higher his gratitude and praise for God’s kindness to one who is so much inferior. A sense of God’s greatness had this effect on Nebuchadnezzar on that extraordinary favour of his restoration, after he had been driven from men and dwelled with the beasts. A sense of God’s exceeding greatness raises his gratitude very high; so that, in the loftiest terms, he extols and magnifies God, and calls upon all the world to do it with him. If a natural man, at the same time that he is greatly affected by God’s infinite greatness and majesty, entertains a strong conceit that this great God has made him his child and his special favourite, and that God has promised him eternal glory in his highest love, will this not have a natural tendency to raise his joy and praise to a great height?

Therefore, it is beyond doubt that too much weight has been laid on having revelations of God’s greatness, awful majesty, and natural perfection operating in this way, without having any real

33 Exod. 9:16; 14:18; 15:16, Psa. 66:3 and 46:10, and numerous other places.
view of the holy and lovely majesty of God. Experience abundantly confirms what reason and Scripture declare in this matter. Many persons have seemed overpowered by the greatness and awful majesty of God, but they have been far from having a Christian spirit and temper in any proportion, and far from showing fruits in their practice that are in any way agreeable to that spirit. No, their revelations have worked contrary to the operation of truly spiritual revelations.

It is not that a sense of God's greatness and natural attributes is not useful and necessary. For as I observed before, this is implied in a manifestation of the beauty of God's holiness. Though that beauty is something beyond those natural attributes, it nonetheless supposes them, just as the greater supposes the lesser. Though natural men may have a sense of the natural perfections of God, yet undoubtedly this is more frequent and common with the saints than with them. Grace enables men to see these things in a better way than natural men see them. Grace not only enables them to see God's natural attributes, but also that beauty of those attributes which (according to our way of conceiving of God) is derived from his holiness.
4. Gracious affections arise from an enlightened mind

Gracious affections arise from the mind’s being enlightened rightly and spiritually to understand or apprehend divine things.

Holy affections are not heat without light. Rather, they evermore arise from the information of the understanding, from some spiritual instruction that the mind receives, from some light or actual knowledge. The child of God is graciously affected because he sees and understands something more of divine things than he did before, more of God or Christ and of the glorious things exhibited in the gospel. He has some clearer and better view than he had before, when he was not affected. Either he receives some understanding of divine things that is new to him, or else he has his former knowledge renewed after his view was decayed. 1John 4:7, “Everyone that loves, knows God.” Phil. 1:9, “I pray that your love may abound more and more in knowledge, and in all judgment.” Rom. 10:2, “They have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge.” Col. 3:10, “The new man, which is renewed in knowledge.” Psalm 43:3, 4, “O send out your light and your truth; let them lead me, let them bring me to your holy hill.” John 6:45, “It is written in the prophets, And they shall be all taught of God. Every man therefore that has heard, and learned of the Father, comes to me.” Knowledge is the key that first opens the hard heart, and enlarges the affections, and so it opens the way for men into the kingdom of heaven. Luke 11:52, “You have taken away the key of knowledge.”

Now there are many affections which do not arise from any light in the understanding. When it is this way, it is sure evidence that these affections are not spiritual, no matter how high they are. Indeed they have some new apprehensions which they did not have before. Such is the nature of man, that it is impossible for his mind to be affected unless it is by something that he apprehends or conceives of. But in many persons, those apprehensions or conceptions that they have, and which affect them, have nothing of knowledge or instruction in them. For instance, when a person is affected by a lively idea suddenly excited in his mind, of some shape, or a beautiful and pleasant face, or some shining light, or other glorious outward appearance, something is apprehended or conceived by his mind. But there is nothing of the nature of instruction in it; they become never wiser by such things, or by knowing more about God, or about a Mediator between God and man, or about the way of salvation by Christ, or anything contained in the doctrines of the gospel. By these external ideas, they have no further acquaintance with God as to any of the attributes or perfections of his nature. Nor do they have any further understanding of his word, or any of his ways or works. Truly spiritual and gracious affections are not raised in this way. They arise from the enlightening of the mind to understand the things that are taught by God and Christ in a new way. Thus a person comes to a new understanding of the excellent nature of God and of his wonderful perfections; he gains a new

1 "Many that have had mighty strong affections at first conversion, afterwards become dry and wither; and they consume, and pine, and die away: and now their hypocrisy is manifest; if not to all the world by open profaneness, yet to the discerning eye of living Christians by a formal, barren, unsavory, unfruitful heart and course [of life]; because as of yet they never had enough light to [lead them to] conviction."— It is strange to see some people carried with mighty affection against sin and hell, and after Christ And what is the hell you fear? A dreadful place. What is Christ? They scarce know as much as devils do; but that is all. Oh trust them not! Many have, and these will fall away to some lust, or opinion, or pride, or to the world; and the reason is that they never had enough light, John 5:35. John was a burning and shining light, and they enjoyed him for a season; yet glorious as it was, they did not see Christ by it, especially not with divine light It is rare to see Christians full of both light and affection. And therefore consider of this; many a man has been well brought up, and is of a sweet loving nature, mild, and gentle, and harmless, likes and loves the best things, and his meaning, and mind, and heart is good, and has more in heart than in show; and so hopes all shall go well with him. I say, there may lie the greatest hypocrisy under the greatest affections; especially if they lack light. You shall be hardened in your hypocrisy by them. I never liked violent affections and pangs, but only such as were dropped in by light: because those come from an external principle, and do not last, but these do.—Men are not frightened by the light of the sun, even though it is clearer than the lightning— Shepard’s Parable, Part I p. 146.
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view of Christ in his spiritual excellencies and fullness; or things that pertain to the way of salvation by Christ are opened to him in a new way, by which he now sees how it is; he understands those divine and spiritual doctrines which once were foolishness to him. Such enlightenings of the understanding as these, are things entirely different in their nature from strong ideas of shapes and colors, or outward brightness and glory, or sounds and voices. All gracious affections arise from some instruction or enlightening of the understanding. This is therefore a further proof that affections which arise from a mere impression on the imagination are not gracious affections. The things observed before also make this evident.

From this it also appears that affections which arise from texts of Scripture coming to mind are vain, when no instruction is received in the understanding from those texts, or from anything taught in those texts as being the ground of those affections, but only as to the way they came to mind. When Christ uses the Scripture as a means to make the heart burn with gracious affection, it is by opening the Scriptures to our understanding. Luke 24:32, “Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened the Scriptures to us?” It also appears that the affection occasioned by a text of Scripture coming to mind must be vain when the affection is founded on something that is supposed to be taught by it, but which is not really contained in it, nor in any other Scripture. This is because such supposed instruction is not real instruction; it is a mistake and a misapprehension of the mind. For instance, when persons suppose that they are expressly taught by some Scripture coming to mind that they in particular are beloved by God, or that their sins are forgiven, or that God is their Father and the like, this is a mistake or a misapprehension. For the Scripture nowhere expressly reveals the individual persons who are to be loved, except by consequence – by revealing the qualifications of the persons that are beloved by God. Therefore this matter is not to be learned from Scripture in any other way than by consequence and qualifications, for things are not to be learned from Scripture in any other way than they are taught in Scripture.

In these instances, as in others that might be mentioned, affections really arise from ignorance rather than instruction. When they find themselves speaking freely in prayer, some say it is God being with them; this affects them, and their affections are increased. They do not look into the cause of this freedom of speech, which may arise from many other causes than God’s spiritual presence. In the same way, some are greatly affected by some apt thoughts that come into their minds about the Scripture; and they say it is the Spirit of God teaching them. So they ascribe to the special and immediate influences of God’s Spirit many of the workings of their own minds, which they have a high opinion of, and are pleased and taken with; and so they are mightily affected by their privilege. There are some instances of persons in whom it seems obvious that the first ground of their affection is some bodily sensation. The animal spirits, by some cause (and probably sometimes by the devil) are suddenly and unaccountably put into a very agreeable motion, causing some people to feel pleasure in their bodies. That the animal spirits are put into such a motion, is usually connected with the exhilaration of the mind; and the soul, being united to the body, feels pleasure from this. The motion of the animal spirits does not first arise from any affection or apprehension of the mind. Rather, the very first thing felt is an exhilaration, and perhaps a pleasant external sensation in their breasts. Hence, through ignorance, the person being surprised by this begins to think that surely this is the Holy Ghost coming into him. And then the mind begins to be affected and raised by it. There is first great joy, and then many other affections, in a very tumultuous way, putting all nature, both body and mind, into a mighty ruffle. As I observed before, although only the soul is the seat of the affections, this does not hinder bodily sensations becoming the occasion for affections in the mind in this way.

If men’s religious affections truly arise from some instruction or light in their understanding, the affection is still not gracious unless the basis of its light is spiritual. Affections may be excited by an understanding of things which are obtained merely by human teaching, and by the ordinary improvement of the faculties of the mind. Men may be greatly affected by knowledge of the
things of religion that they obtain in this way. Some philosophers have been mightily affected and almost carried beyond themselves by the discoveries they have made in mathematics and natural philosophy. So men may be greatly affected by ordinary illuminations of the Spirit of God, in which God assists men's faculties to gain a greater degree of understanding in religious matters. They have these in some degree, but only by the ordinary exercise and improvement of their own faculties. Such illuminations may greatly affect the mind. Many of those we read about in Scripture were once enlightened, but their affections were not spiritual.

If the Scriptures teach us anything, it is that there is such a thing as a spiritual and supernatural understanding of divine things that is unique to the saints; those who are not saints have nothing of it. It is certainly a kind of understanding, apprehending, or discerning of divine things that natural men have nothing of, which the apostle speaks of in 1Cor. 2:14: “But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.” It is certainly a kind of seeing or discerning of spiritual things that is unique to the saints, which is spoken of in 1John 3:6: “Whoever sins, has not seen him, or known him.” 3 John 11, “One who does evil, has not seen God.” And John 6:40, “This is the will of him that sent me, that everyone that sees the Son, and believes on him, may have everlasting life.” Chap. 14:19, “The world sees me no more; but you see me.” Chap. 17:3, “This is eternal life, that they might know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.” Matt. 11:27, “No man knows the Son, except the Father; nor does any man know the Father, except the Son, and whoever the Son reveals him to.” John 12:45, “He that sees me, sees him that sent me.” Psa. 9:10, “Those who know your name, will put their trust in you.” Phil. 3:8, “I count all things but loss, for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord:” ver. 10, “That I may know him.” And there are numerous other places all over the Bible which show the same thing. It is evident from this that there is such a thing as an understanding of divine things which, in its nature and kind, is wholly different from any knowledge that natural men may have. There is an understanding of divine things which the scripture calls spiritual understanding. Col. 1:9, “We do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will, in all wisdom and spiritual understanding.” It has already been shown that what is spiritual, in the ordinary use of the word in the New Testament, is entirely different in nature and kind from everything which natural men are or can be the subjects of.

From this it may be surely inferred what spiritual understanding consists of. For if there is in the saints a kind of apprehension or perception, which in its nature is perfectly different from all that natural men have, or can have until they have a new nature, then it must consist in having certain kinds of ideas, or sensations of mind, which are simply different from all that can exist in the minds of natural men. That is the same as saying that it consists in the sensations of a new spiritual sense which the souls of natural men do not have. This is evident from what was repeatedly observed before. But I have already shown what that new spiritual sense is which the saints have been given in regeneration, and what its object is. I have shown that the immediate object of it is the supreme beauty and excellency of the nature of divine things, as they are in themselves. And this agrees with the Scripture. The apostle plainly teaches that the great thing revealed by spiritual light, and understood by spiritual knowledge, is the glory of divine things. 2Cor. 4:3-4, “But if our gospel is hidden, it is hidden to those who are lost; in whom the god of this world has blinded the minds of those who do not believe, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, shine to them;” together with ver. 6: “For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, has shined into our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God, in the face of Jesus Christ.” And chap. 3:18, preceding: “But we all with open face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image, from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.” And it must be so, for as observed before, the Scripture often teaches that all true religion summarily consists in the love of divine
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things. Therefore that kind of understanding or knowledge, which is the proper foundation of true religion, must be the knowledge of the loveliness of divine things. For doubtless, that knowledge which is the proper foundation of love, is the knowledge of loveliness. That beauty of divine things which is the proper and immediate object of a spiritual sense of mind, was shown under the last topic: that it is the beauty of their moral perfection. Therefore spiritual understanding more immediately and primarily consists in the view or sense of this beauty. Indeed, it is plain that it can be nothing else. For (as shown) nothing pertains to divine things besides the beauty of their moral excellency – and those properties and qualities of divine things of which this beauty is the foundation – except what natural men and devils can see and know, and will know fully and clearly to all eternity.²

From what has been said, therefore, we necessarily conclude that spiritual understanding consists in “a sense of the heart for the supreme beauty and sweetness of the holiness or moral perfection of divine things, together with all that discerning and knowledge of the things of religion that depend on and flow from such a sense.”³

Spiritual understanding consists primarily in a cordial sense, or a sense of heart, of that spiritual beauty. I say a sense of heart, for it is not merely speculation that is involved in this kind of understanding; nor can there be a clear distinction made between the two faculties of understanding and will, as though acting distinctly and separately in this matter. When the mind is sensible of the beauty and amiableness of a thing, it implies that it is sensible of taking delight in the presence of its idea. This carries in the very nature of it, the sense of the heart; or an effect and impression of the soul, of a substance possessed of taste, inclination, and will.

There is a distinction to be made between a mere notional understanding, in which the mind only beholds things in the exercise of a speculative faculty; and the sense of the heart, in which the mind not only beholds and beholds, but relishes and feels. That sort of knowledge by which a man has a tangible perception of amiableness and loathsome, or of sweetness and nausea, is not the same sort of knowledge as that by which he knows what a triangle is, or what a square is. The latter is mere speculative knowledge; the former is sensible or tangible knowledge, in which more than the mere intellect is concerned. The heart, or the soul, is the proper subject of it. It not only beholds it, but it has an inclination towards it, and it is pleased or displeased by it. And yet there is the nature of instruction in it – just as someone who perceives the sweet taste of honey knows much more about honey than someone who has only looked at it and felt it.

The apostle seems to make a distinction between mere speculative knowledge of the things of religion, and spiritual knowledge of them. He does so in Rom. 2:20, “Which have the form of knowledge, and of the truth in the law.” Spiritual knowledge of the truth is often represented by relishing, smelling, or tasting, as in 2Cor. 2:14: “Now thanks be to God, which always causes us to triumph in Christ Jesus, and makes manifest the savor of his knowledge in every place.” Matt. 16:23, “You do not savor the things that are of God, but those things that are of men.” 1Pet. 2:2-3, “As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that you may grow thereby; if you have tasted that the Lord is gracious.” Cant. 1:3, “Because of the savor of your good ointments, your name is like ointment poured out; therefore the virgins love you;” compared with 1John 2:20, “But you have an unction⁴ from the Holy One, and you know all things.”

Spiritual understanding primarily consists in this sense of taste of the moral beauty of divine things; so that no knowledge can be called spiritual any further than it arises from this sense, and it has this sense in it. But secondarily it includes all that discerning and knowledge of the

² Discussed beginning in the middle of p. 122 supra for three paragraphs. – WHG
³ This is Edwards’ own definition. – WHG
⁴ An anointing, usually by pouring oil over the head. – WHG
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things of religion which depend on and flow from such a sense. When the true beauty and amiableness of the holiness or true moral good that is in divine things is revealed to the soul, it opens a new world to its view. This shows the glory of all the perfections of God, and of everything pertaining to the divine Being. For, as observed before, the beauty of all arises from God’s moral perfection. This shows the glory of all God’s works, both of creation and providence. For it is their special glory that God’s holiness, righteousness, faithfulness, and goodness, are manifested in them. Without these moral perfections, there would be no glory in that power and skill with which they are wrought. The glorifying of God’s moral perfections, is the special end of all the works of God’s hands. The sufficiency of Christ as a mediator is understood by this sense of the moral beauty of divine things. For it is only by a revelation of the moral perfection of Christ, that the believer is let into the knowledge of the excellency of his person so as to know anything more of it than the devils do. It is only by the knowledge of the excellency of Christ’s person, that anyone may know his sufficiency as a mediator – for the latter depends on and arises from the former. It is by seeing the excellency of Christ’s person, that the saints are made aware of the preciousness of his blood, and its sufficiency to atone for sin – for the preciousness of Christ’s blood consists in being the blood of so excellent and amiable a person. The merit of his obedience, and the sufficiency and prevalence of his intercession, depend on this.¹

By this sight of the moral beauty of divine things is seen the beauty of the way of salvation by Christ; for it consists in the beauty of the moral perfections of God, which wonderfully shines forth in every step of this method of salvation from beginning to end. By this is seen the fitness and suitableness of this way: for this wholly consists in its tendency to deliver us from sin and hell, and to bring us to the happiness which consists in the possession and enjoyment of moral good in a way that sweetly agrees with God’s moral perfections. The way of salvation has been so contrived as to attain these ends; and in that consists the excellent wisdom of that way. By this is seen the excellency of the word of God: take away all the moral beauty and sweetness in the word, and the Bible is left wholly a dead letter – a dry, lifeless, tasteless thing. By this is seen the true foundation of our duty: the worthiness of God to be esteemed, honored, loved, submitted to, and served as he requires of us – and the amiableness of the duties themselves that are required of us. By this is seen the true evil of sin, for the one who sees the beauty of holiness must necessarily see the hatefulness of sin, and its contrariness. By this men understand the true glory of heaven, which consists in the beauty and happiness that is found in holiness. By this is seen the amiableness and happiness of both saints and angels. The one who sees the beauty of holiness, or true moral good, sees the greatest and most important thing in the world, which is the fullness of all things, without which the whole world is empty – indeed, worse than nothing.

Unless this is seen, nothing is seen that is worth seeing; for there is no other true excellency or beauty. Unless this is understood, nothing is understood that is worthy of understanding. This is the beauty of the Godhead, and the divinity of divinity (if I may say so), the good of the infinite fountain of good without which God himself (if that were possible) would be an infinite evil; without which it would have been better if we ourselves had never been; and without which it would have been better to have no being. Therefore, in effect, the one that does not know this, knows nothing. His knowledge is but the shadow of knowledge, or the form of knowledge, as the apostle calls it. Rom 2.20 Therefore the Scriptures well-represent those who are destitute of that spiritual sense by which the beauty of holiness is perceived, as totally blind, deaf, and senseless; indeed, they are dead. Regeneration, in which this divine sense is given to the soul by its Creator, is well-represented as opening blind eyes, raising the dead, and bringing a person into a

¹ Christ’s person as the Son of God, in all his eternal beauty, glory, and holiness, is as vital to the efficacy and power of his work, as the work itself. Even though his work makes him beautiful and glorious to our eyes, he is first beautiful in himself. – WHG

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new world. For if what has been said is considered, it is evident that when a person has this sense and knowledge given to him, he will view nothing as he did before. Even though before he knew all things “after the flesh, yet afterward he will know them in that way no more. He has become a new creature; old things are passed away, behold all things have become new;” 2Cor. 5:16-17.

Besides the things already mentioned, there arises from this sense of spiritual beauty, all true experiential knowledge of religion, which is a new world of knowledge in itself. Someone who does not see the beauty of holiness, does not know what even one of the graces of God’s Spirit is. He is destitute of any idea or conception of all gracious exercises of the soul, and all holy comforts and delights, and all effects of the saving influences of the Spirit of God on the heart. And so he is ignorant of the greatest works of God, the most important and glorious effects of his power on the creature. He is also wholly ignorant of the saints as saints – he does not know what they are and, in effect, he is ignorant of the whole spiritual world.

Things being thus, it plainly appears that God’s implanting of that spiritual supernatural sense which has been spoken of, makes a great change in a man. Were it not for the very imperfect degree to which this sense is commonly given at first, or the small degree of this glorious light that first dawns upon the soul, the change made by this spiritual opening of the eyes in conversion would be much greater and more remarkable in every way. It would be more remarkable than a man who had been born blind with only the other four senses, and continued blind for a long time, who then instantly had the sense of seeing imparted to him in the clear light of the sun, revealing a world of visible objects. Though sight is more noble than any of the other external senses, yet this spiritual sense which has been spoken of is infinitely more noble than that, or any other principle of discerning that a man naturally has; and the object of this sense is infinitely greater and more important.

This sort of understanding or knowledge, is that knowledge of divine things from which all truly gracious affections proceed. Therefore it is that knowledge by which all affections are to be tested. Those affections that arise wholly from any other kind of knowledge, or that result from any other kind of apprehensions of the mind, are vain.6

It may be learned from what has been said, the most essential difference which lies between the light or understanding which is given by the ordinary influences of the Spirit of God on the hearts of natural men, and that saving instruction which is given to the saints. The latter primarily and most essentially lies in beholding the holy beauty that is in divine things – which is the only true moral good, and which the soul of fallen man is, by nature, totally blind to. The former consists only in a further understanding, through the assistance of natural principles, of those things which men may know in some measure solely by the ordinary exercise of their faculties. And this knowledge consists only in the knowledge of those things pertaining to

6 “Take heed of contenting yourselves with every kind of knowledge. Do not worship every image of your own heads; especially you that fall short of truth, or the knowledge of it. For when you have some, there may yet be lacking what may make you sincere. There are many men of great knowledge, able to teach themselves, and others too: and yet their hearts are unsound. How does this come to pass? Is it because they have so much light? No; but because they lack much. And therefore do not content yourselves with every knowledge. There is some knowledge which men have by the light of nature, (which leaves them without excuse,) from the book of creation; some by power of education: some by the light of the law by which men know their sin and evils; some by the letter of the gospel; and so men may know much, and speak well; and so in seeing, they do not see: some by the Spirit, and may see much, so as to prophesy in Christ’s name, and yet they are bid to depart. Matt 7.23. Now there is a light of glory, by which the elect see things in another manner: they cannot tell you how: it is the beginning of light in heaven: and the same Spirit that fills Christ, filling their minds, so that they know all things by this anointing; which if you ever have this, you must become babes and fools in your own eyes. God will never write his law in your minds, until all its scribblings are blotted out. Account all your knowledge loss for the gaining of this. It is sad to see many a man pleasing himself in his own dreaming delusions; yet the poor creature in seeing, does not see: which is God’s heavy curse upon men who are under the greatest means, and which lays all of it waste and desolate.” Shepard’s Parable. Part. I. p. 147.
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religion which are natural. Thus, for instance, it consists in those awakenings of the conscience that natural men are often subject to. The Spirit of God gives them no knowledge of the true moral beauty which is in divine things; he only assists their mind to have a clearer idea of the guilt of sin; or of its relation to punishment; and its connection with the evil of suffering (without any sight of its moral evil, or its odiousness as sin); and he gives a clearer idea of the natural perfections of God in which consists, not his holy beauty and glory, but his awful and terrible greatness. It is a clear sight of this that will fully awaken the consciences of wicked men at the Day of Judgment, without giving any spiritual light. It is a lesser degree of the same thing that awakens the consciences of natural men in this world, but without any spiritual light. The same revelations are in some measure given in the conscience of an awakened sinner in this world, which will be given more fully in the consciences of sinners at the Day of Judgment. The same kind of sight or apprehension of God, in a lesser degree, makes awakened sinners in this world aware of the dreadful guilt of sin against so great and terrible a God, and aware of its awful punishment. It fills them with fearful apprehensions of divine wrath that will thoroughly convince all wicked men of the infinitely dreadful nature and guilt of sin. It will astonish them with apprehensions of wrath when Christ comes in the glory of his power and majesty, and every eye shall see him, and all the kindreds of the earth will wail because of him.

In those common illuminations which are sometimes given to natural men, and which excite some kind of religious desire, love, and joy in them, the mind is only assisted to a clearer apprehension of the natural good that exists in divine things. Thus sometimes, under common illuminations, men are stirred up by ideas of the natural good that is in heaven, such as its outward glory, ease, honor, and advancement, and being the object of God’s high favor there, and having the great respect of men and angels, etc. So there are many things exhibited in the gospel concerning God and Christ, and the way of salvation, that have a natural good in them which suits the natural principle of self-love. Thus, in that great goodness of God towards sinners, and the wonderful dying love of Christ, there is a natural good which all men love, just as they love themselves. There is also a spiritual and holy beauty which is seen only by the regenerate. Therefore, there are many things pertaining to the word of God’s grace delivered in the gospel, which may cause natural men to briefly receive it with joy when they hear it. All that love which natural men have for God and Christ, and Christian virtues, and good men, is not from any sight of the amiableness of the holiness or true moral excellency of these things; it is only for the sake of the natural good there is in them. All natural men hate sin as much from the principles of nature as they hate a tiger for his rapaciousness, or a serpent for his poison and harmfulness. All their love of Christian virtue flows from no higher principle than their love of a man’s good nature. It appears amiable to natural men, but no more than silver and gold appears amiable to a merchant, or black soil appears beautiful to a farmer.

From what has been said of the nature of spiritual understanding, it appears that spiritual understanding does not consist in any new doctrinal knowledge, nor in having a new proposition suggested to the mind, nor having read or heard of it before. For it is plain that suggesting new propositions is something entirely different from giving the mind a new taste or relish of beauty and sweetness. It is also evident that spiritual knowledge does not consist in any new doctrinal explanation of any part of the Scripture – for this is still only doctrinal knowledge, or the knowledge of propositions. The doctrinal explanation of a part of Scripture only allows us to understand what propositions are contained or taught in that part of Scripture.

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7 Calvin, in his Institutes, Book I. Chap. 9.§ 1, says, “It is not the office of the Spirit that is promised to us, to make new and before unheard of revelations, or to coin some new kind of doctrine, which tends to draw us away from the received doctrine of the gospel; but to seal and confirm to us that very doctrine which is by the gospel.” And in the same place he speaks of some that in those days maintained the contrary notion, “pretending to be immediately led by the Spirit, as persons that were governed by a most haughty self-conceit: and not so properly to be looked upon as only laboring under a mistake, as [they were] driven by a sort of raving madness.”
Hence, it appears that spiritual understanding of Scripture does not consist in opening to the mind the mystical meaning of the Scripture in its parables, types, and allegories; for this is only a doctrinal explication of the Scripture. Someone who explains what is meant by the stony ground, and the seed springing up suddenly, and quickly withering away, only explains what propositions or doctrines are taught in it. So too, someone who explains what is typified by Jacob’s ladder, and the angels of God ascending and descending on it, or what was typified by Joshua’s leading Israel through the Jordan, only shows what propositions are hidden in these passages. Many men can explain these types who have no spiritual knowledge. It is possible that a man might know how to interpret all the types, parables, enigmas, and allegories in the Bible, and yet not have one beam of spiritual light in his mind. This is because he may not have the least degree of that spiritual sense of the holy beauty of divine things which has been spoken of, and he may see nothing of this kind of glory in anything contained in any of these mysteries, or in any other part of the Scripture. It is plain, by what the apostle says, that a man might understand all such mysteries, and have no saving grace. 1Cor. 13:2, “And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge, and do not have charity, it profits me nothing.” Therefore, those who have an exalted opinion of their own spiritual attainments are very foolish, when notions come into their minds of the mystical meaning of various passages of Scripture – as though it was a spiritual understanding of these passages; as though it was immediately given to them by the Spirit of God; and so they have their affections highly raised by this. What has been said shows the vanity of such affections.

From what has been said, it is also evident that it is not spiritual knowledge for someone to be informed of his duty, by having it immediately suggested to his mind that such and such outward actions or deeds are the will of God. We cannot suppose that it is truly God’s way to thus signify his will to his people, by immediate inward suggestions, when such suggestions have nothing of the nature of spiritual light in them. Such knowledge would only be one kind of doctrinal knowledge. A proposition concerning the will of God is as properly a doctrine of religion, as a proposition concerning the nature of God, or a work of God. Declaring any of these kinds of propositions to a man, whether by speech or inward suggestion, differs vastly from having the holy beauty of divine things manifested to his soul; and yet this latter sort is what spiritual knowledge most essentially consists of. Thus there was no spiritual light in Balaam, even though he had the will of God immediately suggested to him by the Spirit of God from time to time, and it concerned the way that he should go, and what he should do and say.

It is manifest, therefore, that being led and directed in this way, is not the same holy and spiritual leading of the Spirit of God which is unique to the saints, and which is a distinguishing mark of the sons of God that is spoken of in Rom. 8:14: “For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, are the sons of God;” and Gal. 5:18, “But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.”

If people have the will of God concerning their own actions suggested to them by some text of Scripture that is suddenly brought to their minds – and this text, as the words lay in the Bible before they came to their minds, related to the action and behavior of some other person – it does not alter the case. Having a suggestion accompanied by an apt text of Scripture, does not make it the nature of spiritual instruction. For instance, say a person in New England, on some occasion, was at a loss whether it was his duty to go into some popish or heathenish land where he was likely to be exposed to many difficulties and dangers. Say he prayed to God to show him the way of his duty. And after earnest prayer, he had those words which God spoke to Jacob in Gen. 46, suddenly and extraordinarily brought to his mind, as if they were spoken to him: “Do not fear to go down into Egypt; for I will go with you; and I will also surely bring you up again.” These words, as they are recorded in the Bible before they came to his mind, related only to Jacob, and to Jacob’s behavior. Yet this man supposes that God has a further meaning for them, as if they were brought out and applied to him; that they are to be understood in a new sense;
that Egypt is to be understood as referring to this particular country he has in his mind; and that the action which is intended is his going there; and the meaning of the promise is that God would bring him back to New England again. There is nothing of the nature of a spiritual or gracious leading of the Spirit in this; for there is nothing of the nature of spiritual understanding in it.

Thus, understanding the texts of Scripture is not the same as having a spiritual understanding of them. To understand the Scriptures spiritually, is to rightly understand what is in the Scripture, and what was in it before it was understood. It is to rightly understand what used to be contained in the meaning of it, and not making a new meaning for it. When the mind is enlightened spiritually, and rightly understands the Scripture, it is enabled to see in the Scripture what was not seen before, because of blindness. But if it was because of blindness, that would be an evidence that the same meaning was in it before, otherwise it would not have been blindness not to see it – for it is not blindness to miss a meaning which is not there. Spiritually enlightening the eyes to understand the Scripture, is to open the eyes. Psa. 119:18, “Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of your law.” This argues that the reason why the same thing was not seen in the Scripture before, was that their eyes were shut. This would not be the case if the meaning that is now understood was not there before, but has been newly added to the Scripture by the way the Scripture has come to mind. Making a new meaning for the Scripture, is the same as making a new Scripture; it is adding to the word, which is threatened by a dreadful curse. To spiritually understand the Scripture, is to have the eyes of the mind opened to behold the wonderful spiritual excellency of the glorious things that are contained in the true meaning of it – and that were always contained in it, ever since it was written. It is to behold the amiable and bright manifestations of the divine perfections, and of the excellency and sufficiency of Christ, and the excellency and suitableness of the way of salvation by Christ, and the spiritual glory of the precepts and promises of the Scripture, etc. These things are and always were in the Bible. They would have been seen before if it had not been for blindness; they could have been seen without having any new sense added by these same words being sent by God to a particular person, and somehow spoken anew to him, with a new meaning.

As to a gracious leading of the Spirit, it consists in two things: partly in instructing a person in his duty by the Spirit, and partly in powerfully inducing him to comply with that instruction. But as far as the gracious leading of the Spirit lies in instruction, it consists in a person being guided by a spiritual and distinguishing taste for what has true moral beauty in it. I have shown that spiritual knowledge primarily consists in a taste or relish for the amiableness and beauty of what is truly good and holy. This holy relish is a thing that discerns and distinguishes between good and evil, between holy and unholy, without needing a train of reasoning. Someone who has a true relish of external beauty knows what is beautiful just by looking at it. He has no need for a train of reasoning about the proportion of the features in order to determine whether what he sees is beautiful or not; he needs nothing except the glance of his eye. Someone who has a rectified musical ear, knows whether the sound he hears is true harmony; he does not need to reason like a mathematician about the proportion of the notes. Someone that has a rectified palate knows what good food is as soon as he tastes it, without reasoning like a physician about it. There is a holy beauty and sweetness in words and actions, as well as a natural beauty in countenances and sounds, and sweetness in food, Job 12:11, “Does not the ear test words, and the mouth taste its food?”

When a holy and amiable action is suggested to the thoughts of a holy soul, that soul, if it is in the lively exercise of its spiritual taste, at once sees beauty in it, and so it inclines towards it, and draws near it. By contrast, if an unworthy or unholy action is suggested to it, its sanctified eye sees no beauty in it; it is not pleased with it; its sanctified taste relishes no sweetness in it. On the contrary, it is nauseating. Indeed, its holy taste and appetite leads it to think of what is truly lovely and naturally suggests it, just as a healthy taste and appetite naturally suggests the idea of
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its proper object. Thus a holy person is led by the Spirit as he is instructed and led by his holy
taste and disposition of heart. By means of this instruction, in the lively exercise of grace, he
easily distinguishes good and evil; he knows at once what is a suitable and amiable behavior
towards God and man. He Judges what is right spontaneously, for himself, without a particular
deduction by any arguments other than the beauty that is seen, and the goodness that is tasted.
Thus Christ blames the Pharisees that they did not judge for themselves what was right, without
needing miracles to prove it, Luke 12:57. The apostle plainly refers to this way of judging
spiritual beauty in Rom. 12:2: “Be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may
prove what is that good, perfect, and acceptable will of God.”

There is such a thing as having good taste for natural beauty (which learned men often speak of).
It is exercised about temporal things, in judging them, such as the justness of a speech, the
goodness of style, the beauty of a poem, the gracefulness of deportment, etc. A late great
philosopher of our nation writes this way about it:8

“To have taste, is to give things their real value, to be touched with the good, to be shocked with the ill;
not to be dazzled with false lusters, but in spite of all colors, and everything that might deceive or
amuse, to judge soundly. Taste and judgment, then, should be the same thing; and yet it is easy to
discern a difference. The judgment forms its opinions from reflection: the reason on this occasion
fetches a kind of circuit, to arrive at its end; it supposes principles, it draws consequences, and it
judges; but not without a thorough knowledge of the case; so that after it has pronounced, it is ready
to render a reason for its decrees. Good taste observes none of these formalities; before it has time to
consult, it has taken its side; as soon as the object is presented, the impression is made, the sentiment
formed, ask no more of it. Just as the ear is wounded by a harsh sound, and the smell is soothed with
an agreeable odor, before the reason has ever meddled with those objects to judge them, so the taste
opens itself at once to experience, and prevents all reflection. They may come afterwards to confirm it,
and reveal the secret reasons for its conduct; but it was not in its power to wait for them. Frequently
we do not know those reasons at all, and whatever pains it took, we cannot discover what it was that
determined it to think as it did. This conduct is very different from what the judgment observes in its
decisions: unless we choose to say, that good taste is, as it were, a first motion, or a kind of instinct of
right reason, which hurries on with rapidity and conducts itself more securely, than all the reasonings
she could make; it is a first glance of the eye, which reveals to us the nature and relations of things in a
moment.”

There is such a kind of taste of the mind as this one which philosophers speak of, and by which
persons are guided in their judgment of the natural beauty, gracefulness, propriety, nobleness,
and sublimity of speeches and action – they judge by the glance of the eye, or by inward
sensation, and by the first impression of the object. So there is likewise such a thing as a divine
taste, given and maintained by the Spirit of God in the hearts of the saints, by which they are in
a similar way led and guided in discerning and distinguishing the true spiritual and holy beauty
of actions. And they are able to do that more easily, readily, and accurately, as they have more or
less of the Spirit of God dwelling in them. Thus “the sons of God are led by the Spirit of God, in
their behavior in the world.” Rom 8:14

A holy disposition and spiritual taste, where grace is strong and lively, will enable the soul to
determine what actions are right and becoming of Christians, not only more speedily, but far
more exactly, than the greatest abilities without it. This may be illustrated by the manner in
which some habits of mind, and dispositions of heart, that have a nature inferior to true grace,
will teach and guide a man in his actions. For instance, if a man is a very good-natured man, his
good nature will teach him better how to act benevolently among mankind; it will direct him on
every occasion to those speeches and actions which are agreeable to rules of goodness, better
than the strongest reason will direct a man of morose temper. So too, if a man’s heart is under
the influence of a friendship, and he has the most endeared affection towards another – even

8 Chambers’ Dictionary, under the word “Taste.”
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though he is a man of indifferent capacity – yet this habit of his mind will direct him far more readily and exactly to such a speech and deportment, or manner of behavior, that is sweet and kind in all respects, and that is more agreeable to a benevolent disposition of heart, than the greatest capacity of some other man will direct him to these things without it. He has a spirit within him that guides him; the habit of his mind is attended with a taste by which he immediately relishes that air and mien which is benevolent; and he dis-relishes the contrary. It causes him to distinguish between one and the other, in a moment, more precisely than the most accurate reasonings can discover in many hours. The nature and inward tendency of a stone or other heavy body that falls from aloft, shows the way to the center of the earth more exactly in an instant, than the ablest mathematician without it could determine by his most accurate observations in a whole day. Thus it is that a spiritual disposition and taste teaches and guides a man in his behavior in the world. An eminently humble, meek, or charitable disposition, will direct a person of mean capacity to behavior that is agreeable to Christian rules of humility, meekness, and charity, and do so far more readily and precisely than the most diligent study, and elaborate reasonings of a man of the strongest faculties, who does not have a Christian spirit within him. So also will a spirit of love towards God, and a holy fear and reverence towards God, and a filial confidence in God, and a heavenly disposition, teach and guide a man in his behavior.

It is an exceedingly difficult thing for a wicked man, destitute of Christian principles in his heart to guide him, to know how to demean himself like a Christian with the life and beauty, and heavenly sweetness of a truly holy, humble, Christ-like behavior. He does not know how to put on these garments; they do not fit him: Eccl. 10:2-3, “A wise man’s heart is at his right hand; but a fool’s heart is at his left. Indeed also, when a fool walks by the way, his wisdom fails him, and he says to everyone that he is a fool;” verse 15, “The labor of the foolish wearies every one of them, because he does not know how to go to the city.” Prov. 10:32, “The lips of the righteous know what is acceptable.” Chap. 15:2, “The tongue of the wise uses knowledge rightly; but the mouth of fools pours out foolishness.” And chap. 16:23, “The heart of the righteous teaches his mouth, and adds learning to his lips.”

The saints, thus judging actions by a spiritual taste, do not have a particular recourse to the express rules of God’s word with respect to every word and action that is before them. Yet their taste itself, in general, is subject to the rule of God’s word, and must be tested by that, rightly reasoning upon it. As a man with a rectified palate judges particular morsels by his taste, yet his palate itself must be judged by certain rules and reasons, as to whether it is right or not. But a spiritual taste of soul mightily helps the soul in its reasonings on the word of God, and in judging the true meaning of its rules. As it removes the prejudices of a depraved appetite, it naturally leads the thoughts in the right channel, and it throws light on the word of God. It causes the true meaning to come to mind most naturally through the harmony between the disposition and relish of a sanctified soul, and the true meaning of the rules of God’s word. Indeed, this harmony tends to bring the texts themselves to mind on proper occasions, just as the particular state of the stomach and palate tends to bring those particular foods and drinks to mind which are agreeable to their hunger. “Thus the children of God are led by the Spirit of God” Rom 8.14 in judging actions for themselves, and in their meditations on, judgment of, and application of the rules of God’s holy word. And so God “teaches them his statutes, and causes them to understand the way of his precepts;” which the Psalmist so often prays for. Psa 119.26-27

But this leading of the Spirit is exceedingly different from what some call leading – which in their estimation does not consist in teaching them the statutes and precepts that God has already given, but in giving them new precepts by immediate inward speech or suggestion. It does not have in it any tasting of the true excellency of things, or judging or discerning the nature of things at all. They do not determine what the will of God is by any taste or relish, or by any manner of judging the nature of things, but by an immediate dictate concerning the thing to
be done. There is no judgment or wisdom in the case. But in that leading of the Spirit which is unique to God’s children, he imparts that true wisdom and holy discretion which are so often spoken of in the word of God. It is as high above the other way as the stars are higher than a glowworm. It is what Balaam and Saul (who sometimes were led by the Spirit in that other way) never had, and no natural man can have without a change of nature.

What has been said of the nature of spiritual understanding, as consisting most essentially in a divine supernatural sense and relish of the heart, shows that there is nothing of it in this falsely supposed leading of the Spirit which has just been spoken of. But it also shows the difference between spiritual understanding, and all kinds and forms of enthusiasm; and all the imaginary sights of God, Christ, and heaven; and all supposed witnessing of the Spirit; and the testimonies about the love of God felt by immediate inward suggestion; and all impressions of future events; and immediate revelations of any secret facts whatever; and all overly enthusiastic impressions and applications of words of Scripture, as though they were words now immediately spoken by God to a particular person, with a new meaning, and carrying something more in them than the words contain as they lie in the Bible; and all interpretations of the mystical meaning of the Scripture by supposed immediate revelation. None of these things consists in a divine sense and relish of the heart, or of the holy beauty and excellency of divine things. Nor do they have anything to do with such a sense. Instead, they all consist in impressions in the head; they are all to be referred to under the heading of impressions on the imagination; and they consist in stimulating external ideas in the mind, whether ideas of outward shapes and colors, spoken words, written letters; or ideas of things that are external and tangible – actions that are done or events that are accomplished or will be accomplished.

An enthusiastic supposed manifestation of the love of God, is made by exciting an idea of a smiling countenance, or some other pleasant outward appearance, or by the idea of pleasant words that are spoken or written, excited in the imagination, or by some pleasant bodily sensation. So when persons have an imaginary revelation of some secret fact, it is by exciting external ideas, either of some words, implying a declaration of that fact, or some visible or tangible circumstances of such a fact. So the supposed leading of the Spirit to do the will of God in outward behavior, occurs either by exciting the idea of words in their minds (which are outward things) – either the words of Scripture or other words which they consider an immediate command of God – or else by exciting and strongly impressing the ideas of the outward actions themselves. So when an interpretation of a Scripture type or allegory is immediately, in an extraordinary way, strongly suggested, it is done by suggesting words to the mind, as though someone secretly whispered and told their meaning, or by exciting other ideas in the imagination.

Such experiences and revelations as these, commonly raise the affections of those deluded by them, to a great height; they make a mighty uproar in both soul and body. And a great part of the false religion that has been in the world from one age to another, consists in such revelations as these, and in the affections that flow from them. The experiences of the ancient Pythagoreans among the heathen consisted in such things. Many others among them had strange ecstasies and raptures, and pretended to have a divine inspiration, and immediate revelations from heaven. The experiences of the Essenes, an ancient sect among the Jews at and after the time of the apostles, seem to have consisted in such things. Many others among them had strange ecstasies and raptures, and pretended to have a divine inspiration, and immediate revelations from heaven. The experiences of the Essenes, an ancient sect among the Jews at and after the time of the apostles, seem to have consisted in such things. Many others among them had strange ecstasies and raptures, and pretended to have a divine inspiration, and immediate revelations from heaven. The experiences of the ancient Gnostics, and Montanists, and many other sects of ancient heretics in the primitive ages of the Christian church, consisted in such things. The pretended immediate conversations with God and Christ, and saints and angels of heaven, claimed by the Monks, Anchorites, and Recluses that formerly abounded in the Church of Rome, consisted in such things as these. So did the pretended high experiences and great spirituality of many sects of enthusiasts that swarmed in
the world after the Reformation. And in these things seems to lie the religion of many kinds of enthusiasts of the present day.

It is chiefly by this sort of religion that Satan transforms himself into an angel of light. And it is what he has most successfully made use of to confound hopeful and happy revivals of religion from the beginning of the Christian church to this day. When the Spirit of God is poured out to begin a glorious work, then the old serpent, as fast as possible, and by all means, introduces this bastard religion, and mingles it with the true. From time to time this quickly brings all things into confusion. The pernicious consequence of it is not easily imagined or conceived of until we see and are amazed by its awful effects, and the dismal desolation it has made. If the revival of true religion is very great at its start, and this bastard comes in, there is danger of its doing what Gideon’s bastard son Abimelech did. He did not leave until he had slain every one of Gideon’s seventy true-born sons except one, who was forced to flee. Therefore the watch and guard that ministers maintain against such things should be great and strict, especially at a time of great awakening. For men, especially the common people, are easily bewitched by such things; they have such a glaring and glistering show of high religion about them. The devil hides his own shape, and appears as an angel of light, so that men may not be afraid of him.

All these delusions of Satan, false religion and counterfeit graces and affections, seem to be formed in the imagination or fantasy. Here is the devil’s grand lurking place, the very nest of foul and delusive spirits. It is very doubtful whether the devil can come at the soul of man to affect it at all, or to excite any thought or motion in it, or to produce any effect whatever in it, by any other way than by fantasy. This is that power of the soul by which it receives and becomes the subject of any ideas of outward and tangible things. As to the laws and means which the Creator has established for the intercourse and communication of unembodied spirits, we know nothing about them. We do not know by what medium they manifest their thoughts to each other, or excite thoughts in each other. But as to spirits that are united to bodies, those bodies God has united them to, are their medium of communication. They have no other medium of acting on other creatures, or being acted on by them, than the body. Therefore it is not to be supposed that Satan can excite any thought, or produce any effect in the soul of man, in any way other than by some motion of the animal spirits, or by causing some motion or alteration in something which pertains to the body. There is reason to think that the devil cannot produce thoughts in the soul any other way than by the medium of the body. He cannot directly know the thoughts of the soul. Scripture abundantly declares that this is unique to the omniscient God. And it is not likely that the devil can directly produce an effect which is outside his direct view. It seems unreasonable to suppose that his direct agency would be out of his own sight, or that it would be impossible for him to see what he directly does himself. Is it not unreasonable to suppose that any intelligent agent should, by the act of his own will, produce effects according to his understanding, or agreeable to his own thoughts, and do so directly, and yet those effects produced are beyond the reach of his understanding, and of his direct perception of them? But if the devil cannot produce thoughts in the soul directly, or in any way other than by the animal spirits, or by the body, then it follows that he never brings to pass anything in the soul except by the imagination or fantasy, or by stimulating external ideas in the mind.

For we know that alterations in the body immediately excite no other sort of ideas in the mind, except external ideas, or ideas of the outward senses, or ideas which are of the same outward nature. As for reflection, abstraction, reasoning, etc., and those thoughts and inward motions

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9 Such as the Anabaptists, Antinomians, and Familists, the followers of N. Stork, Th. Muncer, Jo. Becold, Henry Pfeiser, David George, Casper Swenckfield, Henry Nicolas Johannes Agreola Eislebius; and the many wild enthusiasts that were in England in the days of Oliver Cromwell; and the followers of Mrs. Hutchison in New England. This is apparent from the particular and large accounts given of all these sects by that eminently holy man, Mr. Samuel Rutherford, in his Display of the Spiritual Antichrist. The experiences of the late French prophets and their followers consisted in such things as these.
which are the fruits of these acts of the mind, they are not the after-effects of impressions on the body. So it must be only by the imagination that Satan has access to the soul, to tempt and delude it, or to suggest anything to it. And this seems to be the reason why persons that are under the disease of melancholy, ordinarily are visibly and remarkably subject to the suggestions and temptations of Satan. It is a disease which uniquely affects the animal spirits, and is attended by weakness in that part of the body which is the fountain of the animal spirits, the brain, which is the seat of fantasy. It is by impressions made on the brain, that any ideas are excited in the mind by the motion of the animal spirits, or by any changes made in the body. The brain being thus weakened and diseased, it is less under the command of the higher faculties of the soul, and it yields more easily to extrinsic impressions. It is overpowered by the disordered motions of the animal spirits, and so the devil has greater advantage to affect the mind by working on the imagination. Thus Satan, when he tosses in those horrid suggestions into the minds of many melancholy persons, which they have no hand in themselves, he does it by stimulating imaginary ideas, either of some dreadful words or sentences, or other horrid outward ideas. When he tempsts other persons who are not melancholy, he does it by presenting to their imagination, in a lively and alluring manner, the objects of their lusts, or by stimulating ideas of words, and so he stimulates thoughts by them; or by promoting an imagination of outward actions, events, or circumstances, etc. The ways by which the mind might be led into all kinds of evil thoughts, by stimulating external ideas in the imagination, are innumerable.

If persons keep no guard at these avenues of Satan by which he has access to the soul to tempt and delude the soul, they will likely encounter him often. Especially if, instead of guarding against him, they lay themselves open to him, and seek and invite him, because he appears as an angel of light and counterfeits the illuminations and graces of the Spirit of God. He does this by inward whispers and immediate suggestions of facts and events. He does it by pleasant voices, beautiful images, and other impressions on the imagination. There are many who are deluded by such things, and are lifted up with them, and seek after them, who have a continued course of them, and can have them almost at will. And this is especially so when their pride and conceit have the greatest occasion for them, in order to make a show of them before company. With them, it is something like it is with those who are professors of the art of telling where lost things can be found – by impressions made on their imaginations. They lay themselves open to the devil who is always on hand to give them the desired impression.

Before I finish with this heading of imaginations, counterfeit spiritual light, and affections that arise from them, I want to prevent any misunderstanding of what has been said. Let it be observed that I am far from determining that no affections are spiritual which are attended by imaginary ideas. Such is the nature of man that he can scarcely think of anything intensely,

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10 “The imagination is that place in the soul in which the devil often appears. Indeed (to speak exactly) the devil has no efficient power over the rational part of a man: he cannot change the will; he cannot alter the heart of a man. So that the utmost he can do, in tempting a man to sin, is by persuasion and suggestion only. But how does the devil do this? Specifically, by working upon the imagination. He observes the temper, and bodily constitution of a man; and thereupon he suggests to a man’s fancy, and he injects his fiery darts into it, by which the mind will come to be worked upon. The devil then, though he has no imperious efficacy over your will, yet because he can thus stir and move your imagination, and you being naturally destitute of grace, cannot withstand these suggestions: hence it is that any sin in your imagination, though only in the outward works of the soul, yet it quickly lays hold on all. And indeed, by this means arise those horrible delusions that are in many erroneous ways of religion; all of it is because their imaginations are corrupted. Indeed, how often are these diabolical delusions of the imagination taken for the gracious operation of God’s Spirit! It is from this that many have pretended to enthusiasms: they leave the Scriptures and wholly attend to what they perceive and feel within them.” Burgess on Original Sin, p. 369. The great Turretine, speaking on that question, What is the power of angels? says, “As to bodies, there is no doubt but that they can do a great deal upon all sorts of elementary and sublunary bodies [i.e., of this earth], to move them locally and variously to agitate them. It is also certain, that they can act upon the external and internal senses, to excite them or to bind them. But as to the rational soul itself, they can do nothing immediately upon that: for to God alone, who knows and searches the hearts, and who has them in his hands, does it also pertain to bow and move them wherever he will. But angels can act upon the rational soul, only mediatly, by imaginations.” Theolog. Elench. Loc. VII. Quest. 7.
without some kind of outward ideas. They arise and interpose themselves unavoidably in the
course of a man’s thoughts – though they are often very confused, and disregarded by the mind.
When the mind is greatly engaged, and its thoughts are intense, the imagination is often
stronger, and the outward idea is more lively, especially in persons with some constitutions of
body. But there is a great difference between imaginations that arise from strong affections, and
strong affections that arise from lively imaginations. The former may found, and doubtless often
is, in cases of truly gracious affections. The affections do not arise from the imagination, nor do
they depend on it; to the contrary, the imagination is only the accidental effect or consequent of
the affection, through the infirmity of human nature. But when the affection arises from the
imagination, and is built on it as its foundation, and not on a spiritual illumination or revelation,
then however elevated the affection may be, it is worthless and vain. This is the drift of what has
now been said about impressions on the imagination. Having observed this, I proceed to
another mark of gracious affections.
5. Gracious affections are attended by a conviction of divine things

 Truly gracious affections are attended by a reasonable and spiritual conviction of the reality and certainty of divine things.

This seems to be implied in the text that was laid as the foundation of this discourse: “Whom having not seen, you love; in whom, though now you do not see him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy unspeakable, and full of glory.”

All those who are truly gracious persons have a solid, full, thorough, and effectual conviction of the truth of the great things of the gospel. I mean, that they no longer hesitate between two opinions. The great doctrines of the gospel cease to be doubtful things any longer, or matters of opinion which, though probable, are still disputable. Rather, with them these are settled and determined points, undoubted and indisputable, so that they are not afraid to risk everything on the truth of them. Their conviction is an effective conviction, so that the great, spiritual, mysterious, and invisible things of the gospel have the influence of real and certain things on them. They have the weight and power of real things in their hearts. Accordingly they rule their affections, and they govern them through the course of their lives. With respect to Christ being the Son of God, and Savior of the world, and the great things that he has revealed concerning himself and his Father, and another world — truly gracious persons not only have a predominant opinion that these things are true, yielding their assent to them as they do in many other matters of doubtful speculation; but they see these things are really so. Their eyes are opened, so that they see that Jesus really is the Christ, the Son of the living God. As to the things which Christ has revealed, of God’s eternal purposes and designs concerning fallen man, and the glorious and everlasting things prepared for the saints in another world, they see that these are indeed so. Therefore these things carry great weight with them, and have a mighty power on their hearts, and an influence over their practice, corresponding in some measure to their infinite importance.

It is abundantly manifest from the Holy Scriptures that all true Christians have such a conviction about the truth of the things of the gospel. I will mention a few places. Matt. 16:15-17, “But whom do you say that I am? Simon Peter answered and said, you are Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus answered and said to him, Blessed are you, Simon Barjona; My Father which is in heaven has revealed it to you.” John 6:68-69, “You have the words of eternal life. And we believe and are sure that you are that Christ, the son of the living God.” John 17:6-8, “I have manifested your name to the men which you gave me out of the world. Now they have known that all things whatever that you have given me, are of you. For I have given to them the words which you gave me; and they have received them, and have surely known that I came from you, and they have believed that you sent me.” Acts 8:37, “If you believe with all your heart, you may.” 2. Cor. 4:11-14, “We who live are always delivered to death for Jesus’ sake. Death works in us. We having the spirit of faith, according to what is written, I believed, and therefore I have spoken; we also believe, and therefore we speak; knowing, that he which raised up the Lord Jesus, shall raise us up also by Jesus, and shall present us with you.” Together with ver. 16, “For which cause we do not faint.” And ver. 18 “While we do not look at the things which are seen,” etc. And chap. 5:1, “For we know, that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God.” And ver. 6-8, “Therefore we are always confident, knowing that while we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord; for we walk by faith, not by sight. We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and present with the Lord.” 2Tim. 1:12, “For which cause I also suffer these things; nevertheless I am not ashamed; for I know whom I have believed, and I am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed to him against that day.” Heb. 3:6, “Whose house are we, if we hold fast the confidence, and the rejoicing of the hope firm to the end.” Heb. 11:1, “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not seen;” together with that whole
chapter. 1John 4:13-16, “By this we know that we dwell in him, and he in us, because he has
given us of his Spirit. And we have seen, and testify, that the Father sent the Son to be the Savior
of the world. Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwells in him, and he in God.
And we have known and believed the love that God has towards us.” Chap. 5:4-5, “For whatever
is born of God, overcomes the world; and this is the victory that overcomes the world, even our
faith. Who is he that overcomes the world, but he that believes that Jesus is the Son of God?”

Therefore truly gracious affections are attended by such a conviction and persuasion of the truth
of the things of the gospel, and by the sight of their evidence and reality, as these and other
Scriptures speak of.

Many religious affections are not accompanied by such a conviction of the judgment. Many
apprehensions and ideas which some call divine revelations, are affecting, but not convincing.
Though for a little while, they may seem to be more persuaded of the truth of religion than they
used to be, and their affections may produce a positive assent. But like many of Christ’s hearers
who believed for a while, they have no thorough and effectual conviction. Nor is there any great
and abiding change in them in this respect: if they were convinced, then where formerly they did
not realize the reality and certainty of the great things of the gospel, these things should now
appear new to them; they should have quite another view of them than they used to. Yet many
who have been greatly moved by religious affections, and think they have been converted, are no
more convinced of the truth of the gospel than they used to be; or at least, there is no
remarkable alteration. They do not live under the influence and power of a realizing conviction
of the infinite and eternal things which the gospel reveals. If they were, it would be impossible
for them to live as they do. Because their affections are not accompanied by a thorough
conviction of the mind, those affections are not to be depended on at all. However great a show
and noise they make, it is like the blaze of tow, or the crackling of thorns, or like a quickly
flourishing blade of grass on stony ground; it has no root or depth of earth to maintain its life.

Some persons, under high affections, and with a confident persuasion of their good estate,
experience what they ignorantly call “seeing the truth of the word of God,” though it is very far
from it; they have some text of Scripture coming to their minds in a sudden and extraordinary
way, immediately declaring to them (they suppose) that their sins are forgiven, or that God loves
them and will save them. They may have a chain of Scriptures coming to mind one after another,
to the same purpose; and they are convinced that it is truth; i.e., they are confident that it is
certainly so, that their sins are forgiven, and God loves them, etc. They say they know it is so.
When these words of Scripture are suggested to their minds, they suppose they are directly
spoken to by God, with this very meaning. And so they are ready to cry out, Truth, truth! It is
certainly so! The word of God is true! And they call this “seeing the truth of the word of God.”
But the whole of their faith amounts to no more than a strong confidence of their own good
estate. Thus they are confident that these words are true, which they suppose tell them they are
in a good estate – when indeed (as was shown before) there is no Scripture which directly
declares that any person is in a good estate, or can be in any way other than by consequence. So
that, instead of being a real sight of the truth of the word of God, this is a sight of nothing but a
phantom, and it is wholly a delusion. Truly, to see the truth of the word of God, is to see the
truth of the gospel. The gospel is the glorious doctrine that the word of God contains concerning
God and Jesus Christ, the way of salvation by him, and the world of glory that he has entered
into, which was purchased for all those who believe. It is not a revelation that such and such
particular persons are true Christians, and will go to heaven. Therefore, those affections which

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1 That is, a conviction that “makes real,” in a practical and evident way, the truth which they say they are convinced of.
   - WHG
2 “Tow” is an untwisted bundle of fibers such as flax, hemp or jute, lit on fire and used for a short-term torch. - WHG
3 “Consequence” refers to external evidences of an internal change of heart, produced by truly believing the gospel. - WHG
arise from no other persuasion of the truth of the word of God than this presumption, arise from a delusion, and not from a true conviction. Consequently, they are themselves delusive and vain.

But if the religious affections that persons have do indeed arise from a strong persuasion of the truth of the Christian religion, their affections are no better unless their persuasion is a reasonable persuasion or conviction. By a “reasonable conviction,” I mean a conviction founded on real evidence, a good reason, a just ground for that conviction. Men may have a strong persuasion that the Christian religion is true when their persuasion is not built on any evidence at all. Instead, it is built entirely on education and the opinion of others. Many Muslims are strongly persuaded of the truth of the Muslim religion because their fathers, neighbors, and nation believe it. That belief of the truth of the Christian religion which is built on the same grounds as a Muslim’s belief of the Muslim religion, is the same sort of belief. Though the thing believed happens to be better, that does not make the belief itself a better sort; for though the thing believed happens to be true, yet the belief does not owe itself to this truth, but to education. So just as this conviction is no better than the Muslim’s conviction, so the affections that flow from it are no better in themselves than the religious affections of Muslims.

But suppose that the belief of Christian doctrines from which a person’s affections arise, are not merely from education, but indeed arise from reasons and arguments which are offered. It still does not necessarily follow from this that their affections are truly gracious. For in order to be truly gracious, it is requisite not only that the belief which their affections arise from is reasonable, but that it is also a spiritual belief or conviction. I suppose no one will doubt that some natural men yield a kind of assent of their judgments to the truth of the Christian religion, from the rational proofs or arguments that are offered to evince it. Judas doubtless thought Jesus was the Messiah from the things which he saw and heard; yet all along he was a devil. So in John 2:23-25, we read of “many that believed in Christ’s name when they saw the miracles that he did;” yet Christ did not trust them, because he knew what was in a man. Simon the sorcerer believed when he beheld the miracles and signs which were done; yet he remained in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity, Acts 8:13, 23. If there is this kind of assent or belief in some natural men, no one can doubt that religious affections may arise from that assent or belief – as we read of some who believed only for awhile; they were greatly affected and received the word with joy.

It is evident that there is a spiritual conviction of the truth, or a belief, that is unique to those who are spiritual, those who are regenerated and have the Spirit of God, in his holy communications, dwelling in them as a vital principle. Their conviction not only differs from what natural men have, in that it is accompanied by good works, but the belief itself is different. The assent and conviction of the judgment is of a kind that is unique to those who are spiritual; natural men are wholly destitute of it. This is evident by John 17:8, “They have believed that you sent me.” Tit. 1:1, “According to the faith of God’s elect, and the acknowledgment of the truth which accords with godliness” (Tit 1:1). John 16:27, “The Father himself loves you, because you have loved me, and have believed that I came from God.” 1John 4:15, “Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwells in him, and he in God.” Chap. 5:1, “Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ, is born of God.” Ver. 10, “He that believes on the Son of God, has the witness in himself.”

We are led to determine what spiritual conviction of the judgment is from what has been said already, under the former heading of spiritual understanding. Conviction of the judgment arises from the illumination of the understanding. Passing right judgment on things, depends on having a right apprehension or idea of them. Therefore it follows that a spiritual conviction of the truth of the great things of the gospel, is the sort of conviction that arises from having a spiritual view or apprehension of those things in mind. This is evident from the Scripture. It often represents that a saving belief of the reality and divinity of the things that are proposed
Distinguishing Signs of Truly Gracious and Holy Affections

and exhibited to us in the gospel, comes from the Spirit of God. He enlightens the mind to have right apprehensions of the nature of those things. Thus he unveils or reveals them, and enables the mind to view them and see them as they are. Luke 10:21-22, “I thank you, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and prudent and have revealed them to babes: even so, Father, for so it seemed good in your sight. All things are delivered to me by my Father: and no man knows who the Son is except the Father; and who the Father is except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son reveals him.” John 6:40, “And this is the will of him that sent me, that everyone who sees the Son, and believes on him, may have everlasting life.” Here it is plain that true faith arises from a spiritual sight of Christ. John 17:6-8, “I have manifested your name to the men you gave me out of the world. Now they have known that all things you have given me, are from you. For I have given to them the words which you gave me; and they have received them, and have known surely that I came from you, and they have believed that you sent me.” Christ manifested God’s name to the disciples, and gave them a true apprehension and view of divine things; and by this they knew that Christ’s doctrine was of God, and that Christ himself was of God, and was sent by him: Matt. 16:16-17, “Simon Peter said, You are Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus answered and said to him, Blessed are you, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood has not revealed it to you, but my Father which is in heaven.” 1John 5:10, “He that believes on the Son of God, has the witness in himself.” Gal. 1:15-16, “But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother’s womb, and called me by his grace to reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the heathen, I did not immediately confer with flesh and blood.”

If that is a spiritual conviction of the divinity and reality of the things exhibited in the gospel, which arises from a spiritual understanding of those things, then I have already shown what that is. In short, it consists in a sense and taste of the divine, supreme, and holy excellency and beauty of those things. The mind is spiritually convinced of the divinity and truth of the great things of the gospel, when that conviction arises (directly or indirectly) from such a sense or view of the divine excellency and glory that is exhibited there. This clearly follows from what has already been said. The Scripture is very plain and express about this:

2Cor. 4:3-6: “But if our gospel is hidden, it is hidden to those who are lost; in whom the God of this world has blinded the minds of those who do not believe, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them. For we do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus’ sake. For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, has shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.”

It is also plain in the last verse of the foregoing chapter, which introduces it: “but we all, with open face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image, from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.” Nothing can be more evident than this: the apostle is saying that a saving belief of the gospel arises from the mind being enlightened to behold the divine glory of the things the gospel exhibits.

This view or sense of the divine glory, and of the unparalleled beauty of the things that are exhibited to us in the gospel, has a tendency to convince the mind of their divinity in two ways: directly and indirectly (or remotely).

1. A view of this divine glory directly convinces the mind of the divinity of these things, as this glory is in itself a direct, clear, and all-conquering evidence of it – especially when it is clearly revealed, or when this supernatural sense is given to a good degree.

The one that has his judgment thus directly convinced and assured of the divinity of the things of the gospel, by a clear view of their divine glory, has a reasonable conviction. His belief and assurance is entirely agreeable to reason. This is because the divine glory and beauty of divine things is, in itself, real evidence of their divinity – it is the most direct and strong evidence of it.
The one that truly sees the divine, transcendent, supreme glory of those things which are divine, knows their divinity intuitively. He not only argues that they are divine, but he sees that they are divine; he sees what divinity chiefly consists of. For the true notion of divinity chiefly consists in this glory, which is so vastly and inexpressibly distinguished from the glory of artificial things, and from all other glory. **God is God.** He is distinguished from all other beings; and he is exalted above them chiefly by his divine beauty, which is infinitely different from all other beauty. Therefore, those who see the stamp of this glory in divine things, see divinity in them; they see God in them. And they see they are divine, because they see in them that in which the truest idea of divinity consists. Thus a soul may have a kind of intuitive knowledge of the divinity of the things exhibited in the gospel. It is not that a person judges that the doctrines of the gospel are from God, without any argument or deduction at all; but it is without a long chain of arguments. There is only one argument, and the evidence for it is **direct.** The mind ascends to the truth of the gospel by just one step, and that is its divine glory.

It would be very strange, if any professing Christian were to deny the possibility that there is an excellency in divine things, which is so transcendent and exceedingly different from what is in other things, that if it were seen, it would evidently distinguish them. We cannot rationally doubt that things which are divine, and pertain to the Supreme Being, are vastly different from things which are human. There is a Godlike high and glorious excellency in them, that so distinguishes them from the things of men, that the difference is inevitable. Therefore, if seen, they will have a most convincing and satisfying influence upon anyone, that they are what they are: divine. Doubtless there is that glory and excellency in the divine Being, by which he is so infinitely distinguished from all other beings, that if it were seen, he might be known by it. It would therefore be unreasonable to deny, that it is possible for God to give manifestations of this distinguishing excellency in those things by which he is pleased to make himself known – so that this distinguishing excellency may be clearly seen in them. There are natural excellencies that evidently distinguish their subjects or authors to anyone who beholds them. How vastly different is the speech of an understanding man from that of a little child! And how greatly distinguished is the speech of some men of great genius, such as Homer, Cicero, Milton, Locke, Addison, and others, from the speech of many other understanding men! There are no limits to be set on the degrees of the manifestation of mental excellency, just as there are none to be set on speech. But the appearances of the natural perfections of God, in the manifestations he makes of himself, may doubtless be unspeakably and more evidently distinguishing than any excellencies that may exist in the worms of the earth. Someone who is well acquainted with mankind and their works may, by viewing the sun, know that the sun is no human work.

It is reasonable to suppose that when Christ comes at the end of the world, in the glory of his Father, it will be with such ineffable appearances of divinity, that they will leave no doubt to the inhabitants of the world, even the most obstinate infidels, that the one who appears is a divine person. But above all, the manifestations of the moral and spiritual glory of the divine Being (which is the proper beauty of the divinity) bring their own evidence, and they tend to assure the heart. Thus the disciples were assured that Jesus was the Son of God “for they beheld his glory, as the glory of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth,” John 1:14. Christ appeared in the glory of his transfiguration to his disciples, with an outward glory that was manifested to their physical eyes. It was a sweet and admirable symbol and semblance of his spiritual glory, along with his spiritual glory itself which was also manifested to their minds. The manifestation of glory was such that it perfectly, and with good reason, assured them of his divinity. This appears by what the Apostle Peter says concerning it. 2Pet. 1:16-18, “For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For he received from God the Father, honor and glory when a voice came to him from the excellent glory saying, ‘This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased;’ and we heard this voice which came from heaven,
when we were with him on the holy mount.” The apostle calls that mount, the holy mount, because of the manifestation of Christ which was made to their minds there, and with which their minds were especially impressed and ravished. This manifestation was the glory of his holiness, or the beauty of his moral excellency; as another disciple who was there expressed it, “his glory, as full of grace and truth.” Joh 1.14

Now this distinguishing glory of the divine Being has its brightest appearance and manifestation in the things proposed and exhibited to us in the gospel – in the doctrines that are taught there, in the words that are spoken there, and the divine counsels, acts, and works that are revealed there. These things have the clearest, most admirable and distinguishing representations and exhibitions of the glory of God’s moral perfections, that were ever made to the world. And if indeed there is such a distinguishing, evidential manifestation of divine glory in the gospel, then it is reasonable to suppose that there may be such a thing as seeing that glory in it. What would hinder it from being seen? It is not an argument to say that it cannot be seen, or that some do not see it, even though they may be discerning men in temporal matters. If such ineffable, distinguishing, and evidential excellencies exist in the gospel, then it is reasonable to suppose that they are not to be discerned except by the special influence and enlightening of the Spirit of God. An uncommon force of mind is needed to discern the distinguishing excellencies of the works of authors of great genius: those things in Milton which, to lowly judges, appear to be tasteless and imperfect, are his inimitable excellencies in the eyes of those who are of greater discernment and taste. And if there is a book of which God is the author, then it is reasonable to suppose that the distinguishing glories of his word are such that the corruption of men’s hearts would blind them from discerning the beauties of that book. Their corruption, above all things, alienates men from the Deity. It makes the heart dull and stupid to any sense or taste of those things in which the moral glory of the divine perfections consists. Therefore, they will not see them unless God is pleased to enlighten them, and to restore a holy taste to them, so that they may discern and relish divine beauties.

This sense of the spiritual excellency and beauty of divine things also tends to directly convince the mind of the truth of the gospel. This is because many of the most important things declared in the gospel, are hidden from the eyes of natural men. The truth of them, in effect, consists in this excellency; or it so immediately depends upon and results from it, that by seeing this excellency, the truth of those things is seen. As soon as the eyes are opened to behold the holy beauty and amiableness that is in divine things, a multitude of the most important doctrines of the gospel that depend on it, are at once seen to be true (though they all appear strange and dark to natural men). From this arises what the word of God declares to be true concerning the exceeding evil of sin. The same eye that discerns the transcendent beauty of holiness, necessarily sees it the exceeding odiousness of sin. The same taste which relishes the sweetness of true moral good, tastes the bitterness of moral evil. And by this means, a man sees his own sinfulness and loathsomeness – for he now has a sense to discern objects of this nature; and so he sees the truth of what the word of God declares concerning the exceeding sinfulness of mankind, which he did not see before. He now sees the dreadful pollution of his heart, and the desperate depravity of his nature in a new way; for his soul now has a sense given to it to feel the pain of such a disease. And this shows him the truth of what the Scripture reveals concerning the corruption of man’s nature, his original sin, and the ruinous, undone condition that man is in. It shows him his need for a Savior – his need for the mighty power of God to renew his heart and change his nature.

By seeing the true excellency of holiness, men see the glory of all those things which both reason and Scripture show to be in the divine Being; for it has been shown that their glory depends on this. By this they can see the truth of all that the Scripture declares concerning God’s glorious excellency and majesty, his being the fountain of all good and the only happiness of the creature, etc. Again, this shows to the mind the truth of what the Scripture teaches concerning the evil of
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sin against so glorious a God; and also the truth of what it teaches concerning sin’s just desert, and of that dreadful punishment which it reveals. It also shows the impossibility of our offering any satisfaction or sufficient atonement for what is so infinitely evil and heinous. This again shows the truth of what the Scripture reveals concerning the necessity of a Savior, and the necessity to offer an atonement of infinite value for our sin. This sense of spiritual beauty that has been spoken of, enables the soul to see the glory of those things which the gospel reveals concerning the person of Christ. And so it enables us to see the exceeding beauty and dignity of his person that appear in what the gospel exhibits of his word, works, acts, and life. This apprehension of the superlative dignity of Christ’s person shows the truth of what the gospel declares concerning the value of his blood and righteousness, and so the infinite excellency of that offering he made to God for us, and so its sufficiency to atone for our sins and recommend us to God. Thus the Spirit of God reveals the way of salvation by Christ. And thus the soul sees the fitness and suitableness of this way of salvation; it sees the admirable wisdom of the scheme, and the perfect solution of the provision that the gospel displays (as made for us) to meet our needs. A sense of true divine beauty thus being given to the soul, the soul discerns the beauty of every part of the gospel scheme. This also shows the soul the truth of what the word of God declares concerning man’s chief happiness, as consisting in holy exercises and enjoyments. This shows the truth of what the gospel declares concerning the unspeakable glory of the heavenly state. What the prophecies of the Old Testaments and the writings of the apostles declare, concerning the glory of the Messiah’s kingdom, is now all plain – and also what the Scripture teaches concerning the reasons and grounds for our duty. The truth of all these things that are revealed in the Scripture, and many more things that might be mentioned, appears to the soul only by first imparting that spiritual taste of divine beauty which has been spoken of. These were things hidden to the soul before.

Besides all this, the truth of all those things which the Scripture says about experiential religion is known by this same means – for they are now experienced. And this convinces the soul that the one who knew the heart of man better than we know our own hearts, and who perfectly knew the nature of virtue and holiness, was the author of the Scriptures. Opening to our view, with such clarity, this world of wonderful and glorious truth in the gospel that was unknown before, and quite above the view of a natural eye (but now appearing so clear and bright), has a powerful and invincible influence on the soul, to persuade it of the divinity of the gospel.

Unless men come to a reasonable, solid persuasion and conviction of the truth of the gospel, by the internal evidences of it, in the way that has been spoken of – by a sight of its glory – it is impossible that those who are illiterate and unacquainted with history, would have any thorough and effectual conviction of it at all. Without this conviction, they may still see a great deal of probability in it. It may be reasonable for them to give credit to what learned men and historians tell them: who make it look probable and rational to them that the Christian religion is true; and that it would be unreasonable not to entertain this opinion. But the evidence they can have from history cannot be sufficient to produce a conviction so clear and evident, and so assuring, that it induces them to boldly sell all, and to confidently and fearlessly run the risk of losing it all, and of enduring the most exquisite and long-continued tortments, and to trample the world underfoot, and to count all things but dung for Christ. It is impossible for men who do not have something of a general view of the historical world, or the procession of history from age to age, to come to the truth of Christianity by the force of arguments, drawn from history, to that degree needed to effectually induce them to risk everything on it. After all that learned men have said to them, there will remain innumerable doubts in their minds. They will be ready, when squeezed by some great trial of their faith, to say, “How do I know this or that? How do I know when these histories were written? Learned men tell me these histories were attested in their day, but how do I know that there were such attestations back then? They tell me there is just as good a reason to believe these facts, as any other facts that are related after such a long time; but how
do I know that the other facts related about those ages ever happened? Those who do not have something of a general view of the series of historical events, and of the state of mankind from age to age, cannot see the clear evidence from history of the truth of facts in distant ages. Instead, endless doubts and scruples will remain.

But the gospel was given not only for learned men. There are at least nineteen in twenty, if not ninety-nine in a hundred, of those for whom the Scriptures were written, that are not capable of any certain or effectual conviction of the divine authority of the Scriptures by the arguments that learned men make use of. If men who have been brought up in Heathenism must wait for a clear and certain conviction of the truth of Christianity, until they have enough learning and acquaintance with the histories of politer nations, to see clearly the force of such arguments, then it will make the evidence of the gospel immensely cumbersome to them; and it will render the propagation of the gospel infinitely difficult among them. The condition of the Houssatunnuck Indians and others, who have recently manifested a desire to be instructed in Christianity, is a miserable one, if they cannot come in any other way than by having sufficient evidence of the truth of Christianity – evidence that would induce them to sell everything for Christ.

It is unreasonable to suppose that God provided for his people no more than probable evidence of the truth of the gospel. He has with great care abundantly provided, and given to them, the most convicting, assuring, satisfying and manifold evidence of his faithfulness in the covenant of grace. As David says, he “made a covenant, ordered in all things and sure.” Therefore it is rational to suppose that at the same time, he would not fail to order the matter so that no great and clear evidence would be lacking that this is his covenant, and that these promises are his promises, or that the Christian religion is true, and the gospel is his word. Otherwise those great assurances he has given us are in vain – of his faithfulness in his covenant, which he confirmed with his oath, and which he variously established by seals and pledges. For the evidence that it is his covenant, is the foundation on which all the force and effect of those other assurances stand. We may therefore undoubtedly suppose and conclude that there is some sort of evidence, which God has given, that this covenant and these promises are his, beyond all mere probability. There are some grounds of the assurance of this presented to us, if we were not blind to them, which tend to give a higher persuasion than arguing from history, human traditions etc. The illiterate and those unacquainted with history should be capable of receiving it. Indeed, what is good ground for the highest and most perfect assurance that mankind can have, is agreeable to those high expressions which the apostle uses in Heb. 10:22, “Let us draw near in full assurance of faith.” And Col. 2:2, “That their hearts might be comforted, being knit together in love, and to all the riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the acknowledgment of the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ.” It is reasonable to suppose that God would give the greatest evidence of those things which are the greatest, and the truth of which is of greatest importance to us. Therefore, if we are wise and act rationally, then we will have the greatest desire to have full, undoubting, and perfect assurance of it. But it is certain that such an assurance is not to be attained by most of those who live under the gospel, merely by hearing arguments that are fetched from ancient traditions, histories, and monuments.

If we come to fact and experience, there is not the least reason to suppose that one in a hundred of those who have been sincere Christians, and have had a heart to sell all for Christ, have come by their conviction of the truth of the gospel by such arguments. If we read over the histories of the many thousands that died martyrs for Christ, since the beginning of the Reformation, and that have cheerfully undergone extreme tortures, confident of the truth of the gospel, and we consider their circumstances and their advantages – how few of them there were that we can reasonably suppose ever came by their assured persuasion by such arguments; or for whom it was even possible to reasonably receive so full and strong an assurance from such arguments! Many of them were weak women and children. The greater part of them were illiterate persons.
Many of them had been brought up in popish ignorance and darkness and had only newly come out of it. They lived and died in times in which those arguments from antiquity and history, for the truth of Christianity, had been imperfectly handled. Indeed, it is only recently that these arguments have been set in a clear and convincing light, even by learned men themselves. And since it has been done, we have never had so few thorough believers among those who have been “educated” in the true religion, as we do now. Infidelity has never prevailed as much in any age as it does in this age – an age in which these arguments are handled to the greatest advantage.

True martyrs of Jesus Christ are not those who have only been strong in their opinion that the gospel of Christ is true, but those who have seen the truth of it. This is what the very name martyrs or witnesses implies (the name by which they are called in Scripture). They would be improperly called witnesses of the truth if they only declared they are very much of the opinion that such a thing is true. Only those who can and do testify that they have seen the truth of the thing they assert, are proper witnesses. John 3:11, “We speak of what we know, and testify of what we have seen.” John 1:34, “And I saw and bare witness that this is the Son of God.” 1John 4:14, “We have seen and testify that the Father sent the Son to be the Savior of the world.” Acts 22:14-15, “The God of our fathers has chosen you, that you should know his will, and see the just one, and that you should hear the voice of his mouth; for you shall be his witness to all men of what you have seen and heard.” True martyrs of Jesus Christ are called his witnesses. All the saints who declare their faith by their holy practice under great trials – which is the substance of things hoped for and the evidence of things not seen – are called witnesses, Heb. 11:1, and 12:1. This is because, by their profession and practice, they declare their assurance of the truth and divinity of the gospel. They have had the eyes of their minds enlightened to see divinity in the gospel, or to behold that unparalleled, ineffably excellent, and truly divine glory shining in it, which is altogether distinguishing, evidential, and convincing. They may truly be said to have seen God in it, and to have seen that it is indeed divine; and so they can speak in the style of witnesses. They not only say that they think the gospel is divine, but they say that it is divine, giving it as their testimony, because they have seen it to be so.

Doubtless Peter, James and John, after seeing that excellent glory of Christ on the mount, were ready to speak as witnesses when they came down, and to say positively that Jesus is the Son of God. As Peter says, they were eyewitnesses, 2Pet. 1:16. All nations will be ready to positively say this when they behold his glory at the Day of Judgment; though what will be universally seen will be only his natural glory, not his moral and spiritual glory (which is much more distinguishing). Yet it must be noted that, among those who have a spiritual sight of the divine glory of the gospel, there is great variety in the degrees of the strength of their faith, just as there is vast variety in the degrees of clarity in their views of this glory. But there is no true and saving faith, nor any spiritual conviction of the judgment of the truth of the gospel, that has no degree of this manifestation of its internal evidence. The gospel of the blessed God does not go abroad begging for its evidence, as much as some think. It has its highest and most proper evidence in itself. Great use may be made of external arguments. They are not to be neglected, but should be highly prized and valued. For they may be greatly serviceable to awaken unbelievers and bring them to a serious consideration of the truth, and to confirm the faith of true saints. Indeed, they may in some respect be subservient to begetting a saving faith in men. Though what was said before remains true: that there is no spiritual conviction of the judgment unless it arises from an apprehension of the spiritual beauty and glory of divine things. For, as observed, this apprehension or view has a tendency to convince the mind of the truth of the gospel in two ways, either directly or indirectly. Having therefore observed how it does this directly, I proceed now,

2. To observe how a view of this divine glory convinces the mind of the truth of Christianity more indirectly.
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First, it does so as the prejudices of the heart against the truth of divine things are removed by it, so that the mind thereby lies open to the force of the reasons which are offered. The mind of man is naturally full of enmity against the doctrines of the gospel. This is a disadvantage to those arguments that prove their truth; it causes them to lose their force upon the mind. But when a person has the divine excellency of Christian doctrines revealed to him, this destroys that enmity; it removes the prejudices and sanctifies his reason, which causes it to be open and free. Hence there is a vast difference as to the force that arguments have to convince the mind. The effect which Christ’s miracles had to convince the disciples, was very different from what those same miracles had to convince the Scribes and Pharisees. It was not that the disciples had stronger reasons, or that their reason was more improved; rather, their reason was sanctified. And those same blinding prejudices which the Scribes and Pharisees were under, were removed from the disciples by the sense they had of the excellency of Christ and his doctrine.

Secondly, divine glory not only removes the hindrances to reason, but it positively helps reason. It makes even the speculative notions more lively. It assists and engages the attention of the mind toward the kind of objects which causes it to have a clearer view of them, and to more clearly see their mutual relations. By this means, the ideas themselves, which otherwise are dim and obscure, have a light thrown on them; they are impressed with greater strength so that the mind can better judge them. This just like someone who beholds the objects on the face of the earth when the light of the sun is thrown on them. He has a greater advantage to discern them in their true forms and mutual relations, and to see the evidences of divine wisdom and skill in their contrivance, than someone who sees them in dim starlight or twilight.

What has been said may serve in some measure to show the nature of a spiritual conviction of the judgment of the truth and the reality of divine things. So it distinguishes truly gracious affections from others, for gracious affections are always attended by such a conviction of the judgment.

Before I finish with this heading, it is necessary to observe the ways by which some are deceived with respect to this matter; and to note several things that are sometimes taken to be spiritual and saving belief of the truth, which indeed are very different from it.

1. There is a degree of conviction of the truth of the great things of religion that arises from the common enlightenings of the Spirit of God. The more lively and tangible apprehension of the natural things of religion – such as natural men have who are under awakenings and ordinary illuminations – will give some degree of conviction of the truth of divine things beyond what they had before they were thus enlightened. For by such enlightenment, they see the manifestations that exist in the revelation made in the holy Scriptures. And they see the things exhibited in that revelation of the natural perfections of God, such as his greatness, power, and awful majesty. This tends to convince their minds that this is the word of a great and terrible God. From the tokens of God’s greatness and majesty in his word and works, which they have a great sense of, and from the ordinary influence of the Spirit of God, they may have a much greater conviction that these are indeed the words and works of a very great and invisible Being. The lively apprehension of the greatness of God which natural men may have, tends to make them aware of the great guilt which sin against such a God brings, and the dreadfulness of his wrath for sin. This tends to cause them to more easily and fully believe the revelation that the Scripture makes of another world, and the extreme misery that it threatens to indict on sinners. And so from that sense of the great natural good that exists in the things of religion, which is sometimes given in ordinary illuminations, men may be more induced to believe the truth of religion. Yet, persons may have these things, without any sense of the beauty and amiableness of the moral and holy excellency of the Christian religion. Therefore, there is no spiritual

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4 Such divine excellence is not revealed to him by an evangelist, but by the Spirit of God through regeneration. – WHG
conviction of the truth. Yet such natural convictions are sometimes mistaken for saving convictions, and the affections flowing from them are sometimes mistaken for saving affections.

2. The extraordinary impressions which are made on the imaginations of some persons, in their visions, strong impulses, and suggestions (as though they saw sights and had words spoken to them), may and often do produce a strong persuasion of the truth of invisible things. The general tendency of such things, in their final issue, is to draw men away from the word of God, and to cause them to reject the gospel, and to establish unbelief and atheism in them. Yet, for the present, they may and often do produce a confident persuasion of the truth of some things that are revealed in the Scriptures. However, their confidence is founded on delusion, and so it has no worth. For instance, say a person has by some invisible agent, immediately and strongly impressed on his imagination, the appearance of a bright light, and the glorious form of a person seated on a throne with great external majesty and beauty, who is uttering some remarkable words with great force and energy. The person who is the subject of such an operation, might be confident from what he has experienced, that there are invisible agents, spiritual beings. He knows that he had no hand in this extraordinary effect which he has experienced; he might also be confident that this is Christ whom he saw and heard speaking. And this might make him confident that there is a Christ, and that Christ reigns on a throne in heaven, just as he saw him. He might be confident that the words which he heard Christ speak are true, etc. In the same way, the lying miracles of the Papists may, for the present, produce in the minds of ignorant and deluded people, a strong persuasion of the truth of many things that are declared in the New Testament. Thus when the images of Christ in Popish churches are, on extraordinary occasions, made by priestcraft to appear to the people as if they wept, and shed fresh blood, and moved, and uttered such and such words – the people might be truly persuaded that it is a miracle wrought by Christ himself. From this, they might be confident that there is a Christ, and that what they are told of his death and sufferings, resurrection and ascension, and present government of the world, is true. For they might look upon this miracle as certain evidence of all these things, and a kind of ocular demonstration of them. This may be the influence of these lying wonders for the present – though their general tendency is not to convince anyone that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh, but to promote atheism in the end. Even the intercourse which Satan has with witches, and their experience of his immediate power, has a tendency to convince them that some of the doctrines of religion are true – particularly the reality of an invisible world, or a world of spirits, which is contrary to the doctrine of the Sadducees. The general tendency of Satan’s influence is delusion. Yet he may mix truth with his lies, so that his lies may not be so easily discovered.

There are multitudes that are deluded with a counterfeit faith, from impressions made on their imagination in the way just spoken of:

- they say they know that there is a God, for they have seen him;
- they know that Christ is the Son of God, for they have seen him in his glory;
- they know that Christ died for sinners, for they have seen him hanging on the cross, and his blood running from his wounds;
- they know there is a heaven and a hell, for they have seen the misery of damned souls in hell, and the glory of saints and angels in heaven (meaning some external representations have been strongly impressed on their imagination);
- they know that the Scriptures are the word of God, and that such and such promises in particular are his word, for they have heard him speak them to them;
- these things came to their minds suddenly and directly from God, without having any hand in it themselves.
3. Persons may seem to have their belief of the truth of the things of religion greatly increased, when the foundation of it is only a persuasion that they have received because of their interest in them. First, by some means or other, they are confident that if there is a Christ and heaven, then Christ and heaven are theirs; and this prejudices them more in favor of the truth of them. When they hear of the great and glorious things of religion, it is only with this idea: that all these things belong to them. And for this reason, they easily become confident that they are true. They look at it as something which is in their interest to be true. It is obvious what a strong influence men’s interest and inclinations have on their judgments. A natural man may think that if there is a heaven and a hell, and that hell belongs to him, then he will hardly be persuaded that there is a heaven or a hell at all. But if he is persuaded that hell belongs only to other folks, and not to him, then he can easily allow the reality of hell. He will decry others’ senselessness and sottishness\(^5\) in neglecting the means to escape from it. Being confident that he is a child of God, and that God has promised heaven to him, he may seem strong in his faith about its reality, and he may have a great zeal against any infidelity which denies it.

These are some things that are sometimes taken to be spiritual and a saving belief of the truth of the things of religion, when indeed they are very different from it. But now I proceed to another distinguishing sign of gracious affections.

\(^5\) Being in a drunken stupor; unable to respond with reason.
6. Gracious affections are attended by evangelical humility

Gracious affections are attended by evangelical humility. *Evangelical humility* is a sense that a Christian has of his utter insufficiency, despicableness, and odiousness,¹ with a corresponding frame of heart.

A distinction is to be made between *legal* and *evangelical* humility. Legal humility is what men may have while they are still in a state of nature, and have no gracious affections. Evangelical humility is unique to true saints. *Legal* humility is from the common influence of the Spirit of God, assisting natural principles, and especially the natural conscience. *Evangelical* humility is from the special influences of the Spirit of God, implanting and exercising supernatural and divine principles. *Legal* humility is from the mind being assisted to a greater sense of the things of religion, as to their natural properties and qualities, and particularly of the natural perfections of God – such as his greatness, terrible majesty, etc. These were manifested to the congregation of Israel, in giving the law at mount Sinai. *Evangelical* humility is from a sense of the transcendent beauty of divine things in their moral qualities. In *legal* humility, a sense of the awful greatness, and natural perfections of God, and of the strictness of his law, convinces men that they are exceedingly sinful and guilty, and exposed to the wrath of God, just as it will convince wicked men and devils at the Day of Judgment. But they do not see their own odiousness which results from sin; they do not see the hateful nature of sin. A sense of this is given in *evangelical* humility by a revelation of the beauty of God’s holiness and moral perfection. In *legal* humility, men are made aware that they are little and nothing before the great and terrible God, and that they are undone, and wholly insufficient to help themselves – just as wicked men will be at the Day of Judgment. But they do not have a corresponding frame of heart, consisting in a disposition to abase themselves, and to exalt God alone. This disposition is given only in *evangelical* humility by overcoming the heart, by changing its inclination, and by a revelation of God’s holy beauty. In *legal* humility, the conscience is convinced, just as the consciences of all will be most perfectly convinced at the Day of Judgment. But because there is no spiritual understanding, the will is not bowed, nor is the inclination altered. This is done only in *evangelical* humility. In *legal* humility, men despair of helping themselves; in *evangelical* humility, they voluntarily deny and renounce themselves. In *legal* humility, they are subdued and forced to the ground; in *evangelical* humility, they are sweetly brought to yield, and to freely and with delight, prostrate themselves at the feet of God.

*Legal* humility has no spiritual good in it, nothing of the nature of true virtue. But *evangelical* humility is that in which the excellent beauty of Christian grace very much consists. Legal humility is useful as a means to evangelical humility, just as a common knowledge of the things of religion is a means to spiritual knowledge. Men may be *legally humbled*, and yet have no humility. The wicked at the Day of Judgment will be thoroughly convinced that they have no righteousness, but are altogether sinful, exceedingly guilty, and justly exposed to eternal damnation. They will be fully aware of their own helplessness, without the least mortification of the pride of their hearts. The essence of *evangelical* humility consists in the humility that becomes a creature that is exceeding sinful in itself, and yet is under a dispensation of grace. It consists in a lowly esteem of himself, that he is nothing in himself, and altogether contemptible and odious. *Evangelical* humility is attended by a mortification of any disposition to exalt himself, and by a free renunciation of his own glory.

This is a great and essential thing in true religion. The whole frame of the gospel, and everything pertaining to the new covenant, and all God’s dispensations towards fallen man, are calculated to bring to pass this humbling effect in the hearts of men. Those who are destitute of this, have no true religion, whatever profession they may make, and however high their religious affections

¹ Offensiveness.

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may be. Hab. 2:4, “Behold, his soul which is lifted up, is not upright in him; but the just shall live by his faith;” i.e., he shall live by his faith in God’s righteousness and grace, and not by his own goodness and excellency. God has abundantly manifested in his word that this is what he uniquely has with regard to his saints: nothing is acceptable to him without faith.² Psalm 34:18, “The Lord is near to those who are of a broken heart, and saves those of a contrite spirit.” Psalm 51:17, “The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.” Psalm 138:6, “Though the Lord is on high, yet he regards the humble.” Prov. 3:34, “He gives grace to the humble.” Isa. 57:15, “Thus says the high and lofty One who inhabits eternity, whose name is holy, I dwell in the high and holy place; with him that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones.” Isa. 66:1-2, “Thus says the Lord, the heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool: but to this man I will look, to the one that is poor, and of a contrite spirit, and trembles at my word.” Micah 6:8, “He has shown you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord your God require of you; but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?” Matt. 5:3, “Blessed are the poor in spirit; for theirs is the kingdom of God.” Matt. 18:3-4, “Truly I say to you, unless you are converted, and become like little children, you shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. Whoever therefore humbles himself like this little child, is greatest in the kingdom of heaven.” Mark 10:15, “Truly I say to you, Whoever will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child, will not enter in.”

The centurion, that we have an account of in Luke 7, acknowledged that he was not worthy to have Christ enter under his roof, and he was not worthy to come to him. See the way that the sinful woman came to Christ in Luke 7:37, etc.: “And behold, a woman in the city, who was a sinner, when she knew that Jesus sat at meal in the Pharisee’s house, brought an alabaster box of ointment, and stood at his feet behind him weeping; and she began to wash his feet with her tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head.” She did not think the hair of her head, which is the natural crown and glory of a woman (1Cor. 11:15), was too good to wipe the feet of Christ with. Jesus most graciously accepted her, and said to her, “Your faith has saved you, go in peace.” The woman of Canaan submitted to Christ when he said to her, “it is not fitting to take the children’s bread and throw it to dogs;” she admitted that she was worthy to be called a dog, upon which Christ said to her, “O woman, great is your faith: it will be given to you even as you desire,” Matt. 15:26-28. The prodigal son said, “I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you, and I am no longer worthy to be called your son: make me as one of your hired servants,” Luke 15:18 ff. See also Luke 18:9 ff, “And he spoke this parable to certain men who trusted in themselves, that they were righteous, and who despised others, etc. The publican, standing afar off, would not so much as lift up his eyes to heaven, but struck his chest, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner. I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other: for everyone that exalts himself, shall be abased; and the one that humbles himself, shall be exalted.” Matt. 28:9, “And they came, and held him by the feet and worshipped him.” Col. 3:12, “Put on, as the elect of God, humility of mind.” Ezek. 20:41, 42, “I will accept you with your sweet savor, when I bring you out from the people, etc. And there you will remember your ways, and all your doings, in which you have been defiled; and you will loathe yourselves in your own sight, for all the evils that you have committed.” Chap. 36:26-27, 31, “I will also give you a new heart – and I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, etc. Then you will remember your own evil ways, and your doings that were not good, and you will loathe yourselves in your own sight, for your iniquities, and for your abominations.” Chap. 16:63, “That you may remember and be confounded, and never open your mouth again because of your shame, when I am pacified

² Heb 11:6 “But without faith it is impossible to please Him” – Here Edwards equates faith with a broken and contrite heart; humility is an evidence of our dependent faith in another, as opposed an independent trust in ourselves. - WHG
towards you for all that you have done, says the Lord.” Job 42:6, “I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes.”

Because we would make the holy Scriptures our rule in judging the nature of true religion, and in judging our own religious qualifications and state, it concerns us greatly to look at humility as one of the most essential things pertaining to true Christianity. 3 This is the principal part of the great Christian duty of self-denial. That duty consists in two things: first, in a man denying his worldly inclinations, and forsaking and renouncing all worldly objects and enjoyments; and, secondly, in denying his natural self-exaltation – renouncing his own dignity and glory by being emptied of himself, so that freely and from his heart, he renounces and annihilates himself. This is what the Christian does in evangelical humility. Self-renunciation is the greatest and most difficult part of self-denial. Although they always go together, and one never truly exists where the other does not, yet natural men can come much nearer to self-denial than self-renunciation. 4 Though many Anchorites and Recluses have abandoned the wealth, pleasures, and common enjoyments of the world (though without any true mortification), they were far from renouncing their own dignity and righteousness; they never denied themselves for Christ, but only sold one lust to feed another. They sold a beastly lust to pamper a devilish one, and so they were never the better for it; their latter end was worse than their beginning. They turned out one black devil, only to let in seven white ones that were worse than the first, though of a fairer countenance. It is inexpressible and almost inconceivable, how strong a self-righteous, self-exalting dispostion exists naturally in man; and what he will do and suffer to feed and gratify it; and what lengths have been gone to in seeming self-denial and in other respects by the Essenes and Pharisees among the Jews, and by the Papists; by heretical sects; by enthusiasts among professing Christians; by many Muslims; by Pythagorean philosophers, and by others among the Heathen. They do it to make sacrifices to this Moloch of spiritual pride or self-righteousness, so that they may have something in which to exalt themselves before God, and above their fellow creatures.

The humility which has been spoken of is what all the most glorious hypocrites, who make the most splendid show of mortification to the world, and of their high religious affection, grossly fail in. Were it not that this is so greatly insisted on in Scripture, as a most essential thing in true grace, one would be tempted to think that many of the heathen philosophers were truly gracious – those in whom there was so bright an appearance of many virtues, and also great illuminations, and inward fervors and elevations of mind, as though they were truly the subjects of divine illapses5 and heavenly communications. 6 It is true that many hypocrites make great

3 Calvin in his Institutes, Book II chap. 2. § 11, says “I was always exceedingly pleased with that saying of Chrysostom. “The foundation of our philosophy is humility;” and yet more pleased with that of Augustine: “As,” he says, “the rhetorician being asked, what was the first thing in the rules of eloquence, he answered, pronunciation; what was the second, pronunciation; what was the third, still he answered, pronunciation. So if you were to ask me concerning the precept of the Christian religion, I would answer, firstly, secondly, thirdly, and forever: humility.”
4 Edwards simply used “former” and “latter” here. The wording was expanded for clarity if not exactness. – WHG
5 A gliding into, entrance, permeation, or influx; used especially to describe the descent of the Holy Spirit: inspiration.
6 Even though the Pythagoreans were thus famous for Judaic mysterious wisdom, and many moral as well as natural accomplishments, yet they were not exempted from boasting and pride; which was indeed a vice most epidemic, and as it were congenial, among all the philosophers; but in a more particular manner among the Pythagoreans. So Hornius Hist. Philosoph. L. III. chap. 11. The manners of the Pythagoreans were not free from boasting. They were all such as abounded in the sense and commendation of their own excellencies, and boasting almost to the degree of immodesty and impudence, as great Heinsius, ad Horat. has rightly observed. Thus indeed, proud nature delights to walk in the sparks of its own fire. And although many of these old philosophers could, by the strength of their own lights and heats, together with some common elevations and raisings of spirit (peradventure from a more than ordinary, though not special and saving assistance of the Spirit), abandon many grosser vices; yet they were all deeply immersed in that miserable cursed abyss of spiritual pride, so that all their natural, and moral, and philosophic attainments, fed, nourished, strengthened, and rendered most inveterate, this hell-bred pest of their hearts. Indeed, those of them that seemed most modest, such as the Academicians who professed they knew nothing, and the Cynics who greatly decried, both in words and habits, the pride of others, yet even they abounded in the most notorious and
pretenses of humility, as well as other graces; and very often there is nothing of which they make a higher profession. They endeavor to make a great show of their humility in speech and behavior. But they usually make a bungling work of it, though it is a glorious work in their own eyes. They cannot discover what humble speech and behavior is, or how to speak and act so that there may indeed be a savor of Christian humility in what they say and do. That sweet humble air and mien is beyond their art, not being led by the Spirit, or naturally guided to behavior that is becoming holy humility, by the vigor of a lowly spirit within them.

Therefore many of them have no other way than by constantly declaring that they are humble, and telling how they were humbled to the dust at such and such times. They abound in negative expressions about themselves such as, “I am the least of all saints, I am a poor vile creature, I am not worthy of the least mercy, or that God should look upon me! Oh, I have a dreadfully wicked heart! My heart is worse than the devil! Oh, this cursed heart of mine,” etc. Such expressions are very often used, not with a heart that is broken, not with spiritual mourning, not with the tears of the woman who washed Jesus’ feet, not as “remembering and being confounded, and never opening their mouth again because of their shame, when God is pacified,” (the expression used in Ezek. 16:63). But instead, it is said with a light air, with a smiling countenance, or with a pharisaic affectation. And we are to believe that they are humble, and that they see themselves so vile, only upon the credit of their say-so. For there is nothing apparent in them of any savor of humility in the manner of their deportment and in the deeds that they do. There are many who are full of expressions of their own vileness, who still expect to be looked at as eminent and bright saints by others, as if it is their due. It is dangerous for anyone to so much as hint the contrary, or carry on towards them in any other way than to look at them as the best of Christians. There are many who cry out about their wicked hearts, and their great shortcomings, and unprofitableness, and who speak as though they looked at themselves as the least of the saints. Yet, if a minister seriously said the same things about them in private, and indicated that he feared they were base and weak Christians, and thought they had reason to solemnly consider their great barrenness and unprofitableness, and that they were falling short of many others, it would be more than they could digest. They would think themselves highly injured; and there is danger that a rooted prejudice might grow in them against such a minister.

There are some who abundantly speak against legal doctrines, legal preaching, and a legal spirit, who little understand what they are speaking against. A legal spirit is more subtle than they imagine; it is too subtle for them. It lurks, and operates, and prevails in their hearts, and they are most notoriously guilty of it, at the same time that they inveigh against it. To the extent a man is not emptied of himself, and of his own righteousness and goodness, in whatever form or shape, he has a legal spirit. A spirit of pride of man’s own righteousness, morality, holiness, affection, experience, faith, humility, or any goodness whatever, is a legal spirit. It was not pride in Adam before the fall to have a legal spirit; because of his circumstances, he sought God’s acceptance by his own righteousness. But a legal spirit in a fallen, sinful creature, can be nothing else but spiritual pride; and reciprocally, a spiritually proud spirit is a legal spirit. Any man living that is exalted by a conceit about his own experiences and revelations, and as a result glisters in his own eyes, and trusts in his experiences, and makes a righteousness of them — no matter how he may use humble terms, or speak of his experiences as the great things that God has done for him, and perhaps how he calls on others to glorify God for them — yet he is proud of his experiences. He arrogates something to himself as though his experiences were a dignity of his. And if he looks at them as his own dignity, he necessarily thinks that God looks at them that way too. For he necessarily thinks his own opinion of them is true; and consequently he judges
that God looks at them as he does. And so he unavoidably imagines that God looks at his experiences as a dignity in him, just as he looks at them himself. He thinks that he glisters as much in God’s eyes, as he does in his own. Thus he trusts in what is inherent in him to make him shine in God’s sight, and to recommend him to God. And with this encouragement, he goes before God in prayer; and this makes him expect much from God. It makes him think that Christ loves him, and that he is willing to clothe him with his righteousness, because he supposes that Christ is impressed with his experiences and graces. To a high degree, this is living on his own righteousness, and such persons are on the high road to hell. These are poor deluded wretches, who think they look so glistening in God’s eyes, when they are smoke in his nose. Many of them are more odious to him than the most impure beast in Sodom that makes no pretense to religion! These persons live on their experiences, according to the true notion of it. This is not what those do who only make use of spiritual experiences as evidences of a state of grace, and who in that way receive hope and comfort from them.

Some are of a sort that abundantly decries works, and advocates faith in opposition to works. They set themselves up very much as evangelical persons. They do so in opposition to those that are of a legal spirit. They make a fair show of advancing Christ and the gospel, and the way of free grace. Yet, in fact, they are some of the greatest enemies of the gospel of free grace, and they are the most dangerous opposers of pure and humble Christianity.7

One of the most elated things in the world is a pretention of great humility, of being dead to the law and emptied of self. There are some who profess to have experienced a thorough work of the law on their hearts, and then of being brought fully away from works. Their conversation is the most savored with a self-righteous spirit of anyone I ever had an opportunity to observe. Some who think they are quite emptied of themselves, and are confident that they are abased in the dust, are actually as full as they can be with the glory of their own humility. They are lifted up to heaven with a high opinion of their own abasement. Their humility is a swelling, self-conceited, confident, showy, noisy, assuming humility. It seems to be the nature of spiritual pride to make men conceited and ostentatious with their humility. This appears in that first-born of pride among the children of men, the one who would be called “his holiness,”8 the man of sin that exalts himself above all that is worshipped or called God. He styles himself as a Servant of servants. To make a show of his humility, he washes the feet of a number of poor men at his inauguration.

For persons to be truly emptied of themselves, and to be poor in spirit, and broken in heart, is quite another thing than many imagine, and it has quite different effects. It is astonishing how greatly deceived many are about themselves in this matter. They imagine themselves the most humble when they are the most proud, and when their behavior is really the most haughty. The deceitfulness of the heart appears in nothing so much as in spiritual pride and self-righteousness. The subtlty of Satan appears at its height in his management of people with

7 “Do not take every opinion and doctrine from men or angels, that bears a fair show of advancing Christ; for they may be but the fruits of evangelical hypocrisy and deceit; that being deceived themselves, they may deceive others too; Matt. 7.15. Beware of those who come in sheep’s clothing; for they may be wolves, proud, cruel, censorious, speaking evil of what they do not know. By their fruits you shall know them. Do not think, beloved, that Satan will not seek to send delusions among us. And do you think these delusions will come out of the popish pack, whose inventions smell above-ground here? No, he must come, and will come, with more evangelical, fine-spun devices. It is a rule observed among Jesuits at this day, if they would conquer religion by subtlety, never oppose religion with an opposing religion; but set it against itself. So oppose the gospel by the gospel. And look like churches pleading for works, and new invented and devised works; so that when faith is preached, men will have their new inventions of faith. I do not speak against the doctrine of faith, where it is preached; rather, I am glad of it. It is not that I would have men content themselves with every form of faith: for I believe that most men’s faith needs confirming or trying. But I speak to prevent danger on that hand.” Shepard, Parable, Part I. p. 122.

8 An unveiled reference to the Pope in Rome. – WHG
respect to this sin. Perhaps one reason may be that here he has the most experience. He knows how it comes in, and he is acquainted with the secret springs of it, because it was his own sin. Experience gives a vast advantage in leading souls either towards good or evil.

Although spiritual pride is a subtle and secret iniquity, and although it usually appears under the pretext of great humility, yet there are two things by which it may be discovered and distinguished from true humility (perhaps universally and surely).

The first thing is this: someone who is under the prevalence of this disease, is apt to think highly of his attainments in religion, in comparison to others. It is natural for him to fall into thinking that he is an eminent saint, that he is very high among the saints, and he has distincingly good and great experiences. That is the secret language of his heart. Luke 18:11, “God, I thank you that I am not like other men.” And Isa. 65:5, “I am holier than you.” Hence such men are apt to put themselves forward among God’s people, and take a high seat among them, as if there was no doubt that it belonged to them. They do naturally what Christ condemns: they take the highest place, Luke 14:7, etc. They do this by being eager to take upon themselves the place and business of the chief: to guide, teach, direct, and manage. “They are confident that they are guides to the blind, a light to those in darkness, instructors of the foolish, teachers of babes,” Rom. 2:19-20. It is natural for them to take it for granted that it belongs to them to do the part of dictators and masters in matters of religion. And so, like the Pharisees, they implicitly like to be called Rabbi, which means Master, Matt. 23:6-7. That is, they are apt to expect others to regard them and yield to them as masters in matters of religion.9

But the one whose heart is under the power of Christian humility, is of a contrary disposition. If the Scriptures are at all to be relied on, such a person is apt to think his attainments in religion are comparatively mean. He esteems himself low among the saints, and one of the least of saints. Humility, or true lowliness of mind, disposes persons to think others are better than themselves. Phil. 2:3, “In lowliness of mind, let each esteem others better than themselves.” Hence they are apt to think the lowest place belongs to them, and their inward disposition naturally leads them to obey that precept of our Savior in Luke 14:10. It is not natural for them to take on the part of teachers. On the contrary, they are disposed to think that they are not the persons, and that others are more fit for it than they are – as it was with Moses and Jeremiah (Exod. 3:11, Jer. 1:6) – even though they were such eminent saints, and had great knowledge. It is not natural for them to think that it belongs to them to teach, but to be taught. They are much more eager to hear, and to receive instruction from others, than to dictate to others. Jam. 1:19, “Be swift to hear, slow to speak.” And when they do speak, it is not natural for them to speak with a bold, masterly air; but humility disposes them instead to speak with trembling. Hos. 13:1, “When Ephraim spoke with trembling, he exalted himself in Israel; but when he offended in Baal worship, he died.” They are not apt to assume authority, or take it upon themselves to be chief managers and masters; rather they choose to be subject to others: Jam. 3:1-2, “Not many should be masters.” 1Pet. 5:5, “All of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility.” Eph. 5:21, “Submit yourselves one to another in the fear of God.”

Some persons’ experiences naturally make them think highly of their experiences; and they often speak of them as very great and extraordinary; they freely speak of the great things they have met with. This may be said and meant in a good sense. In one sense, every degree of saving mercy is a great thing. It is a great thing, indeed, infinitely great, for God to bestow the least crumb of children’s bread on such dogs as we are in ourselves. The more humble a person is, who hopes that God has bestowed such mercy on him, the more apt he will be to call it a great thing that he has met with in this sense. But by great things which they have experienced, they

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9 “There are two things in which it appears that a man has only common gifts, and no inward principle. 1. These gifts ever puff up, and make a man something in his own eyes, as the Corinthian knowledge did; and many a private man thinks himself fit to be a minister.” Shepard’s Parable Part 1. pp.181-182.
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may mean comparatively great spiritual experiences, or great compared to others’ experiences, or beyond what is ordinary, which evidently is often the case. For someone to say, ‘I have met with great things,’ is the same as saying, ‘I am an eminent saint, and I have more grace than ordinary men.’10 For having great experiences, if the experiences are true and worth telling about, is the same as having great grace. There is no true experience, except the exercise of grace; and the degree of true experience is exactly according to the degree of grace and holiness. The persons who talk this way about their experiences when they give an account of them, expect others to admire them. Indeed they do not call it boasting to talk in this way about their experiences. Nor do they look at it as a sign of pride because, they say, “they know that it was not they that did it, it was free grace; these are things that God has done for them; they acknowledge the great mercy that God has shown them, and they do not make light of it.”

But so it was with the Pharisee that Christ tells us about in Luke 18. He gave God the glory for making him different from other men: “God, I thank you that I am not like other men.” 11 Verbally ascribing to the grace of God, the claim that they are holier than other saints, does not hinder their forwardness in thinking so highly of their own holiness. It is sure evidence of the pride and vanity of their minds. If they were under the influence of a humble spirit, their attainments in religion would not be so apt to shine in their own eyes, nor would they so admire their own beauty. The Christians that are really the most eminent saints, and therefore who have the most excellent experiences, and are greatest in the kingdom of heaven, humble themselves as a little child, Matt. 8:4. They look at themselves as little children in grace, and their attainments are but the attainments of babes in Christ. They are astonished at and ashamed of the low degree of their love, thankfulness, and knowledge of God. Moses, when he had been conversing with God on the mount, and his face shone so bright in the eyes of others as to dazzle their eyes, wished that his face did not shine. Some persons are called high professors, and some claim they are high professors. But eminently humble saints, those who shine brightest in heaven, are not apt to profess they are high at all. I do not believe there is an eminent saint in the world that is a high professor. They are much more likely to profess themselves to be the least of all saints, and to think that every other saint’s attainments and experiences are higher than his.12

Such is the nature of grace, and of true spiritual light, that they naturally dispose the saints in their present state to look at their grace and goodness as little, and to look at their deformity as great. Those who have the most grace and spiritual light have this disposition the most. This will appear most clearly and evidently to anyone who soberly and thoroughly weighs the nature and reason of things, and considers the things which follow.

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10 Yet, not all Christians experience the same things, in the same way, or to the same degree. Edwards pointed this out previously. To tell someone that God has dealt with us in a way that, to them, may seem extraordinary or unusual, is not necessarily to draw attention to ourselves, or to exalt ourselves, merely by telling it. Otherwise the testimonies of the NT might be said to be prideful self-exaltation by Paul and the other apostles, merely because they spoke of the extraordinary things they met with. – WHG

11 Calvin, in his Institutes, B. III. chap. 12 § 7, speaking of this Pharisee, observed “That in his outward confession, he acknowledges that the righteousness that he has is the gift of God; but (he says) because he trusts that he is righteous, he goes away out of the presence of God, unacceptable and odious.”

12 Luther, as his words are cited by Rutherford, in his Display of the Spiritual Antichrist, p. 143, 144, says thus: “So is the life of a Christian, that he has begun, seems to himself to have nothing; but strives and presses forward, that he may apprehend: from which Paul says, ‘I do not count myself to have apprehended.’ Phil 3:13 For indeed nothing is more pernicious to a believer, than that presumption that he has already apprehended and has no further need of seeking. From this also, many fall back and pine away in spiritual security and slothfulness. So Bernard says, ‘To stand still in God’s way, is to go back.’ Which is why this remains to him that has begun to be a Christian: to think that he is not yet a Christian, but to seek that he may be a Christian, so that he may glory with Paul, ‘I am not, but I desire to be,’ a Christian not yet finished, but only in his beginnings. Therefore he is not a Christian, that is a Christian; that is, he that thinks himself to be a finished Christian is not aware how he falls short. We reach after heaven, but we are not in heaven. Woe to him that is wholly renewed, that is, that thinks himself so. That man, without doubt, has never so much as begun to be renewed, nor did he ever taste what it is to be a Christian.
Grace and holiness that is worthy to be called little, is little in comparison to what it ought to be. And it seems so to one who is truly gracious. For such a person has his eye on the rule of his duty; conformity to that rule is what he aims at; it is what his soul struggles and reaches after; and he estimates and judges what he does and what he has by that rule. To a gracious soul, and especially to one who is eminently gracious, that holiness appears to be little, if it is little of what it should be – little of what he sees infinite reason for, and little of what he has an obligation to. If his holiness appears to him to be at a vast distance from this, then it naturally appears despicable in his eyes, and not worthy to be mentioned as any beauty or amiableness in him. For the same reason, a hungry man naturally accounts what is set before him as only a little food, and a small matter and not worth mentioning, if it is nothing in comparison to his appetite. Or it is like the child of a great prince, who is jealous for the honor of his father, and who has the respect of others toward himself. He naturally looks at his own honor and respect as very little; it is not worthy to be regarded, because it is nothing compared to what the dignity of his father requires.

But that is the nature of true grace and spiritual light: it opens to a person’s view the infinite reasons that he should be holy to a high degree. The more grace he has, the more this is opened to his view; and the greater sense he has of the infinite excellency and glory of the divine Being, and of the infinite dignity of the person of Christ, and of the boundless length, breadth, depth and height of the love of Christ towards sinners. As grace increases, the field opens more and more to a distant view, until the soul is swallowed up with the vastness of the object. The person is astonished to think how much it becomes him to love this God, and this glorious Redeemer who has so loved man, and to think how little he himself loves. And so the more he apprehends God’s love, the more the smallness of his own grace and love appears both strange and inexplicable to him. Therefore he is more ready to think that others are beyond him. Wondering at the littleness of his own grace, he can scarcely believe that so strange a thing happens to other saints. It is amazing to him that someone who is really a child of God, and has actually received the saving benefits of that unspeakable love of Christ, should love as little as he does. He is apt to look at it as a thing unique to himself, a strange and exempt instance – for he sees only the outside of other Christians; but he sees his own insides.

Here the reader may possibly object that love towards God is really increased in proportion to the increase in knowledge of God; therefore how should an increase of knowledge in a saint make his love appear less, compared to what is known? To this I answer that, although grace and the love of God in the saints corresponds to the degree of knowledge or sight of God, yet it is not in proportion to the object that is seen and known. The soul of a saint, by having something of God opened to sight, is convinced of much more than is seen. There is something that is seen that is wonderful; and that sight brings with it a strong conviction of something vastly beyond, that is not immediately seen. At the same time, the soul is astonished at its own ignorance, and that it knows so little, and that it loves so little. As the soul, in a spiritual view, is convinced of infinitely more in the object which is still beyond sight, so it is convinced of the capacity of the soul to know vastly more, if only the clouds and darkness were removed. This causes the soul, in the enjoyment of a spiritual view, to complain greatly of its spiritual ignorance, and its lack of love, and to long and reach after more knowledge, and more love.

Grace and the love of God, in the most eminent saints in this world, is truly very little compared to what it ought to be. This is because the highest love that anyone ever attains in this life is poor, cold, exceedingly low, and not worthy to be named in comparison to what our obligations appear to be. This follows from the joint consideration of these two things:

1. God has given us reasons to love him, in the manifestations he has made of his infinite glory, in his word, and in his works; and particularly in the gospel of his Son and what he has done for sinful man through him. And,
2. There is a capacity in the soul of man, by those intellectual faculties which God has given it, to see and understand these reasons which God has given us to love him. How small indeed is the love of the most eminent saint on earth, in comparison to what these things, jointly considered, require! And this grace tends to convince men of this, and especially eminent grace – for grace has the nature of light, and it brings truth to view. Therefore, the one who has much grace apprehends much more than others, the great height to which his love ought to ascend. And he sees better than others, how he has risen towards that height only a little way. Therefore, estimating his love by the whole height of his duty, that love appears astonishingly little and low in his eyes.

The eminent saint, having such a conviction of the high degree to which he ought to love God, is shown not only the smallness of his grace, but the greatness of his remaining corruption. In order to judge how much corruption or sin we have remaining in us, we must take our measure from that height to which the rule of our duty extends. The whole distance we are from that height, is sin – for failing in our duty is sin; otherwise our duty is not our duty. How far we fall short of our duty, is how much sin we have. Sin in a moral agent is his incongruity with the law or rule of his duty. Therefore, the degree of sin is judged by the rule: so much incongruity to the rule, so much sin, whether in defect or excess. Thus, in their love towards God, if men do not come halfway to the height which duty requires, then they have more corruption in their hearts than grace – because more goodness lacking than is present; and whatever is lacking, is sin. It is an abominable defect; and it appears that way to the saints, especially to those who are eminent. It appears exceedingly abominable to them that Christ should be loved so little, and thanked so little, for his dying love. In their eyes, it is hateful ingratitude.

And then, the increase of grace has another tendency, which is to cause the saints to think their deformity vastly exceeds their goodness. It not only tends to convince them that their corruption is much greater than their goodness, which is indeed the case; but it also tends to cause the deformity that exists in the least sin, or the least degree of corruption, to appear so great as to vastly outweigh all the beauty there is in their greatest holiness – for this also is indeed the case. The least sin against an infinite God, has an infinite hatefulness or deformity in it. But the highest degree of holiness in a creature, does not have an infinite loveliness in it. Therefore the loveliness of the greatest holiness is nothing compared to the deformity of the least sin. It is demonstrably evident that every sin has infinite deformity and hatefulness in it, because what the evil, or iniquity, or hatefulness of sin consists in, is the violation of an obligation. It is being or doing what is contrary to what we should be or do, or are obliged to be or do. Therefore, the greater the obligation that is violated, the greater the iniquity and hatefulness of the violation. But certainly our obligation to love and honor any being, is in some proportion to his loveliness and honorableness, or to his worthiness to be loved and honored by us – which is the same thing. We are surely under greater obligation to love a more lovely being, than a less lovely being. And if a Being is infinitely lovely or worthy to be loved by us, then our obligation to love him is infinitely great. Therefore, whatever is contrary to this love, has an infinite iniquity, deformity, and unworthiness in it. On the other hand, with respect to our holiness or love towards God, there is no infinite worthiness in that. The sin of the creature against God is hateful in proportion to the distance that exists between God and the creature. The greatness of the object, and the meanness and inferiority of the subject, aggravates the hatefulness of the sin. But it is the reverse with regard to the worthiness of the creature in respect to God – it is not worthy in proportion to the meanness of the subject. The greater the distance between God and the creature, the less the creature is worthy of God’s notice or regard. The great degree of

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13 We do not have a greater obligation to love lovable men than unlovable ones, and Edwards isn’t saying that. He refers to God, not men; besides, the love we bestow on other men is not ours, but Christ’s, who “died for us while we were yet sinners.” – WHG
superiority increases the obligation on the inferior to regard the superior; and so it makes the lack of regard in the inferior all the more hateful. But the great degree of inferiority diminishes the worth of the regard paid by the inferior. This is because the more inferior he is, the less he is worthy of notice. The less he is in himself, the less he can offer of worth— for he can offer no more than himself in offering his best respect. Therefore, because he is of little worth, his respect is of little worth. The more a person has of true grace and spiritual light, the more it will appear this way to him. The more he appears to himself to be infinitely deformed because of his sin, the less the goodness he will see in his grace, or in the good of his experience, compared to that sin. For indeed it is nothing compared to it; it is less than a drop in the ocean. For the finite bears no proportion at all to what is infinite. But the more a person has of spiritual light, the more things will appear to him as they really are in this respect. Hence it demonstrably appears that true grace is of such a nature, that the more a person has of grace, even with his remaining corruption, the less his goodness and holiness appears to have any worth in proportion to his deformity. That is in regard not only to his past deformity, but to his present deformity: in the sin that now appears in his heart, in the abominable defects of his highest and best affections, and in his brightest experiences.

The nature of many high and religious affections, and great revelations (as they are called), in many persons that I have been acquainted with, is to hide and cover over the corruption of their own hearts, and to make it seem to them as if all their sin was gone. It leaves them without complaints about any hateful evil that is left in them (though they may cry out greatly about their past unworthiness). This is a sure and certain evidence that their revelations (as they call them) are darkness and not light; darkness hides men’s pollution and deformity. But light that is let into the heart will disclose it, searching out its secret corners, and making its deformity plainly appear—especially that penetrating, all-searching light of God’s holiness and glory. It is true that saving revelations may for the present hide corruption in one sense— they restrain the positive exercises of corruption such as malice, envy, covetousness, lasciviousness, murmuring, etc.—but they also bring corruption to light, in what is privative: that there is not more love, humility, or thankfulness evident. These defects appear most hateful in the eyes of those who have the most eminent exercises of grace. They are burdensome, and they cause the saints to decry their leanness, and their odious pride and ingratitude. Whatever positive exercises of corruption may arise at any time, and mingle with eminent acts of grace, grace will exceedingly magnify the view of the former, and render their appearance far more heinous and horrible.

The more eminent that saints are, and the more light of heaven they have in their souls, the more they appear to themselves, as the most eminent saints in this world might appear to the saints and angels in heaven. How can we rationally imagine what the most eminent saints on earth appear like to those in heaven, except as covered over with the righteousness of Christ, with all their deformities swallowed up and hidden in the coruscation of the beams of his abundant glory and love? How do we suppose our most ardent love and praises must appear to those who behold the beauty and glory of God without a veil? How does our highest thankfulness for the dying love of Christ appear to those who see Christ as he is, who know him as they are known, and who see the glory of the one who died, and the wonders of his dying love, without any cloud of darkness? How do they look at the deepest reverence and humility with which we worms of the dust on earth approach that infinite Majesty which they behold? Do these appear great to them, or are they not even worthy of the name of “reverence” and “humility” in those that they see, those who are at such an infinite distance from that great and holy God in whose glorious presence they stand? The reason why the highest attainments of the saints on earth appear so mean to them, is that they dwell in the light of God’s glory, and they

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14 That is, privation— the poverty or lack of some gracious attribute.
15 A sudden or striking display of brilliance— “sparkle.”
see God as he is. In this respect, it is the same with the saints on earth, as it is with those in heaven: the more eminent they are in grace, the less regard they have for their own attainments.

I do not wish to be understood as saying that the saints on earth always have the worst opinion of themselves when grace is most exercised in them. In many respects it is otherwise. With respect to the positive exercises of corruption in them, they may appear to themselves to be freest and best when grace is most exercised in them, and worst when grace is least exercised. When they compare themselves with themselves at different times in their lives, they may actually know (when grace is exercised) that it is better now than it was before (though at the time they did not see as much badness in themselves as they see now). When afterwards, their frame of mind sinks again, they may indeed know that they are sinking. This gives them a new argument that their corruption largely remains. They have a rational conviction of a greater vileness in themselves now than they saw before. Many have a greater sense of guilt, and a greater legal sense of their sinfulness by far, in this sunken frame of mind, than when grace is exercised in them. Yet it is true, and it is demonstrable from the previous considerations, that the children of God never have so much of a tangible and spiritual conviction of their deformity, and so great, quick, and abasing a sense of their present vileness and odiousness, as when the exercise of true and pure grace in them is at its highest. They are never so disposed to set themselves low among Christians as then. Thus the one who is greatest in the kingdom, or most eminent in the church of Christ, is the one who humbles himself as the least infant among them, in conformity to that great saying of Christ in Matt. 18:4.16

A true saint may know that he has some true grace; and the more grace he has, the more easily it is known by him, as observed and proved before. Yet it does not follow, that an eminent saint is easily aware that he is an eminent saint when compared to others. I will not deny that it is possible that someone who has much grace, and is an eminent saint, may know it. But he will not be apt to know it. It will not be an obvious thing to him that he is better than others, and has higher experiences and attainments than others; this is not a foremost thought to him. Nor is it something that readily and regularly offers itself to his way of thinking. It is not in his way; it lies far out of his sight – he must take pains to convince himself of it. He will need a great command of reason, a high degree of strictness, and care in his arguing, to convince himself of it. And if he is rationally convinced by a very strict consideration of his own experiences, compared to the low degrees of grace that appear in some other saints, it will hardly seem real to him that he has more grace than they do. He will be apt to lose the conviction that he obtained by pains. Nor will it seem at all natural to him to act on that supposition. So this may be laid down as an infallible thing: "The person who is apt to think that he is a very eminent saint compared to others, and that he is greatly distinguished in his Christian experience, and this is the first thought that arises in him on its own, and that naturally offers itself to his way of thinking – such a person is certainly mistaken about it. He is not an eminent saint at all, but is under the great prevailings of a proud and self-righteous spirit." If this is habitual with the man, and if it is the prevailing temper of his mind, then he is no saint at all. He does not have the least degree of any true Christian experience, as surely as the word of God is true.

Experiences which tend to elevate a person with a great conceit about his experiences, are certainly vain and delusive experiences. Supposed revelations that naturally puff up a person to admire the eminency of his revelations, and that fill him with a conceit that he has now seen and knows more than most other Christians, have nothing of the nature of true spiritual light in them. The nature of all true spiritual knowledge is such that the more a person has of it, the more aware he is of his own ignorance. This is made evident by 1Cor. 8:2: "He that thinks he knows anything, knows nothing yet as he ought to know." Agur had a great revelation of God, and a sense of the wonderful height of his glory, and of his marvellous works, and he cried out

16 Matthew 18:4 "Therefore whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven."
about God’s greatness and incomprehensibleness. At the same time, he had the deepest sense of his own brutish ignorance; he looked at himself as the most ignorant of all the saints. Prov. 30:2-4: “Surely I am more brutish than any man, and I do not have the understanding of a man. I neither learned wisdom, nor do I have knowledge of the holy. Who has ascended up into heaven, or descended? Who has gathered the wind in his fists? Who has bound the waters in a garment? Who has established all the ends of the earth? What is his name, and what is his son’s name, if you can tell?”

For a man to be highly conceited about his spiritual and divine knowledge, is to be wise in his own eyes. Therefore it comes under those prohibitions in Prov. 3:7, “Do not be wise in your own eyes.” Rom. 12:16, “Do not be wise in your own conceits.” It brings men under that woe in Isa. 5:21: “Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight.” Those who are wise in their own eyes, of anyone in the world, are least likely to obtain good. Experience shows the truth of it. Prov. 26:12: “Do you see a man who is wise in his own conceit? There is more hope for a fool than for him.”

Some may object that the Psalmist, when we suppose he was in a holy frame of mind, speaks of his knowledge as eminently great, and far greater than that of other saints: Psa. 119:99-100, “I have more understanding than all my teachers: for your testimonies are my meditation. I understand more than the ancients, because I keep your precepts.”

To this I answer two things:

(1.) There is no restraint placed on the Spirit of God as to what he will reveal to a prophet for the benefit of His church; and the prophet is speaking or writing under immediate inspiration. The Spirit of God may reveal and dictate to the prophet that he is to declare secret things to others that otherwise would be hard, or indeed impossible, for him to find out himself. The Spirit may reveal mysteries to him that otherwise would be above the reach of his reason; or things that are in a distant place that he cannot see; or future events that it would be impossible for him to know and to declare unless they were extraordinarily revealed to him. In the same way, the Spirit of God might grant to David this distinguishing revelatory benefit through meditating on God’s testimonies. And He might use David as his instrument to record it for the benefit of others, to motivate them to a similar duty, using the same means to gain that knowledge for themselves. Nothing can be concluded concerning the natural tendency of the gracious influences of the Spirit of God, from what David declares about his distinguishing knowledge under the extraordinary influences of God’s Spirit – any more than we can reasonably argue that it is the natural tendency of grace to incline men to curse others, and to wish the most dreadful misery upon others, just because David, under inspiration, often curses others and prays that such misery may come upon them.

(2.) It is not certain that the knowledge David speaks of here is spiritual knowledge, in which holiness fundamentally consists. But it may be a greater revelation which God made to him about the Messiah, and about the things of his future kingdom, and the clearer and more extensive knowledge that he had of the mysteries and doctrines of the gospel than others had. These were given to David as a reward for keeping God’s testimonies. In this, it is apparent by the book of Psalms, that David far exceeded all that had gone before him.

Secondly, another infallible sign of a person’s spiritual pride is being apt to think highly of his humility. False experiences are commonly attended by a counterfeit humility. And it is the very nature of counterfeit humility to be highly conceited about itself. False religious affections generally have that same tendency (especially when raised to a great height) to make persons think that their humility is great. Accordingly, they take much notice of their great attainments, and they admire them. But eminently gracious affections (I hesitate to say it) always have a
contrary tendency, and a contrary effect, in those that have them. They make them very aware of the reason they should be deeply humbled, and they cause them to earnestly thirst and long after humility. But these gracious affections also make their present humility (or what they have attained of it) appear small – thus their remaining pride appears great and abominable.

The reason why a proud person is apt to think his humility is great, and why a very humble person thinks his humility is small, may be easily seen. Just consider that it is natural for persons, when judging the degree of their own humility, to take their measure from what they consider their proper rank, or dignity. What may be great humility in one, is no humility at all in another, because the degree to which each is honorable or renowned, is very different. If some great man stooped to undo the laces of another equally great man, or to wash his feet, it would be noticed as an act of abasement. Being aware of his own dignity, he would look at it that way himself. But if a poor slave stoops to untie the shoes of a great prince, nobody would take notice of it as an act of humiliation, or as a token of humility. Nor would the slave take it that way, unless he were horribly proud and ridiculously conceited. If afterward, by his talk and behavior, he showed that he thought his abasement was great, and that his action was evidence of being very humble, everybody would scream, “Who do you think you are, thinking that what you did was such a deep humiliation?” This would plainly demonstrate that this slave was swollen with pride and vanity, as much as if he declared, “I think I am someone great.” The matter is no less plain and certain when worthless, vile, and loathsome worms of the dust, put such a construction on their acts of abasement before God – thinking it is a token of great humility to acknowledge that they are mean and unworthy, and to behave like those who are so inferior.

The very reason why such outward acts and inward exercises look like great abasement in such a person, is because he is highly conceited. If he thought of himself more justly, these things would be nothing to him, and his humility in them would not be worthy of regard. Rather, he would be astonished at his pride, that one so infinitely despicable and vile, is brought no lower before God. When he says in his heart, “This is a great act of humiliation; and it is certainly a sign of great humility in me, that I feel this way and do so;” he actually means, “This is great humility for me, for one who is so considerable and worthy.” He considers how low he has been brought, and then he compares it to the height of his dignity which, in his own heart, he thinks is proper for him. Because the distance between the two appears very great to him, he calls it all humility; and he admires it as such. But in someone who is truly humble, and who really sees his own vileness and loathsomeness before God, the distance appears the other way. When he is brought lowest of all, it does not appear to him that he has been brought below his proper station at all, but that he has not yet come to it. To himself, he still appears vastly above it, and he longs to get lower so that he may come to it. But it remains a great distance from him, and this distance he calls pride. Therefore it is his pride that appears great to him, and not his humility. Although he has been brought much lower than he used to be, it does not appear to be worthy of the name humility. For one who is so infinitely mean and detestable, to come down to a place which, even though it is lower than what he used to assume, is still vastly higher than what is proper for him. Men would hardly consider it worthy of the name humility if a lowly slave, who pretended to be a prince, were to take the place of a nobleman – because this latter position is still so far above his proper station as a slave.

All men, in judging the degree of their own and others’ humility as it appears in any act of theirs, consider two things: first, the real degree of dignity in which they stand; and secondly, the degree of their abasement; then they consider the relation between the two. The same lowly position, or lowly act, may be evidence of great humility in one; but it evidences little or no humility in another. Truly humble Christians have such a mean opinion of their own real dignity, that all their self-abasement, when compared to their dignity, appears very small to them. It does not seem to be any great humility or abasement to lie at the foot of God; being such poor, vile, and abject creatures as they are, this act should not be made much of.
The degree of humility is to be judged by the degree of abasement, and the degree of the cause for abasement. But someone who is truly and eminently humble, never thinks his humility is great. The cause why he should be abased appears so great, and the abasement of the frame of his heart so greatly falls short of it, that he takes much more notice of his pride than his humility.

Everyone that has been conversant with souls who are convinced of their sin, knows that those who are greatly convinced of it, are not likely to think themselves greatly convinced. And the reason is this: men judge the degree of their own convictions of sin by two things, jointly considered: first, the degree of their sense of guilt and pollution, and second, the degree of the cause they have for such a sense, in the degree of their real sinfulness. It is really no argument that there is any great conviction of sin, when some men think they are sinful beyond most other sinners in the world. This is because they are sinful indeed, plainly and notoriously. Therefore a far lesser conviction of sin may incline such a person to think he is more sinful than another. He would have to be blind indeed not to be aware of it. But someone who is truly under great convictions of sin, naturally thinks that the cause he has to be aware of his guilt and pollution, is greater than others have. Therefore he ascribes his awareness of it to the greatness of his sin, and not to the greatness of his sense of it. It is natural for someone under great convictions, to think that he is one of the greatest of sinners. A man is greatly convicted of his sin when his conviction is great in proportion to his sin. But no man who is truly convicted, thinks his conviction is very great in proportion to his sin. For if he does, it is a certain sign that inwardly he thinks his sins are small. And if that is the case, it is certain evidence that his conviction is small. This, by the way, is the main reason that persons who are under a work of humiliation, are not aware of it at the time it happens.

As it is with conviction of sin, so it is (by parity of reason) with respect to people’s conviction or awareness of their own meanness and vileness, their own blindness, their own impotence, and all of that low sense that a Christian has of himself in the exercise of evangelical humiliation. So that, when the degree of this conviction is high, the saints are never disposed to think that their awareness of their own meanness, filthiness, impotence, etc., is very great – because it never appears great to them as they consider the cause.

An eminent saint is not apt to think he is eminent in anything. All his graces and experiences appear to him to be comparatively small, especially his humility. There is nothing that pertains to Christian experience, and true piety, that is so much out of his sight as his own humility. He is a thousand times more quick-sighted to discern his pride than his humility. He easily discerns it, and he is apt to take notice of it, but he barely discerns his humility. By contrast, the deluded hypocrite who is under the power of spiritual pride, is blind to nothing as much as he is blind to his own pride; he sees nothing more quickly than he sees his own displays of humility.

The humble Christian is more apt to find fault with his own pride than with other men’s. He is apt to put the best construction on others’ words and behavior, and to think that none are so proud as himself. But the proud hypocrite is quick to discern the speck in his brother’s eye, in this respect; while he sees nothing of the beam in his own. He often decries others’ pride, finding fault with their apparel and their way of living; he is affected ten times more by his neighbor’s ring or apparel, than with all the filthiness of his own heart.

From the hypocrites’ disposition to think highly of their own humility, it follows that counterfeit humility is eager to put itself in view by all. Those that have it, are apt to speak a lot about their humiliations. They present them in eloquent terms, and make a great outward show of their humility by affected looks, gestures, or manner of speech, or by the meanness of their apparel,
Distinguishing Signs of Truly Gracious and Holy Affections

or by some other affected specialness. It was this way with the false prophets in Zech. 13:4; and with the hypocritical Jews in Isa. 57:5. Christ tells us in Matt. 6:16 that it was this way with the Pharisees. But such behavior is contrary to true humility. Those who have true humility are not apt to display their eloquence by drawing attention to it, nor do they speak of their abasement in strong terms. True humility does not make a pretense with any special outward meanness of apparel, or way of living. This is in accord with Matt. 6:17, “But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face.” Col. 2:23. “These things indeed have an appearance of wisdom in will-worship and humility, and neglecting the body.” Nor is true humility a noisy thing; it is not loud and boisterous. The Scripture presents it as having a contrary nature. Ahab, when he had visible humility, or a resemblance of true humility, went about softly, 1Kings 21:27. A penitent, in the exercise of true humiliation, is represented as still and silent. Lam. 3:28, “He sits alone and keeps silence, because God has laid it on him.” Silence is mentioned as what attends humility in Prov. 30:32: “If you have done foolishly in exalting yourself, or if you have thought evil, then lay your hand on your mouth.”

Thus I have specifically and largely shown the nature of true humility, the kind that attends holy affections. It has a tendency to cause persons to think little of their attainments in religion as compared to the attainments of others, and particularly of their attainments in humility. And I have shown the contrary tendency of spiritual pride, to dispose persons to think their attainments in these respects are great. I have insisted longer on this, because I look at it as a matter of great importance; it affords a certain distinction between true and counterfeit humility. And also because this disposition that hypocrites have, to look at themselves as better than others, is what God has declared to be hateful to him. Isa. 65:5. It is “smoke in his nose, and a fire that burns all day.” It is mentioned as an example of the pride of the inhabitants of the holy city Jerusalem, that they esteemed themselves to be far better than the people of Sodom; and so they looked at them as worthy to be overlooked and disregarded. Ezek. 16:56, “For your sister Sodom was not mentioned by your mouth in the day of your pride.”

May the reader not lightly pass over these things as they apply to himself. When you imagine that it is a bad sign for a person to be apt to think he is a better saint than others, take heed lest there arise a blinding prejudice in your own favor. There will probably be a need for strict self-examination to determine if it is this way with you. If you conclude, “No, it seems to me that none are as bad as I am,” do not let it pass, but examine yourself again. Ask whether or not you think you are better than others because you think so lowly of yourself? If so, do you not have a high opinion of this alleged humility? And if you answer again, “No, I do not have high opinion of my humility; it seems to me that I am as proud as the devil,” examine yourself yet again. Ask whether self-conceit arises under this cloak of humility. Ask whether it is for this very reason – thinking you are as proud as the devil – that you do not think you are very humble.

From this opposition between the natures of a true and a counterfeit humility, as to the esteem the subjects have of themselves, arises a manifold contrariety of temper and behavior as well.

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18 Zech 13:4 “And it shall be in that day that every prophet will be ashamed of his vision when he prophesies; they will not wear a robe of coarse hair to deceive.

19 This is a curious reference. Perhaps it should be Isa 58:1-5, concerning hypocrisy on the Sabbath. – WHG

20 Matt. 6:16 “Moreover, when you fast, do not be like the hypocrites, with a sad countenance. For they disfigure their faces that they may appear to men to be fasting. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward.”

21 It is an observation of Mr. Jones, in his excellent treatise of the canon of the New Testament, that the evangelist Mark, who was the companion of St. Peter, and is supposed to have written his gospel under the direction of that apostle, when he mentions Peter’s repentance after denying his Master, does not use such strong terms to set it forth as the other evangelists do; he only uses these words, “When he thought about it, he wept,” Mark 14:72; whereas the other evangelists say it thus, “he went out and wept bitterly,” Matt. 26:75, Luke 22:62.

22 1Ki 21:27 So it was, when Ahab heard those words, that he tore his clothes and put sackcloth on his body, and fasted and lay in sackcloth, and went about [softly] – or mourning.
A truly humble person, having such a lowly opinion of his righteousness and holiness, is poor in spirit. Being poor in spirit, is being poor in his own sense and apprehension of what is actually in him, and to have a corresponding disposition. Therefore a truly humble person, especially one who is eminently humble, naturally behaves himself in many respects like a poor man. “The poor uses entreaties, but the rich answers roughly.” Prov 18:23 A poor man is not disposed to quick and high resentment when he is among the rich:

- he is apt to yield to others, for he knows that others are above him;
- he is not stiff and self-willed;
- he is patient with hard fare;
- he expects to be despised, and he takes it patently;
- he does not take it heinously that he is overlooked and little regarded;
- he is prepared to be in a lowly position;
- he readily honors his superiors;
- he takes reproofs quietly;
- he readily honors others as being above him;
- he easily yields to being taught, and does not claim much understanding and judgment;
- he is not overly nice or humorous, and he has his spirit subdued to hard things;
- he is not assuming, nor apt to make much of himself; and
- it is natural for him to be subject to others.

This is how it is with the humble Christian. Humility is (as the great Maastricht expresses it) a kind of holy pusillanimity. 24

A man who is very poor is a beggar; so is someone who is poor in spirit. There is a great difference between those affections which are gracious, and those which are false. Under gracious affections, the person is still a poor beggar at God’s gates, exceedingly empty and needy. But false affections make men appear rich to themselves, and increased with goods, and not very needy; they place great stock in their own imagination for their subsistence. 25

A poor man is modest in his speech and behavior. Much more modest, and more certainly and universally, is one who is poor in spirit, who is humble and modest in his behavior among men. It is in vain for any men to pretend they are humble, and like little children before God, when they are haughty, assuming, and impudent in their behavior among men. The apostle informs us in Romans 4:1-2, that the design of the gospel is to cut off all glorying, not only before God, but also before men. Some pretend to have great humility, who are very haughty, audacious, and assuming in their external appearance and behavior. But they ought to consider these Scriptures: Psa. 131:1, “Lord, my heart is not haughty, nor my eyes lofty; nor do I exercise myself

23 Bartholomeus van Maastricht (d. 1446), a theologian and Carthusian monk who taught university at Heidelberg. - WHG
24 A seeming oxymoron – to be pusillanimous is to be cowardly, weak, and timid to a fault. It is derogatory. – WHG
25 “This spirit ever keeps a man poor and vile in his own eyes, and empty. When a man has gotten some knowledge, and can discourse pretty well, and has some taste of the heavenly gift, and some sweet illapses of grace, his conscience is pretty well quieted. And if he has gotten some answers to his prayers, and has sweet affections, he grows full. And having his conscience eased, he casts off sense and his daily groaning under sin. Hence the spirit of prayer dies: he loses his esteem for God’s ordinances, and he does not feel such a need for them; or he gets no good and feels no life or power from them. This is the woeful condition of some; yet they do not know it. But now, the Lord empties the one who is filled with the Spirit; and the more He empties, the longer the man lives. So others think he does not need much grace, and yet he considers himself the poorest of it.” Shepard’s Parable of the Ten Virgins, Part II. p. 132. “After all fillings, be ever empty, hungry, and feeling the need, and praying for more.” Ibid , p. 151. “Truly, brothers, when I see the curse of God upon many Christians, who have now grown full of their portions, gifts, peace, comforts, abilities, and duties, I stand adoring the riches of the Lord’s mercy, to a little handful of poor believers, not only in making them empty, but in keeping them so all their days.” Shepard’s Sound Believer, the late edition in Boston, p. 158-159.
in great matters or in things too high for me.” Prov. 6:16-17, “These six things the Lord hates; indeed seven are an abomination to him: a proud look, etc.” Prov. 21:4, “A high look, and a proud heart are sin.” Psa. 18:27, “You will bring down high looks.” Psa. 101:5, “The one who has a high look, and a proud heart, I will not suffer.” 1Cor. 13:4. “Charity does not vaunt itself, and it does not behave itself in an unseemly way.”

There is a certain amiable modesty and fear that belongs to Christian behavior among men, and that arises from humility, which the Scripture often speaks of. 1Pet. 3:15, “Be ready to give an answer to every man that asks you – with meekness and fear.” Romans 13:7, “Fear those to whom fear is due.” 2Cor. 7:15, “While he remembers the obedience of you all, how with fear and trembling you received him.” Eph. 6:5, “Servants, be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling.” 1Pet. 2:18, “Servants, be subject to your masters with all fear.” 1Pet. 3:2, “While they behold your chaste conduct coupled with fear.” 1Tim. 2:9, “That women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety.” In this respect a Christian is like a little child: a little child is modest before men, and his heart is apt to be possessed with fear and awe among them.

The same spirit will dispose a Christian to honor all men. 1Pet. 2:17, “Honor all men.” A humble Christian is not only disposed to honor the saints in his behavior; but others also, in all those ways that do not imply a visible approval of their sins. Thus Abraham, the great pattern of believers, honored the children of Heth. Gen. 23:7, “Abraham stood up, and bowed himself to the people of the land.” This was a remarkable instance of humble behavior towards those who were out of Christ, and that Abraham knew were accursed, and therefore would by no means allow his servant to take a wife for his son from among them. Esau’s wives, being of these children of Heth, were a grief to Isaac and Rebekah. Paul honored Festus in Acts 26:25, “I am not mad, most noble Festus.” Not only will Christian humility dispose persons to honor those wicked men that are out of the visible church, but also false brothers and persecutors. Jacob, when he was in an excellent frame of mind, having just wrestled with God all night, and having received the blessing, honored Esau, who was his false and persecuting brother. Gen. 33:3, “Jacob bowed himself to the ground seven times, until he came near to his brother Esau.” So he called him lord; and commanded all his family to honor him in the same way.

Thus I have endeavored to describe the heart and behavior of someone who is governed by a truly gracious humility, as exactly in agreement with the Scriptures as I am able to do.

Now, it is out of a heart such as this, that all truly holy affections flow. Christian affections are like Mary’s precious ointment that she poured on Christ’s head, that filled the whole house with a sweet odor. It was poured out of an alabaster jar. In the same way, gracious affections flow to Christ out of a pure heart. It was poured out of a broken jar. Until the box was broken, the ointment could not flow out, nor could it diffuse its odor. In the same way, gracious affections flow out of a broken heart. Gracious affections are also like those of Mary Magdalene (Luke 7 at the end), who also pours precious ointment onto Christ out of a broken alabaster jar, anointing the feet of Jesus with it; she washed them with her tears, and wiped them with the hair of her head. All gracious affections that are a sweet aroma to Christ, and that fill the soul of a Christian with a heavenly sweetness and fragrance, are broken-hearted affections. A truly Christian love, either towards God or men, is a humble broken-hearted love. The desires of the saints, however earnest, are humble desires. Their hope is a humble hope. And their joy, even when it is unspeakable and full of glory, is a humble broken-hearted joy. It leaves the Christian more poor in spirit, and more like a little child, and more disposed to universal lowliness in his behavior.
7. **Gracious affections are attended by a change of nature**

Another thing that distinguishes gracious affections from others, is that they are attended by a change of nature.

All Gracious affections arise from a spiritual understanding in which the excellency and glory of divine things are revealed to the soul, as shown before. All spiritual revelations are transforming; they not only alter the present exercise, sensation, and frame of the soul, but they have such power and efficacy, that they make an alteration in the very nature of the soul. 2Cor. 3:18, “But we all with open face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image, from glory to Glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.” Power such as this is divine power, and it is unique to the Spirit of the Lord. Other power may alter men’s present frames and feelings, but only the power of a Creator can change the nature, or give a new nature. Also, no revelations or illuminations except divine and supernatural ones will have this supernatural effect. But all those revelations that have this effect, are truly divine. The soul is deeply affected by these revelations, and it is so affected as to be transformed by them.

It is this way with those affections that the soul experiences in its conversion. The Scripture representations of conversion strongly imply and signify a change of nature. It uses such phrases as “being born again; becoming new creatures; rising from the dead; being renewed in the spirit of the mind; dying to sin, and living to righteousness; putting off the old man, and putting on the new man; being engrained into a new stock; having a divine seed implanted in the heart; being made partakers of the divine nature,” etc.

Therefore if there is no great, remarkable, and abiding change in persons who think they have experienced a work of conversion, then all their imaginations and pretenses are in vain, however they may have been affected by them. Conversion is a great and universal change of the man, turning him from sin to God. A man may be restrained from sin before he is converted; but when he is converted, he is not only restrained from sin, but his very heart and nature is turned from it to holiness. From that point forward he becomes a holy person, and an enemy to sin. Say a person has high affections at his supposed first conversion, and yet after a while there has been no tangible or remarkable alteration in him. Instead, those same bad qualities and evil habits which were visible before, are still visible; he typically remains under the same prevalence of dispositions that he used to be under before his conversion. His character remains unchanged as well: he appears as selfish, carnal, stupid, perverse, unchristian, and unsavory as ever. There is greater evidence against him, than the brightest story of his experiences can be evidence for him. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision, nor uncircumcision, neither high profession, nor low profession, neither a fair story nor a broken one, avails anything – only being a new creature.

If there is a great alteration visible in a person for a while, but it does not abide, and afterwards he returns to being much as he used to be, then it appears there has been no change of nature – for nature is an abiding thing. A swine may be washed, but the swinish nature remains; a dove may be defiled, but its cleanly nature remains.

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1 “I would not judge the whole soul’s coming to Christ, so much by sudden pangs as by inward bent. For the whole soul, in affectionate expressions and actions, may be carried to Christ; but being without this bent, and change of affections, is unsound.” Shepard’s *Parable*, Part I. p. 203.

2 “It is with the soul, as with water; all the cold may be gone, but the native principle of cold still remains. You may remove the burning of lusts, not the blackness of nature. Where the power of sin lies, change of conscience from security to terror, change of life from profaneness to civility, and fashions of the world to escape its pollutions, change of lusts, even quenching them for a time: yet the nature is never changed in the best hypocrite that ever was.” Shepard’s *Parable*, Part I. p. 194.
Indeed allowances must be made for the natural temperament. Conversion does not entirely root it out – meaning those sins which a man, by his natural constitution, was most inclined towards before his conversions, may be the ones he is still most apt to fall into. Yet conversion will make a great alteration even with respect to these sins. While we are imperfect, grace does not root out an evil natural temperament; yet it has great power and efficacy to correct it. The change that is wrought in conversion is a universal change; grace changes a man with respect to whatever is sinful in him. The old man is put off, and the new man is put on. He is sanctified throughout. The man becomes a new creature; old things have passed away, and all things have become new. All sin is mortified, constitutional sins as well as others. Before his conversion, if a man’s natural constitution was especially inclined towards lasciviousness, drunkenness, or maliciousness, then converting grace will make a great alteration in him with respect to these evil dispositions. He may still be most in danger of these sins, yet they no longer have dominion over him; nor will they characterize him any longer. Indeed, true repentance in some respects, especially turns a man against that iniquity in which he has been most guilty, and by which he has chiefly dishonored God. Someone who forsakes other sins, but keeps his leading sin (the iniquity he is chiefly inclined towards), is like Saul when he was sent against God’s enemies, the Amalekites. Saul was given a strict charge to save no one, but to utterly to destroy them, both small and great. Saul utterly destroyed the lower-ranking people, but he kept the king alive, the chief of all.

Some foolishly make it an argument in favor of their revelations and affections, that when these things are gone, they are left wholly without any life or sense, or anything beyond what they had before. They think it is evidence that what they experienced was wholly of God, and not of themselves, because (they say) when God has departed, all is gone. They can see and feel nothing, and they are no better than they used to be. It is very true, that all grace and goodness in the hearts of the saints is entirely from God; and they are universally and immediately dependent on him for it. Yet these persons are mistaken as to how God communicates himself and his Holy Spirit in imparting saving grace to their soul. He gives his Spirit to be united to the faculties of the soul, and to dwell there as a principle of nature. So that the soul, in being endowed with grace, is endowed with a new nature; but nature is an abiding thing. All the exercises of grace are entirely from Christ. But as a living agent, grace will move and stir what is without life, so that it cannot remain lifeless. The soul has life communicated to it, so that through Christ's power, it has a vital nature inherent in itself. In the soul where Christ savingly is, there he lives. He not only lives outside it, so as to violently actuate it, but he lives in it, so that it too is alive. Grace in the soul is as much from Christ, as the light in a mirror, held in the sunbeams, is from the sun. But this represents the manner of the communication of grace to the soul only in part – because the mirror remains as it was. Its nature is not changed at all; its nature is as much without lightsomeness as ever. But the soul of a saint receives light from the Sun of righteousness in such a way that its nature is changed. It becomes a luminous thing. Not only does the sun shine in the saints, but they also become little suns, partaking of the nature of the fountain of their light. In this respect, the manner of their derivation of light, is more like the lamps in the tabernacle, than a reflecting glass. Though they were lit by fire from heaven, yet thereby they became burning shining things themselves. The saints not only drink of the water of life that flows from the original fountain, but this water becomes a fountain of water in them, springing up there, and flowing out of them. Grace is compared to an implanted seed that is not only in the ground, but it has hold of it. It takes root there, grows there, and it is an abiding principle of life and nature there.

As it is with spiritual revelations and affections that are given at first conversion, so it is in all illuminations and affections of that kind that occur afterwards; they are all transforming. There

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is a divine power and energy in them similar to the first revelations. They still reach the bottom of the heart, and they affect and alter the very nature of the soul in proportion to the degree in which they are given. A transformation of nature is continued and carried on by them to the end of life, until it is brought to perfection in glory. This is how the progress of the work of grace in the hearts of the saints is represented in Scripture: as a continued conversion and renovation of the nature. So the apostle exhorts those at Rome, “beloved of God, called to be saints,” Rom 1:7 – they were the subjects of God’s redeeming mercies – “to be transformed by the renewing of their mind.” Rom. 12:1-2, “I beg you therefore, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice; do not be conformed to this world; but be transformed by the renewing of your mind;” compared with chap. 1:7. So the apostle wrote to the “saints and faithful in Christ Jesus,” that were at Ephesus (Eph. 1:1). They were once dead in trespasses and sins, but were now regenerated and raised up, and made to sit together in heavenly places in Christ. Eph 2:6 They were created in Christ Jesus for good works. Eph 2:10 They once were far off, but were now made near by the blood of Christ. Eph 2:13 They were no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God. Eph 2:19 They were built together for a habitation of God through the Spirit. Eph 2:22 The apostle, writing to these saints, tells them, “that he did not cease to pray, that God would give them the spirit of wisdom and revelation, in the knowledge of Christ; that the eyes of their understanding being enlightened, they might know, or experience, what was the exceeding greatness of God’s power towards those who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, which he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places,” Eph. 1:16 ff. In this, the apostle refers to the glorious power and work of God in converting and renewing the soul, which is made plain by the sequel. Thus the apostle exhorts them “to put off the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; and be renewed in the spirit of their minds; and put on the new man, which is created after God in righteousness and true holiness,” Eph. 4:22-24.

Some, from time to time, have the sort of high affections that leave them without any abiding effect. They end suddenly; so that from the very height of their emotion, and seeming rapture, they pass at once to being quite dead, and void of all sense and activity. This is surely not the usual way with high and gracious affections. These would have left a sweet savor and a relish of divine things on the heart, and a stronger bent of the soul towards God and holiness. Moses’ face not only shone while he was on the mount, extraordinarily conversing with God, but it continued to shine after he came down from the mount. When men have been conversing with Christ in an extraordinary manner, its tangible effect remains on them. There is something remarkable in their disposition and frame, which if we take note of it, and trace it to its cause, we will find that it is because they have been with Jesus, Acts 4:13.

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4 “Do you think the Holy Ghost comes on a man as on Balaam, by immediate acting, and then leaves him – and then he has nothing?” Shepard’s Parable, Part I. p. 126.

5 Acts 4:13 Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated and untrained men, they marveled. And they realized that they had been with Jesus.
8. Gracious affections are attended by the temperament of Christ

Truly gracious affections differ from false and delusive affections in that they tend towards and are attended by the lamblike and dovelike spirit and temper of Jesus Christ. In other words, they naturally produce and promote the spirit of love, meekness, quietness, forgiveness and mercy that appears in Christ.

The evidence of this in the Scripture is abundant. If we judge the nature of Christianity and the proper spirit of the gospel by the word of God, this spirit of the gospel may eminently be called the Christian spirit. It may be looked at as the true and distinguishing disposition of the hearts of Christians as Christians. When some of the disciples of Christ said something that was feeble and inconsiderate, and that was not agreeable to such a spirit, Christ told them that they did not know what manner of spirit they were of, Luke 9:55. It implied that this spirit I am speaking about is the proper spirit of his religion and kingdom. All who are truly godly, and real disciples of Christ, have this spirit in them. Not only do they have it, but they are of this spirit. It is the spirit by which they are so possessed and governed, that it is their true and proper character. This is evident by what the wise man says in Prov. 17:27 (plainly referring to this spirit): “A man of understanding is of an excellent spirit.” Christ gives a particular description of the qualities and temper of those who are truly blessed, who will obtain mercy, and are God’s children and heirs. Matt. 5:5, 7, 9, “Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy. Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God.” This spirit is the special character of the elect of God. It is described in Col. 3:12-13. “Therefore as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on hearts of mercy, kindness, meekness of mind, meekness, long-suffering; forbearing one another, and forgiving one another.”

The apostle is speaking of that temper and disposition which is the most excellent and essential thing in Christianity, and without which none are true Christians, and without which the most glorious profession and gifts are nothing. Calling this spirit by the name of charity, he describes it this way in 1Cor. 13:4-5: “Charity is longsuffering and kind; charity does not envy; charity does not vaunt itself; it is not puffed up, it does not behave unseemly; it does not seek its own, is not easily provoked, and thinks no evil.” The same apostle in Gal. 5:22-23, intending to declare the distinguishing marks and fruits of true Christian grace, chiefly insists on the things that pertain to the temper and spirit that I am speaking about. He says: “The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance.” The Apostle James, in describing true grace, or wisdom from above, intends that others, who are of a contrary spirit, should not deceive themselves and lie against the truth by professing to be Christians when they are not. James 3:14-17, “If you have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, do not glory and lie against the truth. This wisdom does not descend from above; but it is earthly, sensual, and devilish. For where envying and strife are found, there is confusion, and every evil work. But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits.”

Everything that pertains to holiness of heart, indeed belongs to the nature of true Christianity, and to the character of Christians. But a spirit of holiness as appearing in some particular graces, may more especially be called the Christian spirit or temper. There are some amiable qualities and virtues that more especially agree with the nature of the gospel constitution and Christian profession. This is because there is a special agreeableness in them with those divine attributes which God has more remarkably manifested and glorified in the work of redemption by Jesus Christ – which is the grand subject of Christian revelation. There is also a special agreeableness with those virtues that were so wonderfully exercised by Jesus Christ towards us in that affair, and the blessed example he has set for us in it. It is also true because they are uniquely agreeable to the special drift and design of the work of redemption, and the benefits we
receive by it, and the relation that it brings us into: to God and to one another. These virtues include things like humility, meekness, love, forgiveness, and mercy. These things therefore especially belong to the character of Christians.

These things are spoken of as being especially the character of Jesus Christ himself, the great head of the Christian church. They are spoken of in the prophecies of the Old Testament, as cited in Matt. 21:5: “Tell the daughter of Zion, Behold, your King comes to you, meek, and sitting upon an ass, and a colt, the foal of an ass.” So Christ himself speaks of them, Matt. 11:29: “Learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart.” It is apparent in the name by which Christ is so often called in Scripture, the Lamb. And just as these things are especially the character of Christ, so they are also especially the character of Christians. Christians are Christ-like; none deserve the name Christian that are not Christian in their prevailing character. “The new man is renewed, after the image of the one that created him,” Col. 3:10. All true Christians behold as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, and are changed into the same image by his Spirit, 2Cor. 3:18. The elect are predestined to be conformed to the image of the Son of God, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers, Rom. 8:29. Just as we have borne the image of the first man who is earthly, so we must bear the image of the heavenly man – for as is the earthy, so are those who are earthly; and as is the heavenly, so are those who are heavenly, 1Cor. 15:47-49. Christ is full of grace, and all Christians receive his fullness; they receive grace for grace. That is, there is grace in Christians that corresponds to the grace in Christ, like the correspondence between the wax and the seal. There is character for character. The kind of graces, the spirit and temper, the same things that belong to Christ’s character, also belong to theirs. That special disposition in which Christ’s character consists, is the same disposition in which his image consists.

Christians that shine by reflecting the light of the Sun of righteousness, shine with the same sort of brightness, the same mild, sweet, and pleasant beams. These lamps of the spiritual temple that are kindled by fire from heaven, burn with the same sort of flame. The branch has the same nature as the stock and root; it has the same sap; and it bears the same sort of fruit. The members of the body have the same kind of life as the head. Eph 4:15-16 It would be strange if Christians were not of the same temper and spirit as Christ when they are his flesh and his bone. Indeed, they are one spirit, 1Cor. 6:17; and they live so. It is not they that live, but Christ that lives in them. Gal 2:20 A Christian spirit is Christ’s mark that he sets upon the souls of his people. It is his seal on their foreheads, bearing his image and superscription. Christians are the followers of Christ; and they are his followers as they are obedient to the call of Christ. Matt. 11:28-29, “Come to me – and learn from me: for I am meek and lowly of heart.” They follow him as the Lamb. Rev. 14:4, “These are the ones who follow the Lamb wherever he goes.” True Christians are, as it were, clothed with the meek, quiet, and loving temper of Christ. For as many as are in Christ, have put on Christ. Gal 3:27 In this respect, the church is clothed with the sun, not only by being clothed with his imputed righteousness, but also by being adorned with his graces, Rom. 13:14. Christ the great Shepherd, is himself a Lamb, and believers are also lambs; all in the flock are lambs. John 21:15, “Feed my lambs.” Luke 10:3, “I send you out as lambs in the midst of wolves.” The redemption of the church by Christ from the power of the devil, was typified of old by David delivering the lamb out of the mouth of the lion and the bear.

The manner of virtue spoken of is the very nature of the Christian spirit, or the spirit that works in Christ and in his members. The distinguishing nature of it is evident by this: that the dove is the very symbol or emblem chosen by God to represent it. The fittest emblems of other things, are those which best represent what is most distinguishing in their nature. The Spirit that descended on Christ when he was anointed by the Father, descended on him like a dove. The dove is a noted emblem of meekness, harmlessness, peace and love. But the same Spirit that descended on the Head of the church, descends on its members. “God has sent forth the Spirit of his Son into their hearts,” Gal. 4:6. And “if any man does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his,” Rom. 8:9. There is but one Spirit for the whole mystical body, head, and members, 1Cor.
6:17, Eph. 4:4. Christ breathes his own Spirit on his disciples, John 20:22. As Christ was anointed with the Holy Ghost descending on him like a dove, so Christians also “have an anointing from the Holy One,” 1John 2:20, 27. They are anointed with the same oil – it is the same “precious ointment on the head, that goes down to the skirts of the garments.” And on both, it is a spirit of peace and love. Psalm 133:1-2, “Behold, how good and how pleasant it is, for brothers to dwell together in unity! It is like the precious ointment upon the head, that ran down upon the beard, even Aaron’s beard, that went down to the skirts of his garments.” The oil on Aaron’s garments had the same sweet and inimitable odor as the oil on his head; the smell of the same sweet spices. Christian affections, and a Christian behavior, are the out-flowing of the savor of Christ’s sweet ointments. Because the church has a dovelike temper and disposition, it is said of her that she has doves’ eyes, Cant. 1:15: “Behold, you are fair, my love, behold, you are fair, you have doves’ eyes.” And chap. 4:1, “Behold, you are fair, my love, behold, you are fair; you have doves’ eyes within your locks.” The same is said of Christ in chap. 6:12: “His eyes are like the eyes of doves.” The church is frequently compared to a dove in Scripture, in Cant. 2:14, “O, my dove, that is in the clefts of the rock.” Chap. 5:2, “Open to me, my love, my dove;” and chap. 6:9, “My dove, my undefiled is but one.” Psa. 68:13, “You shall be like the wings of a dove, covered with silver, and her feathers with yellow gold.” And 74:19, “O do not deliver the soul of the turtle dove to the multitude of the wicked.” The dove that Noah sent out of the ark, which could find no rest for the sole of her foot until she returned, was a type of a true saint.

Meekness is so much the character of the saints, that meek and godly are synonymous terms in Scripture. In Psalm 37:10-11, the wicked and the meek are set in opposition one to another, as wicked and godly: “Yet a little while and the wicked shall not be; but the meek shall inherit the earth.” So too in Psa. 147:6, “The Lord lifts up the meek: he throws the wicked down to the ground.”

It is doubtless on this account that Christ represents all his disciples, all the heirs of heaven, as little children. Matt. 19:14, “Allow the little children to come to me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of heaven.” Matt. 10:42, “Whoever gives a drink to one of these little ones, a cup of cold water, in the name of a disciple, truly I say to you, he shall in no way lose his reward.” Matt. 18:6, “Whoever offends one of these little ones, etc.” Ver. 10, “Take heed that you do not despise one of these little ones.” Ver. 14, “It is not the will of your Father in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish.” John 13:33, “Little children, yet a little while I am with you.” Little children are innocent and harmless; they do not do a great deal of mischief in the world; men need not be afraid of them; they are not a dangerous sort of persons; their anger does not last long; they do not lay up injuries in high resentment, entertaining deep and rooted malice. So Christians, in malice, are like children, 1Cor. 14:20.1 Little children are not guileful and deceitful, but plain and simple; they are not versed in the arts of fiction and deceit; and they are strangers to artful disguises. They are yieldable and flexible, not willful and obstinate; they do not trust to their own understanding, but rely on the instructions of parents, and others of superior understanding. Here therefore is a fit and lively emblem of the followers of the Lamb. Being like little children, is not just a thing that is highly commendable, and what Christians approve and aim at, and which some extraordinary proficiency attain to. But it is their universal character, and it is absolutely necessary to enter into the kingdom of heaven: Matt. 18:3, “Truly I say to you, unless you are converted, and become as little children, you shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.” Mark 10:15, “Truly I say to you, Whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a little child, shall not enter into it.”

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1 1Cor 14:20 Brethren, do not be children in understanding; however, in malice be babes, but in understanding be mature.
But here some may be ready to ask, “Is there no such thing as Christian fortitude, and boldness for Christ, or being good soldiers in Christian warfare, and boldly coming against the enemies of Christ and his people?”

I answer, doubtless there is such a thing. The whole Christian life is compared to warfare, and fitly so. The most eminent Christians are the best soldiers, endued with the greatest degrees of Christian fortitude. It is the duty of God’s people to be steadfast and vigorous in their opposition to the designs and ways of those who are endeavoring to overthrow the kingdom of Christ, and the interest of religion. Yet many persons seem to be quite mistaken concerning the nature of Christian fortitude. It is an exceedingly different thing from brutal fierceness, or the boldness of beasts of prey. True Christian fortitude consists in strength of mind, through grace, exerted in two things: first, in ruling and suppressing the evil and unruly passions and affections of the mind; and secondly, in steadfastly and freely exerting, and following good affections and dispositions – without being hindered by sinful fear, or the opposition of enemies. But the passions that are restrained and suppressed in the exercise of this Christian strength and fortitude, are those very passions that are vigorously and violently exerted in a false boldness for Christ. Those affections that are vigorously exerted in true fortitude, are those Christian, holy affections that are directly contrary to them. Though Christian fortitude is apparent in withstanding and counteracting the enemies that are outside us, it appears much more in resisting and suppressing the enemies that are within us. This is because they are our worst and strongest enemies, and they have the greatest advantage against us. The strength of the good soldier of Jesus Christ appears in nothing more than in steadfastly maintaining the holy calm, meekness, sweetness, and benevolence of his mind, amidst all the storms, injuries, strange behavior, and surprising acts and events of this evil and unreasonable world. The Scripture seems to intimate that true fortitude consists chiefly in this. Prov. 16:32, “The one who is slow to anger, is better than the mighty; and the one who rules his spirit, is better than the one takes a city.”

The most direct and sure way to rightly judge what holy fortitude is in fighting with God’s enemies, is to look to the Captain of all God’s hosts, our great leader and example, and see how his fortitude and valor appeared in his chief conflict, in the greatest battle that ever was, or ever will be fought with these enemies. He fought with them alone; none of the people were with him. Yet this is when he exercised his fortitude to the highest degree ever, and obtained that glorious victory that will be celebrated in the praises and triumphs of all the hosts of heaven throughout all eternity. This was Jesus Christ in his last sufferings, when his enemies on earth and in hell made their most violent attack upon him, surrounding him on every side like renting and roaring lions. Doubtless here will we see, in its highest perfection and greatest luster, the fortitude of a holy warrior and a champion in the cause of God. It is an example fit to follow for the soldiers who fight under this Captain. But how did he show his holy boldness and valor at that time? Not in the exercise of any fiery passions; not in fierce and violent speeches, vehemently declaiming and crying out about the intolerable wickedness of his opposers, giving them their own in plain terms. Rather it was by not opening his mouth when afflicted and oppressed, and in going like a lamb to the slaughter, and like a dumb sheep before his shearers; it was in praying that the Father would forgive his cruel enemies, because they did not know what they were doing; it was in not shedding others’ blood, but with all conquering patience and love, shedding his own. Indeed one of his disciples, who made an immodest pretense to boldness for Christ, and confidently declared he would sooner die with Christ than deny him, began to swing his sword. But Christ meekly rebuked him, and healed the wound that the disciple gave. Never was the patience, meekness, love, and forgiveness of Christ so gloriously manifested as it was at that time. Never did he appear so much like a lamb, and never did he show so much of the dovelike spirit, as at that time. If therefore we see any of the followers of Christ, in the midst of the most violent, unreasonable, and wicked opposition of God’s enemies...
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and his own, maintaining under all this temptation, the humility, quietness, and gentleness of a lamb, and the harmlessness love, and sweetness of a dove, we may well judge that here is a good soldier of Jesus Christ.

When persons are fierce and violent, and exert their sharp and bitter passions, it shows weakness instead of strength and fortitude. 1Cor. 3 at the beginning, “And I, brothers, could not speak to you as to spiritual, but as carnal, even as babes in Christ. For you are still carnal: for where there is envying, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal, and walking as men?”

There is a pretended boldness for Christ that arises from no better a principle than pride. A man may be bold to expose himself to the dislike of the world, and even to provoke their displeasure, and yet it may arise out of pride. For it is the nature of spiritual pride to make men seek distinction and uniqueness. They often start a war with those that they call carnal, so they may be more highly exalted by those of their own party. True boldness for Christ is universal. It overcomes all, and it carries men above the displeasure of friends and foes, so that they will forsake all rather than forsake Christ. They would rather offend all parties, and be thought meanly of by all, rather than offend Christ. Any duty which tests whether a man is willing to be despised by those who are of his own party, and willing to be least worthy of their regard, is a much better test of his boldness for Christ, than being eager to expose himself to the reproach of his opposers. The apostle did not seek glory from Heathens and Jews, nor even from Christians, as he declares in 1Thess. 2:6. This is the one who is bold for Christ: he has enough Christian fortitude to confess his fault openly when he has committed one that requires it, and he would fall on his knees before his opposers. Such things are vastly greater evidence of holy boldness, than resolutely and fiercely confronting our opposers.

Just as some are greatly mistaken concerning the nature of true boldness for Christ, so they are mistaken concerning Christian zeal. It is indeed a flame, but a sweet one; or rather it is the heat and fervor of a sweet flame. For the flame of which it is the heat, is none other than that of divine love, or Christian charity. This is the sweetest and most benevolent thing that can be in the heart of man or angel. Zeal is the fervor of this flame as it ardently and vigorously goes out towards the good that it has as its object. And so consequentially, it opposes the evil that is contrary to it, and which impedes it. There is indeed vigorous opposition that attends such zeal, but that opposition is against things, and not persons. Bitterness against persons has no part in it; rather, it is contrary to it. The warmer true zeal is, and the higher it is raised, the further persons are from such bitterness, and the more love they have – both towards those who are evil and those who are good. It is apparent from what has just been observed, that the nature and essence zeal is none other than the fervor of a spirit of Christian love. As to what opposition it has towards things, it is firstly and chiefly against evil things in the person who has this zeal. It is against the enemies of God and the enemies of holiness in his own heart (because these are most in view and he deals with them the most). Only secondarily does it oppose the sins of others. Therefore, there is nothing in true Christian zeal that is contrary to that spirit of meekness, gentleness, and love – nothing contrary to that spirit of a little child, lamb, and dove – that has been spoken of. Christian zeal is entirely agreeable to it, and it tends to promote it.

But let me say something specific concerning this Christian spirit which I have been speaking of, as it is exercised in these three things: forgiveness, love, and mercy. I would observe that the Scripture is very clear and express concerning the absolute necessity for each of these to belong to the temper and character of every Christian.

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2 Mr. Shepard, speaking of hypocrites affecting applause, says, “For this reason, men forsake their friends and trample underfoot the scorns of the world: they have credit elsewhere. To maintain their interest in the love of godly men, they will suffer much.” Parable of the Ten Virgins, Part I. p. 180.
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It is so as to a forgiving spirit, or a disposition to overlook and forgive injuries. Christ gives it to us both as a negative and positive evidence. He is express in teaching us that if we are of such a spirit, then it is a sign that we are in a state of forgiveness and favor ourselves – and if we are not of such a spirit, then we are not forgiven by God. He seems to take special care that we should take good notice of it, and always bear it in mind. Matt. 6:12, 14-15, “Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.” Christ expresses the same thing in Mark 11:25-26; and again in Matt. 18:22 to the end. This is the parable of the servant that owed his lord ten thousand denarii; therefore he was delivered to the tormentors. In the application of the parable, Christ says in ver. 35, “My heavenly Father will do likewise to you if you do not, from your heart, forgive your brother his trespasses.”

All true saints are of a loving, benevolent, and beneficent temper; the Scripture is very plain and abundant about that. Without it, the apostle tells us, though we speak with the tongues of men and angels, we are like a sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal; and though we have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge, yet without this spirit we are nothing. Of the marks laid down in the New Testament by which to know true Christians, no one virtue or disposition is so often and so expressly insisted on as love. It is often given as a sign that is uniquely distinguishing, a sign by which all may know Christ’s disciples, and by which they may know themselves. It is often laid down both as a negative and positive evidence. To give it eminence, Christ calls the law of love, his commandment. John 13:34, “A new commandment I give you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, so you must love one another.” And chap. 15:12, “This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.” And ver. 17, “These things I command you, that you love one another.” And it says in chap. 13:35, “By this all men shall know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.” And chap. 14:21 (still with a special reference to what he calls his commandment), “The one who has my commandments, and keeps them, he is the one that loves me.” The beloved disciple who had so much of this sweet temper himself, abundantly insists on it in his epistles. None of the other apostles, so much as he, lays down express signs of grace for professors to try themselves by. In his signs, he scarcely insists on anything else except a spirit of Christian love, and an agreeable practice. 1John 2:9-10, “He that says he is in the light, and hates his brother, is in darkness up until now. He that loves his brother abides in the light; there is no occasion of stumbling in him.” Chap. 3:14, “We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brothers: he that does not love his brother abides in death.” Ver. 18-19, “My little children, let us not love in word and in tongue, but in deed and in truth. By this we know that we are of the truth, and we will assure our hearts before him.” Ver. 23-24, “This is his commandment, that we love one another. He that keeps his commandments dwells in Him, and He in him. By this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit which he has given us.” Chap. 4:7-8, “Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and everyone that loves is born of God, and knows God. He that does not love, does not know God, for God is love.” Ver. 12-13, “No man has ever seen God. If we love one another, God dwells in us, and his love is perfected in us. By this we know that we dwell in him, because he has given us of his Spirit.” Ver. 16, “God is love; and he that dwells in love, dwells in God, and God in him.” Ver. 20, “If a man says, I love God, and yet hates his brother, he is a liar; for if he does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen?”

The Scripture is as plain as possible, that none are true saints except those whose true character is to be of a disposition to pity and relieve their fellow creatures who are poor, indigent, and afflicted: Psa. 37:21, “The righteous shows mercy, and gives.” Ver. 26, “He is ever merciful, and

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3 1Cor 13.1-2.
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lends.” Psa. 112:5, “A good man shows favor, and lends.” Ver. 9, “He has dispersed abroad, and
given to the poor.” Prov. 14:31, “He that honors God, has mercy on the poor.” Prov. 21:26, “The
righteous gives, and does not spare.” Jer. 22:16, “He judged the cause of the poor and needy;
then it was well with him: Was this not to know me? says the Lord.” Jam 1:27, “Religion that is
pure and undefiled before God the Father is this: to visit the fatherless and widows in their
affliction,” etc. Hos. 6:6, “For I have desired mercy, and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God,
more than burnt offerings.” Matt. 5:7, “Blessed are the merciful; for they shall obtain mercy.
“2Cor. 8:8, “I do not speak by commandment, but on occasion of the forwardness of others, and
to prove the sincerity of your love.” Jam. 2:13-16, “For he shall be judged without mercy, who
has shown no mercy. What does it profit, my brothers, though a man say he has faith, and does
not have works? Can faith save him? If a brother or sister is naked, and destitute of daily food;
and one of you says to them, ‘Depart in peace, be warmed and filled;’ but you do not give them
those things which are needed for the body, what does it profit?” 1John 3:17, “Whoever has this
world’s goods, and sees his brother in need, and has no compassion towards him, how does the
love of God dwell in him?” Christ, in his description of the Day of Judgment in Matt. 25:34 ff.,
says that judgment will be based on how merciful men are found to be in their practice, or
otherwise. Christ’s design in giving such a description of the process of that day, is plainly to
instill in all his followers an apprehension that, unless this was their spirit and practice, there
was no hope of their being accepted and owned by him on that day. Therefore this is an
apprehension that we should be possessed with. We find in Scripture that a righteous man, and
a merciful man, are synonymous expressions. Isa: 57:1, “The righteous perishes and no man lays
it to heart; merciful men are taken away, but none considers that the righteous have been taken
away from the evil to come.”

Thus we see how full, clear, and abundant, the evidence from Scripture is that those who are
truly gracious, are under the government of that lamb-like, dove-like Spirit of Jesus Christ. This
is essentially and eminently the nature of the saving grace of the gospel; and it is the proper
spirit of true Christianity. We may therefore determine that all truly Christian affections are
accompanied by such a spirit. This is the natural tendency of the fear and hope, the sorrow and
joy, the confidence and zeal, of true Christians.

No one should understand me to say that true Christians have no remains of a contrary Spirit; or
that they can never, in any instances, be guilty of behavior that is disagreeable to such a spirit.
But I do affirm this, and will affirm it until I deny the worth of the Bible: that everything in
Christians that belongs to true Christianity, has this tendency, and works this way. There is no
true Christian on earth that is not under the prevailing power of such a spirit. He is identified by
it, and it is truly and justly his character. Therefore, ministers and others have no warrant from
Christ to encourage persons who are of a contrary character and behavior, to think they are
converted just because they tell a fair story about illuminations and revelations. In doing so,
they would set up their own wisdom against Christ’s. They would judge against the rule by which
Christ said all men should know his disciples. Some deform religion by identifying it so much
with certain transient illuminations and impressions, and so little with a person’s spirit and
temper, that their notions of Christianity quite differ from what it is delineated in the Scriptures.
The Scripture knows of no true Christians who have a sordid, selfish, cross, and contentious
spirit. No invention is more absurd than a morose, hard, distant, high-spirited, spiteful
Christian. We must learn the way of bringing men to rules, and not rules to men. We must not
strain and stretch the rules of God’s word so much that we delude ourselves and some of our
neighbors, and make those rules of no effect.

It is true, that allowances must be made for men’s natural temper. But we must not allow men,
who once were wolves and serpents, to be converted without any remarkable change in the spirit
of their mind. The change made by true conversion tends to be most remarkable and tangible
when compared to the wickedness that the person was most notoriously guilty of before. Grace

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has as great a tendency to restrain and mortify those sins which are contrary to the spirit spoken of, as it has to mortify drunkenness or lasciviousness. Indeed, the Scripture represents the change worked in us by gospel-grace, as especially apparent in altering the former sort. Isa. 11:6-9, “The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid: and the calf, and the young lion, and the fatling together – and a little child shall lead them. The cow and the bear shall feed together; their young ones shall lie down together: and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. The sucking child shall play on the hole of the cobra, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the viper’s den. They shall not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain: for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, just as the waters cover the sea.” Isa. 65:25 repeats this description. Accordingly we find that in the primitive times of the Christian church, converts were remarkably changed in this respect. Tit. 3:3, “For we ourselves also were sometimes foolish, disobedient, and deceived, serving various lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another. But afterward, the kindness and love of God our Savior towards man appeared – he saved us by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost.” And Col. 3:7-8, “In which you also walked sometimes when you lived in them. But now put off all these as well: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, and filthy communications from your mouth.”
9. Gracious affections soften the heart and tender the spirit

Gracious affections soften the heart, and they are attended by and followed with a Christian tenderness of spirit.

False affections, however some may seem to be melted by them while new, have a tendency to harden their hearts in the end. A disposition to some kind of fleshy passions may still be established, such as self-seeking, self-exaltation, and opposition to others. False affections, with their accompanying delusion, tend to stupefy the mind in the end. They close it against those affections which a tender heart consists of. Their final effect is that persons fall into a settled frame of mind. They become less affected by their present and past sins, and less conscientious with respect to future sins. They are less moved by the warnings and cautions of God’s word, or by God’s chastisements in his providential dealings with them. They are more careless of the frame of their hearts, and the manner and tendency of their behavior. They are less quick-sighted to discern what is sinful, and less afraid of the appearance of evil, than they were while the law awakened their conscience, and gave them the fear of hell. Being the subjects of such impressions and affections, they now have a high opinion of themselves; they look at their state as safe. They rest easier than before, neglecting any duties that are troublesome and inconvenient for them. They are much slower and more partial in complying with difficult commands. They are not alarmed in any measure at the appearance of their own defects and transgressions. They are emboldened to favor themselves more with respect to the labor, painful care, and exactness of their walk. They yield more easily to temptations, and to the solicitations of their lusts. And they are far less careful in their behavior when they come into the holy presence of God during public or private worship. It may be that formerly, under legal convictions, they took great pains in their religion, and they denied themselves many things. But now they think they are out of the danger of hell, and so they put off the burden of the cross, and save themselves the trouble of difficult duties. They allow themselves to enjoy their ease more, and entertain their lusts.

Such people, instead of embracing Christ as their Savior from sin, trust in him as the Savior of their sins. Instead of flying to him as their refuge from their spiritual enemies, they make use of him as a defense of their spiritual enemies, from God, strengthening themselves against him. They make Christ the minister of sin, the great officer and vicegerent of the devil, to strengthen the devil’s interests, and make him above all things in the world strong against Jehovah; so that they may sin against God with good courage, and without any fear. This effectively secures them from any restraints by God’s most solemn warnings and awful threatenings. They trust in Christ to preserve for them the quiet enjoyment of their sins, and to be their shield to defend them against God’s displeasure. They come close to Christ’s bosom, the place of his children, to fight against him with their mortal weapons hidden under their skirts. However, some of these, at

1 “These are hypocrites that believe, but fail in regard to the use of the gospel and of the Lord Jesus. We read of these in Jude 3, of some men that turned grace into wantonness. For in this appears the exceeding evil of man’s heart: that not only the law, but also the glorious gospel of the Lord Jesus, works in him all manner of unrighteousness. And it is too common for men at the first work of conversion, Oh then to cry for grace and Christ, and then afterwards to grow licentious, to live and lie in the breach of the law, and take their warrant for their course from the gospel” Shepard’s Parable , Part I. p. 126. Again, p. 232. Mr. Shepard speaks of such hypocrites as those, “who, like strange eggs being put into the same nest, where honest men have lived, they have been hatched up; and when they are young, they keep their nest, and live by crying and opening their mouths wide after the Lord, and the food of his word; but when their wings are grown, and they have gotten some affections, some knowledge, some hope of mercy, they are hardened thereby to fly from God.” And he adds, “Can that man be good, whom God’s grace makes worse?” Again. Part II. p. 167. “When men fly to Christ in times of peace, so that they may preserve their sins with greater peace of conscience; so that sin makes them fly to Christ, as well as misery; not that they may destroy and abolish sin, but so that they may be preserved in their sins with peace; then men may be said to apprehend Christ only by a seeming faith.”— Many a heart secretly says this: If only I can have my sin, and peace, and a quiet conscience for the present, and have God merciful to pardon it afterward; hence he relies (as he says) only on the mercy of God in Christ: and now this hardens
the same time, make a great profession of love towards God, and assurance of his favor, and great joy in tasting the sweetness of his love.

The apostle Jude speaks this way about those who trusted in Christ, who crept in among the saints unawares. But they were ungodly men, who turned the grace of God into lasciviousness, Jude 4. These are men who trust in being righteous. Because God promised that the righteous shall surely live, or certainly be saved, they are therefore emboldened to commit iniquity. These are the ones whom God threatens in Ezek. 33:13: “Though I say to the righteous that he shall surely live, if he trusts in his own righteousness, and commits iniquity, none of his righteousness shall be remembered; rather, for the iniquity he has committed, he shall die.”

Gracious affections have a quite contrary tendency. They turn a heart of stone more and more into a heart of flesh. A holy love and hope are principles that are vastly more efficacious to make the heart tender, and to fill it with a dread of sin or whatever might displease and offend God. These engage the heart in watchfulness, care, and strictness, rather than a slavish fear of hell. Gracious affections, as observed before, flow out of a contrite heart, or (as the word signifies) a bruised heart – bruised and broken with godly sorrow. This is what makes the heart tender, just as bruised flesh is tender and easily hurt. Godly sorrow has a much greater influence to make the heart tender, than mere legal sorrow which flows from selfish principles.

The tenderness of the heart of a true Christian is elegantly signified by our Savior as he compares such a Christian to a little child. The flesh of a little child is very tender; so is the heart of one who is newborn. This is represented in what we are told about Naaman’s cure of his leprosy by washing in the Jordan. This was undoubtedly a type of the renewing of the soul by washing in the laver of regeneration. We are told in 2Kings 5:14, that “he went down, and dipped himself seven times in the Jordan, according to the saying of the man of God; and his flesh became again like the flesh of a little child.” Not only is the flesh of a little child tender, but his mind is tender. A little child has his heart easily moved, worked on and bowed; so is a Christian in spiritual things. A little child is apt to be affected by sympathy, to weep with those who weep, and cannot bear to see others in distress: so it is with a Christian, as in John 11:25, Rom. 12:15, 1Cor. 12:26. A little child is easily won by kindness: so is a Christian. A little child is easily affected by grief at temporal evils; he has his heart melted, and falls down weeping: the heart of a Christian is tender in this way with regard to the evil of sin. A little child is easily frightened by the appearance of outward evils, or anything that threatens harm: so a Christian is apt to be alarmed at the appearance of moral evil, and anything that threatens to hurt the soul. A little child, when it meets enemies or fierce beasts, is not apt to trust its own strength, but flies to its parents for refuge: so a saint is not self-confident in engaging spiritual enemies, but flies to Christ. A little child is apt to be suspicious of evil in places of danger, afraid in the dark, afraid when left alone, or afraid when far from home: so a saint is apt to be aware of his spiritual dangers, suspicious of himself, full of fear when he cannot see his way plain before him, afraid to be left alone, or to be at a distance from God. Prov. 28:14, “Happy is the man that fears always: but he that hardens his heart shall fall into mischief.” A little child is apt to be afraid of superiors, and to dread their anger, and to tremble at their frowns and threatenings: so is a true saint with respect to God: Psa. 119:120, “My flesh trembles for fear of you, and I am afraid of and blinds him, and it makes him secure, and his faith is sermon-proof, nothing stirs him. Were it not for their faith, they should despair, but this keeps them up. And now they think that if they have any trouble of mind, it is the devil that troubles them; and so they make Christ and faith protectors of sin, not purifiers from sin, which is most dreadful; it is turning grace into wantonness, as they did with sacrifice. So these men would sin under the shadow of Christ, because the shadow is good and sweet, Mic. 5.11. They had subtle and sly ends in their good duties; for in this may lie a man’s sin: yet they lean upon the Lord.— When money-changers came into the temple, ‘You have made it a den of thieves.’ Thieves when hunted fly to their den or cave, and there they are secure against all searchers, and their hue and cries: so it is here. But Christ whipped them out of the temple. So when men are pursued with cries and fears of conscience, away to Christ they go as to their den: not as saints, to pray and lament the life of their sin there; but to preserve their sins. This is vile; will the Lord receive such as these?”
your judgments.” Isa. 66:2, “To this man I will look, even to him that is poor, and trembles at my word.” ver. 5, “Hear the word of the Lord, you that tremble at his word.” Ezra. 9:4, “Then assembled before me was everyone that trembled at the words of the God of Israel.” Chap. 10:3; “According to the counsel of my Lord, and of those that tremble at the commandment of our God.” A little child approaches superiors with awe: so the saints approach God with holy awe and reverence. Job 13:11, “Shall his excellency not make you afraid? And his dread fall upon you?” Holy fear is so much of the nature of true godliness, that it is called in Scripture by no other name more frequently, than the fear of God.

From this we see that gracious affections do not tend to make men bold, forward, noisy, and boisterous; rather they cause them to speak with trembling. Hos. 13:1, “When Ephraim spoke with trembling, he exalted himself in Israel; but when he offended in Baal, he died;” They clothe men with a kind of holy fear in all their behavior towards God and man. This is agreeable with Psa. 2:11, 1Pet. 3:15, 2Cor. 7:15, Eph. 6:5, 1Pet. 3:2, Rom. 11:20.

But here some may object and say, is there no such thing as holy boldness in prayer, and in the duties of divine worship? I answer, there is doubtless such a thing; and it is chiefly to be found in eminent saints, persons with great degrees of faith and love. But this holy boldness is not in the least opposite to reverence; though it is opposite to disunion and servility. It abolishes or lessens that disposition which arises from moral distance or alienation; it also arises from the distance of relationship, such as that of a slave to its master. But it does not at all lessen that natural distance by which we are infinitely inferior. No boldness in poor sinful worms of the dust, having a right sight of God and themselves, will prompt them to approach God with less fear and reverence than the spotless and glorious angels in heaven, who cover their faces before his throne (Isa. 6, at the beginning). Rebecca, in her marriage to Isaac, was manifestly a type of the church, the spouse of Christ. When she met Isaac, she got off her camel, took a veil and covered herself – even though she was brought to him as his bride, to be with him in the nearest relation, and in the most intimate union, that mankind has to unite one person to another.² Elijah, the great prophet who had so much holy familiarity with God, when he was especially near God as he conversed with him on the mount, wrapped his face in his mantle. This was not because he was terrified with any servile fear of the terrible wind, earthquake, and fire; rather, after these were over, God spoke to him as a friend, in a still small voice: 1Kings 19:12-13, “And after the fire, a still small voice; and it was so, when Elijah heard it, that he wrapped his face in his mantle.”

Moses, with whom God spoke face to face as a man speaks with his friend, was distinguished from all the prophets in the familiarity with God that he was admitted to. Yet, when he was brought nearest of all, when God showed him his glory on that same mount where God later spoke to Elijah, “he made haste, and bowed his head towards the earth, and worshipped,” Exod. 34:8. In some persons, there is a most unsuitable and insufferable boldness in their addresses to the great Jehovah, in affecting a holy boldness, and an ostentatious and eminent nearness and familiarity with God. The very thought of this would make them shrink into nothing, with horror and confusion, if they only saw the distance that exists between God and them. They are like the Pharisee who boldly came near in a confidence of his own eminency in holiness. But if they saw their vileness, they would be more like the publican that “stood afar off, and dared not so much as lift his eyes to heaven; but struck his breast, saying, God be merciful to me, a sinner.” Luk 18:13 It becomes such sinful creatures as we are, to approach a holy God with faith, and without terror; and yet with contrition, penitent shame, and a bewildered face. It is foretold that this should be the disposition of the church in the time of her highest privileges on earth, in her latter day of glory, when God would remarkably comfort her by revealing his covenant-mercy to her. Ezek.

² Dr. Ames, in his Cases of Conscience, Book III. chap. iv., speaks of a holy modesty in the worship God, as one sign of true humility.
16:60, to the end: “I will establish for you an everlasting covenant. Then you shall remember your ways and be ashamed. And I will establish my covenant with you, and you shall know that I am the Lord, so that you may remember and be confounded, and never again open your mouth because of your shame – when I am pacified towards you for all that you have done, says the Lord God.” We read of a woman in the 7th chapter of Luke, that was an eminent saint, and had much of that true love which casts out fear, by Christ own testimony of her in ver. 47. She approached Christ in an amiable and acceptable manner as he reclined at meal. She came in with humble modesty, reverence, and shame. She stood at his feet, weeping behind him, as if not fit to appear before his face; and then she washed his feet with her tears.

One reason why gracious affections are attended by this tenderness of spirit, is that true grace tends to promote convictions of conscience. Persons are prone to have convictions of conscience before they have any grace. And if afterwards, they are truly converted, and have true repentance and joy, and peace in believing, this tends to put an end to errors. But it has no tendency to put an end to convictions of sin; rather, it increases them. It does not stupify man’s conscience; but it makes it more aware, more easily and thoroughly discerning of the sinfulness of sinful things. It receives a greater conviction of the heinous and dreadful nature of sin. It is susceptible to a quicker and deeper sense of it, making a man more convinced of his own sinfulness and of the wickedness of his heart. Consequently, it has a tendency to make him more suspicious of his heart. Grace tends to give the soul a further and better conviction of the same things concerning sin that it was convinced of under a legal work of the Spirit of God. It is convinced of its great contrariety to the will, law, and honor of God, the greatness of God’s hatred of it, and displeasure against it – and the dreadful punishment it exposes the soul to, and deserves. Not only this, but it convulses the soul of something further concerning sin, that it saw nothing of while it was only under legal convictions. And that is the infinitely hateful nature of sin, and its dreadfulness on that account. This makes the heart sensitive to sin; like David’s heart that struck him with guilt when he cut off Saul’s skirt. The heart of a true penitent is like a burnt child who dreads fire. By contrast, someone with a counterfeit repentance, and false comforts and joys, is like iron that has been suddenly heated and quenched; it becomes much harder than before. A false conversion puts an end to convictions of conscience; and so it either takes away, or greatly diminishes, that conscientiousness which was manifested under a work of the law.³

All gracious affections have a tendency to promote this Christian tenderness of heart that has been spoken of; not only a godly sorrow, but also a gracious joy: Psa. 2:11, “Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling.” And a gracious hope: Psa. 33:18, “Behold the eye of the Lord is upon those who fear him; upon those who hope in his mercy.” And Psa. 147:11, “The Lord takes pleasure in those who fear him, in those that hope in his mercy.” Indeed, the most confident and assured hope, hope that is truly gracious, has this tendency. The higher a holy hope is raised, the more there is of this Christian tenderness. The banishing of servile fear by a holy assurance, is attended by a proportionate increase in reverent fear. The diminishing of the fear of the fruits of God’s displeasure in future punishment, is attended by a proportionate increase in the fear of God’s displeasure itself. The diminishing of the fear of hell, is attended by an increase in the fear of sin. The vanishing of the suspicions of the person’s state, is attended by a proportionate increase in the suspicion of his heart, in a distrust of its strength, wisdom, stability, faithfulness, etc. The less apt he is to be afraid of natural evil – having his heart fixed, trusting in God, and so, not being afraid of evil tidings – the more apt is he to be alarmed by the appearance of moral evil, or the evil of sin. As he has more holy boldness, so he has less self-confidence, less presumptuous boldness, and more modesty. As he is more sure than others of deliverance from hell, so he has a greater a sense of deserving hell. He is less apt than others to be shaken in his

³“I would not have known sin except through the law. For I would not have known covetousness unless the law had said, ‘You shall not covet.’” (Rom 7:7)
faith; but he is more apt than others to be moved by solemn warnings, God’s frowns, and the
calamities of others. He has the firmest comfort, but the softest heart. He is richer than others,
but he is the poorest of all in spirit. He is the tallest and strongest saint, but he is the least and
tenderest child among them.
10. Gracious affections are proportionately virtuous

Another thing in which those affections that are truly gracious and holy differ from those that are false, is their beautiful symmetry and proportion.

It is not that the symmetry of the virtues and gracious affections of the saints in this life is perfect. It is often, and in many things, defective. This comes through the imperfection of grace, or lack of proper instructions, through errors in judgment, or because of natural temper, or defects in education, and many other disadvantages that might be mentioned. Yet in the saints, there is not the monstrous disproportion in gracious affections, or in the various parts of true religion, that is commonly observed in false religion, and in the counterfeit graces of hypocrites.

In the truly holy affections of the saints is found that proportion which is the natural consequence of the universality of their sanctification. They have the whole image of Christ upon them. They have put off the old man, and have put on the new man, entire in all its parts and members. It has pleased the Father that in Christ all his fullness should dwell. In him is every grace; he is full of grace and truth. And those who are Christ’s “receive his fullness, and grace for grace” (John 1:14, 16). That is, every grace is in them which is in Christ, grace corresponding to grace. The grace in Christ reproduces its corresponding image in believers. The image is a true image. There is something of the same beautiful proportion in the image that is in the original; there is feature for feature, and member for member. There is symmetry and beauty in God’s workmanship. The natural body which God has made, consists of many members; and all those members are in beautiful proportion. So it is in the new man, consisting of various graces and affections. The body of someone who was born a perfect child, may fail to have exact proportion through disease, and through the weakness and wounds of some of its bodily members; and yet the disproportion is not in the same measure as those who are born deformed.

It is with hypocrites, as it was with Ephraim of old, at a time when God complained greatly about their hypocrisy. Hos. 7:8, “Ephraim is a cake not turned,” half roasted and half raw. Commonly there is no kind of uniformity in their affections.

There is great partiality in many of them, with regard to the several kinds of religious affections. They have great affections in some things, and disproportionate affections in others. Now, a holy hope and a holy fear go together in the saints, as observed from Psa. 33:18, and 147:11. But some of these hypocrites have the most confident hope, while they are void of reverence, self-suspicion, and caution – to a great degree, they have cast off fear. In the saints, joy and holy fear go together, though the joy is never as great as it was with the disciples on that joyful morning of Christ’s resurrection. Matt. 28:8: “And they departed quickly from the sepulcher, with fear and great joy.” But many of these hypocrites rejoice without trembling. Their joy is of the sort, that it is truly opposite to godly fear.

But particularly, one great difference between saints and hypocrites is this: that the joy and comfort of the saints is attended by godly sorrow and mourning for sin. They not only have sorrow to prepare them for their first comfort, but they have sorrow after they are comforted, and after their joy is established. It was foretold of the church of God, that they would mourn and loathe themselves for their sins, after they were returned from captivity, and were settled in the land of Canaan, which was the land of rest, and the land flowing with milk and honey, Ezek. 20:42-43: “And you shall know that I am the Lord, when I bring you into the land of Israel, into the country for which I lifted up my hand to give it to your fathers. And there you shall

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¹ "Renewed care and diligence follows the sealings of the Spirit. Now is the soul at the foot of Christ, as Mary was at the sepulcher, with fear and great joy. He that travels the road with a rich treasure about him, is afraid of a thief in every bush.” Flavel’s Sacramental Meditations, Med. 4.
remember your ways, and all your doings in which you have been defiled; and you shall loathe yourselves in your own sight for all your evils that you have committed.” Also in Ezek. 16:61-63.

A true saint is like a little child in this respect: he never had godly sorrow before he was born again; but since then, his sorrow is often exercised. A little child, before it is born, and while it remains in darkness, never cries; but as soon as it sees the light, it begins to cry; and from then on, it cries often. Christ has borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows, so that we are freed from the sorrow of punishment; and we may now sweetly feed upon the comforts Christ has purchased for us. Yet while we feed on these comforts, it does not prevent them from being accompanied by the sorrow of repentance. As of old, the children of Israel were commanded to forever feed upon the paschal lamb with bitter herbs.\(^2\) True saints are spoken of in Scripture, not only as those who have mourned for sin, but as those who do mourn; it is their way to continue to mourn; as in Matt. 5:4, “Blessed are those who mourn; for they shall be comforted.”

Not only do hypocrites often have an essential deficiency as to the various kinds of religious affections, but they also have a strange partiality and disproportion in those same affections, with regard to their different objects.

Thus, as to the affection of love, some make a great pretense and show of love towards God and Christ; maybe they have been greatly affected by what they have heard or thought concerning them. But they do not have a spirit of love and benevolence towards men. Instead, they are disposed to contention, envy, revenge, and evil speaking. They may perhaps allow an old grudge to rest in their bosoms towards a neighbor, for seven years, if not twice seven years. They live in real ill-will and bitterness of spirit towards him. It may be that in their dealings with their neighbors, that they are not very strict and conscientious in observing the rule of “doing to others as they would have them do to them.” On the other hand, there are others who appear to have a great deal of benevolence towards men, and who are very good-natured and generous in their social ways, but they have no love towards God.

As to love towards men, there are some who have flowing affections towards some; but their love is far from being as extensive and universal in its nature, as a truly Christian love would be. They are full of dear affections towards some, and full of bitterness towards others. They are knit to their own party, those who approve of them, who love them and admire them. But they do not have a spirit of love and benevolence towards Christ; maybe they have been greatly affected by what they have heard or thought concerning Christ; trust in Christ, and there is an end for their faith. But what confession and sorrow do they have for sin? What more love for Christ follows this faith? Truly none. No, their faith is the cause why they have none. For they think, if I trust in Christ to forgive me, he will do it; and there is an end of the business. Truly, this hedge of faith, this bramble-faith that catches hold on Christ, and pricks and scratches Christ by more impenitence, more contempt for Christ, is mere presumption. One day it shall be burnt up and destroyed by the fire of God’s Jealousy. Fie [contempt] upon that faith, that serves only to keep a man from being tormented before his time! Your sins would be your sorrows, except that your faith quiets you. But if faith is accompanied by repentance, and with mourning for sin, and more esteem for God’s grace in Christ; so that nothing breaks your heart more than the thoughts you have of Christ’s unchangeable love for one so vile – and if this love makes you love much, and love him more – then as your sin increases, so you will desire your love’s increase; and now the stream of your thoughts will run to how you may live for him that died for you. This was Mary’s faith, who sat at Christ’s feet, weeping, washing them with her tears, and loving much, because much was forgiven.”—Shepard’s Sound Believer, p. 128-129. “You shall know godly sorrow (says Dr. Preston, in his discourse on Paul’s conversion) by its continuance; it is constant. But worldly sorrow is only a passion of the mind; it changes, but it does not last. Though for the present it may be violent and strong, and show itself outwardly, yet it comes only by fits, and it does not continue. Like a land-flood which violently, for the present, overflows the banks, it will go away again; it is not always this way. But godly sorrow is like a spring that still keeps running both winter and summer, wet and dry, in heat and cold, early and late. So this godly sorrow stays the same in a regenerate man. Take him when you will, he still sorrow for sin. This godly sorrow stands like the center of the earth which is not removed, but still remains.” “I am persuaded, many a man’s heart is kept from breaking and mourning because of this. He says (perhaps) that he is a vile sinner, but I trust in Christ, etc. If such men do go to Christ to destroy their sin, this makes them more secure in their sin. For (they say) I cannot help it, and Christ must do it all. Whereas faith makes the soul mourn after the Lord all the more.” Shepard’s Parable of the Ten Virgins, Part II. p. 168.
heaven; for he makes his sun to rise upon the evil, and on the good. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the publicans do the same?" Some show a great affection towards their neighbors, and pretend to be enamored with the company of the children of God abroad; at the same time, they are uncomfortable and churlish towards their wives and other near relations at home, and they neglect their related duties. As for their great love towards sinners and those who oppose religion, and their great concern for their souls that appears in some, they may even have extreme distress and agony, singling out a particular person from a multitude for its object. At the same time, there is no general compassion towards sinners in equally miserable circumstances, except in a monstrous disproportion. This does not seem to be of the nature of gracious affection. It is not that I find it strange that pity towards the perishing souls of sinners should come to the point of agony, other things being equal – nor that a truly gracious compassion towards souls should be exercised much more towards some persons than others who are equally miserable, especially on some particular occasion. Many things may happen to fix the mind and affect the heart with respect to a particular person at such a juncture. Without doubt, some saints have been in great distress for the souls of particular persons, so as to be “in travail” for them. Persons may appear at times to be in racking agony for the soul of some particular person, and it is far beyond what has been heard or read about with eminent saints. And yet, generally, they appear to have a spirit of meek and fervent love, charity, and compassion towards mankind to a far lesser degree than those saints. If this is so, then I say that such agonies are greatly suspect, for the reason already given: that the Spirit of God tends to give graces and gracious affections in a beautiful symmetry and proportion. Just as there is a monstrous disproportion in the love of some, in its exercises towards different persons, so there is disproportion in their seeming exercises of love towards the same persons. Some men show a love towards others as to their outward man. They are liberal with their worldly substance, and often give to the poor; but they have no love towards, or concern for the souls of men. Others pretend a great love towards men’s souls, but they are not compassionate and charitable towards their bodies. Making a great show of love, pity, and distress for souls costs them nothing; but in order to show mercy towards men’s bodies, they must part with the money in their pockets. But true Christian love towards our brothers extends both to their souls and to their bodies; in this, it is like the love and compassion of Jesus Christ. He showed mercy towards men’s souls by laboring for them, in preaching the gospel to them; and he showed mercy towards their bodies in going about doing good, healing all kinds of sickness and disease among the people. We have a remarkable instance of Christ having compassion at once both for men’s souls and bodies, and showing compassion by feeding both, in Mark 6:34: “And Jesus when he came out, saw many people, and was moved with compassion towards them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd; and he began to teach them many things.” Here was his compassion for their souls. In the sequel, we have an account of his compassion for their bodies, because they had nothing to eat for a long while; and so he fed five thousand of them with five loaves and two fishes. If the compassion of professing Christians towards others does not work in the same ways, then it is a sign that it is not true Christian compassion. Furthermore, it is a sign that their affections are not the right sort, if persons seem greatly affected by the bad qualities of their fellow Christians, as to the coldness and lifelessness of other saints, but they are not proportionately affected by their own defects and corruptions. A true Christian may be affected by the coldness and unsavoriness of other saints, and may greatly mourn over it. At the same time, he is not as likely to be affected by the badness of anyone else’s heart as he is by his own. This is most in his view; this he is most quick-sighted to discern; this he sees most in its aggravations; and this he is most ready to lament. And a lesser degree of virtue will bring him to pity himself, and to be concerned with his own calamities, than to be rightly affected by others’ calamities. If men have not attained the lesser, we may conclude they have never attained the greater.
Distinguishing Signs of Truly Gracious and Holy Affections

Here, by the way, I would observe that as a general rule, if persons pretend they have come to high attainments in religion, but have not yet arrived at lesser attainments, it is a sign of a vain pretense. They may pretend to have gone beyond mere morality, so as to live a spiritual and divine life; but in reality, they are not even moral persons themselves. Or they pretend to be greatly affected by the wickedness of their own hearts, and yet they are not affected by the palpable violations of God’s commands in their own practice (which is a lesser attainment). Or they pretend to be willing to be damned for the glory of God, but they have no intention to suffer a little in their own estates and names, or in their worldly convenience, for the sake of their duty. Or they pretend that they are not afraid to risk their souls for Christ, and to commit their all to God, trusting in his bare word and in the faithfulness of his promises for their eternal welfare; yet at the same time, they do not have confidence enough in God to trust him with a little of their estates, to part with them for pious and charitable uses. I say, when it is this way with them, then their pretenses are manifestly vain. Someone who is on a journey, and imagines he has gotten far beyond a particular place on his road, but in fact has not yet come to it, he must be mistaken; he cannot have arrived at the top of the hill, if he never got halfway there. But this is by the way.

What has been observed of the affection of love, is also to be observed about other religious affections. Those that are true, extend in some proportion to the various things that are their due and proper objects; but usually when they are false, they are strangely disproportionate. So it is with religious desires and longings. These desires in the saints are towards those things that are spiritual and excellent in general. And they are proportionate to their excellency, importance, or necessity, or to the near concern they have in these things. But in false longings, it is often otherwise. They will run with an impatient vehemence after something of less importance, when other things of greater importance are neglected. Thus, for instance, some persons from time to time, have a vehement inclination and an unaccountably violent pressure to proclaim their own experience to others, and to exhort others. At the same time, there is no inclination, in any equal measure, towards other things that true Christianity has a greater tendency towards, such as pouring out their soul before God in secret, earnest prayer with praise to him, to be more and more conformed to him, living more to his glory, etc. We read in Scripture of “groanings that cannot be uttered, and of the soul breaking for the longing it has; and longings, thirstings, and pantings,” far more frequently for these latter things, than the former.

As to hatred and zeal, when these are from right principles, they are generally against sin; and they are in proportion to the degree of sinfulness. Psalms 119:104, “I hate every false way.” So too in ver. 128. But a false hatred and zeal against sin, is only against some particular sin. Thus some seem to be zealous against profaneness and pride in apparel, when they themselves are notorious for their covetousness and stinginess; maybe backbiting, envy towards superiors, a violent spirit towards rulers, and a rooted ill-will towards those who have injured them. False zeal is directed against the sins of others, while they have no zeal against their own sins. But one who has true zeal, exercises it chiefly against his own sins; though he also shows a proper zeal against prevailing and dangerous iniquity in others. Some pretend to abhor their own sins of heart, and greatly decry their inward corruption; yet they make light of sins in their practice, and seem to commit them without much restraint or remorse. These imply sin both in heart and life.

Just as there is a much greater disproportion in the exercises of false affections than of true as to their different objects, so there is disproportion as to their different times. True Christians are not always alike. Indeed, there is a great difference between them, at different times; and the best of them have reason to be greatly ashamed of their unsteadiness. Yet in no way is there the same instability and inconstancy in the false-hearted, as there is in those who are true virgins, and who follow the Lamb wherever he goes. The righteous man is truly said to be one whose
heart is fixed, trusting in God, Psa. 112:7. His heart is established with grace, Heb. 13:9. He holds onto his way, Job. 17:9: “The righteous shall hold onto his way, and he that has clean hands will grow stronger and stronger.” In noting the hypocrisy of the Jewish church, it is said that they were like a swift dromedary traversing her ways.

Some persons are religious only by fits and starts. Now and then they seem to be raised up to the clouds in their affections; and then suddenly they fall down again, and lose it all, and become quite careless and carnal. This is their way of carrying on religion. They appear greatly moved and mightily engaged in religion only in extraordinary seasons. It happens during a remarkable outpouring of the Spirit, or during other uncommon dispensations of providence, or upon the real or supposed receipt of some great mercy. They received some extraordinary temporal mercy, or they suppose that they are newly converted, or recently had what they call a “great revelation.” But they quickly return to such a frame, that their hearts are chiefly fixed on other things; and the prevailing bent of their hearts and the stream of their affections is ordinarily towards the things of this world. They are like the children of Israel in the wilderness, who had their affections highly raised by what God did for them at the Red Sea, and they sang his praise for it. But soon they fell to lusting after the fleshpots of Egypt. Then again, when they came to Mount Sinai, and saw the great manifestations which God made of himself there, they seemed to be greatly engaged again. They were mightily intent to enter into a covenant with God, saying, “All that the Lord has spoken we will do, and be obedient.” But then they quickly made themselves a golden calf.

I say, when people are this way, it is a sign of the unsoundness of their affections. They are like the waters during a shower of rain. During the shower, and for a little while afterwards, the waters run like a brook, flowing abundantly. But they are soon quite dry; and when another shower comes, the waters flow again. Whereas a true saint is like a stream from a living spring. Though it may be greatly increased by a shower of rain, and diminished during a drought, yet it constantly runs. John 4:14, “The water that I give him, shall be a well of water in him, springing up,” etc., or like a tree planted by such a stream, that has a constant supply at the root, and so it is always green, even during the greatest drought. Jer. 17:7-8, “Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, and whose hope is the Lord. For he shall be like a tree planted by the waters, that is always green, even during the greatest drought. Jer. 17:7-8, “Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, and whose hope is the Lord. For he shall be like a tree planted by the waters, that spreads out her roots by the river, and shall not fear when heat comes, but her leaf shall be green, and shall not be anxious in the year of drought, nor shall it cease from yielding fruit.”

Many hypocrites are like comets that appear for awhile with a mighty blaze, but are very evanescent, uncertain, unstable, not only as to their degrees, but as to their very being. Sometimes they are like a river ready to overflow its banks, men cannot help but pour them out on all occasions; and sometimes they are like waters that fail, no drop comes from them. Sometimes they are hot, and sometimes cold; sometimes up, and sometimes down; sometimes all of heaven, and sometimes all of the world; without equality or stability. But true grace fixes the affections on spiritual things. As to the degrees of their exercise, there may be and there is in them a great variety, according to how they may be excited, aided, or assisted by grace and the means of it; or obstructed and impeded, by the interposition of temptations and diversions. But the constant bent and inclination of renewed affections, is for spiritual things; as the Scripture everywhere testifies, and as experience confirms. “There is (says Dr. Preston) a certain love, by fits, which God does not accept: when men come and offer great promises to God, like the waves of the sea, as big as mountains: oh, they think they will do much for God! But their minds change; and they become like those high waves, which at last fall level with the other waters.” Mr. Flavel, speaking of these changeable professors, says, “These professors have more of the moon than of the sun: little light, less heat, and many changes. They deceive many; indeed, they deceive themselves; but they cannot deceive God. They lack that ballast and establishment in themselves that would have kept them tight and steady.” Touchstone of Sincerity, Ch. 2, Sect. 2.

3 Dr. Owen (on the Spirit, Book III. Chap. 2 Sect. 18), speaking of a common work of the Spirit, says, “This work operates greatly on the affections: we have given instances, in fear, sorrow, joy, and delight, about spiritual things, that are stirred up and acted out thereby: yet in two things it comes short of a thorough work upon the affections themselves. For the first, it does not fix them. And secondly, it does not fill them.” It is required that our affections be fixed on heavenly and spiritual things and true grace will effect it; Col. 3:1-2. “If you are risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sits at the right hand of God. Set your affections on things above.” The joys, the fears, the hopes, the sorrows, with reference to spiritual and eternal things, which the work before mentioned produces, are evanescent, uncertain, unstable, not only as to their degrees, but as to their very being. Sometimes they are like a river ready to overflow its banks, men cannot help but pour them out on all occasions; and sometimes they are like waters that fail, no drop comes from them. Sometimes they are hot, and sometimes cold; sometimes up, and sometimes down; sometimes all of heaven, and sometimes all of the world; without equality or stability. But true grace fixes the affections on spiritual things. As to the degrees of their exercise, there may be and there is in them a great variety, according to how they may be excited, aided, or assisted by grace and the means of it; or obstructed and impeded, by the interposition of temptations and diversions. But the constant bent and inclination of renewed affections, is for spiritual things; as the Scripture everywhere testifies, and as experience confirms. “There is (says Dr. Preston) a certain love, by fits, which God does not accept: when men come and offer great promises to God, like the waves of the sea, as big as mountains: oh, they think they will do much for God! But their minds change; and they become like those high waves, which at last fall level with the other waters.” Mr. Flavel, speaking of these changeable professors, says, “These professors have more of the moon than of the sun: little light, less heat, and many changes. They deceive many; indeed, they deceive themselves; but they cannot deceive God. They lack that ballast and establishment in themselves that would have kept them tight and steady.” Touchstone of Sincerity, Ch. 2, Sect. 2.
unsteady and irregular in their motion (therefore they are called wandering stars, Jude 13). Their blaze soon disappears, and they appear but once in a great while. But true saints are like fixed stars which, though they rise and set, and are often clouded, yet they are steadfast in their orb; they may truly be said to shine with a constant light. Hypocritical affections are like a violent motion – like air moved by strong winds (Jude 12). But gracious affections have more of a natural motion. They are like the stream of a river which, although it has many turns, and meets with obstacles, and runs more freely and swiftly in some places than others – yet in general, it has a steady and constant course; it tends to stay the same until it gets to the ocean.

Just as there is a strange unevenness and disproportion in false affections at different times, so it is disproportionate in different places. Some are greatly affected when they are in the company of others. But they have nothing bearing any proportion to it when they are in private, in meditations, in secret prayer and conversing with God – when they are alone and separated from all the world. A true Christian doubtless delights in religious fellowship, and Christian conduct, and he finds much to affect his heart in this; but he also delights at times to retire from all mankind, to converse with God in solitary places. This also has its unique advantages for fixing his heart, and engaging its affections. True religion disposes saints to be alone in solitary places, often, for holy meditation and prayer. So it worked in Isaac, Gen. 24:63. And what is much more, so it worked in Jesus Christ. How often we read of his retiring into mountains and solitary places for holy converse with his Father! It is difficult to conceal great affections. Yet gracious affections are of a much more silent and secret nature than those that are counterfeit. So it is with the gracious sorrow of the saints for their own sins. Thus the future gracious mourning of true penitents, at the beginning of the latter-day glory, is represented as being so secret as to be hidden from their bosom companions. Zech. 12:12-14: “And the land shall mourn, every family apart, the family of the house of David apart, and their wives apart: the family of the house of Nathan apart, and their wives apart: the family of the house of Levi apart, and their wives apart: all the families that remain, every family apart, and their wives apart.” So it is with their sorrow for the sins of others. The saints’ pains and travelling for the souls of sinners are chiefly experienced in secret places. Jer. 13:17, “If you will not hear it, my soul shall weep in secret places for your pride, and my eye will weep sorely, and run down with tears, because the Lord’s flock is carried away captive.” So it is with gracious joys: they are hidden manna in this respect, as well as in other respects, Rev. 2:17.

The Psalmist seems to speak of his sweetest comforts, as those that were to be had in secret. Psalm 63:5-6, “My soul shall be satisfied as with rich food; and my mouth shall praise you with joyful lips: when I remember you upon my bed, and meditate upon you in the night watches.” Christ calls his spouse away from the world into retired places, so that he may give her his joy. Cant. 7:11-12, “Come, my beloved, let us go forth into the field; let us lodge in the villages: Here I will give you my love.” In Scripture, the most eminently divine favors which the

4 The Lord is neglected secretly, yet honored openly; because there is no wind in their chambers to blow their sails; and therefore they stand still there. For this reason, many men keep their profession when they lose their affection. They have by the one a name to live by (and that is enough) though their hearts are dead. Hence, so long as you love and commend them, they will love you; but if you do not, they will forsake you. They were warm only by another’s fire, and hence, having no principle of life within them, they soon grow dead. This is the water that turns a Pharisee’s mill.” Shepard’s Parable, Part I. p. 180. “The hypocrite (says Mr. Flavel) is not for the closet, but the synagogue, Matt. 6:5. It is not his food and drink to retire from the clamor of the world, to enjoy God in secret.” Touchstone of Sincerity, Chap. 7 Sect. 2. Dr. Ames, in his Cases of Conscience, Lib. III. Chap. 5., speaks of it as a thing by which sincerity may be known: “That persons are obedient in the absence as well as in the presence of onlookers – in secret as well, indeed more, than in public,” alleging Phil. 2:12, and Matt. 6:6.

5 Mr. Flavel, in reckoning up those things in which the sorrow of saints is distinguished from the sorrow of hypocrites, says about their sins, “Their troubles for sin are more private and silent troubles than others are; their sore runs in the night” Touchstone of Sincerity, chap. vi. § 5.

6 Rev 2:17 “...To him who overcomes I will give some of the hidden manna to eat. And I will give him a white stone, and on the stone a new name written which no one knows except him who receives it.”
Distinguishing Signs of Truly Gracious and Holy Affections

saints obtained, were obtained in their retirement. The principal manifestations that God made of himself and of his covenant mercy towards Abraham, were made when Abraham was alone, apart from his numerous family (as anyone will judge who carefully reads his history). Isaac received Rebekah while he was walking alone, meditating in the field. She was a special gift of God to him, and a great comfort to him; by her he obtained the promised seed. Jacob was retired for secret prayer when Christ came to him; Jacob wrestled with him, and obtained the blessing. God revealed himself to Moses in the bush, when he was in a solitary place in the desert on Mount Horeb (Exodus 3, at the beginning). Afterwards, when God showed Moses his glory, and admitted him to the highest degree of communion with Himself that Moses ever enjoyed, he was alone on the same mountain. He continued there forty days and forty nights, and then came down with his face shining. God came to those great prophets, Elijah and Elisha, and conversed freely with them, chiefly in their retirement. Elijah conversed alone with God at Mount Sinai, as Moses did. When Jesus Christ had his greatest prelibation of his future glory, it was when he was transfigured, not when he was with the multitude, or with the twelve disciples. It was when he had retired to a solitary place on a mountain, with only three select disciples; it was a hidden matter, and he charged them not tell anyone man about it until he was risen from the dead. When the angel Gabriel came to the blessed virgin, and when the Holy Ghost came upon her, and the power of the Highest overshadowed her, she seems to have been alone, and this matter too was hidden from the world. Her nearest and dearest earthly friend, Joseph, who had betrothed her (though a just man), knew nothing of it. Mary Magdalene, who first partook of the joy of Christ’s resurrection, was alone with Christ at the sepulcher, John 20. When the beloved disciple was favored with those wonderful visions of Christ, and his future dispensations towards the church and the world, he was alone on the isle of Patmos. It is not that we lack instances of great privileges that the saints receive when they are with others; or that there is not much to be had in Christian conversation, or in social and public worship – it tends to greatly refresh and rejoice the hearts of the saints. But this is all that I aim at by what has been said: to show that it is the nature of true grace, that however it loves Christian society in its proper place, yet in a unique way it delights in retirement, and in secret converse with God. So if persons are greatly engaged in social religion, and little engaged in the religion of the closet, and if they are often highly affected when they are with others, but little moved when they have only God and Christ to converse with, then it reflects darkly on their religion.

7 In Gen 32:24-30, Jacob “wrestled with a man”, representing the physical presence of God (as indicated by verses 28 and 30). In other places, this “pre-incarnate” Christ is uniquely and eminently called “The Angel of the Lord.” – WHG
8 Referring to the Apostle John who wrote Revelation (or Apocalypse) in isolation on Patmos. – WHG
11. As gracious affections grow, so does the spiritual appetite

Another great and very distinguishing difference between gracious affections and others, is that as gracious affections are raised higher, the spiritual appetite increases, and the soul longs more for spiritual attainments. By contrast, false affections rest satisfied in themselves.¹

The more a true saint loves God with a gracious love, the more he desires to love him, and the more uneasy is he at his lack of love towards God. The more he hates sin, the more he desires to hate it, and he laments that he has so much love remaining for it. The more he mourns for sin, the more he longs to mourn for sin. The more his heart is broken, the more he desires it to be broken. The more he thirsts and longs after God and holiness, the more he longs to long, and to breathe out his very soul in longings after God. The kindling and raising of gracious affections is like kindling a flame: the higher it is raised, the more ardent it is; and the more it burns, the more vehemently it tends and seeks to burn. So that the spiritual appetite for holiness, and for an increase in holy affections, is much more lively and keen in those who are eminent in holiness than it is in others; and it is greater when grace and holy affections are in their most lively exercise than at other times. It is as much the nature of one that is spiritually newborn, to thirst after growth in holiness, as it is the nature of a newborn babe to thirst after the mother’s breast; it has the sharpest appetite when it is healthiest. 1Pet. 2:2-3, “As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, so that you may grow by it – if you have tasted that the Lord is gracious.” The most that saints have in this world, is but a taste, a prelibation of that future glory which is their proper fullness. It is only an earnest of their future inheritance in their hearts, 2Cor. 1:22, 5:5, and Eph. 1:14. The most eminent saints in this state are but children, compared with their future, which is their proper state of maturity and perfection, as the apostle observes in 1Cor. 13:10-11. The greatest eminence that the saints arrive at in this world, has no tendency to satiety, or to abate their desires for more. On the contrary, it makes them even more eager to press forward, as evident by the apostle’s words in Phil. 3:13-15: “Forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press towards the mark. Let us therefore, as many as are mature, be thus minded.”

The reason for it, is that the more persons have of holy affections, the more they have of that spiritual taste which I spoke of elsewhere – the taste by which they perceive the excellency and relish the divine sweetness of holiness. And the more grace they have, while in this state of imperfection, the more they see their imperfection and emptiness, and their distance from what ought to be; and so the more they see of their need for grace (as I showed at large before when speaking of the nature of evangelical humility).² Besides, as long as grace is imperfect, it has a growing nature, and it is in a growing state. We see this is so with all living things, that while they are in a state of imperfection, and in their growing state, their nature seeks to grow; and the more they are healthy and prosperous, the more growth they want. Therefore the cry of every true grace is like the cry of true faith in Mark 9:24: “Lord, I believe, help my unbelief.” The greater spiritual revelations and affections the true Christian has, the more he becomes an earnest beggar for grace, and for spiritual food, so that he may grow – and the more earnestly he pursues it, by the use of proper means and endeavors. For true and gracious longings for holiness are not idle and ineffectual desires.

But here some may object and say, How is this consistent with what everyone admits, that spiritual enjoyments are of a soul-satisfying nature?

I answer that, being so is not at all inconsistent with what has been said. Consider in what way spiritual enjoyments are said to be of a soul-satisfying nature. Certainly they are not so in the

¹ “Truly there is no work of Christ that is right (says Mr. Shepard) unless it carries the soul to long for more of it.”

² See p. 152.
sense of being cloying\(^3\) in nature, so that whoever has tasted anything of them, even to an imperfect degree, desires no more. But spiritual enjoyments are of a soul-satisfying nature in the following respects:

1. In their kind and nature, they are fully adapted to the nature, capacity, and need of the soul of man. So that those who find them, desire no other kind of enjoyments. They sit down fully contented with that kind of happiness which they have, desiring no change, nor are they inclined to wander about any more, saying, “Who will show us any good?” The soul is never cloyed, never weary; but perpetually surrendering itself, with all its powers, to this happiness. It is not that those who have something of this happiness, desire no more of it.

2. They are also satisfying in this respect: that they answer the expectation of the appetite. When the appetite is high towards anything, the expectation is consequently high. Appetite for a particular object implies expectation as part of its nature. This expectation is not satisfied by worldly enjoyments. A man may expect to have a great accession of happiness with them, but he is disappointed. It is not so with spiritual enjoyments; they fully answer and satisfy the expectation.

3. The gratification and pleasure of spiritual enjoyments is permanent. It is not so with worldly enjoyments. In a sense, they satisfy particular appetites. But the appetite, in being satisfied, is glutted, and then the pleasure is over. And as soon as that pleasure is over, the general appetite of human nature for happiness returns; but it is empty, and without anything to satisfy it. So the gluttoning of a particular appetite only takes away from, and leaves empty, the general thirst of nature.

4. Spiritual good is satisfying, because there is enough in it to satisfy the soul, if obstacles to it were only removed, and if the enjoying faculty\(^4\) were duly applied. There is room enough here for the soul to extend itself; there is an infinite ocean of it available. If men are not satisfied here in the degree of their happiness, then the cause is with themselves. It is because they do not open their mouths wide enough.

But these things do not argue that a soul has no appetite for more of the same, once it has tasted a little. Nor do they argue that his appetite will not increase, the more he tastes, until he comes to full enjoyment – as bodies attracted to the globe of the earth move towards it more strongly the nearer they come to its attracting body, and will not rest until they are at its center. Spiritual good is of a satisfying nature. And for that very reason, the soul that tastes and knows its nature will thirst after it, to be full of it, so that it may be satisfied. The more he experiences, and the more he knows this excellent, unparalleled, exquisite, and satisfying sweetness, the more earnestly he will hunger and thirst for more until he comes to perfection. Therefore, this is the nature of spiritual affections: that the greater they are, the greater the appetite for, and longing after, grace and holiness.

But with those joys and other religious affections that are false and counterfeit, it is otherwise. Say previously there was a great desire for grace. As these affections rise, that previous desire ceases or abates. It may be that before, while the man was under legal convictions, and was very afraid of hell, he earnestly longed to obtain spiritual light in his understanding, and to have faith in Christ, and love towards God. But now, when these false affections have risen, they deceive him. They make him confident that he is converted, and that his state is good. And so his earnest longings for light and grace are no more: his goal has been answered. He is confident that his sins are forgiven and that he will go to heaven; and so he is satisfied. And especially when false affections are raised very high, they put an end to his longings after grace and holiness. He no

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\(^3\) Overly sweet.

\(^4\) That part of our nature which causes us to enjoy something. It triggers the “pleasure center” of the brain. – WHG
longer appears to himself to be a poor empty creature. On the contrary, he is rich, and increased with goods, and hardly conceives of anything more excellent than what he has already attained.

Hence, after many have obtained what they call their conversion, there is an end to earnestness in seeking after grace; or at least it ends after those high affections have made them fully confident of their conversion. Before, while they looked at themselves as being in a state of nature, they were engaged in seeking after God and Christ. They cried earnestly for grace, and strove in their means. But now they act as though their work is done. They live on their first work, or some past high experiences. There is an end to their crying and striving after God and grace. By contrast, the holy principles that actuate a true saint, have a far more powerful influence to stir him up to earnestly seek God and holiness, than servile fear has. Hence, seeking God is spoken of as one of the distinguishing characteristics of the saints. The phrase “those who seek God” is used to describe the godly in Scripture. Psa. 24:6, “This is the generation of those who seek him, that seek your face, O Jacob!” Psa. 69:6, “Let not those who seek you, be confounded for my sake.” Ver. 32, “The humble shall see this and be glad: and your heart shall live that seek God.” And 70:4, “Let all these who seek you, rejoice, and be glad in you: and let those who love your salvation, say continually, The Lord be magnified.” And the Scriptures everywhere represent the seeking, striving, and labor of a Christian, as being chiefly after his conversion; his conversion is but the beginning of his as work. The New Testament speaks about men’s watching, giving earnest attention to themselves, running the race that is set before them, fighting, putting on the whole armor of God, standing – and having done all to stand, pressing forward, reaching forth, continuing to be instant in prayer, and crying to God day and night. I

5 “It is usual to see a false heart most diligent in seeking the Lord, when he has been worst, and most careless when it is best. Hence many at first conversion, sought the Lord earnestly: afterwards affections and endeavors die; that now they are good as the word can make them. – A hypocrite’s last end is to satisfy himself: hence he has enough. A saint’s is to satisfy Christ: hence he never has enough.” Shepard’s Parable, Part I. p. 157. Many a man, perhaps, may say, I have nothing in myself, and all is in Christ; and he comforts himself there; and so he falls asleep. Hands off! and do not touch this ark, lest the Lord slay you: a Christ of clouts would serve your turn as well.” Ibid. p. 71. “A hypocrite’s light goes out, and does not grow. Hence many ancient slanders take all their comfort from their first work, and droop when they are in old age.” Ibid. p. 77, 93-94. 

Mr. Shepard, mentioning the characters of those who have a dead hope, says they are “those who content themselves with any measure of holiness and grace, and do not look for Christ’s coming and company. For saints that do look for him, even though they do not have that holiness and grace they want to have, yet they do not rest satisfied in any measure; 1 John 3.3. “He that has this hope, purifies himself as he is pure.”— Thus saints do not content themselves with any dressings, until they are made glorious, and so fit for fellowship with that spouse.— But when a man does not leave until he gets a measure of faith and grace, and once he has it, contents himself with it as a good sign that he shall be saved, he no longer looks for Christ. Or when men are heavily laden with sin and then close with Christ, and are comforted, and sealed, they have joy that fills them; but now their work is done. —When men will not content themselves with any measure; but wish they had more, if only grace would grow while they watch the clock and sit idly; and so God must do it all: but they do not purge themselves, and make work of it.” Again, p. 109. “There is never a hypocrite living, that does not close with Christ for his own ends: for he cannot work beyond his principle. Now when men have served their own turns out of another man, away they go, and keep what they have. A hypocrite closes with Christ, as a man closes with a rich shop; he will not buy the shop at its cost, but pays only as much as serves his turn. Commonly men in horror, seek so much of Christ as will ease them; and hence they profess, and hence they seek only as much of Christ as will benefit them; hence their desires after Christ are soon satisfied. Appetitus finis est infinitus.” Woe to you who can paint such a Christ in your head, and receive such a Christ into your heart, as will pander to your sloth. The Lord will revenge this wrong done to his glory, with greater sorrows than ever anyone felt: to make Christ not only meat and drink to feed you, but clothes to cover your sloth — Why what can we do? What can we do?— As the first Adam conveys not only guilt, but power; so the second Adam conveys both righteousness and strength.” Ibid. p. 158. “When the Lord has given some light and affection, and some comfort and some reformation, now a man grows full here. Saints do for God; and carnal hearts do something too; but a little fills them, and quiets them, and so it damns them. Hence men at the first work upon them, and are very diligent in the use of means; but after that, they are brought to neglect prayer, sleep out sermons, and be careless, sapless, lifeless.” Ibid. p. 210. “It is an argument for lack of grace, when a man says to himself, as the glutton said to his soul, “Take your rest, for you have goods laid up for many years.” So you have repentance and grace, and peace enough for many years: and hence the soul takes its rest, grows sluggish and negligent. Oh, if you die in this state, this night your soul will be taken away to hell.” Ibid. p. 227.
say, almost all that is said in the New Testament of these things, is spoken of and directed to the saints. For every once these things are said about sinners who are seeking conversion, they are said ten times about the saints’ prosecution of the great business of their high calling. But many in these days have gotten into a strange and anti-scriptural way. All their striving and wrestling is over before they are converted. And so, having an easy time of it afterwards, they sit down and enjoy their sloth and indolence as those who now have a supply to meet their want; they have become rich and full. But when the Lord “fills the hungry with good things, these rich are likely to be sent away empty,” Luke 1:53.

Doubtless there are some hypocrites, who have only false affections. They will think they are able to withstand this trial. They will readily say that they do not desire to rest satisfied with their past attainments, but to press forward. They say that they do desire more; they long after God and Christ; and they desire more holiness; and they do seek it. But the truth is, that their desires are not properly the desires of an appetite for holiness – not for its own sake, or for the moral excellency and holy sweetness that is in it. Rather, their desires are only for the by-products of it. They long for clearer revelations, so that they may be better satisfied about the state of their souls. Or because the self is gratified in great revelations, in being made so much of by God, and being so exalted above others. They long to taste the love of God (as they call it) more than they long to have a greater love for God. Or it may be that they have forced, fancied, or made-up longings, because they think they must long for more grace, otherwise it will reflect badly on them. But things such as these are far different from the natural, and as it were, necessary appetite and thirsting of the new man who longs after God and holiness. There is an inward burning desire that a saint has for holiness. It is as natural to the new creature, as vital heat is to the body. There is a holy breathing and panting after the Spirit of God, to increase personal holiness; and this is as natural to a holy nature as breathing is to a living body. And holiness or sanctification is more directly its object than any manifestation of God’s love and favor. This is the food and drink that is the object of the spiritual appetite. John 4:34, “My food is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work.” Where we read in Scripture of the desires, longings, and thirstings of the saints, righteousness and God’s laws are much more frequently mentioned as their object than anything else. The saints desire the sincere milk of the word – not so much to testify of God’s love towards them – as to help them grow in holiness. I have shown before, that holiness is that good which is the immediate object of a spiritual taste. But undoubtedly the same sweetness that is the chief object of a spiritual taste, is also the chief object of a spiritual appetite. Grace is the godly man’s treasure. Isa. 32:6, “The fear of the Lord is his treasure.” Godliness is the gain that he is covetous and greedy for, 1Tim. 6:6.6 Hypocrites long for revelations more for the present comfort of the revelation, and for the manifestation of God’s love in it, than for any sanctifying influence it may have. Longing after great revelations, or after great tastes of the love of God, or longing to be in heaven, or longing to die, are not the distinguishing marks of true saints, as much as longing after a more holy heart, and living a more holy life.

But I have come now to the last distinguishing mark of holy affections that I shall mention.

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6 1Tim 6:6 Now godliness with contentment is great gain.
12. Gracious affections have their exercise and fruit in Christian practice

Gracious and holy affections have their exercise and fruit in Christian practice. I mean, they have that influence and power on the believer which causes the practice and business of his life to be the practice which is universally conformed to and directed by Christian rules. This implies three things:

1. That his behavior or practice in the world is universally conformed to and directed by Christian rules.

2. That he places the business of such holy practice above all things. It is a business in which he is chiefly engaged and devoted to. He pursues it with the highest earnestness and diligence, so that he may be said to make this practice of religion eminently his work and his business.

3. That he persists in it to the end of his life. It may be said of him that it is not only his business at certain seasons, such as Sabbath days, or during extraordinary times, or that it is the business of a month, a year, or seven years, or his business only in certain circumstances — but it is the business of his entire life. It is that business which he perseveres in through all changes, and under all trials, as long as he lives.

The necessity of each of these, in all true Christians, is most clearly and fully taught in the word of God.

1. It is necessary for men to be universally obedient: 1 John 3:3 etc., "Every man that has this hope in him purifies himself, even as he is pure. And you know that he was manifested to take..."
away our sins; and in him there is no sin. Whoever abides in him does not sin; whoever sins has not seen him, or known him. He that does righteousness, is righteous even as he is righteous: one who commits sin is of the devil.” Chap. 5:18, “We know that whoever is born of God does not sin, but he that is born of God keeps himself, and that wicked one does not touch him.” John 15:14, “You are my friends, if you do whatever I command you.”

If one member of the body is corrupt, and we do not cut it off, it will carry the whole body to hell, Matt. 5:29-30. Saul was commanded to slay all God’s enemies, the Amalekites, and he slew all but Agag; saving him proved Saul’s ruin. Caleb and Joshua entered into God’s promised rest because they wholly followed the Lord. Naaman’s hypocrisy appeared in this: however greatly he seemed to be affected by gratitude towards God for healing his leprosy, and engaged himself to serve him, yet he desired to be excused in one thing. And Herod, though he feared John, and observed him, and heard him gladly, and did many things – yet he was condemned because in one thing he would not listen to him: in parting with his beloved Herodias. So it is necessary for men to part with their dearest iniquities, which are like their right hand and right eye. These are the sins that most easily beset them, and which they are most exposed to by their natural inclinations, evil habits, or particular circumstances, as well as other reasons. Joseph would not make himself known to his brothers who had sold him, until the beloved child of the family, Benjamin, the hardest to part with, was surrendered. Christ will not further reveal his love towards us, until we part with our dearest lusts, and until we are brought to comply with the most difficult duties, and those that we have the greatest aversion to.

It is important to observe that, in order to say a man is truly and universally obedient, his obedience must not only consist in negatives – that is, universally avoiding wicked practices (sins of commission) – but he must also be universal in the positives of religion. Sins of omission are as much breaches of God’s commands as sins of commission. Christ, in Matt. 25 represents those on his left hand as being condemned and cursed to everlasting fire for sins of omission. “I was hungry, and you gave me no food,” etc. A man, therefore, cannot be said to be universally obedient, and to have a Christian way of life, only because he is not a thief, oppressor, fraud, drunkard, carouser, whoremonger, rictor, prostitute, unclean, profane in his language, slanderer, liar, furious, malicious, or a reviler. The one who goes this far and no further, is falsely said to have conduct that becomes the gospel. Rather, in order to say this of him, it is necessary for him to also be serious, religious, devout, humble, meek, forgiving, peaceful, respectful, benevolent, condescending, merciful and beneficent in his walk and lifestyle. Without doing such things as these, he does not obey the laws of Christ – laws that Christ and his apostles abundantly insisted on as being of the greatest importance and necessity.

2. In order for men to be true Christians, it is necessary to prosecute the business of religion, and the service of God, with great earnestness and diligence – it is the work to which they devote themselves, and have made the main business of their lives. All Christ’s people not only do good works, but they are zealous for good works, Tit. 2:14. No man can do the service of two masters at once. Those who are God’s true servants surrender themselves to his service, and make it their whole work, employing their whole heart in it, and their greatest strength. Phil. 3:13, “This

small things. If they can keep clear of great transgressions, they hope that God will not insist upon the small things.—But indeed all the commands of God are established by divine authority: a small shot may kill a man, as well as a cannon ball; a small leak may sink a ship. If a man lives in small sins, that shows he has no love for God, no sincere care to please and honor God. Little sins, as well as great, have a damning nature. If they do not deserve as much punishment as greater ones, they still deserve damnation. There is contempt of God in all sins; Matt. 5.19. “He that breaks one of the least of these commands, and teaches men to do so, shall be called the least in the kingdom of God.” Prov. 19.16. “He that keeps the commandment, keeps his own soul; but he that despises his way, shall die.” If a man says this is a great command, and so lays weight on it, and says another is a little commandment, and so disregards it, and allows himself to break it, then he is in a perishing condition.”—Stoddard’s Way to Know Sincerity and Hypocrisy.

one thing I do.” Christians in their effectual calling, are not called to idleness, but to labor in God’s vineyard, and to spend their day doing a great and laborious service. All true Christians comply with this call (as implied in being an effectual call), and they do the work of Christians. This is compared everywhere in the New Testament to those exercises in which men are prone to exert their strength with the greatest earnestness, such as running, wrestling, and fighting. All true Christians are good and faithful soldiers of Jesus Christ, and “fight the good fight of faith;” for only those who do so “ever lay hold on eternal life.”

Those who “fight as those that beat the air,” 1 Cor 9:26 never win the crown of victory. “ Those who run in a race, all run, but one wins the prize;” those who are slack and negligent in their course, do not “run so as to obtain.” 1 Cor 9:24

The kingdom of heaven is not to be taken except by violence. Mat 11:12 Without earnestness we cannot move along the narrow way that leads to life; and so we cannot arrive at that state of glorious life and happiness which it leads to. Without earnest labor, there is no ascending the steep and high hill of Zion, and no arriving at the heavenly city on top of it. Without constant labor, there is no stemming the swift stream in which we swim, so as to come to the fountain of the water of life which lies at its head. We need to “watch and pray always, in order to escape those dreadful things that are coming upon the ungodly, and to be counted worthy to stand before the Son of man.” Lk 21:36

We need to “put on the whole armor of God, and having done all, to stand,” Eph 6:13 in order to avoid being totally overthrown, and utterly destroyed by “the fiery darts of the devil.” Eph 6:16 In order to obtain the prize, we need to “forget the things that are behind, and reach forward to what lies ahead... and press towards the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.” Phil 3:13-14

Slothfulness in the service of God in his professed servants, is as damning as open rebellion; for the slothful servant is a wicked servant, and will be thrown into outer darkness, among God’s open enemies, Matt. 25:26, 30. Those who are slothful are not “followers of those who, through faith and patience, inherit the promises.” Heb. 6:11-12, “We desire that each one of you shows the same diligence to the full assurance of hope until the end, so that you do not become sluggish, but imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.” And all those who follow that cloud of witnesses that have gone before us to heaven, “lay aside every weight, and the sin that so easily besets them, and run with patience the race that is set before them,” Heb. 12:1. That true faith by which persons rely on the righteousness of Christ, and the work that he has done for them, and truly feed and live upon him, is increasingly accompanied by this spirit of earnestness in the Christian work and course. This was typified in olden times by the way the children of Israel fed on the paschal lamb. They were directed to eat it as those who were in a hurry, with their loins girded, their shoes on their feet, and their staff in their hand, Exod. 12:11.

3. Every true Christian perseveres in this universal obedience, and in diligent and earnest service to God, through all the various kinds of trials he encounters, to the end of his life. All true saints, all those that obtain eternal life, thus persevere in the practice of religion, and the service of God. This is a doctrine so abundantly taught in the Scripture, that to specifically repeat all the texts which imply it would be endless; I will content myself with referring to some in the footnote.³

Perseverance in obedience, which is most insisted on in Scripture as a special mark of the truth of grace, is continuing in the practice of a professor’s duty, and being steadfast in his holy walk, through all the various trials with which he meets.

By trials here, I mean those things that occur, and that a professor meets with in his course of life, that especially render continuance in his duty and faithfulness to God difficult to his nature.

In Scripture these things are sometimes called trials or temptations (which have the same meaning). These trials are of various kinds. Many things may render continuing in the way of duty difficult by their tendency to cherish, and foment, or stir up and provoke a person’s lusts and corruptions. Many things make it hard to continue in the way of duty, by having an adhering nature, and a tendency to entice a person to sin, or by their tendency to remove restraints and embolden him in his iniquity. Other things test the soundness and steadfastness of professors, by their tendency to make the duty appear terrifying to them, and thus they frighten and drive them from it. This includes the sufferings which duty will expose them to: pain, ill-will, contempt, and reproach, or the loss of outward possessions and comforts. After someone has made a profession of religion, if he lives any considerable time in this world (which is so full of changes and so full of evil), he will unavoidably have many trials of his sincerity and steadfastness. And besides, it is God's way, and by His design, and in his providence, to bring trials on his professing friends and servants. This is to expose and sufficiently convict their own consciences of the state they are in, and often to show it to the world. This is made apparent by numerous Scriptures.

True saints may be guilty of some kinds and degrees of backsliding; they may be foiled by particular temptations; and they may fall into sin – indeed, great sins. But they can never fall away so as to grow weary of religion and the service of God. They will never habitually dislike and neglect it, either on its own account, or on account of the difficulties that attend it. This is made evident by Gal. 6:9,4 Rom. 2:7,5 Heb. 10:36,6 Isa. 43:22,7 and Mal. 1:13.8 They can never backslide so as to no longer continue in a way of universal obedience; or so that it will cease to be their way to observe all the rules of Christianity, and to do all the required duties, even in the most difficult circumstances.9 This is abundantly manifest by the things that have been observed already. Nor can they ever fall away so as to habitually be more engaged in other things than in the business of religion; or so that it should become their way and manner to serve something else more than God; or so as to cease to serve God with such earnestness and diligence. They will still be habitually devoted and surrendered to the business of religion unless these words of Christ can fall to the ground: “You cannot serve two masters;” Mat 6:24 and those of the apostle,

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4 Gal 6:9 And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart.
5 Rom 2:7 ...eternal life to those who by patient continuance in doing good seek for glory, honor, and immortality;
6 Heb 10:36 For you have need of endurance, so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise.
7 Isa 43:22 But you have not called upon Me, O Jacob; And you have been weary of Me, O Israel.
8 Mal 1:13 You also say, 'Oh, what a weariness!' And you sneer at it," Says the LORD of hosts. "And you bring the stolen, the lame, and the sick; Thus you bring an offering! Should I accept this from your hand?" Says the LORD.
9 "One sinful way is exception enough against men’s salvation, though their temptations are great. Some persons delight in iniquity; they take pleasure in rudeness and intemperate practices. But there are others who do not delight in sin; when they can handsomely avoid it, they do not choose it. Unless they are under some great necessity, they will not do it They are afraid to sin; they think it is dangerous, and they take some care to avoid it. But sometimes they force themselves to sin. They are reduced to difficulties, and cannot tell how to avoid it; and so it is a dangerous thing not to do it. If Naaman did not bow himself in the house of Rimmon, the king would be enraged with him; he might take away his office, and maybe his life, so he complies; 2Kings 5.18. — So Jeroboam forced himself to set up the calves at Dan and Bethel: he thought that if the people went up to Jerusalem to worship, they would kill him and return to Rehoboam.; therefore he must think of some expedient way to deliver himself in this strait; 1Kings 12.27-28. He was driven by apparent necessity to take this wicked course.— So the stony-ground hearers were willing to retain their profession of the true religion; but the situation was such that they thought they could not do it. Matt. 13.21, “When tribulation or persecution arises because of the word, by and by he is offended.” So Achan and Gehazi had unique opportunities to gain an estate. If they lived twenty years, they were not likely to have such an advantage; and so they forced themselves to borrow a point, and break the law of God. They laid necessity on estate, liberty, and life, but not upon obedience. If a man is willing to serve God in ordinary cases, but excuses himself when there are great difficulties, he is not godly. It is a small matter to serve God when men have no temptation. But Lot was holy in Sodom, and Noah was righteous in the old world. Temptations try men, but they do not force men to sin: and grace will establish the heart in a day of temptation.— Those who endure temptation are blessed, James 1.12. But those who fall away in a day of temptation are cursed.” Stoddard’s Way to know Sincerity and Hypocrisy.
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“The one who would be a friend of the world, is the enemy of God;” Jas 4:4 and unless a saint can change his God, and still be a true saint. Nor can a true saint ever fall away so that, ordinarily, there is no remarkable difference in his walk and behavior after his conversion from what was before. Those who are truly converted are new men, new creatures – new not only within, but without. They are sanctified throughout in spirit, soul, and body. Old things have passed away, and all things have become new. 2Cor 5:17 They have new hearts, new eyes, new ears, new tongues, new hands, new feet – that is, there is a new conduct and practice. They walk in newness of life, and they continue to do so to the end of their life. Rom 6:4

For those who fall away, and cease to visibly observe all the rules of Christianity, it is a sign that they were never risen with Christ.10 When men’s opinion of their being converted, and of being in a safe estate, is the very cause of their coming to this end, it is a most evident sign of their hypocrisy.11 Whether falling away means falling back into their former sins, or into some new kind of wickedness, it only means having their corrupt nature turned into a new channel instead of being mortified. Even though some think they are converted, and do not return to their former profaneness and lewdness, they still have a high opinion of their experiences, graces, and privileges. And so they gradually settle more and more into a self-righteous and spiritually proud temper of mind. This is the manner of behavior that naturally arises from presumption. When it is this way with men, however far they may seem to be from their former evil practices, this alone is enough to condemn them, and it may render their last state far worse than the first. For this seems to be the very case of the Jews in the generation that Christ speaks of in Matt. 12:43-45. They were awakened by John the Baptist’s preaching, and reformed their licentious courses. The unclean Spirit in them was turned out, and the house swept and decorated. Yet being empty of God and of grace, and full of themselves, and exalted in an exceedingly high opinion of their own righteousness and eminent holiness, they became habituated to a corresponding self-exalting behavior. They exchanged the sins of publicans and harlots, for those of the Pharisees; and in the issue, they had seven devils worse than the first.

Thus I have explained what exercise and fruit I mean, when I say that gracious affections have their exercise and fruit in Christian practice.

The reason why gracious affections have such a tendency and effect, appears from many things that have already been observed in the preceding parts of this discourse.

The reason for it appears from this: that gracious affections arise from spiritual operations and influences.12 The inward principle from which they flow is something divine – a communication of God, a participation in the divine nature. Christ lives in the heart. The Holy Spirit dwells there in union with the faculties of the soul, as an internal vital principle. And he exerts his own

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10 “Hence we learn what verdict to pass and give concerning those men that decay and fall away from the Lord. They never had oil in the vessel; never had a dram of grace in their heart. Thus 1John 2.19. “If they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us.” It seems they were such eminent and excellent men, that there were no brands or marks on them to indicate to the churches that they were marked out for apostasy; they were only discovered to be unsound by their apostasy; and this argument was good enough.” Shepard’s Parable. Part I. p. 226.

11 As “when a man’s rising is the cause of his fall, or seals a man in his fall, or at least it is the cause of it through his corruption. For example, say a man lived a loose, careless, and carnal life; but by the ministry of some word, or reading some book, or speaking with some friend, he comes to be convinced of his misery and woeful condition – he sees no good or grace in himself; he has been deceived up to this point. At last he gets some light, some taste, some sorrows, some heart to use the means, some comfort and mercy, and hope of life. When it is this way with him, now he falls: he grows full and he falls. And this rising is the cause of his fall; his light is darkness and death to him; and it grows into a form of knowledge; his rising makes him fall into formality, and then to profaneness; and so his tasting satisfies him; his sorrows empty his heart of sorrows for sin; and his sorrows for his falls harden his heart; and all the means of recovering him, instead harden him.— Look how it is in diseases; if the medicine and food turn to poison, then there is no hope of recovery; a man is now sick to death. The saint’s little measure makes him forget what is behind.” Shepard’s Parable. Part I. p. 226.

12 First sign – see p. 79.
proper nature in the exercise of those faculties. This is sufficient to show why true grace should have such activity, power, and efficacy in believers. It is no wonder that what is divine, is powerful and effectual – for it has omnipotence on its side. If God dwells in the heart, and he is vitally united to it, then he will show that he is God by the efficacy of his operation. Christ is not in the heart of a saint as if living in a sepulcher, or as a dead savior who does nothing. Rather, he lives in his temple as one who is alive from the dead. For in the heart where Christ abides savingly, there he lives, and there he exerts himself after the power of that endless life that he received at his resurrection. Thus every saint that is subject to the benefit of Christ’s sufferings, is made to know and experience the power of his resurrection. Phil 3:10

The Spirit of Christ, which is the immediate spring of grace in the heart, is all life, all power, and all acting. 1Cor. 2:4, “In demonstration of the Spirit, and of power.” 1Thess. 1:5, “Our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost.” 1Cor. 4:20, “The kingdom of God is not in word, but in power.” Hence saving affections, though often not making so great a noise and show as others, still have in them a secret solidity, life, and strength whereby they take hold of, and carry away the heart. They lead it into a kind of captivity (2Cor. 10:5), where it gains a full and steadfast determination of the will, for God and for holiness. Psa. 110:3, “Your people shall be willing in the day of your power.” Thus holy affections have a governing power in the course of a man’s life. A statue may look very much like a real man, and a beautiful man. Indeed, it may have, in its appearance to the eye, the resemblance of a very lively, strong, and active man. Yet an inward principle of life and strength is lacking in it. Therefore it does nothing; it brings nothing to pass; there is no action or operation that corresponds to the outward show. False revelations and affections do not go deep enough to reach and govern the spring of men’s actions and practice. The seed in stony ground did not have the depth of earth, and its root did not go deep enough, to bring forth fruit. But gracious affections go to the very bottom of the heart, and they take hold of the very innermost springs of life and activity.

The power of true godliness chiefly appears in this: in its effectual practice. And the efficacy of godliness in this respect, is what the apostle plainly refers to when he speaks of the power of godliness in 2Tim. 3:5. For there he particularly declares how some professors of religion would notoriously fail in the practice of it. And then in the 5th verse he observes that, being unholy in practice, they deny the power of godliness, even though they have the form of it. Indeed the power of godliness is exerted in the first place within the soul, in the tangible, lively exercise of gracious affections there. Yet the principal evidence of this power of godliness, is in those exercises of holy affections that are practical. And being practical; they show themselves in conquering the will, and conquering the lusts and corruptions of men, and carrying men on in the way of holiness through all temptations, difficulties, and opposition.

Again, the reason why gracious affections have their exercise and effect in Christian practice appears from this (as observed before): that “the first objective ground for gracious affections is the transcendently excellent and amiable nature of divine things as they are in themselves; and not in any conceived relation they bear to self, or to self-interest.” This shows why holy affection will cause men to be holy in their practice universally. What makes men partial in religion is that they seek themselves in their religion, not God; and they embrace religion, not for its own excellent nature, but only to obtain a return. Someone who embraces religion only to obtain a return, will embrace no more of it than he imagines will obtain that return. But the one who embraces religion for its own excellent and lovely nature, embraces all that has that nature. He embraces religion for its own sake, and so he embraces the whole of religion. This also shows why gracious affections will cause men to practice religion perseveringly, and at all times.

Religion may alter greatly in the process of time, as to its consistency with men’s private interest in many respects. Therefore, the one who complies with it only for selfish purposes, is liable to

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13 Second sign - see page 104.
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forsake it as times change. But the excellent nature of religion, as it is in itself, is invariable; it is always the same, at all times, and through all changes. It never alters in any respect.

The reason why gracious affections result in holy practice, further appears from the excellency of divine things which, it has been observed, is the foundation of all holy affections: “their moral excellency, or the beauty of their holiness.”

Seeing that holiness is the main thing that excites, draws, and governs all gracious affections, it is no wonder that all such affections tend towards holiness. That which men love, they desire to have, and to be united to, and to be possessed by. The beauty which men delight in, they also desire to be adorned with. Men are necessarily inclined to do those acts in which delight.

What was observed about the divine teaching and leading of the Spirit of God, acting in gracious affections, shows the reason for the tendency of such affections for a universally holy practice. For, as observed, the Spirit of God in this, his divine teaching and leading, gives the soul a natural relish for the sweetness of what is holy, and of everything that is holy (so far as it comes into view), and he excites a disrelish and disgust for everything that is unholy.

The same is also apparent from what was observed about the nature of that spiritual knowledge which is the foundation of all holy affection. It consists in a sense and view of that excellence in divine things which is supreme and transcendent. For by this sense, these things appear worthy to be chosen and adhered to above all others. By seeing the transcendent glory of Christ, true Christians see him worthy to be followed; and so they are powerfully drawn after him. They see him worthy, so that they forsake all for him. By the sight of that superlative amiableness, they are thoroughly disposed to be subject to him. They are engaged to labor with earnestness and activity in his service. And they are made willing to go through all difficulties for his sake. It is the discovery of this divine excellency of Christ, that makes them constant to him – for it makes so deep an impression on their minds that they cannot forget him. They will follow him wherever he goes. It is in vain for anyone to endeavor to draw them away from him.

The reason for this practical tendency, and for the generation of gracious affections, further appears from what was observed: that such affections are “attended by a thorough conviction of the reality and certainty of divine things.”

Again, the reason for this expression and effect of holy affections in the practice of religion, appears in what was observed about “a change of nature, accompanying such affections.” Without a change of nature, men’s practice will not be thoroughly changed. Until the tree is made good, the fruit will not be good. Men do not gather grapes from thorn bushes, nor figs from thistles. The swine may be washed and appear clean for a little while; yet, without a change of nature, he will still wallow in the mire. Nature is a more powerful principle of action than anything that opposes it. Though it may be violently restrained for awhile, it will finally overcome what restrains it. It is like the stream of a river: it may be stopped awhile with a dam, but if nothing is done to dry up the fountain, it will not be stopped always – it will make a course

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14 Third sign – see page 114.
15 Fourth sign - see page 123.
16 Fifth sign - see page 139.
17 Seventh sign - see page 171.
either in its old channel, or in a new one. Nature is more constant and permanent than any of those things that are the foundation of carnal men’s reformation and righteousness. When a natural man denies his lust, and lives a strict, religious life, and seems humble, pained, and earnest in religion, it is not natural – it is a force against nature. This is like a stone that is thrown with violent force upwards; that force will gradually be spent. Yet nature will remain in its full strength, and so it prevails, and the stone will return downwards. As long as the corrupt nature is not mortified, and the principle is left whole in a man, it is a vain thing to expect it not to govern the man. But if the old nature is indeed mortified, and a new and heavenly nature is infused in him, then it may well be expected that the man will walk in newness of life, and will continue to do so to the end of his days.

The reason for this practical exercise and effect of holy affections may also be partly seen from what has been said about that spirit of humility which attends them. Humility is what a spirit of obedience greatly consists of. A proud spirit is a rebellious spirit; but a humble spirit is a yielded, subject, and obedient spirit. We see among men, that the servant who has a haughty spirit is not apt to be submissive and obedient to the will of his master in everything; but it is otherwise with the servant who has a lowly spirit.

That lamb-like, dove-like spirit that was spoken of, which accompanies all gracious affections, fulfills all the duties of the second table of the law (as the apostle observes in Rom. 13:8-10 and Gal. 5:14). This is what Christian practice very much consists of, and what the external practice of Christianity chiefly consists of.

The reason why gracious affections are attended by that strict, universal, and constant obedience which was spoken of, further appears from what was observed about the tenderness of spirit that accompanies the affections of true saints. It is what causes in them to have so quick and lively a sense of pain from the presence of moral evil, and such a dread of the appearance of evil.

One large reason why the Christian practice which flows from gracious affections is universal, constant, and persevering, appears from what was observed about those affections themselves, from which this practice flows. These affections are universal and constant in all kinds of holy and virtuous exercises, towards all objects, in all circumstances, and at all seasons, in beautiful symmetry and proportion. Much of the reason why holy affections are expressed and manifested in such earnestness and activity, and with such an engagement and perseverance in holy practice, is apparent from what was observed about the spiritual appetite, and about longing after further attainments in religion. This appetite increasingly attends true affection. It does not decay; rather it increases as those affections increase.

Thus we see how the tendency of holy affections towards such Christian practice, as explained, appears from each of those characteristics of holy affection that were spoken of before.

This point may be further illustrated and confirmed if it is considered that the holy Scriptures abundantly emphasize sincerity and soundness in religion in the following things:

- in fully choosing God as our only Lord and portion, forsaking all others for him; Psa 142:5
- in a full determination of the will for God and Christ, upon counting the cost; Luk 14:28

18 Sixth sign – see page 152.
19 Eighth sign – see page 175.
20 Ninth sign – see p. 184.
21 Tenth sign – see p. 189.
22 Eleventh sign - see page 196.
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- in our heart’s embracing and complying with the religion of Jesus Christ, with all that belongs to it; 1Pet 1:14-15
- in embracing it with all its difficulties, hating our dearest earthly enjoyments, and even our own lives, for Christ’s sake; Luk 14:26
- in surrendering ourselves to Christ with all we have, wholly and forever, keeping nothing back, nor making any reserve: in a word, the great duty of self-denial for Christ; Mat 16:24
- in denying, i.e., in disowning and renouncing ourselves, for him, making ourselves nothing so that he may be all. Phil 2:5-8

See the texts speaking to this purpose, referred to in the footnote.23

Now surely having a heart to forsake all for Christ, tends towards actually forsaking all for him, as there is opportunity and a trial. Having a heart to deny ourselves for Christ, tends towards denying ourselves indeed, when Christ and self-interest stand in competition with each other. Surrendering ourselves, with all that we have in our hearts, without making any reserve there, tends towards universally behaving ourselves as his, as subject to his will, and devoted to his ends. When our heart entirely embraces the religion of Jesus, with all that belongs to it, attended by all its difficulties, then upon deliberately counting the cost, the heart tends towards universally embracing the religion of Jesus in act and deed. We actually go through all the difficulties that we meet with in the way of religion; and so we hold out with patience and perseverance.

The tendency of grace in the heart towards holy practice is very direct, and the connection is most natural, close, and necessary. True grace is not an inactive thing. There is nothing in heaven or earth of a more active nature – for grace is life itself, and the most active kind of life, even spiritual and divine life. It is not a barren thing; there is nothing in the universe that in its nature has a greater tendency to produce fruit. Godliness in the heart has as direct a relation to godly practice, as a fountain has to a stream, or as the luminous nature of the sun relates to the beams it sends out, or as life relates to breathing, or to the beating of the pulse, or to any other vital act; or as a habit or principle of action directly relates to action. For it is the very nature and notion of grace, that it is a principle of holy action or practice. Regeneration, which is that work of God in which grace is infused, has a direct relation to practice; for it is the very end and purpose of grace; it is the view to which the whole work is wrought in us. Everything is calculated and framed to produce this mighty and manifold change in the soul, so as to directly tend towards this end of grace. Eph; 2:10, “For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works. Indeed, it is the very end of the redemption of Christ. Tit. 2:14, “Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify for himself a special people, zealous for good works.” 2Cor. 5:15. “He died for all, that those who live, should no longer live for themselves, but for him who died for them, and rose again.” Heb. 9:14. “How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit, offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?” Col. 1:21-22. “And you who once were alienated, and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now he has reconciled in the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and blameless, and above reproach in his sight.” 1Pet. 1:18. “Knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct.” Luke 1:74-75. “That he would grant to us, that being delivered out of the hands of our enemies, we might serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him, all the days of our life.”

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God often speaks of holy practice, as the end of that great typical redemption, the redemption from Egyptian bondage; as in Exod. 4:23. “Let my son go, that he may serve me.” (So chap. 4:23; 7:16; 8:1, 20; 9:1, 13; and 10:3.) And this is also declared to be the end of election; John 15:16. “You did not choose me, but I chose you, and ordained that you should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain.” Eph. 1:4, “Accordingly he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love.” Eph. 2:10, “Created for good works, which God has foreordained that we should walk in them.” Holy practice is as much the end of all that God does about his saints, as fruit is the end of all that the farmer does about the growth of his field or vineyard. This is how the matter is often represented in Scripture. Therefore everything in a true Christian is calculated to reach this end. This fruit of holy practice is what every grace, and every revelation, and every individual thing which belongs to Christian experience, has a direct tendency towards.

The constant and indissoluble connection that exists between a Christian principle and profession in true saints, and the fruit of holy practice in their lives, was typified of old in the form of the golden candlestick in the temple. Doubtless the golden candlestick, with its seven branches and seven lamps, was a type of the church of Christ. The Holy Ghost himself was pleased to put that matter out of doubt in representing his church by such a golden candlestick, with seven lamps, as in the fourth chapter of Zechariah. He represented the seven churches of Asia by seven golden candlesticks, as in the first chapter of the Revelation. The golden candlestick in the temple was made with knops and flowers everywhere, throughout its whole frame: Exod. 25:31 ff.; 37:17-24. The word translated knop, in the original, signifies apple or pomegranate. There was a knop and a flower, a knop and a flower: wherever there was a flower, there was an apple or pomegranate with it. The flower and the fruit were constantly connected, without fail. The flower contained the principle of the fruit, a beautiful promising appearance of it; and it was never a deceitful appearance. The principle or show of fruit, had evermore real fruit attending it, or succeeding it. So it is in the church of Christ. There is the gracious principle of fruit in the heart; then there is an amiable profession of it, signified by the open flowers of the candlestick; and then there is corresponding fruit in holy practice, which constantly attends this principle and profession. Every branch of the golden candlestick, thus composed of golden apples and flowers, was crowned with a burning, shining lamp on top of it.

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24 "To profess to know much, is easy; but to bring your affections into subjection, to wrestle with lusts, to cross your wills and yourselves upon every occasion, this is hard. The Lord looks that in our lives we should be serviceable to him, and useful to men. That which is within, the Lord and our brothers are never the better for it: but the outward obedience, flowing from it, glorifies God, and does good to men. The Lord will have this done. What else is the end of every grace, but to mollify the heart, and to make it pliable to some command or other? Look, how many commandments there are, and how many graces there are in virtue and efficacy, although not so many names are given to them. The end of every such grace is to make us obedient: just as the end of temperance is chastity – to bow the heart to these commands. Be sober, etc. not in promiscuity and wantonness, etc. When the Lord commands us not to be angry with our brother, the end of meekness, and why the Lord infuses it, is to keep us from ill-advised rash anger. So the end of faith is to take Jesus Christ, to make us obedient to the command of the gospel, which commands us to believe in him. As all graces join together only to frame and fashion the soul for obedience, therefore as much obedience as you have in your lives, that much grace is in your hearts, and no more. Ask your hearts, how subject are you to the Lord in your lives? It was the counsel that Francis Spira gave to them about Lord.

He said, ‘Learn all about me to take heed about severing faith and obedience: I taught justification by faith, but I neglected obedience; and therefore this has befallen me. I have known some godly men, whose comfort on their death-beds has not been from the inward acts of their minds, which considered separately, might be subject to misapprehensions, but from the course of obedience in their lives which issued from them. Let Christians see to it that in all their conduct, as they stand in every relation, as scholars, tradesmen, husbands, and wives, look to this: that when they come to die, they have been subject in all things. This will yield comfort." Dr. Preston’s Church’s Carriage.

25 “What is the end of every grace, but to mollify the heart, and to make it pliable to some command or other? Look, how many commandments there are, and how many graces there are in virtue and efficacy, although not so many names are given to them. The end of every such grace is to make us obedient: just as the end of temperance is chastity – to bow the heart to these commands. Be sober, etc. not in promiscuity and wantonness, etc. When the Lord commands us not to be angry with our brother, the end of meekness, and why the Lord infuses it, is to keep us from ill-advised rash anger. So the end of faith is to take Jesus Christ, to make us obedient to the command of the gospel, which commands us to believe in him. As all graces join together only to frame and fashion the soul for obedience, therefore as much obedience as you have in your lives, that much grace is in your hearts, and no more. Ask your hearts, how subject are you to the Lord in your lives? It was the counsel that Francis Spira gave to them about Lord.

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For it is by this means that the saints shine as lights in the world – by making a fair and good profession of religion, and then by having their profession evermore joined with corresponding fruit in practice. This agrees with that saying of our Savior in Matt. 5:15-16, “Nor do men light a candle and put it under a bushel, but they place it on a candlestick, and it gives light to all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.” A fair and beautiful profession, and golden fruits accompanying one another, are the amiable ornaments of the true church of Christ. Therefore we find that apples and flowers were not only the ornaments of the candlesticks in the temple, but of the temple itself, which is a type of the church which the apostle tells us “is the temple of the living God.”

Much the same thing seems to be signified by the ornaments on the skirt of the ephod, the garment of Aaron the high priest; these were golden bells and pomegranates. That these skirts of Aaron’s garment represent the church, or the saints (who, as it were, are the garment of Christ), is manifest – for they are evidently spoken of this way in Psa. 133:1-2: “Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brothers to dwell together in unity! It is like the precious ointment upon the head, that ran down upon the beard, even Aaron’s beard, which went down to the skirts of his garments.” That ephod of Aaron signified the same as the seamless coat of Christ, our great High Priest. Just as Christ’s coat had no seam, but was woven from the top throughout, so it was with the ephod, Exod. 29:22. Just as God took care in his providence, that Christ’s coat would not be torn, so God took special care that the ephod would not be torn, Exod. 28:32, 39:23. The golden bells on this ephod, by their precious material and pleasant sound, well-represent the good profession that the saints make; and the pomegranates represent the fruit they bring forth. In the hem of the ephod, bells and pomegranates were constantly connected, as time and again observed: there was a golden bell and a pomegranate, a golden bell and a pomegranate, Exod. 28:34, 39:26. So it is in true saints: their good profession and their good fruit constantly accompany one another. The fruit they bring forth in life, evermore corresponds to the pleasant sound of their profession.

Again, the very same thing is represented by Christ in his description of his spouse in Cant. 7:2: “Your belly is like a heap of wheat, set about with lilies.” Here again are beautiful flowers, and good fruit, accompanying one another. The lilies were fair and beautiful flowers, and the wheat was good fruit.

This fruit of Christian practice is always found in true saints, as they have opportunity and trial, and so it is found in them only. None but true Christians live such an obedient life, and are so universally devoted to their duty, and are so surrendered to the business of a Christian, as explained. All unsanctified men are workers of iniquity. They are of their father the devil, and they will perform the lusts of their father. No hypocrite will go through with the business of religion, and both begin and finish the tour. They will not endure the trials that God is prone to bring on professors of religion. Instead they will turn aside to their crooked ways. Whatever lengths they may go to in religion in some instances, though they may appear exceedingly strict, and mightily engaged in the service of God for a season – yet they are servants to sin; the chains of their old task-masters are not broken. Their lusts still have a
reigning power in their hearts; and therefore they will bow down again to these masters. Daniel 12:10, “Many shall be purified and made white, and tried: but the wicked will do wickedly, and none of the wicked shall understand.” Isa. 26:10, “Let favor be shown to the wicked, yet he will not learn righteousness; in the land of uprightness he will deal unjustly.” Isa. 35:8, “And a highway shall be there, and a road, and it shall be called the Way of Holiness; the unclean shall not pass over it.” Hos. 14:9, “The ways of the Lord are right, and the just shall walk in them: but the transgressors shall fall in them.” Job. 27:8-10, “What is the hope of the hypocrite? Will he delight himself in the Almighty? Will he always call upon God?” An unsanctified man may hide his sin, and he may refrain from sin in many things, and for a season; but he will not be brought finally to renounce his sin, and give it a bill of divorce – sin is too dear to him, for him to be willing to do that. Job 20:12-13, “Wickedness is sweet in his mouth; and therefore he hides it under his tongue; he spares it, and does not forsake it; but he still keeps it in his mouth.” This is what the narrowness of the gate chiefly consists in, and the

__27__ No unregenerate man, though he goes ever so far, and does ever so much, yet he lives in some one sin or other, secret or open, little or great. Judas went far, but he was covetous; Herod went far, but he loved his Herodias. Every dog has his kennel; every swine has his swill; and every wicked man has his lust.” Shepard’s Sincere Convert, 1st edition, p. 96. “There is never an unsound heart in the world, but as they say of witches, they have some familiar that sucks them, so they have some lust that is beloved of them, some beloved there is they have given a promise to never to forsake.” Shepard’s Parable, Part I. p. 15. “No man is married to the law, unless his fig-leaves cover some nakedness. All his duties ever brood some lust. There is some one sin or other that the man lives in, which either the Lord discovers, and the man will not part with (as with the young man); or else he is so spiritual, that he cannot see during his entire life-time. Read through the strictest of all, and see this, Matt 23. They are painted sepulchres. Paul was blameless, yet (Eph. 2.3. Tit. 3.3.) he served various lusts and pleasures. And the reason is that the law is not the ministration of the Spirit, 2Cor. 3.8-9, which breaks us off from every sin. There is no law that can give life. Gal. 3.21; and hence many men have strong resolutions, and break them all again. Hence men sin and sorrow, and pray again, and then go more easily in their sin. Examine yourself; is there any lust living with your righteousness? It is sure, it is the administration of the Spirit, 2Cor. 3.8-9, which breaks us off from every sin. There is no law that can give life. Gal. 3.21; and hence many men have strong resolutions, and break them all again. Hence men sin and sorrow, and pray again, and then go more easily in their sin. Examine yourself; is there any lust living with your righteousness? It is sure, it is the righteousness you were married to, and were never yet matched to Christ.” Shepard’s Parable, Part I. p. 109. “Their faith is in such a party with sin, that it was never thoroughly torn from it. And here is the great wound of the most cunning hypocrites living. Let a man be cast down as low as hell with sorrow, and lie under chains, quaking in apprehension of the terror to come; and then let a man be raised up to heaven in joy, not able to live – let him reform and shine like an earthly angel – yet if he is not torn from his lust, so that either you never see it, or if you do, you have not followed Lord to remove it, but remain proud, dogged, worldly, sluggish still, false in your dealings, cunning in your tradings, devils in your families, images in your churches: you are objects of pity now, and shall be in terror at the great day. For where sin remains in power, it will bring faith and Christ and joy into bondage and into service of itself.” Shepard’s Parable, Part I. p. 125. “I think it is with the best hypocrites, as it is with various old merchants: they prize and desire the gain of merchandise; but they will never take the trouble to prepare the ship, or put themselves under the risk and dangers of the ship, to go and fetch the treasure that they prize. So many prize and earnestly desire the treasures of heaven; but the best hypocrite will fail to take the trouble of a heaven-voyage to fetch this treasure, and to pass through the valley of Baca, with tears, temptations, the powers of darkness, the breaches, opposition, and contradictions of a sinful unbelieving heart, good and evil report, to pass from one depth and wave to another; and hence he loses all at last. And this I conceive to be one of the great differences between the strong desires and esteems of hypocrites and saints. Look how it is with men who have two trades, or two shops; one is as much as they can follow or tend to. They are forced at last to sell off or neglect one; so it is here. That spirit of sloth and slumber which the Lord ever leaves the best hypocrite to, so mightily oppresses all their senses, that they cannot effectually use all the means needed to accomplish their ends. Hence a man may desire the end, but he does not have it; Prov. 13:4.” Shepard’s Parable, Part I. p. 150-151. “Read through all the Scripture; constantly, there are no hypocrites who do not have this brand (Matt 7.23): you workers of iniquity. Shepard’s Parable, Part I. p. 195. “A carnal man may hit upon some good duty that God commands, and refrain from some sin that God forbids; but he cannot go through so as to take up reproach and disgrace, or lose his credit, forsake his friends, lose his honor, riches, and pleasures; this he will not do, until he is humbled.” Dr. Preston on Paul’s Conversion. “So it is with men, because they lack humility. Therefore they make their profession but do not continue; they willingly separate one from the other. They will do some things, but not all things: and they will forego some things, but not all things. And therefore our Saviour says, Luke 14:23. “Anyone who will not forsake all for my sake, is not worthy of me,” Anyone who does not prize me above all things is not worth the saving. And a man will not prize Christ, nor forsake all things for Christ, until he is humbled.” Ibid.

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narrowness of the way that leads to life. This is the reason carnal men will not go in there: it is a way of utterly denying, and finally renouncing, all ungodliness; and so it is a way of self-denial or self-renunciation.

Under the means used, and despite God’s strivings with them to bring them forsake their sins, many natural men do by their sins what Pharaoh did by his pride and covetousness: he gratified these by keeping the children of Israel in bondage when God strove with him to let the people go. When God’s hand pressed Pharaoh sorely, and Pharaoh was fraught with fears of God’s future wrath, he entertained some thoughts of letting the people go, and he promised he would do it. But time and again he broke his promises when he saw there was a respite. When God filled Egypt with thunder and lightning, and the fire ran along the ground, then Pharaoh was brought to confess his sin with seeming humility, and greatly resolved to let the people go. Exod. 9:27-28, “And Pharaoh sent, and called for Moses and Aaron, and said to them, I have sinned this time: the Lord is righteous, and I and my people are wicked: entreat the Lord (for it is enough) so that there will be no more mighty thunderings and hail; and I will let you go, and you shall stay no longer.” By thunder and lightning and great terrors of the law, sinners are sometimes brought to a seeming work of humiliation, and appear to part with their sins. But they are no more thoroughly brought to a disposition to dismiss them, than Pharaoh was brought to let the people go. Pharaoh, in the struggle between his conscience and his lusts, contrived how God might be served, and yet how he could still enjoy his lusts that were gratified by the slavery of the people. Moses insisted that Israel’s God must be served and sacrificed to. Pharaoh was willing to consent to that, but he would not consent to parting with the people: “Go sacrifice to your God in the land,” he says in Exod. 8:25. In the same way, many sinners contrive to serve God, and yet enjoy their lusts too. Moses objected to Pharaoh’s proposal, because serving God, and yet continuing in Egypt under their taskmasters, did not agree. These two things were inconsistent with one another (there is no serving God, and at the same time, continuing to be slaves to the enemies of God).

After this, Pharaoh consented to let the people go, provided they would not go far away: he was not willing to finally part with them, and therefore he wanted them within reach. Many hypocrites do this with respect to their sins. Afterwards Pharaoh consented to let the men go, if they would leave the women and children behind, Exod. 10:8-10. And after that, when God’s hand was still harder on him, he consented to let them go, women and children as well as men, provided they would leave their cattle behind! But he was not willing to let them go, and all that they had. Exod. 10:24 So often this is how it is with sinners: they are willing to part with some of their sins, but not all; they are brought to part with their gross acts of sin, but not with lesser indulgences of their lusts. But we must part with all our sins, little and great; and all that belongs to them, men, women, children, and cattle. As Moses told Pharaoh, they must be let go with “their young, and with their old, with their sons, and with their daughters, with their flocks, and with their herds, there must not be a hoof left behind.” At last, when it became extreme, Pharaoh consented to let the people all go, and all that they had; but even then he was not steadfast. He soon changed his mind and pursued them again. The reason was that these lusts of pride and covetousness which were gratified by Pharaoh’s dominion over the people, and the gains he enjoyed by their service, were never really mortified in him; they were only forcefully restrained. And thus, being guilty of backsliding, after his seeming compliance with God’s commands, he was destroyed without remedy. Thus there may be a forced parting with their ways of disobedience to the commands of God, and it may seem universal, and it may appear for a season. But because it is mere external force, without mortifying the inward principle of sin, they will not persevere in it. They will return to it as the dog returns to his vomit; 2Pet 2:23 and so they bring upon themselves dreadful and remediless destruction. There were many false disciples in Christ’s time who followed him for a while; but none of them followed him to the
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end. Instead, some on one occasion, and some on another, went back and walked no more with him.28

From what has been said, it is obvious that Christian practice, or a holy life, is a great and distinguishing sign of true and saving grace. But I may go further and assert that it is the chief of all the signs of grace, both as evidence to others of the sincerity of professors, and also as evidence to their own consciences.

But then it is necessary that this be rightly taken, and that it is well-understood and observed, in what sense and manner Christian practice is the greatest sign of grace. Therefore, to set this matter in a clear light, I will endeavor particularly and distinctly to prove that Christian practice is the principal sign by which Christians are to judge the sincerity of godliness, both their own and others’. Along with this, I will observe some things that need to be particularly noted in order to rightly understand this matter.

(1) **Christian practice is the best evidence to others of a sincere profession.**

I will consider Christian practice and a holy life as the manifestation and sign of the sincerity of a professing Christian, to the eye of his neighbors and brothers.

It is very evident from the word of God that this is the chief sign of grace in this respect. Christ, who knew best how to give us rules to judge others, has repeated and inculcated the rule that we should know them by their fruits. Matt. 7:16, “You shall know them by their fruits.” And then, after arguing the point, and giving clear reasons why men’s fruits must be the chief evidence of what sort they are, he repeats the assertion in verse 20, “Therefore by their fruits you will know them.” Again, in chap. 12:33, “Either make the tree good, and his fruit good; or else make the tree corrupt, and his fruit corrupt;” It is as if to say, it is absurd for anyone to suppose that the tree is good and yet its fruit is bad; that the tree is of one sort, and the fruit is of another – for the proper evidence of the nature of the tree is its fruit. Nothing else can be meant by that last clause, “For the tree is known by its fruit,” than that the tree is chiefly known by its fruit. This is the main and most proper diagnostic by which one tree is distinguished from another. So too in Luke 6:44, “Every tree is known by his own fruit.” Christ nowhere says, “you shall know the tree by its leaves or flowers,” or “you shall know men by their talk,” or “you shall know them by the good story they tell of their experiences,” or “you shall know them by the manner and air of their speech.” It is not by the emphasis and pathos of their expression, or the freedom of their speech,

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28 “The counterfeit and common grace of foolish virgins after some time of glorious profession, will certainly go out and be quite spent. It is consumed in the using, and shining, and burning – Men that have been most forward, decay: their gifts decay, life decays. It is so even after some time of profession: for at first, it more grows than decays and withers; but afterwards, they have had enough of it, and it withers and dies. The spirit of God comes upon many hypocrites, in abundant and plentiful measure of awakening grace: it comes upon them, as it did upon Balaam, and as it is in overflowing waters, which spread far, and grow very deep, and fill many empty places. Though it comes upon them in this way, yet it never rests within so as to dwell there, to take up an eternal mansion for himself. Hence it decays little by little, until at last it is quite gone. Like ponds filled with rain water which comes upon them; not like spring water that rises up from within them, it dries up little by little until quite dry.” Shepard’s *Parable*, Part II. p. 58, 59. “Some men may apprehend Christ, neither out of fear of misery nor only to preserve some sin; but God lets in light and heat of the blessed beams of the glorious gospel of the Son of God: and therefore there is mercy, rich, free, sweet, for damned, great, vile sinners: Good Lord, says the soul, what a sweet ministry, word, God, and gospel is this! and there it rests. This was the frame of the stony-ground; which heard the word, and received it with joy, and for a time believed. And this is the case of thousands, that are much affected with the promise and mercy of Christ, and hang upon free grace for a time: but as it is with sweet smells in a room, they do not continue long: or as flowers, they grow old and withered, and then fall. In a time of temptation, lust and the world, and sloth, are more sweet than Christ and all his gospel.” Shepard’s *Parable*, Part II. p. 168. “Never was any carnal heart, that some root of bitterness did not grow up at last in this soil.” Shepard’s *Parable*, Part I. p. 195. “We shall see in experience: take the best professors living; though they may come to the Lord, as they and others judged, and follow the Lord, yet they will in time depart. The Spirit was never given to effectually draw them, nor yet to keep them.” Shepard’s *Parable*, Part I. p. 205.
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or making a great show of it by the abundance of their talk, or by many tears and affectionate expressions, or by the affections you feel towards them in your heart. *It is only by their fruits that you shall know them; the tree is known by its fruit; every tree is known by its own fruit.*

And just as this is the evidence that Christ has directed us to mainly look at in others to judge them by, so it is the evidence that Christ has mainly directed us to give to others, *by which they may judge us.* Matt. 5:16, “Let your light so shine before men, that others seeing your good works, may glorify your Father which is in heaven.” Here Christ directs us to manifest our godliness to others. Godliness is a light that shines in the soul. Christ directs that this light not only shine within, but that it should shine out before men, *so that they may see it.* But how shall this be? *It is by our good works.* Christ does not say that it is by others hearing of your good works, or by your good story, or by your pathetic expressions; but “that others, *seeing* your good works, may glorify your Father which is in heaven.” Doubtless, when Christ gives us a rule for how to make our light shine so that others have evidence of it, his rule is the best to be found.

And the apostles mention Christian practice as the principal ground of their esteem for persons as true Christians. In the 6th chapter of Hebrews, the Apostle Paul speaks of those who have great but ordinary illuminations. They have “been enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come; afterwards they fall away, and are like barren ground that is near to cursing, whose end is to be burned.” Then in the 9th verse, he immediately expresses his love for the Christian Hebrews who have saving grace, which is better than all these ordinary illuminations. He says, “but beloved, we are persuaded better things of you, and things that accompany salvation, even though we speak in this way.” Then in the next verse he tells them the reason he had such good thoughts of them. He does not say it was because they gave him a good account of a work of God upon their souls, and talked very experientially. Rather, *it was their work and labor of love:* “for God is not unrighteous, to forget your work and labor of love which you have shown towards his name, in that you have ministered to the saints, and still minister.” The same apostle speaks of faithfully serving God in practice as the proper proof to others that men love Christ above all, and prefer his honor to their own private interest. Phil. 2:21-22, “For they all seek their own, not the things which are of Jesus Christ; but you know the proof of [Timothy], that like a son with his father, *he has served with me in the gospel.*”

The Apostle John expresses the same thing as the basis for his good opinion of Gaius. 3John 3-6, “For I rejoiced greatly when the brothers came and testified of the truth that is in you.” But how did the brothers testify of the truth that was in Gaius? And how did the apostle judge the truth that was in him? It was not because they testified that he had given them a good account of the steps of his experiences, and talked like one who felt what he said, and used the language of a Christian. But they testified that he walked in the truth as follows, “even as you *walk in the truth.* I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in the truth. Beloved, you are faithfully doing whatever you do for the brothers and strangers; they have *borne witness of your charity* before the church.” Thus the apostle explains what the brothers had borne witness to when they came and testified of his walking in the truth. And the apostle seems in this same place, to give it as a rule to Gaius for how he should judge others. In verse 10, he mentions Diotrephes, who did not carry himself well, and who led others away after him. Then in the 11th verse, he directs Gaius to beware of such men, and not to follow them. He gives him a rule by which he may know them, exactly in accord with the rule Christ gave before: “*by their fruits you shall know them;*” says the apostle. “Beloved, do not follow what is evil, but what is good. The one who *does good* is of God; but the one who does evil has not seen God.”

I would further observe that the Apostle James, expressly comparing the way to show others our faith and Christianity, whether by our practice and good works, or by showing our faith without good works, plainly and abundantly prefers the former. James 2:18, “Indeed, a man may say,
you have faith, and I have works; show me your faith without your works, and I will show you
my faith by my works." Any manifestation of our faith without works, or in a way different from
works, is professing faith with a mere display of words. As the apostle says in verse 14, “What
does it profit, my brothers, if a man says he has faith?” Therefore, here are two ways of
manifesting to our neighbor what is in our hearts: one is by what we say, and the other is by
what we do. But the apostle abundantly prefers the latter as the best evidence. Now certainly all
accounts we give of ourselves in words alone, saying that we have faith, and that we are
converted, and telling how we came to have faith, and the steps by which it was done, and the
revelations and experiences that accompany it, are still manifesting our faith only by what we
say. It is merely showing our faith by our words. The apostle speaks of this as falling vastly short
of manifesting of it by what we do, and showing our faith by our works.

As the Scripture plainly teaches, practice is the best evidence of the sincerity of professing
Christians; reason teaches the same thing. Reason shows that men’s deeds are better and more
faithful interpreters of their minds than their words are. The common sense of all mankind,
through all ages and nations, teaches them in other matters to judge men’s hearts chiefly by
their practice; such as, whether a man is a loyal subject, a true lover, a dutiful child, or a faithful
servant. If a man professes a great deal of love and friendship towards another, reason teaches
all men that such a profession is not as good an evidence of his being a real and hearty friend, as
being a friend in his deeds; being faithful and constant to his friend in prosperity and adversity;
being ready to lay himself out and deny himself; ready to suffer in his personal interest to do his
friend a kindness. A wise man will trust such evidences of the sincerity of friendship further than
he will trust a thousand earnest professions and solemn declarations, and the most affectionate
expressions of friendship in words alone.

There is equal reason why practice should also be looked upon as the best evidence of friendship
towards Christ. Reason says the same thing that Christ said in John 14:21, “He that has my
commandments and keeps them, he is the one that loves me.” Thus, if we see a man, who in the
course of his life seems to follow and imitate Christ, and greatly exerts and denies himself for the
honor of Christ, and promotes Christ’s kingdom and interest in the world, then reason teaches
us that this is evidence of his love for Christ. It is more to be depended on than if a man only
says he loves Christ, and tells about the inward experiences he has had of love for Christ, and the
strong love he felt, and how his heart was drawn out in love at such and such a time. Yet there
may be only a small imitation of Christ in his behavior, and he seems reluctant to do anything
substantial for Christ, or to put himself out of his way to promote his kingdom. Rather, he seems
apt to excuse himself whenever he is called upon to deny himself for Christ.

In declaring his experiences, a man may tell of how he found his heart weaned from the world,
and he saw the vanity of it, so that everything in this world looked like nothing to him. And he
may profess that he gives up everything for God, and he calls heaven and earth to witness to it.
Yet his practice may be to forcefully pursue the things of the world; and what he gets he keeps
close; and he is loath to part with much of it for charitable and pious uses; it comes from him
almost like draining his heart’s blood. But there is another professing Christian, who does not
say a great deal, yet in his behavior appears ready at all times to forsake the world whenever it
stands in the way of his duty. He is free to part with it at any time to promote religion, and the
good of his fellow creatures. Reason teaches that this latter man gives by far the most credible
manifestation of a heart that is weaned from the world. If a man appears to walk humbly before
God and men, and his conduct has the savor of a broken heart, and he appears patient and
resigned to God under affliction, and he is meek in his behavior among men – then this is better
evidence of humility, than if a person only tells about how great a sense he had of his own
unworthiness, and how he was brought to lie in the dust, and how he was quite emptied of
himself, and saw himself as nothing, filthy, and abominable etc. Yet, if this same man acts as if
he looked at himself as one of the first and best of saints, and was rightfully the head of all the
Christians in town, and he is assuming, self-willed, and impatient about the least contradiction or opposition he encounters – then we may be assured in such a case, that a man’s practice comes from a lower place in his heart than his profession.

So (to mention no more instances), if a professor of Christianity shows in his behavior a pitying and tender spirit towards others in calamity, and he is ready to bear their burdens with them, and willing to spend his substance for them, and to suffer many inconveniences in his worldly interest in order to promote the good of others’ souls and bodies, then this is a more credible manifestation of a spirit of love towards men, than if a man only tells about the love he felt towards others at certain times – how he pitied their souls, and how his soul was in travail for them, and how he felt hearty love and pity towards his enemies – when in his behavior, he seems instead to have a very selfish spirit; he is close and niggardly; all for himself, and none for his neighbors; and perhaps he is envious and contentious. Persons who have a pang of affection may think they have a willing heart for great things, and to do much and suffer much; and indeed they may profess it very earnestly and confidently, when really their hearts are far from it. Thus many in their affectionate pangs, have thought themselves willing to be damned eternally for the glory of God. But passing affections easily produce words; and words are cheap. Godliness is more easily feigned in words than in actions. Christian practice is a costly and laborious thing. The self-denial that is required of Christians, and the narrowness of the way that leads to life, does not consist in words, but in practice. Hypocrites may much more easily be brought to talk like saints, than to act like saints.

Thus it is plain that Christian practice is the best sign or manifestation of the true godliness of a professing Christian, to the eye of his neighbors.

But the following things should be well observed, so that this matter may be rightly understood.

First, it must be observed, that when the Scripture speaks of Christian practice as the best evidence to others of sincerity and of the truth of grace, a profession of Christianity is not excluded, but presumed.29 The rules mentioned were rules given to the followers of Christ, to guide them in their thoughts about professing Christians, and those that presented themselves as part of Christian society. By these rules, they might judge the truth of others’ pretenses, and the sincerity of the profession they made. The rules were not for the trial of Heathens, or those that made no pretense to Christianity, and that Christians have nothing to do with. This is as plain as possible in that great rule which Christ gives in the 7th chapter of Matthew, “By their fruits you shall know them.” He gives there a rule for how to judge those who profess to be Christians. Indeed, to judge those who made a very high profession, false prophets, “who came in sheep’s clothing,” as ver. 15. So too with the Apostle James in chap. 2:18, “Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works.” It is evident, that both these sorts of persons, offering to give these varying evidences of their faith, are professors of faith. This is implied in soliciting each of them to give evidences of the faith they professed. And it is evident by the preceding verses, that the apostle is speaking of professors of faith in Jesus Christ. So it is very plain that the Apostle John, in those passages that were observed in his third epistle, is speaking of professing Christians.30

In these rules, Christian practice is spoken of as the greatest and most distinguishing sign of their sincerity in their profession of faith; it is much more evidential than their profession itself. And yet a profession of Christianity is plainly presupposed. It is not the main thing in the evidence, nor anything determinative, yet it is a thing that is requisite and necessary in it. Just as having an animal body is nothing that distinguishes a man from other creatures, because it

29 The test is not to identify a good person in practice, but a gracious Christian in practice. – WHG
30 1Cor 5:12 For what have I to do with judging those also who are outside? Do you not judge those who are inside? – WHG
not the main thing that evidences human nature, yet it is requisite and necessary in the
evidence. If any man were to plainly say that he is not a Christian, and that he does not believe
that Jesus was the Son of God, or a person sent by God, then these rules of Christ and of his
apostles do not oblige us to look at him as a sincere Christian, no matter what his visible practice
and virtues may be. Not only do these rules have no use with respect to a man who explicitly
denies Christianity, and is a professed Deist, Jew, Heathen, or open Infidel – but these rules also
have no use with respect to a man who refrains from making a profession of Christianity. That is
because these rules were given to us to judge professing Christians only: fruits must be joined
with open flowers; bells and pomegranates go together.

**What is a credible profession of faith in Christ?**

But here will naturally arise this inquiry: When may a man be said to profess Christianity? What
profession may properly be called a profession of Christianity?

I answer, it is properly a profession of Christianity in two things.

1. In order for a man to properly be said to have made a profession of Christianity, there must
   undoubtedly be a profession of all that is necessary to being a Christian, or of all that belongs to
   the essence of Christianity. Whatever is essential in Christianity itself, is essential in the
   profession of Christianity. The profession must be about the thing which is professed. For a man
to profess Christianity, he must declare that he has it. And therefore, whatever belongs to a
   thing, as necessary in order to be truly denominates as that thing – that much is essential in
   order to declare that thing. If we take only a part of Christianity, and leave out an essential part,
then what we take is not Christianity, because something in its essence is lacking. So too if we
profess only a part of it, and leave out a part that is essential to it, then what we profess is not
Christianity.

Thus, in order to make a profession of Christianity,\(^{31}\) (1) we must profess that we believe that
Jesus is the Messiah, because such a belief is essential to Christianity. And (2) we must profess,
either expressly or implicitly, that Jesus made satisfaction for our sins, and (3) other essential
doctrines of the gospel, because a belief of these things is also essential to Christianity.

But there are other things that are as essential to religion as an orthodox belief. Therefore it is
just as necessary to profess these things, if we are to be truly said to profess Christianity. Thus it
is essential to Christianity that (4) we repent of our sins, (5) that we are convinced of our own
sinfulness, (6) that we are aware that we have justly exposed ourselves to God’s wrath, (7) that
our hearts renounce all sin, (8) that we embrace Christ as our only Savior with our whole heart;
(9) that we love him above all; (10) that we are willing for his sake to forsake all; and (11) that we
surrender ourselves to be entirely and forever his, etc.

Such things as these belong as much to the essence of Christianity, as the belief of any of the
doctrines of the gospel. And therefore professing them also belongs as much to a Christian
profession. It is not that, in order to be professing Christians, it is necessary to explicitly profess
every individual thing that belongs to Christian grace or virtue. But certainly, there must be a
profession, either express or implicit, of what comprises the essence of the Christian religion. As
to those things that Christians should express in their profession, we ought to be guided by the
precepts of God’s word, or by Scripture examples of public professions of religion which God’s
people have made from time to time. Thus they ought to profess their repentance of sin. As of
old, when persons were initiated as professors of Christ, they came confessing their sins, and
manifesting their humiliation for sin, as in Matt. 3:6.\(^{32}\) The baptism they were baptized with,
was called the baptism of repentance, Mark 1:4. And John, when he had baptized them, exhorted them to bring forth fruits in keeping with repentance, Matt. 3:8 – that is, conduct agreeable to the repentance which they professed. He encouraged them that if they did so, they would escape the wrath to come, and would be gathered like wheat into God’s storehouse, Matt. 3:7-10, 12.

So the Apostle Peter says to the Jews in Acts 2:38, “Repent, and be baptized.” This shows that repentance is a qualification that must be visible in order to be baptized; therefore it ought to be publicly professed. So when the Jews who returned from captivity entered publicly into covenant, it was with a public confession of repentance of their sins, Neh. 9:2. This profession of repentance should include or imply a profession of their conviction that God would be just in their damnation (see Neh. 9:33, 35; and the beginning of the next chapter). Believers should profess their faith in Jesus Christ, and embrace Christ, and rely on him as their Savior with their whole heart, and joyfully entertain the gospel of Christ. Thus Philip, in baptizing the eunuch, required him to profess that he believed with all his heart. Those who were received as visible Christians, at that great outpouring of the Spirit which began at the day of Pentecost, appeared to gladly receive the gospel. Acts 2:41, “Then those who gladly received the word, were baptized; and the same day there were added to them about three thousand souls.” They should profess that they rely on Christ’s righteousness alone, and on his strength; and that they are devoted to him as their only Lord and Savior, and that they rejoice in him as their only righteousness and portion. It is foretold that all nations will publicly make this profession. Isa. 45:29 ff., “Look to me, and be saved, all the ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is no other. I have sworn by myself, the word has gone out of my mouth in righteousness, and it shall not return, that every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall swear. Surely, one will say, in the Lord I have righteousness and strength; even to him men shall come, and all who are incensed against him shall be ashamed. In the Lord all the seed of Israel shall be justified, and shall glory.”

They should profess to surrender themselves entirely to Christ, and to God through him. The children of Israel did this when they publicly recognized their covenant with God. Deut. 26:17, “You have avowed the Lord this day to be your God, and to walk in his ways, and to keep his statutes, and his commandments, and his judgments, and to obey his voice.” They ought to profess a willingness of heart to embrace religion with all its difficulties, and to walk in a way of obedience to God, universally and perseveringly.33 They ought to profess that their whole heart and soul is in these engagements to be the Lord’s, and they will serve him forever.34 God’s people swearing to God, and swearing by his name, or to his name (as it might be rendered),35 is spoken of as a duty to be performed by all God’s visible Israel.36 Therefore, in order for persons to be entitled to full esteem and charity with their neighbors, as being sincere professors of Christianity – by those rules of Christ and his apostles mentioned previously – there must be a visibly holy life, with a profession that either expresses or plainly implies things such as those mentioned just now. We are to know them by their fruits: that is, we are to know by their fruits whether they are what they profess to be; not that we are to know by their fruits that they have something in them to which they do not even pretend.37

Moreover,

34 2Chron. 15:12-14.
35 Which seems to signify solemnly surrendering themselves to him in covenant, and vowing to receive him as their God, and to be entirely his, to obey and serve him.
37 That is, if someone does not profess to be a Christian, then we cannot, “by his fruit,” declare him to be one. – WHG
2. What is properly called a Christian profession, must be joined with Christian practice in order to be entitled to the benefit of those rules, and the profession must be made understandingly,\(^{38}\) That is, they must be persons who appear to have been so far instructed in the principles of religion, that they have an ordinary capacity to understand the proper import of what is expressed in their profession. For sounds do not signify or declare anything, any further than men understand the meaning of their own sounds.

But for persons to make a proper profession of Christianity, as the Scripture directs them to, and as the followers of Christ should require of them, and in order to be accepted as professors with full charity, and be included as members of their society – it is not necessary for them to give an account of the particular steps and the method by which the Holy Spirit, sensibly wrought and brought about those great and essential things of Christianity in their hearts. There is no footstep in the Scripture of any such thing required by the apostles, or by primitive ministers and Christians, in order to be received and treated by others as their Christian brothers. Nor is there any such requirement when first examining them, concerning the particular method and order of their experiences. They required a profession of the things wrought in them; but the account of the manner of that working was not required. Nor is there the least shadow in the Scripture of any such custom in the church of God, from Adam to the death of the Apostle John.

I am far from saying that it is not requisite for persons to give an account of their experiences to their brothers. For persons to profess those things in which the essence of Christianity lies, is the same as professing that they experienced those things. This is true when persons solemnly profess,

- a full conviction of their own utter sinfulness, misery, and impotence;
- that they are in a totally undone state in themselves;
- that their just desert is God’s utter rejection and eternal wrath;
- that they recognize the utter insufficiency of their own righteousness, or anything in them, to satisfy divine justice, or to recommend them to God’s favor;
- that they entirely depend on the Lord Jesus Christ, and his satisfaction and righteousness;
- that they believe the truth of the gospel of Christ with all their heart;
- that in full conviction of his sufficiency and perfect excellency as a Savior, as exhibited in the gospel, they cling to him with their whole soul;
- that they acquiesce in him as the refuge and rest for their souls, and as the fountain of their comfort;
- that they repent of their sins, and utterly renounce all sin;
- that they surrender themselves wholly to Christ, willingly subjecting themselves to him as their King, giving him their hearts and their whole man;
- that they are willing and resolved to have God for their whole and everlasting portion;
- in dependence on his promises of a future eternal enjoyment of him in heaven, they renounce all the enjoyments of this vain world, selling all for this great treasure and future inheritance;
- that they will comply with every command of God, even the most difficult and self-denying;
- that they devote their whole lives to God’s service;

\(^{38}\) We normally refer to this “a credible profession of faith.” – WHG
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- in forgiveness of those that have injured them, and having a general benevolence towards mankind, their hearts are united to the people of Jesus Christ as their people;
- that they will cling to them and love them as their brothers,
- that they will worship and serve God, and follow Christ in union and fellowship with them,
- that they are willing and resolved to perform all those duties that belong to them, as members of the same family of God and mystical body of Christ;

I say, for persons to solemnly profess such things as these, as if in the presence of God, is the same thing as professing that they are conscious of, or experience such things in their hearts.

I do not suppose that giving an account of their experience of particular exercises of grace, along with the times and circumstances of it, gives no advantage to others in forming a judgment about their state. Persons may be fitly questioned concerning these things, in some cases – especially cases of great importance, where all possible satisfaction concerning a person’s piety should especially be desired and sought after. These would included cases of ordination or the approval of a minister. It may give some advantage in forming a judgment in several other respects. By inquiring, we may be better satisfied that the professor is speaking honestly and understandingly in what he professes; and that he is not making the profession out of mere formality.

In order for a profession of Christianity to be accepted for any purpose, there ought to be good reason, from the circumstances of the profession, to think that the professor is not making such a profession out of mere customary compliance with a prescribed form. That is, he is not using words without any distinct meaning, nor in a lax and ambiguous manner, as confessions of faith are often subscribed. Rather, the professor understandingly and honestly signifies what he is conscious of in his own heart. Otherwise his profession can have no significance, and it should be regarded as vocal sounds without any life in them. But whatever advantage an account of particular exercises may give in judging this, it must be admitted that the best evidence, is having the professor be instructed by his teachers beforehand, and having him give a good proof of his sufficient knowledge of it, together with a practice that matches his profession.

I can only suppose that if a person is asked about the specific circumstances of his Christian experience, and he seems able to give a distinct account of the manner of his conversion (describing what is frequently observed in true conversions), so that things seem to sensibly and distinctly follow one another in a timely and natural order, then it is an illustrating circumstance. Among other things, it adds luster to the evidence he gives his brothers of the truth of his experiences.

But the thing that I speak of as unscriptural, is insisting on a particular account of the distinct method and steps in which the Spirit of God sensibly proceeded in first bringing the soul into a state of salvation, as something that is requisite in order to receive a professor into full charity as a real Christian – or, if such an account is lacking, to disregard other evidences they give of their Christianity, that are vastly more important and essential.

**Secondly,** so that we may rightly understand how Christian practice is the greatest evidence that others can have of the sincerity of a professing Christian, it is necessary to bear in mind what was said before about what Christian practice is, and the extent to which it is visible to others. A professor of Christianity may be what is commonly called an honest man, and a moral man – that is, we have no special transgression or iniquity to charge him with that might blot his character. But this is not substantial evidence of the sincerity of his profession. This is not

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39 That is, the person isn’t reading or signing a prepared form, or reciting something from memory that he has no understanding of. It is a genuine, credible, and personal profession of his faith in Christ alone for salvation. – WHG
making his light shine before men. This is not that work and labor of love shown towards
Christ’s name, which persuaded the apostle of the sincerity of the professing Hebrews in Heb.
6:9-10. We may see nothing in a man except that he may be a good man; nothing appears in his
life and conversation that is inconsistent with being godly; and, yet neither is there any positive
evidence that he is.

But indeed there may be great positive appearances of holiness in men’s visible behavior. Their
life may visibly be a life of service to God. They may visibly follow the example of Jesus Christ,
and in great measure come up to those excellent rules in the 5th, 6th, and 7th chapters of
Matthew, and the 12th chapter of Romans, and in many other parts of the New Testament.
There may be a great demonstration of being universal in their obedience to Christ’s commands
and to the rules of the gospel. They may be visibly universal in the performance of the duties of
the first table, manifesting the fear and love of God, and they may also show they are universal
in fulfilling the rules of love towards men, love towards the saints, and love towards their
enemies – rules of meekness and forgiveness; rules of mercy and charity; looking not only to
their own needs but also to the needs of others; rules of doing good to men’s souls and bodies; of
doing good to particular persons and to the public; rules of temperance, mortification, and
humble conduct; rules of bridling the tongue and improving it to glorify God and bless men –
thereby showing that the law of kindness is in their tongues.40

They may visibly walk as Christians, in all places and at all seasons, in the house of God, in their
families, and among their neighbors – on Sabbath days and every day, in business and in
conversation, towards friends and enemies, towards superiors, inferiors, and equals. In their
visible walk, they may show that they are earnestly engaged in the service of God and mankind.
They greatly labor and lay themselves out in this work of a Christian, and they are very constant
and steadfast in it, under all circumstances and temptations. There may be great manifestations
of a spirit to deny themselves, and to suffer for God and Christ in the interest of religion, and for
the benefit of their brothers. There may be great demonstrations in a man’s walk of a disposition
to forsake anything rather than forsake Christ, and to make everything give way to his honor.
There may be great manifestations in a man’s behavior of religion such as this, that it is his
element, and that he places the delight and happiness of his life in it. His conversation may be
such that he carries with him a sweet odor of Christian graces and heavenly dispositions
wherever he goes. When it is this way in the professors of Christianity, there is evidence to
others of their sincerity in their profession of faith, to which all other manifestations are not
worthy to be compared.

Now, doubtless there is great variety in the degrees of evidence that professors exhibit of their
sincerity, in their life and practice; just as there is great variety in the fairness and clarity of the
accounts that persons give of the manner and method of their experiences. But undoubtedly,
such a manifestation as described above, of a Christian spirit in practice, is vastly beyond the
fairest and brightest story ever told of particular steps and passages of personal experience. In
general, a manifestation of the sincerity of a Christian’s profession in practice, is far better than
relating his experiences. Yet,

Thirdly, it must be noted, in accord with what was previously observed, that no external
manifestations and outward appearances whatever, even though visible to the world, are
infallible evidences of grace. Those manifestations that were mentioned, are the best that
mankind can have. They oblige Christians to fully embrace professors as saints, and to love them

40 Such fruits of the spirit, or demonstrations of faith, are rare in new believers, because they have only just received
the Spirit. What Edwards is describing here is an affirmation of a prior profession of faith by subsequent practice. It
implies that pastors and elders should, from time to time, determine the spiritual condition of each member of their
flock, to assess their needs and to challenge them as to their progress in sanctification. New converts are addressed on
page 241. – WHG
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and rejoice in them as the children of God. They are sufficient satisfaction for these things, and
they are ever necessary to guide them in their conduct – or for any purpose that needs to be met
in this world. But nothing that is seen in their neighbor, can be sufficient to produce an absolute
certainty concerning the state of his soul. For they do not see his heart, nor can they see all of his
external behavior. Much of it is done in secret, hidden from the eye of the world. And so it is
impossible to determine with any certainty how far a man may go in external appearances and
in imitations of grace, which flow from other principles. Though undoubtedly, if others could see
as much of what belongs to a man’s practice, as that man’s conscience sees of it, then it might be
infallible evidence of his state. This will become apparent from what follows.

Having thus considered Christian practice as the best evidence of the sincerity of professors to
others, I now proceed to observe that it is the best evidence to a person’s own conscience.

(2) Christian practice is the best evidence to one’s conscience of a sincere
profession.

The Scripture also speaks of Christian practice as distinguishing and sure evidence of grace to a
person’s own conscience. This is very plain in 1John 2:3: “By this we know that we know him, if
we keep his commandments.” And the testimony of our consciences, with respect to our good
deeds, is spoken of as what may give us assurance of our own godliness. 1John 3:18-19, “My little
children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth. And by this we know that
we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before him.” The Apostle Paul, in Heb. 6, speaks
of the work and the labor of love of the Christian Hebrews, as what persuaded him that they had
something above the highest common illuminations, and also what tended to give them the
highest assurance of hope concerning themselves. Verse 9 ff., “But, beloved, we are persuaded
better things of you, things that accompany salvation, though we thus speak. For God is not
unrighteous to forget your work and labor of love which you have shown towards his name, in
that you have ministered to his saints, and still minister. And we desire that everyone of you
show the same diligence, to the full assurance of hope to the end.” So the apostle directs the
Galatians to examine their behavior or practice, so that they might rejoice in themselves, in their
own happy state. Gal. 6:4, “Let every man prove his own work, so he shall have rejoicing in
himself, and not in another.” And the psalmist says in Psa. 119:6, “Then I will not be ashamed,
when I have respect for all your commandments;” i.e., then I shall be bold, and assured, and
steadfast in my hope. Our Savior says in Matt. 7:19-20: “Every tree that does not produce good
fruit, is cut down and thrown into the fire. Therefore by their fruits you shall know them.”

Though Christ gives this, firstly, as a rule by which we should judge others, yet in the words that
immediately follow, he plainly shows that he also intends it to be a rule by which to judge
ourselves:

“No one that says to me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but the one who
does the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, etc. And
then will I profess to them, ‘I never knew you: depart from me, you that work iniquity.’ Therefore,
whoever hears these sayings of mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man, which built his
house upon a rock. And everyone that hears these sayings of mine, and does not do them, shall be
likened to a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand.”

I shall have occasion to mention other texts to show the same thing later. But for greater clarity
in this matter, I would first show how Christian practice (doing good works, or keeping Christ’s
commandments), is to be taken, when the Scripture represents it as a sure sign to our own
consciences that we are real Christians. Secondly, I will prove that this is the best evidence that
men can have of their own sincere godliness.

First, I would show how Christian practice, or keeping Christ’s commandments, is to be taken,
when the Scripture represents it as sure evidence to our own consciences that we are sincere
Christians.
Here I would observe that we cannot reasonably suppose that when the Scripture, in this case, speaks of good works, good fruit, and keeping Christ’s commandments, that it merely refers to what is external, or the motion and action of the body without regard to any aim or intention of the agent – without any act of his understanding or will. For if we consider men’s actions in this way, then they are no more good works or acts of obedience than the regular motions of a clock. Nor would they be considered the actions of a man, or human actions at all. The actions of the body, taken apart from our intent, understanding, or will, are neither acts of obedience nor disobedience, any more than the motions of the body would be in a convulsion. But the obedience and fruit that are spoken of, are the obedience and fruit of the man. And therefore they are not only the acts of the body, but the obedience of the soul; and they consist in the acts and practice of the soul. And I do not suppose that when the Scripture speaks of gracious works, fruit, and practice, that these expressions include all our inward piety and holiness of heart, both their principle and exercise, both the spirit and practice. Because if they did, then these things being given as the sign of a gracious principle in the heart, the sign would be a sign of itself – there would be no distinction between the root and the fruit. But only the gracious exercise, and holy act of the soul is meant by these expressions, and they are given as the sign of the holy principle and the good estate of the man. Nor is every kind of inward exercise of grace meant; but only the practical exercise of it. It refers to that exercise of the soul, and that exertion of inward holiness, which is expressed in an obedient act; or that exertion of the mind, and act of grace, which issues and terminates in what they call imperative acts of the will – in which something is directed and commanded by the soul to be done, and brought to pass in practice.

Here, for a clearer understanding, I would observe, that there are two kinds of exercises of grace.

1. There are those that some call immanent acts; that is, those exercises of grace that remain within the soul, and that begin and terminate there, without any immediate relation to anything done outwardly, or brought to pass in practice. Such are the exercises of grace which the saints often have in contemplation. The exercise that is in the heart does not directly proceed to or terminate in anything beyond the thoughts of the mind. However, they may tend towards practice more remotely 42 (as all exercises of grace do).

2. There is another kind of acts of grace, that are more strictly called practical acts, or effective exercises, because they immediately regard something that is to be done. They are the exertions of grace in the commanding acts of the will which direct the outward actions: such as when a saint gives a cup of cold water to a disciple as an exercise of the grace of charity; or when a saint voluntarily endures persecution as an immediate exercise of his supreme love towards Christ. Here the exertion of grace produces its effect in outward actions.

These exercises of grace are practical and produce good works, not only because they are from a productive nature (as all exercises of true grace are), but they are the producing acts. This is properly the exercise of grace in the act of the will; and this is properly the practice of the soul. And the soul is the immediate actor of no other practice than this: the motions of the body follow from the laws of union between the soul and body, which God and not the soul, has fixed and maintains. The act of the soul, and the exercise of grace, that is exerted in the performance of a good work, is the good work itself – so far as the soul is concerned in it, or so far as it is the soul’s good work. The determinations of the will are indeed our very actions, so far as they are properly ours, as Dr. Doddridge observes.43 Included in this practice of the soul is the aim and intention of the soul, which is the agent. We would not look at the motions of a statue, executing justice or distributing alms by clockwork, as acts of obedience to Christ by that statue. But

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41 Imperate: performed by a faculty other than the will, at the command of the will.
42 Or indirectly.
43 Scripture Doctrine of Salvation, Sermon I. p. 11.
neither should anybody call the voluntary actions of a man, that may be externally and materially agreeable to a command of Christ, acts of obedience to Christ, if that man never heard of Christ, nor of any of his commands, and if he had no thought of Christ’s commands in what he did. If the acts of obedience and the good fruit spoken of, are looked upon, not as mere motions of the body, but as acts of the soul, then the whole exercise of the spirit of the mind in those acts must be taken into account, along with the ends of those acts, and the regard the soul has for God, etc. Otherwise they are not acts of self-denial, or obedience to God, or service to him, but something else. Many of the Martyrs experienced to a high degree such effective exercises of grace as these that I have now described. All true saints live a life of such acts of grace as these; and these operative exertions of grace are the life and soul of such acts. This is the obedience and fruit that God mainly looks at, because he looks at the soul more than the body, in as much as the soul is the superior part in the constitution of the human nature. As God looks at the obedience and practice of the man, he looks at the practice of the soul; for the soul is the man in God’s sight, “for the Lord does not see as man sees, ...but he looks at the heart.” 1Sam 16:7

When obedience, good works, and good fruits are given in Scripture as sure evidence to our own consciences of a true principle of grace, they are to be taken as including the obedience and practice of the soul – which precedes and governs the actions of the body. When practice is given in Scripture as the main evidence to others of our true Christianity, then it refers to our practice which is visible to them: our outward actions. But when practice is given as a sure evidence of our real Christianity to our own consciences, then it refers to our practice which is visible to our own consciences. This is not only the activities of our bodies, but the exertion of the soul, which directs and commands those activities. This is more directly and immediately under the view of our own consciences, than the actions of the body. Not only does the nature and reason of the thing show that this is the intent of the Scripture, but it is plain by the Scripture itself. This is evident when Christ, at the conclusion of his sermon on the mount, speaks of putting his teachings into practice. This is the grand sign that professors are true disciples. Without these, he likens them to a man that built his house on the sand. But with these, he likens them to a man that built his house on a rock. Mat 7:24 He refers not only to the outward behavior, but to the inward exercise of the mind in that behavior. This is evident by observing what he referred to when he spoke of putting them into practice.

We find such statements as these: “Blessed are the poor in spirit; blessed are those who mourn; blessed are the meek; blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness; blessed are the merciful; blessed are the pure in heart; Whoever is angry with his brother without cause, etc.; Whoever looks at a woman to lust after her, etc.; love your enemies; take no thought for your life,” and other sayings of a similar nature which imply inward exercises. Mat 5 And when Christ says in John 14:2, “The one that has my commandments and keeps them, he is the one that loves me;” he especially refers to that command several times, repeating it in the same discourse (eminently calling it “his” commandment), so that they should love one another as he had loved them.44 But this command is given chiefly in respect to an exercise of the mind or heart, even though exerted in practice. So when the Apostle John says in 1John 2:3, “By this we know that we know him, if we keep his commandments;” he plainly refers principally to this same command. This is clear by what follows in ver. 7-11,45 and in his 2nd Epistle, 1:5-6.46 When

44 John 13:34;15:10, 12-14. 45 1 John 2:7-11 Brethren, I write no new commandment to you, but an old commandment which you have had from the beginning. The old commandment is the word which you heard from the beginning. 4 Again, a new commandment I write to you, which thing is true in Him and in you, because the darkness is passing away, and the true light is already shining. 8 He who says he is in the light, and hates his brother, is in darkness until now. 9 He who loves his brother abides in the light, and there is no cause for stumbling in him. 10 But he who hates his brother is in darkness and walks in darkness, and does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes.
we are told in Scripture that men at the last day will be judged according to their works. Mat 16:27 and all will receive according to the things done in the body. 2Cor 5:10 it is not to be understood only of outward acts. For if that were so, then why is God so often spoken of as searching the hearts and trying the minds, “that he may render to everyone according to his works”? As in Rev. 2:23, “And all the churches shall know that I am he which searches the minds and hearts; and I will give to everyone according to his works.” Jer. 17:9-10, “I the Lord search the heart, I try the mind, to give every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings.” But if what is meant by “his ways,” and the fruit of “his doings,” is only the actions of his body, then what need is there to search the heart and mind in order to know them? Hezekiah in his sickness pleads that his practice is evidence of his title to God’s favor. It included not only his outward actions, but what was in his heart. Isa. 38:3, “Remember now, O Lord, I beg you, how I have walked before you in truth, and with a perfect heart.”

Although in this great evidence of sincerity that the Scripture gives us, what is inward is of greatest importance. Yet, what is outward is also included and intended. It is connected with the practical exertion of grace in the will, as directing and commanding the actions of the body. This effectually cuts off all pretensions that any man can have as to evidences of his godliness, if externally he lives wickedly. The great evidence of godliness lies in that inward exercise and practice of the soul, which consists in the acts of the will that command the outward acts. But it is known that these commanding acts of the will are not one way, and the actions of the bodily organs another. For the unalterable law of nature is that they should be united as long as soul and body are united, and as long the organs are not so destroyed as to be incapable of those motions that the soul commands. Thus it would be ridiculous for a man to plead that the commanding act of his will was to go to public worship, while his feet carried him to a tavern or a brothel-house; or that the commanding act of his will was to give the money he had in his hand to a poor beggar, while at the same his hand kept it back, and held it fast.

Secondly, I will proceed to show that Christian practice, taken in the sense explained, is the chief evidence to the professor’s conscience, of a saving sincerity in religion. It is much preferred to the method of looking at the first convictions, enlightenings, and comforts in conversion, or to any immanent revelations or exercises of grace, whatever they may be, which begin and end in contemplation alone.47

The evidence of this appears by the following arguments.

46 2 John 1:5-6 And now I plead with you, lady, not as though I wrote a new commandment to you, but that which we have had from the beginning: that we love one another. 6 This is love, that we walk according to His commandments. This is the commandment, that as you have heard from the beginning, you should walk in it.

47 “Look upon John, Christ’s beloved disciple and bosom companion! He had received the anointing to know the one who is true, and he knew that he knew him, 1John 2:3. But how did he know that? He might be deceived; (as it is strange to see what a melancholy fancy will do, and the effects of it; as honest men are reputed to have weak brains, and never saw the depths of the secrets of God;) what is his last proof? ‘Because we keep his commandments.’” Shepard’s Parable, Part I. p. 131. “A man may know his present union to the Lord Jesus, by a work; 1 John 2.4. He that says, I know him, and does not keep his commandments, is a liar.—Yes, that is true negatively; but may a man, ought a man, to see or know his union positively by this? Ans. ver. 5. Many said they did know and love the Lord, but only he that keeps his words.—O they are sweet! It is heaven to cling to him in every command: it is death to depart from any command: by this know we that we are in him. If it were possible to ask of angels, how they know they are not devils, they would answer, ‘the Lord’s will is ours.’” Shepard’s Parable, Part I. p. 134. “If the question is, Whom does the Lord Jesus love? you need not go to heaven for the answer, the word is near you: those that love Christ. Who are those? Those that keep his commandments.” Shepard’s Parable, Part I. p. 138. “Will you have Christ sit in heaven, and not look to see that he subdues your lusts by the work of his grace, and so sways your hearts? If so, the you despise his kingdom. Do you seek pardon in the blood of Christ, and never look for the virtue and end of that blood to wash you and make you without spot, etc.? If so, then you despise his priesthood and blood. Do you look for Christ to work for you, and yet you do not do Christ’s work, and bring forth no fruit for him? If so, then you despise his honor. John 15.8. If I were to discover a hypocrite, or a false heart, I would say he is that one that claims Christ, but loathes his work.” Shepard’s Parable, Part I. p. 140.
ARGUMENT 1.
Reason plainly shows that those things which test what men actually cling to and prefer in their practice, when they are left to follow their own choice and inclinations, are the proper trial of what they really prefer in their hearts. Sincerity in religion, as observed already, consists in setting God highest in the heart, in choosing him before all other things, in having a heart to sell all for Christ, etc. But a man’s actions are the proper trial of what a man’s heart prefers. For instance, when God and other things are in competition, God is set before a man on one hand, and his worldly interest or pleasure is set on the other (as often happens in the course of a man’s life). His behavior in such a case, in actually clinging to the one and forsaking the other, is the proper trial of which he prefers. Sincerity consists in forsaking all for Christ in heart. But to forsake all for Christ in heart, is the same as having a heart to forsake all for Christ; yet certainly the proper trial of whether a man has a heart to forsake all for Christ, is actually being put to the test. It is having Christ and other things in competition, so that he must actually or practically cling to one, and forsake the other. To forsake all for Christ in heart, is the same as having a heart to forsake all for Christ when called to do so. But the highest proof to ourselves and others, that we have a heart to forsake all for Christ when we are called to do so, is to actually do it to the extent that we are called to do it. To follow Christ in heart is to have a heart to follow him. To deny ourselves in heart for Christ, is the same as having a heart to deny ourselves for him in fact. The main and most proper proof of having a heart for anything, in which a man is at liberty to follow his own inclinations either to do it or not do it, as he pleases, is actually doing it. When a man is at liberty either to speak or to keep silent, the proper proof of having a heart to speak, is speaking. When a man is at liberty either to walk or to sit still, the proper proof of having a heart to walk, is walking.

Godliness does not consist in a heart that intends to do the will of God, but in a heart that does it. The children of Israel in the wilderness had the former. We read of them in Deut. 5:27-29, “Go near, and hear all that the Lord our God shall say; and speak to us all that the Lord our God shall speak to you, and we will hear it, and do it. And the Lord heard the voice of your words when you spoke to me; and the Lord said to me, ‘I have heard the voice of the words of this people, which they have spoken to you; they have said well all that they have spoken. O that there would be such a heart in them, that they would fear me and keep all my commandments always, that it might be well with them, and with their children forever!’” The people manifested that they had a heart to intend to keep God’s commandments, and to be very eager in those intentions; but God manifests that this was far from being the thing that he desired, and in which true godliness consists, which is having a heart to actually keep them.

It is therefore absurd, and even ridiculous, for anyone to pretend that they have a good heart, while they live a wicked life, or while they do not produce the fruit of universal holiness in their practice. For it is proved in fact, that such men do not love God above all. It is foolish to dispute against plain fact and experience. Men that live in the ways of sin, and yet flatter themselves that they will go to heaven, or who expect to be received in the hereafter as holy persons without a holy practice, act as though they expected to make a fool of their Judge. This is implied in what the apostle says when he speaks of men doing good works and living a holy life, and thereby exhibiting evidence of their title to everlasting life. Gal. 6:7: “Do not be deceived; God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap.” It is like saying, “Do not deceive yourselves with an expectation of reaping life everlasting hereafter, if you do not sow to the Spirit here. It is in vain to think that God will be made a fool of by you, or that he will be shammed and baffled with shadows instead of substances, and with a vain pretense (instead of the good fruit he expects), when the opposite of what you pretend, plainly appears in your life – before his face.” The word mock is sometimes used this way in other Scriptures. Thus Delilah says to Sampson, “behold you have mocked me, and told me lies,” Judges 16:10, 13. That is, “You have baffled me, as though you would have made a fool of me, as if I might be easily persuaded
by any vain pretense, instead of by the truth.” So it is said that Lot, when he told his sons-in-law that God would destroy that place, to them “he seemed like someone that mocked,” Gen. 19:14. That is, he seemed like someone that would make a game of them, as though they were such credulous fools as to believe his tales.

But the great Judge, whose eyes are like a flame of fire, will not be mocked or baffled by any pretenses; he expects a holy life. If men have prophesied and wrought miracles in his name, and if they have had faith so as to remove mountains, and if they cast out devils, and however high their religious affections may have been, and however great a resemblance they may have made of grace, and even though their hiding-place has been so dark and deep that no human skill or search could find them out – yet if they are workers or practicers of iniquity, they cannot hide their hypocrisy from their Judge. Job 34:22, “There is no darkness, or shadow of death, where the workers of iniquity may hide themselves.” Would a wise prince allow himself to be fooled and baffled by a subject who pretended to be a loyal subject, and who told his prince that he had complete affection towards him, and that he had once experienced it, and felt his affections strongly working towards his prince, and expected to be accepted and rewarded by his prince as one of his best friends on that account – even though he lived in rebellion against him, and even though he was following some pretender to his prince’s crown, and from time to time had stirred up sedition against him? Or would a master allow himself to be shammed and gullled by a servant who pretended to have experienced love and honor towards him in his heart, and a great sense of his worthiness and kindness to him, when at the same time he refused to obey him, and his master could get no service from him?

**ARGUMENT 2.**

As reason shows, those things which occur in the course of life, that test whether men prefer God to other things in practice, are the proper trial of the uprightness and sincerity of their hearts. They are represented in Scripture as the proper trial of the sincerity of professors. There we find such things called by that very name, **trials or temptations** (which have the same meaning, as observed before). The things that test whether men prefer God to other things in practice, are the difficulties of religion, or those things which occur that make the practice of duty difficult, and which cross other principles against the love of God, because in such trials, God and other things are set before men together, for their actual and practical choice. It comes to this: we cannot hold to both; one or the other must be forsaken. Again, these things are referred to in Scripture as **trials or proofs**. They are called by this name, because professors are tried by this, and proved what sort they are, whether they are really what they profess and appear to be or not. And because by these trials, the reality of a supreme love towards God is tested by experiment and fact. These are the proper proofs in which it is truly determined, by experience, whether men have a thorough disposition of heart to cling to God or not. Deut. 8:2, “And you shall remember that the Lord your God led you the whole way these forty years in the wilderness, to humble you, and to prove you, whether you would keep his commandments or not.” Judges 2:21-22, “I also will no longer drive out before them, any of the nations which Joshua left when he died; so that through them I may prove Israel, whether they will keep the way of the Lord.”

The Scripture, when it calls these difficulties of religion **temptations or trials**, explains it as the trial or testing of their faith. James 1:2-3, “My brothers, count it all joy when you fall into various temptations; knowing this, that the trying of your faith works patience:” 1Pet. 1:6-7, “Now, for a season you are in heaviness, through manifold temptations; so that the trial of your

48 2Cor. 8:2; Heb. 11:36; 1Pet 1:7; chap. 4:12; Gen. 22:1; Deut. 8:2, 16; chap. 13:3; Exod. 15:25; chap. 16:4; Judges 2:22; chap. 3:1, 4; Psa. 66:10-11, Dan. 12:10, Rev. 3:10; Job 23:10; Zech 13:9; James 1:12, Rev. 2:10; Luke 8:13; Acts 20:19; James 1:2; 3; 1Pet. 1:6.

49 Also Jdg. 3:1, 4, and Exod. 16:4.
faith being much more precious than gold,” etc. So the Apostle Paul speaks of that expensive
duty of parting with our substance to the poor, as the proof of the sincerity of the love of
Christians, 2Cor. 8:8.50 The difficulties of religion are often represented in Scripture as the trial
of professors, the same way that a furnace is the proper trial of gold and silver. Psa. 66:10-11,
“You, O God, have proved us: you have tried us as silver is tried: you brought us into the net;
you laid affliction on our backs.” Zech. 13:9, “And I will bring a third of them through the fire;
and I will refine them as silver is refined; and I will try them as gold is tried.” Things that have
the color and appearance of gold are put into the furnace to test whether they are what they
seem to be, real gold or not. So the difficulties of religion are called trials, because they test those
that have the profession and appearance of saints, to see if they are what they appear to be, real
saints or not.

If we put true gold into the furnace, we will find its great value and preciousness. So the truth
and inestimable value of the virtues of a true Christian appear when they are under these trials.
1Pet. 1:7, “So that the trial of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes,
might be found for praise, honor, and glory.” Just as true and pure gold will come out of the
furnace its full weight, so true saints, when they are tried, come out as gold, Job 23:10. Christ
distinguishes true grace from counterfeit grace by this: that it is gold tried in the fire, Rev. 3:17-
18. So it is evident, that these things are called trials in Scripture, principally because they try or
prove the sincerity of professors. And, from what has now been observed, it is evident that they
are the most proper trial or proof of their sincerity. The very meaning of the word “trial” as
ordinarily used in Scripture, is the difficulty occurring in the way of a professor’s duty – it is the
trial or testing of his sincerity. If the trial of sincerity is the proper name for these difficulties of
religion, then, doubtless, these difficulties of religion are properly and eminently the trial of
sincerity. For doubtless they are eminently what the Holy Ghost calls them by. God gives things
their name from what is eminently their nature. And if it is true that these things are the proper
and eminent trial, proof, or testing of the sincerity of professors, then certainly the result of the
trial or testing (that is, a person’s behavior or practice under such trials) is the proper and
eminent evidence of their sincerity. For they are called trials or proofs, only with regard to the
result: the effect is eminently the proof or evidence. This is the most proper proof and evidence
to the conscience of those who are the subjects of these trials. For when God is said to try men,
and to prove them by these things, to see what is in their hearts and whether they will keep his
commandments or not – we are not to understand that it is for his own information, or that God
may obtain evidence for himself of their sincerit y (for he needs no trials for his information).
Rather, it is chiefly for their conviction, and to exhibit the evidence of it to their consciences.51

Thus, when God is said to prove Israel by the difficulties they met with in the wilderness, and by
the difficulties they met with from their enemies in Canaan, to know what was in their hearts,
whether they would keep his commandments or not, it must be understood that it was to reveal
to them what was in their own hearts. So too, when God tempted or tried Abraham with the
difficult command to offer up his son, it was not for God’s satisfaction, to see whether Abraham
feared him or not, but for Abraham’s own greater satisfaction and comfort, to more clearly
manifest God’s favor towards him. When Abraham proved faithful under this trial, God said to
him, “Now I know that you fear God, seeing that you have not withheld your son, your only son,
from me.” This plainly implies, in this practical exercise of Abraham’s grace under trial, that it
was clearer evidence of the truth of his grace than ever before. And it was the greatest evidence
to Abraham’s conscience, because God himself gave it to Abraham for his comfort and rejoicing.

50 2Cor 8:8 I speak not by commandment, but I am testing the sincerity of your love by the diligence of others.
51 “I am persuaded, as Calvin is, that all the several trials of men are to show them to themselves, and to the world,
that they are but counterfeits; and to make saints better known to themselves, Rom. 5.5. Tribulation works trial, and
hope, Prov. 17:3. If you would know whether it will hold weight, the trial will tell you. Shepard’s Parable, Part I. p.
191.
And God speaks of it as what might be the greatest evidence to Abraham’s conscience of being upright in the sight of his Judge. This proves what I say, that holy practice under trials is the highest evidence of the sincerity of professors to their own consciences.

We find that Christ, from time to time, used the same method to convince the consciences of those who pretended friendship towards him, to show them what they were. This was the method he used with the rich young man in Matt. 19:16, etc. He seemed to show great respect for Christ. He came kneeling and called him good Master, and made a great profession of obedience to the commandments. But Christ tried him by asking him to go and sell all that he had, and give it to the poor, and then come and take up his cross and follow him – then he would have treasure in heaven. He tried another person this way; we read of in Matt. 8:20. He made a great profession of respect to Christ. He said, “Lord, I will follow you wherever you go.” Christ immediately put his friendship to the test by telling him that the foxes had holes, and the birds of the air had nests, but that the Son of Man had nowhere to lay his head. Thus Christ is still prone, in his providence, to try professed disciples in general. The seed is sown in every kind of ground: stony ground, thorny ground, and good ground. It all appears alike when the seed first sprouts. Yet it is tried, and the difference is made apparent by the burning heat of the sun.

Seeing therefore, that these are the things that God makes use of to try us, it is undoubtedly the surest way for us to pass a right judgment on ourselves: to try ourselves by the same things. These trials of his are not for his information, but for ours. Therefore we ought to receive our information from them. The surest way to know our gold, is to look at it and examine it in God’s furnace where he tries it for that purpose, so that we may see what it is. If we have a mind to know whether a building stands strong or not, we must look at it when the wind blows. If we would know whether what appears in the form of wheat, has the real substance of wheat, or is only chaff, we must observe it when it is winnowed. If we would know whether a staff is strong, or if it is a rotten and broken reed, we must observe it when it is leaned on, and weight is placed on it. If we would weigh ourselves justly, we must weigh ourselves in the scales that God makes use of to weigh us. These trials, in the course of our practice, are the balances in which our

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52 Dr. Sibbes, in his Bruised Reed, says, “When Christ’s will competes with any earthly loss or gain, then in that particular case, having a heart that is willing to bow to Christ is a true sign; for the truest trial of the power of grace is in those particular cases which touch us closest, for that is where our corruption makes the greatest headway. When Christ came closest to home with the young man in the gospel, he lost him as a disciple (Matt. 19. 22).” Mr. Flavel speaks of a holy practice under trials, as the greatest evidence of grace. “No man (he says) can say what he is, whether his grace is true or false, until he is tried and examined by those things which are to him as fire is to gold.” Touchstone of Sincerity, chap. 4. sect. 1. Again, speaking of great difficulties and sufferings in the way of duty in which a person must actually part with what is dearest of a worldly nature, or with his duty; he says, “It cannot be doubted that such sufferings as these will reveal the falseness and rottenness of men’s hearts, if you consider that this is the fire designed by God for this very use and purpose, to separate the gold from the dross. So you will find it in 1Pet. 4.12, “Beloved, do not think it not strange concerning the fiery trial that is to try you,” i.e. The very design and aim of Providence in permitting and ordering them, is to try you. On this account you find the hour of persecution (in a suitable notion) called the hour of temptation or probation, Rev. 3.10. For then professors are sifted to the very bran, searched to the very bottom principles. This is ‘the day that burns as an oven; all that do wickedly will be as stubble,’ Mal. 4.1. For in that day the predominant interest must appear and be discovered; it can be concealed no longer. ‘No man can serve two masters,’ says Christ, Luke 16.13. A man may serve many masters, if they all command the same thing, or things subordinate to each other. But he cannot serve two masters, if their commands clash and interfere with each other; and such are the commands of Christ and the flesh in a suffering hour. Thus the two interests come in full opposition. And now have patience and wait a little, and you will discern which is predominant. A dog follows two men, while they both walk one way, and you do not know which of the two is his master. Wait but a little while, until their path parts, and you will quickly see who is his master; so it is in this case.” Ibid, chap 8. § 3. And in another chapter he says, “Great numbers of persons are deceived and destroyed by trusting to seemingly untried grace. This was the miserable condition of the Laodicean professors; they reckoned themselves rich, but they were really poor. All that glitters is not gold: their gold (as they accounted it) was never tried in the fire. If a man’s whole estate lay in some precious stone, suppose a rich diamond, how concerned he will be to have it thoroughly tried, to see whether it will bear a smart stroke with the hammer, or fly like a Bristol diamond!” ibid. chap. 10. § 3. Again, in the same place, “The promises of salvation are made to tried grace, and only such grace as endures the trial.” “The Lord will try you. God
hearts are weighed, or in which Christ and the world, or Christ and his competitors are weighed, as to the esteem and regard our hearts have for them. They are placed on opposing scales to see which preponderates. Say a man is brought to a divided path to see which way he will go; the one path leads to Christ, and the other to the object of his lusts. He is set between Christ and the world, with Christ on the right hand, and the world on the left, so that if he goes to one, he must leave the other. This is to see which one his heart most inclines towards, or which one preponderates in his heart. This is the same as laying Christ and the world in two opposing scales; going to one, and leaving the other, is the same as the sinking of the one scale, and the rising of the other. A man’s practice, therefore, under the trials of God's providence, is as much the proper evidence of the inclination of his heart, as the motion of the balance is the proper testing of which of two weights is the superior when placed in opposing scales.

ARGUMENT 3.

Another argument that holy practice, in the sense explained, is the highest kind of evidence of the truth of grace to the consciences of Christians is that, in practice and in the style of Scripture, grace is said to be made perfect, or to be finished. So the Apostle James says in James 2:22, “Do you see how faith was wrought with his works, and by works, faith was made perfect?” (or finished, as the word in the original properly signifies). So the love of God is said to be made perfect, or finished, in keeping his commandments. 1John 2:4-5, “He that says, I know him, and yet does not keep his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him: but, whoever keeps his word, truly the love of God is perfected in him.” The commandment of Christ, which the apostle especially referred to when he speaks here about keeping his commandments, (as I observed before) is that great commandment of his which refers to deeds of love towards our brothers, as the subsequent verses make apparent. Again, the love of God is said to be perfected in the same sense in chapter 4:12: “If we love one another, God dwells in us, and his love is perfected in us.” Here, doubtless, the apostle still refers to loving one another, in the same manner he explained in the preceding chapter, speaking of loving one another as a sign of the love of God. Verses 17-18, “Whoever has this world’s goods, and shuts up his heart, etc., how does the love of God dwell in him? My little children, let us not love in word, or in tongue, but in deed (or in work) and in truth.” By loving in work, the apostle says, “The love of God is perfected in us.” Grace is said to be perfected or finished in holy practice, because it is brought to its proper effect in it, and it is brought to that exercise which is the end of the principle of grace. The tendency and design of grace is reached in it, and its operation is completed and crowned in it.

The tree is made perfect in the fruit. It is not perfected in the seed being planted in the ground; it is not perfected in the first stirring of the seed, or in putting out root and sprout; nor is it perfected when it comes up out of the ground; nor is it perfected in producing leaves; nor even in producing blossoms. But when it has produced good ripe fruit, then it is perfected; then it reaches its end; then the design of the tree is finished. All that belongs to the tree is completed and brought to its proper effect in the fruit. So too, grace is perfected in its practical exercises. Grace is said to be made perfect or finished in its work or fruit, in the same way that it is said of sin. James 1:15, “When lust has conceived, it brings forth sin; and sin, when it is finished, brings forth death.” Here are the three steps: first, sin exists in its principle or habit, as lust in the heart; next is its conceiving, which consists in the immanent exercises of it in the mind; and has his trying times; and they were never sent except to reveal who were dross, who were gold. And the main end of all God's trials, is to reveal this truth that I now am pressing upon you. Some have a thorough work; and now the trial discovers the truth, as in Abraham, Heb. 11.17. Some have a superficial work, and they fall in trial, as with Saul; it reveals that it was only a covering work. For this is the question God makes. Is it thorough, or not? Yes, says the carnal heart; Yes, says a gracious heart. Hence it is strange to see what men will do when a trial comes.” Shepard's Parable, Part I. p. 219. "There is an hour of temptation which tries men, which will reveal men indeed." Shepard's Parable, Part II. p. 60.
Lastly in the fruit that was conceived and actually brought forth in wicked work and practice. The apostle calls this the finishing or perfecting of sin – for the word in the original is the same one translated “perfected” in those forementioned places.

Now certainly, if grace is made perfect in its fruit in this way, if these practical exercises of grace are those exercises in which grace is brought to its proper effect and end, and the exercises in which whatever belongs to its design, tendency, and operation is completed and crowned – then these exercises must be the highest evidences of grace – above all other exercises. Certainly the proper nature and tendency of every principle must appear best and most fully in its most perfect exercises, or in those exercises in which its nature is most completely exerted, and in which its tendency is most fully answered and crowned in its proper effect and end. If we would see the proper nature of anything whatever, and see it in its full distinction from other things, then let us look at it in its finishing. The Apostle James says that faith is made perfect by works; and he introduces this as an argument to prove that works are the chief evidence of faith, by which the sincerity of the professor of faith is justified, James 2:22. The Apostle John, after he repeatedly told us that love was made perfect in keeping Christ’s commandments, observes in 1John 4:18, that perfect love casts out fear. This means (at least in part) that love is made perfect in this sense. This agrees with what he said in the foregoing chapter, that by loving in deed (or in work), we know that we are of the truth, and we will assure our hearts, verses 18-19.

ARGUMENT 4.

Another thing which makes it evident, that holy practice is the principal evidence that we ought to make use of in judging both of our own and others’ sincerity, is that this evidence is insisted on in Scripture above all others. An ordinary acquaintance with the Scripture, together with a little attention and observation, will be sufficient to show anyone that this is ten times more insisted on as a mark of true piety throughout the Scripture, from the beginning of Genesis to the end of Revelations, than anything else. And in the New Testament, where Christ and his apostles expressly and by declared purpose, laid down signs of true godliness, this is almost wholly insisted on. Observe that Christ and his apostles often say these things when they are discoursing on the great doctrines of religion. They show what the nature of true godliness must be, or where the nature and signs of it may be inferred by just consequence. They often mention many things pertaining to godliness. But also, and for a set purpose, they often give signs and marks for the trial of professors, putting it on them to try themselves by the signs they give. They introduce what they say with expressions like these: “By this you shall know that you know God; by this the children of God, and the children of the devil, are made manifest; the one who has this, builds on a good foundation; the one who does not have it, builds on the sand; by this we will assure our hearts; he is the man that loves Christ,” etc. But I can find no place where either Christ or his apostles, in this way, give signs of godliness, except where Christian practice is almost the only thing insisted on. Indeed, in many of these places, love towards the brothers is spoken of as a sign of godliness. As I observed before, no one virtuous affection or disposition is so often expressly spoken of as a sign of true grace, than having love one for another. But then the Scriptures explain what is intended, chiefly, is this love as exercised and as expressed in practice, or in deeds of love. The Apostle John, who above all others insists on love towards the brothers as a sign of godliness, most expressly explains himself in 1John 3:14, etc., “We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brothers: he that does not love his brother, abides in death. Whoever has this world’s goods, and sees his brother in need, and yet withholds his compassion from him, how does the love of God dwell in him? My little children, let us love, not in word, or in tongue, but in deed (i.e., in deeds of love) and in truth. By this we know that we are of the truth, and will assure our hearts before him.”

So when the Scripture insists so much on loving one another as a great sign of godliness, we are not to understand this as referring so much to the immanent workings of affection by which
men feel towards one another, as referring to practicing all the duties of the second table of the law. The New Testament tells us again and again that these are what true love for one another comprehends. So that, really, there is no place in the New Testament, where the declared purpose is to give signs of godliness, that holy practice and keeping Christ’s commandments are not the marks chosen above all others, and insisted on. This is an invincible argument that it is the best of all evidences of godliness – unless we suppose that when Christ and his apostles, by design, set themselves about this business of giving those signs by which professing Christians in all ages might determine their state, they did not know how to choose signs as well as we could have chosen signs for them. But if we make the word of Christ our rule, then undoubtedly those marks which Christ and his apostles chiefly laid down and gave to us, so that we might try ourselves by them, we should especially receive those marks, and chiefly make use of them in our trials. Surely ministers ought to chiefly insist on the rules which Christ and his apostles chiefly insisted on. To insist much on those things that the Scripture little insists on, and to insist very little on those things which the Scripture insists much on, is a dangerous thing. It is going out of God’s way. And it is judging ourselves and guiding others in an unscriptural manner. God knew which way was safest and best for them to lead and guide souls. He insisted so much on some things, because he knew it was necessary for them to be insisted on. And as a wise God, he left other things more alone, because he knew it was not best for us to lay so much weight on them in the trial. Just as the Sabbath was made for man, so the Scriptures were made for man. They are, by infinite wisdom, fitted for our use and benefit. We should therefore make them our guide in all things, in our thoughts about religion and about ourselves. For us to make something great which the Scripture makes little of, or to make little of what the Scripture makes great, tends to give us a misshapen idea of religion; and (at least indirectly and gradually) it tends to lead us wholly away from the right rule, and from a right opinion about ourselves. Thus it tends to establish delusion and hypocrisy.

**ARGUMENT 5.**

Christian practice is plainly spoken of in the word of God, as the main evidence of the truth of grace – not only to others, but to men’s own consciences. It is not only spoken of more and insisted on more than other signs, but in many places where it is spoken of, it is represented as the chief of all evidences. This is plain in the way in which it is expressed from time to time. If God were now to speak from heaven to resolve our doubts concerning signs of godliness, and if he were to give some particular sign by which all might know whether they were sincerely godly or not, and have such a qualification or mark, then he might use such emphatic expressions as these: “the man who is a true saint; this is the very man; by this you may know; this is the thing by which it is made manifest who are saints and who are sinners; such men as these are saints indeed.” Would we not look at it as something beyond doubt that it was given as a special and eminently distinguishing mark of true godliness? Yet this is the very case with respect to the sign of grace that I am speaking about. God has again and again uttered these expressions in his word concerning Christian practice, in this very way. John 14, “He that has my commandments, and keeps them, he is the one that loves me.” Thus Christ gives the disciples in this passage, not so much a guide to judge others by, as to apply it to themselves for their own comfort after his departure – which is apparent by every word of the context.

By the way, I would observe that it is not only the emphasis with which Christ utters it that is remarkable, but also insisting on it so much and repeating it, as he does in John 14.15, “If you love me, keep my commandments.” Verse 23, “If a man loves me, he will keep my words.” And verse 24, “He that does not love me, does not keep my words.” And over and over in the next

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53 Rom. 13:8, 10; Gal. 5:14; Matt. 22:39-40
54 “It is a sure rule,” says, Dr. Preston, “that, what the Scriptures spend many words on, we should have as many thoughts on: and what the Holy Ghost urges most, we should prize most.” *Church’s Carriage.*
chapter, 15:2, “Every branch in me that does not bear fruit, he takes away; and every branch that bears fruit; he prunes.” Verse 8. “In this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so shall you be my disciples.” Verse 14, “You are my friends, if you do what I command you.” We have this mark laid down with the same emphasis again in John 8:31 “If you continue in my word, then you are my disciples indeed.” Again, 1John 2:3, “Hereby we know that we know him, if we keep his commandments.” And verse 5, “Whoever keeps his word, the love of God is truly perfected in him; hereby we know that we are in him” And chapter 3:18-19, “Let us love in deed, and in truth; hereby we know that we are of the truth.” What is translated “hereby we know” would have been a little more emphatic if it had been rendered, “by this we know.”

Holy practice is evidently spoken of as the grand mark of distinction between the children of God and the children of the devil. 1John 3:10, “In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest.” It is speaking of a holy practice, and a wicked practice, as may be seen throughout the context; as in verse 3, “Every man that has this hope in him, purifies himself even as he is pure.” Verses 6-10, “Whoever abides in him, does not sin. Whoever sins, has not seen him, or known him. Little children, let no man deceive you; he that practices righteousness, is righteous, even as he is righteous: he that commits sin is of the devil. Whoever is born of God does not sin. Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God.” We have a similar emphasis in 2John 1:6: “This is love, that we walk after his commandments;” that is (as we must understand it), this is the proper evidence of love. 1John 5:3, “This is the love of God, that we keep his commandments.” The Apostle James, speaking of the proper evidences of true and pure religion, says in James 1:27, “Pure religion, undefiled before God and the Father, is this: to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.” We have similar emphatic expressions used about the same thing in the Old Testament, in Job 28:28: “And to man he said, Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom, and to depart from evil is understanding.” Jer. 22:15-16, “Did your father not eat and drink, and do justice and righteousness? He judged the cause of the poor and needy: was this not to know me? says the Lord.” Psa. 34:11, etc. “Come to me, children, and I will teach you the fear of the Lord. Keep your tongue from evil, and your lips from speaking guile; depart from evil, and do good; seek peace and pursue it.” Psa. 15:1-2, “Who shall abide in your tabernacle? Who shall dwell in your holy hill? He that walks uprightly,” etc. Psa. 24:3-4, “Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord? And who shall stand in his holy place? He that has clean hands, and a pure heart,” etc. Psa. 119:1, “Blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of the Lord.” Verse 6, “Then I shall not be ashamed, when I look to all your commandments.” Prov. 8:13, “The fear of the Lord is to hate evil.”

The Scripture never uses such emphatic expressions concerning any other signs of hypocrisy, or unsoundness of heart, as it uses concerning unholy practice. So Gal. 6:7, “Do not be deceived; God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that shall he also reap.” 1Cor. 6:9-10, “Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, etc., shall inherit the kingdom of God.” Eph. 5:5-6, “For you know this, that no whoremonger or unclean person, etc., has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ, and of God. Let no man deceive you with vain words.” 1John 3:7-8, “Little children, let no man deceive you; he that practices righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous; he that commits sin is of the devil.” Chap. 2:4, “He that says, I know him, and does not keep his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.” And chap. 1:6. “If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not practice the truth.” James 1:26, “If any man among you seems to be religious, and does not bridle his tongue, but deceives his own heart, this man’s religion is vain.” Chap. 3:14-15, “If you have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, do not glory, and do not lie against the truth. This wisdom does not descend from above, but is earthly, sensual, and devilish.” Psa. 125:5, “As for those who turn aside to their crooked ways, the Lord shall lead them forth with the workers of iniquity.” Isa. 35:8, “A high way shall be there, and it shall be called the Way of Holiness; the unclean shall not pass over it.”
Rev. 21:27, “But by no means shall anything enter into it that defiles, or causes an abomination, or a lie.” And in several places, “Depart from me, I do not know you, you that work iniquity.

ARGUMENT 6.

Another thing which makes it evident that holy practice is the chief of all the signs of the sincerity of professors, not only to the world, but to their own consciences, is that this is the grand evidence which will be made use of hereafter, before the judgment seat of God. His judgment will be regulated according to this sign; the state of every professor of religion will be unalterably determined by it. In the future judgment, there will be an open trial of professors, and evidences will be made use of in their judgment. God’s future judgment of men for their eternal retribution will not be trying, finding out, and passing a judgment on the state of men’s hearts in God’s own mind; it will be a declarative judgment. And its end will not be to have God form a judgment within himself, but the manifestation of his judgment, and its righteousness, to men’s own consciences, and to the world. Therefore in Rom. 2:5, the Day of Judgment is called the day of the revelation of the righteous judgment of God. And the end of God’s future trial and judgment of men, as to the part each one will have in the judgment, will especially be the clear manifestation of God’s righteous judgment with respect to a man’s conscience. This is manifest by Matt. 18:31 to the end; chap. 20:8-15, chap. 22:11-13, chap. 25:19-30, and verse 35 to the end, Luke 19:16-23. Therefore, although God needs no medium by which to make the truth evident to himself, evidences will still be made use of in his future judgment of men. Doubtless the evidences that will be made use of in their trial will be those best suited to serve the ends of the judgment – which is the manifestation of God’s righteous judgment, not only to the world, but to men’s own consciences.

But the Scriptures abundantly teach us that the grand evidences which the Judge will make use of in the trial for these ends, according to which the judgment of everyone shall be regulated and the irreversible sentence passed, will be men’s works, or practice, here in this world. Rev. 20:12, “And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened — and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works.” Verse 13, “And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell gave up the dead which were in them; and they were judged every man according to his works.” 2Cor. 5:10, “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that everyone may receive the things done in his body, whether it is good or bad.” Christ represents that men’s practice is the only evidence by which the future judgment is regulated. So it is represented at the end of Matt. 25, in the most particular description of the Day of Judgment which we have in the Holy Bible. To convict men’s own consciences and to manifest them to the world, at the Day of Judgment the Judge will not examine men as to the method of their experiences, or have every man tell his story of the manner of his conversion. Rather, his works will be presented as evidences of what he is, and what he has done in darkness and in light. Eccl. 12:14, “For God will bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it is good, or whether it is evil.” In the trial of the professors in the future judgment, God will make use of evidences, and he will manifest them to their consciences and to the world. These are the same evidences which he makes use of in the temptations or trials of his providence here. He will make use of their practice in those cases in which Christ and other things come into actual and immediate competition. At the Day of Judgment, to manifest his righteous judgment, God will weigh professors in a balance that is visible. And the balance will be the same one that he weighs men in now, as already described.

55 Romans 2:5 But in accordance with your hardness and your impenitent heart you are treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God...
Hence we may undoubtedly infer that men’s works (in the sense explained) are the highest evidences by which they ought to try themselves. Certainly, what our supreme Judge will chiefly use to judge us by when we stand before him, we should chiefly use to judge ourselves by. If it had not been revealed in what manner, and by what evidence the Judge would proceed with us hereafter, it would be natural for someone to say, “O if I knew what token God will chiefly look for and insist on in the last and decisive judgment, and what he expects everyone to be able to produce in order to be accepted by him, and according to which the sentence will be passed, then I might know what token or evidence to especially look for and pursue now. I would be sure not to fail then.” Seeing that God has so plainly and abundantly revealed what this token or evidence is, surely if we act wisely, we will regard it as of the greatest importance.

Now from all that has been said, I think it is abundantly manifest, that Christian practice is the most proper evidence of the gracious sincerity of professors, both to themselves and to others. It is the chief mark of grace, the sign of signs and evidence of evidences, which seals and crowns all other signs. I want to have the testimony of my conscience, that I have my Supreme Judge on my side, who says of me as he says in John 14:21, “He has my commandments, and keeps them; he is the one that loves me.” I would rather have that approval, than the judgment and fullest approval of all the wise, sound, and experienced divines that have lived this thousand years, on the most exact and critical examination of my experiences, as to the manner of my conversion. It is not that there are no other good evidences of a state of grace than this. There may be other exercises of grace besides these efficient exercises which the saints may have in contemplation, and that may be very satisfying to them. Yet this is the chief and most proper evidence. There may be several good evidences that a tree is a fig tree; but the highest and most proper evidence of it, is that it actually bears figs.

It is possible for a man to have good assurance of being in a state of grace at his first conversion, before he has had an opportunity to gain assurance by this great evidence which I am speaking of. Say a man hears that a great treasure is offered him in a distant place, on the condition that he will prize it so much, that he will be willing to leave what he possesses at home, and go on a journey for it. He must travel over the rocks and mountains that are in the way, to the place where the treasure is. It is possible that the man may be well-assured that he values the treasure to the degree spoken of, as soon as the offer is made him. He may feel a willingness within him to go for the treasure, beyond all doubt. Yet, actually going for it is the highest and most proper evidence of his willingness, not only to others, but to himself. But then as an evidence to himself, his outward actions, and the motions of his body in his journey, are not considered alone. They are not exclusive of the action of his mind, and of the consciousness within himself of the thing that moves him, and the end for which he goes. Otherwise his bodily activity is no evidence to him that he prizes the treasure. In the same way, Christian practice is the most proper evidence of the saving value of the pearl of great price, and of the treasure hidden in the field.

Christian practice is the sign of signs, in this sense: that it is the great evidence which confirms and crowns all other signs of godliness. There is no one grace of the Spirit of God, that Christian practice is not the most proper evidence of the truth of it. As it is with the members of our bodies, and with all our utensils, the proper proof of their soundness and goodness, is in their use. So it is with our graces. They are given to be used in practice, as much as our hands and feet, or the tools with which we work, or the arms with which we fight. The proper trial and proof of them is their exercise in practice. Most things we use are serviceable to us, and their serviceableness is proved in some pressure, straining, agitation, or collision. So it is with a bow,

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57 “What God makes a rule of his own judgment, as what he judges every man by, that is a sure rule for every man to judge himself by. What we shall be judged by at the last day, is a sure rule to apply to ourselves for the present. Now by our obedience and works he judges us. ‘He will give to every man according to his works.’” Dr. Preston’s *Church’s Carriage*. 
sword, axe, saw, cord, chain, staff, foot, tooth, etc. Those that are too weak to bear the strain or pressure we need to put them to, are good for nothing. So it is with all the virtues of the mind. The proper trial and proof of them, is exercising them under those temptations and trials that God brings to us in the course of his providence, and putting them to such service that it strains hard on the principles of nature.58

**Practice is the proper proof of the true and saving knowledge of God.** This is made apparent by what the apostle already mentioned, “By this we know that we know him, that we keep his commandments.” It is in vain for us to profess that we know God, if we deny him in our works, Tit. 1:16. And if we know God, but do not glorify him as God, then our knowledge will only condemn us, and not save us, Rom. 1:21. The great mark of that knowledge which saves and makes happy, is that it is *practical* knowledge. John 13:17, “If you know these things, you are happy if you do them.” Job 28:28, “To depart from evil is understanding.”

**Holy practice is the proper evidence of repentance.** When the Jews professed repentance, they came confessing their sins to John, who was preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins. He directed them to the right way of getting and exhibiting proper evidences of the truth of their repentance. He said to them, “Bring forth fruits fit for repentance,” Matt. 3:8. This agreed with the practice of the Apostle Paul; see Acts 26:20.59 Pardon and mercy are from time to time promised to the one who has *this* evidence of true repentance: that he forsakes his sin, Prov. 28:13, and Isa. 55:7, and many other places.

**Holy practice is the proper evidence of a saving faith.** It is evident that the Apostle James speaks of works as what eminently justify faith, or (the same thing) that justify the professors of faith. Works vindicate and manifest the sincerity of their profession, not only to the world, but to their own consciences. This is evident by the instance he gives of Abraham in James 2:21-24.60 In verses 20 and 26,61 he speaks of the practical and working nature of faith, as the very life and soul of it – in the same way that the active nature and substance in the body of a man, is the life and soul of that body. If this is so, then doubtless *practice* is the proper evidence of the life and soul of *true* faith, by which it is distinguished from a *dead* faith. For practice is the most proper evidence of a practical nature; and operation is the most proper evidence of an operative nature.

**Practice is the best evidence of a saving belief of the truth.** What is spoken of as the proper evidence of being a professing Christian is that he *walks* in the truth. 3John 3, “I rejoiced greatly when the brothers came and testified of the truth that is in you, even as you walk in the truth.”

**Practice is the most proper evidence of truly coming to Christ, and accepting and drawing near to him.** Truly and savingly coming to Christ is (as Christ often teaches) coming so as to forsake all for him. And, as observed before, to forsake all for Christ in heart, is the same as having a heart to actually forsake all; but the proper evidence of having a heart to actually forsake all is, indeed, to actually forsake all so far as we are called to do it. If a king courts a woman in a far country, so that she would forsake her own people, and her father’s house, and come to him to be his bride, then the proper evidence of her heart’s compliance with the king’s suit, is actually forsaking her own people, and her father’s house, and coming to him. By doing

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58 Edwards defined “principle of nature” on p. 84. – WHG
59 Acts 26:20 “but declared first to those in Damascus and in Jerusalem, and throughout all the region of Judea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent, turn to God, and do works befitt[ing] repentance.
60 James 2:21 Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar? 22 Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect? 23 And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, "Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness." And he was called the friend of God. 24 You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only.
61 James 2:26 For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.
this, her compliance with the king’s suit is perfected, in the same sense that the Apostle James says, “By works faith is made perfect.” Christ promises us eternal life on the condition of our coming to him. But it is such a coming as he directed the young man who came to inquire what he must do to have eternal life. Christ asked him go and sell all that he had, and come to him, and follow him. If he had consented in his heart to the proposal, and came to Christ in his heart, then the proper evidence of it would have been doing it; coming to Christ would have been perfected in this. Christ called Levi the publican while he was sitting and receiving customs; he was in the middle of his worldly gains. The acceptance by Levi’s heart of this invitation of his Savior to come to him, was manifested and made perfect by actually rising up, leaving all behind, and following Christ, Luke 5:27-28. Christ and other things, are set before us together, specifically for us to cling to one and forsake the other. In such a case, clinging to Christ is the practical acceptance of Christ. A beggar who reaches out his hand to take a gift that is offered, is making a practical acceptance of the gift. Indeed, the act of the soul in clinging to Christ in practice, is the most perfect coming of the soul to Christ.

**Practice is the most proper evidence of trusting in Christ for salvation.** The proper meaning of the word trust, according to its ordinary use, both in common speech and in the Holy Scriptures, is emboldening and encouraging a person’s mind to run some risk in practice, or in something that he does, on the credit of another’s sufficiency and faithfulness. Therefore, the proper evidence of his trust, is the risk that he runs in what he does. He is not properly said to run any risk, in dependence on anything, if he does nothing on that dependence, or if his practice is not different than if he were not dependent. For a man to run a risk in dependence on another, is doing something for which he seems to expose himself, and which he would not do if it were not for his dependence. Therefore, it is in complying with the difficulties and seeming dangers of Christian practice, in dependence on Christ’s sufficiency and faithfulness to bestow eternal life, that persons are said to risk themselves for Christ, and to trust in him for happiness and life. They depend on such promises as that made in Matt. 10:39, “He that loses his life for my sake, shall find it.” And so they part with all, and risk their all, in dependence on Christ’s sufficiency and truth. This is the Scripture notion of trusting in Christ in the exercise of a saving faith in him.

Thus Abraham, the father of believers, trusted in Christ. By faith he left his own country in reliance on the covenant of grace that God established with him, Heb. 11:8-9. Thus also, “Moses, by faith refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season,” Heb. 11:23, etc. So by faith, others exposed themselves to be stoned and sawn asunder, or slain with the sword; they endured the trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, bonds and imprisonments, and wandered about in sheep skins, and goat skins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented.” And in this sense, the Apostle Paul, by faith, trusted in Christ and committed himself to him, risking himself and his whole interest, in dependence on the ability and faithfulness of his Redeemer. And he did so under great persecutions, suffering the loss of all things. 2Tim. 1:12, “For which cause I also suffer these things; nevertheless I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed, and I am persuaded, that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day.”

If a man were to have word brought to him from the king of a distant island, that the king intended to make him the king’s heir, but only if, upon receiving the tidings, he immediately left his native land and his friends and all he has in the world, to go to that country in dependence

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62 “Really taking Christ appears in our actions and works: Isa. 1:19. ‘If you consent and obey, you shall eat the good things of the land.’ That is, if you will consent to take JEHOVAH for your Lord and King: if you give consent, there is the first thing; but that is not enough, unless you also obey. The consent that stands in the inward act of the mind, the truth of it, will be seen in your obedience, in the acts of your lives. ‘If you consent and obey, you shall eat the good things of the land;’ that is, you shall take of all that he has that is convenient for you; for then you are married to him in truth, and you have an interest in all his good.” Dr. Preston’s *Church’s Carriage*. 

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on what he heard – then he may be said to risk himself and all that he has in the world on it. But, if he only sits still, and hopes for the promised benefit, inwardly pleasing himself with thoughts of it, then he cannot properly be said to risk anything. He runs no risk in this case. He does nothing other than what he would have done if he had received no such tidings, and was not exposed to any suffering in case it all failed. So that, crediting what he hears of a future world, and in dependence on the report of the gospel concerning life and immortality, if someone forsakes all, or forsakes what he must, making everything give way to his eternal interest – then he, and he alone, may be said to risk himself on the report of the gospel. This is the proper evidence of a true trust in Christ for salvation.

Practice is the proper evidence of a gracious love, both towards God and men. The texts that plainly teach this have been so often mentioned already, that it is needless to repeat them.

Practice is the proper evidence of humility. The expression and manifestation of humility of heart – which God speaks of and insists on as its great expression, and what we should look at as the proper expression and manifestation of humility – is just this: walking humbly. Micah 6:8, “He has shown you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you, but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?”

Practice is also the proper evidence of the true fear of God. Prov. 8:13, “The fear of the Lord is to hate evil.” Psa. 34:11, etc., “Come, you children, hearken to me, and I will teach you the fear of the Lord. Keep your tongue from evil, and your lips from speaking guile: depart from evil, and do good; seek peace and pursue it.” Prov. 3:7, “Fear the Lord, and depart from evil.” Prov. 16:6, “By the fear of the Lord, men depart from evil.” Job 1:8, “Have you considered my servant Job – a perfect and an upright man, one that fears God, and eschews evil?” Chap. 2:3, “Have you considered my servant Job – a perfect and an upright man, one that fears God, and eschews evil? And still he holds fast his integrity, although you moved me against him.” Psa. 36:1, “Transgression speaks to the heart of the wicked; There is no fear of God before his eyes.”

So practice (in rendering back according to the benefits received) is the proper evidence of true thankfulness. Psa. 116:12, “What shall I render to the Lord for all his benefits towards me?” 2Chron. 32:25, “But Hezekiah did not render back according to the benefit done to him.” Paying our vows to God, and ordering our conversation rightly, seem to be spoken of as the proper expressions and evidences of true thankfulness. In the 50th Psalm, ver. 14: “Offer to God thanksgiving, and pay your vows to the Most High.” Verse 92 ff., “Whoever offers praise, glorifies me; and to him that orders his conversation rightly, I will show the salvation of God.”

So the proper evidence of gracious desires and longings, and what distinguishes them from those who are false and vain, is that they are not idle ‘wishes and woulds,’ like Balaam’s. Rather, they are effectual in practice, to stir persons up earnestly and thoroughly to seek the things they long for. Psalm 27:4 “One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after.” Psa. 63:1-2, “O God, you are my God, early will I seek you: my soul thirsts for you, my flesh longs for you in a dry and thirsty land where there is no water, to see your power and your glory.” Verse 8, “My soul follows hard after you.” Cant. 1:4, “Draw me, we will run after you.”

Practice is the proper evidence of a gracious hope. 1John 3:3, “Every man that has this hope in him, purifies himself even as he is pure.” Patiently continuing in well-doing, through the difficulties and trials of the Christian course, is often mentioned as the proper expression and fruit of Christian hope. 1Thess. 1:3, “Remembering without ceasing your work of faith, and labor of love, and patience of hope.” 1Pet. 1:13-14, “Therefore, gird up the loins of your mind; be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ, as obedient children,” etc. Psa. 119:166, “Lord, I have hoped in your salvation, and done your commandments.” Psa. 78:7, “That they might set their hope in God, and not forget the works of the Lord, but keep his commandments.”
A cheerful practice of our duty, and doing the will of God, is the proper evidence of a truly holy joy. Isa. 64:5, “You come to him that rejoices, and works righteousness.” Psa. 119:111-112, “I have taken your testimonies for my heritage forever; for they are the rejoicing of my heart. I have inclined my heart to perform your statutes always, even to the end.” Verse 14, “I have rejoiced in the way of your testimonies as much as in all riches.” 1Cor. 13:6, “Charity does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth.” 2Cor. 8:2, “The abundance of their joy abounded to the riches of their liberality.”

Practice also is the proper evidence of Christian fortitude. The trial of a good soldier is not in his chimney corner, but in the field of battle, 1Cor. 9:25-26, 2Tim. 2:3-4, 6.

Just as the fruit of holy practice is the chief evidence of the truth of grace, so the degree to which experiences influence a person’s practice, is the surest evidence of the degree to which his experiences are spiritual and divine. Whatever pretenses persons may make to having great revelations, love, and joys, they are to be regarded no further than they influence their practice. Of course, allowances must be made for the natural temper; but assuming the degree of grace is justly measured, that does not negate the degree of the effect in practice. For the effect of grace is as great, and the alteration is just as remarkable, in an ill-tempered person as it is in a good-natured person. Although an ill-tempered person may not behave himself well, or with the same degree of grace as the other, the difference after conversion may be just as great. This is because, before his conversion, a good-natured person did not behave as badly as an ill-tempered person.

Thus I have endeavored to represent what evidence there is that Christian practice is the chief sign of saving grace. Before I conclude this discourse, I would briefly say something in answer to two objections that may be made by some against what has been said about this topic.

**Objection I.**

Some may be ready to say that this seems contrary to the accepted opinion among good people, that those who profess Christ should judge their state chiefly by their inward experience; and that spiritual experiences are thus the main evidences of true grace.

I answer that this is doubtless a true opinion, and justly received among good people, that those professors should chiefly judge their state by their experience. But it is a great mistake to conclude that what has been said is at all contrary to that opinion. The chief sign of grace to the consciences of Christians is indeed Christian practice. But in the sense that has been explained, and according to what has been shown to be the true notion of Christian practice, this is not at all inconsistent with saying that Christian experience is the chief evidence of grace. Christian or holy practice is spiritual practice; and that practice is not just the activity of a body that does not know how, when, or why it moves. Rather, spiritual practice in man is the practice of his spirit and his body jointly – or the practice of a spirit that animates, commands, and actuates the body it is united to, and over which the Creator has given it power. Therefore, the main thing in this holy practice, is the holy action of the mind, directing and governing the actions of the body. And the actions of the body belong to Christian practices only secondarily, because they are dependent and consequent on the acts of the soul. The exercises of grace that Christians find, or are conscious of within themselves, are what they experience within themselves. Therefore Christian experience lies in this. And this Christian experience consists as much in those operative exercises of grace in the will, that immediately concern the management of the body’s behavior, as it does in other exercises. These inward exercises are not the lesser part of Christian experience, merely because they have outward behavior that is directly connected with them. A strong act of love towards God is not the lesser part of spiritual experience, merely

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63 “Chimney corner” refers to staying warm and cozy by the fireplace, while the wintery battle rages outside. – WHG
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because it is the act that immediately produces and effects some self-denying and costly outward action, which is much to the honor and glory of God.

To speak of Christian experience and practice as if they were two entirely distinct things, is to make a distinction without consideration or reason. Indeed, all Christian experience is not properly called practice; but all Christian practice is properly called experience. The distinction that is made between them is not only an unreasonable distinction, but an unscriptural one. Holy practice is one kind or part of Christian experience; and both reason and Scripture represent it as the chief, and the most important, and the most distinguishing part of it. This is how it is represented in Jer. 22:15-16: “Did your father not eat and drink, and do justice and judgment? He judged the cause of the poor and needy – Was this not to know me, says the Lord?” Our inward acquaintance with God surely belongs to the head of experiential religion. But God represents this as consisting chiefly in that experience which is found in holy practice. So the exercises of those graces of the love of God, and the fear of God, are a part of experiential religion. But the Scripture represents these as consisting chiefly in practice, as in those forementioned texts. 1John 5:3, “This is the love of God, that we keep his commandments.” 2John 1:6, “This is love, that we walk after his commandments.” Psalm 34:11, etc., “Come, you children, and I will teach you the fear of the Lord: depart from evil, and do good.” Hezekiah took comfort in experiences such as these, chiefly on his sick bed, when he said, “Remember, O Lord, I beg you, how I have walked before you in truth, and with a perfect heart.” And the Psalmist chiefly insists upon experiences such as these in the 119th Psalm, and elsewhere.

The Apostle Paul mainly insists on experiences such as these, when he speaks of his experiences in his epistles. Rom. 1:9, “God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son.” 2Cor. 1:12, “For our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience, that by the grace of God, we have conducted ourselves in the world.” Chap. 4:13, “Since we have the same spirit of faith, according to what is written, ‘I believed and therefore I spoke,’ we also believe and therefore speak.” Chap. 5:7, “We walk by faith, not by sight.” Ver. 14, “The love of Christ constrains us.” Chap. 6:4-7, “In all things we prove ourselves as the ministers of God: in much patience, in afflictions, in necessities, in distresses, in labors, in watchings, in fastings; by pureness, by knowledge, by kindness, by the Holy Ghost, by unfeigned love; by the power of God.” Gal. 2:20, “I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ lives in me: and the life, which I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God.” Phil. 3:7-8, “But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as dung, that I may gain Christ.” Col. 1:29, “For which I also labor, striving according to his working, which works in me mightily.” 1Thess. 2:2, “We were bold in our God, to speak the gospel of God to you, with much contention.” Ver. 8-10, “Being affectionately desirous for you, we were willing to impart to you, not only the gospel of God, but also our own souls, because you were dear to us. For you remember, brothers, our labor and travel, laboring night and day. You are witnesses, and God also, how devoutly, and justly, and blamelessly, we behaved ourselves among you.” This blessed apostle comforted himself chiefly in the consideration of experiences such as these when he was going to martyrdom: 2Tim. 4:6-7, “For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith.”

Not only does the most important and distinguishing part of Christian experience lie in spiritual practice, but the nature of these exercises of grace (in which spiritual practice consists) is such that nothing is more properly called “experimental religion.” For the experience which lies in these exercises of grace, are effectual at the very point of our trial, in which God proves what we actually cling to, whether Christ or our lusts. Thus the proper testing of the truth and power of our godliness – in which its victorious power and efficacy in producing its proper effect, and in reaching its proper end – is found by experience. This is properly Christian experience, in which
the saints have an opportunity to see by actual experience and trial, whether they have a heart to do the will of God, and to forsake all other things for Christ. What is called “experimental philosophy” tests opinions and notions as to their factualness. Similarly, experimental religion tests religious affections and intentions as to their factualness.

There is a sort of external religious practice in which there is no inward experience. No account is taken of it in the sight of God; it is esteemed good for nothing. And there is what is called experience without practice. It is neither accompanied by, nor followed by, Christian behavior; and this is worse than nothing. Many persons seem to have wrong notions of Christian experience, and spiritual light and revelations. Whenever a person finds within himself a heart to treat God as God, in the moment of his trial, and he finds that his disposition is effectual in that experiment, then that is the most proper and the most distinguishing experience. To have at such a time, that sense of divine things, that apprehension of the truth, importance, and excellency of the things of religion, which then sways, prevails, and governs his heart and his hands – this is the most excellent spiritual light, and these are the most distinguishing revelations. “Religion greatly consists in holy affection.” But those exercises of affection which are most distinguishing of true religion, are these practical exercises. Friendship between earthly friends greatly consists in affection. Yet, those strong exercises of affection that actually carry them through fire and water for each other, are the highest evidences of their true friendship.

There is nothing in what has been said that is contrary to what is asserted by some sound divines when they say that there are no sure evidences of grace, except the acts of grace. For that does not hinder the conclusion that these operative, productive acts, these exercises of grace that are effectual in practice, are the highest evidences of it above all other acts of grace. Nor does it hinder the conclusion that, when there are many of these acts and exercises following one another in a course, under various trials of every kind, the evidence is still heightened: one act confirms another. By seeing his neighbor once, a man may have good evidence of his presence. But seeing him from day to day, and conversing with him in various circumstances, establishes the evidence. When the disciples first saw Christ after his resurrection, they had good evidence that he was alive. But by conversing with him for forty days, and having him show himself to them alive by many infallible proofs, they had still higher evidence.

The witness or seal of the Spirit that we read about, doubtless consists in the effect of the Spirit of God on the heart, in the implantation and exercises of grace there. And and so it consists in our experience. It is also beyond doubt that this seal of the Spirit is the highest kind of evidence of the saints’ adoption that they will ever obtain. But in these exercises of grace in practice, God gives witness and he sets his seal on us in the most conspicuous, eminent, and evident manner. In the experience of the Christian church, it has been found to be true that Christ, by his Spirit, gives the greatest and most joyful evidences to his saints of their sonship.

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64 This is the “scientific method.” Psychological processes are being experimented on, or tested, by external behaviors. If you believe ‘x’ internally, then it should manifest itself as ‘y’ externally; or if you behave as ‘y’, then you must believe ‘x’. – WHG

65 “The more these visible exercises of grace are renewed, the more certain you will be. The more frequently these acts are renewed, the more abiding and confirmed your assurance will be. A man that has been assured of such visible exercises of grace, may quickly after be in doubt whether he was not mistaken. But when such acts are renewed again and again, he grows more settled and established about has good estate. If a man sees a thing once, that makes him sure; but, if afterwards, he fears he was deceived; when he comes to see it again, he is more sure he was not mistaken. If a man reads such passages in a book, he is sure it is so. Some months after, some may bear him down, that he was mistaken, so as to make him question it himself; but, when he looks, and reads it again, he is abundantly confirmed. The more men’s grace is multiplied, the more their peace is multiplied.” 2Pet. 1:2, “Grace and peace he multiplied to you, through the knowledge of God, and Jesus our Lord.” Stoddard’s Way to know Sincerity and Hypocrisy.

66 Rom 8.16; 2Cor 1.22.
And he does so in those effectual exercises of grace under trials, as spoken about, manifested in the full assurance and unspeakable joys of many of the martyrs. Agreeing with this is 1Pet. 4:14, “If you are reproached for the name of Christ you are happy; for the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you.” And in Rom. 5:2-3, “We rejoice in hope of the glory of God, and glory in tribulations.” And this also agrees with what the Apostle Paul often declares about what he experienced in his own trials. When the Apostle Peter talks about the unspeakable joy, and being full of glory, 1Pet 1:8 which the Christians to whom he wrote experienced, he refers to what they found under persecution. This is apparent from the context of the passage. Christ thus manifests himself as the friend and savior of his saints; they cling to him under trials. This was represented by his coming to and manifesting himself to Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the furnace. 

Dan 3:25

When the apostle speaks of the witness of the Spirit in Rom. 8:15-17, he more directly refers to what the Christians experienced in their exercises of love towards God, in suffering persecution, as the context makes plain. In the preceding verses, Paul encourages the Christian Romans under their sufferings, that although their bodies are dead because of sin, yet they should be raised to life again. But it is especially made plain by the verse immediately following it. Verse 18, “For I reckon, that the sufferings of this present time, are not worthy to be compared to the glory that shall be revealed in us.” So the apostle evidently refers to their persecutions in all that he says to the end of the chapter. When the apostle speaks of the earnest of the Spirit which God had given to him (2Cor. 5:5), the context plainly shows that he refers to what was given to him during his great trials and sufferings. In that promise of the white stone and new name, given to the one who overcomes (Rev. 2:17), it is evident that Christ especially refers to a benefit that Christians obtain by overcoming in the trial they have on that day of persecution. This is apparent in verse 13, and in many other passages in this epistle to the seven churches of Asia.

Objection II.

Some also may be ready to object to what was said of Christian practice being the chief evidence of the truth of grace – that this is a legalistic doctrine. It makes practice a thing of such great importance in religion, that it magnifies works, and so it leads men to make too much of their own doings. It thereby diminishes the glory of free grace, and is inconsistent with the doctrine of justification by faith alone.

This objection is altogether without reason. In what way is it inconsistent with the free grace of God, to say that holy practice is a sign of God’s grace? Works being the price of God’s favor, and not the sign of it, is the thing that is inconsistent with the freeness of God’s favor. Surely a beggar looking at the money in his hands as a sign of the kindness of the person who gave it to him, is in no way inconsistent with the freeness of that kindness. Having money in his hands as the price of a benefit, is the thing that is inconsistent with the free kindness of the giver. The notion of the freeness of God’s grace towards sinners, as revealed and taught in the gospel, is not that holy and amiable qualifications or actions in us cannot be a fruit and a sign of that grace. Rather, the worthiness or loveliness of any qualification or action of ours does not merit such grace. God’s kindness is shown to the unworthy and unlovely. There is great excellence in the benefit that is freely bestowed; but there no excellence in the subject as a price paid for that benefit. Goodness goes forth and flows out of the fullness of God’s nature, the fullness of the fountain of his good, without any amiableness in the object to draw it out.

This is the notion of justification without works (as this doctrine is taught in the Scripture): that it is not the worthiness or loveliness of our works, or anything in us, which is in any way accepted by God to balance the guilt of our sin. Nor do our works or anything in us recommend us to God, to be accepted by him as heirs to eternal life. Thus we are justified only by the righteousness of Christ, and not by our own righteousness. When works are opposed to faith in this affair, and it is said that we are justified by faith and not by works, what is meant is that it is
not the worthiness or amiableness of our works, or anything in us, which recommends us to have an interest in Christ and his benefits. Rather, we have this interest only by faith, or by receiving Christ, or by adhering to and being drawn to him. Nothing in our worthiness or amiableness, recommends us or brings us to have an interest in Christ. But this is not an argument that nothing in us can be a sign of already having an interest in Christ.

If the doctrines of free grace and justification by faith alone are inconsistent with the importance of holy practice as a sign of grace, then these are equally inconsistent with the importance of anything in us being a sign of grace, holiness, or any other grace in us, or indeed of any of our experiences of religion. For it is as contrary to the doctrines of free grace and justification by faith alone, that any of these should be the righteousness by which we are justified, or that holy practice would be our righteousness. It is the same for holy works, as it is for holy qualifications. It is inconsistent with the freeness of gospel grace, that a title to salvation should be given to men for the loveliness of any of their holy qualifications. And it is inconsistent that salvation should be given for the holiness of their works. It is inconsistent with the gospel doctrine of free grace, that any interest in Christ and his benefits should be given to someone,

- for the loveliness of his holiness,
- for the amiableness of his renewed, sanctified, heavenly heart,
- for his love towards God and being like God,
- for his experience of joy in the Holy Ghost,
- for self-emptiness,
- for a spirit to exalt Christ above all, and to give all glory to him, or
- for a heart that is devoted to him.

I say it is inconsistent with the gospel doctrine of free grace, that a title to Christ’s benefits should be given out of regard for the loveliness of any of these, or that any of these should be our righteousness in the affair of justification. And yet, this does not hinder the importance of these things as evidences of an interest in Christ. It is the same with respect to holy actions and works.

Making light of works because we are not justified by works, is the same as making light of all religion, all grace and holiness, indeed, true evangelical holiness, and all gracious experience. For all these are included when the Scripture says, we are not justified by works. For works in this case, means all our own righteousness, religion, or holiness, and everything that is in us; all the good we do, and all the good which we are conscious of; all external acts, and all internal acts and exercises of grace; all experiences; and all those holy and heavenly things in which the life and power, and the very essence of religion consist. It includes all those great things which Christ and his apostles insisted on in their preaching, and endeavored to promote as of the greatest consequence in the hearts and lives of men. It includes all good dispositions, and all exercises and qualifications of every kind – even faith itself, considered as a part of our holiness. For we are justified by none of these things. If we were, then we would, in a Scripture sense, be justified by works.

Therefore, if it is legalistic, and if it is contrary to the evangelical doctrine of justification without works, to insist that any of these is of great importance, and that they are evidences of an interest in Christ – then it is no less legalistic and contrary to insist on the importance of holy practice. It would be legalistic to suppose that holy practice justifies us by obtaining a title to Christ’s benefits, as the price of that title; or that holy practice recommends us for that title by its preciousness or excellence. But it is not legalistic to suppose that holy practice justifies the sincerity of a believer, as the proper evidence of it.
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The Apostle James did not think it legalistic to say that Abraham our father was justified by works in this sense. The Spirit that indited the Scripture, did not think the great importance and absolute necessity of holy practice, in this respect, is inconsistent with the freeness of grace. For it commonly teaches them together, as in Rev. 21:6-7. God says, “I will freely give from the fountain of the water of life to him who thirsts.” and then he adds, “he that overcomes shall inherit all things” – as though behaving well in the Christian race and warfare was the condition of the promise. So in the next chapter, in the 14th and 15th verses, Christ says, “Blessed are those who do his commandments, that they may have a right to the tree of life, and enter into the city through the gates;” and then he declares in the 15th verse, “how those who are of a wicked practice” shall be excluded; and yet in the two verses following, with great solemnity, he invites all to come and take of the water of life freely: “I am the root and the offsprings of David, the bright and morning star. And the Spirit and the bride say, come. Let him that hears, come. And let him that is thirsty, come; and whoever would, let him come and take of the water of life freely.” So too in chapter 3:20-21, “Behold I stand at the door and knock; if any man hears my voice, and opens the door, I will come in to him, and sup with him, and he with me.” But then it adds, “To him that overcomes, I will grant to sit with me in my throne.” And in that great invitation of Christ in the latter end of Matt. 11, “Come to me, all you that labor, and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest;” Christ adds in the next words, “Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am meek and lowly in heart; and you will find rest for your souls; for my yoke is easy, and my burden is light;” – as though taking the burden of Christ’s service, and imitating his example, were necessary in order to obtain the promised rest. So too in that great invitation to sinners to accept free grace in Isa. 55, “Listen everyone that thirsts, come to the waters; and he that has no money, come, buy and eat, indeed, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.” Even there, in the continuation of the same invitation, the sinner forsaking his wicked practice is necessary to obtain mercy. Verse 7, “Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return to the Lord, and he will have mercy on him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.” So the riches of divine grace, in the justification of sinners, is set forth with the necessity of holy practice. Isa. 1:16 ff., “Wash: make yourself clean; put away the evil of your doings from before my eyes; cease to do evil; learn to do well; seek judgment; relieve the oppressed; judge the fatherless; plead for the widow. Come now, let us reason together, says the Lord; though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall be as wool.”

And in that most solemn invitation of wisdom, Prov. 9, it first represents what real provision has been made, and how all things were ready: the house was built, the beasts killed, the wine mingled, the table furnished, and the messengers sent forth to invite the guests. Then we have the free invitation, verses 4-6: “Whoever is simple, let him turn in here; as for the one who wants understanding [i.e. who has no righteousness] she says to him, Come, eat of my bread, and drink of the wine which I have mingled.” But then in the next breath it follows, “Forsake the foolish and live; go in the way of understanding;” as though forsaking sin, and going in the way of holiness, were necessary in order to obtain life. So the freeness of grace, and the necessity of holy practice, which are from time to time joined together in Scripture, are not inconsistent with one another. Nor does it at all diminish the honor and importance of faith, that the exercises and effects of faith in practice, should be considered the chief signs of it – any more than it lessens the importance of life, that action and motion are considered the chief signs of it.

So that, in what has been said of the importance of holy practice as the main sign of sincerity, there is nothing legalistic, nothing derogatory to the freedom and sovereignty of gospel grace, nothing in the least that clashes with the gospel doctrine of justification by faith alone, apart from works of the law. There is nothing in the least tending to lessen the glory of the Mediator,

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67 Indited: to produce a literary work. “…for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit. (2Pe 1:21)
and our dependence on his righteousness; nothing infringes on the special prerogatives of faith in the affair of our salvation; nothing in any way detracts from the glory of God and his mercy, or exalts man, or diminishes his dependence and obligation. So if any are against the importance of holy practice as spoken of, then it can only be from a senseless aversion to the letters and sound of the word works. There is no other reason in the world for it. But what may be asked with equal force is, why should they not have an aversion to the words holiness, godliness, grace, religion, experience, and even faith itself? For making any of these into a righteousness, is as legalistic and inconsistent with the way of the new covenant, as it would be to make a righteousness of holy practice.

It greatly hurts religion for persons to make light of, or to little insist on, those things which the Scripture most insists on as important evidence of our interest in Christ. They do so under a notion that laying weight on these things is legalistic, and an old covenant way. And so they neglect the exercises and effectual operations of grace in practice. They insist almost entirely on revelations, and on the method and manner of the immanent exercises of conscience and of grace in contemplation. They depend on an ability to make fine distinctions in these matters, and on having a faculty for accurately discerning such things from mere philosophy or experience. It is useless to search for better or further signs of godliness than those expressly mentioned, and most frequently insisted on in the Scripture. Some pretend great accuracy in the signs they give, or by their extraordinary experience or insight to be able to provide better distinguishing marks, in order to thoroughly search out and detect the hypocrite. These are but subtle things to darken their own minds and the minds of others. In God's sight, their refinements and fine discernments are but refined foolishness and a sagacious delusion. Here, the words of Agur are applicable. Prov. 30:5-6, “Every word of God is pure; he is a shield to those who put their trust in him: do not add to his words lest he reprove you, and you be found a liar.”

Our discerning, with regard to the hearts of men, is not to be trusted much. We can see only a little way into the nature of the soul, and the depths of a man's heart. The ways are so many by which a person's affections may be moved without any supernatural influence – the natural springs of the affections are so various and so secret, and so many things often have a joint influence on the affections and the imagination, in innumerable and unsearchable ways. Natural temper, education, the common influences of the Spirit of God, a surprising confluence of affecting circumstances, an extraordinary coincidence of things in the course of men's thoughts, combined with the subtle management of invisible malicious spirits, are such that no philosophy or experience will ever be sufficient to guide us safely through this labyrinth and maze – not without closely following the clues which God has given us in his word. God knows his own reasons why he insists on some things. He plainly sets them forth as the things that we should test ourselves by, rather than others. It may be it is because he knows that these things are attended by less perplexity, and that we are less liable to be deceived by them than others. He best knows our nature; and he knows the nature and manner of his own operations; and he best

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68 “You say you know Christ, and the love and good-will of Christ towards you, and that he is the propitiation for your sins. How do you know this? ‘He that says I know him, and does not keep his commandments, is a liar,’ 1John 2. 4. True, might some reply, he that does not keep the commands of Christ, thereby has a sure evidence that he does not know him, and that he is not united to him: but if we keep his commandments, is this any evidence that we do know him, and that we are united to him? Yes, truly, says the apostle, “By this we know that we know him, if we keep his commandments.” And again, ver. 5. “By this we know that we are in him.” What can be more plain? What a vanity it is to say that this is running on a covenant of works? O beloved, it is a sad thing to hear such questions and such cold answers also, that sanctification may possibly be an evidence. May be? Is it not certain? Assuredly, to deny it is as bad as to affirm that God's own promises of favor are not sure evidences of it, and consequently that they are lies and untruths. Our Saviour, who was no legal preacher, pronounces and consequently evidences blessedness, by eight or nine promises, expressly made to such persons who had inherent graces, Matt. 5.3-4, etc.” — Shepard’s Sound Believer p. 221-223.

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knows the way of our safety; he knows what allowances to make for different states of his church, and for different tempers of particular persons, and for the varieties in the manner of his own operations; he knows how far nature may resemble grace, and how far nature may be mixed with grace; and what affections may arise from the imagination; and how far imagination may be mixed with spiritual illumination.

Therefore, it is wise not to take his work out of his hands, but instead to follow him, and to lay the stress of judging ourselves where he has directed us to lay it. If we do otherwise, then it is no wonder that we are bewildered, confounded, and fatally deluded. But if we look chiefly at those things which Christ, his apostles, and his prophets chiefly insisted on, and if we judge ourselves and others chiefly by regarding the practical exercises and effects of grace (though not neglecting other things), then it would have a manifold happy consequence. Above all things,

- it would tend to convict deluded hypocrites;
- it would prevent the delusion of those whose hearts were never brought to a thorough compliance with the straight and narrow way which leads to life;
- it would tend to deliver us from the innumerable perplexities that arise from various inconsistent schemes which weigh the methods and steps of experience, instead of practice;
- it would greatly tend to prevent professors from neglecting the strictness of life;
- it would tend to promote engagement and earnestness in their Christian walk;
- it would become fashionable for men to show their Christianity more by an amiable and distinguished behavior, than by an abundant and excessive declaration of their experiences.

We would get on the way to appearing lively in our religion, more by being lively in the service of God and our generation, than by the liveliness and eagerness of our tongues, or by making a business of proclaiming from the rooftops the holy and eminent acts and exercises of our own hearts. Christians who are intimate friends would talk together about their experiences and comforts, in a manner that better becomes Christian humility and modesty, and more to each other’s profit. Their tongues would not run before, but after their hands and feet, following the prudent example of the blessed apostle in 2Cor. 12:6. 69 Many occasions for spiritual pride would be cut off – and so a great door would shut against the devil. A great many of the main stumbling-blocks against experiential and powerful religion would be removed. Religion would be declared and manifested in such a way that, instead of hardening spectators, and promoting infidelity and atheism, it would above all things tend to convince men that there is a reality in religion. It would greatly awaken them, and win them, by convincing their consciences of the importance and excellency of religion. Thus the light of those who profess their faith in Christ would so shine before men, that others, seeing their good works, would glorify their Father which is in heaven. Mat 5:16

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69 2Co 12:6 For though I might desire to boast, I will not be a fool; for I will speak the truth. But I refrain, lest anyone should think of me above what he sees me to be or hears from me.
Appendix – Analysis By Victor Shepherd

The revivals of 1734 and 1740 were the immediate context of Edward’s reflections giving rise to Religious Affections which is an analysis of the role of experience in Christian life and understanding. The book appeared in 1746, two years after Edwards declared that the revival was over.

Edwards can’t be understood if we espouse a traditional head/heart dualism. Edwards insisted, rather, on a unitary self, e.g., concerning his understanding of “affection.”

[1] Affection is not the same as emotion.

Affection is a felt response to an object called forth by an understanding of the nature of the object. Plainly, where there’s no understanding there can be no affection, regardless of how much emotion is present. (There was no shortage of emotion during the revivals.)

[2] Affections differ from passions. Passions,

(a) are inclinations that overpower an individual, thus diminishing self-control

(b) captivate people. To be captive to a passion is to be passive. Such passivity is a denial of the active response aspect of an affection. Whereas passion enslaves the will, affection is an exercise of the will. An affection is a response of the total self as the nature of something (someone) is apprehended.

In the course of the revivals, Edwards met people who admitted that previously they had assented to the gospel-truth, but who with a new “sense” born of spiritual understanding could “see” the truth and committed themselves to it (Him). [Note the empiricist/intuitionist vocabulary from the Enlightenment: “sense”, “see”.] These people apprehended the nature of God (in the gospel), were seized by its truth or “excellency” (a favourite word of Edwards’), and their conviction generated their commitment.

Note the shift from assensus to fiducia, born of apprehending the nature of God. A “sense” or affection was a concomitant of the apprehension.

Note also that for Edwards “affection” includes understanding and will. (Here he differs from the older “faculty” notion that understanding, will, and affection are related but distinct.)

Edwards wishes to provide people with criteria for exposing counterfeit piety (bodily contortions or jerks, imaginings or visions as such -- what he called “negative signs.”

Edwards sought to identify “enthusiasm (in Wesley’s sense), superstition, and intemperate zeal.”

Edwards insisted that experience, as such, was an insufficient criterion; experience must always be measured by scripture.

In Religious Affections, Edwards identifies true piety with the fruit of the Spirit, or holy affections. Positive religion consists in holy affections; these in turn are a means of “testing the spirits.”

Edwards maintains that love (here he has in mind love for God) is

(a) the paramount affection,

(b) the fountain of all the affections.

Note Edwards' subtle discernment: Satan is to be seen in both the revivals and in those who oppose revivals. In the revivals, false affections are the tares among the wheat; in those who oppose revivals, there is the denial that affections are essential to the Christian life. In other words, since affect-less Christian life is impossible, affect-less revival is equally impossible.

Note Edwards’ two further qualifications:

(i) the Spirit doesn’t everywhere follow the same order of operations. e.g., it mustn’t be assumed that people must first be terrified to the point of despair before they can embrace Jesus Christ in faith. (Here Edwards differs from much Puritanism.) In the same way, not all fear of judgement is holy; some is mere self-preservation, and therefore it is a manifestation of selfism. (Wesley made this point in Catholic Spirit.)
(ii) other people cannot judge someone’s spiritual state. We can only assess our own, under the God who alone is the ultimate searcher of the heart.

**FIRST SIGN: a new inward perception, a new sense of the heart** (lacking in unbelievers.)

Here there is a realm or sphere of affection that is not naturally generated. The holy affection is now the new basis for the understanding and the will. Genuine believers are aware of the sphere of the spiritual, of the Divine-human encounter as reality. This new inward perception or sense affects the self as a unity: the new self will manifest itself in all that a person thinks, feels, or does.

**SECOND SIGN: a pure love for God without any utilitarian consideration.**

This affection arises entirely from the perception and contemplation of God’s glory. i.e., believers mature beyond loving God for what he has done for them, to loving God for who he is in himself; better yet, what he does for us is an expression of who he is in himself.

Edwards insists that regardless of what Satan can counterfeit, Satan cannot counterfeit an “intrinsic nature”; i.e., Satan cannot counterfeit the intrinsic nature of God, or of a holy love towards God. Satan cannot simulate holy love just because he has none.

**THIRD SIGN: a sense of, or “taste” of, the beauty of God’s holiness.**

(Edwards understands God’s holiness as God’s “goodness” or “moral excellency.” Is he right in this?) Not to apprehend the beauty of God’s holiness, is to declare oneself spiritually obtuse.

**FOURTH SIGN: gracious affections arise from a spiritually enlightened mind.**

Spiritual understanding is a spiritual “sense” that apprehends the nature of God in that, one is now a participant rather than an observer. Because of one’s being a “participant,” such understanding is qualitatively different from all natural knowledge.

Definition of “spiritual understanding”: “a sense of the heart for the supreme beauty and sweetness of the holiness of moral perfection of divine things, together with all that discerning and knowledge of the things of religion that depend on and flow from such a sense” (p. 115) – e.g., the person of Jesus Christ, scripture, obedience, prayer. We can apprehend the nature and significance of these only as we have a heart-sense for God’s holiness. Edwards likens this (in a naturalistic analogy) to someone with a musical ear. Such a person can judge spontaneously, without making any deductions or hearing any arguments. Such spontaneous judgement is “taste,” and “taste reacts immediately and anticipates all reflection.” Such taste is “a relish of the heart.” This relish means that spiritual understanding already contains inclination and judgement.

**FIFTH SIGN: gracious affections “are associated with historical evidence and true conviction.”**

The emphasis here is on the conviction that arises from the apprehension of the excellency of God. Conviction arises from a direct (non-speculative, non-balance of probability) apprehension of truth; i.e., there is a “mystical” immediacy.

Edwards uses “historical” in a peculiar way: he means that conviction doesn’t arise from visions and raptures, but rather from the spiritual understanding grasping God’s glory in the scriptures; i.e., the conviction is internal and intrinsic to the gospel itself.

**SIXTH SIGN: gracious affections flow from deep awareness of personal insufficiency.**

Here Edwards moves beyond Puritan “legal humbling” (the unbeliever’s self-renunciation arising from one’s inability to keep the Law of God) to “evangelical humbling” (the believer’s “sense” of the majesty and awesomeness of God.)

**SEVENTH SIGN: gracious affections change us to be more Christ-like.**

Edwards emphasizes change of nature; he does not emphasize an identifiable moment of conversion.
This new nature perdures.¹

The unregenerate may be restrained from (outward) sin; the regenerate is restrained from sin because he is turned towards a life of holiness. [cf. Thomas Chalmers, “the expulsive power of a new affection.”]

**EIGHTH SIGN: gracious affections have Christ-like gentleness.**

Here Edwards has in mind not spinelessness, but rather the biblical meaning of “boldness: strength exercised through gentleness. (The wild horse now tamed and therefore useful, but whose spirit remains unbroken; the victorious general who spares a conquered people.)

Edwards opposed “brutal fierceness”, displayed too often by the “fleshly” people in revivals. Such “brutal fierceness”, said Edwards, is (a) an indulgence of our depravity, and (b) pride.

Zeal is to be exercised against evil, but never against people.

Fervour is always to manifest itself as fervent love.

“An ugly, selfish, angry and contentious spirit” is no sign of the Spirit.

**NINTH SIGN: gracious affections soften the heart in Christian tenderness.**

Horror at sin (past and present) is a sign of such tenderness; such horror must never recede.

After conversion, one’s sense of guilt may be removed, but one’s sensitivity to sin will be intensified.

Here Edwards, like all spiritual counsellors, distinguishes between servile fear and reverential fear. [Ronald Ward: “If we fear God we shall never have to be afraid of him.”]

**TENTH SIGN: gracious affections are consistent and constant.**

These gracious affections display “beautiful symmetry and proportion.” i.e., the Christian life is balanced.

Counterfeit graces of hypocrites give rise to a “monstrous disproportion in affections.”

E.g., We are to exemplify both love for God and love for neighbour. Our love for neighbour is to embrace both spiritual concern and material concern.

At the same time Edwards is not suggesting perfectionism: the godliest remain “unsteady,” and ultimately aspire to constancy.

**ELEVENTH SIGN: gracious affections intensify spiritual longings.**

Ever-increasing spiritual appetite is a sign of true piety.

Believers exemplify a hunger for holiness for its own sake.

**TWELFTH SIGN: holy practice.**

(Edwards discusses signs 1-11 in 200 pages, the 12th sign in 80 pages.)

(i) the believer's conduct is always to be governed by Christ’s claim

(ii) holy practice is the Christian’s chief business

(iii) obedience to Christ’s claim betokens the genuineness of conviction.

In other words. the chief evidence of grace is holy practice, not vivid inner experiences.

**Source:** [http://www.victorshepherd.on.ca/Course/Historical%20Theology/new_page_9.htm](http://www.victorshepherd.on.ca/Course/Historical%20Theology/new_page_9.htm)

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¹ That is, it permanently endures
Prior to joining the Tyndale faculty in 1993, Dr. Shepherd was Adjunct Professor in the Department of Church History, Emmanuel College, University of Toronto, the Department of Religious Studies, McMaster University and the Department of Religious Studies, Memorial University of Newfoundland. A frequent lecturer, he has addressed learned societies both in Canada and abroad, including the North American Calvin Studies Society and the Oxford Institute of Methodist Theological Studies.

An adjunct professor at the Toronto School of Theology (University of Toronto) Dr. Shepherd supervises PhD comprehensive examinations and dissertations on themes related to the Sixteenth Century Reformation and to the tradition arising from it.

Dr. Shepherd earned his Th.D. from Emmanuel College, University of Toronto, in 1978. In 1995 he was awarded an honorary doctorate from Roberts Wesleyan College in Rochester, N.Y., in recognition of his contribution to Wesley studies.

A Presbyterian, ordained in 1970 to the ministry of Word, Sacrament and Pastoral Care, Dr. Shepherd has served four pastorates in New Brunswick and Ontario. He is the author of six books and numerous journal articles that reflect his extensive pastoral and academic experience. A long-time advocate for the mentally ill and the under-housed, he has served on the board of the Peel Mental Health Housing Coalition and Pathway Community Developments.

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