

THE
POOR DOUBTING CHRISTIAN

DRAWN TO CHRIST:

*In which the main hindrances which keep men from
coming to Christ are revealed; with special helps
to recover God's favor.*

BY REV. THOMAS HOOKER,
FIRST MINISTER OF HARTFORD, CONNECTICUT

With an abstract of the Author's life:

Also an Introduction, by

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Isa 55.1. Ho, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters,
and he that has no money, come, buy and eat; yes, come,
buy wine and milk without money, and without price.

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Formatted, corrected, annotated, and modernized by
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Contents

Introduction.	3
Biographical Sketch.	5
ADDENDUM.....	9
Supplement to the Biographical Sketch.	10
CHAPTER 1.	11
Impediments which hinder souls from coming to Christ, removed.	11
CHAPTER 2.	22
Helps to come to Christ.....	22
CHAPTER 3.	29
Rules to direct a Christian how to use the word of God for his evidence, or assurance with peace.	29
CHAPTER 4.	35
Means to obtain an interest in the promises.....	35
CHAPTER 5.	42
How a man shall be trained up, that he may get the skill of living by faith.....	42
The Conclusion.	54

Editor’s Note on modernization:

The language of the Puritans, and of the editor of 1845, was the language of the King James Bible, beautiful and comprehensible in its day, but less so now. The words no longer have the same meaning; and the style is “out of fashion.” I updated the *Introduction* and *Biographical Sketch*, as well as the text of the book. The syntax of Dr. Hooker is awkward to the modern ear, though perhaps poetic in his day. Where he says, “happiness eternal,” there may be objections if I change it to “eternal happiness.” But for the modern ear, and for those with English as a second language, it gets between the author’s message and his *current* audience. I believe he should be heard clearly, because what he has to say is still vital to our Christian walk.

To aid our understanding of what Thomas Hooker would have us hear, syntax has been simplified, vocabulary updated, spelling Americanized, implicit words made explicit, ambiguous pronouns given references, some italics and contractions added, and wordiness reduced. Run-on sentences have been broken into separate sentences; and his many parenthetical statements have been somewhat corralled. I corrected what appeared to be a couple of stenographic errors (footnoted). Meanwhile, I strived to preserve the author’s own voice and style.

This book provides a precious assurance of salvation to those who are poor in spirit, and doubting in their faith – who may have slipped into the swamp of despair, Bunyan’s “slough of despond.” This book is “Help,” with an outstretched hand.¹

William H. Gross
July 7, 2020

¹ Re: John Bunyan, *Pilgrim’s Progress* (1678).

Introduction.

EVERY minister, especially if a pastor, meets with Christians who suffer spiritual trials of various forms and degrees of intensity. His solicitude as a conscientious and affectionate watchman for souls, is awakened for them, while he yet feels uncertain on the precise counsels to be given for their instruction and relief. Therefore, a book which can be put into their hands, adapted to their needs — one they can read repeatedly; examine their own hearts by; pray over; aid in their understanding of the causes of their sorrows, and finding their way out of perplexity and darkness into light and comfort — such a book cannot fail to be esteemed of great worth. A book of such a character, it is believed, will be found in the present little volume. It will subserve the twofold purpose of guarding Christians against the devices of their adversary, and preventing discomfort and mistakes relative to their spiritual state. The biographical sketch of the venerable author will apprise the reader of how well qualified he was to deal with cases of spiritual perplexity.

Not only the private Christian, but the minister, will find this little work worthy of frequent perusal. As the physician avails himself of the books of experienced and skillful practitioners, so the Christian minister feels it a privilege to avail himself of the results of the studies, experience, and observation of his fathers and brethren — those who have been wise and successful in their treatment of the cases of afflicted and tender-spirited Christians.

It cannot be doubted that there is a danger of “healing the hurt” of the professor of religion too readily. Peace and comfort may be administered where they do not belong; or before the way is prepared. There are probably professors of religion who have occasion to doubt themselves. The one in whom a worldly spirit predominates — whose example is inconsistent with his Christian covenant; who lives in an unsettled, uneasy, and skeptical frame of mind relative to great and fundamental doctrines of the gospel; or who has adopted unscriptural views of divine truth; or contends with those doctrines of the Scriptures which humble human pride, and show man entirely dependent on the sovereign grace of God; or who is endeavoring to make hope and profession the means of his quiet, notwithstanding the disturbances and rebukes of a dissatisfied conscience; — the professor of religion in whom any of these things appear, has serious reason to be afraid for himself. The following pages do not appear to have been written for such a person. Instead, Fuller’s *Backslider*; Mead’s *Almost Christian*; Alleine’s *Alarm*, and Baxter’s *Call to the Unconverted*, are recommended for their serious perusal. The faithful minister will make it one object of his instructions, to disturb the peace of such professors. For they may be ruined by self-deception, unless their peace is broken up and replaced by “a better hope.”

This book, therefore, should be read with a right understanding of its design, and of the precise class of cases to which its counsels are adapted. It is designed for “mourners in Zion:” for those children of God whose “souls are cast down and disquieted within them:” for those who “walk softly before the Lord;” who live in conflict with sin in themselves; who have been wounded with “the fiery darts of the wicked one;” and who would prize, inestimably, the peace and comfort to be obtained by going to Calvary, and in “sitting at the feet of Jesus.”¹

It is probable that the present volume will fall into the hands of some who have prematurely entered the visible church. Views of religion have been taught in recent years, which have multiplied such cases to an alarming extent. Under the influence of erroneous instruction, many (it is feared) have made a profession of religion because they have resolved in a general way to live “religiously.” They have begun to do some of the *outward* things of religion; while (to use the language of David Brainard) they “do not see any manner of difference between those exercises which are spiritual and holy, and those which have self-love for their beginning, center, and end!” The statement of such subjects of Christian experience, which are contained in this book, may be

¹ In other words, this book is written for the believer, not for the unbeliever. As such, when Hooker speaks of grace, he mostly means the work of grace in sanctification, not salvation; he speaks of the fruit, not the root. — WHG

met by this class of persons, with the language of the skeptical Athenians to Paul: “You bring certain strange things to our ears.” It is affectionately suggested for their consideration, that to have come into the visible church in ignorance of those spiritual affections which are produced in the renewed heart by the Holy Spirit, is to have taken a step that is attended with serious hazard. The one who professes religion in *ignorance* or *skepticism* of the offices and work of Christ in our redemption, does it to the endangering of his soul. The one who comes to the altar of God to declare himself a Christian, and to take a Christian’s vows — who misunderstands, disesteems, or calls into question the offices and work of the Holy Spirit in regeneration — equally imperils his eternal interests.

If the perusal of the following pages by those who profess religion, induces in them a spirit of inquiry, a review of their religious course, self-examination, and the correction of mistaken views as to the work of grace and its Author — and if any perplexed and trembling Christian would be relieved, established, and comforted in being “drawn to Christ” — then it will not be in vain that the venerable author of this book, in its republication, has broken the silence of more than a hundred years, to speak again to the children of God, “the heirs of salvation.”

It is respectfully suggested for the consideration of ministers of the gospel, to inquire whether the methods of instruction and counsel exemplified in this book, may not be too rare at the present day. Shouldn’t those to whom Christ has said, “feed my sheep, feed my lambs,” cultivate that acquaintance with the members of their churches? Shouldn’t pastors take that interest in their members’ spiritual condition, which will better prepare them to understand their religious trials, perplexities, and conflicts — and help themselves to more wisely and successfully administer for their comfort and establishment in the hope which is in Christ Jesus? In such duties will be found some of the most interesting and profitable labors of the pastor. It is good to thus be laborers together with Christ, in “comforting those who mourn in Zion.”

In the revision of this volume for the press, the editor has confined himself principally to changes in the orthography (spelling), and the omission of numeral repetitions. The author appears to have translated his Scripture proofs for himself; this accounts for discrepancies from the received English text.

No apology is offered for leaving the author to speak in the style of his time. Antiquated though it may be, in some instances, it has a simplicity and force of expression which should not be sacrificed to so unimportant an object as giving ancient thoughts a modern dress. Puritan thoughts are best expressed in the style of their Puritan authors. That is not good taste which would bring up from his grave, a writer of another century, to express himself in the style of the present day. Moreover, changes made in an author’s style, place at risk the precise import of his writings. And thus shades of difference (or even something more important than shades) may be introduced. This does injustice to his true sentiments, and frustrates the original design of his work. There is nothing in the fact that a man has been gone to his grave a hundred years, or only as many days, to justify taking liberties with his book, which we would not dare to take if he were living; and in which he may be made to speak unlike himself, either as to his style, or the character of his thoughts. ¹

E. W. HOOKER.

Theol. Inst. of Connecticut.
East Windsor, Feb. 1845.

¹ I nonetheless “freshened” it for a new generation. There is a growing hunger among the “new reformed” for the truth and the passion of these timeless Puritan authors — to inflame and inform their own labors in these troubled days. Language should not get in the way of their message. *Smoldering wicks, He shall not quench* (Isa 42.3). — WHG

Biographical Sketch.

MR. THOMAS HOOKER was one of the most esteemed divines in England, Holland, and New England, in his day — for his great abilities, a piercing judgment, solid learning, extraordinary sanctity, deep acquaintance with the Scriptures and with experiential divinity, and for awakening and successful preaching. His name and writings were very dear to multitudes of the most serious Christians in those distant countries. Dr. Cotton Mather tells us the following:

“He was born at Marfield, in Leicestershire, in England, about the year 1586. His natural temper was cheerful and courteous; but accompanied with such a sensible grandeur of mind, that it caused his friends to prognosticate that he was born to be considerable. His parents gave him a liberal education, and sent him to Cambridge. There he was chosen a proctor of the University (whose office is to see good orders and exercises duly performed there). The influence he had there in the reformation of some growing abuses, signalized him; and he became a fellow of Emanuel College. The ability and fidelity with which he acquitted himself in his fellowship, was sensible to the whole University. And while he was in this employment, the more effectual grace of God gave him the experience of a true regeneration. It pleased the Spirit of God to break into the soul of this person very powerfully, with such a sense of his being exposed to the just wrath of heaven, that it filled him with the most unusual degrees of horror and anguish. It broke not only his rest, but his heart also. And it caused him to cry out, *While I suffer your terrors, O Lord, I am distraught.* (Psa 88.15)

“He long had a soul harassed with such distresses. He afterwards gave this account of himself: that in the time of his agonies, he could reason himself to the rule,¹ and conclude that there was no other way than submission to God — lying at the foot of his mercy in Christ Jesus, and waiting humbly there till He was pleased to persuade the soul of His favor. Nevertheless, when he came to apply this rule to himself, in his own condition, his reasoning would fail him; he was able to do nothing. Having been thus troubled for a considerable while with such impressions from the *spirit of bondage*, he at length received the *spirit of adoption*, with a well-grounded persuasion of his interest in the New Covenant. This would fit him for the great services and employments which God intended for him. It became his manner at lying down for sleep in the evening, to single out some certain promise of God, which he would repeat and ponder, and keep his heart close to it, until he found that satisfaction of soul with which he could say, *I will lay me down in peace and sleep; for You, O Lord, make me dwell in assurance.* And he would afterwards counsel others to take the same course — telling them that the promise was the boat which was to carry a perishing sinner over to the Lord Jesus Christ. Having gotten well through the storm of soul, which had helped him to a most experiential acquaintance with the truths of the gospel, and to the way of employing and applying those truths, he was willing to serve the church of God in the ministry.

“Leaving the University, he now had no superior, and scarcely any equal, for the skill of treating a troubled soul. He publicly and frequently preached around London. And in a little time, he grew famous for his ministerial abilities — but especially for his notable faculty at the wise and fit management of wounded spirits. Mr. Rogers, of Dedham, ² so highly valued Hooker for his multifaceted abilities, that he used many endeavors to get him settled at Colchester. But Chelmsford, in Essex, a town of great concourse, hearing the fame of Mr. Hooker’s powerful ministry, asked him to become their lecturer. About the year 1626, he accepted their offer. He became not only their lecturer, but also on the Lord’s days, an assistant to one Mr. Mitchel, the incumbent of the place. Being a godly person, he gladly encouraged Mr. Hooker, and lived with him in most comfortable amity. Here his lecture was exceedingly frequented and succeeded;

¹ “The rule” is exercising the spiritual disciplines (Bible-study, prayer, meditation) to pursue growth in holiness.

² The famous Mr. John Rogers, minister of the Parish Church of Dedham, in England.

Biographical Sketch

and the light of his ministry shone through the whole county of Essex. His hearers felt those penetrating impressions of his ministry upon their souls, which caused them to reverence him as a teacher sent from God. As his person was adorned with learning, so his preaching was set off with an extraordinary liveliness. Yet the vigor in his ministry being raised like a coal from the altar, it would be a wrong to the good spirit of God, if He were not acknowledged to be the author of it. That Spirit accordingly gave a wonderful and unusual success to the ministry in which He so remarkably breathed. Hereby a great reformation was wrought, not only in the town, but in the adjacent country. They came from all parts to hear the wisdom of the Lord Jesus Christ in the gospel, dispensed by this worthy man. And some persons of great quality, among the rest, would often travel from afar to Mr. Hooker's assembly.

“The joy of the people in this light, was but for a season. The conscientious non-conformity of Mr. Hooker, with some rites of the Church of England which were then vigorously pressed — especially on those able and useful ministers who were most likely to be pushed aside because of their doctrinal objections to those rites — made it necessary for him to lay down his ministry at Chelmsford. He had been employed there about four years. At the request of several eminent persons, he then kept a school at his own hired house, having our Mr. John Eliot ¹ for his usher at Little-Baddow, not far from Chelmsford. There he managed his charge with such discretion, such authority, and such efficacy, that he did a very great service to the Church of God in the education of those who afterwards proved not a little serviceable themselves. In a manuscript written by our blessed Eliot, he gives a very great account of the little academy then maintained in the house of Mr. Hooker. Among other things, he says, ‘I was called to this place, through the infinite riches of God's mercy in Christ to my poor soul. For here the Lord said to my dead soul, *live*; and through the grace of Christ, I *do* live, and I *shall* live forever! When I came to this blessed family, I then saw — and never before — the power of godliness in its lively vigor and efficacy.’

“While Mr. Hooker continued this way in the heart of Essex and in the hearts of the people there, he signalized his usefulness in many other instances. The godly ministers around the country had recourse to him, to be directed and resolved in their difficult cases. And it was by his means that those godly ministers held their monthly meetings for fasting, prayer, and profitable conferences. He was indeed a general blessing to the church of God. And what made silencing Mr. Hooker more inexplicable, was that forty-seven conformable ministers of neighboring towns, understanding that the bishop of London claimed that Mr. Hooker's ministry was injurious or offensive to them, subscribed a petition to the bishop for Mr. Hooker's continuance in the ministry at Chelmsford. Yet all this would not avail. The spiritual court sitting at Chelmsford about 1630, had not only silenced Mr. Hooker, but also imposed a bond of fifty pounds, to appear before the high commission. But his friends advised him to forfeit his bond rather than throw himself any further into the hands of his enemies; they sent the sum into court. And having gotten a private recess for a time, by the earl of Warwick, Mr. Hooker fled from the pursuivants ² to take his passage for the low countries. At parting with some of his friends, one of them said, ‘Sir, what if the wind should not be fair when you come to the vessel?’ To which he instantly replied, ‘Brother, let us leave that with Him who keeps the wind in the hollow of his hand.’ And it was observed that although the wind was cross ‘till he came aboard, it immediately came about fair and fresh. He was no sooner under sail, than the king's officer arrived at the seaside, happily too late to come at him.

“Arriving in Holland, Mr. Hooker was invited to a settlement with Mr. Paget, at Amsterdam. But that gentleman secretly willed that Mr. Hooker should not accept the invitation. Mr. Hooker went to Delft, where he was most kindly received by Mr. Forbs, an aged and holy Scotch

¹ This was afterwards the reverend and renowned Mr. Eliot, of Roxbury, in New England.

² *Pursuivant*: The king's messenger or arresting officer, who executes warrants.

Biographical Sketch

minister, under whose ministry many English merchants were then settled. Mr. Forbs manifested a strong desire to enjoy the fellowship of Mr. Hooker in the work of the gospel, which he did for about two years. In all this time, they lived like brethren. At the end of two years, Mr. Hooker had a call to Rotterdam, which he more readily accepted, because it renewed his acquaintance with his invaluable Dr. Ames; he had newly left his place (as Professor of Divinity) in the Frisian University. Mr. Hooker spent the residue of his time in Holland with him, and assisted him in composing some of his discourses. Such was the regard which Dr. Ames had for him, that notwithstanding his own vast ability and experience, when he came to the fine point of any question about the instituted worship of God, he would still profess himself conquered by Mr. Hooker's reason. He declared that, though he had been acquainted with many scholars of diverse nations, he never met with Mr. Hooker's equal, either for preaching or for disputing.

“But having tarried in Holland long enough to see the state of religion in the churches there, he became satisfied that it was neither suitable for him to tarry in that country, nor convenient for his friends to be invited there after him. About this time, many of his friends in Essex were on the wing for a wilderness in America. There they hoped for an opportunity to enjoy and practice the pure worship of Christ, in churches gathered according to His direction. Therefore, he readily answered their invitation to accompany them in this undertaking. Returning to England, he was quickly scented by the pursuivants (and remarkably preserved). But he carefully concealed himself 'till he went on board the ship at the Downs. It brought him, Mr. Cotton, and Mr. Stone to New England in 1633.¹ Mr. Hooker and Mr. Cotton were, for their different genius, the Luther and Melancthon of New England. At their arrival, Mr. Cotton settled with the church of Boston. But Mr. Hooker settled with the church of Newtown,² having Mr. Stone for his assistant. The joy of Mr. Hooker was now inexpressible, to find himself surrounded with his friends, who had come over the year before to prepare for his reception. He embraced them with open arms, and uttered these words, ‘Now I live, if you stand fast in the Lord.’

“But such multitudes flocked over after them, that Newtown became too confined for them. It was Mr. Hooker's advice that they should not incur the danger of a Sitnah or an Esek, where they might have a Rehoboth.³ Accordingly, in June, 1636, with about a hundred persons in the first company, he moved a hundred miles to the west, to settle on the banks of Connecticut river. Not being able to walk more than ten miles a day through the woods, they took nearly a fortnight in their journey. They had no pillows to take their nightly rest on, but only such as their father Jacob found on the way to Padan Aram (Gen 28.5, 11). Here (*i.e.*, at Hartford), Mr. Hooker was the chief instrument of beginning another colony: namely, Connecticut Colony.

“He was a man of prayer, and would say that prayer was a principal part of a minister's work; it was by this that he was to carry on the rest. Accordingly, he devoted one day a month to private prayer with fasting before the Lord, beside the public fasts, which often occurred. He would say that such extraordinary favors as the life of religion, and the power of godliness, must be preserved by the frequent use of such extraordinary means as prayer with fasting.⁴ And if professors grow negligent in those means, iniquity will abound, and the love of many grow cold.

¹ She set sail about the middle of July, and arrived at Boston on September 3d, which glorious triumvirate (as Dr. Cotton Mather calls them) coming together, inspired the people here with great and universal joy — as I remember the ancient people speaking in my youthful days.

² Since and now called *Cambridge*.

³ **Gen 26:20-22** But the herdsmen of Gerar quarreled with Isaac's herdsmen, saying, “The water is ours.” So he called the name of the well Esek (*contention*), because they quarreled with him. Then they dug another well, and they quarreled over that *one* also. So he called its name Sitnah (*strife*). And he moved from there and dug another well, and they did not quarrel over it. So he called its name Rehoboth (*wide place*), because he said, “For now the LORD has made room for us, and we shall be fruitful in the land.”

⁴ Prayer and fasting are known as *ordinary* means of grace. But because of the extraordinary favors we receive from fellowship with God, these ordinary means become extraordinary in their blessings. — WHG

Biographical Sketch

He much abounded in acts of charity. He had a singular ability at giving answers to cases of conscience, which was the happy experience of thousands. And for this work, he usually set apart the second day of the week, in which he admitted all sorts of persons in their discourses with him, to reap the benefit of the extraordinary experience of Satan's devices, which he himself had found.

“Though he had a notable hand in discussing and adjusting controversial points, he would hardly ever handle polemical divinity in the pulpit. Rather, the spirit of his ministry lay in points of the most practical religion, and the grand concerns of a sinner's preparation for implantation in, and salvation by Christ. That reverend and excellent man, Mr. Henry Whitfield, having spent many years in studying *books*, at length took two or three years in studying *men*. In pursuance of this design, and having acquainted himself with the most considerable divines in England, he at last fell into the acquaintance of Mr. Hooker. Concerning him, he gave this testimony, ‘that he hadn't thought there was such a man on earth; a man in whom there shone so many excellencies as were in this incomparable Hooker; a man in whom learning and wisdom were so tempered with zeal, holiness, and watchfulness.’

“When one who stood weeping by the bedside in the time of his last sickness, said to him, Sir, you are going to receive the reward of all your labors, he raised himself up and replied, Brother, I am going to receive *mercy*.¹ At last he closed his eyes with his own hands, and gently stroking his forehead, with a smile in his countenance, he gave a little groan and expired, July 7th, 1647. In those last hours, the glorious peace of soul which he had enjoyed without any interruption for near thirty years, so gloriously accompanied him, that a worthy spectator then writing to Mr. Cotton (a relation of his), made this reflection: ‘Truly sir, the sight of his death will make me have more pleasant thoughts of death, than I ever yet had in my life!’ Thus lived and died one of the first three. He of whom his pupil, Mr. Ash, ² gives this testimony; ‘For his great abilities and glorious services, both in this and the other England, he deserves a place in the first rank of those whose lives are recorded of late.’”

These are so many passages recited from his life, written by Dr. Cotton Mather. He also calls him “the light of the western churches” and “pillar of Connecticut Colony.” And he declares that he has yet *underdone* this part of his composure. Dr. Increase Mather, writing of Mr. Hooker, says he was so good and so great a man, that Connecticut never did, and perhaps never will see a greater; and Dr. Ames used to say, he never knew his equal.

As to the following treatise, it evidently breathes his most pious spirit, and shows his intimate acquaintance with heart-religion. It is delivered in the plainest and most familiar language, void of all ornament, as if he were speaking privately to some distressed soul. This was his usual manner in his practical discourses, being more adapted to reach the heart than the imagination. And this admirable condescension in a man of such vast abilities, is a clear revelation of the real greatness of his holy soul.

It seems to be a part of others on the same text, delivered to a popular auditory, taken in shorthand by one of his hearers in England, and published there, after his coming over here. It was without his knowledge, as many if not most of his practical Discourses were — and also with diverse mistakes committed by transcribers and printers, which I have endeavored to correct. And for the reader's clearer understanding of the particular purport of the several parts, I have presumed to divide the treatise into chapters, and set the heads in the former margin for their titles, in this edition, which I guess to be about the seventh.

¹ So Dr. C. Mather expressed it to me.

² I suppose the Rev. and famous Mr. Simeon Ash, of London: and by this he means old England; and by the other, New.

Biographical Sketch

I would recommend it to those who desire to have the impediments removed which hinder them from applying by faith to Christ; and to those who, by divine help, would learn the happy way of going first to the promises of Christ, and with those in hand, then to Christ himself – in this way living on him daily, and deriving from him all their strength and blessedness.

And may the Divine Spirit apply it to the soul of everyone who reads it. And by promoting the life of faith, and other parts of sanctification, may He increase their present comfort, and the glory of the Divine Redeemer, as well as their mutual joy with Him and this blessed instrument of his, when they meet together in the growing world above. Amen.

THOMAS PRINCE.

Boston, April 1, 1743.

ADDENDUM

Family life:

When Thomas Hooker arrived in America, he was already married to his second wife named Suzanne. No records have been found concerning the name of his first wife. They had a son named Samuel. He was born in America, probably in Cambridge. It is recorded that he graduated in 1653 from Harvard. He became a minister and well known in Farmington, Connecticut. He had many children including John and James, both of whom served as Speaker of the Connecticut Assembly. Samuel's granddaughter, Sarah Pierpont, would marry Rev. Jonathan Edwards. One of Thomas' descendants was American financier, John Pierpont Morgan.

Thomas and Suzanne also had a daughter named Mary. She would marry Rev. Roger Newton, who founded Farmington, Connecticut before moving on to be a preacher in Milford.

Political views:

Hooker was a strong proponent of not requiring religious tests to allow for voting rights. In fact, he argued for religious tolerance, at least towards those of the Christian faith. He was also a strong proponent of the ideas behind the *Social Contract*,¹ and the belief that the people formed the government and it must answer to them.²

¹ Proponents: Hugo Grotius (1625), Thomas Hobbes (1651), and John Locke (1689). This theory asserts that individuals in a society *consent* (explicitly or tacitly) to surrender some of their natural rights, when they submit to the authority of the state; this is done in exchange for maintaining social order. The government and its officials are accountable to the people as their sovereign, for the people derive their natural rights from God (or nature), not government. Hooker was a seminal thinker in this; his ideas later influenced the founding fathers of the country. – WHG

² Kelly, Martin. "Thomas Hooker: Founder of Connecticut." ThoughtCo, Feb. 11, 2020, [thoughtco.com/thomas-hooker-4107866](https://www.thoughtco.com/thomas-hooker-4107866). See also, *The Life of Thomas Hooker* by H. W. Hooker— vol. vi., *Lives of the Chief Fathers of New England* (Boston, 1870). – WHG

Supplement to the Biographical Sketch.

It may be interesting to the reader to know the esteem in which the venerable author of this little volume was held by such men as the Rev. THOMAS SHEPARD, first minister of Cambridge, Massachusetts, and JOHN COTTON, who came to this country about the same time.

Mr. Shepard, in giving the reasons for coming to New England, assigns as his third reason,

“I saw the Lord departed from England when MR. HOOKER and MR. COTTON were gone; and I saw the hearts of most of the godly set and bent that way, and I thought I should feel many miseries if I stayed behind.”¹

Mr. John Cotton, thus coupled with Hooker, it appears, wrote a “Funeral Elegy” on his esteemed and revered associate. An extract from it, the testimony of such a good man, as to his excellence of character, may properly be given here:

“Paul in the pulpit, Hooker could not reach,
Yet did he Christ in spirit so lively preach,
That living hearers thought he did inherit,
A double portion of Paul’s lively spirit.

“Prudent in rule, in argument quick, full,
Fervent in prayer, in preaching powerful,
That well did learned *Ames* record bear,
The like to him he never went to hear.

“‘Twas of *Geneva’s worthies* said with wonder,
(Those wonders three) *Farell* was wont to thunder,
Viret, like rain, on tender grass to shower;
But *Calvin* lively oracles to pour.

“All these in *Hooker’s* spirit did remain,
A son of thunder, and a shower of rain;
A pourer forth of lively oracles,
In saving souls the sum of miracles.

“Now blessed *Hooker* you art set on high,
Above the thankless world and cloudy sky;
Do you of all thy labors reap the crown,
Whilst we here reap the seed which you have sown.”²

¹ Autobiography of Thomas Shepard, p. 43.

² Autobiography of Thomas Shepard, p. 107, 108.

The Poor Doubting Christian
DRAWN TO CHRIST

Every man therefore who has heard, and has learned
from the Father, comes to me. Joh 6.45.

CHAPTER 1.

Impediments which hinder souls from coming to Christ, removed.

THERE are diverse impediments which hinder poor Christians from coming to Christ; all of which I desire to reduce to these following heads,

I. First, those hinderances which really keep men from coming to take hold of Christ at all; briefly, they are these:

1. Blind, careless, or presumptuous security whereby men content themselves with their present condition, presuming all is well with them, when there is no such matter for security.
2. Being convinced of this, they think how to save themselves by their own strength; and thereupon set upon a reformation of life, thinking to make amends to God by reforming some sins which they hear themselves reprov'd of by the ministers.
3. The sinner being convinced of his utter inability to please God in himself, at length gets up a stair higher, and sees all his performances, and prayers, and duties to be of no power in themselves, but that he must leave all, and cling only to Christ by faith. And this he thinks he can do well enough, and so he thrusts himself upon Christ, thinking all the work is then done, and is no more to be looked after.
4. If he sees this fails him too, then he goes yet further, and confesses he cannot come to Christ unless Christ gives him his hand, and helps him up. Therefore he will now attend to the ordinances, and labor and stir himself hard in the use of all good means, conceiving thereby to hammer out at last a faith of his own to make him happy. And here he rests, as it were hanging on the outside of the ark so long, till at last the waves and winds growing fierce and violent, he is beaten off, and so he sinks forever.

II. Besides these, there are other kinds of hinderances which do not indeed deprive a man of title and interest to eternal happiness, but they make the way tedious and uncomfortable, so that he cannot come to Christ as readily as he desires and longs to do. The ground of it is this: when men, out of carnal reason, contrive another way to come to Christ than he ever ordained or revealed; that is, when we set up our standards alongside God's standard, or our threshold alongside His, Eze 43.8¹ — and out of our own imagination, we make another state of believing than Christ ever required or ordained. It is no marvel that we come short of him: for thus we put rubs, and make bars in our way. We manacle our hands, and fetter our feet, and then say that we cannot take or go. Thus it is with you poor Christians, and the fault is your own.

But among many there are *three hinderances* which are chiefly to be observed, by which many gracious hearts are marvelously hindered from coming to, and receiving that comfort from Christ which they might have, and he is willing to impart to them.

1. The distressed soul, being, perhaps, truly humbled, takes notice of the beauty of holiness, and the image of God stamped on the hearts of his children, and of all those precious promises which

¹ Eze 43:8 “When they set their threshold by My threshold, and their doorpost by My doorpost, with a wall between them and Me, they defiled My holy name by the abominations which they committed; therefore I have consumed them in My anger.

Hindrances to a soul's coming to Christ, removed.

God has made to all that are his. Now, the soul seeing these, begins to reason thus with itself, and says, "Surely if I were so holy and so gracious, then I might have hope to receive the pardon of my sins. Or if my heart were so enlarged to duties, and could be so carried with power against my corruptions, to master them, then there would be some hope. But when I have no power against sin, nor any heart to seek so importunately for a Christ, how dare I think that any mercy belongs to me, having so many insufficiencies?" Thus they dare not come to the promise; and they will not venture upon it because they don't have that enlargement to duties, and that power against corruption, which sometimes the saints of God have.

But we must know, this *does not hinder*; and that we make something a hinderance which, in truth, is none. For (observe it) we must not think to bring our enlargements and hope to the promise, but go to the promise *for them*. Hope must be stirred, and desire quickened, and love and joy kindled by the promise. But who made *this* a condition of the covenant: that a man must have so much enlargement *before* he can come to the promise? Our Saviour being our husband, he requires no portion from us, nor ever looked for any. All that he looks for is mere poverty and emptiness. If you have nothing, he will yet have you with your nothing, provided that you will have him. Therefore it is thus written, *the rich he sends away empty*, but the poor he satisfies, and the thirsty he refreshes with good. And so, there is nothing required on our side but to receive him as a husband. For, *buy without money*, is the text (Isa 55.1). You must not come and think to buy a husband. The Lord looks for no power or sufficiency from you, of yourselves — nor any power against corruption, or enlargement to duties of yourselves. If you will be content that Christ will take all from you, and dispose of you and all; then take a Saviour, and then you have him.

But the poor soul says, if I go hoodwinked this way, how will I know that I don't presume, and how will I know that I have a true title to the promise?

I answer, there is no better argument in the world to prove you have an interest in Christ, than this: which is your taking the Lord Christ as a Saviour wholly, and as a husband only (Joh 1.12). *As many as received him, to them he gave power to become the sons of God, even to those who believe on his name*. He doesn't say, to as many as had such enlargement to duties, and such power against corruption — but he says, if you take Christ upon those terms on which he offers himself. There is no better argument under heaven than to prove you have a title to the promise. Indeed, there is a desperate despair that often seizes upon the hearts of distressed sinners.

2. Therefore in the second place, just as the sinner looks upon the excellency of Christ and of grace, and upon his own insufficiency which makes him not venture upon the promise; so he looks too altogether upon his own sinfulness and worthlessness, and therefore dares not venture upon it. He views the number of his sins so many and vile, and the continuance of them so long and durable; and he sees the floods of abominations coming in so forcefully upon his soul, and Satan to boot (who helps him forward in all this); he therefore dares not make toward Christ. But this is the policy of the devil, who (if he can) will make a man see sin through his own spectacles; or not see it at all, and then say, there is mercy enough in a Saviour, and I may therefore live as I wish. But when the sinner necessarily sees his sin, then the devil will let him see nothing *but* sin; and this is to the end that he may despair forever.

Now, here the poor sinner is at a standstill, and can go no further. For if you tell him of the mercy of God, and of the plenteous redemption in Christ, and of the riches of the freeness of God's grace: "What (he says), should I think there is any mercy for me, and that I have any interest in Christ? That would be strange." And thus the soul is always poring, and always too fastened and settled upon his corruptions; ever picking at the sore, without ever going to the physician. Where note, that a man is as well kept from looking to Christ by despair, as by presumption. Before he sees his sin, he thinks his condition is good, and that he has a sufficiency of his own, and he *need not* go to Christ. And when he sees his sin, then he beholds so much vileness in himself, and in his sin,

Hindrances to a soul's coming to Christ, removed.

that he *dares not* go to Christ, lest when he comes before him, he sends him down to that ever-burning lake of fire and brimstone. The devil is very subtle in this. But this doesn't hinder our title to Christ; nor should it discourage us from laying hold on salvation. For,

1. Observe it: For whom Christ did come into the world, and for whom did he die when he came? Was it for the righteous? They didn't need him (Luk 5.31-32): it was for the poor sinner who judges himself, who condemns himself, and who finds that he cannot save himself. Paul says, 1Tim 1.15, *Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the chief*. And the prophet Zechariah, 13.1, *There is a fountain opened for sin and for uncleanness*; that is, for all sorts of sins, and all kinds of sinners; let their iniquities be ever so great, and ever so vile, there is a fountain set open for them, come who will. There was none ever saved who was not first a rebel; nor any received to mercy, who did not first oppose the mercies of God, and his grace in Christ. The fiery serpents stung the people in the wilderness; first they were stung, and then being stung, there was a brazen serpent to heal them, But,

2. Observe the folly of this plea: what Scripture ever said that the greatness of man's sin could hinder the greatness of God's mercy? — no Scripture says so. We see that David prays to the contrary, Psa 25.16, 11, *Have mercy upon me, O Lord, and pardon my sins, for they are great*. No, God himself does quite the contrary, Isa 43.24-25, *You have served me with your sins, and wearied me with your iniquities; yet I am He that blots out your transgressions for my name's sake*. When the Jews tired God with their distempered manners, and burdened him with their sinful courses; then the Lord, for his own name's sake, would not so much as remember their iniquities against them (Psa 103.12).

3. Again, observe that sins, though they be ever so heinous of themselves, if the soul can see them, and the heart be burdened with them, they are so far from hindering the work of faith, and from making you incapable of mercy, that they rather *fit you* to go to Christ. The truth is (which I pray you to notice), it is not properly our unworthiness, but our pride and haughtiness that hinder us from coming to Christ. For we would have something from ourselves, and not *all* from him. But I say to the distressed soul who sees the vileness of his sins, suppose that your sins were fewer. Yet upon such a supposition, you would not go to Christ, as if persuaded of the freeness of his grace. Rather, because your sins are not many, and upon a conceit that you have some worthiness in yourself, and would bring something to Christ, and not receive all from him — you therefore keep back. Is it not plain, then, that it is your pride and self-conceitedness that hinder you? You think you must first have so much grace and holiness; and that Christ must not justify the ungodly, but the godly man. But I tell you that, upon such terms, he will *never* justify you, nor any man while the world stands.

But the soul replies again, My sins are worse than so, not only because they are many, but because of the mercy and salvation that I have rejected, and which have been offered me from day to day.

But I answer: this cannot hurt you, provided that you can see those evils of yours. For then, though you have cast away the kindness of the Lord, yet the Lord will not cast you away, if you will come and seek him earnestly again and again. Isa 57.17-18. *For the iniquity of his covetousness I was angry* (says God) *and I struck him; I hid myself, and he went on forwardlike in the way of his own heart*. If this could have hindered Judah, he would never have received mercy. But the text says, *I have seen his ways and will heal him*. Jer 3.1, *You have played the harlot with many lovers, yet return again to me, says the Lord*. So then, there is no time too late, if a man has but a heart to return. There is no limitation of the riches of God's free grace, except the sin against the Holy Ghost. Therefore says Christ, Rev 3.20, *I stand at the door and knock*. Though he cries 'till he is hoarse, and stands 'till he is weary, yet he stands still. If any adulterous or deceitful wretch opens, the Lord will come in, and bring a store of comfort to him, and dine with him.

Hindrances to a soul's coming to Christ, removed.

Objection. “Oh, all that is true (says the poor soul), if I had but a heart to mourn for my baseness. I see my sins, but this is my *misery*. I cannot be burdened with them. I have a heart that cannot break and mourn for dishonoring God, and offending him in so many ways.”

Answer. This doesn't hurt either; provided that your heart is weary of itself, because it cannot be weary of sin. Mic 7.18,¹ *The Lord shows mercy, because he will show mercy*: it is not because you can please him, but because *mercy* pleases him. When did the Lord show mercy to Paul? I say, even when Paul expressed the most malice against him. Acts 9.4, “*Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?*” Paul persecutes Christ, and yet Christ pities him, and shows him mercy. And so the surly jailor, when he was most opposite to the means of grace, the Lord even then showed the most compassion upon him. The one who before resisted the means of grace, was now brought home by that same means he resisted.

Objection. “But woe to me, says the poor soul; you have now come to the quick.² This very word is like a millstone around my neck, and I in the sea, am ready to be sunk forever. This is the depth of that baseness that lies upon me, even this — that all the means of grace can do no better for me. Why, even if Paul and the jailor were bad enough, and so bad as you say, yet they were made better by the means. But this is my hopeless condition, that the means of grace do *not* prevail with me. Oh, is there such a heart in hell as I have? For how bad must it be, when all the means in the world can do it no more good! And now I think I feel my heart harder and more inexorable under all God's ordinances, than when I first believed. My condition is therefore most certainly hopeless, seeing that the means which should soften me, only harden me, and make me worse.”

Answer. This is the last plea by which the devil restrains and possesses the heart of a poor disheartened sinner. But let me answer you, and say, this doesn't hurt either. For here, at least, you may have hope of mercy! And here observe three things by way of answer, and know that,

1. The word and means of grace *do* work good, if they make you more sensible of your hardness and deadness. Though perhaps they *don't* work that good, and in that manner you desire; yet if they make you to see your baseness, your hardness of heart, and dullness of spirit, in regard to that body of death which hangs upon you, then they and the word work in the best manner, because it is in God's manner, even if not in yours. That medicine works most kindly, that makes the party sick before it works; so it is with the word. Before, you had a proud heart, and therefore lifted yourself up in your own abilities, and trusted in your own strength; and you thought that your care and the improvement of the means would work wonders. But now, the word works sweetly when it makes you apprehend that a wounded soul is the gift of God, not man, nor of the means of man; it works when it makes you look up to God for it, and to prize it when you have it; and to wait upon God with your daily prayers, still to continue so. To feel deadness is life; and to feel hardness is softness. Only remember this one caution: unless there is some lust or distemper that your heart hankers after (for then the word will harden you, because you harden yourself), that one excepted, I say, you are in a good way.

2. Mark this, I beseech you: you are the cause why your heart is not softened, and why the word does not work upon your soul. The distemper of your own heart hinders the working of the word, and the dispensation of God's providence, and the tenor of the covenant of grace. You think to limit the holy one of Israel; but that may not be. For, his covenant is a covenant of grace; and the Lord who is free will not stand bent to your bow, or give you grace when you will it. For, it is not for us to know the times and seasons. What if the Lord will not give you grace this year, nor the next, nor all your life? If at the last gasp he drops in a little of his favor, it is more than he owes you. Therefore hear today, and await tomorrow, and continue doing so, because you don't know

¹ **Mic 7:18** Who is a God like You, Pardoning iniquity And passing over the transgression of the remnant of His heritage? He does not retain His anger forever, Because He delights in mercy.

² *The quick*: any area of the body (or here, of the soul) that is highly sensitive to pain.

when God may bless his own ordinances. Don't complain of delays, but wait — for God has waited for you long. And therefore if he makes you wait for peace of conscience, and assurance of his love, he deals but equally with you, and as will be best with you. God gives what, and when, and how he will; therefore wait for it.

3. Know and consider, that you have rested upon your own duties and endeavors, and so you do not go to God, who blesses both the means and all his endeavors this way. The fault therefore is your own (I say); your own, because you rest in your own performances, and in the power of the means that you apprehend; and you do not go to God, who would have wrought more than all they can. For, if a man depended on God's power and mercy in his ordinances, he would always find some proportional succor, whether he finds success or not. God sometimes gives, and sometimes delays giving. But God's love is as constant when he doesn't give, as when he gives. Therefore, labor to quit all carnal confidence in holy duties. Don't rest in your own performances, but look beyond all duties to God in Christ, and desire him to give you the success above them.

Watch how your soul behaves itself after the naked discharge of a duty. All quiet and calm, though he lives in a daily course and practice of sin — so that he prays and lies, fasts and cheats, and yet this makes the whole. I tell you, it is an undoubted argument, that the soul placed a carnal confidence in his own performances, and as yet never attained to having a *Lord Christ* in the duty. For the one who seeks a Saviour in his duties, and doesn't rest in self-performances, this man brings a Saviour, a *Christ* into his soul. And mark what follows that: Christ brings pardoning virtue, and purging virtue with him, and gives this man more power against corruptions, and more care over his own soul, than he ever had before. So that the soul begins to quarrel with itself, and lies down with shame, and says, What will I think of my praying and hearing? Where is the virtue and power of it? Did Christ ever hear my prayers, or come into my soul by his ordinances? Where is the purging virtue then, to clear me of my *sins*? Where is the purifying virtue to cleanse me of my *corruptions*? This is a ground of a gracious heart: that it places no confidence in holy duties, but only in the Lord Christ.

Don't content yourselves in this, that you see a *need* of a Saviour — because your minds are enlightened in this, and your reason is persuaded by it — when in the meantime you place a kind of confidence in the duty performed and service discharged, and think thereby to bring Christ at your beck; and *you*, meanwhile, do what you please. This is a wonderful cunning craft of Satan. In this, I say then, a man may see a *need* of a Saviour. But do not quiet your soul because you know it must be so, and because you find by experience, that you cannot help yourself — the guilt of sin still sticks upon you, and therefore a Saviour must now help you. I say, do not content yourself with the mere notion of it — to say, I see that it should be so, and it must be so — and rest yourself contented in the performance of services; and think to bring a Saviour at your beck, to do what you will for your soul. This is a slight that Satan has pinned to your soul. Many think to have a sovereign authority over Christ, when they have performed duties. So that the man does not use the means to be led to Christ, but he takes up his duties to be commanders of Christ, that he may dispose of Christ for his own turn — so that he makes Christ an abettor of his own wickedness, not a subduer of his corruptions. This is a marvellous deceit, when men rest in their own abilities, and so abuse Christ. And this will appear in the following particulars:

First. Watch how your heart is, in the performance of duty. Does your prayer, and hearing, and performing of services, make you venturous and fool-hardy to meddle with corruptions? Then it is a certain ground that you place carnal confidence in your own performances. As for example: if a professor should say, what if I now and then sin? And what if I now and then pilfer, and use false weights and measures? I'll just pray that much more, and fast that much oftener. Won't my conscience then be satisfied? It *shall* be satisfied; I will *command* it: I will put up bail for my sin, and pray against it. Now, I beseech you to observe it: this praying, and performing of duties, is merely to command a Saviour to *allow* sin, that so he may commit it freely — as if to say, I have

Hindrances to a soul's coming to Christ, removed.

authority over my Saviour, and he will pardon my sin, and allow me to commit sin. O the wretched villainy that is in this man's heart! Fearful is your estate, whoever you are, that makes your performances an abettor of your distempers: so that you do your duties, *not* to convey Christ that he may help you to prevent sin, but only that Christ may remove the venom and indignation of it, so that you may commit wickedness without either misgiving or further distraction.

Many a man makes his services his saviors; for he makes them the bottom to bear up his conscience. The ground of it is this: perhaps he finds and feels by woeful experience what the fruits of sin are: he sees the venom of his corruptions, and the lamentable effects of all his sinful practices. Before, he thought it a fine thing to swear, and lie, and drink, and follow base company; but now they are gravel to his heart, and gall to his soul. His conscience flies in his face, and he is ready to sink down to hell under the burden of his mis-ordered life. Conscience says, "these are your sins, and these will be your damnation: they have been your delight, but they will prove your shame and confusion in the end; and shortly you will find the smart of them: *to hell* therefore; be packing, and gone."

Now, in such a case, this man has no other cure for his conscience than this: he entreats it to be quiet. He confesses that he has lived in base courses, and his condition is very miserable; but now he will reform all. He has neglected prayer previously, but now he will pray. He has hated God's servants, but now he will love them. His ways have been exceedingly evil, but now he will reform them, and now he will turn over a new leaf. This he says, and this he thinks will serve his turn. And thus many poor souls use the means as mediators, and so they fall short of Christ. But a gracious heart not only prays, and hears, and receives, and uses all possible means to obtain Christ, but it is restless and unsatisfied till he enjoys and possesses Christ *in the means*. He doesn't rest upon the bare performance of any duty, nor think to get into Christ by virtue of any such of his endeavors.

I will express this particular more fully in this manner. Tell a rich usurer, who is sick from some disease, that only such a physician can cure him; but the physician stands upon rank, and will not come without a great deal of expense. 'Expense,' the usurer says, 'I don't stand upon that; I have money enough by me, enough to fetch the physician here.' Such a man now places all his confidence in his money. So too, when the soul sees that the guilt of sin is not removed, and that his conscience is still snarling, and the law condemning him, Christ is the only Saviour — and he alone can satisfy and cure all. But now, how will Christ be procured? Why, his prayer, and fasting, and performances, may command so much, and that is by the power and merit of the work done. This is the voice of a Pharisee, and the proper language of a Papist. But what promise is there for it? Within the book, there is none. But thus fools rest on their own performances, and so they fall short of Christ and salvation.

Objection. But oh! says a poor sinner, I would gladly go out of myself. I see too well now, that I have rested, and I rest upon duties done; but I cannot deny myself as I would.

I answer: it is Satan's subtlety to keep us in ourselves, by endeavoring thus to make us go out of ourselves. For he would have us to do it *by our own strength*; and he persuades us that we may. But this is a marvellous deepness of his, in which he shows both malice and cunning in the superlative. For here he makes us believe (and out of ignorance, we are persuaded as he would have us), that we have the staff in our own hands; that is, the power to get out of ourselves. But is it so? Oh no! it is a supernatural work to be quite out of ourselves. The same hand must bring us out of ourselves, that must bring us to Christ. And this is self-denial. And self-denial is when the soul knows it has nothing, and therefore is so overpowered with the mighty hand of God, and the work of his spirit, that it does not so much as expect *any* power or ability from itself, nor from the creature, in the doing of any good. For it knows it is dead, and therefore cannot help itself; much less can the creature do it any good. It therefore looks up to heaven, and seeks all sufficiency from God alone. For observe, while I think that I have the ability to go out of myself; do I not then say,

Hindrances to a soul's coming to Christ, removed.

I have a principle *within* me to deny myself? But it is not so; rather it is quite contrary. For to deny a man's self, is to know he has no power in himself to do any spiritual duty. Therefore we must look only to the voice that calls us — the voice of Christ — and know that the One who calls us from the ways of darkness, and out of ourselves, must and will *bring* us out. Therefore, expect power only from Christ to pluck you out of yourself, and to make you a believer; for the same hand must do *both*, or it will never be.

I would not have a poor creature think this way with himself: "If this means, and these ordinances will do me no good, nor work upon my heart, I will never have comfort." But speak this way to God, and say, "In truth, Lord, I expect no power from myself, nor from the means; but my resolution is to look up to Him that has yet hidden his face from his poor servant. I will not look any lower, such as here within myself, for any such power — no, Lord, but to the highest in power and gifts. Nor will I look to the minister, or to the means, but I will wait upon *you*, O Lord, and look up to your power, to work by your own means." Remember what the prophet Isaiah says, 50.10, *Who is among you that fears the Lord, and obeys the voice of his servant that walks in darkness, and has no light; let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay himself upon his God.* Then, when all other things in the world fail, let the soul look up to the Lord, and get away from itself. For then is the fittest time of all to meet with God. I would have a Christian choose this time, above all times, the fittest in which to meet his Saviour, and to disappoint Satan. For as I said, it is the last refuge that the devil has; and if he misses this, his force is gone forever. For otherwise, the sinner, partly seeing the beauty of grace, and partly seeing the baseness of his own heart, will not dare to come to Christ.

3. But the next complaint is, a lack of sense and feeling, such as a Christian must have, and doesn't find. Therefore the distressed soul says, "Alas! I never knew what it was to have the assurance of God's love; I never received any evidence of God's favor; and can I then think that I have faith? Those who believe, have their hearts filled with joy unspeakable and glorious; the word says as much. But I am a stranger to this joy; how then can I think that I have any work of faith wrought in me?"

I answer: this doesn't mean either that you don't have faith, or that you may not come to God in Christ by believing. Only remember these particulars:

First, you must not think to have this joy and refreshing before you go to the promise. — You must look for it when you have chewed and fed upon it. Or would you have the Lord give you the whole bargain at once, and before the match is made? This joy is a fruit that proceeds from faith after much wrestling; and it does not presently flow from faith — not as soon as a Christian begins to believe, but after a time — and then the heart is joyous. But it is never filled with joy *before* believing. Afterwards, and when a man has had the sweet dew of the promises dropping upon him, only many a day after, let him look for this joy.

Secondly, know that these joys, and this sense and feeling may be absent from faith. For a man may have a good faith, and yet lack the relish and sweetness which he longs for. One may lack what he desires, and yet lack neither life nor heat. A tree may lack leaves and fruit, and yet lack neither sap nor moisture. And a man's *faith* may be somewhat strong, when his *feeling* is nothing at all. David was justified and sanctified, and yet he lacked this joy. And Job trusted upon God when he had but little feeling; as when he says, *You make me an example to shoot at; yet I will trust in you, though you kill me.* (Job 13.15) Therefore, don't build your comfort upon sense and feeling, which is to build upon the sand; but go to the promise for it, as to the Rock.

Question. But where does this desire for Christ come from?

Hindrances to a soul's coming to Christ, removed.

I answer: there are no more than two affections in the soul toward absent good,¹ God infinitely wise having so framed it — and these two are *hope* and *desire*. The understanding says, such a thing is profitable and comfortable, if I had it. Then hope is sent out to wait for that goodness. And if it doesn't come, then desire is sent out to meet that goodness. Hope stands and waits for it, but desire wanders up and down seeking and inquiring after a Lord Jesus, and goes from coast to coast, from east to west; "O that I could, O that I might, and when shall I? And how may I come to the speech of a Lord Christ?" As it was with the spouse in the Canticles, when her beloved was gone, she wandered up and down seeking him, and inquiring of the watchmen if they didn't see the one whom her soul loved. So she wanders from this thing to that, from this place to that place, and never ceases to seek and see if she can gain notice of Christ. It goes to prayer, to see if that will entreat a Christ. It goes to the word, to see if that will reveal a Christ. It goes to conference, to see if it can hear of Christ there. Then it comes to the congregation, and to the sacrament, to see if it can hear of any news of a Lord Christ, and of mercy.

The soul thus continues wandering and seeking, till at last the Lord Christ comes into the soul, when the soul has thus hungered and longed for him. At length, the Lord Christ is pleased to show himself: *Behold! the King comes*; so the soul says. *Behold the Lamb of God, that takes away your sins*. O you poor broken-hearted sinner, here is your Savior; he has come down from heaven to speak peace to your soul in the pardon of your sins. You who hunger for a Christ, here he is to satisfy you. You who thirst after Christ, here he is to refresh you. You who have long sought him, he says, "Here I am, and all my merits are yours."

Now when the Lord Jesus is pleased to present himself to the soul, desire has met with the Lord.

It is with a sinner, as it is with a traitor who is pursued, and takes a stronghold, and is besieged there. And now he sees no hope of favor, nor hope of escape. Therefore he is content to submit, and lay his head on the block, that he may receive punishment for his offence. Now coming to execution, he hears an inkling from the messenger, that there is yet hope he may be pardoned. With that, the poor traitor in the prison is stirred up to hope. Indeed, then he hears by another messenger from the king himself, if he will come to the court, and seek his majesty, and importune his grace for mercy and favor, it is likely he will be pardoned. Then he makes haste, and desire carries him to the court to sue for favor from the king. So that now he will be listening and inquiring of everyone there, "Did you hear the king speak nothing of me? How does the king's mind stand towards me? Pray how does my case go?" Then some tell him, "the truth is, the king hears you are humbled, and that you are sorry for what you have done." At last the king looks out of the window, and sees the malefactor, and says, "Is this the traitor?" One says, "yes, if it please your highness, this is the man that is humbled and pleads for mercy, and desires nothing so much as favor." Hereupon, the king being full of mercy, tells him, "The truth is, his pardon is drawing, and coming towards him." With that his heart leaps in his bowels, and is enlarged towards his majesty; and he says, "God bless your majesty; never was there so favorable a prince to so poor a traitor." His heart leaps for joy, because his pardon is coming towards him. Perhaps it is not sealed yet. Now when it is sealed, and all done, the king calls him in, and delivers it.

So it is with a poor sinner; he is the malefactor. You who have committed high treason, you don't think of it: but take heed, God will pursue you one day. Perhaps God lets you alone for the present, but he will surprise you suddenly, and conscience will pluck you by the throat, and carry you down to hell. And now the Lord pursues him with a heavy stroke and indignation, and lets fly at his face, and sets conscience at work as a pursuivant,² and that says; "These are your sins, and to hell you must go; God has sent me to execute your soul." Now the poor soul sees no way to escape from

¹ "Our desires carry the mind out to absent good, according to the necessity which we think there is of it to the making or increase of our happiness." — John Locke (1632-1704).

² *Pursuivant*: The king's messenger or envoy; a herald.

Hindrances to a soul's coming to Christ, removed.

the Lord, and to purchase any favor; he sees it is impossible. Therefore he is resolved to lie down at God's feet, and hope. Now hope is a faculty of the soul to look out for mercy. As a man expecting the coming of his friend, goes to the top of a hill, looks around to see if he can understand anything of his friend, so the soul hopes and waits, and stretches itself out for mercy. "When will it be, Lord? When will this pardon come?" The soul gets up and stands on tiptoe, as it were, "O when will it come, Lord?"

How does God stir up the heart to hope? It is worthwhile to consider how this is maintained.

1. The Lord sweetly stays the heart, and persuades it that his sins are pardonable, and that the good he wants may be supplied; this is a great support to the soul. Hope is always expectation of a good to come. Now, when a poor sinner sees his sins — the number of them, the nature of them, the vileness of them, the cursedness of his soul — such that he can take no rest, he sees no rest in the creature,¹ nor in himself. Though he prays all day, he cannot get the pardon of one sin. The soul is out of any expectation of pardon, or power of mercy in anything he has or does. Though all means, all helps, though all men and angels should join together, yet they cannot pardon one sin of his. Now the Lord lifts up his voice, and says from heaven, "Your sins are pardonable." O the infiniteness of God's power! though the guilt of sin is powerful to condemn the soul. But when the infinite power of the Lord is considered as able to overpower all his sins, this lifts up the heart in some expectation that the Lord will show mercy to a man; though it is a hard thing to hope, when the soul is thus troubled. "Can this heart be broken? Can these sins be pardoned? Can this soul be saved?" Now comes in the power of God: *God* can pardon them. Never measure the power of God by that shallow conceit of yours. All things are possible to God, though not to men. And as it is said of Abraham, he hoped above hope; he looked to the Lord who was able to do what he had promised. He didn't consider that he had a dead body, but that he had a living God to hope on. Justice cannot be so severe to revenge you, as mercy is gracious to do good to you. If your sins are ever so many, God's justice is never so great; mercy is yet above all your sins, above all your rebellions. *This* may support your soul.

So here you have the first ground to stir up hope; your sins are pardonable. There is more power in God to show mercy to you, than power in sin to destroy you.

The Lord Jesus' Christ came *to seek and to save that which was lost*. It was the scope of his coming. Now the broken and humble sinner says, "I am lost. Did Christ come to save sinners? Then either Christ must fail in his end, or I in my comfort. God says, *Come to me all you who are weary and heavy laden* — I am weary. Unless the Lord intended good to me, why did he invite me, and bid me to come? Surely he means to show mercy to me."

Oh take heed of despair. You may, you *must* question your estate; but to cast away all hope is very heinous in the eyes of the Lord. You must cast away all carnal confidence, and yet you must *hope*. Let Israel hope in the Lord: for with the Lord there is mercy, and with Him there is plenteous redemption.

The Lord takes this very badly at our hands. You go to the deep dungeon of your corruption, and there you say, "These sins can never be pardoned: I am still proud, and more stubborn. God does not see this distress; God does not succor; his hand cannot reach; his mercy cannot save." Now mark what the prophet Isaiah says to such a perplexed soul, *Why, you say my way is hidden from the Lord! The Lord says, Why do you say so? The young men will faint and be weary; but those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength.*² Is anything too hard for the Lord? (Gen 18.14) You wrong God exceedingly. You think it is matter of humility, to count yourself so vile. Can God pardon such a wretch's sin as mine? Mark that place of the Psalmist (78.19); they spoke against

¹ "the creature" is a way of saying, "created things."

² Isa 40.27, 30, 31.

Hindrances to a soul's coming to Christ, removed.

the Lord: *Can the Lord prepare a table in the wilderness?* They didn't speak against themselves, but against the Lord. So we speak against God, and charge God himself. "It is true," says the soul, "Manasseh was pardoned, Paul was converted, God's saints have been received to mercy; but can *my* sin be pardoned? Can *my* soul be quickened? No, no, my sins are greater than can be pardoned," says the despairing soul.

Consider how injurious this is to God, to make the power of sin greater to condemn you, than the power of God to save you: to make the power of Satan stronger to ruin you, than the power of God to relieve you, and succor you. And what more can you say? And what more can you do against the Lord? Isn't this to make God an underling to Satan, and to sin? This is as if to say, the Almightyness of God is weaker than the weakness of sin; the sufficiency of God is weaker than the malice of Satan. It is so; poor humble sinners many times will make bitter complaints this way; and they think they are speaking against themselves. No, no, they speak against the Lord. They spoke against the Lord when they said, *Can the Lord prepare a table in the wilderness?* So you are speaking in this desperate manner: "Why the truth, Lord, is that this proud heart will never be humbled; if anything *would* have wrought it, it would have been done before this day. How many sermons, how many mercies, how many judgments, how many prayers? And yet this proud heart, this stubborn heart will not be reformed." You think you speak against *yourselves* now — no, no, you speak against the *Lord*. And know this: it is one of the greatest sins you commit, to say that your sins cannot be forgiven.

2. As this sin is *injurious* to God, so it is *dangerous* to your own soul. It is that which takes up the bridge, and cuts off all passages, so that no spiritual comfort or consolation can come into the soul of a poor sinner. Luke 3.5-6, *Every valley (or ditch) shall be filled, and then all flesh shall see the salvation of the Lord*. What are these ditches? Why nothing else but those deep gulfs and ditches of despair — and unless they are filled, no man can see the Lord Jesus Christ. The truth is, this despair of the soul is that which cuts the sinews of man's comfort, and dulls the power and edge of all the means of grace; daunts all a man's endeavors; indeed, it plucks up endeavors by the very roots — for that which a man despairs of, he will never labor after. It is here, as it is with a man in the pangs of death: to such a man, all things are unavailable for his good — his bed will not ease him, food will not refresh him, chafing will not revive him; until at last we say *he is gone*, he is a *dead man*. Friends leave him, physicians leave him. They may go and pray for him, and mourn for him, but they cannot recover him. So this despair of soul makes a man cast off all hope, and lie down in a forlorn condition, expecting no good to come. "Alas!" says the poor soul, "What difference for a man to pray? What profit for a man to read? What benefit in all the means of grace? The truth is, the stone is rolled upon me, and my condemnation is sealed forever. And therefore I will not look after Christ, grace, and salvation anymore."

Let him come to hear the word, and mark how he discards its benefit. It was marvellous, seasonable and profitable; it was the good word of God, to those who have a share in it. Why then may you not expect any benefit from it? "No," says this soul, "The time of grace is past, the day is gone." If ministers want to pray for him, and good people pray for him, he bids them save their labor; for hell is his portion, and his condemnation is sealed in heaven. See now and consider what desperate *danger* despair brings to a poor heart, and carries him beyond the reach of mercy. That's a sweet passage of David's, Psa 77.7, *Will the Lord cast me off for ever? I said, this is my infirmity*. The word in the original, *this is my sickness*, as if to say, "This will be my death. What, is mercy gone forever? Then my *life* is gone, then all my *comfort* is gone, my *hope* is gone." Therefore, take heed of this, it dulls the edge of all our endeavors and God's ordinances that might do us good.

3. This marvellously condemns that great sin of presumption; a sin more frequent, and if possible, more dangerous — the presumption of carnal hypocrites who bolster themselves with marvellous boldness in their course. It is as true here, and I beseech you to observe that just as they said, *Saul*

Hindrances to a soul's coming to Christ, removed.

has slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands — so despair has slain his thousands, but presumption his ten thousands. Men may swear, and lie, and cheat, and break all commands, and yet hope to be saved. They hope grace will save them, and yet they resist grace. They hope Jesus Christ will save them, and yet they oppose Christ. This is what has slain many thousands among us; and there are few who have not split upon this rock. And therefore I say, this serves to reprove the baseness of those hypocrites who boast of themselves, and compare their hopes with the hopes of the saints. “It is true,” they say, “I cannot walk so freely; I cannot repeat a sermon; I don’t have those parts that they have; yet I hope to be saved as well as they.” This is what has slain so many thousands of souls who are now roaring in hell; they may thank *presumption* for it.

Now, *this* hope is not the hope of the saints. The hope of the saints is a *grounded* hope; but these hopes hang upon some idle pleas and foolish pretenses, and some carnal reasons. But I tell you they will fail, and sink into the bottomless pit before they are aware. It is the command and counsel of Peter (1Pet 1.21), that every man should be ready to *give an account of his faith and hope that is in Him*. Look to the reasons that carry you, and to the arguments that persuade you; see they are not groundless and foolish hopes. You hope to be saved, and you hope to go to heaven, and you hope to see the face of God with comfort. Look about, I say — good hope has good reason, grounded hope has grounded reason.

4. The saints of God, many times, are deprived of comfort, not because God withholds it, but because they put it away from themselves, and will not have it, though He offered it — as David says in Psalm 77: *My soul refused comfort*. He was like a sullen child who will not drink his milk, because he cannot have it in the golden dish. So sometimes we will have nothing at all, because God does not do for us what we wish. These are the main hinderances, and I might add many more. For carnal reason is very fruitful this way; and through our own folly, and the devil’s craft, we are apt to abuse things, and to make them hinderances in our way to eternal happiness.

CHAPTER 2.

Helps to come to Christ.

I COME now to the cures for all these impediments, where, if we had the wisdom and care we should have, we might break through them all to Christ. The means are especially four, by which we may be inwardly strengthened against them all, and at last be able to overcome and foil them forever.

The first cure and help is this; we must not look too long, nor pore too much or unwarrantably upon our own corruptions within, so far as to be disheartened by them from coming to the riches of God's grace. For this is a sure and everlasting truth, that whatever sight of sin unfits a man for mercy, when it is offered and he may take it — that sight of sin is ever sinful, even if it never has so fair an outside of sorrow and deep humiliation. Namely, as when we think and say (as we often do) if I had a soul so thoroughly humbled, and bruised, and softened, and so forth, I could do well enough. And thus the devil keeps us in sin by poring too long and too much upon our sins; as if thinking thereby to get away from them. But such a course is a *sinful* course. Tell not me of sorrow, and repentance, and humiliation — all that sorrow, humiliation, and repentance is for naught if it keeps a man from receiving mercy when there is need, and it is offered. See this in Abraham. He had this promise that he would have a son in his old age; and Rom 4.19-21, *Not being weak in faith, he did not regard his old age or deadness, nor the barrenness of Sarah's womb, but believed in Him who had promised it.* There he rests, and there he stays; he saw his body was dead, yet there was a living promise; and what if Sarah's *womb* was barren, yet the *promise* was fruitful. He knew his own deadness and her barrenness; but he didn't stay there long. As Abraham saw his body, therefore, so we may see our sins, and consider our many weaknesses. But must not so settle upon them, or consider them so as to be hindered by them from coming to God for mercy, which he freely offers us, and which we stand in need of. For while the soul of a man is daily plodding upon his own misery and distempered life, these two things follow:

1. We stop the stream of God's promise, and let down the sluice against it, so that the promise cannot enter into us.
2. We set open the stream and floodgate of corruption, and make it run most violently down, and to flood in upon us; and in the end to overwhelm us.

Now the inconvenience arising by this is enough to flay the best Christian in the world; for what can a man get out of his corruption? He can have no more from it than is to be had; and it is in vain to look for comfort where it is *not* to be had. All this, and the least of all this, may dishearten us, but it will not encourage us, or put heart into us. See the humility and wisdom of the woman of Canaan, Mat 15.22-27. She follows Christ, but he doesn't listen to her; he gives her a sore foil, and calls her a dog; and says, "you Gentiles are dogs; and the gospel of grace and salvation is the children's bread." Now, if she had only considered the words of Christ, and only looked into herself and her own baseness, then she would never have received either mercy or comfort from Him. But she says, "*In truth Lord, I am a dog; yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master's table.*" This was her resolution. There are two things in this, which express and set forth the frame of a gracious heart — a heart that is truly wise to attend to its own baseness, *with faith* — and that is her humility and wisdom. It is as if she said, "You say I am a Gentile and a dog; I confess it;" *there's* her humility. "Yet, though I am a dog, I will not go outdoors, but lie under the table for mercy;" *there* is her wisdom. Thus she did; and so must we. And when our corruptions, as I said, flood in upon us, and we see ourselves quite lost and damned in our sins, we must then

Helps to come to Christ.

say, “In truth Lord, I am as bad as your word can make me; yet do not let me fly from mercy, but lie at the feet of my Savior’s mercy, till he looks upon me as he once did upon Peter, Luk 22.61.¹

It is *fitting*, and we *ought* to see our sins: but we must not stay too long there. See them we must, but not fasten on them, so as to shackle us from coming to Christ. I have said it, and will say it, that the sight of sin which does not drive a man to Christ for mercy, is ever sinful. Labor therefore to see your sins, and in this way:

First, see your sins in the Royal Law (Jas 2.8), as in the right mirror; a mirror that will present them *as they are*, and look not away till you have seen them so.

Secondly, so see them, by such a holy gaze at them, that you may see the utter insufficiency in yourself to satisfy (atone) for them.

Thirdly, and so see them, that by that sight, you may behold an absolute necessity of Christ to succor you. And then go speedily to Him who alone can help you; and dwell no longer on your sins, but go to the throne of grace, where there is plentiful redemption, from which issue pardons in abundance to remove that guilt which sin has brought upon your soul; and where there is power enough to enable you to be more than a conqueror over your corruption.

First cure: briefly, every soul should say, “It is true, Lord, my sins are many and great, for I have departed from You, the fountain of bliss. But shall I continue, and so depart further from you, and persist in evil? God forbid!” All this while I speak to broken-hearted *Christians*. You others, the *profane ones*, have your portion already, and will have more of it in hell hereafter. Therefore, stand by for a while, and let the children come to their bread.

Isa 66.2, *The Lord looks to him who is of a humble and contrite heart, and who trembles at His word*. A poor creature cannot help but observe every word of God, and tremble at every truth. His meditation is such as this: “Here is salvation indeed, but it is not mine; here is mercy, but I have no part in so great a mercy.” And thus he shakes at every apprehension of every word of God, concluding that certainly, he will never enjoy any part of it. But mark what the text says, *The Lord looks at such a trembling soul*; that is, he casts sweet intimations of his goodness and love into him, and says, “You poor trembling sinner, to you let it be spoken, I have an eye toward you in the Lord Jesus Christ.” Therefore, he further says, Isa 40.1-2. Comfort, yes comfort my people, speak comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, and her iniquity is pardoned; “tell Jerusalem she is accepted, tell her what my mind is.”

And here he goes on, and says to his minister, “speak to the heart of such a humble penitent, and tell him from me, no, tell him from *heaven*, and tell him from the Lord Jesus Christ, and from beneath the hand of the Spirit, that his person is accepted, and all his sins are done away by them, and he himself is shined upon in great mercy.”

Here Ephraim is the picture of a soul truly humbled, in whose behavior we may see the behavior of a true penitent towards God; and God’s dealing towards him. The text says, Jer 31.18-20,

Surely I have heard Ephraim bemoaning himself (there’s the heart broken and thirsty). You have chastised me, and I was chastised; turn me, and I shall be turned; you are the Lord my God. Surely after I was turned, I repented, and after I was instructed, I struck my thigh; I was ashamed, yes, even confounded (humiliated), because I bore the reproach of my youth.

Thus is the sinner, as if he had said,

“I am the wretch that has seen all the means of grace in abundant measure, and yet never profited under the hand of any. The Lord has corrected me, but I would not be tamed; and he

¹ **Luk 22:61** And the Lord turned and looked at Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how He had said to him, “Before the rooster crows, you will deny Me three times.”

Helps to come to Christ.

instructed me, but I would not learn. Lord turn me, you are my God; I have nothing in myself; no, indeed. Now I see the evils which I never perceived before; and I observe the baseness of my course, which I didn't consider before. Now I am ashamed of my abuse of grace so plainly revealed: I am even now confounded with the sense of those abominations my soul formerly took pleasure in."

This may be conceived to be the mourning of a poor and much broken sinner. And now mark God's answer: *Ephraim is my Son; he is a pleasant child: for since I spoke against him, I earnestly remember him still; therefore my heart trembles for him, I will surely have mercy upon him.* This is like saying, "I observed all those secret sighs; I considered all those tears, heard all those prayers, and took notice of all those complaints; and my heart even yearns towards this poor dejected sinner, a humble soul who seeks me out for mercy. The truth is, I will embrace him with my lovingkindness." This for the *first* help.

Now, the ***second means of cure*** is this: take heed of judging your estate by carnal reason without the rule. This is commonly the fashion and fault of poor distressed spirits, who pass a fearful sentence against themselves upon groundless arguments, and say, "I never found it, I feel no such thing, and I fear it isn't so." But in this, we hear but carnal pleas, coming out of Satan's forge, and by his help, *from* ourselves, *against* ourselves — for we judge ourselves by them. But, I say, take heed of this wile of Satan's, and make conscience of this as much as you would of any other fault — as much as you would of swearing, stealing, adultery, or murder. For it is as truly sin as those, though not so great; yet it is a far greater sin than you imagine. Consider this, you humble-hearted Christian, for I speak *to you*. Therefore, when you conclude on these grounds, that your case and estate is nothing, see and consider against how many commandments you offend.

First, you dishonor God and the work of his grace, by denying what God has done for you. Also, you speak irreverently against Him. Besides, you are a murderer, in that you wound your own soul. Further, you rob yourself of much comfort, and so you are a thief. And you bore false witness against yourself — indeed, against Christ, and the spirit of Christ, and the work of grace already wrought in you. You also join with the devil against the Lord Jesus Christ. Are these *not sins*?

You may say, "I speak as I think." Yet that doesn't hinder you from bearing false witness. As we see, if a man affirms someone is a drunkard, and doesn't know it, this man bears false witness — because, though the man is indeed a drunkard, it is more than the witness knows. So you say you have nothing, when you only fear it, and suspect it, and don't feel it. I say this rather because of the sinful distemper that creeps in upon the hearts of many broken-hearted Christians. And this is such that, out of a self-willed road of carnal reason, and a vile haunt that they have gotten, their hearts are persuaded that they do well to do so, and that they can never be well *unless* they do so.

But those who are such (mark what I say), when reason is plain against them, and plain Scripture evidences the contrary, don't so much attend to what the minister says, as they stand and invent how they may answer the minister — and so they put away their own mercy. Therefore, let the fear of God fall upon every poor soul who hears this. And let him know that, however he has taken or given leave to himself, or taken up the wasters,¹ by taking up pleas against the truth, he is now to change course, go aside, and mourn apart for his misprision.² He is also to wonder that all this while, the Lord has not taken away all the comforts of His grace, and all the motions of His Spirit from him. The prophet David prays the Lord to *turn his eyes away from beholding falsehoods*, Psa 119.37. Now, if God must do that for him; that is, turn our eyes away so that they don't see, then much more must God turn away our hearts, so that they don't attend lying vanities. We must

¹ *Waster*: a person who destroys, ruins or lays waste to something; who dissipates resources self-indulgently.

² *Misprision*: misapprehension, misconception, or mistake; also, neglect, negligence, or contempt of the truth.

Helps to come to Christ.

attend God and the voice of his Spirit. But to listen to carnal pleas (which we have no warrant to do), is to sin deeply, and to hurt our own soul both deeply and dangerously. No man would deal with a cheater. Carnal reason is a cheater; therefore we should not heed it unless we would resolve to be cheated. And now, if the *danger* of the sin cannot make us do this, then let the *sorrow* that will come of it constrain us. The prophet Isaiah says. *Behold, all you who kindle a fire, and who surround yourselves with the sparks that you have kindled; this you shall have by my hand: you shall lie down in sorrow.* These are the prophet's words; indeed, God's words by him.

And now I will tell you what is meant by *sparks*, and what is meant by *fire*. In the old law, as some of you know, a *heavenly fire* was kept continually burning on the altar of the sanctuary. This shadowed out (signified) the will and wisdom of God in his word. And there was also *strange fire*, which signifies the diverse sparks of men's own imaginations and conceits. Concerning this, every poor creature carries his tinderbox with him, and is ever kindling it. But such a fire greatly provoked God once, and it still does; so says the text. In it are two things.

First, that the heart of man will naturally invent carnal reasons and pleas against itself, and is settled upon them as upon the dregs at the bottom of a vessel.

Secondly, the result that follows is fearful; for it is said, *This you shall have by my hand: you shall lie down in sorrow.*

Now then, when the Scriptures are clear, and the reasons upon it are evident — and yet you would have your own devices and ways — this much I must tell you: *you shall lie down in sorrow* at last, and you may thank *yourselves* for it. Away, then, with your tinderboxes; abase yourselves before the throne of grace, and at last be “wise unto salvation” that is so near.

“*Ho, everyone who thirsts (says God by his prophet, Isaiah, 55.1) come and buy without money, take of the well of the water of life freely, and live forever.*” Many a poor minister, while he preaches the good word of God, would gladly leave his own commodity behind him,¹ while he says, “You must have it; and you shall have it; it is your portion, and it belongs to you by right.” Thus we are prepared even to force God's favor upon you. Hereupon we *beseech* you to believe, and we *entreat* you for the Lord Jesus' sake, to receive mercy, and to humble your hearts.

Thus we deal with you in fatherly terms. But will you take so great and so good a commodity as this from us? No, beloved; many sweet promises, and many admirable, precious things of grace and salvation are revealed — but men are negligent to take these for themselves. In this case, our markets stand upon ourselves; we avoid laying out anything here to benefit, because some carnal plea or other would mar it all. This argues plainly, the small estimation that we have of Christ. But the poor hungry sinner, one who is apprehensive of his own weakness and feebleness, longs till the feast day comes, so that he may partake of these and similar delicacies. Oh! how carefully does he listen, and how diligently does he attend what the minister says? And if the word comes home to his conscience, enlightening his heart, and reproving him of his ways: then he cries out; “Oh! I am in great trouble; good Lord comfort me, I am full of doubts; good Lord resolve me, I am ignorant in spiritual things; good Lord teach me, I have a proud, stout, stubborn heart; good Lord humble me.” He was never better than now. Therefore take this for a general rule: that a good heart is never better at ease, than when the word works most, and most biting. Contrarily, a wicked graceless person is never better than when the word works least, or never at all upon him. But when he thinks the minister will come close to his sore and soul, he won't be at home that day; he will be sure to be out of town, or not in place. He knows the word would awaken him, and frighten him, and he cannot bear the blow. And therefore he keeps away, and shuns the hearing of the word, when it might work to his reformation in any way.

¹ **Rom 9:2-3** “I have great sorrow and continual grief in my heart. ³ For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren...”

Helps to come to Christ.

And now for a **third cure**, let us be marvellously wary and watchful that we do not enter into the fray,¹ and dispute with Satan on points which are beyond the reach of man, such as saying, “I am not elected, therefore God will not look upon me to do me any good. Or, it is a vain thing for me to use the means of mercy, my time of mercy having run out. Oh! the days of grace that I have seen, when the Lord knocked sweetly at my heart, and was pleased to reveal my sins to me at such a time. But then, hard-hearted wretch that I was, I shut the door upon him, and now he is gone and past; and now there is no hope for the visit of grace, or that Christ should return again to show me any mercy.” If the devil can have you here, all your comfort is gone — for upon this ground, a man will never receive rest for his soul, come what days will. And how can he? For if he cannot judge about or know comfort, then how will I as the minister be able to give it, or he as the hearer be able take it?

And here, look how it is with a poor travelling man, one who falls among thieves, who come and promise to carry him by a nearer way. But they bring him into a wood where no passengers come, and there they do what they will to him. So it is with a poor soul, when the devil gets him into these unwarranted disputes, as it were — large wildernesses of God’s eternal counsel, where there are no passengers, and therefore he cannot help but be void of helps and succor, so that Satan may now exercise his full pleasure, and whole malice, by terrifying his poor desolate soul.

To avoid which straits, observe these three rules.

First, let the soul in this case bear upon the Almightyness of the power of God, who said to Abraham, *I am God all-sufficient*, Gen. 17.1. For if you are persuaded of the all-sufficiency of God, that assurance cannot help but stay you slipping from falling. And here remember that God can do more than you can think. *He is able*, and He does you good, even if you don’t know it. And further, consider that the soul cannot doubt God’s *will*, without that very doubt questioning His *power*. This much for the first rule.

Secondly, It bids you check your own heart for meddling with God’s secrets, and for prying into his closet of hidden counsels. For no man should go beyond his bounds; and it does not pertain to you to look into this ark of matters that are sealed up. Deut. 29,29: *Secret things belong to God, but revealed things belong to us*. And *who has known the mind of God?* asks Paul, 1Cor 2.16. Mark this, you who would be climbing up the ladder of God’s eternal predestination, and going into the skies to know what God’s secret mind is. Keep your stations wisely; for neither the devil, nor all the devils in hell, ever knew the mind of the Lord. When Jonah cried against Nineveh, saying, within forty days all of you — that is, all you drunkards, and adulterers, and murderers, and others — shall be destroyed. Mark here how the king resolves: Jonah 4.19, *Who can tell if the Lord will repent, and stay his fierce wrath so that we do not perish?* Therefore the devil tells you this much, and says, “God has appointed a way to salvation, and you have had the means, and didn’t profit by them; therefore God will *never* show you mercy, nor give you grace.” Thus says the devil. But how can he tell that? Surely all the devils in hell cannot tell it. Say to yourself, “Let me walk in that course which God has appointed and commanded, and do what I should; and then I may say, and say it with comfort, who knows but that God may break the heart of a proud, rebellious, contrary sinner, such as mine is, and such as I am?” Truly, none but God knows.

Thirdly, therefore don’t measure the riches of God’s love, and the sweetness of His saving grace, according to your own concepts; nor think that because you cannot conceive it, therefore God will not do it. For the prophet Isaiah says (55.7-9), *Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts*; that is, all you wicked ones, and you who have lived lewdly, return from your wicked ways, and vain thoughts, and He will abundantly show mercy.

¹ *Originally*, “enter into the lists of” – to engage in combat, rivalry, or competition. The term comes from medieval jousting tournaments, in which the *list* or *lists* was the barrier around the arena for such a contest.

Helps to come to Christ.

“But will the Lord pardon all my sins?” asks the poor doubting soul. “I cannot think so. If I myself were a God, I would never let pass such intolerable things as have been done by me.”

Because *you* cannot, you think *God* cannot, or will not. Yes, says the Lord, “I can abundantly pardon: for my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor my ways as your ways.” A poor creature thinks his sins are unpardonable, and that he will never get assurance of God’s favor, or hope of His love. “But you are men,” says the Lord, “and have finite thoughts; but I am a God, and infinite in mercies, when you think I will have no mercy.”

“But were any *such as I*, ever received to mercy?” asks the drooping soul. “And therefore, why should I be the only one?”

To this I say, when Christ had wrought many strange miracles, the people said there were never any such things done in Israel. And therefore it is plainly not to be doubted that God can do things that were never done: Job 9.10, *He does great things past finding out, and wonders without number*, says Job. And therefore, don’t judge either God’s power or His love by your scant understanding.”

The best Christians are the ones who are most suspicious of themselves. And none are more filled with doubts and fears, than those who have the least cause to fear or doubt that their estates are broken and bad. Therefore Satan makes it his chief work to grieve and terrify them. Besides, their own distrustful hearts are always ready to join issue with his false reports against them, raising false surmises against themselves, and putting mercy away from them. It is as if they were hired by the devil to take his part in pleading against their own sure salvation. Therefore it is worth the time to hear what David says, Psa 42.8: *The Lord shall command his loving-kindness in the morning*. It is a phrase taken from princes and great men whose words are a law of command. For so God will send forth his loving-kindness, as by a commandment, to a truly humble Christian. It is as if to say, “Go, Love and Everlasting Mercy, take your commission. I charge you go to that poor broken-hearted sinner; go to that poor, hungry, and thirsty soul; go and prosper, and prevail, and stamp My love upon his heart. And there let it stand, whether he will have it or not.” Thus the Lord charges his loving-kindness to do good to poor sinners. And by his own Almightyness, He bears up the soul when it is ready to sink under the weighty burden of its many transgressions.

“But what? Shall *I* have mercy? No, no,” says the poor doubting heart. “Will the Lord Jesus accept *me*? No, surely not. If I could pray so and so, and if I had these and those parts, and if I could perform duties in this and that manner, *then* there might be some hope. But all is *contrary* — and therefore, woe and alas, there is no mercy for me.”

But to answer this also, let me tell you, whoever you are, that God invites you in particular, *by name*; and that all the sweetness in Christ, and in his precious promises, pertain to *your* soul. And you have as great an interest in them as any servant of God in the world whatsoever.

“No, no,” says the trembling soul, “I cannot believe that such a wretch as I, shall or *can* go to heaven. It cannot be. Heaven will rather fall, than I come there.” Thus the discouraged sinner knocks for mercy, and then shuts the door against himself.

And now, when all carnal reasonings, and high-soaring imaginations, as Paul calls them, have raised up strongholds against mercy and comfort; when the word cannot for the present settle peace in the unquiet soul; God is made at last to *command* his loving-kindness, and send it with a commission from heaven; and say to it, “I charge you, break open the doors of such a reluctant sinner. Tear off that veil of ignorance that is before his eyes; silence all his doubts and fears. And when this is done, I charge you to go home to that broken soul, and cheer and refresh it with the sense of My sweet favor; and with the assurance of My love to fill it.”

While we were enemies, says the apostle, *Christ died for us*, Rom 5.8. And here the Lord sends from heaven to a poor miserable creature, and says, “Commend my love, commend my mercy to

Helps to come to Christ.

such a distressed soul, and tell it, though it has been an enemy to me, yet I am a friend to it. Tell it, though it has been a traitor to me, I have been a good king to it. And tell it, that though it has been a rebel to me, I have yet been a loving God to it. Tell the man, whose heart is so, that his sins are pardoned, his person accepted, and his soul shall be saved. Tell him his sighs and groans are not lost, and that his prayers are heard in heaven. Let him know that the Lord Jesus died for sinners, *when* they were sinners. Make all this good to his soul, I charge you, *before* you come back.”

The **fourth cure** is this. And it is especially to be observed by a Christian — above all, in his proceedings with himself at the bar of judgment — and that is, to pass no hasty sentence against yourself, that is not according to the evidence of the word. If you are to be approved, let the word of God do it. And let the same word examine you, if you come to be examined. If this word speaks *for* you, no matter if all men and angels speak *against* you — and if it *condemns* you, no matter who speaks *for* you — by this word you rise or fall to your own master. Even if some wrangling fellow steps in, who would determine causes before the judge comes, will his word stand? No! Therefore, a wise man will stay till the judge himself comes, and wait upon the judgment of his mouth. Do not deal otherwise with your own soul. Don't submit the case to be tried by a company of peevish carnal reasons, but stay till the word comes (which is the judge); and judge yourself by *that*, and hold to *that* for your life, and for the life of your soul. *The light is what manifests all things*, says the apostle, Eph 5.13. His meaning is this: the light of the word, and the evidence of God's truth, manifested to the souls of God's people — these, properly, are the judges. The others are but wrangling cases, and not to be admitted. And here sense and feeling, grounded upon carnal matter, are like fogs and mists, which make a man unable to see his way. But upon clearing up his state and condition, it is open before him; and then it is manifest what it is. *Learn from me*, says our Savior, Mat 11.29, *and you shall find rest for your souls*. And the Psalmist says, *I will inquire what the Lord will say*. So say you, “I will not hearken to what carnal reason will say; I will hear what *God* says.” The lack of this, is the cause why we have so many distractions and disquietudes, and why we are still in our doubts: because he that teaches and can persuade us, is a deluder.

And it is from this, that the poor soul says, “What, will I have an interest in Christ? Will I have a title to the promises? No, this belongs to those who are broken-hearted. Indeed, if I had such power against corruption, such heavenly-mindedness, and this and that precious grace, *then* there would be some hope. But I am so full of weakness, and many times led captive by such a rebellious heart, that it is too apparent that I never had saving grace. Indeed, I fear that I will never have it truly wrought in my soul.”

This is what you say, poor soul; but *who told you so?* And where did you learn that religion? I am sure you never learned it from Christ. For who, or what word tells you, “If I have such a load of corruptions, I will never have grace”? Not the word of Christ, I am sure. Therefore I charge you, *hold to the truth of the word*. Learn from me, says Christ, and don't let your case be decided by carnal reason; neither regard what it tells you. For if you take that way, and don't turn back, you can never come to Christ; that way is no way to Him. Learn from the Lord Christ, for his word is faithful, and his promise sure; and there you will find a tower of rest as strong as mount Zion. It is that word by which we will be judged at the last great day, when sense and feeling will be thrown over the bar for deceivers, and never come into court again.

And this much of the **four cures**. It now remains that I propound **four rules**, by which a man may know how to order himself, and to so walk, that he may keep a strait course by the word, and not turn aside to one hand or the other, from that guide of his way: And thus walking, he may get into his hands, the evidences that can assure him of a perpetual rest, and establish his mind with perfect peace. For those who walk in this way, work no iniquity.

CHAPTER 3.

Rules to direct a Christian how to use the word of God for his evidence, or assurance with peace.

THE first of these rules teaches to use the word of God rightly. For just as you must turn to the word in all things that concern your soul, so you must consider your own uprightness by it, and see what work is in your soul that is able to answer the word, and to testify that the work of grace is there. And here, be sure to take your soul at its best. Don't always pore upon the worst in it, nor upon your failings, nor what can only accuse you. But if there is anything there that may justly speak for you, don't neglect that. It is an injustice for any court to hear one side and not another. The Scripture is a text of justice. And the Lord doesn't lie in wait to catch his children,¹ but takes them at their best, as in Rom 4.21-22. It is therefore said that *Abraham believed the promise, and it was imputed to him for righteousness*. Indeed, in Genesis 12, he had some doubts; but God took him at his best; and says this about his faith. So Sarah is spoken of as a gracious woman, and a pattern for women, by calling her husband *lord*. This was a sign of reverence to her husband, and a humble heart toward the Lord. And yet we read that she derided the message of the Lord by the angel, Gen 18.12. The Lord buries that, and only speaks of what was a commendation to her; and so He took her at her best too.

Now, as the Lord dealt with these, so should we with ourselves. Whatever is found sincere and upright in us, that is what we should observe, as well as that which is not so; indeed, observe that instead of and before the other. If a man were to have his cause handled in any court of justice in this negative fashion — namely, that there should only be observed what is failing in the cause, and never what supports it — then even the best cause might fall to the ground. Therefore the court will hear it *all* read: every bond or bill that comes in, and every matter of agreement; briefly, everything. The cry will be, *let it all be read*. Again, suppose a man has a bond or other instrument in court, and the lawyer only opens and reads the failings in it, and whatever seems to work against the party. If the judge only hears *that*, then how can it help but go against that side? Therefore that party says, "Good my Lord, hear it all." Now when all is read, those defects are corrected, and the cause goes well, which would not have been so if that bond or deed, or other instrument, had been half-read, not thoroughly read. So too, when men bring in so many and main indictments against themselves, and say, "Oh what pride and stubbornness is in my heart! Oh! how weak I am, and dull, and dead, and backward to holy duties; Oh! how careless of enjoying communion with God! How negligent in sifting and testing my own heart, in watching over my senses, and mourning in secret for my daily failings!"

Even if this were so, yet if men will see no more than this, and these are too much, then it is no marvel if they trouble their own house, or if Satan judges them by their own words. To such a one I therefore say, "All that you say may be true; but aren't you troubled with these failings? And aren't they the greatest grief that your soul has?" "Yes," says the poor soul, "I confess my heart is vexed, and my soul grieved for them; and I could be content to be anything, if I could not be so." Now hear on *this* side, and take the best of it. For as it is with a man's hand and the staff, so it is here. I compare the promise to a staff: you know that the back of a man's hand *cannot* take hold of the staff; but the palm of his hand *can*. So likewise, turn the right side of your soul to the promise, and then you may take hold of it. We don't take hold of it, because we turn the back side of our hearts to the promise. For then, the soul says, "Oh! my stubbornness is great, and my inabilities grievous, and my corruptions many." But this is the wrong side, which will ever hinder you from taking hold of the promise. But turn to the right side, and then say, "my soul hates these, and my soul is right weary of them." Oh, this is the right side; turn to *that*, and you are well.

¹ Originally, "lie at catch with his children..."

How to use the word of God for evidence or assurance.

Labor to have your conscience settled and established in that truth which you have now gotten out of the word, to bear witness of the work of grace in you. For if there is any lack of the assurance of God's love, and if the evidence of the work of grace doesn't come roundly in, but there is some guilt of sin still remaining, then conscience will make new stirs and breed new broils, and continually move and disquiet the heart. Therefore, just as it is good to have our judgment informed by the word when we see the good that is in us, so it is appropriate to persuade our conscience of it, so that conscience may speak for us, and all be made strait. Otherwise, just as the debtor who is indebted to many creditors, if he doesn't agree with all, or with all save one, that one may come upon him, as well as all the rest. So it is for the poor distressed soul who lies at the mercy of the Lord, and is so deep in arrearages to the law that he cannot wind his way out. If he doesn't labor to still his conscience, and whatever else is against him, in *every* point as well as in *some* point, and he leaves one undischarged, then that one alone may set his conscience against him, as well as a hundred might.

The lack of this, is why lawsuits and new bills are daily entered against us: because conscience is not pacified, nor completely quieted. And now, take a poor sinner who has all his doubts and objections answered. Come to him and say, "Are these *all* your doubts and objections?" He will say, "Yes." "And are they *all* answered?" Here he will say "Yes," too. "And do you now have anything to say against that which has been made known to you?" "No, not now." But say to him again, "Did your conscience say to you, *it is a sin to say you have no grace?*" Here he demurs and stops; and he says, "No, I dare not say so, but rather, I say the contrary." Now mark what he says: "All the charges are crossed out,¹ and all the objections answered. And yet conscience puts in a new plea, because perhaps it was not satisfied to the full, and in every parcel of aberration."

Now come to him again, and say, "You are sometimes captivated by sin, are you not? And are you willing to be at God's free disposal, and have Him pluck away from you all your corruptions, all your *shackles*, as it were?" "Oh!" says the poor sinner, "I *must* yield to that." "Then I affirm to your soul, that this is a work of true grace. Here therefore, let your conscience be fully satisfied." "But satisfied how?"

Thus: cancel all self-accusations, and this will quit all scores and clear the heart, scattering all the clouds that mist it. This will cast out all objections, and all new bills against us: *for if our consciences don't condemn us, then we have boldness towards God.* (1Joh 3.21) We must then shut the mouth of conscience; that is, be convinced and agree that it is a sin to say that God has not wrought this work of grace in the heart, when it is so clear that He has. For even if sense and feeling are gone, as it sometimes will be, conscience remembers the day and year when the sinner had a clear evidence of God's love. And therefore it says, "Lord you know it, and you said out of your word at such a time, that the heart of this poor soul was upright and sincere before you."

And here it should be with a poor sinner, as it is with a wise man, when he would make his lands sure to himself and his posterity, by sealed evidences and writings. He isn't content here only to have his evidences in his own keeping, but he will have them enrolled in chancery,² such a year, and such a day. So that if he were to lose his deeds, he might be sure where to find them. So it should be with the distressed soul. It should not only be willing to have all objections to the contrary of it answered, but it should further get them recorded in the court of conscience, as in chancery. That way, when sense and feeling are lost, it may readily go to that high court of conscience, and there find the day and year when God's love was made sure to it.

¹ Originally, "All the books are crossed..." – **Col 2:14** having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.

² That is, recorded in the city clerk's office, at the courthouse – officially signed and dated. A chancery, in British law, is a court with jurisdiction in equity, or a court of public records. It acts as a court of appeals.

How to use the word of God for evidence or assurance.

We should strive, and strive mightily to have our hearts overpowered with the evidence that reason and conscience make good to us — so that we may quietly receive, and calmly welcome it; yes, and yield and subject our hearts to the truth of it. But here we all stick. There are three things in the soul of a man — three, I say — that abet all these quarrels and oppositions against the evidences of the word in that man. (1) Reason objects. (2) Conscience accuses. (3) The will of man will not submit. And here we find by experience, that when a man has stilled the conscience, and silenced all reasons to the contrary of his peace, such is the *iron* of the stubborn heart, that nothing can bar it. It still maintains some challenging and some new quarrels against the truth and itself. Besides, it keeps afoot even that which has long ago been answered, and let down — indeed, a man would think had been buried in a grave as deep as hell, never to rise again.

Now, in this case it is with a poor sinner, as it is with a man who has a contentious adversary. Perhaps the cause that the two have in hand, has been tried in all the courts of law, and at last it comes to the chancery. And there it is concluded against the caviling adversary,¹ as it was in the other courts. There all matters are as well stated, and as ordered as a man would wish, and as an honest man would grant. Yet this man who is so contentious, will not be so concluded, nor so yield, but will go to the law again with a countersuit; and then, upon that same old grudge, stake all he has on it, and sell his shirt. He will have his will, whatever it costs him. Nor will he give up, till the judge comes to take notice of him, and so toss out his cause, along with himself — whom he commits to prison. And the judge says, “Sir, all these matters were answered long ago, and will you trouble us again, not with new matters, but with old quarrels?”

It is just so with the heart, even of a gracious man sometimes, and one who is humbled in some measure — one who could be content to yield to the commanding power of God’s word, and to the witness of his own conscience. And therefore he says, My condition is better than I thought it was. Yet there is an old proud, self-willed heart still within me; a heart that won’t be quieted or spoken to; but will still be quarrelsome, and maintain the old exception. For though all reasons are well confuted, and conscience bears witness that it is so; and the minister, as the judge under Christ, tosses out the cause — yet observe: the poor distressed sinner will keep the old road of objecting against himself. And though he has been answered fully as to every point, not many hours before, yet he keeps these old matters still fresh, and out of the salt, till they yield a foul stench to all who come within hearing. And thus, even when a man would think he shouldn’t dare to come into court with such old cashiered stuff, that proud self-willed heart will be doing it still; nor will it yield or give up. Don’t we have just cause, then, to labor our hearts so far as to overpower them with the authority of the truth concerning whatever God reveals to them for their good?

Oh therefore, poor soul, do not reject the evidence which God makes known, and passes upon you for your sure welfare eternally. Do not reject all, just because you don’t have the comfort you want; as if you wanted none at all. So then, the fault here is not properly because you *cannot*, but because you *will not* receive the promise. And this is what so racks and torments your spirit; this is what breeds the quarrel so hard, as compound it. And hence, when reason is satisfied, and conscience is convinced, yet the soul is still perplexed. For put this question to it, and say to it, are you persuaded that the Lord has done you this good — that He will show an everlasting mercy to your soul? And the soul will say, NO; and that all the world will not persuade it of that. “Ministers are merciful (such a distempered soul will say), and Christians are charitable. They are loth to displease too much, or to discourage someone in my case, or do to me as I would do to them. But if they knew me indeed, they would never think this way about me. Certainly *I* will never find it so. What? Do *I* have grace? All the world will never persuade me of it.”

Mark what I say: this is merely your pride and self-will, that *will not* receive that good which God is willing to give you. But repent, or this pride of your pettish heart will cost you dearly one day; I

¹ *Cavil*: to raise trivial or irrelevant objections; a fault-finder.

wish it may not. Some will say, “How can you make this out to be pride? We are ever complaining about and condemning ourselves; and can *this* be pride?”

Yes, I say (and mark what I say); it is intolerable pride against the majesty of heaven. And this I make good by these two things:

1. For a man to follow his own conceits and self-will, against the truth, the force of reason, the witness of the servants of God, and his own conscience, cannot be anything *but pride*.
2. And for a man, because he doesn't have what he would, to therefore be so off the hinges, as to throw away all God's kindness, and deny the grace that is given him, and do this because he cannot be such a conqueror as he desires — *isn't this pride?*

That measure of mercy which God has already shown to your soul, is incomprehensible, beyond man's reach. And yet, because you can not have what you would, you will have nothing at all. It is just as if a man who has the law on his side, and has his estate settled, were to throw it all away because his evidences are not written in great golden letters, or on the largest royal paper. This is your case: for because you don't have so much of grace, or with such a sweetness as you would like, you deny that you have any. But have you no humility — because this grace is none to *your* mind, or not as much, or not in the manner *you* require? Oh yes, *this* is pride; and pride in the highest degree!

These things considered, labor to bring your hearts lower, in a holy subjection to God's measure and time. And think it is your duty as well, to receive comfort when God offers it on good terms, as to do any other duty commanded. And know that it is as truly a sin, though of a higher degree, to reject mercy when God *offers* it, as to kill a man, which God has *forbidden*. I say, not as much; for I know there is a difference in degree. Therefore you, the saints of God, who have thus been pestered and possessed to become your own enemies, *remember this*: when your hearts begin to slide away, take them unto you; don't give them the reins at such desperate conclusions against God and conscience. Deal better with your souls, and say, “Good Lord, this is the proud unyielding distemper of this vile heart of mine. For what would I have? Isn't God's word clear in this point, and my conscience satisfied? Don't the ministers of God affirm that my state is good? And will I thus dishonor God, and slight them?”

But what does the poor soul say to this? “Must I eat my own words? Must I say, and then unsay? Say I have grace, when before I said that I had none?”

Yes! And be thankful too to God, that you may say so. Isn't it better for you to cross your own flesh, than to cross God's Spirit? Take notice of this, and fear lest that proud and peevish soul of yours (which now refuses consolation when God offers it) be forced to fare as a man who eats his own flesh; and to come to her knees for comfort, and get none to her dying day. For though God will save you at last, you will meanwhile have a hell on earth.

One would have thought it was great humility in Peter to refuse to let Christ wash his feet; but it was no such matter; indeed nothing less than a lack of it. Therefore Christ takes him up roundly for it — which is indeed the only way to cure such a distemper as this. Joh 13.8-9, *If I don't wash you, you have no part in me*. If you will have your own way, and humor yourself, and will not be persuaded for evidence of assurance, you may go down to hell in the mind. Peter might have paused here, and taken a breath, but he did not. His stout stomach quickly came down, and he presently said then, *Lord, not only my feet, but my hands, and my head*. It is the humility of a good heart, to take what God offers. Most Christians think they are humble-hearted when they are so far proud, as to give way to this sullen disposition. Therefore, labor to master this over-soaring heart of yours, with the authority of the word of God. And be sure to receive mercy while God offers it, lest He withdraw it, and take away the comfort of his Spirit from you, and make you go howling and roaring to your grave. Though He brings you to heaven in the end, you may have an uncomfortable hell before you get there.

The **last rule** is this: maintain the good work which your heart has submitted to, and keep it as the best thing in your house, and the best of treasure under heaven. Then, when you have obtained certain evidence by it, that your estate is good, hear nothing against it, but stick fast to it, as you would to your life. Regard nothing which is not in the word, that is contrary to that evidence of your salvation — I mean, what you have been persuaded of by the word of truth. And here, if Satan or carnal reason have anything to say against you, let them bring Scripture; and then yield to it in its true sense; but without the word, hear *nothing*. See how it is with a man who is in a lawsuit for lands. If he has his adversary on the hip, and has gained some advantage against him, he will keep him there, and hold him to the point. So should you, in a better case. For if a man follows every wrangling lawyer at every impertinent quibble or leap, he should never look for an end of lawsuits. And it is the fashion of many attorneys, to *breed* quarrels, rather than *kill* them at conception. So in this case: one who would quarrel where he may resolve, will never be done. And therefore, hold to the main point. Deal with Satan as with a subtle adversary who is full of wiles and fetches.¹ It is the cunning of the enemy to lead you aside: and he will have many vagaries, if you are in a good way, to bring you out of it. But be sure to hold to that truth which you have received from the evidence of the word, and the witness of conscience.

How the soul being tempted, may answer Satan's accusations.

When a man has gotten some comfort, then the devil begins to play the lawyer, in this or the like manner.

Satan. Don't you see how weak and poor you are? how destitute of all saving grace, and how contrary you walk to God?

It is true (says the soul). Yet it is just as true, that *whoever confesses and forsakes his sin will have mercy*. Pro 28.13.

But don't you see that you are full of pride and weakness, and secretly unwilling to come to duties?

It is true I am. Yet I hate it, and desire to forsake this way, and therefore I will find mercy; the word says so, Isa 55.7.

But are you part of God's counsel? Secret things belong to God.

Indeed I don't know what God's secret will is; yet I know what the word says, which is, *He takes no pleasure in the death of a sinner*, but invites them daily to come to him, Eze 33.11.

But many deceive themselves: mercy is like a black swan, a rare bird; and few obtain it. And why then may not you be deceived as well as others?

But the Lord will not deceive me, and the Lord knows my heart; and the Word knows what the Lord knows.

But may you not be deceived in the letter of the word? The word is true indeed; but how do you know that you rightly apply it, and that the word and your heart align together?

Why, I desire as earnestly to have my sin purged, as I do to have it pardoned. I know my heart by the word, and I turn to the word; and the Lord knows that I hate all sin inwardly, and reform it outwardly, to my weak power. And therefore I know I will find mercy. Show me a place of Scripture that says I do not rightly apply the word, and I will believe it. But I will not believe you; for you are, as you were from the beginning, a liar.

Thus hold to the word, and the devil will be tired, weary, and leave you. Keep here, for if the devil catches you wandering after sense and feeling, you're gone. The prophet says, Psa 119.98, *Through your commandments, You have made me wiser than my enemies, for they are ever with me.*

¹ *Fetch*: a stratagem, trick, or artifice.

How to use the word of God for evidence or assurance.

Satan is wise by long experience. And the flesh, and carnal reason, and the world are wise too. But blessed be our God who makes every poor ignorant servant of his, wiser than all these. But how? The word must be ever in your hands, and the meditation of it in your hearts. It must always be with you; and you must keep it with you daily. For that will make you know not only what is amiss, but gain ground against corruption, and whatever else may hinder your peace with God and with yourselves.

Satan deals in this case with the soul, as with the enemies in war. When Joshua defeated the men of Ai, he got the enemy out of the city. And then those who lay in ambush went and took it, and burnt it with fire, Jos 8.19. This is what the devil does. Our castle or city is the *promises*, the *word*, and the *ordinances* of God. Now if the devil can but get you out of this castle, he has you where he wants you. If you look after every bird that flies, and listen after every word of carnal reason, and every temptation that comes along, you're gone. If he can get you away from the sure hold of the promise, he will entangle you in his snare of unbelief, and so prevail against you.

Little children, if you abide in God's commandments, you abide in God, says the apostle. 1Joh 2.27. It is as if he said, children, your enemies are many, and great, and cunning. Therefore, stay at home, and within the walls of your sure hope, and then you are well, whatever weather comes up. It is the fashion of parents, if their children run abroad and catch a blow, to tell them that they are well enough served: "You might have stayed at home when you had a warning." So it is here.

The issue of the point is this: judge your soul by the word, and look upon that sacred piece in the mirror of itself: and here, let it bear witness for you. And what the word of God evidences to you, maintain it, and hear nothing against it. This is the way to receive constant comfort, and the way to go on cheerfully in your Christian course. Let quarrels, troubles, and temptations come; just keep close within doors, and rest yourself on the riches of the grace that is in Christ Jesus. Then you may be forever comforted, and go singing to heaven, and cheerfully to your graves — even if you meet with ever so many temptations and oppositions crossing your path.

CHAPTER 4.

Means to obtain an interest in the promises.

Now follow some means to obtain an interest in the promises, and improve them for our benefit.

IT remains that I show you some means by which a man may so improve his time, that at last he may obtain this blessed estate of being glad in the Lord. There are four means. But before I begin with them, you must know that we may use the means, and yet find no means under heaven to do it, unless God strikes the blow. You must therefore wait upon God, and the Spirit of God, in the use of means for this matter, by believing rightly to your assurance. For so the text says, Phi 1.29, *To you it is given to believe*. It must be *given* therefore: and *faith is the gift of God*, Eph 2.8. It is God, then, who must do it; yet He won't do it without us, being reasonable men and women in the power of willing. Again, the Lord affords us *means*; and yet we are not to use them and give Him the slip. Here is a good saying: let the Lord do what He will, and let us do what we should. We must not think, when we have the means, that we can get faith immediately. For, as Paul says, Eph 1.20, *The same power that raised up Jesus from the dead, must make us able to believe*; or else all the angels in heaven, and all the ministers on earth, and all the help that men and means can give us, will do us no good.

Now, the means are of diverse kinds: such as hearing, and prayer, and sacraments; these are the conduit pipes through which God communicates faith. But I will let them pass, and fasten upon those which are needed for feeble Christians, to bring them into this blessed state of rightly believing. And these are such means as follow.

1. As much as it lies in us, we must labor to pull away all those carnal outward stays that the soul leans upon, and all other like succors, and whatever contentment it is which a poor sinner resorts to as to his refuge for relief and help. So that, when all these are taken from us, we may be forced to go for succor *there*, where the right succor is to be had. It is a natural thing for us all, even from our first parents, to desire to have the staff in our own hands, and to be able to supply ourselves with all necessaries, without being beholden to others, or to any.

Now, therefore, the way to make the soul lean upon Christ, is to pluck away all those deceiving props. The *last* thing we fly to is the promise. If we could find good anywhere else than in Christ, we would never go to him for it. God hears last from us. And therefore, here we should do with ourselves, as the enemy does with a besieged city, when he would make the inhabitants, or those who keep it, yield. The way he takes it is to famish them; to cut off all provision, and stop all passages, so that none can come to relieve them. Then they quickly yield themselves to the mercy of the assailant. So it is with our nature. And seeing that it is so — that we still trust to our own strengths, and rely on something of our own — the best way to famish the heart, is by cutting off all the means and comforts by which the heart is succored and quieted, but not rightly in Christ. For when the heart is thus famished, it will then seek out its Savior, and take itself there, because otherwise there is no other thing or means to help it.

The poor woman in the gospel had spent all her goods on the physicians, Mat 5.26-27, and if she had but a little means left — even just a farthing-token — (for all I know or it appears) she would never have gone to Christ. But when all these failed, she was forced to seek Christ, who was ready and willing to do that for her, and *more* than she desired. Our souls must have something to rest upon, and they cannot subsist without some under-props. Therefore, when all our carnal hopes are taken from us, we stay (as we must) upon the promise, because we have nothing else to rest upon. Yet it is not required — though I speak this way — that a man should cast away all outward comforts that God affords him for the interim here. Oh no; but only this: that even if he has much in this way, that he yet labor to get his heart to see and acknowledge the insufficiency and emptiness of them all, till he has the superlative comfort, CHRIST, above all — and that he not

Means to obtain an interest in the promises.

repose in them as some do, making them their whole contentment and sole rest. For then they are but lying vanities and broken staves, which will not only deceive us, but pierce us too, and deeply.

And now, when the soul sees that these things cannot succor it, but lay it in a worse case, a man will then be content to have his heart divorced from them. And here it is with the soul, as it was with Noah's dove when the ark began to rest on the mountain of Ararat. Noah then sent out the dove; but the dove found no rest for the sole of her foot. No question there were many dead carcasses to settle upon; but the dove found no rest till she came to the ark again. So when a man finds no rest in anything the creature affords, and can get no footing for the soul to stay itself upon, he then takes himself to Christ, the Ark. He goes home to the promise, and he rests there, and expects from there whatever is needful for him. Therefore, just as in the art of swimming, the one who swims must pluck his feet from the bottom, and commit himself to the stream to bear him up — so in this, our purpose to heaven, we must draw our hearts from these vain things below, and these from our hearts. Even if we have honor and preferments, we must put no confidence in them, but pluck our affections from them, like feet from the bottom of the stream. And we must learn by our believing, to commit ourselves wholly to the power of the promise, and to receive comfort from there, and permanent abiding.

Don't let the gods of this world deceive you, then — such as honor, and profit, and pleasures. Did the pride of Pharaoh's heart deliver him? Did the riches of the rich man in hell save him? Did Herod's applause that he had, do him any good? Did these gods secure them? No; haven't they left them in the lurch? Therefore let us take our hearts away from these things, and in comparison to those of our better life, have a base esteem of them. Let us see so great a vanity, emptiness, and insufficiency in them all, that we may be forced to seek to Christ, and say as David did, *Help Lord, for vain is the help of man*. Let us labor further to see the privy wiles of our own hearts, and to hunt out all those mazes, and turnings, and windings of our subtle souls. For here it is wonderful to see how the soul is ready to hang her comforts upon every hedge, and to shift and shirk in every by-corner for them. Now, when you see your heart thus seeking comfort in vain helps, call it away from them, and pluck these vanities up by the roots — see the *emptiness* of them. Then your heart will be fit and ready to make toward Christ. And this much for the first means.

2. Therefore, when this is done, there is in part, some way made for the promise to come into your soul. And therefore labor in the second place, to have your heart possessed *thoroughly*, and persuaded *effectually*, of the fulness of the good that is in the promise, and of that satisfactory mercy and freeness of the grace that is in Christ. Thus the soul may be established with that full contentment which is to be had in the riches of the promise. But mark what I say: let us persuade our *hearts* first, and not be content that we're able to dispute somewhat fully about the excellency of the promise, and of those riches in it, through the free grace of God in Christ. For, to what purpose is it, that the heart knows this; and knowing it, to be so *forestalled*, that it can never realize the promise? Therefore, don't neglect your heart, till it comes to *value* the promise by what the word says about it, in a true account. I say, don't neglect your heart, till the promise of grace is most beautiful in your eye — and your heart may get some earnest ¹ touching the goodness of God, and the riches of his grace towards you, by the same promise. And here, bring your heart to know and see, that the promise is better than all the riches and honors that you can have, or the world can bestow. For so we read, Psa 9.10, *Those who know you, will trust in you; for you, Lord, have never failed those who seek you*. If you know and you will believe this, this kind of knowledge and persuasion cannot help but breed confidence and resolution, and consequently quiet the heart. We dare trust a friend whose faithfulness we have tried; and we rest upon what we know by the sure card of experience. The promises of God are, *all* of them, as true as gospel. Seek from one

¹ *Earnest*: a down payment; a deposit pending the fulfillment of the promise.

Means to obtain an interest in the promises.

end of the heaven to the other, turn the whole Bible over, and see if ever any man leaned on the promise, and the Lord did not *perform* what he had promised for the good of his soul. ¹

Unless the Lord ² had been my delight, I would have perished in my trouble, says David, Psa 119.92. *My flesh fails, and my heart fails, but You are the strength of my heart, and my portion forever.* Psa 73.26.

But here lies a great matter, a work of marvellous difficulty and great necessity. And therefore, so that your heart may sit down satisfied with the sufficiency of the promise, I will propound *three rules*, how the promise may be improved and conduce to your singular benefit here and hereafter.

How to improve the Promises for our benefit.

I. For the first of these rules, labor daily to present your soul a greater good in the promise, than you can see anywhere else. It is a man's skill, and it should be his endeavor daily, to look narrowly to his heart, and to see what it is that the heart desires most; and accordingly, to present the greatest good to it. And what may that be? Even that which has more of contentment in it, than anything else in the world. And here, we should deal with our hearts as men deal with a corrupt judge, when they would have him on their side; *there*, the only way is to bribe him. But though it is sinful in that case, yet it is good to "bribe" (as it were) the corrupt heart, with the goodness of the promise — so that the heart may cling to it, and long for it. Do honors, or riches, or the applause of men, or any earthly pleasures offer you contentment and satisfaction? Then persuade your heart there is greater worth in the promise, than can be had in *all* of them. For here is an exceeding weight of glory: and the one who has it shall be made a king, and shall have that glory that will never fade. Further, does your heart hanker after earthly joy and mirth? You will find more joy in the promise, than in the cracking of these thorns. Does your heart hanker after riches? Tell your heart that there are unsearchable riches in Christ, and that through him we have a title to all the promises of this life and better. We know that the one who offers the most for the bargain, has it. Therefore, we should observe the outgoings of our hearts, and what offers are made to give them the best contentment, and present them with such. This is what the promise does; and it does this with a greater good in God, than in all things in the world beside. Therefore, *Oh the height, and depth, and length, and breadth of the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge!*

The consideration of so much, should not only work a longing after Christ and the promise, but fill our faces with shame and confusion, that we ever set so light by the sure riches of mercy, and walked unworthy of so great a salvation. If we could comprehend the unmeasurable dimensions of God's love and goodness revealed in his word, O how our hearts would be inflamed towards him! When the sinner thinks this way with himself:

I who have done all I could against so good a God, that my heart even bleeds to think of it — there was no name under heaven that I tore in pieces more, or so much, as God's name. His wounds, and life, and heart-blood I have rent and torn a thousand times. Indeed, there was no command in the world that my soul so much despised, as the command of the Lord Jesus. There was no spirit which ever spoke to me, which I so much resisted as the Spirit of the Almighty. Oh how many sweet emotions has the Lord put into my soul, to thereby force me from my courses so base, and practices so sinful? By how many mercies has he allured me; by how many gracious promises has he invited me; by how much of his goodness has he *provoked* me to forsake my sins, and turn to him? But I have flown in the face of his ministers, and blessed Spirit, and rejected all terms of reconciliation. If I had lain in a dungeon, and been plagued with torments all my life-time — yes, even if I could have had another world full of miseries to live in — I would count it infinite mercy, if the Lord would pass by my sinful miscarriages, and pardon these inward insurrections.

¹ Num 23.19 God is not a man that He should lie... Has He said, and will he not do it (perform it)?

² The Hebrew is *Torah*, law; the LXX is *o nomos sou*, "your Law" — rather than "the Lord." — WHG

Means to obtain an interest in the promises.

But that God should send his dearest Son to *love* me, and to do that so incomparably, and so inconceivably as that I couldn't possibly hate him so much as he loved and affected me; that I could not so exceed in unkindness towards him, as he has exceeded in tender kindness towards me — what sort of *love* is this? What unkindness for so great love? Wouldn't it be righteous for God to never more to speak comfort to my soul, that has so lightly esteemed his promise, and his sweet word of comfort? Wouldn't it have been *justice* for him to now take all this, as He well might, for an advantage against me? Wouldn't it be *justice* that I, who have lived in sin, should have *perished* in my sins? And wouldn't it be *justice* that I, who have loved corruption so much, should have reaped the bitter fruit of it, long before this? But that the Lord should find an enemy and *not slay him*; in fact, that he should give his beloved Son out of his own bosom to *save him*, is a love inexpressible. O the height of this mercy, beyond all desire or thought! Oh the breadth of this mercy, a breadth without any bounds! Oh the length of this mercy, a length beyond all times! Oh the depth of this mercy, a profundity beyond all expression!

Labor *here*, therefore, to have access to the promise, and to bring your soul to it. *Here* speak a good word for it, and say, set aside profits, and pleasures, and preferments; make room for the Lord Jesus Christ. Speak thus, and set a peerless and most excellent price upon the promise. And *be sure of this*, for it is a sure rule that whatever the soul accounts as best, that is what it will choose, and leave all others for it. Therefore, if the soul could even once out-bid the world, and out-shoot the devil in his own bow, and put aside all those things which the devil tosses as rubs in its way of coming to the promise — then this labor would be a work of great gain, and usher in the promise itself. For example: when you see your heart look after friends, let those friends usher in the way to think upon the infinite love and favor of God in Christ, *that* Friend as He calls himself. And when your heart would hunt after wealth, let this usher in a way to the promise; and say, if the heart finds such contentment in riches, then what would it find in the riches of God's grace in Christ! Thus present a greater good from the promise, than from anything else, and you will deal safely and well for yourself. This much for the first rule.

II. The second rule, is to labor to bring your heart to this: that all the things in the world, without the promise, are *nothing*; and that if you had all that the earth can afford, and not the promise, then you have gotten only the wind, or that which will be a curse to you rather than a blessing. For *faith is the substance of things hoped for*, Heb 11.1. It gives a kind of being and subsistence to all. So that there is no subsistence in honor or riches, if they don't subsist by faith; and without faith they are clogs and snares to us; not helpers. Unless faith gives them their title, and a blessing with it, they are poor and empty things. Our prayers, if they lack faith in the promise, are prayers of no substance — *words*, and nothing else. On the other side, the most broken and chattering prayers of a poor soul — when a poor creature can scarcely utter five words with any sense — yet these, however weak, when mingled with faith, are a very powerful prayer. So all your hearing, and all my preaching, hangs upon faith. Otherwise they are but lost labor, lacking that which gives a kind of being to whatever I speak, or you hear. This much for the second rule.

III. The third rule in this second means, is this: labor to acquaint your heart with that good which the promise promises. Do this before carnal reason comes and possesses your heart. Remember here, that the promise is most sure. It will come when it will be most seasonable and best for you, and when God sees it is most fit; for then we shall most certainly have it. Heb 4.16, *Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may receive comfort and mercy in time of need*. Not when we see fit, but when *God* sees that it is fit and profitable. But this is what carries many away. Sometimes they are little affected with the excellency of the riches of God's grace in Christ. And seeing what great things the Lord has done for their souls, they say, O that I were such a one; and O that I might die the death of the righteous! But when they don't quickly have what they expect, they throw away their hope. And then the good promise of God, not being what they request, the devil presently steps in and wonderfully prevails with them. They should say with the prophet,

Means to obtain an interest in the promises.

Hab 3.17, *When the fig tree won't blossom, nor the fruit be on the vine, when the labor of the olive fails, and yields no fruit; then will I rejoice in the Lord, and joy in the God of my salvation.* But where there are no blossoms, nor any fruits appear, all joy falls to the ground. We don't consider that comfort from the promise, and from the Lord Jesus, is *then* most seasonable — when we have the most need, and consequently, we may receive the most good by it. For then we may be sure to have the promise so surprise our hearts, that they will be possessed and made happy with the all-sufficiency of God. But we don't go so far. This much for the second rule, under the second means.

III. In the third place, look for all the good which you need and can desire from that sufficiency which is in the promise. And don't think to add any good to it from yourself; but go to it for all your good. For *there* are all the cords of mercy that must draw you; and *there* is that all-sufficiency which can supply you; and therefore, look for all from there. But think to bring nothing there — nothing (I say) that can be of any power to enable you to believe.

And here, it is a weak plea for a man to say, I dare not look to the promise, I cannot believe it; for if I could (and O that I could), then I might expect some good fruit from it.

You will never believe upon these terms. For you must not *first* have faith, and *then* go to the promise — but you must first go to the promise for the power of that faith. From the promise you must receive power to believe. And therefore, say with the prophet, Psa 119.49, *O Lord remember your word to your servant, in which you have caused me to trust.* When men are enlarged in love toward a man, and make fair weather promises to him; this persuades him to trust them, and to rely upon them for the good to come. Therefore he says, "I never dared so much as to think of it, much less expect it, if you had not promised so much." And it is even so here; the promise of God, made to the soul, makes the soul rest upon what is promised.

To expect faith without a promise, is like a man expecting a crop of corn, without seed. For the promise is the immortal seed of God's word, by which the Spirit breeds this faith in the hearts of all who are his. So Christ says, Joh 5.25, *The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear it, shall live.* It is spoken of raising a dead man from the grave of sin. First, there is the voice of Christ to the soul, before there can be an echo of that soul back to Christ. And so the power of the promise must first come to the soul, and we must first hear the voice of God in the promise, before we can return an echo back again to the Lord. The Lord must say, *Come to me*, before the soul can say, *I come, Lord*. Therefore, when you see so much deadness, and an unfit heart in you toward the promise, don't then leave, and give up, and say, "This is how I am, and so it is with me," and so end it. But go to the promise and say, "Whatever frailties I find in myself, I will yet look to the Lord, and to his promise. For if I lack faith, the promise must settle me. I must not bring faith to the promise, but receive faith from it to believe. And therefore I will wait upon God till he is pleased to work it."

IV. And now in the last place, labor to submit to the most equal condition of the promise, not making more conditions there than God has made. Now, the promise requires no more of a man, than that he come and lay hold of mercy. Therefore, don't require more than that. There is enough in the promise to do you good; therefore, expect all good from it, and be content to take from God whatever he has offered there to your faith. *Buy without money*, says the prophet, Isa 55.1-2. This is the condition that God offers mercy upon: *buy wine and milk*, that is, grace and salvation; *without money*, that is, without any sufficiency of your own. If a man were to go running up and down to borrow money before he comes to buy, he may famish before he can come. So the Lord is offering Christ's mercy and salvation without our cost, and is saying, *Come, take it without money.* And yet we run up and down to borrow money from our prayers and other duties also. And from our prayer against corruption, we may be starved spiritually before we can buy at that hand. If we go this way to work, we may quickly lose our labor, and ourselves.

Means to obtain an interest in the promises.

And therefore, make God's commodities no dearer than God himself makes them. Many a poor soul, not remembering this, is kept from coming to the promise. For, "Oh!" says one, "If I were able to master my sins and distempers as such a one can do, then I might with boldness believe." But this is to bring money. But aren't you content to have Christ free of cost, so that he may have you, and rule in you, and supply to you what is lacking, and open your sores, and heal your corruptions? Then why don't you go to the promise with an empty heart, so that the Lord may supply you, and master all your risings, and make you a clean heart? But that must come afterwards, as the Lord says in Eze 16.6-10:

When I passed by you, and saw you polluted in your own blood, behold the time was the time of love; and I spread my skirt over you, and covered your nakedness; yes, I swore to you, and entered into a covenant with you, and you became mine (*i.e.*, you were content that God marry you in all your rags). Then I washed you with water, yes, I thoroughly washed away your blood from you, and anointed you with oil; I clothed you also with embroidered work, etc.

Here we see that Christ first marries the church to himself; and then gives grace, and passes over his estate to his spouse. Now, wouldn't it be a wondrous great folly, if some great king were to make love to a poor milkmaid, and she put it off, and refused the match till she was a queen — when if she will make a match with the king, she will be sure to be made a queen immediately. But this comes *after*, and not *before* the marriage. So too, we must not look for sanctification the first day, nor till we come to the Lord in our Christian vocation. For this is all that the Lord requires of us; namely, to see our sins, to be weary of them, to be content that the Lord Jesus will reveal to us what is amiss, seal a pardon for it, and take it away. And further, that he will give us his grace to take down the old building, and to set up a new one in us in his image. For then the Lord will bring us to himself, and into the wedding-chamber; and then through his great mercy, all our corruption will fall to the ground.

And when the Lord has brought your unfaithful heart to believe, then labor to husband this grace well, and to improve it for your best good, and live by it. It is a marvellous great shame to see those who are born to fair means, I mean the poor saints of God who have a right and title to grace and Christ, who yet live at such an underrate. I would have you live *above* the world, even if you don't have a coat to cover you, or a house to put your head in. Yet, if you have faith, you are a rich man; therefore husband your estate well. It is a shame to see some live, and not husband that estate they have. They live as if they didn't have it — so full of want, so full of care, so full of pride, so weak, and so unable to master their sins. Whereas the fault is not in the power of faith, nor in the promise, nor in the Lord. For God doesn't grudge his people of comfort, but would have his people live cheerfully, and have strong consolations and a mighty assurance of His love. And therefore the text says, *Rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say, rejoice*, Phi 4.4. So too, Heb 6.18, *God has sworn; that by two immutable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we might have strong consolations*.

Indeed, the Lord rejoices in the prosperity of his servants, and therefore He has richly provided for you, that you may rejoice. And in not doing so, we offer a great deal of wrong to the Lord and his promises, and we bring a bad report upon that grace and mercy of his. And hereby we also open the mouths of the wicked, and make them say, "Oh, these precise ¹ people talk of quiet and contentment, and joy in the Holy Ghost! There is great talk about these things, but we could never yet see it." O brethren, this is a great shame. Are the riches and revenues of faith so great, that a Christian may live like a man all his days? Let all the drunkards and malicious wretches against God, laugh and be merry; they cannot see even one of those days that a poor saint can; yes, even if he lay in prison all his life. Mat 17.20, *If a man has but faith as a grain of mustard seed, and says to this mountain, go from here, it shall be done*. Whether this is spoken of justifying faith or

¹ *Precise*: rule-bound; overly prim; finicky.

Means to obtain an interest in the promises.

not, I won't dispute now. But this I am sure of: *Resist the devil and he will flee from you*, Jas 4.7. And you may trample under all your lusts and corruptions. *This* is the life of faith; and this life we may live; this life we *ought* to live.

If a tradesman has a fair stock and quick returns, and his business goes downhill,¹ and begins to decline and decay, everyone will say he was left marvellously well, but either he didn't know how to use it, lacked skill, or else didn't attend to it, lacking care — another man would have lived well on half the means he had. So there is never a poor Christian, who trades in a Christian course, that doesn't have a fair estate, and may live like a man. One promise is enough to make a man live comfortably all his days, even if he were in ever so much want. But if he is thrown behind, and goes downhill with his comfort and joy; and sinks because of his pride, distempers, and vexation — the fault is not in the estate; for the Lord left him very well. He had a child's portion, if only he had a heart to fear God and love him. As David says, *Oh be merciful unto me, as you used to do unto those who love and fear your name*.

The fault was not in the promises, that they could not help him; nor in his faith, that it would not help him. But he let the promises lie by. They came into the table, but he never built them up, nor husbanded them rightly. He had a world of consolations that would have given a man *liberty* in prison, *honor* in shame and disgrace, and *comfort* in time of distress — but he didn't husband them. And therefore, be advised to do as the tradesman does. He will not spend from his stock, but live from his trading, as I would have every Christian live from his faith. Whatever strength you need, fetch it from grace in Christ; and whatever comfort you want, fetch it from Christ. But *live by faith*, and make a *good* living from it too; and then you will have improved the promise rightly. Bring but an empty believing heart with you, and the oil will never fail, the meal in the barrel will never decay, but will continually supply you as it did that poor widow. ²

¹ *Originally*, “down the wind,” in the sense of becalmed, with slack sails.

² 1Kng 17.10-16.

CHAPTER 5.

How a man shall be trained up, that he may get the skill of living by faith.

EVERY man has his shifts and tricks, and lives by his own devices; and the devil has enough of them in the world who live this sort of life; but the best life of all, is little looked for.

Now for an answer, know this much, that there are three particulars for training up the heart to learn this skill of *living by faith*.

1. We must labor to get material for our faith to work upon.
2. We must labor to fit our faith for the work.
3. We must labor to order our faith rightly in the work.

I. First, we must provide material for our faith to work upon. For this we see ordinarily, that if a workman lacks material to work on, say a carpenter or the like; he must cease his work, and can go no further. And if a man's work fails, then how can he provide for his family? This is the complaint of poor people now-a-days, that they have no work. So it is in a Christian's course. Many poor Christians who are newly set up, and are not prepared beforehand in the world, lack even material for their faith. I mean, some are ignorant and cannot read; and some don't have the means of a preaching-ministry. Others have but small parts ¹ and cannot hear, and little do they retain of what they do hear. The promises of God are not understood, nor remembered, nor rightly applied. They live marvellously poor, when they might live very comfortably in the world.

Now the material of our faith, is the whole word of God. As the spider gathers poison out of every flower, so the bee gathers honey out of the same flowers; and out of the sweetest flower she sucks the most honey. Oh the word of God, how full of sweet flowers it is! There, the sharpest terrors, and the most fearful plagues too. A gracious heart will gather sweetness out of both of these. But above all, the sweet of the promises of the gospel, the sap and sweet in it, and the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ that is communicated by it — oh the faithful soul sucks the most there. Now, that we may provide material for our faith, observe these rules, which are commonly observed in all provisions.

1. First, that they provide and lay in, in season, *timely* — as soon as they can. This is the practice of someone who would husband his estate wisely; his care is to buy at the best time. So I would have a good Christian store up all the promises of God, in all the good word of God, *seasonably*. I mean when all your parts and abilities are strong, and nature is able to fight it out; and while the fair day of God's favor lasts; and while the word and sacraments are dispensed — *this* is the best time to lay in spiritual provisions, so that we may not lack them when we have use for them. It is a marvellously strange and preposterous course, when a man is weak, his eyes dim, and his heart and strength fails, and he is even ready to give up the ghost — to *then* lay in grace and provision of mercy. And then for someone who has hated the ministers, and loathed the means of grace, and abused the patience and long-suffering of God; oh, to *then* have a minister come to him, and have a promise in the day of persecution; *then* for a man to think about the promises and comforts of the gospel — when he *should* have been spending on the promises, and then getting from them. *This is bad husbandry.* ²

The better way is this, to be buying and getting in at every turn. And this is the reason why our Savior says, Luk 19.42. *O, if you had known, in this your day, the things that belong to your peace!* While the word, and your life, and the Sabbaths, and the ordinances last — *this* is your day; we don't know how soon the Lord may take it all from us. Oh the estate of the poor Palatinates! If

¹ *Parts*: intellectual ability or learning.

² The analogy is to invest in seed early (the promise), so that you may harvest its fruit later; but instead, those who didn't believe the promise, who haven't planted the seed, still expect to reap a harvest — to find comfort in their moment of need. This is bad husbandry. You cannot reap what you haven't sown.

How to be trained up, to get the skill of living by faith.

what we hear of them is true, they have lost all the means of grace, and they now have idolatry among them, and their enemies force them to go to mass against their consciences; and they cannot see a good minister, nor a good Christian, without weeping to consider the times they once had. Therefore let us labor to be wise in the Lord, *now* while it is fair; and consider how God deals with his children: Psa 48.9, *We have thought of your lovingkindness, O God, in the midst of your temple.* It is spoken there of the goodness of God towards Zion. She was a cup of poison, and a stone of stumbling. When he had spoken of all the bulwarks that God had made, and all the goodness and mercy he had shown to his people, and the malice and wrath of his enemies, he says, *This God is our God even forever and ever*, verse 14. As if to say, the Lord provided for his people in Egypt, and overthrew proud Pharaoh who set himself against God; and *this* is our God. When you are in the wilderness, *this* God is your God; when you are in persecution, *this* God is your God, and the God of *all*. Thus he stores up while the season lasts.

2. Note this, just as you must observe what God does to others, so labor to treasure up your own experiences. He has delivered us, and he does and will deliver us, says the apostle, 2Cor 1.10, and 2Tim 4.18. And the prophet David says, Psa 119.52, *I remembered your judgments of old.* Oh well fares a good old store. I remember, he says, how you rebuked Amalek, and overthrew Nimrod, and Ahithophel. Oh it is admirable to consider these things. *I received comfort*, he says. God will overthrow every enemy. And this is store for your faith to work upon, Psa 89.49. *Where are your former loving-kindnesses?* David is with God *now*, beforehand. He hasn't come to buy food just at the time of famine, but it is laid up beforehand. Lay in abundantly of all the promises of all kinds; you would better leave than lack. It is the wisdom of a man to have something to spare, and to have a surplus beforehand, so that he may not live feebly and poorly, and be at his wits' end at every turn, and not know which way to shift for himself, and have no bread in his house — I mean, no provision of promises by him: Isa 42.23, *Who is wise, let him hear for the time to come*; as if to say, You must not only lay in promises for the present, but store them for afterwards. The merchant says, I will want this at such a time; and so the husbandman says, I will have occasion for this or that at such a time; and so I will get it beforehand.

Oh that God would give us these hearts! It is good, as we say, to keep promises in store, so that we may spend them at our leisure. *In the days of famine*, says the prophet, *you will have enough*, Psa 37.19. These precious promises will be good food in lent; when perhaps you sit under a hollow tree, and creep among the bushes; then three or four of these promises will give a man a good meal of comfort. Therefore store them up; they will do you no harm. And when you are driven from house and home, and friends, and all, these will exceedingly refresh you. Oh how sweetly they are scattered up and down in the word, according to the saints' several necessities and occasions. Bring this precious provision home; don't leave it in the market. It is a folly to say, I have good provision, but it is not here. *Let the word of God dwell plenteously in you, and richly in all wisdom*, Col 3.16. Observe, it must be plenty, not scant; it must dwell in you, so that you may but step aside and have it. There is the material for your faith to work on. So also,

II. In the next place, we are to fit faith for the service, so that it may succeed with more comfort and better speed. Even if a man is a believer, there is yet a great deal of dullness and bluntness that comes upon this grace, though he has it. See how our Savior chides his disciples, *Oh fools, and slow and dull of heart to believe*, etc. (Luk 24.25) So we ought to whet our faith, that it may line up and square with the promises (as it is in the Hebrew); that it may pierce through the veil of all the riches of the freeness of God's grace, and so bring comfort to us. It is with the hand of faith, as it is with the hand of the body. If it is numbed, stiff, or frozen, a man must rub it, or warm it, before he can hold anything. So it is with the hand of faith; for faith is the hand of the soul. It takes hold of that mercy which God has provided for us in Christ Jesus. Now, faith is sometimes benumbed and stiff through carelessness and looseness. Therefore, it is not enough for a man to

How to be trained up, to get the skill of living by faith.

have faith; but he must supple and oil the sinews of faith, so that he may more freely take hold of the promises of life, and receive comfort from them. And so that this may be done, we must,

1. Maintain the evidence of faith once it is gotten. Without question, this grace of faith, once gotten, is to be maintained. Mark this, I am not speaking of those who don't have faith; it is in vain to bid a man live by faith, who has none. But it is for those in whose hearts God has been pleased to work this blessed grace. This must be the care of those who have gotten faith; they must know the nature of faith in general, and of *this* faith in particular — whether it is that faith which Peter speaks of; for there is a great deal of counterfeit faith in the world. It is faith that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners, and the like. Now when you have gained evidence that you have such faith, then fill it up, and keep it by you, and labor to make the demonstration of it so plain to your soul, that it may be undeniable. Isn't it a great folly for a man to question, when he should use it? The work must be greatly hindered, however much faith he has, when he begins to cavil with it, and to question whether it is good or not. It is a proverbial saying: He that doubts his way, misses his way; for while he is doubting, he goes no way in the end.

So he that questions whether he has faith or not, gets little good at present by it. Tell a poor sinner about living by faith, and he says, *It would be good news if he had it*. It is poor comfort to bid a man to go warm himself when he has no fire; so it is poor comfort to bid a man to live by that faith which he never had. Quarrelling and doubting when a man has it, hinders the use and benefit of faith. Here is a man that is quarrelling about it, when he should be living on it. Mat 14.22-31, When the disciples saw Jesus walking on the sea, they thought it was a Spirit; but Jesus said to them, *Be of good comfort, it is I*. Now when Peter knew it was Christ, being a bit too venturesome, he said, *If it is you, Lord, bid me come to you on the water*. Christ said, *Come*. Peter going, the water began to be boisterous, his heart began to sink, and Christ said to him, *O you of little faith, why do you doubt?* As if to say, now is no time for doubting, but for believing. The Lord bid him to come, and he had ground enough to come, and the strength of faith to come. But when he saw the waves were great and troublesome, instead of believing, he fell into questioning and quarrelling with the promise. As it is with a foul rusty musket; shoot it off, and it will backfire. When faith grows rusty with doubting, we sit down dismayed and unsettled. Questioning and quarrelling against the work of faith, in itself, will many times disable a man from exercising the power of faith, as much as if he had no faith at all.

2. When you have maintained the clearness of the work of grace gained before, then labor to bring your heart to a marvellous stillness and calmness from time to time. Staidness and stillness of the soul, frame the heart to hold the shield steadily, and comfortably block the blow when it comes. Those boisterous affections, those crowds and troops of troublesome imaginations, such as fear and jealousy — these unrank the frame of the soul, such that it is not at the command of faith. As it is in an army, once the ranks and files are broken, the troops are routed. However skillful the commander is, he cannot march on in that condition. So too, however vigorous a faith we had, if the soul is hurled up and down with those boisterous distempers, faith cannot command the soul.¹ When it was told to the disciples, Luk 24.41, that Christ was risen from the dead, and had manifested himself to them; the text says, *they did not believe for joy, and wondered*. They would not believe for a while; and it was through the violence of their joy, that they had no leisure to believe. As it is true of moderate affection, so it is true of strong fear, and cares, and distempers. Because these hurry the soul violently, and transport it so, the man cannot believe. As it is in a road, the traveller may be fitted to go his journey, but he can be hindered because the crowd is so great and strong, that they cross him, and oppose him, and are ready to carry him another way, against his will. It is just so with a soul thus troubled with tumultuous thoughts, especially melancholy thoughts, and those other enemies of the soul — vain imaginations, sinful fears, sinful

¹ *Originally*, “the soul could not command faith.” This is the opposite of what he just said above; so I re-ordered it to match the previous proposition. Faith doesn't live by the soul; the soul lives by faith — faith is therefore in command.

How to be trained up, to get the skill of living by faith.

sorrow, distempered thoughts and cares. Though the heart is willing and able to believe, yet those stirrings of boisterous affections may cross faith in the way, and bear it down.

There David chides his heart, in Psa 42.5, 11, and 43.5. He even rocks it to sleep, and would have it quiet, saying, *Why are you so disquieted, O my soul, why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God*, etc. There are three things that fit our purpose in this text.

1. A tumultuous distemper of heart makes a man lie flat on his back, as it were, and sink into a swoon.
2. It hinders the work of faith. Mark what follows: *hope in God*. As if to say, leave those distempers of heart, and rest upon the freeness of God's grace.
3. David yet looks up to God for mercy: *For he is yet my God*. We find the virtue of this rule by experience; especially in melancholy persons, when they have swarms of thoughts buzzing in their minds. Sometimes restless fears chase their hearts, as the hound chases the deer in the forest. And after this one, comes another affection, and after that another; until at last, they all come together.

Sometimes the horror of a man's conscience makes a hue and cry after him, and it makes him say, "Oh how my heart strikes me! I thought I saw hell gaping for me, and the devil standing at my elbow, ready to carry me down to everlasting destruction." This puts his soul into such amazement and ghastliness of spirit, that he cannot reach the promise of God. Well, take the Lord's advice by the prophet: Exo 14.13. *Fear not, but stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord*. Lay aside those restless imaginations, and those crowds of foolish conceits — stand still and be quiet; and with the eye of faith, behold the salvation of God.

3. A third rule of how faith may be fitted for the work. Take notice of this: in the lack of any means, do not seek them first; and in the presence of any means that God affords, do not look to them first for your succor and supply. But first go to the *promise*, so that it may supply what you need, and bless whatever means you have. It is an uncomfortable and disorderly course for a man, to solely and first look at those things which are within the compass of his senses, and so range up and down in the use of means, while the promise and Christ are last thought of in our hearts. For instance, in a time of poverty, how does the soul unfit itself for the promise? Well, when a man sees his estate is low, and he is likely to come to misery, he says to himself, "I have some good friends who will not let me see want; I have so much means still left; I have my health and strength; and I hope to get a meager living." All this while, not one word of a promise. But what do you say to this? If death takes away all your friends, sickness takes away your health and strength, fire or thieves take away all your goods, where will you go now? Why, then at a dead lift (as we commonly say),¹ he is willing to go to that mercy which endures forever. Oh friend, are you there now? Why didn't you come there first? Well, since you have come, reason this way: "I am likely to be poor, and my friends may die, and thieves may rob me of all my goods; but the mercy of the Lord endures forever."

So too with a minister who is faithful. He desires to preach fruitfully, and to the benefit of the congregation; but then we reach for the helps that are near at hand, and we go to our books and studies, our wits and pains, and think these will do the deed. We do well in all this; but the fault is in the *order* of doing them. Perhaps God knocks off the man's cognitive wheels, and he isn't able to get to the bottom of the point; and even if he is able to compass the truth in some measure, God destroys all he does, and there is no good that will come to the souls of his people. At last he is willing to go to the promise. And *then* the poor minister says, "Lord, you have said you will be

¹ *Dead lift*: that which one's strength is not sufficient to raise.

How to be trained up, to get the skill of living by faith.

with your faithful ministers to the end of the world; there is little strength in us; but be with us, Lord.” Now the work goes on again.

The tradesman is honest and painstaking, and he hopes to compass a good estate by his calling. His stock is good and great, and his skill is sufficient, and his pennyworth will be as reasonable as any others, and his acquaintances are many. God destroys all these, and *then* the tradesman comes to the promise, as in Psa 1.3, *Whatever the righteous does, it shall prosper.*

Hold here now, and say, “I expect *all* from the promise — mercy and succor from the promise.” This was the course that Jacob took, Gen 32.9, when first he wrestled with God, and prevailed. Then he wrestled with his brother Esau; and he says, *O God of my father Abraham, and God of my father Isaac, who said to me, return into your own country, and I will do you good; I am not worthy of the least of all your mercies. Lord deliver me from the hand of my brother Esau, for I fear him.* Thus he wrestled with the Lord; by virtue of a promise, overcame him; and then overcame his brother Esau. So Heb 13.5, *Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as you have.* But how will you have help against this covetousness? A man might think this: “You have a good portion, and but little debt, and many friends.” But God takes such a course as this: He says, *I will never leave you nor forsake you.* And thus, when I have chased away doubting, *then* faith is ready, and the shield is scoured.

III. Now for the ordering of faith in the work. There are two things to be attended to:

1. How the soul should get to the promises.
2. How the soul should take, receive, and improve this sufficiency and excellency that is in God, through Christ and the promise.

1. How the soul should get to the promise: you see that all is ready, the way is open, and faith is fitted; there are **three rules** to be observed, as to how the soul may get to the promise.

(1) Throw off all power and ability in yourself. *Nevertheless*, says the apostle, *I live; yet not I, but Christ lives in me*, Gal. 2: 20. It is not I who live by any power of myself, but Christ lives in me. It was Christ’s quickening, reviving, and enabling, though he had faith. Jer 10.23, *I know*, says the prophet, *that the way of man is not in himself, neither is it in man to direct his own steps.* If you would ever have your heart fitted to go to the promise, you should say: “It is not here, Lord, it is not in this vain mind; it is not in the power of this dead heart, nor in any passage that I ever received, by which I am able to believe in you.” I mean, the principle of life is not here; the root of faith is in the promise, and from there it comes into the soul. This is like a mariner, when the ship is on the ground in the ebb and low water; he doesn’t expect to tug his ship to the shore by any power of his own. So here, “It is not in my wisdom that can direct me, and it is not in my weapon that can defend me; it is not this humility that can bring my soul down; it is not here. It is not I, Lord, who can rest or go to a promise; all our abilities are at a low ebb.” All that we are, or can do, is to empty ourselves, and fit ourselves, and get up the mainsail. That is, let the soul be ready for a promise, and by virtue of that, be carried heavenward and Christward. Take notice of this in your own souls, that the heart would begin at home. If a temptation comes, the heart of itself would overcome it; and if a duty is to be done, the heart of itself would perform it; and if opposition comes, the heart of itself would resist it. O remember that a man offers an injury against reason, sense, and religion, and all. Now your faith begins to wrestle with him and his dealing; and your conscience checks, and you would tear your own heart out of your own bosom. Brethren, this will not do it: when a ship of a hundred tons is on the ground, the mariners may pull and tug their hearts out, before they make her go. Oh go then and say, “It is not I that can be patient, and put up a wrong.” Be quiet; don’t expect it from here. Let the heart lie still, till the wind and tide, and promise come, and that will carry you.

(2) Bring the promise home to your heart, so that the promise may bring your heart to it. I would have you reason thus: the Lord Jesus Christ, by the power of his Spirit, is in the promise

How to be trained up, to get the skill of living by faith.

undeniably, and undoubtedly, and unspeakably accompanying in his manner, as he sees fit. This I say, that the almighty power of Christ really and continually accompanies the promise for the good of his own. Hence it is called, the *Spirit of promise*; for there is an almighty creating work that goes along with the promise. And I reason thus: that word which discerns the thoughts of the hearts of men, that word must have the almighty work of God's Spirit accompanying it, so far as God has promised it — not when *you* perhaps think it fit, but when *God* sees it fit. He does it as a voluntary workman; therefore consider that there is an almighty power, and a fullness in the promise. Then lay that promise upon your own heart, and conclude it, and look for virtue from there, to draw your soul to it again.

I have several passages to express this more fully. Jacob would not believe that Joseph was alive; or if he was alive, he had but little means, and was poor. But when he saw the chariots that Joseph had sent him, Gen 45.26-29, *then* he believed, and said, *I have enough; Joseph my son lives*. The chariots sent from Joseph to Jacob, brought Jacob to Joseph. So every believing soul is poor and feeble, and disabled to go to God, and to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, look to the chariots of Israel first, and that will convey you to the promise. Such it is with the miller. First he prepares the mill fitly, and orders all the preparations for it. And when the stones are fitted, and laid to go, it will not run till the sluice is pulled up, and the water runs that drives the mill. So the soul is humbled, and it lies level with the Lord and his truth, and it is content to yield to his conditions. But the soul of itself, in itself, *cannot* go. It doesn't have the principle of going; but pull up the sluice of the promise,¹ and let that come to your heart, and it will bring your soul home to the Lord. As in Luk 19.9, *This day salvation has come to this house*: not to the walls of your house, but to the men who are in your house. They did not come to salvation, but salvation came to them. The Lord sent salvation to salute the house of little Zacchaeus.

(3) When the promise has thus come home to you, and you see the sufficiency and authority of it, then all you have to do is this: in the stream of that promise, be carried home to the promise. The prodigal, Luke 15, is said to be like a lost sheep. (Mark this, for it concerns you, poor creatures.) The poor sheep is wandering up and down, now in the mouth of the lion, and then in the briars, and sometimes in the pit. The text says the shepherd *leaves the ninety-nine to seek that one*. That is, the care he expresses to the lost sheep is in comparison to the others. He leaves a regenerate man not carelessly; but he won't express so great love as he does to a poor lost man. And if you cannot find the way to heaven, he will find it for you; rest upon Jesus Christ. When you find your heart feeble and weak, and you are unable to believe, then the Lord Jesus Christ brings the Spirit of grace, who comes to seek and save; and Jesus Christ lays that soul of yours upon his shoulders; that is, upon the riches of the freeness of his grace. Therefore, let your heart be transported by the power of that grace, and by the virtue of that mercy which God has made known to you for your everlasting good. When the chariots come, get into them. The Lord Jesus Christ has gone up to heaven, and he has sent these chariots for you. Therefore, get up and say, "Lord, take me up with You." When the mariner has sea-room enough, he cares for no man; he doesn't look much at his oars or anything, so he can keep observing the channel. This channel is but the full tide of promise; therefore lay yourself upon the promise and say, "Lord, by virtue of that grace, and in the power of that spirit, carry me. And in the riches of that mercy of yours, Lord, convey the heart of this poor sinner, and make me happy with yourself forever."

Again, never let quick stock lie dead by you; it is very bad husbandry not to trade with living stock. As it is in the world with temporals, it is just so in our spiritual estate. Though a man has little for the present, yet if he has some old reversion² coming, it will refresh his heart, and bear him up in time of poverty and misery. And so he says, if he can make but a shift for a while, for so long a time, then he hopes to live as well as any man in the country. So these are some of the promises

¹ Originally, "let down the sluice of the promise;" that doesn't match the simile just given; so I re-worded it. – WHG

² *Reversion*: the return of an estate to the donor or grantor after the grant expires.

How to be trained up, to get the skill of living by faith.

we have in our possession. Oh, but there is the reversion of old promises, old rents. As old rents of farms that were let long ago, when the leases run out, they are worth treble the rent they were let for at first. So too, there are old rents of comfort and mercy; such as, *Come you blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you*. Then no more tears, no more trouble; no more sorrow, no more sin. Oh get those promises into your hands, and have them in use, and say, “The day will come when we will have happiness and joy beyond all that the tongue of man can express, or the heart conceive.” “Though we are buffeted with many temptations, and wearied with a world of corruptions, yet we shall be saved,” says faith. Thus a man may make a pretty good shift to live on these terms, even if we have nothing else to live on in the world. Remember what I say now, and labor to fasten this truth upon your heart — that there is not only present good in yourself, but in another, and reserved by another for your comfort, and be content that it should be so. Not only look and see what you have, but consider that the greatest part of your glory, is in the glory of Christ; and the greatest part of your wisdom, is in the wisdom of Christ; and the greatest part of your liberty, is in the liberty of Christ; and your riches, in the riches of Christ. And know that whatever is in Christ, you have it all as yours. 1Joh 3.1-2, *Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed upon us, that we are now the sons of God!*

I tell you brethren, this is a marvellous privilege. And if you had no more than but this, you would have a child’s portion. But it does not appear what we will have. Now we have but a glimpse; what do you think the harvest will be? Now we have but the sips of it; what then will the full cups be when we see Christ as he is? Thus Moses improved his estate. Heb 11.26, *He bore all afflictions comfortably; yes, he esteemed the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt; Why? Because he had an eye to the recompense of reward*. We don’t account a man’s estate for what he has in his present possession; but what is likely to befall him, and what he is born unto. What Moses did, do the same. Remember, you have a good stock upon the ground, which will pay all your debt, and yet let you live like a man too. Though you have many corruptions, many disgraces cast upon you; though you have little strength, and are at a great loss in point of comfort — there is yet enough in heaven, enough in Christ, both of riches and comfort. Let your soul then be careful to make all these present with you for your own good.

But some may ask, How may a man expect from the promise, that which God intends, and will undoubtedly bestow?

For an answer to this, I will show what you may expect, and what God will undoubtedly bestow. If you believe, then heaven and salvation are certainly yours, and perseverance to the end, and also that manner and measure of assistance which may make you fit for perseverance: these three things grow here. But for *temporal* blessings which we desire, and that measure of *spiritual* blessings which we would have — so much grace, so much assistance, and so much ability to do our duties — God doesn’t engage himself to bestow these. But what He engages himself to bestow, both for temporal and spiritual blessings, may be discovered in these three particulars: so much grace and assurance of God’s love, and so much comfort in grace as He sees fit for you, in his own order, and in his own time. I will open them all, because here, many bungle wonderfully.

1. He will bestow them IN HIS OWN ORDER, not your order. First, he will make you fit, and make you good, so that you may be able to digest them; and *then* he will bestow them on you. Perhaps a poor man is driven to desperate hazard, and is brought miserably under, and therefore his heart cries earnestly for some more supply. He calls and God does not answer. And so he labors to look up to the promise, where God says, *nothing shall be lacking for him*, and yet it doesn’t come. I say, God will give these in his own order. First, God will make you *fit* for this estate, and then He will give it. I never knew a good man so desperately poor, that his heart wasn’t desperately proud. Therefore the Lord will make him good, and make his proud heart yield; and then He will bestow these things: look for the one first, and then for the other.

How to be trained up, to get the skill of living by faith.

Again, another Christian labors exceedingly for the assurance of God's love, and cannot obtain it. He looks to God in the use of the promises, and yet he cannot find it settled. Well, God will give you comfort and consolation, but in His own order. And know this, that commonly the Lord never debars the soul of comfort, unless he sees that the heart is not fit for it. Your heart would be proud and careless, and God would hear no more from you, and your sail would overturn the boat. Therefore, when God has abased your heart, and made you content to want what He will deny, then he will give you assurance — but it must be in His own order. And this is the reason why most smoke out their days in discontent; the reason is that there is a proud heart and a sturdy disposition of spirit that will not come to God's terms. As it is with a physician, God will not give a cordial to his patient, when the patient wants it. For if he were in a burning fever, it would be the next way to send him going. But first the physician purges him, and makes him fit; and *then* gives him a cordial. So it is in these things which you crave. The Lord will give them to you, when you won't overfill yourself with comfort, and assurance, and prosperity; and when your heart is emptied and purged, and able to digest these things — *then* the Lord will give them.

2. The Lord will give us temporal blessings, and that measure of spiritual blessings, IN HIS OWN DUE TIME; not when you and I would, but when he sees most fit. Such as Joh 2.3-4. The mother of Jesus comes to our Saviour, and says. they have no wine. She thought she had Christ at her command. But he answers her, *Woman, what have I to do with you? My hour has not yet come.* So it is with our souls; we want comfort, and we want strength against our corruptions, and we want assurance, and assistance. But what have I to do with that proud heart? says our Savior; My time is not yet come. You would have it now, as they said in Act 1.6, *Lord, will you now restore the kingdom to Israel?* God will do in his own time, and we must await his leisure. This is one thing that necessarily accompanies the Covenant of Grace. As I have shown before, the Lord would dispense the blessings of his kingdom when he pleases, and not when we will. When the Lord sees that these blessings of spiritual mercies and temporal favors are ripe and most seasonable to your necessity, then you shall have them. But the time is in God's hand.

3. The Lord does not promise in such a manner and measure, and such a particular thing, as to give that temporal blessing, and that spiritual assistance which we desire. But the Lord will do WHAT HE KNOWS IS MOST FITTING. For so the text says, Pro 30.8, *Feed me with food convenient for me.* There was faith now; he wholly refers himself to God. When a man comes to the tailor to have a garment made, he doesn't cut out the garment himself, but refers it to the judgment of the workman. So we must refer ourselves to God; and know that God promises nothing, except as he sees fit for your good. It may be that you will not have this blessing, or that grace. As it is with a potter, he is minded to make so many vessels of honor. So if the Lord will make you a vessel of honor, go away contented — whether you have as much prosperity and good as you desire, or not; or as much grace; it doesn't matter much. It is enough that you are elected to eternal happiness.

Now you see how to manage and improve the promise rightly for your best advantage, and to expect from the promise, that which it will yield.

Another particular in this third rule of living by faith, is this: how to take, and how to enjoy the sap and the sweet of the promise, and to live by it. When the husbandman has sown his ground, and his fruit is ripe, and he has reaped it, then he must gather in his corn so that he may live upon it. So let us gather in the promises when we see the best advantage. Now let us take the gain, and live by it, and do that comfortably too, in the proof of God's goodness in it. For this end, let me suggest these FIVE DIRECTIONS.

1. You see what there is of God in the promise, and you expect no more of God than is there. So then, eye that particular good in the promise which you stand in need of; eye that good in Christ and in the promise. And then set God's power and faithfulness to work to bring that good, and his wisdom to continue it. For instance, say I am in persecution, and either I would have deliverance and safety, that I might not be imprisoned; or else comfort and refreshment, if the Lord carries

How to be trained up, to get the skill of living by faith.

me there. And therefore I would see all this in the promise, still reserving the conditions mentioned before. If you are in prison, eye liberty and preservation in Christ: he that is the great deliverer of his people, and carries his people in his own hands. And then set God's power and faithfulness to work, that can *do* the work;¹ and His wisdom, that can *continue* it for your good. What you see and need in the promise, is what the power and wisdom of God may communicate to your soul. This is the meaning of that place, Psa 37.5, *Commit your ways to the Lord, trust in him, and he shall bring it to pass*. Roll yourself upon Him, and lay all your circumstances upon the Lord. Therefore the apostle says, 1Pet 5.7, *Cast your care upon the Lord, for he cares for you*. This is God's proper office and work: he cares for your soul. Therefore, lay it all upon him, and put all your care into his hands, and set his power and faithfulness to do the work. Only, this is to be scanned a little here. I don't say that we should take no care at all; but I say, hang all the weight and burden upon the Lord.

The brewer tumbles the barrel of beer, and he rolls it; but it is the earth that bears it. So whatever trouble is in your eye, or ear, or heart, roll it upon the Lord. That is, the weight of a man lies especially in three things, which a man must hurl off of himself, and lay upon the Lord. Either, *first*, a man won't be able to know what to do, or what he is commanded. Or else, *secondly*, he won't be able to do what God commands, and he knows to do. Or else, *thirdly*, he won't find success in what he does. It is no trouble to do what we can, or to employ ourselves as we are able. But *this* is the trouble: when the heart says, "I don't know what the mind of God is; or, I won't do what I know to; or, it won't succeed; or, it is not in my power." Now leave all these with God, and don't meddle with them. Rather, put them over to the Lord, and meddle with your own duty, and your own work, and leave God alone with his. And say to the Lord, "In truth, Lord, it is not in my power; it is not in my parts or work, either to compass that wisdom that is able to direct me, or to have any power to do all that is commanded of me, much less to give it good success. Lord, I won't meddle with that, but will leave it with your majesty. If You in your power *cannot*, nor in your faithfulness and goodness *do not*, care for your poor helpless creature, then I am content. And if You will not be faithful, then I am content to be miserable."

And so also, you may suppose a man who has promised to undertake some business for a friend, which in the end proves to be very troublesome; that friend might therefore wish to take it back into his own hands. But he leaves it with him, and says to himself that he engaged him to do it, and he won't look after it: "I won't meddle with it anymore." So whatever it is that is in God's royal prerogative, leave it with God, and don't meddle with it.

Let God now look to it; leave it to his faithfulness and power to accomplish it. So Abraham did, Rom 4.16-20. *Who against (or above) hope, believed in (or under) hope, that he would become the father of many nations*. Sarah's womb was barren, and his body dead, and yet he must have a son. And therefore he sets God's power to work and essentially says, verse 21, "Lord, this body is dead, and Sarah is barren: there is no help here: but you are able, and you have engaged yourself to do it." You see that he sets God's power to work, and puts all the weight and burden of the care upon the Lord.

And therefore Mordecai says, Est 4.14, *If you hold your peace at this time, enlargement and deliverance shall come from some other place*. He was resolved that God had deliverance for his church, and would not deny His truth. *Salvation will come*, says the text. He doesn't know the place or the means, but he knows that salvation will come. So set God's power and faithfulness to work, and not your own care for it: commit it to the Lord, and cast your care upon him, so far as the burden of it is concerned.

¹ The design of the author, in this rather peculiar expression, used here and elsewhere, doubtless was to recommend the believer's humble and prayerful endeavors to engage the divine power for his aid, in circumstances of spiritual extremity. ED.

How to be trained up, to get the skill of living by faith.

2. By faith go back to the promise for help and power to wait on God in that way, and to look towards God in the use of those means which He has appointed for attaining that good which his power will work for you. God will certainly work it: and so you must meet God in the course of his providence, in the improvement of the means that he has appointed for your good. Observe his providence, and do what God requires. For otherwise we don't live by faith; rather, we tempt God, and throw away the promise and all, and deprive ourselves of that good which God would bestow, by not walking in that way which he has appointed.

When our Savior was to go to heaven, he said, Luk 24.49, *Behold, I send the promise of my Father among you: but tarry in the city of Jerusalem, until you are endued with power from above.* Christ would endue them with the Spirit; but they must tarry at Jerusalem and wait for it. So I say, would you have grace and the Spirit from above, and the wealth of the world? Then walk in that way which God has appointed: stay at Jerusalem, and be in the way, and meet God in his providence. And then you will receive what you need, from his power and faithfulness. You would have God bless you in your estate; and yet you would be idle and careless. But this will not do the deed — God would give you a blessing, but you are not there to receive it.

This is the excellency of the promises of God; just as they require conditions before they bestow mercies, so they make us able to be *partakers* of the conditions, and meet the conditions. For example, Ezekiel 36. In the former part of the chapter, the Lord promises to give them many things; but how? It must be by prayer, and humbling themselves before him. He will give you a family blessing, by prayer in your family; and a blessing in private, by prayer in private; and strength against sin, and power against corruption. But *I will be sought for all these*, says the Lord. And the text says, Pro 20.7, *Blessed is the man who walks in his integrity, and his children after him.* Therefore walk in the integrity of your heart; *that is the condition of a Christian in general; or as a husband, wife, or servant in the particular.* This is what the promise requires. But mark this now: the same promise that *requires* the conditions, will help us to *perform* the conditions. And the same Lord who says, *I will be entreated and sought to for these*, says in Psa 10.17, *He prepares their hearts to pray.* Go therefore to God to help you to pray, that he may bestow his blessing upon you, which he has promised. Eze 36.26-27: he will first give them a new heart, and then teach them to walk in his ways.¹ So if you will walk in his ways, you shall have his blessings. Therefore, go by the power of faith, to the promises of God, for strength and grace. And for that, you must use the means appointed; then expect a blessing from it in the course of his providence. Now God's power and faithfulness is set to work.

3. We must set it down, and conclude that God will do it. Thus we will receive, in the ways of his providence, whatever he has promised to give. That is the work of faith; and that work is to draw sap and virtue from the promise, Joh 3.33. *He who has received his testimony, sets His seal that God is true.* Sealing, there, means sealing the promise. This is the nature of sealing; when a man has drawn the articles of agreement, and when they have been sealed, the whole matter is done. So faith must make the promise authentic, and put a seal to it that it is true. Faith says, "It is done in heaven, and I am fully resolved, settled, and persuaded that I will have whatever I have believed, and you, Lord, have promised; and I have used the means in the ways of your providence."

Famous is that saying of Abraham in Gen 22.5. The Lord has bid him to sacrifice his son, and yet He had said before that Isaac would live. And therefore when Abraham came to the place, he said to his servants, *Abide here with the donkeys; for I and the lad will go yonder, and sacrifice, and return again to you.* He thought to sacrifice him, and yet by faith he believed that he would bring Isaac back. I would have a poor saint of God believe and conclude this. When you find your comfort like Isaac's in the ashes, and your estate helpless and hopeless — yet even then, set God's

¹ **Eze 36:26-27** I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. ²⁷ I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do *them*.

How to be trained up, to get the skill of living by faith.

power to work, and wait upon him in the use of the means he has appointed, and there conclude that He will bring patience, power, and deliverance, and do so in every kind, according to all your necessities. Yet remember this, expect no more from the promise, than God will give in the promise. Only say, “My sins shall be mastered one day, and these temptations shall one day be overthrown, that have so long annoyed the soul of your servant. I have begged succor against these corruptions within, and these temptations without, and yet it is not so; but I know it is done in heaven; it lack nothing but the taking out. You will bestow upon your servant what you see fit.” In 1Sam 1.18: Hannah wept sorely, and prayed to the Lord; and then she went away, and was no longer sorrowful. She essentially said, “Lord, I believe that I will either have a child, or that which is as good or better.” Now the business was done.

But suppose the Lord delays, and doesn’t suddenly accomplish what he intends, and you used the means to receive it — he doesn’t give, grant, or send succor according to your desire, and the tenor of the covenant, as you conceive it.

4. Then faith is to take its stand, and stay till it comes: as you resolve, so it will be. Stay till it is, and stay it out. Here is much work to do. We prevent God’s kindness when we go away before He is willing to bestow a kindness on us. But *faith* will not do so. He that believes, doesn’t make haste. He makes haste to *obey*, but then he stays, and resolves that it will be. Hab 2.3, *The vision is for an appointed time; but at the end it shall speak, and not lie; therefore wait for it, because it will surely come.*

You are pestered with your sins, and have labored by faith to subdue them; and your estate is low, and you have labored by faith for deliverance: and yet it doesn’t come. Therefore stay till God sees fit, and it will come. Psa 123.2, *As the eyes of servants look to the hands of their masters, and as the eyes of a maiden to the hand of her mistress; so our eyes wait upon the Lord our God, until he have mercy upon us.* It is not, till I will, or till I see fit, or according to my mind; but until the Lord will have mercy. We suddenly slide away from the covenant which the Lord makes with us, because we don’t have it when we want it; and therefore we go away.

So in 1Sam 13.13. When Samuel tarried long, and the people began to murmur, Saul went and offered a burnt offering to the Lord. And therefore Samuel said to him, *You have done foolishly. You have not kept the commandment of the Lord your God, which he commanded you; for now the Lord would have established your kingdom upon Israel forever.* If Saul had awaited the Lord’s time, He would have established his kingdom upon Israel forever. But he prevented the Lord’s kindness, and offered sacrifice unseasonably and sinfully.

So it is many times with a proud, pettish, rash and distempered heart. If we don’t have what we would, when we would, then we are all amort — *i.e.* quite dead-hearted. We murmur, and say, Why should we wait any longer? You have done foolishly. Have you prayed and looked to the promise this long, and will you now give up? The Lord would have comforted you, had you gone on. But the Lord has withdrawn himself from you, because you have withdrawn your heart from the promise. When the carriage is heavy, and the way is dead, there are many painful pulls. Often the wagon is at a standstill. And if a man were to then go away and give up, all his work would be lost. Therefore stay till the Lord shows mercy. This long you have called, and sought, and looked up to the promise, and waited upon the Lord, and attended to the freeness of His grace. Once more, perhaps, would have done it. Your heart was almost humbled; your sin was almost conquered. Oh you silly soul, why didn’t you hold out? It would have come at last; my life for yours. Now take heed of this; if the time seems tedious, and your heart begins to sink, and your spirit is weary, take heed of flying off; take heed of shifting for your own comfort, and looking to base ends and aims. No, hold your mind to it, and keep your eye of faith on the promise, and stick it out till God sees the time is fit. And know that it is the *best* time, when it is *God’s* time.

How to be trained up, to get the skill of living by faith.

In Act 27.31, Paul says, *Unless these abide in the ship, you cannot be saved*. Every man was jumping overboard to save himself, but Paul stayed them. A man would have thought otherwise; but the apostle knew it was not so; for the Lord had revealed it to him. So I say to you, however strong your temptations; and however many your sins; and though you complain and say, “I have cried, Lord, and sought earnestly, and yet my condition is worse, and my soul more sinful, and I am less able to help myself; there is no more succor to be expected;” — *take heed* of going out of the ship, and away from the use of means. Keep in the ship; for in it you will be safe. Keep in the promise, and still your hearts there. You will have a happy arrival at heaven, though upon a little broken board. It is no matter, stay God’s time.

5. Lay hold on God in Christ, and wrestle with him, and never let him go. For *still*, perhaps, the Lord seems not only to delay his poor servants, and to withhold his favor; but he seems to frown and say that He will not hear. And he seems to be angry with the prayer of his servants, and with their importunity; and as if he would not succor and supply them. Thus he dealt with Jacob, Gen 32.26. There the Lord says, Let me go; I don’t care what becomes of you, let me go: but Jacob lays hold upon him, and would not let him go.

So the last work of faith is this: in holy humility, labor to contend with God, and by a strong hand overcome the Lord; for the Lord loves to be overcome this way. Don’t be irreverent with the Lord. But in the sense of your own baseness, as it were, lay hold upon the Lord Jesus, and strive with him. Don’t leave till you have those comforts he has promised, and you have begged. This is the glory and the victory of the triumph of faith; this is what gives you the day. The Lord, as it were, lays down the weapons, and yields himself as conquered, as it was with Jacob when God saw he couldn’t prevail. God said to him, verse 28, *Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, because you have prevailed with God*. God is ready to give what he has promised; but he would have us test the mastery with him. God overcomes himself; and we, by faith in God, overcome or prevail with God. As it says in Jas 2.13, *Mercy triumphs over justice*.

“Lord,” says my soul “why shouldn’t I have that mercy, supply, and succor?” Says *Justice*, “You are a sinful wretch, and have wronged me.” Says *Anger*, “You deserved to be plagued; and therefore you shall feel the smart of my displeasure.” Now faith lays hold upon the riches of the “freeness of God’s mercy in Christ;” and in Him, *Justice* is satisfied, and *Anger* appeased for all. And now mercy is purchased for all, and mercy triumphs over justice; and faith takes hold upon and overcomes God himself, if I may say, with a holy, humble baseness of heart. You know what the Lord did to the woman of Canaan, Mat 15.28, when she strived with him a great while, and would take no denial. At last he says, *O woman, great is your faith, be it unto you even as you will*. “Take what you will; if you will have life for your child, and peace for your own conscience, and joy in the Holy Ghost, then take it; for it is all yours.” He turns her loose to all his treasury, as it were. If she had gone away at the first or second denial, she would have found no help. But because she held out, she had all her heart’s desire. God would have us wrestle with his majesty, that he may be overcome in mercy and goodness.

I might have here taken some of the most desperate cases that could be, so that you might see what faith would have done in the midst of the lack of all means, and in the greatest extremity that could have befallen a poor sinner. But I will pass over that at this time.

Now, therefore, consider what has been said. Lay these things up, and have them ever before you, and practice them — by often writing, learn to write; and by often living, learn to live. Many people live poorly, and make a poor shift to go to heaven. I would not have a Christian live that way, but instead be a master of his art. Know and see your way, and use the means. Labor to get good by it, so that you may have the sap and sweet of the promises — and so, go singing and rejoicing and triumphing up to heaven.

The Conclusion.

NOW, what I conclude with is this: you see how far the Lord has brought us; how the soul has been prepared and cut off from sin and itself, if it is fitted for the Lord Jesus by contrition and humiliation; and how the soul comes to see that there is no hope in the creatures, nor in any succor in heaven, except *in the Lord Jesus Christ*. And so at last the sinner comes, and lies at the foot of the Lord Jesus, and knows that he must be either *another* man, or a *damned* man. Now, when he sees that prayer and all other means will not profit him, and that the power of the means still doesn't prevail, and the power of his corruptions is not yet mastered — then he looks up to Christ, and is contented that Christ should do with him what He will. Now, when the Lord Jesus sees him lie wearied this way with his corruptions, then the Lord gives special notice to his soul that it is his purpose to do him good, and that there is mercy for that broken heart of his. With that, hope is stirred; and faith cries out, “Is it possible? Is it credible? Shall this wretchedness of mine be pardoned? Oh, my desire is kindled within me, and I long for that day. O that I might once see the funeral of all my sins!”

Mark now, how love and joy are cheered to entertain this mercy; and oh how the soul is bound and engaged to God, who offers free and undeserved grace to a stubborn and rebellious sinner! At last the will says *amen* to the promise; and it further says, O that mercy I will have! And thus the soul has come home to God by vocation. Now the prodigal has come home to his father; and the father's heart leaps within his breast, when he sees him lie at the door. And as the Father rejoices, so the angels in heaven rejoice; and all the faithful shall rejoice, and say, “Oh my husband, oh my father, oh my child, and oh my wife who was a sinful woman, has come home again to her first and best husband.” You who have found it thus in yourselves, be *comforted*. You who know it in others, *rejoice*.

To sum it all up briefly, we see,

First, when we have plucked away all carnal props, then a way is made for the promise to come in to us.

Secondly, when our hearts are possessed thoroughly by the sufficiency of God's promise and grace, then the promise that draws near, begins its work.

Thirdly, when we expect *all* from the promise, even the power to come to it, then it lays fast hold upon us.

Fourthly, when we are content to yield to the just conditions of the promise, then the promise carries us, and all in us.

Thus we have seen the hinderances removed, and the means propounded. And hence we see that faith is to be labored for above all graces. And now that we may be moved and persuaded importunately to seek after this blessed grace of God, let us further consider this much: namely, that once we get this grace, we get all other graces with it. This is a ground of much comfort, and it cannot help but keep us doing. For won't it greatly encourage a man, when in doing one work, he knows he will do another — indeed, he will do *all* his work with one labor! But so it is in the work of faith. Oh then how should it encourage us to labor for faith, seeing that by getting it, we have all? Men who are wise to provide for themselves, and to lay out their monies in some purchase for the best — when they see a ground that is well wooded and watered, but especially if it has some rich mines in it — their entire mind will be upon such a place, because in having it, they will have all with it. So it should be here, in our desires; and as it is there, so too here — get this grace, and get all. Strengthen here, and all is strong: but want here, and want everywhere. Having this grace of faith, you need not seek after wisdom; for faith will make you wise unto salvation. And you need not labor for patience; for he that is faithful, will be patient; and so too for all other graces. He that has the grace of faith, has them all; he has holiness, cleanness, love, a

Conclusion.

pure mind, and a good conscience. What does he not have? The saints of God endeavor with great pains to get grace, and to subdue corruption. But because they don't take the right way to it, they seek and do not find.

Many a poor soul mourns and cries to heaven for mercy, and prays against a stubborn hard heart, and is weary of his life because this vile heart remains in him, and yet perhaps gets little or no redress. The reason is — and the main wound lies here — he goes about the work the wrong way. For the one who would have *grace*, must (first of all) get *faith*. Faith will bring all the rest. Buy the field and the pearl is yours; it goes with the purchase. You must not think, with your own struggling, to get the mastery of a proud heart; for that will not do. But let your faith go first to Christ, and try what that can do. Many graces are necessary in this work — such as meekness, patience, humility, and wisdom. Now, faith will fetch all these, and possess the soul of them. Therefore, brethren, if you set any value on these graces, then buy the field: labor for faith — get that, and you get all. The apostle says, 2Cor 3.18, *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*. The Lord Christ is the mirror; and the glorious grace of God in Christ, is that glory of the Lord.

Therefore, first behold this grace in Christ *by faith* — and you must do so *before* you can receive this grace. First see humility in Christ, and then draw humility from there. First see strength and courage in him, by which to enable your own weak heart, and then strength will come. Fetch it there, and there you will have it. Would you then have a meek, gracious, and humble heart? I dare say that for some of you, you would rather have it than anything under heaven, and you would think it the best bargain that you ever made. This is the cause why you say, “O that I could once see the day that this proud heart of mine might be humbled. Oh if I could see the last blood of my sins, I would then think myself happy, none happier, and desire to live no longer.” But is this your desire, poor soul? *Then get faith*, and so buy the whole; for they all go together. Nor think you may have them at any price, not having faith: I mean having patience, meekness, and a humble heart. But buy faith (the field), and you will have the pearl.¹

Furthermore, would you have the glory of God in your eye, and be more heavenly-minded? Then look to it, and get it by the eye of faith. Look up to it in the face of Jesus Christ, and then you will see it; and then hold yourself there. For there, and there only, is this vision of the glory of God to be seen, to your everlasting peace and endless comfort. When men make a purchase, they speak of all its commodities — such as so much wood, worth so much; and so much stock, worth so much — and then they offer for the *whole*, corresponding to these *several parts*. So it is here; there is an item for a heavenly mind, and that is worth thousands; and an item for a humble heart, and that is worth millions; and so on, for the rest. And are those graces worth so much? *What is faith worth then?* Hence we may conclude and say this: O precious faith! precious indeed, that is able, through the Spirit of Christ, to bring so many — no, to bring *all* graces with it — as one degree of grace after another; grace here, and happiness forever hereafter (Joh 1.16). If we have but the hearts of men (I do not say of *Christians*), I think that what is spoken of faith, should provoke us to labor always, above all things, for this blessed grace of God — the grace of faith.

FINIS.

¹ Mat 13.44-46.