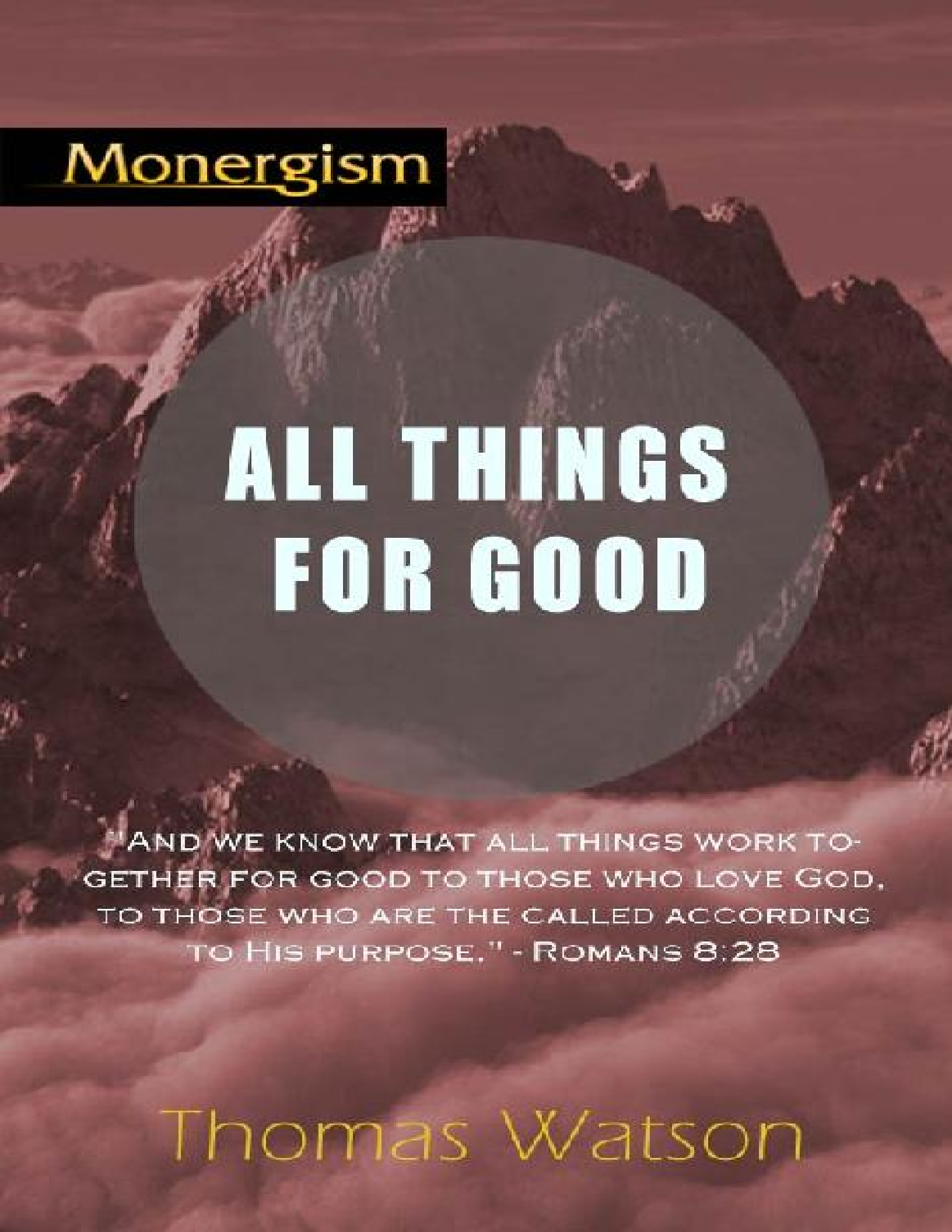

Monergism
ALL THINGS FOR GOOD
"AND WE KNOW THAT ALL THINGS WORK TOGETHER FOR GOOD TO THOSE WHO LOVE GOD, TO THOSE WHO ARE THE CALLED ACCORDING TO HIS PURPOSE." - ROMANS 8:28
Thomas Watson

All Things For Good

by Thomas Watson

Table of Contents

Introduction

The Best Things Work for God for the Godly

The Worst Things Work for Good

Why All Things Work for Good

Of Love to God

The Tests of Love to God

An Exhortation to Love God

Effectual Calling

Exhortations to Them that are Called

Concerning God's Purpose

Introduction

"And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His

purpose." Romans 8:28

Christian Reader,
There are two things, which I have always looked upon as difficult. The one is—to make the **wicked** sad; the other is—to make the **godly** joyful. Dejection in the godly arises from a double spring: either because their inward comforts are darkened, or their outward comforts are disturbed. To cure both these troubles, I have put forth this ensuing treatise, hoping, by the blessing of God, that it will buoy up their desponding hearts, and make them look with a more pleasant aspect. I would prescribe them to take, now and then, a little of this Cordial: "all things work together for good to those who love God." To know that nothing hurts the godly, is a matter of comfort; but to be assured that all things which fall out shall cooperate for their good, that their *crosses* shall be turned into blessings, that *showers of affliction* water the withering root of their grace and make it flourish more—this may fill their hearts with joy until they run over!

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If the whole Scripture be the feast for the soul (as Ambrose says)—then Romans 8 may be a dish at that feast, and with its sweet variety may very much refresh and animate the hearts of Gods people. In the preceding verses the apostle had been wading through the great doctrines of justification and adoption, mysteries so arduous and profound, that without the help and conduct of the Spirit, he might soon have waded beyond his depth. In this verse the apostle touches upon that pleasant string of consolation, "we know that all things work together for good, to those who love God." Not a word but is weighty; therefore I shall gather up every *filing of this gold*, that nothing will be lost.

In the text there are three general branches.

First, a glorious privilege. All things work for good.

Second, the people interested in this privilege. They are doubly specified. They are ***lovers*** *of God*, they are ***called***.

Third, the origin and spring of this effectual calling, set down in these words, "according to His purpose."

I. First, the glorious PRIVILEGE. Here are two things to be considered:

1. The certainty of the privilege—"We know."

2. The excellency of the privilege—"All things work together for good."

1. The CERTAINLY of the privilege: "We **know**." It is not a matter wavering or doubt. The apostle does not say, "We *hope*, or *conjecture*." "We *know* that all things work for good." Hence observe that the truths of the gospel are evident and infallible.

A Christian may come not merely to a vague opinion, but to a certainty of what he holds. As axioms and aphorisms are evident to reason, so the truths of true religion are evident to faith. "We know," says the apostle. Though a Christian has not a *perfect* knowledge of the mysteries of the gospel—yet he has a *certain* knowledge. "We see through a glass darkly" (1 Cor. x3:12), therefore we have not *perfection* of knowledge; but "we behold with open face" (2 Cor. 3:18), therefore we have *certainty*. The Spirit of God imprints heavenly truths upon the heart, as with the point of a diamond. A Christian may know infallibly that there is an evil in sin, and a beauty in holiness. He may know that he is in the state of grace. "We know that we have passed from death to life" (1 John 3:14).

He may know that he shall go to heaven. "We know that if our earthly tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens" (2 Cor. 5:1). The Lord does not leave His people at uncertainties in matters of

salvation. The apostle says, "We know. We have arrived at a holy confidence. We have both the Spirit of God, and our own experience, setting seal to it."

Let us then not rest in skepticism or doubts—but labor to come to a certainty in the things of religion. As that martyr woman said, "I cannot *dispute* for Christ—but I can *burn* for Christ." God knows whether we may be called forth to be witnesses to His truth; therefore it concerns us to be well-grounded and confirmed in it. If we are *doubting* Christians, we shall be *wavering* Christians. Whence is apostasy, but from incredulity? Men first *question* the truth, and then *fall* from the truth. Oh, beg the Spirit of God, not only to anoint you, but to seal you (2 Cor. 1:22).

2. The EXCELLENCY of the privilege. "All things work together for good."

This is as Jacob's staff in the hand of faith, with which we may walk cheerfully to the mount of God! What will satisfy or make us content, if this will not? All things work together for good. This expression "work together" refers to medicine. Several poisonous ingredients put together, being tempered by the skill of the apothecary, make a sovereign medicine, and work together for the good of the patient. So all God's providences being divinely tempered and sanctified, do work together for the best to the saints. He who loves God and is called according to His purpose, may rest assured that everything in the world shall be for his good. This is a Christian's cordial, which may warm him—and make him like Jonathan who, when he had tasted the honey at the end of the rod, "his eyes were enlightened" (1 Sam. xiv. 27). Why should a Christian destroy himself? Why should he kill himself with care, when all things shall sweetly concur, yes, conspire for his good? The result of the text is this—all the various dealings of God with His children, do by a special providence turn to their good. "All the paths of the Lord are mercy and truth unto such as keep his covenant" (Psalm 25:10). If every path has mercy in it, then it works for good.

We shall consider, first, **WHAT things work for good to the godly**; and here we shall show that both the **best** things and the **worst** things work for their good. We begin with the best things.

The Best things Work for Good to the Godly

1. God's attributes work for good to the godly.

(1). God's POWER works for good. It is a glorious power (Col. 1:11), and it is engaged for the good of the elect.

God's power works for good, in **supporting us in TROUBLE**. "Underneath are the *everlasting* arms" (Deut. 33:27). What upheld Daniel in the lion's den? What upheld Jonah in the whale's belly? What upheld the three Hebrews in the furnace? Only the power of God! Is it not strange to see a *bruised reed* grow and flourish? How is a weak Christian able, not only to endure affliction—but to rejoice in it? He is upheld by the arms of the Almighty. "My strength is made perfect in weakness" (2 Cor. 12:9).

The power of God works for us by **supplying our NEEDS**. God creates comforts, when means fail. He who brought food to the prophet Elijah by ravens, will bring sustenance to His people. God can preserve the "oil in the cruse" (1 Kings x7:14). The Lord made the sun on Ahaz's dial go ten degrees backward: so when our outward comforts are declining, and the sun is almost setting, God often causes a revival, and brings the sun many degrees backward.

The power of God **subdues our CORRUPTIONS**. "He will subdue our iniquities" (Micah 7:19). Is your sin strong? God is powerful, He will break the head of this leviathan. Is your heart hard? God will dissolve that stone in Christ's blood. "The Almighty makes my heart soft" (Job 23:16). When we say as Jehoshaphat, "We have no might against this great army"; the Lord goes up with us, and helps us to

fight our battles. He strikes off the heads of those goliath lusts which are too strong for us!

The power of God **conquers our ENEMIES**. He stains the pride, and breaks the confidence of adversaries. "You shall break them with a rod of iron" (Psalm 2:9). There is *rage* in the enemy,and *malice* in the devil—but *omnipotence* in God. How easily can He rout all the forces of the wicked! "It is nothing for you, Lord, to help" (2 Chr. xiv. 11). God's power is on the side of His church. "Happy are you, O Israel, O people saved by the Lord, who is the shield of your help, and the sword of your excellency" (Deut. 33:29).

(2). The WISDOM of God works for good. God's wisdom is our oracle to instruct us. As He is the mighty God, so also the Counselor (Isaiah 9:6). We are oftentimes in the dark, and, in intricate and doubtful matters, know not which way to take; here God comes in with light. "I will guide you with my eye" (Psalm. 32:8). "Eye," there, is put for God's wisdom. Why is it, that the saints can see further than the most quick-sighted politicians? They foresee the evil, and hide themselves; they see Satan's sophisms. God's wisdom is the pillar of fire to go before, and guide them.

(3). The GOODNESS of God works for good to the godly. God's goodness is a means to make us good. "The goodness of God leads to repentance" (Romans 2:4). The goodness of God is a spiritual sunbeam to melt the heart into tears. "Oh," says the soul, "has God been so good to me? Has He reprieved me so long from hell, and shall I grieve His Spirit any more? Shall I sin against God's goodness?"

The goodness of God works for good, as it ushers in all blessings. The favors we receive, are the silver streams which flow from the fountain of God's goodness. This divine attribute of goodness brings in two sorts of blessings. **Common** blessings: all partake of these, the bad as well as the good; this sweet dew falls upon the thistle as well as the rose. **Crowning** blessings: these only the godly partake

of. "Who crowns us with loving-kindness" (Psalm 103. 4). Thus the blessed attributes of God work for good to the saints.

2. The PROMISES of God work for good to the godly.

The promises are God's bank notes. The promises are the milk of the gospel; and is not the milk for the good of the infant? They are called "precious promises" (2 Pet. 1:4). They are as cordials to a soul that is ready to faint. The promises are full of virtue.

Are we under the guilt of sin? There is a promise, "The Lord is merciful and gracious" (Exod. 34:6), where God as it were puts on His glorious embroidery, and holds out the golden scepter, to encourage poor trembling sinners to come to Him. "The Lord is merciful and gracious." God is more willing to *pardon*—than to *punish*. Mercy does more multiply in Him, than sin in us. Mercy is His nature. The bee naturally gives honey; it stings only when it is provoked. "But," says the guilty sinner, "I cannot deserve mercy." Yet He is gracious: He shows mercy, not because we deserve mercy—but because He delights in mercy. But what is that to me? Perhaps my name is not in the pardon. "He keeps mercy for thousands!" The treasury of mercy is not exhausted. God has treasures lying by, and why should not you come in for a child's part?

Are we under the defilement of sin? There is a promise working for good. "I will heal their backslidings" (Hos. 14:4). God will not only bestow mercy—but grace. And He has made a promise of sending His Spirit (Isaiah 44:3), which for His sanctifying nature, is in Scripture compared sometimes to *water*—which cleanses the vessel; sometimes to the *fan*—which winnows corn, and purifies the air; sometimes to *fire*—which refines metals. Thus the Spirit of God shall cleanse and consecrate the soul, making it partake of the divine nature.

Are we in great trouble? There is a promise which works for our good, "I will be with him in trouble" (Psalm 91. 15). God does not

bring His people into troubles, and leave them there. He will stand by them; He will hold their heads and hearts when they are fainting. And there is another promise, "He is their strength in the time of trouble" (Psalm 37:39). "Oh," says the soul, "I shall faint in the day of trial." But God will be the strength of our hearts; He will join His forces with us. Either He will make His hand lighter—or our faith stronger!

Do we fear outward needs? There is a promise. "Those who seek the Lord shall not lack any good thing" (Psalm 34:10). If it is good for us, we shall have it; if it is not good for us, then the withholding of it is good. "I will bless your bread and your water" (Exod. 33:25). This blessing falls as the honey dew upon the leaf; it sweetens that little we possess. Let me lack the venison, so I may have the blessing. But I fear I shall not get a livelihood? Peruse that Scripture, "I have been young, and now am old—yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread" (Psalm 37:25). How must we understand this? David speaks it as his own observation; he never beheld such an eclipse, he never saw a godly man brought so low that he had not a bit of bread to put in his mouth. David never saw the righteous and their seed lacking. Though the Lord might try godly parents a while by need—yet not their seed too; the seed of the godly shall be provided for. David never saw the righteous begging bread, and forsaken. Though he might be reduced to great straits—yet not forsaken; still he is an heir of heaven, and God loves him.

Question. How do the promises work for good?

Answer. They are food for **faith**; and that which strengthens faith works for good. The promises are the milk of faith; faith sucks nourishment from them, as the child from the breast. "Jacob feared exceedingly" (Gen. 32:7). His spirits were ready to faint; now he goes to the promise, "Lord, you have said you will do me good" (Gen. 32:12). This promise was his food. He got so much strength

from this promise, that he was able to wrestle with the Lord all night in prayer, and would not let Him go until He had blessed him.

The promises also are springs of **joy**. There is more in the promises to comfort—than in the world to perplex. Ursin was comforted by that promise: "No man shall pluck them out of my Father's hands" (John 10:29). The promises are cordials in a fainting fit. "Unless your word had been my delight, I had perished in my affliction" (Psalm 119:92). The promises are as cork to the net, to bear up the heart from sinking in the deep waters of distress!

3. The MERCIES of God world for good to the godly.

The mercies of God **humble**. "Then King David went in and sat before the Lord and prayed, "Who am I, O Sovereign Lord, and what is my family, that you have brought me this far?" (2 Sam. 7:18). Lord, why is such honor conferred upon *me*, that I should be king? That I who followed the sheep, should be king over Your people? So says a gracious heart, "Lord, who am *I*, that it should be better with me than others? That *I* should drink of the fruit of the vine, when others drink, not only a cup of wormwood—but a cup of blood (or suffering to death). Who am *I*, that I should have those mercies which others lack, who are better than I? Lord, why is it, that with all my unworthiness, a fresh tide of mercy comes in every day?" *The mercies of God make a sinner proud—but a saint humble.*

The mercies of God have a **melting** influence upon the soul; they dissolve it in love to God. God's judgments make us fear Him—but His mercies make us love Him. How was Saul wrought upon by kindness! David had him at the advantage, and might have cut off, not only the skirt of his robe—but his head; yet he spares his life. This kindness melted Saul's heart. "Is this your voice, my son David? and Saul lifted up his voice, and wept" (1 Sam. 24:16). Such a melting influence has God's mercy; it makes the eyes drop with tears of love.

The mercies of God make the heart **fruitful**. When you lay out more cost upon a field, it bears a better crop. A gracious soul honors the Lord with his substance. He does not do with his mercies, as Israel with their jewels and ear rings, make a golden calf; but, as Solomon did with the money thrown into the treasury, build a temple for the Lord. The golden showers of Gods' mercy, cause fertility.

The mercies of God make the heart **thankful**. "What shall I render unto the Lord for all his benefits towards me? I will take the cup of salvation" (Psalm 116:12, 13). David alludes to the people of Israel, who at their peace offerings used to take a cup in their hands, and give thanks to God for deliverances. Every mercy is an gift of free grace; and this enlarges the soul in gratitude. A godly Christian is not a grave to bury God's mercies—but a temple to sing His praises. "If every bird in its kind," as Ambrose says, "chirps forth thankfulness to its Maker, much more will a sincere Christian, whose life is enriched and perfumed with mercy."

The mercies of God **quicken**. As they are loadstones to love, so they are whetstones to obedience. "I will walk before the Lord in the land of the living" (Psalm 116. 9). He who takes a review of his blessings, looks upon himself as a person engaged for God. He argues from the *sweetness* of mercy—to the *swiftness* of duty. He spends and is spent for Christ; he dedicates himself to God. Among the Romans, when one had redeemed another, he was afterwards to serve him. A soul encompassed with mercy, is zealously active in God's service.

The mercies of God work **compassion** to others. A Christian is a temporal Savior. He feeds the hungry, clothes the naked, and visits the widow and orphan in their distress; among them he sows the golden seeds of his charity. "A godly man shows favor, and lends" (Psalm 112. 5). Charity drops from him freely, as myrrh from the tree. Thus to the godly, the mercies of God work for good; they are wings to lift them up to heaven.

SPIRITUAL mercies also work for good.

The **word preached** works for good. It is a savor of life, it is a soul transforming word, it assimilates the heart into Christ's likeness; it produces assurance. "Our gospel came to you not in word only—but in power, and in the Holy Spirit, and in much assurance" (1 Thess. 1:5). It is the chariot of salvation.

Prayer works for good. Prayer is the bellows of the affections; it blows up holy desires and ardours of soul. Prayer has power with God. "Command me" (Isaiah 14:11). Prayer is a key which unlocks the treasury of God's mercy. Prayer keeps the heart open to God—and shut to sin. Prayer assuages the swellings of lust. It was Luther's counsel to a friend, when he perceived a temptation begin to arise, to betake himself to prayer. Prayer is the Christian's gun, which he discharges against his enemies. Prayer is the sovereign medicine of the soul. Prayer sanctifies every mercy (1 Tim. 4:5). Prayer is the dispeller of sorrow—by venting the grief it, eases the heart. When Hannah had prayed, "she went away, and was no more sad" (1 Sam. 1:18). And if it has these rare effects, then it works for good.

The **Lord's Supper** works for good. It is an emblem of the marriage supper of the Lamb (Rev. 19:9), and a pledge of that communion we shall have with Christ in glory. It is a feast of fat things; it gives us bread from Heaven, such as preserves life, and prevents death. It has glorious effects in the hearts of the godly. It quickens their affections, strengthens their graces, mortifies their corruptions, revives their hopes, and increases their joy. Luther says, "It is as great a work to comfort a dejected soul, as to raise the dead to life"; yet this may and sometimes is done to the souls of the godly in the blessed supper.

4. The GRACES of the Spirit work for good.

Grace is to the soul, as light to the eye, as health to the body. Grace does to the soul, as a virtuous wife to her husband, "She will do him good all the days of her life" (Proverbs 31:12). How incomparably useful are the graces! Faith and fear go hand in hand. Faith keeps the heart cheerful, fear keeps the heart serious. *Faith* keeps the heart from sinking in despair, *fear* keeps it from floating in presumption. All the graces display themselves in their beauty: hope is "the helmet" (1 Thess. 5:8), meekness "the ornament" (1 Pet. 3:4), love "the bond of perfectness" (Col. 3:14). The saints' graces are weapons to defend them, wings to elevate them, jewels to enrich them, spices to perfume them, stars to adorn them, cordials to refresh them. And does not all this work for good? The graces are our evidences for heaven. Is it not good to have our evidences at the hour of death?

5. The ANGELS work for the good of the Saints.

The good angels are ready to do all offices of love to the people of God. "Are not all angels ministering spirits, sent to serve those who will inherit salvation?" (Heb. 1:14). Some of the fathers were of opinion that every believer has his guardian angel. This subject needs no hot debate. It may suffice us to know the whole hierarchy of angels is employed for the good of the saints.

The good angels do service to the saints in **life**. The angel comforted the virgin Mary (Luke 1:28). The angels stopped the mouths of the lions—that they could not hurt Daniel (Dan. 6:22). A Christian has an invisible guard of angels about him. "He shall give his angels charge over you, to keep you in all your ways" (Psalm 91. 11). The angels are of the saints' life guard, yes, the chief of the angels: "Are they not all ministering spirits?" The highest angels take care of the lowest saints.

The holy angels do service at **death**. The angels are about the saints' sick beds to comfort them. As God comforts by His Spirit, so by His angels. Christ in His agony was refreshed by an angel (Luke xx2:43);

so are believers in the agony of death: and when the saints' breath expires, their souls are carried up to heaven by a convoy of angels (Luke 16:22).

The holy angels also do service at the day of **judgment**. The angels shall open the saints' graves, and shall conduct them into the presence of Christ, when they shall be made like His glorious body. "He shall send his angels, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from the one end of heaven to the other" (Matt. 26:31). The angels at the day of judgment shall rid the godly of all their enemies. Here the saints are plagued with enemies. "They are my adversaries, because I follow that which is good" (Psalm 38:20). Well, the angels will shortly give God's people a writ of ease, and set them free from all their enemies: "The tares are the children of the wicked one, the harvest is the end of the world, the reapers are the angels; as therefore the tares are gathered and burnt in the fire, so shall it be in the end of the world: the Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things which offend, and them which do iniquity, and cast them into a furnace of fire" (Matt. 13:38 42). At the day of judgment the angels of God will take the wicked, which are the tares, and will bundle them up, and throw them into hell furnace, and then the godly will not be troubled with enemies any more: thus the good angels work for good.

See here the honor and dignity of a believer. He has God's name written upon him (Rev. 3:12), the Holy Spirit dwelling in him (2 Tim. 1:14), and a guard of angels attending him!

6. The Communion of Saints works for good.

"We are helpers of your joy" (2 Cor. 1:24). One Christian conversing with another is a means to confirm him. As the stones in an arch help to strengthen one another, one Christian by imparting his experience, heats and quickens another. "Let us provoke one another to love, and to good works" (Heb. 10:24). How does grace

flourish by holy conference! A Christian by good discourse drops that oil upon another, which makes the lamp of his faith burn the brighter.

7. Christ's intercession works for good.

Christ is in heaven, as Aaron with his golden plate upon his forehead, and his precious incense; and He prays for all believers as well as He did for the apostles. "My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me" (John 17:20). When a Christian is weak, and can hardly pray for himself, Jesus Christ is praying for him; and He prays for three things.

First, that the saints may be kept from sin (John 17:15). "I pray that you should keep them from the evil." We live in the world as in a pest-house; Christ prays that His saints may not be infected with the contagious evil of the times.

Second, for His people's progress in holiness. "Sanctify them" (John 17:17). Let them have constant supplies of the Spirit, and be anointed with fresh oil.

Third, for their glorification "Father, I will that those which you have given me, be with me where I am" (John 17:24). Christ is not content until the saints are in His arms. This prayer, which He made on earth, is the copy and pattern of His prayer in heaven. What a comfort is this—when Satan is tempting, Christ is praying! This works for good.

Christ's prayer takes away the sins of our prayers. As a child who present his father with a posy, goes into the garden, and there gathers some flowers and some weeds together—but coming to his mother, she picks out the weeds and binds the flowers, and so it is presented to the father. Just so—when we have put up our prayers, Christ comes, and picks away the weeds, the sin of our prayer, and presents nothing but flowers to His Father, which are a sweet smelling savor.

8. The prayers of Saints work for good to the godly.

The saints pray for all the members of the mystical body, their prayers prevail much. They prevail for recovery from sickness "Your prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up" (James 5:15). They prevail for victory over enemies. "Lift up your prayer for the remnant that is left" (Isaiah 37:4). That night the angel of the Lord went out to the Assyrian camp and killed 185,000 Assyrian troops" (Isaiah 37:36). They prevail for deliverance out of prison. "But while Peter was in prison, the church prayed very earnestly for him. The night before Peter was to be placed on trial, he was asleep, chained between two soldiers, with others standing guard at the prison gate. Suddenly, there was a bright light in the cell, and an angel of the Lord stood before Peter. The angel tapped him on the side to awaken him and said, "Quick! Get up!" And the chains fell off his wrists." (Acts 12:5-7). The *angel* fetched Peter out of prison—but it was *prayer* which fetched the angel. They prevail for forgiveness of sin. "My servant Job shall pray for you, for him will I accept" (Job 13:8).

Thus the prayers of the saints work for good to the mystical body. And this is no small privilege to a child of God, that he has a constant trade of prayer driven for him. When he comes into any place, he may say, "I have some prayer here, nay, all the world over I have a stock of prayer going for me. When I am indisposed, and out of tune, others are praying for me, who are quick and lively." Thus the **best** things work for good to the people of God.

The Worst things Work for Good to the Godly

Do not mistake me, I do not say that of their own nature, the worst things are good, for they are a fruit of the curse. But though they are

naturally evil—yet the wise overruling hand of God disposing and sanctifying them—they are morally good. As the elements, though of contrary qualities—yet God has so tempered them, that they all work in a harmonious manner for the good of the universe. Or as in a watch, the wheels seem to move contrary one to another—but all carry on the motions of the watch: so things that seem to move cross to the godly—yet by the wonderful providence of God, work for their good. Among these worst things, there are **four sad evils** which work for good to those who love God.

1. The evil of AFFLICTION works for good, to the godly.

It is one heart-quieting consideration in all the afflictions which befall us—that God has a special hand in them: "The Almighty has afflicted me" (Ruth 1:21). Instruments can no more stir until God gives them a commission, than the axe can cut, by itself, without a hand. Job eyed God in his affliction: therefore, as Augustine observes, he does not say, "The Lord gave—and the devil took away," but, "The Lord has taken away." Whoever brings an affliction to us, it is God who sends it.

Another heart quieting consideration is—that afflictions work for good. "I have sent them into captivity for their own good." (Jer. 24:6). Judah's captivity in Babylon was for their good. "It is good for me that I have been afflicted" (Psalm 119:71). This text, like Moses' tree cast into the bitter waters of affliction, may make them sweet and wholesome to drink. Afflictions to the godly are *medicinal*. Out of the most poisonous drugs God extracts our salvation. Afflictions are as needful as ordinances (1 Peter 1:6). No vessel can be made of gold without fire; so it is impossible that we should be made vessels of honor, unless we are melted and refined in the furnace of affliction. "All the paths of the Lord are mercy and truth" (Psalm 35:10). As the painter intermixes bright colors with dark shadows; so the wise God mixes mercy with judgment. Those afflictive providences which seem to be harmful, are beneficial. Let us take some instances in Scripture.

Joseph's brethren throw him into a pit; afterwards they sell him; then he is cast into prison; yet all this did work for his good. His *abasement* made way for his *advancement*, he was made the second man in the kingdom. "You thought evil against me—but God meant it for good" (Gen. 50:20).

Jacob wrestled with the angel, and the hollow of Jacob's thigh was put out of joint. This was sad; but God turned it to good, for there he saw God's face, and there the Lord blessed him. "Jacob called the name of the place Peniel, for I have seen God face to face" (Gen. 32:30). Who would not be willing to have a bone out of joint, so that he might have a sight of God?

King **Manasseh** was bound in chains. This was sad to see—a crown of gold changed into fetters. But it wrought for his good, for, "So the Lord sent the Assyrian armies, and they took Manasseh prisoner. They put a ring through his nose, bound him in bronze chains, and led him away to Babylon. But while in *deep distress*, Manasseh sought the Lord his God and cried out humbly to the God of his ancestors. And when he prayed, the Lord listened to him and was moved by his request for help." (2 Chron. 33:11-13). He was more indebted to his iron chain—than to his golden crown. The one made him proud—the other made him humble.

Job was a spectacle of misery; he lost all that he ever had; he abounded only in boils and ulcers. This was sad; but it wrought for his good, his grace was proved and improved. God gave a testimony from heaven of his integrity, and did compensate his loss by giving him twice as much as ever he had before (Job 13:10).

Paul was smitten with blindness. This was uncomfortable—but it turned to his good. God did by that blindness, make way for the light of grace to shine into his soul; it was the beginning of a happy conversion (Acts 9:6).

As the hard frosts in winter bring on the flowers in the spring; as the night ushers in the morning star: so the evils of affliction produce much good to those who love God. But we are ready to question the truth of this, and say, as Mary did to the angel, "How can this be?" Therefore I shall show you several ways how affliction works for good.

(1). Affliction works for good, as it is our preacher and teacher—"Hear the rod" (Micah 6:9). Luther said that he could never rightly understand some of the Psalms—until he was in affliction.

Affliction teaches what **sin** is. In the word preached, we hear what a dreadful thing sin is, that it is both defiling and damning—but we fear it no more than a *painted* lion; therefore God lets loose affliction—and then we feel sin bitter in the fruit of it. A sick bed often teaches more than a sermon. We can best see the *ugly visage of sin* in the looking-glass of affliction!

Affliction teaches us to know **ourselves**. In prosperity we are for the most part strangers to ourselves. God afflicts us—that we may better know ourselves. We see that corruption in our hearts, in the time of affliction, which we would not believe was there. Water in the glass looks clear—but set it on the fire, and the scum boils up. In prosperity, a man seems to be humble and thankful, the water looks clear; but set this man a little on the *fire of affliction*, and the scum boils up—much impatience and unbelief appear. "Oh," says a Christian, "I never thought I had such a bad heart, as now I see I have! I never thought my corruptions had been so strong, and my graces so weak."

(2). Afflictions work for good, as they are the means of making the heart more upright. In prosperity the heart is apt to be divided (Hos. 10:2). The heart cleaves partly to God—and partly to the world. It is like a needle between two loadstones: God draws, and the world draws. Now God takes away the world—that the heart

may cleave more to Him in sincerity. Correction is a setting the heart right and straight. As we sometimes hold a crooked rod over the fire to straighten it; so God holds us over the fire of affliction to make us more straight and upright. Oh, how good it is, when sin has bent the soul awry from God, that affliction should straighten it again!

(3). Afflictions work for good, as they conform us to Christ. God's rod is a pencil to draw Christ's image more lively upon us. It is good that there should be symmetry and proportion between the Head and the members. Would we be parts of Christ's mystical body, and not like Him? His life, as Calvin says, was a series of sufferings, "a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief" (Isaiah 53:3). He wept, and bled. Was His head crowned with thorns, and do we think to be crowned with roses? It is good to be like Christ, though it be by sufferings. Jesus Christ drank a bitter cup, it made Him sweat drops of blood to think of it; and, though He drank the *poison* in the cup (the wrath of God) yet there is some *wormwood* in the cup left, which the saints must drink: only here is the difference between Christ's sufferings and ours; His were atoning, ours are only chastening.

(4). Afflictions work for good to the godly, as they are destructive to sin. Sin is the mother, affliction is the daughter; the daughter helps to destroy the mother. Sin is like the tree which breeds the worm, and affliction is like the worm that eats the tree. There is much corruption in the best heart: affliction does by degrees work it out, as the fire works out the dross from the gold, "The Lord did this to purge away his sin" (Isaiah 37:9). What if we have more of the rough file—if we have less rust! Afflictions carry away nothing but the dross of sin. If a physician should say to a patient, "Your body is distempered, and full of bad humours, which must be cleared out, or you will die. But I will prescribe physic which, though it may make you sick—yet it will carry away the dregs of your disease, and save your life." Would not this be for the good of the patient? Afflictions are the medicine which God uses to carry

off our spiritual diseases; they cure the swelling of pride, the fever of lust, the cancer of covetousness. Do they not then work for good?

(5). Afflictions work for good, as they are the means of loosening our hearts from the world. When you dig away the *earth* from the root of a tree, it is to loosen the tree from the earth. Just so, God digs away our earthly comforts to loosen our hearts from the earth. A *thorn* grows up with every *flower*. God would have the world hang as a loose tooth which, being twitched away does not much trouble us. Is it not good to be weaned? The oldest saints need it. Why does the Lord break the conduit pipe—but that we may go to Him, in whom are "all our fresh springs" (Psalm 87:7).

(6). Afflictions work for good, as they make way for comfort. "In the valley of *Achor,* is a door of hope" (Hos. 2:15) *Achor* signifies trouble. God sweetens outward pain with inward peace. "Your sorrow shall he turned into joy" (John 16:20). Here is the water turned into wine. After a bitter pill, God gives sugar. Paul had his *prison* songs. God's rod has *honey* at the end of it. The saints in affliction have had such sweet raptures of joy, that they thought themselves in the borders of the heavenly Canaan.

(7). Afflictions work for good, as they are a magnifying of us. "What is man, that you should magnify him, and that you should visit him every morning?" (Job 7:17). God does by affliction magnify us three ways.

(1st.) In that He will condescend so low as to take notice of us. It is an honor that God will mind dust and ashes. It is a magnifying of us, that God thinks us worthy to be smitten. God's not *striking* is a slighting: "Why should you be stricken any more?" (Isaiah 1:5). If you will go on in sin, take your course—sin yourselves into hell.

(2nd.) Afflictions also magnify us, as they are ensigns of glory, signs of sonship. "If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons" (Heb. 12:7). Every print of the *rod,* is a badge of honor.

(3rd.) Afflictions tend to the magnifying of the saints, as they make them renowned in the world. Soldiers have never been so admired for their victories, as the saints have been for their sufferings. The zeal and constancy of the martyrs in their trials have rendered them famous to posterity. How eminent was Job for his patience! God leaves his name upon record: "You have heard of the patience of Job" (James 5:11). Job the *sufferer*, was more renowned than Alexander the *conqueror*.

(8.) Afflictions work for good, as they are the means of making us happy. "Happy is the man whom God corrects" (Job 5:17). What politician or moralist ever placed happiness in afflictions? Job does. "Happy is the man whom God corrects."

It may be said, How do afflictions make us happy? We reply that, being sanctified, they bring us nearer to God. The moon in the full is furthest off from the sun: so are many further off from God in the full moon of prosperity; afflictions bring them nearer to God. The *magnet of mercy* does not draw us so near to God as the *cords of affliction*. When Absalom set Joab's corn on fire, then he came running to Absalom (2 Sam. 16:30). When God sets our worldly comforts on fire, then we run to Him, and make our peace with Him. When the prodigal was pinched with need, then he returned home to his father (Luke 15:13). When the dove could not find any rest for the sole of her foot, then she flew to the ark. When God brings a deluge of affliction upon us, then we fly to the ark, Christ. Thus affliction makes us happy, in bringing us nearer to God. Faith can make use of the waters of affliction, to swim faster to Christ.

(9). Afflictions work for good, as they put to silence the wicked. How ready are they to asperse and calumniate the godly, that they serve God only for self-interest. Therefore God will have His people endure sufferings for religion, that He may put a padlock on the lying lips of wicked men. When the atheists of the world see that God has a people, who serve Him not for a livery—but for love, this stops their mouths. The devil accused Job of hypocrisy, that he

was a mercenary man, all his religion was made up of ends of gold and silver. "Does Job serve God for naught? Have not you made a hedge about him?" Etc. "Well," says God, "put forth your hand, touch his estate" (Job 1:9). The devil had no sooner received a commission—but he falls a breaking down Job's hedge; but still Job worships God (Job 1:20), and professes his faith in Him. "Though he slays me—yet will I trust in him" (Job 13:15). This silenced the devil himself. How it strikes a damp into wicked men, when they see that the godly will keep close to God in a suffering condition, and that, when they lose all, they yet will hold fast their integrity.

(10). Afflictions work for good, as they make way for glory (2 Cor. 4:17). Not that they merit glory—but they prepare for it. As ploughing prepares the earth for a crop, so afflictions prepare and make us meet for glory. The painter lays his gold upon dark colors—so God first lays the dark colors of affliction, and then He lays the golden color of glory. The vessel is first seasoned before wine is poured into it: the vessels of mercy are first seasoned with affliction, and then the wine of glory is poured in. Thus we see afflictions are not harmful—but beneficial, to the saints. We should not so much look at the evil of affliction, as the good; not so much at the dark side of the cloud, as the light. *The worst that God does to His children, is to whip them to heaven!*

2. The evil of TEMPTATION is overruled for good to the godly.

The evil of temptation works for good. Satan is called the tempter (Mark 4:15). He is ever lying in ambush, he is continually at work with one saint or another. The devil has his circuit that he walks every day: he is not yet fully cast into prison—but, like a prisoner that goes under bail, he walks about to tempt the saints. This is a great molestation to a child of God. Now concerning Satan's temptations; there are three things to be considered:

(1). His method in tempting.

(2). The extent of his power.

(3). These temptations are overruled for good.

(1). Satan's METHOD in tempting. Here take notice of two things. His **violence** in tempting; and so he is the *red dragon*. He labors to storm the castle of the heart, he throws in thoughts of blasphemy, he tempts to deny God. These are the fiery darts which he shoots, by which he would inflame the passions. Also, notice his **subtlety** in tempting; and so he is the *old serpent*. There are five chief subtleties the devil uses.

(1.) He observes the temperament and constitution—he lays suitable baits of temptation. Like the farmer, he knows what grain is best for the soil. Satan will not tempt contrary to the natural disposition and temperament. This is his policy—he makes the wind and tide go together; that way the natural tide of the heart runs, that way the wind of temptation blows. Though the devil cannot know men's thoughts—yet he knows their temperament, and accordingly he lays his baits. He tempts the ambitious man with a crown, the lustful man with beauty.

(2.) Satan observes the fittest time to tempt—as a cunning angler casts in his angle when the fish will bite best. Satan's time of tempting is usually after an ordinance—and the reason is, he thinks he shall find us most secure. When we have been at solemn duties, we are apt to think all is done, and we grow remiss, and leave off that zeal and strictness as before; just as a soldier, who after a battle leaves off his armor, not once dreaming of an enemy. Satan watches his time, and, when we least suspect, then he throws in a temptation.

(3.) He makes use of near relations; the devil tempts by a proxy. Thus he handed over a temptation to Job by his wife. Are you still trying to maintain your integrity? Curse God and die!" (Job

2:9). A wife in the bosom may be the devil's instrument to tempt to sin.

(4.) Satan tempts to evil by those who are good; thus he gives poison in a golden cup. He tempted Christ by Peter. Peter dissuades him from suffering. "Master, pity Yourself!" Who would have thought to have found the tempter in the mouth of an apostle?

(5.) Satan tempts to sin under a pretense of religion. He is most to be feared when he transforms himself into an *angel of light*. He came to Christ with Scripture in his mouth: "It is written." The devil baits his hook with religion. He tempts many a man to covetousness and extortion under a pretense of providing for his family; he tempts some to do away with themselves, that they may live no longer to sin against God; and so he draws them into sin, under a pretense of avoiding sin. These are his *subtle stratagems* in tempting.

(2). The extent of his POWER; how far Satan's power in tempting reaches.

(1.) He can propose the object; as he set a wedge of gold before Achan.

(2.) He can poison the imagination, and instill evil thoughts into the mind. As the Holy Spirit casts in good suggestions, so the devil casts in bad ones. He put it into Judas' heart to betray Christ (John 13:2).

(3.) Satan can excite and irritate the corruption within, and work some kind of inclinableness in the heart to embrace a temptation. Though it is true Satan cannot force the will to yield consent—yet he being a cunning suitor, by his continual solicitation, may provoke to evil. Thus he provoked David to number the people (1 Chron. 21:1). The devil may, by his subtle arguments, *dispute us into sin*.

(3). These temptations are overruled for good to the children of God. A tree that is shaken by the wind is more settled and rooted. Just so, the blowing of a temptation does but settle a Christian the more in grace. Temptations are overruled for good in eight ways:

(1.) Temptation sends the soul to prayer. The more *furiously* Satan tempts, the more *fervently* the saint prays. The deer being shot with the dart, runs faster to the water. When Satan shoots his fiery darts at the soul, it then runs faster to the throne of grace. When Paul had the messenger of Satan to buffet him, he says, "For this I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me" (2 Cor. 12:8). Temptation is a medicine for carnal security. That which makes us pray more, works for good.

(2.) Temptation to sin, is a means to keep from the perpetration of sin. The more a child of God is tempted, the more he fights against the temptation. The more Satan tempts to blasphemy, the more a saint trembles at such thoughts, and says, "Get you hence, Satan." When Joseph's mistress tempted him to folly, the stronger her temptation was, the stronger was his opposition. That temptation which the devil uses as a spur to sin, God makes a bridle to keep back a Christian from it.

(3.) Temptation works for good, as it abates the swelling of pride. "Lest I should be exalted above measure, there was given me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to buffet me" (2 Cor. 12:7). The thorn in the flesh was to puncture the puffing up of pride. Better is that temptation which humbles me—than that duty which makes me proud. Rather than a Christian shall be haughty minded, God will let him fall into the devil's hands awhile, to be cured of his swelling pride.

(4.) Temptation works for good, as it is a touchstone to try what is in the heart. The devil tempts, that he may deceive; but God allows us to be tempted, to try us. Temptation is a trial of our

sincerity. It argues that our heart is chaste and loyal to Christ, when we can look a temptation in the face, and turn our back upon it. Also it is a trial of our courage. "Ephraim is a silly dove, without heart" (Hosea 8:11). So it may be said of many, they are without a heart; they have no heart to resist temptation. No sooner does Satan come with his bait—but they yield; like a coward who, as soon as the thief approaches, gives him his purse. But he is the valorous Christian, who brandishes the sword of the Spirit against Satan, and will rather die than yield. The courage of the Romans was never more seen than when they were assaulted by the Carthaginians: the valor and courage of a saint is never more seen than on a battlefield, when he is fighting the red dragon, and by the power of faith puts the devil to flight. That grace is *tried* gold, which can stand in the fiery trial, and withstand Satan's fiery darts!

(5.) Temptations work for good, as God makes those who are tempted, fit to comfort others in the same distress. A Christian must himself be under the buffetings of Satan, before he can speak a word in due season to him that is weary. Paul was versed in temptations. "We are not ignorant of his devices" (2 Cor. 2:11). Thus he was able to acquaint others with Satan's cursed wiles (1 Cor. 10:13). A man that has ridden over a place where there are bogs and quicksands, is the fittest to guide others through that dangerous way. He who has felt the claws of the roaring lion, and has lain bleeding under those wounds, is the fittest man to deal with one who is tempted. None can better discover Satan's subtle devices, than those who have been long in the fencing school of temptation.

(6.) Temptations work for good, as they stir up fatherly compassion in God, to those who are tempted. The child who is sick and bruised is most looked after. When a saint lies under the bruising of temptations, Christ prays, and God the Father pities. When Satan puts the soul into a fever, God comes with a cordial; which made Luther say, that temptations are Christ's embraces, because He then most sweetly manifests Himself to the soul.

(7.) Temptations work for good, as they make the saints long more for heaven. There they shall be out of gunshot; heaven is a place of rest, no bullets of temptation fly there. The eagle which soars aloft in the air, and sits upon high trees—is not troubled with the stinging of the serpent. Just so, when believers are ascended to heaven, they shall not be molested by the old serpent, the devil. In this life, when one temptation is over, another comes. This makes God's people wish for death—to call them off the battlefield where the bullets fly so quick—and to receive a victorious crown, where neither the drum nor cannon—but the harp and violin, shall be eternally sounding.

(8.) Temptations work for good, as they engage the strength of Christ. Christ is our Friend, and when we are tempted, He sets all His power working for us. "Since he himself has gone through suffering and temptation, he is able to help us when we are being tempted" (Heb. 2:18). If a poor soul was to fight alone with the Goliath of hell, he would be sure to be vanquished—but Jesus Christ brings in His auxiliary forces, He gives fresh supplies of grace. "We are more than conquerors through him who loved us!" (Romans 8:37). Thus the *evil* of temptation is overruled for good.

Question. But sometimes Satan foils a child of God. How does this work for good?

Answer. I grant that, through the suspension of divine grace, and the fury of a temptation, a saint may be overcome; yet this foiling by a temptation shall be overruled for good. By this foil God makes way for the augmentation of grace. Peter was tempted to self-confidence, he presumed upon his own strength; and Christ let him fall. But this wrought for his good, it cost him many a tear. "He went out, and wept bitterly" (Matt. 26:75). And now he grows less self-reliant. He dared not say he loved Christ more than the other apostles. "Do you love me more than these?" (John 21:15). He dared not say so—his fall into sin broke the neck of his pride!

The foiling by a temptation causes more circumspection and watchfulness in a child of God. Though Satan did before decoy him into sin—yet for the future he will be the more cautious. He will have a care of coming within the lion's chain any more. He is more vigilant and fearful of the occasions of sin. He never goes out without his spiritual armor, and he girds on his armor by prayer. He knows he walks on slippery ground, therefore he looks wisely to his steps. He keeps close sentinel in his soul, and when he spies the devil coming, he grasps his spiritual weapons, and displays the shield of faith (Eph. 6:16). This is all the hurt the devil does when he foils a saint by temptation—he cures him of his careless neglect; he makes him watch and pray more. When wild beasts get over the hedge and damage the grain, a man will make his fence the stronger. Just so, when the devil gets over the hedge by a temptation, a Christian will be sure to mend his fence; he will become more fearful of sin, and careful of duty. Thus the being worsted by temptation works for good.

Objection. But if being foiled works for good, this may make Christians careless whether they are overcome by temptations or not.

Answer. There is a great deal of difference between *falling* into a temptation, and *running* into a temptation. The *falling* into a temptation shall work for good, not the *running* into it. He who falls into a river is fit for help and pity—but he who desperately runs into it, is guilty of his own death. It is madness running into a lion's den. He who runs himself into a temptation is like king Saul—who fell upon his own sword.

From all that has been said, see how God disappoints the old serpent, making his temptations turn to the good of His people. Surely if the devil knew how much benefit accrues to the saints by temptation, he would forbear to tempt. Luther once said, "There are three things which make a godly man—prayer, meditation, and temptation." Paul, in his voyage to Rome, met with a contrary wind

(Acts 27:4). So the wind of temptation is a contrary wind to that of the Spirit; but God makes use of this cross wind, to blow the saints to heaven!

3. The evil of DESERTION works for good to the godly.

The evil of **desertion** works for good. The spouse complains of desertion. "My beloved had withdrawn himself, and was gone!" (Cant. 5:6). There is a twofold withdrawing; either in regard of **grace**, when God suspends the influence of His Spirit, and withholds the lively actings of grace. If the Spirit is gone, grace freezes into a chillness and indolence. Or, a withdrawing in regard of **comfort**. When God withholds the sweet manifestations of His favor, He does not look with such a pleasant aspect—but veils His face, and seems to be quite gone from the soul.

God is **just** in all His withdrawings. We desert Him before He deserts us. We desert God—when we leave off close communion with Him; when we desert His truths and dare not appear for Him; when we leave the guidance and conduct of His word, and follow the deceitful light of our own corrupt affections and passions. We desert God first; therefore we have none to blame but ourselves.

Desertion is very sad, for as when the *light* is withdrawn, darkness follows in the air—so when God withdraws, there is darkness and sorrow in the soul. Desertion is an agony of conscience. God holds the soul over hell. "The arrows of the Almighty are within me, the poison whereof drinks up my spirits" (Job 6:4). It was a custom among the Persians in their wars, to dip their arrows in the poison of serpents to make them more deadly. Thus did God shoot the *poisoned arrow of desertion* into Job, under the wounds of which his spirit lay bleeding. In times of desertion the people of God are apt to be dejected. They dispute against themselves, and think that God has quite cast them off. Therefore I shall prescribe some **comfort** to the deserted soul.

The mariner, when he has no star to guide him—yet he has light in his lantern, which is some help to him to see his compass; so, I shall lay down **four consolations**, which are as the mariner's lantern, to give some light when the poor soul is sailing in the darkness of desertion, and needs the bright morning star.

(1). None but the godly are capable of desertion. Wicked men do not know what God's love means—nor what it is to *lack* it. They know what it is to lack health, friends, trade—but not what it is to lack God's favor. You fear that you are not God's child because you are deserted. The Lord cannot be said to withdraw His love from the wicked, because they never had it. The being deserted, evidences you to be a child of God. How could you complain that God has estranged Himself, if you had not sometimes received smiles and tokens of love from Him?

(2). There may be the *seed of grace*, where there is not the *flower of joy*. The earth may lack a crop of *grain*—yet may have a mine of *gold* within! A Christian may have grace within, though the sweet fruit of joy does not grow. Vessels at sea, which are richly fraught with jewels and spices, may be in the dark and tossed in the storm. A soul enriched with the treasures of grace, may yet be in the dark of desertion, and so tossed as to think it shall be cast away in the storm! David, in a state of dejection, prays, "Take not your Holy Spirit from me" (Psalm 51:11). He does not pray, says Augustine, "Lord, give me your Spirit"—but "Take not away your Spirit", so that still he had the Spirit of God remaining in him.

(3). These desertions are but for a time. Christ may withdraw, and leave the soul awhile—but He will come again. "In a little wrath I hid my face from you for a moment—but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on you" (Isaiah 64:8). When it is low water—the tide will come in again. "I will not always show my anger." (Isaiah 57:16). The tender *mother* sets down her *child* in anger—but she will take it up again into her arms, and kiss it. God may put away the

soul in anger—but He will take it up again into His dear embraces, and display His banner of love over it.

(4). These desertions work for good to the godly.

Desertion cures the soul of sloth. We find the spouse fallen upon the bed of sloth: "I sleep" (Cant. 5:2). And presently Christ was gone. "My beloved had withdrawn himself" (Cant. 5:6). Who will speak to one that is drowsy?

Desertion cures inordinate affection to the world. "Love not the world" (1 John 2:15). We may hold the world as a posy in our *hand*—but it must not lie too near our *heart!* We may use it as an *inn* where we take a meal—but it must not be our *home*. Perhaps these secular things steal away the heart too much. Godly men are sometimes weighed down with an overabundance of temporal things, and drunk with the luscious delights of prosperity. And having spotted their silver wings of grace, and much defaced *God's image* by rubbing it against the *earth*—the Lord, to recover them of this, hides His face in a cloud. This eclipse has good effects—it darkens all the glory of the world, and causes it to disappear.

Desertion works for good, as it makes the saints prize God's countenance more than ever. "Your loving-kindness is better than life" (Psalm 63:3). Yet the *commonness* of this mercy lessens it in our esteem. When *pearls* grew common at Rome, they began to be slighted. God has no better way to make us value His *love*, than by withdrawing it awhile. If the sun shone but once a year, how would it be prized! When the soul has been long benighted with desertion, oh how welcome now is the return of the Sun of righteousness!

Desertion works for good, as it is the means of embittering sin to us. Can there be a greater misery than to have God's displeasure? What makes hell—but the hiding of God's face? And what makes God hide His face—but sin? "They have taken away my

Lord, and I know not where they have laid him" (John 20:13). So, our sins have taken away the Lord, and we know not where He is laid. The favor of God is the best jewel; it can sweeten a prison, and unsting death. Oh, how odious then is that sin, which robs us of our best jewel! Sin made God desert His temple (Ezek. 8:6). Sin causes Him to appear as an enemy, and dress Himself in armor. This makes the soul pursue sin with a holy malice, and seek to be avenged on it! The deserted soul gives sin gall and vinegar to drink, and, with the *spear of mortification*, lets out the heart-blood of it!

Desertion works for good, as it sets the soul to weeping for the loss of God. When the sun is gone, the *dew* falls; and when God is gone, *tears* drop from the eyes. How Micah was troubled when he had lost his gods! "You've taken away all my gods—and I have nothing left!" (Judges 18:24). So when God is gone, what more do we have left? It is not the harp and violin, which can comfort—when God is gone. Though it is sad to *lack* God's presence—yet it is good to *lament* His absence.

Desertion sets the soul to seeking after God. When Christ was departed, the spouse pursues after Him, she "searched for him in all its streets and squares" (Cant. 3:2). And not having found Him, she makes a cry after Him, "Have you seen him anywhere, this one I love so much?" (Cant. 3:3). The deserted soul sends up whole volleys of sighs and groans. It knocks at heaven's gate by prayer—it can have no rest until the golden beams of God's face shine!

Desertion puts the Christian upon inquiry. He inquires the cause of God's departure. What is the *accursed thing* which has made God angry? Perhaps *pride*, perhaps *sloth*, perhaps *worldliness*. "I was *angry* and punished these *greedy* people. I *withdrew* myself from them" (Isaiah 57:17). Perhaps there is some secret sin allowed. A stone in the pipe hinders the current of water; so, sin lived in, hinders the sweet current of God's love. Thus conscience, as a bloodhound, having found out sin and overtaken it —this Achan is stoned to death!

Desertion works for good, as it gives us a sight of what Jesus Christ suffered for us. If the *sipping of the cup* is so bitter, how bitter was that *full cup* which Christ drank to the dregs upon the cross? He drank a cup of deadly poison, which made Him cry out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Matt. 22:46). None can so appreciate Christ's sufferings, none can be so fired with love to Christ—as those who have been humbled by desertion, and have been held over the flames of hell for a time.

Desertion works for good, as it prepares the saints for future comfort. The nipping frosts prepare for spring flowers. It is God's way, first to *cast down*, then to *comfort* (2 Cor. 7:6). When our Savior had been fasting—then the angels came and ministered to Him. When the Lord has kept His people long fasting—then He sends the Comforter, and feeds them with the hidden manna. "Light is sown for the righteous" (Psalm 97:11.) The saints' comforts may be hidden like seed under ground—but the seed is *ripening*, and will *increase*, and *flourish* into a crop!

These desertions work for good, as they will make heaven the sweeter to us. Here on earth, our comforts are like the moon, sometimes they are in the full, sometimes in the wane. God shows Himself to us awhile, and then retires from us. How will this set off heaven the more, and make it more delightful and ravishing, when we shall have a constant aspect of love from God! (1 Thess. 4:17).

Thus we see desertions work for good. The Lord brings us into the deep of *desertion*—that He may not bring us into the deep of *damnation!* He puts us into a *seeming* hell—that He may keep us from a *real* hell. God is fitting us for that time when we shall enjoy His smiles forever, when there shall be neither clouds in His face or sun setting, when Christ shall come and stay with His spouse, and the spouse shall *never* say again, "My beloved has withdrawn himself!"

4. The evil of SIN works for good to the godly.

Sin in its own nature, is damnable—but God in His infinite wisdom overrules it, and causes good to arise from that which seems most to oppose it. Indeed, it is a matter of wonder, that any *honey* should come out of this *lion!* We may understand it in a double sense.

(1). The sins of OTHERS are overruled for good to the godly. It is no small trouble to a gracious heart to live among the wicked. "Woe is me—that I dwell in Mesech" (Psalm 120:5). Yet even this the Lord turns to good. For,

(1.) The sins of others work for good to the godly—as they produce holy sorrow. God's people weep for what they cannot reform. "Rivers of tears run down my eyes, because they keep not your law" (Psalm 119. 136). David was a mourner for the sins of the times; his *heart* was turned into a spring—and his *eyes* into rivers! Wicked men make merry with sin. "When you do evil, then you rejoice" (Jer. 11:15). But the godly are weeping doves; they grieve for the oaths and blasphemies of the age. The sins of others, like spears, pierce their souls!

This grieving for the sins of others is good. It shows a childlike heart, to resent with sorrow the injuries done to our heavenly Father. It also shows a Christ-like heart. "He was grieved for the hardness of their hearts" (Mark 3:5). The Lord takes special notice of these tears. He likes it well—that we should weep when His glory suffers. It argues more grace to grieve for the sins of others, than for our own. We may grieve for our own sins—out of *fear of hell*; but to grieve for the sins of others—is from a principle of *love to God*. These tears drop as water from roses—they are sweet and fragrant, and God puts them in His bottle! "You keep track of all my sorrows. You have collected all my tears in your bottle. You have recorded each one in your book!" (Psalm 56:8)

(2.) The sins of others work for good to the godly—as they set them the more a praying against sin. If there were not such a spirit of *wickedness* abroad, perhaps there would not be such a

spirit of *prayer*. Crying *sins* cause crying *prayers!* The people of God pray against the iniquity of the times—that God will give a check to sin, that He will put sin to the blush. If they cannot pray *down* sin, they pray *against* it; and this God takes kindly. These prayers shall both be recorded and rewarded. Though we do not *prevail* in prayer, we shall not *lose* our prayers. "My prayer returned into my own bosom" (Psalm 35:13).

(3.) The sins of others work for good—as they make us the more in love with grace. The sins of others are a *foil* to set off the luster of grace the more. One *contrary* sets off another: deformity sets off beauty. The sins of the wicked do much disfigure them. *Pride* is a disfiguring sin; now the beholding another's pride makes us the more in love with humility! *Malice* is a disfiguring sin, it is the devil's picture; the more of this we see in others the more we love meekness and charity. *Drunkenness* is a disfiguring sin, it turns men into beasts, it deprives of the use of reason; the more intemperate we see others, the more we must love sobriety. The *black face of sin,* sets off the *beauty of holiness* so much the more.

(4.) The sins of others work for good—as they work in us the stronger opposition against sin. "The wicked have broken your law; therefore I love your commandments" (Psalm 119:126, 127). David would never have loved God's law so much, if the wicked had not set themselves so much against it. The more *violent* others are against the truth, the more *valiant* the saints are for it. Living fish swim *against* the stream. Just so, the more the tide of sin comes in, the more the godly swim against it! The *impieties* of the times provoke *holy passions* in the saints! That anger is *without* sin—which is *against* sin. The sins of others are as a whetstone to set the sharper edge upon us; they whet our zeal and indignation against sin the more!

(5.) The sins of others work for good—as they make us more earnest in working out our salvation. When we see wicked men take such pains for *hell*—this makes us more

industrious for *heaven*. The wicked have nothing to encourage them—yet they sin. They venture shame and disgrace, they break through all opposition. Scripture is against them, and conscience is against them, there is a flaming sword in the way—yet they sin. Godly hearts, seeing the wicked thus *mad for the forbidden fruit*, and wearing out themselves in the devil's service—are the more emboldened and quickened in the ways of God. They will take heaven as it were, by storm. The wicked are like camels—*running* after sin (Jer. 2:23). And do we *creep* like snails in piety? Shall impure sinners do the devil more service—than we do Christ? Shall they make more haste to go to the prison of hell—than we do to the kingdom of heaven? Are they never weary of *sinning*—and are we weary of *praying?* Have we not a better *Master* than they? Are not the *paths* of virtue pleasant? Is not there joy in the *way* of duty, and heaven at the *end?* The activity of the sons of Belial in sin—this is a spur to the godly to make them mend their pace, and run the faster to heaven!

(6.) The sins of others work for good—as they are looking-glasses in which we may see our own hearts. Do we see a heinous, impious wretch? Behold a picture of our own hearts! Such would we be—if God left us! What is in wicked men's *practice*—is in our *nature*. Sin in the wicked is like fire which flames and blazes forth; sin in the godly is like fire in the *embers*. Christian, though you do not break forth into a flame of scandalous sin—yet you have no cause to boast, for there is as much sin in the embers of your nature. You have the root of all sin in you, and would bear as hellish fruit as any ungodly wretch—if God did not either curb you by His power, or change you by His grace!

(7.) The sins of others work for good—as they are the means of making the people of God more thankful. When you see another infected with the plague, how thankful are you that God has preserved you from it! It is a good use that may be made of the sins of others—to make us more thankful. Why might not God have left us to the same excess of wickedness? Think with yourself,

O Christian—why should God be more merciful to you than to another? Why should He snatch you, as brand plucked out of the fire—and not him? How may this make you to adore free grace! What the Pharisee said boastingly, we may say thankfully, "God, I thank you that I am not like other men—robbers, evildoers, adulterers, etc." (Luke 18:11).

If we are not as wicked as others—we should adore the riches of free-grace! Every time we see men hastening on in sin—we are to thank God that we are not such. If we see a crazy person—we thank God that it is not so with us. Much more when we see others under the power of Satan—how thankful we should be, that this is no longer our condition! "For we too were once foolish, disobedient, deceived, captives of various passions and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, detesting one another." Titus 3:3

(8.) The sins of others work for good—as they are means of making God's people better. Christian, God can make you a gainer by another's sin. The more unholy others are—the more holy you should be. The more a wicked man gives himself to sin—the more a godly man gives himself to prayer. "But I give myself to prayer" (Psalm 109:4).

(9.) The sins of others work for good—as they give an occasion to us of doing good. Were there no sinners, we could not be in such a capacity for service. The godly are often the means of converting the wicked; their prudent advice and pious example is a *lure* and a *bait* to draw sinners to the embracing of the gospel. The disease of the *patient,* works for the good of the *physician*; by healing the patient, the physician enriches himself. Just so, by converting sinners from the error of their way, our crown comes to be enlarged. "Those who turn many to righteousness, shall shine as the *stars* forever and ever" (Dan. 12:31). Not as *lamps* or *candles*—but as the *stars* forever! Thus we see the sins of others are overruled for our good.

(2). The sense of their OWN sinfulness, will be overruled for the good of the godly. Thus our own sins shall work for good. This must be understood carefully, when I say the sins of the godly work for good—not that there is the least good in sin. Sin is like poison, which corrupts the blood, and infects the heart; and, without a sovereign antidote, sin always brings death. Such is the venomous nature of sin—it is *deadly* and *damning*. Sin is worse than hell. But yet God, by His mighty over ruling power, makes sin in the outcome turn to the good of His people. Hence that golden saying of Augustine, "God would never permit evil—if He could not bring good out of evil." The feeling of sinfulness in the saints, works for good several ways.

(1.) Sin makes them weary of this life. That sin is *in* the godly—is sad; but that it is their *burden*—is good. Paul's *afflictions* (pardon the expression) were but *child's play* to him—in comparison of his *sin*. He rejoiced in tribulation (2 Cor. 7:4). But how did this bird of paradise weep and bemoan himself under his sins! "Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" (Romans 8:24). A believer carries his *sins* as a prisoner his *shackles*; oh, how does he long for the day of release! This sense of sin is good.

(2.) This *indwelling of corruption,* makes the saints prize Christ more. He who feels his sin, as a sick man feels his sickness—how welcome is Christ the physician to him! He who feels himself stung with sin—how precious is the brazen serpent to him! When Paul had bemoaned his body of death—how thankful was he for Christ! "I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord!" (Romans 8:25). Christ's blood *saves* from sin, and is the sacred ointment which *kills* this deadly disease of sin.

(3.) This sense of sin works for good, as it is an occasion of putting the soul upon six special duties:

(a) Sin puts the soul upon self-searching. A child of God being conscious of sin, takes the candle and lantern of the Word, and

searches into his heart. He desires to know the worst of himself; as a man who is diseased in body, desires to know the worst of his disease. Though our joy lies in the knowledge of our *graces*—yet there is some benefit in the knowledge of our *corruptions*. Therefore Job prays, "Reveal to me my transgression and sin" (Job 13:23). It is good to know our sins—that we may not flatter ourselves, or take our condition to be better than it is. It is good to find out our sins—lest they find us out!

(b) Sin puts a child of God upon self-abasing. Sin is left in a godly man—as a cancer in the breast, or a hunch upon the back—to keep him from being proud. Gravel and dirt are good to *ballast* a ship, and keep it from overturning; the sense of sin helps to ballast the soul, that it be not overturned with pride. We read of the "spots of God's children" (Deut. 32:5). When a godly man beholds his face in the looking-glass of Scripture, and sees the spots of pride, lust and hypocrisy. They are humbling spots—and make the *plumes of pride* fall off! It is a good use that may be made even of our sins, when they occasion low thoughts of ourselves. Better is that sin which humbles me—than that duty which makes me proud! Holy Bradford uttered these words of himself, "I am but a painted hypocrite"; and Hooper said, "Lord, I am hell—and You are heaven."

(c) Sin puts a child of God on self-judging. He passes a sentence upon himself. "I am more brutish than any man" (Proverbs 30:2). It is dangerous to judge *others*—but it is good to judge *ourselves*. But if we judged ourselves, we would not come under judgment" (1 Cor. 11:31). When a man has judged himself, Satan is put out of office. When Satan lays anything to a saint's charge, he is able to retort and say, "It is true, Satan, I *am* guilty of these sins; but I have judged myself already for them; and having condemned myself in the lower court of conscience, God will acquit me in the upper court of heaven."

(d) Sin puts a child of God upon self-conflicting. Spiritual self conflicts with carnal self. "The spirit lusts against the flesh"

(Gal. 5:17). Our life is a wayfaring life—and a war-faring life. There is a duel fought every day between the two seeds. A believer will not let sin have peaceable possession. If he cannot keep sin *out*, he will keep sin *down*; though he cannot quite overcome—yet he is overcoming. "To him who is overcoming" (Rev. 2:7).

(e) Sin puts a child of God upon self-observing. He knows sin is a bosom traitor, therefore he carefully observes himself. A subtle and deceitful heart, needs a watchful eye. The heart is like a castle which is continually in danger to be assaulted; this makes a child of God to be always a sentinel, and keep a guard over his heart. A believer has a strict eye over himself, lest he fall in to any scandalous sin—and so open a sluice to let all his comfort run out.

(f) Sin puts the soul upon self-reforming. A child of God does not only *find* out sin—but *drives* out sin! One foot he sets upon the neck of his sins—and the other foot he "turns to God's testimonies" (Psalm 119. 59). Thus the sins of the godly work for good. God makes the saints' *maladies*—their *medicines*.

But let none abuse this doctrine. I do not say that sin works for good to an *impenitent* person. No, it works for his damnation! Sin only works for good to those who love God; and for you who are godly, I know you will not draw a wrong conclusion from this—either to make *light* of sin, or to make *bold* with sin. If you should do so, God will make it cost you dearly! Remember David. He ventured presumptuously on sin, and what did he get? He lost his peace, he felt the terrors of the Almighty in his soul, though he had all helps to cheerfulness. He was a king; he had skill in music; yet nothing could administer comfort to him; he complains of his "broken bones" (Psalm 51:8). And though he did at last come out of that *dark cloud*—yet perhaps he never recovered his *full joy* to his dying day. If any of God's people should be tampering with sin, because God can turn it to good; though the Lord does not *damn* them—He may send them to hell in this life. He may put them into such bitter agonies and soul convulsions, as may fill them full of horror, and

make them draw near to despair. Let this be a flaming sword to keep them from coming near the forbidden tree!

And thus have I shown, that both the **best** things and the **worst** things, by the overruling hand of the great God—do work together for the good of the saints.

Again, I say—think not lightly of sin!

Why All Things Work for Good

1. The grand reason why all things work for good, is the near and dear interest which God has in His people. The Lord has made a covenant with them. "They shall be my people, and I will be their God" (Jer. 32:38). By virtue of this compact, all things *do*, and *must* work, for good to them. "I am God, even your God" (Psalm 50:7). This word, 'Your God,' is the sweetest word in the Bible, it implies the best relations; and it is impossible there should be these relations between God and His people, and everything not work for their good. This expression, 'I am your God,' implies,

(1). The relation of a PHYSICIAN. 'I am your Physician.' God is a skillful Physician. He knows what is best. God observes the different temperaments of men, and knows what will work most effectually. Some are of a more sweet disposition, and are drawn by mercy. Others are more rugged and knotty pieces; these God deals with in a more forcible way. Some things are kept in *sugar*, others are kept in *brine*. God does not deal alike with all; He has trials for the strong and cordials for the weak. God is a faithful Physician, and therefore will turn all to the best. If God does not give you that which you like—He will give you that which you need. A physician does not so much study to *please the taste* of the patient—as to *cure his disease*. We complain that very sore trials lie upon us; let us remember God is our Physician, therefore He labors rather to *heal*

us—than *humor* us. God's dealings with His children, though they are *sharp*—yet they are *safe*, and in order to cure; "that he might do you good in the latter end" (Deut. 8:16).

(2). This word, 'your God', implies the relation of a FATHER. A father loves his child; therefore whether it be a smile or a stroke, it is for the good of the child. I am your God, your Father, therefore all I do is for your good. "As a man chastens his son, so the Lord your God chastens you" (Deut. 8:5). God's chastening is not to *destroy*—but to *reform*. God cannot hurt His children, for He is a tender hearted Father, "Like as a father pities his children, so the Lord pities those who fear him" (Psalm 103. 13). Will a father seek the ruin of his child, the child that came from himself, that bears his image? All his care and skill is for his child. Whom does he settle the inheritance upon—but his child? God is the tender hearted "Father of mercies" (2 Cor. 1:3). He begets all the mercies and kindnesses in the creatures.

God is an everlasting Father (Isaiah 9:6). He was our Father from eternity; before we were children, God was our Father, and He will be our Father to all eternity. A father provides for his child while he lives; but the father dies, and then the child may be exposed to injury. But God never ceases to be a Father! You who are a believer, have a Father who never dies; and if God is your father, you can never be undone. All things must needs work for your good.

(3). This word, 'your God,' implies the relation of a HUSBAND. This is a near and sweet relation. The husband seeks the good of his spouse—not to destroy his wife. "No man ever yet hated his own flesh," (Ephes. 5:29). There is a marriage relation between God and His people. "Your Maker is your Husband" (Isaiah 54:5). God entirely loves His people. He engraves them upon the palms of His hands (Isaiah 49:16). He sets them as a seal upon His breast (Cant. 8:6). He will give kingdoms for their ransom (Isaiah 43:3). This shows how near they lie to His heart. If He is a Husband

whose heart is full of love, then He will seek the good of His spouse. Either He will shield off an injury—or will turn it to the best.

(4). This word, 'your God,' implies the relation of a FRIEND. "This is my friend" (Cant. 5:16). "A friend is," as Augustine says, "half one's self." He is studious and desirous how he may do his friend good; he promotes his welfare as his own. Jonathan ventured the king's displeasure for his friend David (1 Sam. 19:4). God is our Friend, therefore He will turn all things to our good. There are false friends; Christ was betrayed by a friend. But God is the best Friend.

He is a **faithful** Friend. "Know therefore that the Lord your God, he is God—the faithful God" (Deut. 7:9). He is faithful in His **love**. He gave His very heart to us, when He gave the Son out of His bosom. Here was a pattern of love without a parallel. He is faithful in His **promises**. "God, who cannot lie, has promised" (Titus 1:2). He may change His promise—but cannot break it. He is faithful in His **dealings**; when He is afflicting He is faithful. "In faithfulness you have afflicted me" (Psalm 119:75). He is sifting and refining us as silver (Psalm 66:10).

God is an **immutable** Friend. "I will never leave you, nor forsake you" (Heb. 13:5). Friends often fail at a pinch. Many deal with their friends as women do with flowers; while they are fresh—they put them in their bosoms; but when they begin to wither—they throw them away. Or as the traveler does with the sun-dial; if the sun shines upon the dial, the traveler will step out of the road, and look upon the dial. But if the sun does not shine upon it, he will ride by, and never take any notice of it. So, if prosperity shines on men, then friends will look upon them; but if there is a cloud of adversity on them, they will not come near them. But God is a Friend forever; He has said, "I will never leave you." Though David walked in the shadow of death, he knew he had a Friend by him. "I will fear no evil, for you are with me" (Psalm 23:4). God never takes off His love wholly from His people. "He loved them unto the end" (John 13:1).

God being such a Friend, will make all things work for our good. There is no friend but will seek the good of his friend.

(5). This word, 'your God,' implies yet a nearer relation, the relation between the Head and the members. There is a mystical union between Christ and the saints. He is called, "the Head of the church" (Eph. 5:23). Does not the head consult for the good of the body? The head guides the body, it sympathizes with it. The head is the fountain of spirits, it sends forth influence and comfort into the body. All the parts of the head are placed for the good of the body. The *eye* is set as it were in the watchtower, it stands sentinel to spy any danger that may come to the body, and prevent it. The *tongue* is both a taster and an orator. If the body be a microcosm, or little world, the head is the sun in this world, from which proceeds the light of reason. The head is placed for the good of the body. Christ and the saints make one body mystical. Our Head is in heaven, and surely He will not allow His body to be hurt —but will work for the safety of it, and make all things work for the good of the body mystical.

2. Inferences from the proposition that all things work for the good of the saints.

(1). If all things work for good, hence learn that there is a providence. Things do not work by themselves—but God sets them working for good. God is the great Disposer of all events and issues, He sets everything working. "His kingdom rules over all" (Psalm 103:19). It is meant of His providential kingdom. Things in the world are not governed by second causes, by the counsels of men, by the stars and planets—but by divine providence. Providence is the queen and governess of the world. There are three things in providence: God's *foreknowing*, God's *determining*, and God's *directing* all things to their proper outcomes. Whatever things do work in the world, God sets them a working. We read in the first chapter of Ezekiel, of wheels, and eyes in the wheels, and the moving of the wheels. The wheels are the whole universe, the eyes

in the wheels are God's providence, the moving of the wheels is the hand of Providence, turning all things here below. That which is by some called chance is nothing else but the result of God's providence.

Learn to adore providence. Providence has an influence upon all things here below. God's providence mingles the ingredients, and makes up the whole compound.

(2). Observe the happy condition of every child of God. *All* things work for his good—the *best* and *worst* things. "Unto the upright arises light in darkness" (Psalm 112:4). The most dark cloudy providences of God, have some sunshine in them. What a blessed condition is a true believer in! When he *dies*, he goes to God; and while he *lives*, everything shall do him good. Affliction is for his good. What hurt does the fire to the gold? It only purifies it. What hurt does the winnowing fan do to the grain? It only separates the chaff from it. God never uses His staff—but to beat out the *dust*. Affliction does that which the Word many times will not, it "opens the ear to discipline" (Job 36:10). When God lays men upon their *backs*—then they look up to heaven! God's smiting His people is like the musician's striking upon the violin, which makes it put forth a melodious sound. How much good comes to the saints by affliction! Like bruised flowers—when they are pounded and broken—they send forth their sweetest smell.

Affliction is a bitter *root*—but it bears sweet *fruit*. "It yields the peaceable fruits of righteousness" (Heb. 12:11). Affliction is the highway to heaven; though it be flinty and thorny—yet it is the best way. *Poverty* shall starve our sins; *sickness* shall make grace more helpful (2 Cor. 4:16). *Reproach* shall cause "the Spirit of God and of glory to rest upon us" (1 Pet. 4:14). *Death* shall stop the bottle of tears—and open the gate of Paradise! A believer's dying day is his ascension day to glory. Hence it is, the saints have put their *afflictions,* in the inventory of their *riches* (Heb. 11:26). A child of

God say, "If I had not been afflicted, I would have been destroyed; if my *health* and estate had not been lost—my *soul* had been lost."

(3). See then what an encouragement there is to become godly. All things shall work for good. Oh, that this may induce men to fall in love with piety! Can there be a greater loadstone to piety? Can anything more prevail with us to be good, than this—that all things shall work for our good? Piety is the true *magic stone* which turns everything into gold. Take the sourest part of religion, the suffering part, and there is comfort in it. God sweetens suffering with joy; He candies our wormwood with sugar. Oh, how may this bribe us to godliness! "Acquaint now yourself with God, and be at peace; thereby good shall come unto you" (Job 22:21). No man did ever come off a loser by his acquaintance with God. By this, good shall come unto you, abundance of good, the sweet distillations of grace, the hidden manna, yes, everything shall work for good. Oh, then get acquaintance with God, espouse His interest.

(4). Notice the miserable condition of wicked men. To those who are *godly*—evil things work for good; to those who are *evil*—good things work for hurt.

(1.) *Temporal* good things work for hurt to the wicked. Riches and prosperity are not benefits, but snares to them. Worldly things are given to the wicked, as Michal was given to David, for a snare (1 Sam. 18:21). The vulture is said to draw sickness from a perfume; so do the wicked get hurt from the sweet perfume of prosperity. Their mercies are like poisoned bread; their tables are sumptuously spread—but there is a hook under the bait! "Let their table become a snare" (Psalm 69:22). All their enjoyments are like Israel's quail—which were sauced with the wrath of God (Numb. 11:33). Pride and luxury are the twin offspring of prosperity. "You are waxen fat" (Deut. 32:15). Then he forsook God. Riches are not only like the spider's web, unprofitable—but like the cockatrice's egg, pernicious. "Riches kept for the hurt of the owner" (Eccles. 5:13). The common mercies wicked men have, are not loadstones to

draw them nearer to God—but millstones to sink them deeper in hell (1 Tim. 6:9). Their delicious dainties are like Haman's banquet; after all their lordly feasting, death will bring in the bill, and they must pay it in hell.

(2.) *Spiritual* good things work for hurt to the wicked. From the flower of heavenly blessings—they suck poison!

The **ministers** of God work for their hurt. The same wind that blows one ship to the haven, blows another ship upon a rock. The same breath in the ministry that blows a godly man to heaven, blows a profane sinner to hell. They who come with the word of life in their mouths—yet to many are a savor of death. "Make the heart of this people fat, and their ears heavy" (Isaiah 6:10). The prophet was sent upon a sad message, to preach their funeral sermon. Wicked men are worse for preaching. "They hate him who rebukes" (Amos 5:10). Sinners grow more resolved in sin; let God say what He will, they will do what they desire. "As for the word which you have spoken to us in the name of the Lord—we will not hearken unto you!" (Jer. 44:16). The word preached is not *healing*—but *hardening*. And how dreadful is this for men to be sunk to hell with sermons!

Prayer works for their hurt. "The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord" (Proverbs 15:8). A wicked man is in a great strait: if he prays not—he sins; if he prays—he sins. "Let his prayer become sin" (Psalm 109:7). It were a sad judgment if all the food a man ate, should breed diseases in the body. And so it is with a wicked man. That prayer which should do him good, works for his hurt; he prays against sin, and sins against his prayer; his duties are tainted with atheism, and flyblown with hypocrisy. God abhors them! "The *plowing* of the wicked, is sin." (Proverbs 21:4)

The **Lord's Supper** works for their hurt. "You cannot eat of the Lord's table—and the table of devils. Do we provoke the Lord to jealousy?" (1 Cor. 10:21, 22). Some professors kept their idol-feasts

—yet would come to the Lord's table. The apostle says, "Do you provoke the Lord to wrath?" Profane people feast with their sins; yet will come to feast at the Lord's table. This is to provoke God to wrath. To a sinner there is death in the cup, he "eats and drinks his own damnation" (1 Cor. 11:29). Thus the Lord's Supper works for hurt to impenitent sinners. After the sop—the devil enters!

Christ Himself works for hurt to desperate sinners. He is "a stone of stumbling, and rock of offence" (1 Pet. 2:8). He is so, through the depravity of men's hearts; for instead of believing in Him, they are offended at Him. The sun, though in its own nature pure and pleasant—yet it is hurtful to sore eyes. Jesus Christ is set for the *fall*, as the *rising*, of many (Luke 2:34). Sinners stumble at a Savior, and pluck *death* from the tree of life! As strong medicines recover some patients—but destroy others, so the blood of Christ, though to some it is medicine, to others it is condemnation. Here is the unparalleled misery of such as live and die in sin. The best things work for their hurt; cordials themselves, kill.

(5). See here the wisdom of God, who can make the worst things imaginable, turn to the good of the saints. He can by a divine chemistry extract gold out of dross. "Oh the depth of the wisdom of God!" (Romans 11:33). It is God's great design to set forth the wonder of His wisdom. The Lord made Joseph's prison a step to advancement. There was no way for Jonah to be saved—but by being swallowed alive by the fish. God allowed the Egyptians to hate Israel (Psalm 106:41), and this was the means of their deliverance. Paul was bound with a chain, and that chain which did bind him was the means of enlarging the gospel (Phil. 1:12). God enriches by impoverishing; He causes the augmentation of grace by the diminution of an estate. When the creature goes further from us, it is that Christ may come nearer to us. God works strangely. He brings order out of confusion, and harmony out of discord. He frequently makes use of unjust men to do that which is just.

"He is wise in heart" (Job. 9:4). He can reap His glory out of men's fury (Psalm 86:10). Either the wicked shall not do the *hurt* that they intend—or they shall do the *good* which they do not intend. God often helps when there is least hope, and saves His people in that way which they think will destroy. He made use of the high priest's malice and Judas' treason—to redeem the world. Through indiscreet passion, we are apt to find fault with things that happen: which is as if an illiterate man should censure learning, or a blind man find fault with the work in a landscape. "Vain man would be wise" (Job 11:12). Silly men will be taxing Providence, and calling the wisdom of God to the bar of human reason. God's ways are "past finding out" (Romans 9:33). They are rather to be admired than fathomed. There is never a providence of God—but has either a mercy, or a wonder in it. How stupendous and infinite is that wisdom, that makes the most adverse dispensations work for the good of His children!

(6). Learn how little cause we have then to be discontented at outward trials and troubles! What! Discontented at that which shall do us good! All things shall work for good. There are no sins God's people are more subject to, than *unbelief* and *impatience.* They are ready either to *faint* through unbelief, or to *fret* through impatience. When men fly out against God by *discontent* and *impatience,* it is a sign they do not believe this text. Discontent is an *ungrateful* sin, because we have more mercies than afflictions; and it is an *irrational* sin, because afflictions work for good. Discontent is a sin which puts us upon sin. "Fret not yourself to do evil" (Psalm 37:8). He who frets will be ready to do evil: fretting Jonah was sinning Jonah (Jonah 4:9). The devil blows the coals of passion and discontent, and then warms himself at the fire. Oh, let us not nourish this angry viper in our bosom! Let this text produce patience, "All things work for good to those who love God" (Romans 8:28). Shall we be discontented at that which works for our good? If one friend should throw a bag of money at another, and in throwing it, should graze his head—he would not be troubled much, seeing by this means he had got a bag of money. Just so, the Lord may bruise

us by afflictions—but it is to enrich us. These light afflictions work for us an eternal weight of glory—and shall we be discontented!

(7). See here that Scripture fulfilled, "God is good to Israel" (Psalm 73:1). When we look upon adverse providences, and see the Lord covering His people with ashes, and "making them drunk with wormwood" (Lam. 3:15), we may be ready to call in question the love of God, and to say that He deals harshly with His people. Yet God is good to His people, because He makes all things work for good. Is not He a good God—who turns all to good? He works out sin, and works in grace; is not this good? "We are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world" (1 Cor. 11:32). The depth of *affliction*—is to save us from the depth of *damnation!* Let us always justify God; when our outward condition is ever so bad, let us say, "Yet God is good."

(8). See what cause the saints have to be frequent in the work of thanksgiving. In this, Christians are defective, though they are much in *supplication*—yet little in *thanksgiving*. The apostle says, "In everything giving thanks" (Thess. 5:18). Why so? Because God makes everything work for our good. We thank the physician, though he gives us a bitter medicine which makes us sick, because it is to make us well. We thank any man who does us a good turn; and shall we not be thankful to God, who makes everything work for good to us? God loves a thankful Christian. Job thanked God when He took all away: "The Lord has taken away—blessed be the name of the Lord!" (Job 1:21). Many will thank God when He gives; Job thanks Him when He takes away, because he knew God would work good out of it. We read of saints with *harps* in their hands (Rev. 14:2), an emblem of praise. We meet many Christians who have *tears* in their eyes, and *complaints* in their mouths. But there are few with their harps in their hands, who praise God in affliction. To be *thankful in affliction* is a work peculiar to a saint. Every bird can sing in spring—but some birds will sing in the dead of winter. Everyone, almost, can be thankful in prosperity—but a true saint can be thankful in adversity. A godly

Christian will bless God, not only at sun-rise—but at sun-set. Well may we, in the worst which befalls us, have a psalm of thankfulness, because all things work for good. Oh, be much in blessing of God. We will thank Him who befriends us—and makes all things work out to our good.

(9). Think—if the *worst* things work for good to a believer, what shall the *best* things—Christ, and heaven! How much more shall these work for good! If the *cross* has so much good in it —what has the *crown!* If such precious clusters grow in *Golgotha*— how delicious is that fruit which grows in *Canaan!* If there is any sweetness in the *bitter waters of Marah*— what is there in the *sweet wine of Paradise!* If God's *rod* has honey at the end of it—what has His golden *scepter!* If the *bread of affliction* tastes so savory—then how savory is His *manna!* What is the heavenly ambrosia? If God's *blow* and *stroke* work for good—what shall the *smiles of His face* do! If *temptations* and sufferings have matter of joy in them—what shall *glory* have! If there is so much good out of evil—how great is that good where there shall be no evil? If God's *chastening* mercies are so great—what will His *crowning* mercies be? "Therefore comfort one another with these words."

(10). Consider, that if God makes all things to turn to our good—how right is it that we should make all things tend to His glory! "Do *all* to the glory of God" (1 Cor. 10:31). The angels glorify God, they sing divine anthems of praise. How then ought redeemed man to glorify Him, for whom God has done more than for angels! He has dignified us above them in uniting our nature with the Godhead. Christ has died for *us*—and not the angels. The Lord has given us, not only out of the common stock of His bounty —but He has enriched us with covenant blessings. He has bestowed upon us His Spirit. He studies our welfare, He makes everything work for our good. Free grace has laid a plan for our salvation! If God seeks our *good*—shall we not seek His *glory?*

Question. How can we be said properly to glorify God. He is infinite in His perfections, and can receive no augmentation from us?

Answer. It is true that in a *strict* sense we cannot bring glory to God—but in an *evangelical* sense we may. When we do what in us lies to lift up God's name in the world, and to cause others to have high reverential thoughts of God—this the Lord interprets a glorifying of Him. Likewise, a man is said to *dishonor* God—when he causes the name of God to be evil spoken of.

We are said to advance God's glory in three ways:

(1.) We glorify God—when we aim at His glory—when we make Him the *first* in our thoughts, and the *end* of our life. As all the rivers run into the sea, and all the lines meet in the center—so all our actions should terminate and center in God!

(2.) We advance God's glory—by being fruitful in grace. "Herein is my Father glorified—that you bring forth much fruit" (John 15:8). Barrenness reflects dishonor upon God. We glorify God when we grow in *beauty* as the lily, in *tallness* as the cedar, in *fruitfulness* as the vine.

(3.) We glorify God—when we give the praise and glory of all we do unto God. It was an excellent and humble speech of a king of Sweden; he feared lest the people's ascribing that glory to him which was due to God, should cause him to be removed before the work was done. When the silk worm weaves her curious work, she hides herself under the silk—and is not seen. When we have done our best, we must vanish away in our own thoughts—and transfer the glory of all to God. The apostle Paul said, "I labored more abundantly than them all" (1 Cor. 15:10). One would think this speech savored of pride; but the apostle pulls off the crown from his own head, and sets it upon the head of free grace, "Yet not I—but the grace of God which was with me!" Constantine used to write the

name of Christ over the door, so should we over our duties. "Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do everything for God's glory." 1 Corinthians 10:31

Thus let us endeavor to make the name of God glorious and renowned. If God seeks our good—let us seek His glory. If He makes all things tend to our edification—let us make all things tend to His exaltation. So much for the **privilege** mentioned in the text.

I proceed to the second general branch of the text—the PEOPLE interested in this privilege.

Of Love to God

> "And we know that all things work together for good, **to those who love God**, to those who are the called according to His purpose." Romans 8:28

II. The PEOPLE interested in this privilege. They are lovers of God. "All things work together for good, *to those who love God*."

Despisers and *haters* of God have no lot or part in this privilege. It is children's bread—it belongs only to those who love God. Because love to God is the very heart and spirit of true religion, I shall the more fully treat upon this; and for the further discussion of it, let us notice these five things concerning love to God.

1. The NATURE of love to God. Love is an expansion of soul, or the inflaming of the affections, by which a Christian breathes after God as the supreme and sovereign good. Love is to the soul as the weights to the clock, it sets the soul a-going towards God, as the wings by which we fly to heaven. By love we cleave to God, as the needle to the loadstone.

2. The GROUND of love to God; that is, knowledge. We cannot love that which we do not know. That our love may be drawn forth to God, we must know these three things in Him:

(1.) A fullness (Col. 1:19). He has a fullness of *grace* to cleanse us, and of a fullness *glory* to crown us; a fullness not only of sufficiency —but of redundancy. God is a sea of goodness without bottom and banks!

(2.) A freeness. God has an innate propensity to dispense mercy and grace; He drops as the honeycomb. "Whoever will, let him take of the water of life *freely*" (Rev. 22:17). God does not require that we should bring money with us, only appetite.

(3.) A propriety, or property. We must know that this fullness in God is ours. "This God is *our* God" (Psalm 48:14). Here is the ground of love—His Deity, and the saving interest we have in Him.

3. The KINDS of love—which I shall branch into these three:

(1.) There is a love of APPRECIATION. When we set a high value upon God as being the most sublime and infinite good. We so esteem God, as that if we have Him, we do not care though we lack all other things. The *stars* vanish, when the *sun* appears. All creatures vanish in our thoughts, when the Sun of righteousness shines in His full splendor.

(2.) A love of DELIGHT. As a man takes delight in a friend whom he loves. The soul that loves God, rejoices in Him as in his treasure—and rests in Him as his center. The heart is so set upon God—that it

desires no more. "Show us the Father, and it suffices" (John 14:8).

(3.) A love of BENEVOLENCE. Which is a wishing well to the cause of God. He who is endeared in affection to his friend, wishes all happiness to him. This is to love God—when we are well-wishers. We desire that His interest may prevail. Our desire and prayer is that His name may be had in honor; that His gospel. which is the rod of His strength, may, like Aaron's rod—blossom and bring forth fruit!

4. The PROPERTIES of love.

(1.) Our love to God must be ENTIRE, and that, in regard of the subject, it must be with the whole heart. "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart" (Mark 12:30). In the old law, a high priest was not to marry with a widow, nor with a harlot—not with a widow, because he had not her *first* love; nor with a harlot, because he had not *all* her love. God will have the *whole* heart. "Their heart is divided" (Hos. 10:2). The true mother would not have the child

divided; and God will not have the heart divided. God will not have only one room in the heart, and all the other rooms let out to sin. It must be an entire love.

(2.) Love to God must be SINCERE. "Grace be with all those who love our Lord Jesus in sincerity" (Eph. 6:24). Sincere; it alludes to honey that is quite pure. Our love to God is sincere, when it is pure and without self-interest: this the school-men call a love of friendship. We must love Christ, as Augustine says, for Himself—as we love sweet wine for its taste. God's beauty and love must be the two loadstones to draw our love to Him. Alexander had two friends, Hephestion and Craterus, of whom he said, "Hephestion loves me because I am Alexander; Craterus loves me became I am *king* Alexander." The one loved his person, the other loved his gifts. Many love God because He gives them food and wine, and not for His intrinsic excellencies. We must love God more for what He *is*—than for what He *bestows*. True love is not mercenary. You need not hire a mother to love her child: a soul deeply in love with God needs not be hired by rewards. It cannot but love Him, for that luster of beauty which sparkles forth in Him.

(3.) Love to God must be FERVENT. The Hebrew word for love signifies *ardency of affection*. Saints must be seraphim, burning in holy love. To love one coldly, is the same as not to love him. The sun shines as hot as it can. Our love to God must be intense and vehement; like coals of juniper, which are most acute and fervent (Psalm 120:4). Our love to transitory things must be indifferent; we must love as if we loved not (1 Cor. 7:30). But our love to God must *flame* forth. The spouse was love-sick for Christ (Cant. 2:5). We can never love God as much as He deserves. As God's punishing us is less than we deserve (Ezra 9:13), so our loving Him is less than He deserves.

(4.) Love to God must be ACTIVE. It is like fire, which is the most active element; it is called the *labor* of love (1 Thess. 1:3). Love is no idle grace; it sets the *head* a-studying for God, and the *feet* a-

running in the ways of His commandments. "The love of Christ *constrains*" (2 Cor. 5:14). Pretenses of love are insufficient. True love is not only seen at the *tongue's* end—but at the *finger's* end; it is the *labor* of love. The living creatures, mentioned in Ezekiel 1:8, had *wings*—an emblem of a godly Christian. He has not only the wings of faith to fly—but *hands* under his wings: he works by love, he spends and is spent for Christ.

(5.) Love to God must be LIBERAL. It has love tokens to bestow (1 Cor. 13:4). Love is kind. Love has not only a *smooth tongue*—but a *kind heart*. David's heart was fired with love to God, and he would not offer that to God which cost him nothing (2 Sam. 24:24). Love is not only full of benevolence—but beneficence. Love which enlarges the *heart*, never straitens the *hand*. He who loves Christ, will be liberal to His members. He will be *eyes* to the blind, and *feet* to the lame. The backs and bellies of the poor shall be the furrows where he sows the golden seeds of liberality. Some say they love God—but their love is lame of one hand, they give nothing to good uses. Indeed faith deals with invisibles—but God hates that love which is invisible. Love is like new wine, which *will* have vent; it vents itself in good works. The apostle speaks it in honor of the Macedonians, that they gave to the poor saints, not only up to—but beyond their power (2 Cor. 8:3). Love is bred at court, it is a noble munificent grace.

(6.) Love to God must be SPECIAL. He who is a lover of God gives Him such a love as he bestows upon none else. As God gives His children such a love as He does not bestow upon the wicked—electing, adopting love; so a gracious heart gives to God such a special distinguishing love as none else can share in. "I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ" (2 Cor. 11:2). A wife espoused to one husband gives him such a love as she has for none else; she does not part with her marital love, to any but her husband. So a saint espoused to Christ gives Him a special love—a love incommunicable to any other, namely, a love joined with adoration. Not only the *love* is given to

God—but the *soul*. "A garden enclosed is my sister, my spouse" (Cant. 4:12). The heart of a believer is Christ's garden. The flower growing in it is love mixed with divine worship, and this flower is for the use of Christ alone. The spouse keeps the key of the garden, that none may come there, but Christ.

(7.) Love to God must be PERMANENT. It is like the fire the vestal virgins kept at Rome—it does not go out. True love *boils* over—but does not *give* over. Love to God, as it is *sincere* without hypocrisy, so it is *constant* without apostasy. Love is like the pulse of the body, always beating. Wicked men are constant in love to their sins—neither shame, nor sickness, nor fear of hell, will make them give over their sins. Just so, nothing can hinder a Christian's love to God. Nothing can conquer love, not any difficulties, or oppositions. "Love is as strong as the grave" (Cant. 8:6). The grave swallows up the strongest bodies—so love swallows up the strongest difficulties. "Many waters cannot quench love" (Cant. 8:7). Neither the sweet waters of *pleasure*, nor the bitter waters of *persecution*. Love to God abides firm to death. "Being rooted and grounded in love" (Ephes. 3:17). Light things, as chaff and feathers, are quickly blown away—but a tree that is rooted, abides the storm; he who is rooted in love, endures. True love never ends—but with the life.

5. The DEGREE of love.

We must love God above all other OBJECTS. "There is nothing on earth that I desire beside you" (Psalm 73:25). God is the quintessence of all good things, He is superlatively good. The soul seeing a super eminency in God, and admiring in Him that constellation of all excellencies, is carried out in love to Him in the highest degree. "The measure of our love to God," says Bernard, "must be to love Him without measure." God, who is the chief of our *happiness*, must have the chief of our *affections*. The creature may have the *milk* of our love—but God must have the *cream*. Love to God must be above all other things, as the oil swims above the water.

We must love God more than RELATIONS. As in the case of Abraham's offering up Isaac; Isaac being the son of his old age, no question he loved him entirely, and doted on him; but when God said, "Abraham, offer up your son" (Gen. 22:2), though it were a thing which might seem, not only to oppose his reason—but his faith, for the Messiah was to come of Isaac, and if he be cut off, where shall the world have a Mediator! Yet such was the strength of Abraham's faith and ardency of his love to God—that he will take the sacrificing knife, and let out Isaac's blood. Our blessed Savior speaks of hating father and mother (Luke 14:26). Christ would not have us be unnatural; but if our dearest relations stand in our way, and would keep us from Christ—either we must step over them, or know them not (Deut. 33:9). Though some *drops* of love may run beside to our kindred and friends—yet the *full torrent* must run out after Christ. Relations may lie on the *bosom*—but Christ must lie in the *heart!*

We must love God more than our ESTATE. "You took joyfully the confiscation of your goods" (Heb. 10:34). They were glad they had anything to lose for Christ. If the world be laid in one scale, and Christ in the other—He must weigh heaviest. And is it thus? Has God the highest room in our affections? Plutarch says, When the love of God bears sway in the heart—all other love is as nothing in comparison of this love.

Use. A sharp reproof to those who do NOT love God. This may serve for a sharp reproof to such as have not a grain of love to God in their hearts—and are there such reprobates alive? He who does not love God—is a beast with a man's head! Oh wretch! Do you live upon God's bounty every day—yet not love Him? If one had a friend that supplied him continually with money, and gave him all his allowance, were not he worse than a barbarian, if he did not respect and honor that friend? Such a friend is God—He gives you your breath, He bestows a livelihood upon you—and will you not love Him? You will love your prince if he saves your life, and will you not love God who gives you your life? What loadstone so

powerful to draw love, as the blessed Deity? He is blind whom beauty does not tempt, he is sottish who is not drawn with the cords of love. When the body is cold and has no heat in it, it is a sign of death—that man is dead who has no heat of love in his soul to God. How can he expect love from God, who shows no love to Him? Will God ever lay such a viper in His bosom, as casts forth the poison of malice and enmity against Him?

This reproof falls heavy upon the infidels of this age, who are so far from loving God, that they do all they can to show their hatred of Him. "They declare their sin as Sodom" (Isaiah 3:9). "They set their mouth against the heavens" (Psalm 73:9), in pride and blasphemy, and bid open defiance to God. These are monsters in nature, devils in the shape of men! Let them read their doom: "If anyone does not love the Lord, that person is cursed!" (1 Cor. 16:22), that is, let him be accursed from God, until Christ's coming to judgment. Let him be heir to a curse while he lives, and at the dreadful day of the Lord, let him hear that heart rending sentence pronounced against him, "Depart, you who are cursed!"

The Tests of love to God

Let us test ourselves impartially whether we are in the number of those that love God. For the deciding of this, as our love will be best seen by the fruits of it, I shall lay down fourteen **signs**, or **fruits**, of love to God, and it concerns us to search carefully whether any of these fruits grow in our garden.

1. The first fruit of genuine love to God—is the musing of the mind upon God. He who is in love—his thoughts are ever upon the object of his love. He who loves God is ravished and transported with the contemplation of God. "When I awake, I am still with You!" (Psalm 139:18). The thoughts are as travelers in the mind. David's thoughts kept on the heaven-road, "I am still with You!" God is the treasure, and where the treasure is, there is the

heart. By this we may test our love to God. What are our thoughts most upon? Can we say we are ravished with delight, when we think on God? Have our thoughts got wings? Are they fled aloft? Do we contemplate Christ and glory? Oh, how far are they from being lovers of God—who scarcely ever think of God! "God is not in all his thoughts" (Psalm 10:4). A sinner crowds God out of his thoughts. He never thinks of God, unless with horror, as the prisoner thinks of the judge!

2. The next fruit of of genuine love to God—is desire of communion with Him. Love desires familiarity and fellowship. "My heart and flesh cry out for the living God" (Psalm 84:2). King David being debarred the house of God where the tabernacle was, the visible token of His presence, he breathes after God, and in a holy pathos of desire, cries out for the living God. Lovers desire to be conversing together. If we love God we prize His ordinances, because there we meet with God. He speaks to us in His Word—and we speak to Him in prayer. By this let us examine our love to God. Do we desire intimacy of communion with God? Lovers cannot be long away from each other. Such as love God have a holy affection for Him—and desire to be with Him. They can bear the lack of anything—but God's presence. They can do without health and friends, they can be happy without a full table—but they cannot be happy without God. "Hide not your face from me, lest I be like those who go down into the grave" (Psalm 143:7). Lovers have their fainting fits. David was ready to faint away and die, when he had not a sight of God. They who love God cannot be contented with having ordinances, unless they may enjoy God in them; that would be to lick the glass, and not the honey.

What shall we say to those who can be all their lives long without God? They think that God may be ignored: they complain they lack health and trading—but not that they lack God! Wicked men are not acquainted with God. How can they love Him—who are not acquainted with him! Nay, which is worse, they do not *desire* to be acquainted with Him. "They say to God, Depart from us, we desire

not the knowledge of your ways" (Job 21:14). Sinners shun acquaintance with God, they count His presence a burden; and are these lovers of God? Does that woman love her husband, who cannot endure to be in his presence?

3. Another fruit of of genuine love to God—is grief for sin. Where there is love to God—there is a grieving for our sins of unkindness against Him. A child who loves his father, cannot but weep for offending him. The heart which burns in love—melts in tears. Oh! that I should abuse the love of so dear a Savior! Did not my Lord suffer enough upon the cross—but must I make Him suffer more? Shall I give Him more gall and vinegar to drink? How disloyal and hypocritical have I been! How have I grieved His Spirit, trampled upon His royal commands, slighted His blood! This opens a vein of godly sorrow, and makes the heart bleed afresh. "Peter went out, and wept bitterly" (Matt. 26:75). When Peter thought how dearly Christ loved him; how he was taken up into the mount of transfiguration, where Christ showed him the glory of heaven in a vision; that he should deny Christ after he had received such amazing love from Him, this broke his heart with grief—he went out, and wept bitterly.

By this let us test our love to God. Do we shed the tears of godly sorrow? Do we grieve for our unkindness against God, our abuse of His mercy, our non improvement the talents which He has given us? How far are they from loving God—who sin daily, and their hearts never smite them! They have a sea of sin—and not a drop of sorrow! They are so far from being troubled, that they make merry with their sins. "When you engage in your wickedness, then you rejoice!" (Jer. 11:15). Oh wretch! Did Christ *bleed* for sin—and do you *laugh* at it? These are far from loving God. Does he love his friend—who loves to do him an injury?

4. Another fruit of genuine love to God—is courage. Love is valorous—it turns *cowardice* into *courage*. Love will make one venture upon the greatest difficulties and hazards. The fearful hen

will fly upon a dog or serpent—to defend her young ones. Just so, love infuses a spirit of gallantry and fortitude into a Christian. He who loves God will stand up in His cause, and be an advocate for Him. "We cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard" (Acts 4:20). He who is afraid to own Christ, has but little love to Him. Nicodemus came sneaking to Christ by night (John 3:2). He was fearful of being seen with Him in the day time. Love casts out fear. As the sun expels fogs and vapors, so divine love in a great measure expels carnal fear. Does he love God—who can hear His blessed truths spoken against and be silent? He who loves his friend will stand up for him, and vindicate him when he is reproached. Does Christ appear for us in heaven—and are we afraid to appear for Him on earth? Love animates a Christian, it fires his heart with zeal, and steels him with courage.

5. The fifth fruit of of genuine love to God—is sensitiveness. If we love God, our hearts ache for the dishonor done to God by wicked men. To see piety and morality broken down—and a flood of wickedness coming in; to see God's name dishonored—if there is any love to God in us, we shall lay these things to heart. Lot's righteous soul was "vexed with the filthy lives of the wicked" (2 Pet. 2:7). The sins of Sodom were as so many *spears* to pierce his soul. How far are they from loving God, who are not at all affected with His dishonor? If they have but peace and trading, they lay nothing to heart. A man who is dead drunk, never minds nor is affected by it—though another is bleeding to death by him. Just so, many, being drunk with the wine of prosperity, when the honor of God is wounded and His truths lie a-bleeding, are not affected by it. Did men love God, they would grieve to see His glory suffer, and *piety* itself become a martyr.

6. The sixth fruit of genuine love to God—is hatred against sin. Fire purges the dross from the metal. The fire of love purges out sin. "Ephraim shall say, What have I to do any more with idols!" (Hos. 14:8). He who loves God, will have nothing to do with sin, unless to give battle to it. Sin strikes not only at God's *honor*—but

His *being*. Does he love his prince—who harbors a traitor to the prince? Is he a friend to God—who loves that which God hates? The love of God and the love of sin, cannot dwell together. The affections cannot be carried to two contrarieties at the same time. A man cannot love health and love poison too. Just so, one cannot love God and sin too. He who has any secret sin in his heart allowed, is as far from loving God as heaven and earth are distant one from the other.

7. Another fruit of genuine love to God—is crucifixion to the world. He who is a lover of God—is dead to the world. "The world has been crucified to me, and I to the world." (Gal. 6:14). That is, "I am dead to the honors and pleasures of the world." He who is in love with God is not much in love with anything else. The love of God, and ardent love of the world—are incompatible. "If any man loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him" (1 John 2:15). Love to God swallows up all other love—as Moses' rod swallowed up the Egyptian rods. If a man could live as high as the sun—what a small point would all the earth be. Just so, when a man's heart is raised above the world in the admiring and loving of God, how poor and diminutive are these things below! They seem as nothing in his eye. It was a sign the early Christians loved God, because their property did not lie near their hearts; but they "laid down their money at the apostles' feet" (Acts 4:35).

Test your love to God by this. What shall we think of those who have never enough of the world? They have the cancer of covetousness, thirsting insatiably after riches: "That pant after the dust of the earth" (Amos 2:7). "Never talk of your love to Christ," says Ignatius," when you prefer the world before the Pearl of price!" Are there not many such, who prize their gold above God? If they have a good farm—they care not for the water of life. They will sell Christ and a good conscience for money. Will God ever bestow heaven upon those who so basely undervalue Him, preferring *glittering dust* before the *glorious Deity?* What is there in the earth, that we should so set our hearts upon it? The devil makes us look

upon it through a magnifying glass! The world has no real intrinsic worth, it is but *paint* and *deception*.

8. The next fruit of genuine love to God—is reverential fear of God. In the godly, love and fear kiss each other. There is a double fear arises from love.

(1.) A fear of displeasing. The spouse loves her husband, therefore will rather deny herself than displease him. The more we love God, the more fearful we are of grieving His Spirit. "How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" (Gen. 39:9). When Eudoxia, the empress, threatened to banish Chrysostom; "Tell her" (said he) "I fear nothing but sin!" That is a blessed love which puts a Christian into a hot fit of zeal, and a cold fit of fear, making him shake and tremble, and not dare willingly to offend God.

(2.) A fear mixed with jealousy. "Eli's heart trembled for the *ark*" (1 Sam. 4:13). It is not said, his heart trembled for Hophni and Phinehas, his two *sons*—but his heart trembled for the *ark*, because if the ark were taken, then the glory was departed. He who loves God is full of fear lest it should go ill with the church. He fears lest worldliness (which is the plague of leprosy) should increase; lest popery should get a footing; lest God should go from His people. The presence of God in His ordinances is the beauty and strength of a nation. So long as God's presence is with a people, so long they are safe; but the soul inflamed with love to God fears lest the visible tokens of God's presence should be removed.

By this touchstone let us test our love to God. Many fear lest *peace* and *trading* might leave them—but not lest *God* and His *gospel* might leave them. Are these lovers of God? He who loves God is more afraid of the loss of spiritual blessings than temporal blessings. If the Sun of righteousness removes out of our horizon, what can follow but darkness? What comfort can an anthem give, if the gospel is gone? Is it not like the sound of a trumpet at a funeral?

9. If we are lovers of God—we love what God loves.

(1.) We love God's WORD. David esteemed the Word, for the *sweetness* of it—above honey (Psalm 119. 103), and for the *value* of it—above gold (Psalm 119. 72). The lines of Scripture are richer than the mines of gold. Well may we love the Word; it is the pole-star which directs us to heaven, it is the field in which the Pearl of great price is hidden. That man who does not love the Word—but thinks it too strict and could wish any part of the Bible torn out (as an adulterer did the seventh commandment), he has not the least spark of love in his heart.

(2.) We love God's DAY. We do not only keep a sabbath—but love a sabbath. "If you call the sabbath a delight" (Isaiah 58:13). The sabbath is that which keeps up the face of religion among us; this day must be consecrated as glorious to the Lord. The house of God is the palace of the great King, on the sabbath God shows Himself there through the lattice. If we love God we prize His day above all other days. All the week would be dark if it were not for this day; on this day manna falls double. Now, if ever, heaven gate stands open, and God comes down in a golden shower. This blessed day the Sun of righteousness rises upon the soul. How does a gracious heart prize that day which was made on purpose to enjoy God in.

(3.) We love God's LAWS. A gracious soul is glad of the law because it checks his sinful excesses. The heart would be ready to run wild in sin, if it had not some blessed restraints put upon it by the law of God. He who loves God, loves His law—the law of repentance, the law of self-denial. Many say they love God but they hate His laws. "Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us" (Psalm 2:3). God's precepts are compared to cords, they bind men to their good behavior; but the wicked think these cords too tight, therefore they say, "Let us break them!" They pretend to love Christ as a *Savior*—but hate Him as a *King*. Christ tells us of His yoke (Matt. 11:29). Sinners would have Christ put a

crown upon their head—but not a *yoke* upon their neck! He would be a strange king—who would rule without laws.

(4.) We love God's PICTURE, we love His image shining in the saints. "Everyone who loves the Father loves his children, too" (1 John 5:1). It is possible to love a saint—yet not to love him as a saint; we may love him for something else, for his ingenuity, or because he is affable and bountiful. A beast loves a man—but not as he is a man—but because he feeds him, and gives him provender. But to love a saint as he is a saint, this is a sign of love to God. If we love a saint for his saintship, as having something of God in him, then we love him in these four cases.

(a) We love a saint, though he be **poor**. A man who loves gold—loves a piece of gold, though it is wrapped in a rag. Just so, though a saint is in rags, we love him, because there is something of Christ in him.

(b) We love a saint, though he has many **personal failings**. There is no perfection here on earth. In some, rash anger prevails; in some, fickleness; in some, too much love of the world. A saint in this life is like gold in the ore, much dross of infirmity cleaves to him—yet we love him for the grace that is in him. A saint is like a fair face with a scar—we love the beautiful face of holiness, though there is a scar in it. The best emerald has its *blemishes*, the brightest stars have their *twinklings*, and the best of the saints have their *failings*. You who cannot love another because of his infirmities, how would you have God love you?

(c) We love the saints though in some lesser things they **differ** from us. Perhaps another Christian has not so much light as you, and that may make him err in some things; will you presently *unsaint* him because he cannot come up to your light? Where there is union in *fundamentals*, there ought to be union in *affections*.

(d) We love the saints, though they are **persecuted**. We love precious metal, though it is in the *furnace*. Paul bore in his body the marks of the Lord Jesus (Gal. 6:17). Those marks were, like the soldier's scars, honorable. We must love a saint as well in *chains*, as in *scarlet*. If we love Christ, we love His persecuted members.

If this is love to God, when we love His image sparkling in the saints, oh then, how few lovers of God are to be found! Do they love God, who hate those who are like God? Do they love Christ's person, who are filled with a spirit of revenge against His people? How can that wife be said to love her husband, who tears his picture? What greater crime than holiness—if the devil is the judge! Wicked men seem to bear great reverence to the departed saints; they canonize dead saints—but persecute living saints. In vain do men stand up at the creed, and tell the world they believe in God, when they abominate one of the articles of the creed, namely, the communion of saints. Surely, there is not a greater sign of a man ripe for hell, than this—not only to lack grace—but to hate it.

10. Another blessed sign of genuine love to God—is to entertain good thoughts of God. He who loves his friend interprets what his friend does, in the best sense. "Love thinks no evil" (1 Cor. 13:5). Malice interprets all in the worst sense; love interprets all in the best sense. Love is an excellent commentator upon God's providence; it thinks no evil. He who loves God, has a good opinion of God; though He afflicts sharply—the soul takes all well. This is the language of a gracious spirit: "My God sees what a hard heart I have, therefore He drives in one wedge of affliction after another, to break my heart. He knows how full I am of the cancer of covetousness, or the swelling of pride, or the fever of lust —therefore He gives me bitter remedies, to save my life. This severe dispensation is either to mortify some corruption, or to exercise some grace. How good is God, who will not let me alone in my sins —but smites my body to save my soul!" Thus he who loves God, receives all of God's dealings in the best sense. Love puts a good gloss upon all God's actions. You who are apt to murmur at God, as

if He had dealt ill with you—be humbled for this; say thus with yourself, "If I loved God more, I would have better thoughts of God." It is Satan who makes us have *high* thoughts of ourselves, and *hard* thoughts of God. "But take away everything he has, and he will surely curse You to Your face!" (Job 1:11) Love takes all in the fairest sense; it thinks no evil. "Then Job fell to the ground in worship and said, 'Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will depart. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; may the name of the Lord be praised.' In all this, Job did not sin by charging God with wrongdoing." (Job 1:20-22) "It is the Lord's will. Let him do what he thinks best." (1 Samuel 3:18)

11. Another fruit of genuine love to God—is obedience. "He who has my commandments, and keeps them, he it is that loves me" (John 14:21). It is a vain thing to say we love Christ—if we slight His commands. Does that child love his father, who refuses to obey him? If we love God, we shall obey Him in those things which cross flesh and blood. (1.) In things difficult, and (2.) In things dangerous.

(1.) In things difficult. As, in mortifying sin. There are some sins which are not only as *near* to us as our garment—but *dear* to us as our eye. If we love God, we shall set ourselves against these, both in purpose and practice.

Also, in forgiving our enemies. God commands us upon pain of death to forgive. "Forgive one another" (Ephes. 4:32). This is hard; it is crossing the stream. We are apt to forget *kindnesses*, and remember *injuries*; but if we love God, we shall pass by offences. When we seriously consider how many talents God has forgiven us, how many affronts and provocations He has put up with at our hands; this makes us write after His copy, and endeavor rather to *bury* an injury, than to *retaliate* it.

(2.) In things dangerous. When God calls us to suffer for Him, we shall obey. Love made Jesus suffer for us. "Because of His great

love for us." (Ephesians 2:4) "Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed, for His compassions never fail." (Lamentations 3:22) Love was the chain which fastened Jesus to the cross; so, if we love God, we shall be willing to suffer for Him. Love has a strange quality, it is the least suffering grace, and yet it is the most suffering grace. It is the least suffering grace in one sense; it will not suffer known sin to lie in the soul unrepented of, it will not suffer abuses and dishonors done to God; thus it is the least suffering grace. Yet it is the most suffering grace; it will suffer reproaches, bonds, and imprisonments, for Christ's sake. "I am ready not only to be bound—but to die, for the name of the Lord Jesus" (Acts 21:13). It is true that every Christian is not a martyr—but he has the *spirit of martyrdom* in him. He says as Paul, "I am ready to be bound." He has a disposition of mind to suffer, if God calls him to suffer.

Love will carry men out above their own strength. Tertullian observes how much the heathen suffered, for love to their country. If the spring head of *nature* rises so high, surely *grace* will rise higher. If love to their country will make men suffer, much more should love to Christ. "Love endures all things" (1 Cor. 13:7). Basil speaks of a virgin condemned to the fire, who having her life and estate offered her if she would fall down to worship the idol, answered, "Let life and money go, welcome Christ!" It was a noble and zealous speech of Ignatius, "Let me be ground with the teeth of wild beasts—if I may be God's pure wheat." How did divine affection carry the early saints above the love of life, and the fear of death! *Stephen* was stoned; *Luke* was hanged on an olive tree; *Peter* was crucified at Jerusalem with his head downwards. These divine heroes were willing to suffer, rather than by their cowardice to make the name of God suffer. How did Paul prize his chain that he wore for Christ! He gloried in it, as a woman who is proud of her jewels! And holy Ignatius wore his fetters as a bracelet of diamonds. "Not accepting deliverance" (Heb. 11:35). They refused to come out of prison on sinful terms, they preferred their *innocence* before their *liberty*.

By this let us test our love to God. Have we the spirit of martyrdom? Many say they love God—but how does it appear? They will not forego the least comfort, or undergo the least cross for His sake. If Jesus Christ should have said to us, "I love you much, you are dear to me—but I cannot suffer for you, I cannot lay down my life for you," we would have questioned the genuiness His love. And may not Christ suspect us, when we *pretend* to love Him, and yet will endure nothing for Him!

12. He who sincerely loves God—will endeavor to make Him appear glorious in the eyes of others. Such as are in love will be commending and setting forth the amiableness of those people whom they love. If we love God, we shall spread abroad His excellencies, that so we may raise His fame and esteem, and may induce others to fall in love with Him. Love cannot be silent. We shall be as so many trumpets, sounding forth the freeness of God's grace—the transcendence of His love—and the glory of His kingdom. Love is like fire—where it burns in the heart, it will break forth at the lips. It will be elegant in setting forth God's praise. Love must have vent.

13. Another fruit of genuine love to God—is to long for Christ's appearing. "Henceforth there is a crown of righteousness laid up for me, and not for me only—but for those who love Christ's appearing" (2 Tim. 4:8). Love desires union; Aristotle gives the reason—because joy flows upon union. When our union with Christ is perfect in glory, then our joy will be full. He who loves Christ loves His appearing. Christ's appearing will be a happy appearing to the saints. His appearing now is very comforting, when He appears for us as an *Advocate* (Heb. 9:24). But the other appearing will be infinitely more so, when He shall appear for us as our *Husband*. He will at that day bestow two jewels upon us! His love; a love so great and astonishing, that it is better *felt* than *expressed*. And He will also bestow His *likeness* upon us! "When he shall appear, we shall be like him" (1 John 3:2). And from both these, *love* and *likeness*, infinite joy will flow into the soul! No wonder then, that he who

loves Christ longs for His appearance. "The Spirit and the bride say come; even so come, Lord Jesus!" (Rev. 22:17, 20). By this let us test our love to Christ. A wicked man is afraid of Christ's appearing, and wishes He would never appear; but such as love Christ, are joyful to think of His coming in the clouds. They shall then be delivered from all their sins and fears, they shall be acquitted before men and angels, and shall be forever translated into the paradise of God!

14. Genuine love to God—will make us stoop to the lowest offices. Love is a humble grace, it does not walk abroad in state, it will creep upon its hands, it will stoop and submit to anything whereby it may be serviceable to Christ. As we see in Joseph of Arimathea, and Nicodemus, both of them honorable people—yet one takes down Christ's body with his own hands, and the other embalms it with sweet odors. It might seem much for people of their rank to be employed in that service—but love made them do it. If we love God, we shall not think any work too low for us, by which we may be helpful to Christ's members. Love is not squeamish; it will visit the sick, relieve the poor, wash the saints' wounds. The mother who loves her child is not squeamish; she will do those things for her child which others would scorn to do. He who loves God will humble himself to the lowest office of love to Christ and His members.

These are the **fruits** of love to God. Happy are they who can find these fruits so foreign to their natures, growing in their souls.

1. An Exhortation to Love God

Let me earnestly persuade all who bear the name of Christians to become lovers of God. "O love the Lord, all you his saints" (Psalm 31:23). There are but few that love God: many give Him hypocritical kisses—but few love Him. It is not so easy to love God as most imagine. The *affection* of love is natural—but the *grace* of love is

not. Men are by nature haters of God (Romans 1:30). The wicked would flee from God; they would neither be under His rules, nor within His reach! They fear God—but do not love Him. All the strength in men or angels cannot make the heart love God. Ordinances will not do it of themselves, nor will judgments. Only the almighty and invincible power of the Spirit of God can infuse love into the soul. This being so hard a work, it calls upon us for the more earnest prayer and endeavor after this angelic grace of love to god. To excite and inflame our desires after it, I shall prescribe **twenty motives for loving God**.

(1). Without love to God, all our religion is vain. It is not duty—but love to duty, which God looks at. It is not how much we *do*—but how much we *love*. If a servant does not do his work willingly, and out of love, it is not acceptable. Duties not mingled with love, are as burdensome to God as they are to us. David therefore counsels his son Solomon to serve God with a willing mind (1 Chron. 28:9). To do duty without love, is not *sacrifice*—but *penance*.

(2). Love to God is the most noble and excellent grace. It is a pure flame kindled from heaven; by it we resemble God, who is love. Believing and obeying do not make us *like* God—but by love we grow *like* Him (1 John 4:16). Love is a grace which most delights in God, and is most delightful to Him. That disciple who was most full of love, lay in Christ's bosom. Love puts a verdure and luster upon all the graces: the graces seem to be eclipsed, unless love shines and sparkles in them. Faith is not true, unless it works by love. The waters of repentance are not pure, unless they flow from the spring of love. Love is the incense which makes all our services fragrant and acceptable to God.

(3). Is that unreasonable, which God requires? It is but our love. If He should ask our estate, or the fruit of our bodies, could we deny Him? But He asks only our love! He would only pick this flower! Is this a hard request? Was there ever any debt so easily

paid as this? We do not at all impoverish ourselves by paying it. Love is no burden. Is it any labor for the bride to love her husband? Love is delightful.

(4). God is the most adequate and complete object of our love. All the excellencies which lie scattered in the creatures, are united in Him! He is wisdom, beauty, love, yes, the very essence of goodness. There is nothing in God which can cause a loathing. The *creature* sooner surfeits than satisfies—but there are fresh beauties continually sparkling forth in God. The more we love Him—the more we enjoy Him and are ravished with delight!

There is nothing in God to deaden our affections or quench our love. There is neither infirmity nor deformity—such as usually weaken and cool love. There is that excellence in God, which may not only *invite*—but *command* our love. If there were more angels in heaven than there are, and all those glorious seraphim had an immense flame of love burning in their breasts to eternity—yet could they not love God equivalently to that infinite perfection and transcendence of goodness which is in Him. Surely then here is enough to induce us to love God—we cannot spend our love upon a better object!

(5). Love to God facilitates religion. It oils the wheels of the affections, and makes them more lively and cheerful in God's service. Love takes off the tediousness of duty. Jacob thought seven years but little, for the love he bore to Rachel. Love makes duty a pleasure. Why are the angels so *swift* and winged in God's service? It is because they love Him. Love is never weary. He who loves God, is never weary of telling it. He who loves God, is never weary of serving Him.

(6). God desires our love. We have lost our beauty, and stained our blood—yet the King of heaven is a suitor to us! What is there in our love, that God should seek it? What is God the better for our love? He does not need it, He is infinitely blessed in Himself. If we

deny Him our love, He has more sublime creatures who pay the cheerful tribute of love to Him. God does not need our love—yet He seeks it.

(7). God has deserved our love; how has He loved us! Our affections should be kindled at the fire of God's love. What a miracle of love is it, that God should love us, when there was nothing lovely in us. "When you were in your blood, I said unto you, Live" (Ezek. 16:6). The time of our *loathing,* was the time of God's *loving*. We had something in us to provoke God's fury—but nothing to excite His love. What love, passing understanding, was it, to give Christ to us! That Christ should die for sinners! God has set all the angels in heaven wondering at this love. Augustine says, "The cross is a pulpit, and the lesson Christ preached on it is love." Oh the living love of a dying Savior! I think I see Christ upon the cross bleeding all over! I think I hear Him say to us, "Put your hand into the wound in My side. Feel My bleeding heart. See if I do not love you! And will you not bestow your love upon Me? Will you love the world more than me? Did the world appease the wrath of God for you? Have I not done all this? And will you not love Me?" It is natural to love where we are loved. Christ having set us a copy of love, and written it with His blood, let us labor to write after so fair a copy, and to imitate Him in love. "We love Him because He first loved us." 1 John 4:19

(8). Love to God is the best self-love. It is self-love to get the soul saved; by loving God, we forward our own salvation. "He who dwells in love, dwells in God, and God in him" (1 John 4:16). And he is sure to dwell with God in heaven—who has God dwelling in his heart. So that to love God is the truest self-love; he who does not love God, does not love himself.

(9). Love to God evidences sincerity. "The upright love you" (Cant. 1:4). Many a child of God fears he is a hypocrite. Do you love God? When Peter was dejected with the sense of his sin, he thought himself unworthy that ever Christ should take notice of him, or

employ him more in the work of his apostleship; see how Christ goes about to comfort him. "Peter, do you love me?" (John 21:15). As if Christ had said, "Though you have denied me through fear—yet if you can say from your heart you love me, you are sincere and upright." To *love* God is a better sign of sincerity, than to *fear* Him. The Israelites feared God's justice. "When he *slew* them, they *sought* him, and inquired early after God" (Psalm 78:34). But what did all this come to? "Nevertheless, they did but flatter him with their mouth, and lied to him with their tongue; for their heart was not right with him" (verses 36, 37). That repentance is no better than flattery, which arises only from fear of God's judgments, and has no love mixed with it. Loving God evidences that God has the heart; and if the heart is His, that will command all the rest!

(10). By our love to God, we may conclude God's love to us. "We love Him, because He first loved us" (1 John 4:19). Oh, says the soul, if I knew God loved me, I could rejoice! Do you love God? Then you may be sure of God's love to you. If our hearts burn in love to God, it is because God's love has first shined upon us, else we could not burn in love. Our love is nothing but the *reflection* of God's love.

(11). If you do not love God, you will love something else, either the *world* or *sin*; and are those worthy of your love? Is it not better to love God than these? It is better to love God than the **WORLD**, as appears in the following particulars.

If you set your love on worldly things, they will not satisfy. You may as well satisfy your *body* with air, as your *soul* with earth! "In the fullness of his sufficiency, he shall be in straits" (Job 22:22). Plenty has its poverty. If the globe of the world were yours, it would not fill your soul. Will you set your love on that which will never give you contentment? Is it not better to love God? He will give you that which shall satisfy your soul to all eternity! "When I awake, I shall be satisfied with your likeness" (Psalm 17:15). When I awake out of the sleep of death, and shall have some of the rays and beams

of God's glory put upon me, I shall then be satisfied with His likeness.

If you love worldly things, they cannot remove trouble of mind. If there is a thorn in the conscience, all the world cannot pluck it out. King Saul, being perplexed in mind, all his crown jewels could not comfort him (1 Sam. 28:15). But if you love God, He can give you peace when nothing else can; He can turn the "shadow of death into the morning" (Amos 5:8). He can apply Christ's blood to refresh your soul; He can whisper His love by the Spirit, and with one smile scatter all your fears and disquiets.

If you love the world, you love that which may keep you out of heaven. Worldly contentments may be compared to the wagons in an army; while the soldiers have been entertaining themselves at the wagons, they have lost the battle. "How hard it is for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!" (Mark 10:23). Prosperity, to many, is like a large sail to a small boat, which quickly overturns it; so that by loving the world, you love that which will endanger you. But if you love God, there is no fear of losing heaven. He will be a Rock to hide you—but not to hurt you. By loving Him, we come to enjoy Him forever.

You may love worldly things—but they cannot love you in return. You love gold and silver—but your gold cannot love you in return. You love a picture—but the picture cannot love you in return. You give away your love to the creature—and receive no love back. But if you love God, He will love you in return. "If any man loves me, my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him" (John 14:23). God will not be behindhand in love to us. For our *drop* of love to Him, we shall receive an *ocean* of His love!

When you love the world, you love that which is worse than yourselves. The soul, as Damascen says, is a sparkle of celestial brightness; it carries in it an idea and resemblance of God. While

you love the world, you love that which is infinitely below the worth of your souls. Will any one lay out cost upon sackcloth? When you lay out your love upon the world, you hang a pearl upon a swine—you love that which is inferior to yourself. As Christ speaks in another sense of the fowls of the air, "Are you nor much better than they?" (Matt. 6:26), so I say of worldly things, Are you not much better than they? You love a fair house, or a beautiful garment—are you not much better than they? But if you love God, you place your love on the most noble and sublime object—you love that which is better than yourselves. God is better than the soul, better than angels, better than heaven!

You may love the world, and receive hatred for your love. "Because you are not of the world, therefore the world hates you" (John 15:19). Would it not vex one to lay out money upon a piece of ground which, instead of bringing forth grain or fruit, should yield nothing but nettles? Thus it is with all earthly things—we love them, and they prove nettles to sting us! We meet with nothing but disappointment. "Let fire come out of the bramble, and devour the cedars of Lebanon" (Judg. 9:15). While we love the creature, fire comes out of this bramble to devour us; but if we love God, He will not return hatred for love. "I love those who love me" (Proverbs 7:17). God may chastise His children—but He cannot hate them. Every believer is part of Christ, and God can as well hate Christ as hate a believer.

You may over-love the creature. You may love wine too much, and silver too much; but you cannot love God too much. If it were possible to exceed, excess here were a virtue; but it is our sin that we cannot love God enough. "How weak is your heart!" (Ezek. 16:30). So it may be said, How weak is our love to God! It is like water of the last drawing from the still—which has less spirit in it. If we could love God far more than we do--yet it can never be proportionate to His worth; so that there is no danger of excess in our love to God.

You may love worldly things, and they die and leave you. Riches take wings! Relations drop away! There is nothing here abiding. The creature has a little honey in its mouth--but it has wings! It will soon fly away. But if you love God, He is "a portion forever" (Psalm 73:26). As He is called a Sun for comfort, so a Rock for eternity; He abides forever. Thus we see it is better to love God than the world.

If it is better to love God than the world—surely also it is better to love God than **SIN**. "They are haters of God, insolent, proud, and boastful. They are forever inventing new ways of sinning." (Romans 1:30). What is there in sin, that any should love it? Sin is a **debt**. "Forgive us our debts" (Matt. 6:12). It is a debt which binds over to the wrath of God; why should we love sin? Does any man love to be in debt? Sin is a **disease**. "The whole head is sick" (Isaiah 1:5). And will you love sin? Will any man hug a disease? Will he love his plague sores? Sin is a **pollution**. The apostle calls it "filthiness" (James 1:21). It is compared to leprosy and to poison of asps. God's heart rises against sinners. "My soul loathed them" (Zech. 11:8). Sin is a **hideous monster**. Lust makes a man brutish; malice makes him devilish. What is in sin to be loved? Shall we love deformity? Sin is an **enemy**. It is compared to a "serpent" (Proverbs 23:32). Sin has five sharp stings—shame, guilt, horror, death, damnation. Will a man love that which seeks his death? Surely then it is better to love God than sin. God will save you, sin will damn you! Is he not a fool —who loves damnation? Many love sin, more than God.

(12). The relation we stand in to God calls for love. There is near affinity. "Your Maker is your *husband*" (Isaiah liv. 5). And shall a wife not love her husband? He is full of tenderness. His spouse is to him as the apple of his eye. He rejoices over her, as the bridegroom over his bride (Isaiah 62:5). He loves the believer—as He loves Christ (John 17:26). The same love for quality, though not equally. Either we must love God, or we give ground of suspicion that we are not yet united to Him.

(13). Love to God is the most abiding grace. This will stay with us when other graces take their farewell. In heaven we shall need no *repentance*—because we shall have no sin. In heaven we shall not need *patience*—because there will be no affliction. In heaven we shall need no *faith*—because faith looks at unseen things (Heb. 11:1). Then we shall see God face to face; and where there is vision, there is no need of faith.

But when the other graces are out of date, love continues; and in this sense the apostle says that love is greater than faith or hope—because it abides the longest. "Love will last forever" (1 Cor. 13:8). Faith is the staff which we walk with in this life. "We walk by faith" (2 Cor. 5:7). But we shall leave this staff at heaven's door—and only love shall enter. Thus love carries away the crown from all the other graces. Love is the most long-lived grace—it is a blossom of eternity. How should we strive to excel in this grace, which alone shall live with us in heaven, and shall accompany us to the marriage supper of the Lamb!

(14). Love to God will never let sin thrive in the heart. Some plants will not thrive when they are near together: the love of God withers sin. Though the *old* man lives—yet as a *sick* man, it is weak. The *flower of love* kills the *weed of sin*. Though sin does not die totally—yet it dies daily. How should we labor for that grace, which is the only corrosive to destroy sin!

(15). Love to God is an excellent means for growth of grace. "But grow in grace" (2 Peter 3:18). Growth in grace is very pleasing to God. Christ *accepts* the *reality* of grace—but *commends* the *maturity* of grace; and what can more promote and augment grace than love to God? Love is like watering of the root, which makes the tree grow. Therefore the apostle uses this expression in his prayer, "May the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God" (2 Thess. 3:5). He knew this grace of love would nourish all the graces.

(16). The great benefit which will accrue to us, if we love God. "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, and no mind has imagined what God has prepared for those who love him!" (1 Cor. 2:9). The eye has seen rare sights, the ear has heard sweet music; but eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor can the heart of man imagine what God has prepared for those who love Him! Such glorious rewards are laid up that, as Augustine says, "faith itself is not able to comprehend them!" God has promised a crown of life to those who love Him (James 1:12). This crown encircles within it, all blessedness—riches, and glory, and delight: and it is a crown which is unfading! (1 Pet. 5:4). Thus God would draw us to Him by rewards.

(17). Love to God is armor against error. For lack of *hearts* full of love—men have *heads* full of error; unholy *opinions* are for lack of holy *affections*. Why are men given up to strong delusions? Because "they receive not the love of truth" (2 Thess. 2:10, 11). The more we love God, the more we hate those heterodox opinions that would draw us off from God into libertinism.

(18). If we love God, we have all winds blowing for us, everything in the world shall conspire for our good. We know not what fiery trials we may meet with—but to those who love God all things shall work for good. Those things which work against them, shall work for them; their *cross* shall make way for a *crown*; every *cross*wind shall blow them to the heavenly port!

(19). Lack of love to God is the ground of apostasy. The seed in the parable, which had no root, fell away. He who has not the love of God rooted in his heart, will fall away in time of temptation. He who loves God will cleave to Him, as Ruth to Naomi. "Where you go I will go, and where you die I will die" (Ruth 1:16, 17). But he who lacks love to God will do as Orpah to her mother in law; she kissed her, and took her farewell of her. That soldier who has no love to his commander, when he sees an opportunity, will leave him, and run

over to the enemy's side. He who has no love in his heart to God, you may set him down for an apostate.

(20). Love is the only thing which we can give back to God. If God is *angry* with us, we must not be angry back. If He *chides* us, we must not chide Him back. But if God *loves* us, we must love Him back. There is nothing in which we give back to God—but love. We must give Him our love for His love.

Thus we have seen twenty motives to excite and inflame our love to God.

Question. What shall we do to love God?

Answer. **Study God.** Did we study Him more, we would love Him more. Take a view of His superlative excellencies, His holiness, His incomprehensible goodness. The angels know God better than we, and clearly behold the splendor of His majesty; therefore they are so deeply enamored with Him.

Labor for an interest in God. "O God, you are *my* God" (Psalm lx3:1). That pronoun 'my', is a sweet loadstone to love; a man loves that which is his own. The more we believe, the more we love. Faith is the root, and love is the flower which grows upon it. "Faith which works by love" (Gal. 5:6).

Make it your earnest request to God, that He will give you a heart to love Him. This is an acceptable request, surely God will not deny it. When king Solomon asked for wisdom from God, (1 Kings 3:9), "the request pleased the Lord" (verse 10). So when you cry to God, "Lord, give me a heart to love You. It is my grief, I can love You no more. Oh, kindle this fire from heaven upon the altar of my heart!" Surely this prayer pleases the Lord, and He will pour of His Spirit upon you—whose golden oil shall make the lamp of your love burn bright!

2. An exhortation to preserve your love to God.

You who have love to God, labor to preserve it; let not this love die, or be quenched.

As you would have God's love to be continued to you, let your love be continued to Him. Love, as fire, will tend to die out. "You have left your first love" (Rev. 2:4). Satan labors to blow out this flame, and through neglect of duty we lose it. When a frail body leaves off clothes, it is apt to get cold: so when we leave off duty, by degrees we cool in our love to God. Of all graces, love is most apt to decay; therefore we had need to be the more careful to preserve it. If a man has a precious jewel, he will keep it safe. What care then should we have to keep this precious jewel of love to God! It is sad to see professors declining in their love to God; many are in a spiritual declension, their love is decaying.

There are four signs by which Christians may know that their love is decaying.

(1). When they have lost their taste. He who is in a severe illness, has no taste; he does not find that savory relish in his food as formerly. So when Christians have lost their taste, and they find no sweetness in a promise, it is a sign of a spiritual decay. "If so be you have tasted that the Lord is gracious" (1 Pet. 2:3). Time was, when they found comfort in drawing near to God. His Word was as the dropping honey, very delicious to the palate of their soul—but now it is otherwise. They can taste no more sweetness in spiritual things than in the "white of an egg" (Job 6:6). This is a sign they are in a decay; to lose the taste, argues the loss of the first love.

(2). When they have lost their appetite. A man in a deep decay has not that relish for his food as formerly. Time was, when Christians did "hunger and thirst after righteousness" (Matt. 5:6). They minded things of a heavenly aspect, the grace of the Spirit, the blood of the cross, the light of God's countenance. They had a longing for ordinances, and came to them as a hungry man to a feast. But now the case is altered. They have no appetite, they do not

so prize Christ, they have not such strong affections to the Word, their hearts do not burn within them; a sad presage, they are in a decay, their love is decaying. It was a sign David's natural strength was abated, when they covered him with clothes, and yet he get no heat (1 Kings 1:1). So when men are plied with hot clothes (1 mean ordinances)—yet they have no heat of affection—but are cold and stiff, as if they were ready to be laid forth; this is a sign their first love is declined, they are in a deep decay.

(3). When they grow more in love with the world, it argues the decrease of spiritual love. They were once of a sublime, heavenly temper, they did speak the language of Canaan: but now they are like the fish in the gospel, which had money in its mouth (Matt. x7:27). They cannot lisp out three words—but one is about mammon. Their thoughts and affections, like Satan, are still compassing the earth, a sign they are going down the hill apace, their love to God is in a decay. We may observe, when nature decays and grows weaker, people go more stooping: and truly, when the heart goes more stooping to the earth, and is so bowed together that it can scarcely lift up itself to a heavenly thought, it is now sadly declining in its first love. When rust cleaves to metal, it not only takes away the brightness of the metal—but it cankers and consumes it: so when the earth cleaves to men's souls, it not only hinders the shining luster of their graces—but by degrees it cankers them.

(4). When they make little reckoning of God's worship. Duties of religion are performed in a dead, formal manner; if they are not left *un*done—yet they are *ill* done. This is a sad symptom of a spiritual decay; remissness in duty shows a decay in our first love. The strings of a violin being slack, the violin can never make good music; when men grow slack in duty, they pray as if they prayed not; this can never make any harmonious sound in God's ears. When the spiritual motion is slow and heavy, and the pulse of the soul beats low, it is a sign that Christians have left their first love.

Let us take heed of this spiritual decay; it is dangerous to abatement in our love. Love is such a grace as we know not how to be without. A soldier may as well be without his weapons, an artist without his pencil, a musician without his instrument, as a Christian can be without love. The body cannot lack its natural heat. Love is to the soul as the natural heat is to the body—there is no living without it. Love influences the graces, it excites the affections, it makes us grieve for sin, it makes us cheerful in God; it is like oil to the wheels; it quickens us in God's service. How careful then should we be to keep alive our love for God!

Question. How may we keep our love from going out?

Answer. Watch your hearts every day. Take notice of the first declinings in grace. Observe yourselves when you begin to grow dull and listless, and use all means for quickening. Be much in prayer, meditation, and holy conference. When the fire is going out you throw on fuel: so when the flame of your love is going out, make use of ordinances and gospel promises, as fuel to keep the fire of your love burning.

3. An exhortation to increase your love to God.

Let me exhort Christians to increase your love to God. Let your love be raised up higher. "And this I pray, that your love may abound more and more" (Phil. 1:9). Our love to God should be as the light of the morning: first there is the day break, then it shines brighter, to the full meridian. They who have a few sparks of love should blow up those divine sparks into a flame. A Christian should not be content with so small a grain of grace, as may make him wonder whether he has any grace or not—but should be still increasing the stock. He who has a little gold, would have more; you who love God a little, labor to love Him more. A godly man is contented with a very little of the world; yet he is never satisfied—but would have more of the Spirit's influence, and labors to add one degree of love to another. To persuade Christians to put more oil to the lamp, and

increase the flame of their love, let me propose these four divine incentives.

(1). The growth of love evinces its reality. If I see the almond tree bud and flourish, I know there is life in the root. Paint will not grow; a hypocrite, who is but a picture, will not grow. But where we see love to God increasing and growing larger, as Elijah's cloud, we may conclude it is true and genuine.

(2). By the growth of love we imitate the saints in the Bible. Their love to God, like the waters of the sanctuary, did rise higher. The disciples love to Christ at first was weak, they fled from Christ; but after Christ's death it grew more vigorous, and they made an open profession of Him. Peter's love at first was more infirm and languid, he denied Christ; but afterwards how boldly did he preach Him! When Christ put him to a trial of his love, "Simon, love you Me?" (John 21:16), Peter could make his humble yet confident appeal to Christ, "Lord, you know that I love You." Thus that tender plant which before was blown down with the wind of a temptation, now is grown into a cedar, which all the powers of hell cannot shake!

(3). The growth of love will amplify the reward. The more we burn in love—the more we shall shine in glory! The higher our love —the brighter our crown!

(4). The more we love God, the more love we shall have from Him. Would we have God unbosom the sweet secrets of His love to us? Would we have the smiles of His face? Oh, then let us strive for higher degrees of love. Paul counted gold and pearl but dung for Christ, "Yes, everything else is worthless when compared with the priceless gain of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. I have discarded everything else, counting it all as garbage, so that I may have Christ." (Phil. 3:8). Yes, he was so inflamed with love to God, that he could have wished himself accursed from Christ for his brethren the Jews (Romans 9:3). Not that he could be accursed

from Christ; but such was his fervent love and pious zeal for the glory of God, that he would have been content to have suffered, even beyond what is fit to speak, if God might have had more honor.

Here was love screwed up to the highest pitch that it was possible for a mortal to arrive at: and behold how near he lay to God's heart! The Lord takes him up to heaven a while, and lays him in His bosom, where he had such a glorious sight of God, and heard those "unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter" (2 Cor. 12:4). Never was any man a loser by his love to God.

If our love to God does not increase—it will soon decrease. If the fire is not blown up—it will quickly go out. Therefore Christians should above all things endeavor to cherish and excite their love to God. This exhortation will be out of date when we come to heaven, for then our light shall be clear, and our love perfect; but now it is in season to exhort, that our love to God may abound yet more and more.

Effectual Calling

"And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, **to those who are the called according to His purpose**." Romans 8:28

The second qualification of the people to whom this privilege in the text belongs, is—*they are the called by God*. "All things work for good *to those who are **called**."* Though this word called is placed in order after loving of God—yet in reality, it goes before it. Love is

first named—but not first wrought; we must be called of God, before we can love God.

Calling is made (Romans 8:30) the middle link of the golden chain of salvation. It is placed between predestination and glorification; and if we have this middle link fast, we are sure of the two other ends of the chain. For the clearer illustration of this, there are six things observable.

1. A DISTINCTION about calling. There is a two-fold call.

(**1.) There is an OUTWARD call**, which is nothing else but God's blessed offer of grace in the gospel, His parleying with sinners, when He invites them to come in and accept of mercy. Of this our Savior speaks: "Many are called—but few chosen" (Matt. 20:16). This external call is insufficient to salvation—yet sufficient to leave men without excuse.

(2.) There is an inward call, when God wonderfully overpowers the *heart*, and draws the *will* to embrace Christ. This is an **effectual** call. God, by the outward call, blows a trumpet in the ear; by the inward call, He opens the heart, as He did the heart of Lydia (Acts 16:14). The outward call may bring men to a *profession* of Christ—the inward call brings them to a *possession* of Christ. The outward call *curbs* a sinner—the inward call *changes* him.

2. Our deplorable CONDITION before we are called.

(1.) We are in a state of BONDAGE. Before God calls a man, he is the devil's slave. If he says, "Go!" —the man goes. The deluded sinner is like the slave who digs in the mine, hews in the quarry, or tugs at the oar. He is at the command of Satan, as the donkey is at the command of the driver.

(2.) We are in a state of DARKNESS. "You were once darkness" (Ephes. 5:8). Darkness is very disconsolate. A man in the dark is full of fear, he trembles every step he takes. Darkness is dangerous. He

who is in the dark may quickly go out of the right way, and fall into rivers or whirlpools. Just so, in the darkness of ignorance, we may quickly fall into the whirlpool of hell.

(3.) We are in a state of IMPOTENCY. "When we were without strength" (Romans 5:6). We had no strength to resist a temptation, or grapple with a corruption. Sin cut the lock where our strength lay (Judg. 16:20). Nay, there is not only *impotency*—but *obstinacy*, "You do always *resist* the Holy Spirit" (Acts 8:51). Besides *indisposition* to holiness, there is *opposition* to holiness.

(4.) We are in a state of POLLUTION. "I saw you polluted in your blood" (Ezek. 16:6). The mind coins only earthly thoughts; the heart is the devil's forge, where the sparks of lust fly.

(5.) We are in a state of DAMNATION. We are born under a curse. The wrath of God abides on us (John 3:36). This is our condition before God is pleased by a merciful call to bring us near to Himself, and free us from that misery in which we were before engulfed.

3. The MEANS of our effectual call. The ordinary means which the Lord uses in calling us, is not by raptures and revelations—but is,

(1.) By His WORD, which is "the rod of his strength" (Psalm 105:2). The voice of the Word is God's call to us; therefore He is said to speak to us from heaven (Heb. 12:25). That is, in the ministry of the Word. When the Word calls from sin, it is as if we heard a voice from heaven.

(2.) By His SPIRIT. This is the loud call. The Word is the *instrumental* cause of our conversion, the Spirit is the *efficient* cause of our conversion. The ministers of God are only the pipes and organs; it is the Spirit blowing in them, which effectually changes the heart. "While Peter spoke, the Holy Spirit fell on all those who heard the word" (Acts 10:44). It is not the farmer's

industry in ploughing and sowing, which will make the ground fruitful, without the early and latter rain. Just so, it is not the seed of the Word that will effectually convert, unless the Spirit puts forth His sweet influence, and drops as rain upon the heart. Therefore the aid of God's Spirit is to be implored, that He would put forth His powerful voice, and awaken us out of the grave of unbelief. If a man knocks at a gate of brass, it will not open; but if he comes with a key in his hand, it will open. Just so, when God, who has the key of David in His hand (Rev. 3:7) comes, He opens the heart, though it be ever so fast locked against Him.

4. The METHOD God uses in calling of sinners.

The Lord does not tie Himself to a particular way, or use the same order with all. He comes sometimes in a still small voice. Such as have had godly parents, and have sat under the warm sunshine of religious education, often do not know how or when they were called. The Lord did *secretly* and *gradually* instill grace into their hearts, as the *dew* falls unnoticed. They know by the heavenly **effects** that they are called—but the *time* or *manner* they know not. The hand moves on the clock—but they do not perceive when it moves.

Thus God deals with some. Others are more stubborn and knotty sinners, and God comes to them in a rough wind. He uses more wedges of the law to break their hearts; He deeply humbles them, and shows them they are damned without Christ. Then having ploughed up the fallow ground of their hearts by humiliation, He sows the seed of consolation. He presents Christ and mercy to them, and draws their wills, not only to accept Christ—but passionately to desire, and faithfully to rest upon Him. Thus He wrought upon Paul, and called him from a persecutor—to a preacher. This call, though it is more visible than the other—yet is not more real. God's *method* in calling sinners may vary—but the *effect* is still the same.

5. The PROPERTIES of this effectual calling.

(1.) This call is a SWEET call. God so calls—as He allures. He does not *force*—but *draw*. The freedom of the will is not taken away—but the stubbornness of it is conquered. "Your people shall be willing in the day of your power" (Psalm 110:3). After this call there are no more disputes, the soul readily obeys God's call—as when Christ called Zacchaeus, he joyfully welcomed Him into his heart and house.

(2.) This call is a HOLY call. "Who has called us with a holy calling" (2 Tim. 1:9). This call of God calls men out of their sins—by it they are consecrated, and set apart for God. The vessels of the tabernacle were taken from common use, and set apart to a holy use. Just so, those who are effectually called are separated from sin, and consecrated to God's service. The *God* whom we worship is holy, the *work* we are employed in is holy, the *place* we hope to arrive at is holy; all this calls for holiness. A Christian's heart is to be the presence chamber of the blessed Trinity; and shall not holiness to the Lord be written upon it? Believers are children of God the Father, members of God the Son, and temples of God the Holy Spirit; and shall they not be holy? Holiness is the badge and livery of God's people. "The people of your holiness" (Isaiah 63:18). As chastity distinguishes a virtuous woman from a harlot, so holiness distinguishes the godly from the wicked. It is a holy calling, "God has called us to be holy, not to live impure lives" (1 Thess. 4:7).

Let not any man say he is called by God—who lives in sin. Has God called you to be a swearer, to be a drunkard? Nay, let not the merely moral person say he is effectually called. What is civility without sanctity? It is but a dead carcass strewed with flowers. The king's picture stamped upon *brass,* will not go current for *gold*. The merely moral man looks as if he had the King of heaven's image stamped upon him—but he is no better than counterfeit metal, which will not pass for current with God.

(3.) This call is an IRRESISTIBLE call. When God calls a man by His grace, he cannot but come. You may resist the minister's call

—but you cannot the Spirit's call. The finger of the blessed Spirit can write upon a heart of stone, as once He wrote His laws upon tables of stone. God's words are creating words; when He said "Let there be light, there was light"; and when He says, "Let there be faith", it shall be so. When God called Paul, he answered to the call. "I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision" (Acts 26:19). God rides forth conquering in the chariot of His gospel; He makes the *blind eyes* see, and the *stony heart* bleed. If God will call a man, nothing shall lie in the way to hinder; difficulties shall be untied, the powers of hell shall disband. "Who has resisted his will?" (Romans 9:19). God bends the iron sinew, and cuts asunder the gates of brass (Psalm 107:16). When the Lord touches a man's heart by His Spirit, all proud imaginations are brought down, and the fort-royal of the *will* yields to God. The man that before was as a raging sea of sin, foaming forth wickedness; now he suddenly flies back and trembles, he falls down as the jailer, "What shall I do to he saved?" (Acts 16:30). What has happened this man? The Lord has effectually called him. God has been working powerfully by grace, and now his stubborn heart is *conquered by a sweet violence.*

(4.) This call is a HIGH calling. "I press toward the mark, for the prize of the *high calling* of God" (Phil. 3:14). It is a high calling, because we are called to high exercises of piety—to die to sin, to be crucified to the world, to live by faith, to have fellowship with the Father (1 John 1:3). This is a high calling: here is a work too high for men in a state of nature to perform. It is a high calling, because we are called to high privileges—to justification and adoption, to be made co-heirs with Christ. He who is effectually called, is higher than any of the kings of the earth.

(5.) This call is a GRACIOUS call. It is the fruit and product of free grace. That God should call some, and not others; that some should be taken, and others left; that one should be called who is of a more wicked disposition, while another of a sweeter temper, is rejected; here is free grace! That the *poor* should be rich in faith, heirs of a kingdom (James 2:5), and the *nobles* and great ones of the

world for the most part rejected, "Not many noble are called" (1 Cor. 1:26); this is free and rich grace! "Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in your sight" (Matt. 11:26). That under the same sermon one should be effectually wrought upon—while another is no more moved than a dead man with the sound of music; that one should hear the Spirit's voice in the Word—while another does not hear it; that one should be softened and moistened with the influence of heaven—while another, like Gideon's dry fleece, has no dew upon him; behold here distinguishing, sovereign grace! The same affliction which converts one—hardens another. Affliction to one is as the bruising of spices, which cast forth a fragrant smell; to the other it is as the crushing of weeds in a mortar, which are more unsavory. What is the cause of this—but the free grace of God! It is a gracious calling; it is all enameled and interwoven with free grace! "Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things--and the things that are not--to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before Him." 1 Corinthians 1:26-29

(6.) This call is a GLORIOUS call. "*In his kindness God called you to his eternal glory.*" (1 Peter 5:10). We are called to the enjoyment of the ever blessed God. It is as if a man were called out of a prison to sit upon a throne. Curtius writes of one, who while digging in his garden was called to be king. Thus God calls us to *glory* and *virtue* (2 Pet. 1:3). First to virtue, then to glory. At Athens there were two temples, the temple of Virtue, and the temple of Honor; and no man could go to the temple of honor—but through the temple of virtue. Just so, God calls us first to virtue, and then to glory.

What is the glory among men, which most so hunt after—but a feather blown in the air? What is it, compared to the weight of

eternal glory? Is there not great reason we should follow God's call? He calls to eternal glory; can there be any loss or harm in this? God would have us part with nothing for Him—but that which will damn us if we keep it. He has no design upon us—but to make us happy. He calls us to salvation, He calls us to a heavenly kingdom! Oh, how should we then, with Bartimeus, throw off our ragged coat of sin, and follow Christ when He calls!

(7.) This call is a RARE call. But few are savingly called. "Few are chosen" (Matt. 22:14). Few, not collectively—but comparatively. The word 'to call' signifies to choose out some from among others. Many have the *light* brought to them—but few have their *eyes* anointed to see that light. "You have a few names in Sardis who have not defiled their garments" (Rev. 3:4). How many millions sit in the region of darkness! And in those climates where the Sun of righteousness does shine, there are many who receive the *light* of the truth, without the *love* of it. There are many formalists—but few believers. There is something that looks like faith, which is not. The *Cyprian diamond* sparkles like the true diamond—but it is not of the right kind, it will break with the hammer. Just so, the hypocrite's faith will break with the hammer of persecution. But few are truly called. The number of precious stones is few, compared to the number of pebble stones. Most men shape their religion according to the fashion of the times; they are for the music and the idol (Dan. 3:7). The serious thought of this, should make us work out our salvation with fear, and labor to be in the number of those few whom God has translated into a state of grace.

(8.) This call is an UNCHANGEABLE call. "God's gracious gifts and calling are irrevocable" (Romans 11:29). That is, as a learned writer says, those gifts which flow from election. When God calls a man, He does not repent of it. God does not, as many friends do, love one day, and hate another; or as princes, who make their subjects favorites, and afterwards throw them into prison. This is the blessedness of a saint—his condition admits of no alteration. God's call is founded upon His decree—and His decree is

immutable. Acts of grace cannot be reversed. God blots out His people's sins—but not their names. Let the world ring changes every hour, a believer's condition is unchangeable and unalterable.

6. The END of our effectual calling is the honor of God. "That we should be to the praise of his glory" (Ephes. 1:12). He who is in the state of nature, is no more fit to honor God, than a brute beast can put forth acts of reason. A man before conversion continually reflects dishonor upon God. As black vapors which arise out of moorish grounds, cloud and darken the sun, so out of the natural man's heart arise black vapors of sin, which cast a cloud upon God's glory. The sinner is versed in treason—but understands nothing of loyalty to the King of heaven. But there are some whom the lot of free grace falls upon, and these shall be taken as jewels from among the rubbish and be effectually called, that they may lift up God's name in the world. The Lord will have some in all ages who shall oppose the corruptions of the times, bear witness to His truths, and convert sinners from the error of their ways. He will have His *worthies*, as king David had. Those who have been monuments of God's mercies, will be trumpets of His praise.

These considerations show us the necessity of effectual calling. Without it there is no going to heaven. We must be "made fit for the inheritance" (Col. 1:12). As God makes heaven fit for us, so He makes us fit for heaven; and what gives this fitness—but effectual calling? A man remaining in the filth and rubbish of nature, is no more fit for heaven, than a dead man is fit to inherit an estate. The high calling is not a thing arbitrary or indifferent—but as needful as salvation; yet alas, how is this one thing needful neglected! Most men, like the people of Israel, wander up and down to gather straw —but do not mind the evidences of their effectual calling.

Take notice what a mighty power God puts forth in calling of sinners! God does so call, as to draw (John 6:44). Conversion is styled a resurrection. "Blessed is he who has part in the first resurrection" (Rev. 20:6). That is, a rising from sin to grace. A man

can no more convert himself than a dead man can raise himself. It is called a creation (Col. 3:10). To create is above the power of nature.

Objection. "But," say some, "the will is not *dead,* but *asleep*; and God, by a moral persuasion, does only awaken us—and then the will can obey God's call, and move of itself to its own conversion."

Answer. To this I answer, Every man is by sin bound in fetters. "I perceive that you are in the bond of iniquity" (Acts 7:23). A man that is in fetters, if you use arguments, and persuade him to go, is that sufficient? There must be a *breaking* of his fetters, and setting him free, before he can walk. So it is with every natural man; he is fettered with corruption; now the Lord by converting grace must file off his fetters, nay, give him *legs* to run too—or he can never obtain salvation!

Use. An exhortation to make your calling sure.

"Give diligence to make your calling sure" (2 Peter 1:10). This is the great business of our lives—to get sound evidences of our effectual calling. Do not acquiesce in *outward* privileges, do not cry as the Jews, "The temple of the Lord!" (Jer. 7:4). Do not rest in *baptism*; what is it to have the *water*—and lack the *Spirit*? Do not be content that Christ has been preached to you. Do not satisfy yourselves with an empty profession; all this may be, and yet you are no better than empty professors. But labor to evidence to your souls that you are called of God. Give diligence to make your calling sure—it is both feasible and probable. God is not lacking to those that seek Him. Let not this great business hang in hand any longer. If there were a controversy about your land, you would use all means to clear your title; and is salvation nothing? Will you not clear your title here? Consider how sad your case is, if you are not effectually called.

If you are not effectually called, you are **strangers** to God. The prodigal went into a far country (Luke 14:13), which implies that

every sinner, before conversion, is afar off from God. "At that time you were without Christ, strangers to the covenants of promise" (Ephes. 2:12). Men dying in their sins have no more right to promises, than strangers have to the privilege of free-born citizens. If you are strangers, what language can you expect from God—but this, "I know you not!"

If you are not effectually called, you are **enemies** to God. "Alienated and enemies" (Col. 1:21). There is nothing in the Bible you can lay claim to—but the *threatenings!* You are heirs to all the *plagues* written in the book of God! Though you may resist the *commands* of the law, you cannot flee from the *curses* of the law. Such as are enemies to God, let them read their doom. "Bring here these *enemies* of mine, who did not want me to rule over them, and slaughter them in my presence!" (Luke 19:27). Oh, how it should concern you therefore to make your calling sure! How miserable and damnable will your condition be, if death calls you before the Spirit calls you!

Question. But is there any hope of my being effectually called? I have been a great sinner.

Answer. Great sinners have been called. Paul was a violent persecutor—yet he was called. Some of the Jews who had a hand in crucifying Christ, were called. God loves to display His free grace to sinners. Therefore be not discouraged. You see a golden cord let down from heaven for poor trembling souls to lay hold upon!

Question. But how shall I know I am effectually called?

1. He who is savingly called is called out of himself, not only out of *sinful* self—but out of *righteous* self. "Not having my own righteousness" (Phil. 3:9). He whose heart God has touched by His Spirit, lays down the *idol of self-righteousness* at Christ's feet, for Him to tread upon. The true Christian denies not only *sinful* self —but *righteous* self. He becomes moral and pious--but he does not

trust to his morality or piety. Noah's dove made use of her *wings* to fly—but trusted to the *ark* for safety. This is to be effectually called—when a man is called out of himself. Self-renunciation is the first step to saving faith.

2. He who is effectually called—has a great change wrought. Not a change of the *faculties*—but of the *qualities*. He is altered from what he was before. His *body* is the same—but not his *mind*; he has another spirit. Paul was so changed after his conversion that people did not know him (Acts 9:21). Oh what a metamorphosis does grace make! "Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And *that is what some of you were!* But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God. (1 Corinthians 6:9-11). Grace changes the heart!

In effectual calling there is a three-fold change wrought:

(1). There is a change wrought in the UNDERSTANDING. Before, there was ignorance—but now there is light, "Now you are light in the Lord" (Ephes. 5:8). The first work of God in the creation of the world was light: so it is in the new creation. He who is savingly called says with that man in the gospel: "I once was blind—but now I see!" (John 9:25). He sees such evil in sin, and excellency in the ways of God, as he never saw before. Indeed, this light which the blessed Spirit brings, may well be called a marvelous light. "That you should show forth the praises of Him who has called you into his marvelous light" (1 Pet. 2:9). It is a marvelous light in six respects.

(1.) Because it is supernaturally conveyed. It does not come from the celestial orbs where the planets are—but from the Sun of

righteousness.

(2.) It is marvelous in the effect. This light does that which no other light can. It makes a man perceive himself to be blind.

(3.) It is a marvelous light, because it is more penetrating. Other light may shine upon the face—but this light shines into the heart, and enlightens the conscience (2 Cor. 4:6).

(4.) It is a marvelous light, because it sets those who have it a marveling. They marvel at themselves, how they could be contented to be so long without it. They marvel that their eyes should be opened, and not others. They marvel that notwithstanding their previous hatred and opposition this light—yet it should shine in their souls. This is what the saints will stand wondering at to all eternity.

(5.) It is a marvelous light, because it is more vital than any others. It not only *enlightens*—but *quickens!* It makes alive those who "were dead in trespasses and sins" (Ephes. 2:1). Therefore it is called the "light of life" (John7:12).

(6.) It is a marvelous light, because it is the beginning of everlasting light. The light of grace is the morning star which ushers in the sunlight of glory.

Now then, reader, can you say that this marvelous light of the Spirit has dawned upon you? When you were enveloped in ignorance, and neither knew God nor yourself—did suddenly a light from heaven shined in your mind? This is one part of that blessed change which is wrought in the effectual calling.

(2). There is a change wrought in the WILL. "To will is present with me" (Romans 8:18). The will, which before opposed Christ, now embraces Him. The will, which was an iron sinew against Christ, is now like melting wax—it readily receives the stamp and impression of the Holy Spirit. The will moves

heavenward, and carries all the orbs of the affections along with it. The regenerate will answers to every call of God, as the echo answers to the voice, "Lord, what will you have me to do?" (Acts 9:6). The will now becomes a volunteer, it enlists itself under the Captain of salvation (Heb. 2:10). Oh what a happy change is wrought here! Before, the will kept *Christ* out; now, it keeps *sin* out!

(3). There is a change in the CONDUCT. He who is called of God, walks directly contrary to what he did before. He walked before in envy and malice—now he walks in love! Before he walked in pride —now he walks in humility. The current is carried quite another way. As in the heart there is a new birth, so in the life a new conduct. Thus we see what a mighty change is wrought, in all who are called by God.

How far are they from this effectual call, who never had any change! They are the same as they were forty or fifty years ago—as proud and carnal as ever! They have seen many changes in their times—but they have had no change in their heart. Let not men think to leap out of the harlot's lap (the world) into Abraham's bosom! They must either have a *gracious change* while they live—or a *cursed change* when they die! "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!" 2 Corinthians 5:17

3. He who is called of God—esteems this call as the highest blessing. A king whom God has called by His grace, esteems it more that he is called to be a *saint*, than that he is called to be a *king*. He values his high *calling* more than his high *birth*. Theodosius thought it a greater honor to be a Christian, than to be an emperor. A carnal person can no more value spiritual blessings than an infant can value a diamond necklace. He prefers his worldly grandeur, his ease, plenty, and titles of honor, before conversion. He had rather be called duke than saint—this is a sign he is a stranger to effectual calling. He who is enlightened by the Spirit, counts holiness his best heraldry, and looks upon his effectual calling as

his choicest blessing. When he has taken this degree, he is a candidate for heaven.

4. He who is effectually called—is called out of the world. It is a "heavenly calling" (Heb. 3:1). He who is called of God, minds the things of a heavenly aspect. He is *in* the world—but not *of* the world. Naturalists say of precious stones, though they have their matter from the earth—yet their sparkling luster is from the influence of the heavens. So it is with a godly man—though his body is from the earth—yet the sparkling of his affections is from heaven; his heart is drawn into the upper region, as high as Christ. He not only casts off every *wicked work*—but every *earthly weight*. He is not a *worm*—but an *eagle!*

5. Another sign of our effectual calling—is diligence in our ordinary calling. Some boast of their high calling—but they lie idly at anchor. True religion does not give warrant to idleness. Christians must not be slothful. Idleness is the devil's bath; a slothful person becomes a prey to every temptation. Grace, while it cures the *heart*, does not make the hand *lame*. He who is called of God, as he works for heaven, so he works in his trade.

Exhortations to Those Who are Called

If, after searching you find that you are effectually called, I have three exhortations to you.

1. Admire and adore God's free grace in calling you—that God should pass over so many, that He should pass by the wise and noble, and that the lot of free grace should fall upon you! That He should take you out of a state of vassalage, from grinding the devil's mill, and should set you above the princes of the earth, and call you to inherit the throne of glory! Fall upon your knees, break forth into a thankful triumph of praise! Let your hearts be ten stringed

instruments, to sound forth the memorial of God's saving mercy. There are none so deep in debt to free grace—as you are; and none should be so high mounted upon the pinnacle of thanksgiving. Say as the sweet singer; "I will extol you, O God my King, every day will I bless you, and I will praise your name forever!" (Psalm 145:1, 2). Those who are monuments of mercy—should be trumpets of praise! O long to be in heaven, where your thanksgivings shall be purer and shall be raised a note higher!

2. Pity those who are not yet called. Sinners in scarlet are not objects of envy—but pity; they are under "the power of Satan" (Acts 26:18). They tread every day on the brink of the bottomless pit! What if death should cast them in! O pity unconverted sinners. If you pity an ox or an donkey going astray, will you not pity a soul going astray from God, who has lost his way and his wits, and is upon the precipice of damnation!

Nay, not only **pity** sinners—but **pray** for them. Though they curse you—you must pray for them. You will pray for people who are demented; sinners are demented. "When he came to his senses" (Luke 15:17). It seems the prodigal before conversion, was in his senses. Wicked men are going to execution; sin is the halter which strangles them; death removes them off the ladder; and hell is their burning place! Will you not pray for them, when you see them in such danger?

3. You who are effectually called, honor your high calling. "I beg you to lead a life worthy of your calling" (Ephes. 4:1). Christians must keep a decorum, they must observe what is lovely. This is a seasonable advice, when many who profess to be called of God—yet by their loose and irregular walking—cast a blemish on religion, whereby the ways of God are evil spoken of. It is Salvian's speech, "What do pagans say when they see Christians live scandalously? Surely Christ taught them no better." Will you reproach Christ, and make Him suffer again, by abusing your heavenly calling?

It is one of the saddest sights—to see a man lift up his *hands* in prayer, and with those hands oppress; to hear the same *tongue* praise God at one time, and at another lie and slander; to hear a man in words profess God, and in works deny Him. Oh how unworthy is this! Yours is a *holy* calling, and will you be unholy? Do not think you may take liberty as others do. The Nazarite had a vow on him, separated himself to God, and promised abstinence; though others did drink wine, it was not fit for the Nazarite to do it. So, though others are loose and vain, it is not fit for those who are set apart for God by effectual calling. Are not flowers sweeter than weeds? You must be now "a peculiar people" (1 Pet. 2:9); not only peculiar in regard of dignity—but deportment. Abhor all motions of sin, because it would disparage your high calling.

Question. What is it to walk worthy of our heavenly calling?

1. It is to walk REGULARLY, to tread with an even foot, and walk according to the rules and axioms of the Word. A true saint is for canonical obedience, he follows the canon of Scripture. "As many as walk according to this canon" (Gal. 6:16). When we leave men's inventions, and cleave to God's institutions; when we walk after the Word, as Israel after the pillar of fire; this is walking worthy of our heavenly calling.

2. To walk worthy of our calling is to walk SINGULARLY. "Among all the people of the earth, I consider you alone to be righteous." (Genesis 7:1). When others walked with the devil, Noah walked with God. We are forbidden to run with the multitude (Exod. 23:2). Though in civil things singularity is not commendable —yet in religion it is good to be singular. Melanchthon was the glory of the age he lived in. Athanasius was singularly holy; he appeared for God when the stream of the times ran another way. It is better to be a pattern of holiness, than a partner in wickedness. **It is better to go to heaven with a few, than to hell in the crowd!** We must walk in an opposite course to the people of the world.

3. To walk worthy of our calling is to walk CHEERFULLY. "Rejoice in the Lord always" (Phil. 4:4). Too much drooping of spirit disparages our high calling, and makes others suspect a godly life to be melancholy. Christ loves to see us rejoicing in Him. Causinus speaks of a dove, whose wings being perfumed with sweet ointments, drew the other doves after her. Cheerfulness is a perfume to draw others to godliness. True religion does not banish joy. As there is a seriousness without sourness, so there is a cheerful liveliness without lightness. When the prodigal was converted "they began to be merry" (Luke 15:24). Who should be cheerful—if not the people of God? They are no sooner born of the Spirit—but they are heirs to a crown! God Himself is their portion, and heaven is their mansion—and shall they not rejoice?

4. To walk worthy of our calling is to walk WISELY. Walking wisely implies three things.

(a) To walk WATCHFULLY. "The wise man's eyes are in his head" (Eccles. 2:14). Others watch for our halting, therefore we had need look to our standing. We must beware, not only of scandals—but of all that is unfitting, lest thereby we open the mouth of others with a fresh cry against religion. **If our *piety* will not convert men—our *prudence* may silence them.**

(b) To walk COURTEOUSLY. The spirit of the gospel is full of meekness and politeness. "Be courteous" (1 Pet. 3:8). Take heed of a morose, or haughty behavior. Religion does not take away civility—but refines it. "Abraham stood up, and bowed himself to the children of Heth" (Gen. 23:7). Though they were of a heathenish race—yet Abraham gave them a civil respect. Paul was of an affable temper. "I am made all things to men, that I might by all means save some" (1 Cor. 9:22). In lesser matters the apostle yielded to others—that by his winning manner, he might win upon them.

(c) To walk MAGNANIMOUSLY. Though we must be humble—yet not base. It is unworthy to prostitute ourselves to the lusts of

men. What is sinfully imposed, ought to be zealously opposed. Conscience is God's diocese, where none has right to visit—but He who is the Bishop of our souls (1 Pet. 2:25). We must not be like hot iron, which may be beaten into any form. A brave spirited Christian will rather suffer, than let his conscience be violated. Here is the *serpent* and the *dove* united—*sagacity* and *innocence*. This prudential walking corresponds with our high calling, and much adorns the gospel of Christ.

5. To walk worthy of our calling is to walk INFLUENTIALLY—to do good to others, and to be rich in acts of mercy (Heb. 13:16). Good works honor religion. As Mary poured the ointment on Christ, so by good works we pour ointments on the head of the gospel, and make it give forth a fragrant smell. Good works, though they are not *causes* of salvation—yet they are *evidences*. When with our Savior we go about doing good, and send abroad the refreshing influence of our liberality, we walk worthy of our high calling.

Here is matter of consolation to you who are effectually called. God has magnified rich grace toward you. You are called to great honor to be co-heirs with Christ; this should revive you in the worst of times. Let men reproach and miscall you; set God's calling of you against man's miscalling. Let men persecute you to death: they do but give you a pass, and send you to heaven the sooner! How may this cure the trembling of the heart! What, though the sea roars, though the earth is unsettled, though the stars are shaken out of their places, you need not fear. You are effectually *called*—and therefore are sure to be *crowned!*

Concerning God's Purpose

1. God's purpose is the cause of salvation.

The last thing in the text, which I shall but briefly glance at, is the *ground* and *origin* of our effectual calling, in these words, "according to His purpose" (Eph. 1:11). Anselm renders it, "According to his good will." Peter Martyr reads it, "According to His decree." This purpose, or decree of God, is the fountainhead of our spiritual blessings. It is the moving cause of our effectual calling, justification, and glorification. It is the highest link in the golden chain of salvation. What is the reason that one man is effectually called, and not another? It is from the eternal purpose of God! God's decree gives the casting vote in man's salvation.

Let us then ascribe the whole work of grace to the pleasure of God's will. God did not choose us because we were worthy—but by choosing us He makes us worthy. Proud men are apt to assume and arrogate too much to themselves, in being sharers with God. While many cry out against church sacrilege, they are in the meantime guilty of a far greater sacrilege, in robbing God of His glory, while they go to set the crown of salvation upon their own head. But we must resolve all into God's purpose. The evidences of salvation are in the saints—but the *cause* of salvation is in God.

If it is God's purpose which saves—then it is **not free will**. Pelagians are strenuous asserters of free will. They tell us that a man has an innate power to effect his own conversion; but this text confutes it. Our calling is "according to God's purpose." The Scripture plucks up the root of free will. "It is not of him who wills" (Romans 9:16). All depends upon the purpose of God. When the prisoner is cast at the bar, there is no saving him, unless the king has a purpose to save him. God's purpose is His prerogative royal.

If it is God's purpose which saves—then it is **not merit**. Bellarmine holds that good works do expiate sin and merit glory; but the text says that we are called according to God's purpose, and there is a parallel Scripture, "Who has saved us, and called us, not according to our works—but according to his own purpose and grace" (2 Tim. 1:9). There is no such thing as *merit*. Our best works have in them

both defection and infection, and so are but *glittering sins*; therefore if we are called and justified, it is God's purpose brings it to pass.

Objection. But the Papists allege that Scripture for merit: "Henceforth is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous fudge, shall give me at that day" (2 Tim. 4:8). This is the force of their argument. If God in justice rewards our works, then they merit salvation.

Reply. To this I answer, God gives a reward as a just Judge, not to the worthiness of our works—but to the worthiness of Christ. God as a just Judge rewards us, not because we have deserved it—but because He has promised it. God has two courts, a court of mercy, and a court of justice: the Lord condemns those works in the court of justice, which He crowns in the court of mercy. Therefore that which carries the main stroke in our salvation, is the purpose of God.

Again, if the purpose of God is the spring-head of happiness, then we are **not saved for *foreseen faith***. It is absurd to think anything in us could have the least influence upon our election. Some say that God foresaw that such people would believe—and therefore choose them. Just so, they would make the business of salvation to depend upon something within us. Whereas God does not choose us *for* faith—but *to* faith. "He has chosen us—that we should be holy" (Eph. 1:4), not because we were holy—but that we might be holy. We are elected to holiness, not for any inherent holiness. What could God foresee in us—but pollution and rebellion! If any man be saved, it is according to God's purpose.

Question. How shall we know that God has a purpose to save us?

Answer. By being effectually called. "Give diligence to make your *calling* and *election* sure" (2 Pet. 1:10). We make our *election* sure, by making our *calling* sure. "God has chosen you to salvation

through sanctification" (2 Thess. 2:13). By the *stream*, we come at last to the *fountain*. If we find the *stream of sanctification* running in our souls, we may by this come to the *spring-head of election*. Though I cannot look up into the secret of God's purpose—yet I may know I am elected, by the shining of sanctifying grace in my soul. Whoever finds the word of God transcribed and copied out into his heart, may undeniably conclude his election.

2. God's purpose is the ground of assurance.

Here is a sovereign elixir of unspeakable comfort, to those who are the called of God. Their salvation rests upon God's purpose. "The foundation of God stands sure, having this seal. The Lord knows those who are his. Let everyone who names the name of Christ depart from iniquity" (2 Tim. 2:19). Our *graces* are imperfect, our *comforts* ebb and flow—but God's *foundation* stands sure. They who are built upon this rock of God's eternal purpose, need not fear falling away; neither the power of man, nor the violence of temptation, shall ever be able to overturn them!

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