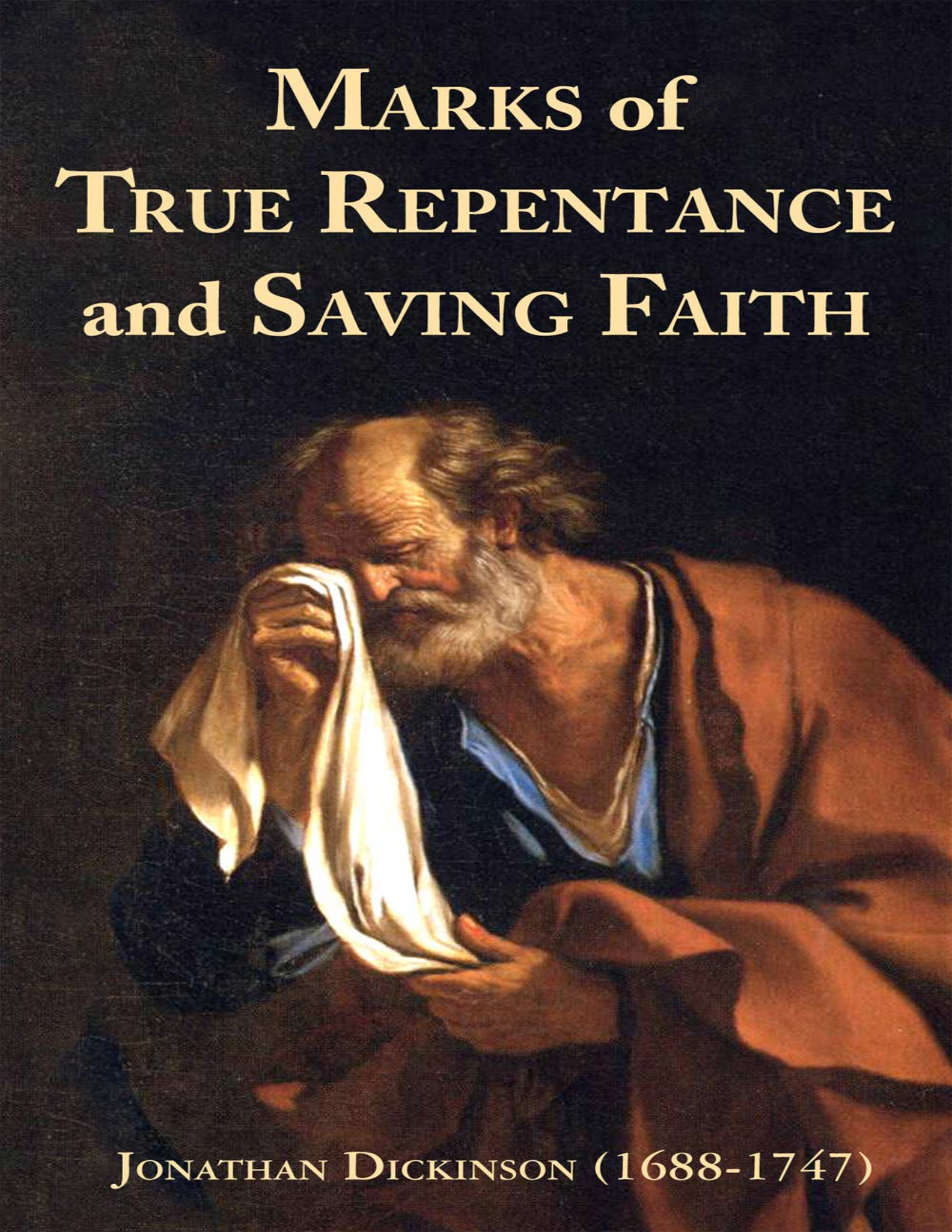
Marks of True Repentance and Saving Faith



Jonathan Dickinson (1688-1747)

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Marks of True Repentance

Introduction

You ask the distinction between a *legal* and an *evangelical* repentance. To give a clear view of the subject, I will first name some particulars wherein the distinction does *not* consist.

A deep *distress of mind* on account of sinning against God is common both to legal and evangelical repentance. Even Judas could cry out with agony of soul, “I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood” (Mat 27:4); as well as the Psalmist groan out his complaint, that “neither is there any rest in my bones because of my sin” (Psa 38:3).

A *fearful apprehension of the divine displeasure* may be common to both sorts of penitents. Mere legal convictions may make sinners in Zion afraid, and fearfulness surprise the hypocrites (Isa 33:14), and destruction from God may be a terror to a holy Job (Job 31:23), in as great reality, though not with such despairing infidelity, as to a Cain or Judas.

Dread of outward and known courses of sinning, and a temporary reformation from them, may likewise be the consequence of both a legal and evangelical repentance. Ahab humbled himself, lay in sackcloth, and went softly, and Herod reformed many things, as well as David refrained his feet from every evil way (Psa 119:101). It is impossible for a sinner to give the reins to his lusts while under the lashes of an awakened conscience. A mere legal conviction must, while it lasts, produce an external reformation.

Men may be brought to *diligence and activity in external duty*, by both a legal and evangelical repentance. An insincere repentance may bring men, with the hypocritical Jews, to seek the Lord daily (Isa 58:2), as true repentance always brings men to lift up their hearts and their hands to God in the heavens (Lam 3:41).

A *comforting persuasion of having obtained pardoning mercy* is common to both kinds of penitents. God’s ancient people, when most incorrigible in their impiety, would “trust in lying words” and come and stand before Him in the house that was called by His name, “and say, We are delivered to do all these abominations” (Jer 7:8, 10). The Israelites in

the wilderness concluded that God was their rock, and the Most High God their Redeemer, when they flattered Him with their lips, and lied to Him with their tongues, and their hearts were not right with Him (Psa 78:35-37). And on the other hand, the true penitent may say with David, “I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the LORD; and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin” (Psa 32:5).

In short, it is not the deepest sense of sin or guilt, nor the most distressing sorrow on that account. It is not the fear of God’s wrath, nor the greatest external reformation of life. It is not the most diligent external attendance upon duty, nor the most quieting persuasion of having made our peace with God, nor all these together that will prove a man sincerely penitent. For all these may be, and have been, attained to by mere hypocrites and often are found with the false as well as the true professor.

Having, by way of precaution, made these remarks, I now proceed directly to consider the *distinction between legal and evangelical repentance.*

1. Mourning over Sin

A *legal repentance* flows only from a *sense of danger* and fear of wrath, but *evangelical repentance* is a true *mourning for sin* and earnest desire of deliverance from it.

When the conscience of a sinner is alarmed with a sense of his dreadful guilt and danger, it must necessarily remonstrate[1] against those impieties which threaten him with ruin. Hence those frights and terrors which we so commonly see in awakened sinners. Their sins (especially some grosser enormities of their lives) stare them in the face, with their peculiar aggravations. They are brought upon their knees before God to acknowledge their sins and to cry for mercy. And now conscience, like a flaming sword, perhaps keeps them from their former course of impiety. And what is all this repentance, but mere terror and fear of hell? It is true, the Law sometimes proves a schoolmaster to drive sinners to Christ—and conviction of sin and a legal repentance are a necessary preparative to a saving conversion, but these alone give no claim to the promise of the gospel. The house may be thus empty, swept, and garnished, but for the reception of seven worse spirits than were driven out of it, and a sinner may

thus escape the pollutions of the world (2Pe 2:20) and yet have his latter end worse than the beginning (Mat 12:45).

If, on the other hand, we consider the character of a sincere *gospel-repentance*, though such legal terrors may lead to its exercise, they do not belong to its nature, nor are they any part of it. *Sin itself* becomes the greatest burden and aversion to a truly penitent soul. “I hate,” says the Psalmist, “every false way” (Psa 119:104). “O wretched man that I am!” says the apostle, “who shall deliver me from the body of this death?” (Rom 7:24). Thus the penitent groans, being burdened, not for fear of hell, such fear being no part of true repentance, though it may sometimes accompany it, but from an affecting, humbling *sense of sin*. His language is, “I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me….Mine iniquities are gone over mine head: as an heavy burden they are too heavy for me….Deliver me from all my transgressions….Let them not have dominion over me….Innumerable evils have compassed me about: mine iniquities have taken hold upon me, so that I am not able to look up; they are more than the hairs of mine head: therefore, my heart faileth me. Be pleased, O LORD, to deliver me: O LORD, make haste to help me” (Psa 51:3; 38:4; 39:8; 19:13; 40:12-13). As the true penitent longs for more and more victory over his corruptions, so is he most watchful, prayerful, and in earnest to mortify his lusts, and to cut off all supplies of sin. There is nothing so grievous to him as sin and nothing which he so earnestly desires as a nearer approach to that blessed state, where nothing can enter which defileth or worketh abomination (Rev 21:27).

Here you see the difference between being driven from a course of sinning by the lashes of an awakened conscience and loathing ourselves in our own sight for all our iniquities and abominations. The former is merely the fruit of self-love, which prompts the soul to fly from danger. The latter is the exercise of a vital principle, which separates the soul from sin and engages the whole man in a continued opposition to it.

2. The Fruit of Saving Faith

A *legal* repentance flows from *unbelief*, but an *evangelical* repentance is *the fruit of saving faith.*

I have shown that a legal repentance is effected[2] by fearful apprehensions of hell. And whence[3] [is] this fear and terror? Has not the gospel provided a glorious relief for such distresses and opened a blessed door of hope for the greatest sinners? Is not pardon and salvation freely offered to all that will accept a blessed Savior and His saving benefits? Is not the blood of Christ sufficient to cleanse from all sin, however aggravated? Why then do they not cheerfully fly for refuge to this hope set before them? Alas, they can see no safety in it! The Law of God condemns their disobedience. Conscience joins it and hence, their only refuge is resolutions, reformations, duties, penance, or some such self-righteous methods to pacify God's justice and quiet conscience. The defect of their endeavors and attainments creates new terrors. Their terrors excite new endeavors, and thus they go on, without attaining to the Law of righteousness, because they seek it not of faith, "but as it were by the works of the law" (Rom 9:31-32). They may, it is true, have some respect to Christ in this their legal progress. They may hope that God will accept them for Christ's sake. They may use His name in their prayers for pardon, while they dare not depend upon the merits of His blood for the remission of their sins and a freedom from condemnation. And what is all this but a secret hope that the redemption of Christ will add such merit to their frights and fears, reformations and duties, as to make them atone for their sins and purchase the favor of God? So that all their penitential appearances are nothing but the workings of unbelief.

The true penitent approaches God's presence with a deep impression of *his guilt and unworthiness*, and of his just *desert* of an eternal rejection from God. But then he comes before a mercy-seat. Though he is forced to acknowledge that if God should mark iniquity he could not stand before Him, he yet remembers that with God there is forgiveness that He may be feared (Psa 130:4) and that with Him there is plenteous redemption (Psa 130:7). He looks to the blood of Christ as what alone can cleanse away his numerous and aggravated sins, and from thence he takes encouragement to mourn out the Psalmist's language, "Wash me throughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin….Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow" (Psa 51:2, 7). This is the prospect which both encourages and invigorates his cries for mercy and

embitters his sins to him, and which makes him loathe them all and long for deliverance from them all.

"Is God infinitely merciful and ready to forgive (says the penitent soul) and have I been so basely ungrateful as to sin against such astonishing goodness, to affront and abuse such mercy and love! Is sin so hateful to God that His own dear Son must die? How vile, how polluted and abominable must I then appear in the eyes of His holiness and justice, that am nothing but defilement and guilt, from the crown of my head to the soles of my feet, nothing "but wounds, and bruises, and putrifying sores" (Isa 1:6)! Has the blessed Savior suffered His Father's wrath for my sins? Have they nailed Him to the cross and brought Him under the agonies of an accursed death, and shall I be ever reconciled to my lusts anymore and go on to crucify the Son of God afresh? May I obtain strength from the Lord Jesus Christ for victory over my corruptions and shall I not both resolve in His strength against them and lie at His feet, that the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus may make me free from the law of sin and death (Rom 8:2)? Have I dishonored God so much already, loaded my precious Savior with so many indignities, and brought such a weight of guilt upon myself, and is it not now high time to bid an utter defiance to my most darling lusts, the greatest enemies to God and my own soul?" Such is the language of a gospel-repentance.

You cannot but see the great distinction, and even contrariety, between a guilty flight of soul *from* God, like Adam after his fall, and a humbling, self-condemning flight *to* God's pardoning mercy, like the prodigal, when returning to his Father's house; between legal, slavish, self-righteous endeavors to atone for our sins and make our peace with God, and repairing only to the blood of Christ for cleansing from all sin; between mourning for our guilt and danger, and mourning for our sins as they are against God, against a precious Savior, against infinite mercy and love; and in a word, between attempting a new life by the strength of our own resolutions and endeavors, and looking only to the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ for grace and strength, as well as pardon and freedom from condemnation.

3. Love for God and His Law

A *legal* repentance flows from an *aversion to God and His holy Law*, but *evangelical* repentance from *love to both.*

The distress, the terror, and amazement that awakened sinners are under, arise from their dreadful apprehensions of God and His terrible justice. They know they have greatly provoked Him and are afraid of His wrath, and therefore want some covert[4] where they may hide themselves from His presence. They might before, perhaps, have some pleasing apprehensions of God, while they considered Him as being all-mercy without justice, and while they could hope for pardon and yet live in their sins. But now they have some sense of His holiness and justice, He appears an infinite enemy and therefore most terrible to their souls. They are consulting, indeed, some way to be at peace with Him, because they are afraid the controversy will issue in their destruction. They resolve upon new obedience, from the same motives that slaves obey their severe tyrannical masters, while the rule of their obedience is directly contrary to the bent, bias, and disposition of their souls. Were the penalty of the Law taken away, their aversion to it would quickly appear and they would soon embrace their beloved lusts with the same pleasure and delight as formerly. This is frequently exemplified in those who wear off their convictions and reformations together, and notwithstanding all their former religious appearances, discover the alienation of their hearts to God and His Law by their sinful lives, and as the apostle expressed it, show themselves enemies in their minds by wicked works (Col 1:21).

But on the contrary, the sincere gospel-penitent sees an admirable beauty and excellency in a life of holiness, and therefore groans after higher attainments in it. He is sensible how much he has transgressed the Law of God, how very far he is departed from the purity and holiness of the divine nature. This is the burden of his soul. Hence it is that he often walks in heaviness and waters his couch with tears. He mourns, not because the Law is so strict or the penalty so severe, for he esteems the Law to be holy and the commandment holy, and just, and good (Rom 7:12). But he mourns that though “the law is spiritual,” he is “carnal, sold under sin” (Rom 7:14). He mourns that his nature is so contrary to God, that his practice is so contrary to His will, and that he can make no better progress in mortifying the deeds of the flesh, in regulating his affections, appetites, and passions, and in living to God. He breathes with the same earnestness after sanctification as after freedom from wrath. He does not want to have the Law bend to his

corruptions, but to have his heart and life fully subjected to the Law and will of God. There is nothing he so much desires as freedom from sin, proficiency in faith and holiness, and a life of fellowship with God.

"Oh," says the penitent believer, "what a wicked heart have I, that is so estranged from the holy nature of God and from His righteous Law! What a guilty wretch have I been, who have walked so contrary to the glorious God, have trampled upon His excellent perfections, violated His holy Law, and made so near an approach even to the nature of the devil! Oh, for the cleansing efficacy of the blood of Christ and the renewing influences of His Holy Spirit to purify this sink of pollution and to sanctify these depraved affections of my soul! 'Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me' (Psa 51:10). Let me be a partaker of the divine nature and be brought near to God, whatever else be denied me! 'O that my ways were directed to keep thy statutes!'" (Psa 119:5). Such are the aspirations of sincere repentance.

Thus the legal penitent looks upon God with dread, terror, and aversion of soul—the evangelical penitent mourns his distance from Him and longs to be more transformed into His image. The one still loves his sins in his heart, though he mourns that there is a Law to punish them—the other hates all his sins without reserve and groans under the burden of them, because they are contrary to God and His holy Law. The obedience of the one is by mere constraint—the imperfections of the other are matter of continual grief, and he is constantly longing and striving after greater degrees of grace and holiness. The one can find no inward and abiding complacency in the service of God—the other runs in the way of His commandments with delight and takes more pleasure in obedience than in anything else.

4. A Trust in God's Mercy

A *legal* repentance ordinarily flows from *discouragement and despondency*, but an *evangelical* repentance is accompanied with a confiding *trust in God's mercy.*

I have already considered how a legal repentance is excited and maintained by terrors of conscience and fearful apprehensions of the wrath of God. Some indeed, by their external reformations, pacify conscience and cry peace to their souls, but while their concern continues, their desponding fears are the very life of it. They are afraid that God will never pardon and

accept such rebels as they have been and though they dare not neglect duty, they come with horror into the presence of God, as to an inexorable[5] judge, and have nothing to keep their souls from sinking into despair but their good designs and endeavors, which yet are too defective to give them comfortable hope. And what is all this but a most ungrateful undervaluing the blood of Christ, limiting the goodness and mercy of God, and an implicit denying the truth of the whole gospel of God our Savior?

On the other hand, though the true gospel-penitent may have a deeper impression of the greatness of his guilt than even the awakened, terrified legalist himself, yet he dare not despair of God's mercy. A fear and jealousy of our own sincerity may be consistent with true repentance and perhaps sometimes serve to further its progress, yet all doubts of the faithfulness of the gospel promises, of the extensiveness of the divine mercy, and fears of our exclusion from the gospel offer, all apprehensions of our not being elected or our having sinned away the day of grace or sinned against the Holy Ghost, and all imaginations that our sins are so circumstanced as not to admit of pardoning mercy are inconsistent with the actings of a true repentance. A sincere penitent looks over the highest mountains which are raised before him by the greatness of his sins, his own misgiving heart, or the temptations of Satan, into an ocean of infinite goodness and mercy. Thither he will fly and there he will hope, let his case appear ever so dark, and though everything seems to make against him. And the more lively and comfortable his hope is, the more he is humbled and abased for his sins, and the more vigorous are his endeavors after a life of new obedience.

"I confess," says the truly penitent soul, "that my sins are like the stars of the firmament and like the sand on the seashore for multitude, that they are of a scarlet and crimson dye, and that it is of the infinite patience of God that such a guilty wretch is out of hell. But yet, great and dreadfully aggravated as are my sins, the merit of a Redeemer's blood is sufficient to atone for them all and infinite mercy is still greater than my greatest sins. I will therefore cast my guilty soul at the footstool of a sovereign God and rely on infinite mercy through a Redeemer. I will depend upon the blood of Christ, which cleanseth from all sin. Oh, how will mercy triumph over such sins as mine! How great glory will God bring to the riches of His infinite grace in the salvation of such a sinner as I, if ever I am saved! How will

heaven ring with eternal hallelujahs on my account! Surely I have sinned enough already. Let me no more add to the number and guilt of my sins by distrust of God's mercy or by doubting the sincerity of His invitations."

5. The Daily Exercise of the True Christian

A *legal* repentance is *temporary*, wearing off with the convictions of conscience which occasion it, but an *evangelical* repentance is the *daily exercise* of the true Christian.

We have sad and numerous instances of those who, for a while, appear under the greatest remorse for sin and yet quickly wear off all their impressions, and return to the same course of impiety which occasioned their distress and terror, and thereby declare to the world that their goodness, like Ephraim's, was but as "a morning cloud and as the early dew" (Hos 6:4). And beside these, there seem to be some who quiet conscience and speak peace to their souls from their having been in distress and terror for their sins, from their reformation of some grosser[6] immoralities, and from a formal course of duty. They have repented, they think, and therefore conclude themselves at peace with God and seem to have no great care or concern about either their former impieties or their daily transgressions.

They conclude themselves in a converted state and are therefore easy, careless, and secure. These may think and perhaps speak loftily of their experiences. They may be blown up with joyful apprehensions of their safe state, but have no impressions of their sins, no mourning after pardon, no groaning under the burden of a wicked heart, imperfect duties, and renewed provocations against God. They perform their duties in a careless manner, with a trifling, remiss[7] frame of soul, while the great concerns of an unseen, eternal world are but little in their minds and all their religion is a mere cold formality. They maintain the form, but are unconcerned about the power of godliness.

On the other hand, a saving *evangelical* repentance involves a *continual self-abasement and abhorrence of all sin*, both in the heart and life. The true penitent does not forget his past sins and grow careless and unconcerned about them, as soon as he obtains peace in his conscience and a comforting hope that he is reconciled to God; but the clearer evidences he obtains of

the divine favor, the more does he loathe, abhor, and condemn himself for sin. The more vile does he seem in his own eyes and the more aggravated and enormous do his past sins appear. A sense of pardoning mercy makes Paul appear to himself the chief of sinners (1Ti 1:15) and speak of himself as a pattern of hope to all that shall come after him (1Ti 1:16).

The true penitent not only continues to abhor himself on account of his past guilt and defilement, but finds daily cause to renew his repentance before God. He finds so much deadness, formality, and hypocrisy in his duties, so much carnality, worldly-mindedness, and unbelief in his heart, so much prevalence of his sinful affections, appetites and passions, and so many foils by the sin that easily besets him, that he cannot but groan, being burdened, while he is in this tabernacle (2Co 5:4).

Repentance, therefore, is the daily continued exercise of the Christian. “Have I hope,” says the penitent soul, “that God has pardoned my sins? What an instance of pardoning mercy is this! How adorable is that wonderful grace which has plucked such a brand out of the fire! And am I still daily offending against such mercy and love? Am I yet doing so little for Him, who has done so much for me? Ah, vile, sinful heart! Ah, base ingratitude to such amazing goodness! Oh, for more victory over my corruptions, for more thankfulness for such mercies, for more spirituality and heavenly-mindedness! What need have I, every day, to have this polluted soul washed in the blood of Christ and to repair to the glorious Advocate with the Father for the benefit of His intercession! Not a step can I take in my spiritual progress without fresh supplies from the fountain of grace and strength, and yet how often am I provoking Him to withdraw His influences in Whom is all my hope and confidence! ‘O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?’ (Rom 7:24).” Thus the true penitent goes with his face Zionward, mourning as he goes. And thus in his highest attainments of comfort and joy will he find cause to be deeply humbled before God and to wrestle with Him for renewed pardon, and new supplies of strengthening and quickening grace.

The difference between these two sorts of penitents is like that between the running of water in the paths after a shower and the streams flowing from a living fountain—a legal repentance lasting no longer than the terrors

which occasion it, but an evangelical repentance being a continued war with sin.

6. A Total Change of Heart and Life

A *legal* repentance does at most produce only a *partial and external reformation*, but an *evangelical* repentance is a *total change* of heart and life, *a universal turning* from sin to God.

As some of the grosser iniquities most commonly lead the way to that distress and terror which is the life of a legal and insincere repentance, so a reformation of those sins too frequently wears off the impression, and gives peace and rest to the troubled conscience, without any further change. Or at best, there will be some darling lusts retained, some right hand or right eye spared, some sweet morsel rolled under the tongue. If the legal penitent be afraid of the sins of commission, he may still live in the omission or the careless performance of known duty. Or if he be more forward in the duties of God's immediate worship, he may still live in acts of injustice, strife, and uncharitableness toward men. If he shows some zeal and activity in the service of God, he will yet, perhaps, have his heart and affections inordinately attached to the world and pursue it as the object of his chief desire and delight. If he avoids all open sins, he yet little regards the sins of his heart, but lives in envy, malice, pride, carnality, unbelief, or some other such heart-defiling sin. To finish his character, whatever seeming progress he may make in religion, his *heart* is "not right in the sight of God" (Act 8:21), but is still going after his idols, still estranged from the power of godliness.

The character of the *sincere penitent* is directly contrary to this. He finds, indeed, continued occasion to lament the great imperfections of his heart and life, and accordingly seeks renewed pardon and cleansing in the blood of Christ. But though he has not "already attained, either were already perfect" (Phi 3:12), he is pressing toward perfection (Phi 3:14; Heb 6:1). He is watching, striving against all his corruptions, aiming at and endeavoring after further conformity to God, "in all holy conversation and godliness" (2Pe 3:11). He is never satisfied with a partial reformation, with external duty or with anything short of a life of vital piety. He does not renounce one lust and retain another, content himself with the duties of the first table of the Law and neglect those of the second, nor quiet himself in a life of mere

formal godliness. Nor can he rest till he rejoices in the testimony of his "conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, [he has] had [his] conversation in the world" (2Co 1:12). All the actings of his mind, as well as his external conduct, fall under his strictest inspection, and he is ever earnest to approve himself to Him who knows his thoughts afar off (Psa 139:2).

His reformation extends not only to the devotions of the church, but of his family and his closet. Not only to his conversation, but to his thoughts and affections. Not only to the worship of God, but to the duties of every relation he sustains among men; and in a word, his repentance produces heavenly-mindedness, humility, meekness, charity, patience, forgiving of injuries, self-denial, and is accompanied with all other fruits and graces of the blessed Spirit. "It is the desire of my soul," says the sincere penitent, "to keep the way of the Lord and never depart from my God. I would refrain my feet from every evil way and 'walk within my house with a perfect heart' (Psa 101:2). I know I have to do with a God who trieth the heart. I would, therefore, set the Lord always before me and serve Him with a perfect heart and a willing mind."

A legal repentance is an external reformation only, destitute of all the graces of the blessed Spirit. True repentance is a change of the heart, of the will, and affections, as well as of the outward conversation—a change which is accompanied with all the fruits and graces of the Spirit of God. The one aims at just so much religion as will keep the mind easy and calm the ruffles of an awakened conscience. The other aims at a holy, humble, watchful, and spiritual walk with God and rests in no degree of attainments whatsoever.

Reader, I have thus laid before you some of the distinguishing marks of true repentance—not to gratify curiosity or as a subject of useless speculation—but that renouncing all sin and casting yourself on the mercy of Christ, you may, through the sanctifying influences of the Holy Spirit, exercise and practice that repentance which is unto life, not to be repented of (2Co 7:10).

The Marks of Saving Faith

Introduction

That men may doctrinally believe the truth of the gospel without a saving faith in Christ and without an interest in Him is a truth clearly taught in the Scriptures, and abundantly evident from our own experience and observation.

"What then," you ask, "is the *plain distinction between a SAVING and a DEAD faith*?" I answer:

1. A Sensible Impression of Gospel Truth

A *true and saving faith* involves a *realizing and sensible impression* of the truth of the gospel, whereas a *dead* faith is but a mere *speculative* belief of it. Faith is by the apostle described: "the *substance* of things hoped for, the *evidence* of things not seen" (Heb 11:1), that which brings eternal things into a near view and presents them to the soul as *realities.* Hence the true believer, when he is wearied out of all his false refuges, emptied of all hope in himself, and brought to see and feel the danger and misery of his state by nature, is then brought in earnest to look to Jesus as the only refuge and safety to his soul. He then sees the incomparable excellency of a precious Savior, breathes with ardent desire after Him, repairs to Him as the only fountain of hope, and rejoices in Christ Jesus, having no confidence in the flesh (Phi 3:3).

Now, the blessed Savior and His glorious salvation is the subject of his serious, frequent, and delightful contemplation. Now, an interest in Christ is valued by him above all the world and he is in earnest to obtain and preserve good evidence that his hope in Christ is well-founded. Now, the favor of God and the concerns of the eternal world appear of greater importance than everything else. He now mourns under a sense of his former sins, groans under the burden of remaining corruption and imperfection, and with earnest diligence follows after holiness.

In a word, he has such an impression of these invisible realities that whatever temptations, desertions, or prevailing corruptions he may conflict with, nothing can so banish the great concern from his mind as to make him slothful and indifferent about it. Nothing can quiet him short of having his

heart and affections engaged in the things of God and his appetites and passions under the governing influence of “the law of the Spirit of life” (Rom 8:2).

On the other hand, a *dead faith* often leaves the man secure and careless, trifling and indifferent in the concerns of the eternal world. These appear to him but distant futurities, which do not engage his solemn attention, nor give any effectual check to his inordinate appetites and passions. Or if (as it sometimes happens) any awakening dispensation alarms the conscience of such a person, drives him to external reformation and makes him more careful and watchful in his conduct, he has yet no sensible impressive view of the way of salvation by Jesus Christ. He either endeavors to pacify the justice of God and his own conscience by his religious performances, and so lulls himself asleep again in his former security, or else continues to agonize under most dark, dreadful, and unworthy apprehensions of the glorious God, as if He were implacable and irreconcilable to sinners as himself. Such a person would readily acknowledge, but he cannot feel this blessed truth, that Christ Jesus is a sufficient Savior. He allows it to be truth, but it is to him such a truth as has no effectual influence upon his heart and life. Though he owns this to be true, yet he does not humbly and joyfully venture his soul and his eternal interest upon it.

Thus a true faith realizes the great truths of the gospel by a lively and feeling discovery of them, giving “the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2Co 4:6). A false faith gives but a lifeless and inactive assent to these important truths. The one influences the heart and affections, and by beholding with open face, as in a glass, the glory of the Lord, changes the soul into the same image, from glory to glory (2Co 3:18). The other only swims in the head and leaves the heart in a state either of security or despondency. The one is an abiding principle of divine life, from which flow rivers of living water. The other is transient and unsteady, and leaves the soul short of any spiritual principle of life and activity.

2. An Embrace of the Terms of the Gospel

A *saving faith cordially embraces the terms* of the gospel, while a *dead* faith is but a *cold assent to its truth*. Accordingly, a true faith is in the gospel described to be a receiving of the Lord Jesus Christ. “But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God” (Joh

1:12). Our blessed Redeemer is freely offering Himself and His saving benefits to poor perishing sinners. Our compliance with and acceptance of the gospel offer are the terms of our interest in Him. They, therefore, and they only, are the true believers in Christ, who heartily acquiesce[8] in the glorious method of a sinner's recovery from ruin by Jesus Christ and heartily accept an offered Savior in all His offices and benefits.

A true believer, convinced of his natural blindness and ignorance, repairs to the Lord Jesus to enlighten his mind, to make his way plain, and to give him a clear and spiritual acquaintance with the great things of his eternal peace. The true believer has found, by experience, his utter incapacity to procure the divine favor by any reformations or moral performances, and that he has cause to be ashamed and confounded in his own sight for the great defects of his highest attainments in religion. He therefore welcomes Christ to his soul, as the Lord his righteousness, repairs to Him, and to Him only, for "wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption (1Co 1:30), and builds all his hope of acceptance with God upon what Christ has done and suffered for him.

The true believer is heavy laden with the sinfulness of his nature and longs for entire victory over his corrupt affections, appetites, and passions, for pure spirituality in his duties and for perfection in holiness. He therefore heartily desires and accepts the Lord Jesus as his *Sanctifier* as well as *Savior*, and earnestly seeks the renewing, strengthening, and quickening influences of His Spirit. The true believer feels the necessity of this blessed Savior in all His offices, relations, and characters. He sees Him to be just such a Savior as his soul wants and therefore cheerfully accepts a whole Christ with his whole heart, without any desire of other terms of acceptance with God.

He may entertain dark apprehensions of himself, and complain heavily of the great defects of his faith and holiness, but he can never entertain hard thoughts of the gospel scheme, nor complain of the terms of salvation. These appear to him the wisdom of God and the power of God (Eph 3:10; Rom 1:16; 1Co 1:24), and every way suited to the exigencies[9] of his state and the desires of his soul.

But a dead faith never brings the soul to consent to the terms of the gospel without some exception and reserve. The unsound believer may imagine that he accepts the Lord Jesus as his Savior, but what is the foundation and encouraging motive of his imaginary compliance with the gospel offer? Upon an impartial inquiry, it will always be found to be something *in himself*—his good affections, duties, moralities, reformations, promises, or purposes. He endeavors by these to recommend himself to God and on account of these he hopes to find acceptance through Christ. Or if he feels ever so strong a desire of salvation by Christ, yet he is driven to it only by *fear* and *self-love*, and will renew his affections to his other lords as soon as his awakening apprehensions are worn off.

He does not feel his want[10] of Christ's enlightening and enlivening influences, for he knows not what they mean. He submits not to the righteousness of Christ (Rom 10:3-4), for he is still endeavoring to procure acceptance with God by some good qualifications of his own, some duties which he performs, or some progress which he makes, or designs to make, in his religious course. He cannot submit to Christ as his *Lord*, for there is some slothful indulgence which he cannot forego, some darling lust which he cannot part with, some worldly idol which his heart is set upon, or some difficult duty from which he must excuse himself.

There is nothing more apparent than the *distinction* between these two sorts of believers. The one comes to Christ destitute of all hope and help in himself, but sees enough in Christ to answer all his wants. The other is full in himself. The one looks to Christ to be his light. The other leans to his own understanding. The one makes mention of Christ's righteousness and that only. The other hopes for an interest in Christ and His salvation on account of his own attainments and, in effect, expects justification by his own righteousness for Christ's sake.

The one brings a guilty, polluted, unworthy soul to the blessed Redeemer, without any qualification to recommend it, expecting from Him alone all the supplies he wants—repairing to Him for gold tried in the fire that he may be rich; for eye-salve that he may see; and for white raiment that he may be clothed (Rev 3:18). The other ordinarily raises his expectations from Christ in proportion to his own imaginary qualifications and good disposition. The one desires salvation by Christ from pollution as

well as from guilt. The other has a reserve of some deceitful lust and hugs some Delilah in his bosom which he cannot be willing to part with. In fine,[11] the one is willing to accept of the Lord Jesus Christ upon any terms. The other will not come to Christ but upon terms of his own stating.

3. A Humble Trust in Christ

A *saving* faith is a *humble trust in Christ, as the Author of our salvation*, but a *dead* faith always builds upon some *false* foundation or upon none at all. A *saving* faith is often described in Scripture by a trusting in the Lord, committing our way to Him, resting on Him (Psa 37:3, 5, 7), and suchlike expressions, which suppose a humble confidence in the abundant sufficiency of the Redeemer's merits and the boundless riches of God's mercy in Him. Accordingly, the true believer, in his greatest darkness and discouragement ventures his soul and eternal interests in the hands of Christ. His past sins may appear in most frightful forms, vastly numerous, dreadfully aggravated; still he humbly trusts that the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin (1Jo 1:7). He may be oppressed with the sense of the defects of his duties and religious attainments, but he yet sees *righteousness* enough in Christ for a safe foundation of confidence.

This, and this alone, keeps his soul from sinking, answers the clamors of conscience, and disposes him to rely upon the free grace and mercy of God. He may be distressed with the prevalence of his inward corruptions. He may, in an unguarded hour, be surprised and foiled by the power of his sinful appetites or passions, or by some unexpected temptation, but even in this case, his refuge is in that blessed "advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous" (1Jo 2:1). And though, from sad experience of his own dreadful imperfections, he may be ready to question his state and to fear lest he be deceived, he ventures that also in the hands of Christ and depends upon Him, that He will not leave him to a soul-ruining deceit, but will guide him by His counsel and afterward receive him to glory (Psa 73:24). Such a dependence upon Christ the believer ordinarily exercises in his darkest hours. But when he is in the more lively exercise of grace, he knows whom he has believed and that He is able to keep that which he has committed to Him against that day (2Ti 1:12). With this confidence, he can even "glory in tribulations" (Rom 5:3). He can cheerfully look death itself in the face and triumph over the king of terrors.

On the contrary, the *false believer* ordinarily raises his expectations and encouragements from something *in himself*. His good frames, his joys and comforts, his endeavors or designs to serve God are what he has to depend upon, and upon these he does and will depend, and perhaps will never see his mistake until it be too late. Some of these, indeed, do not find even this false foundation to build upon, but quiet their souls with a loose and general hope. They believe that God is merciful and that Jesus Christ came to save sinners. Or they hope they shall some time or other obtain grace, though they find none at present.

Thus many go on quietly in their sins, dwell at ease and cry peace to their souls, until the flood of God's displeasure sweeps away their refuge of lies. Others there are who, by means of a better education or from some awakening sense of guilt and danger, cannot but see that these beds are too short to stretch themselves upon and therefore their faith is their torment. They believe in Christ as their Judge, but not as their Savior. They are harassed with fear and anxiety whenever conscience is awake to any serious apprehension of a future world. Thus they live under a "spirit of bondage" (Rom 8:15), never venturing their souls upon the pardoning mercy of God and the infinite merit of the Redeemer's blood.

Nothing can be more apparent than the difference between these two sorts of believers. The *one*, in all his straits, fears, difficulties, and dangers, looks to Christ as to a sure foundation of safety, confidence, and hope. And though he may at some times doubt his interest in Him, he can at no time deliberately place his confidence or expect safety for his soul anywhere else. The *other* leaves the soul asleep or else seeks rest only from the righteousness of the Law, from desires and endeavors of his own, and must either find comfort there or nowhere.

The *one* ventures all his interests and all his hopes of grace and glory upon the faithfulness of the gospel promises and the infinite mercy of God in Christ. The *other* sees not how to quiet the accusations of his conscience and obtain qualifications for salvation by depending upon a naked promise.

In a word, the *one* can see safety and security in leaving all the concerns, both of time and eternity, in the hands of Christ. The *other*, being ignorant of the righteousness of Christ, must make the righteousness of the Law his refuge or else live without hope (Rom 10:3).

4. Submission to Christ

A *saving* faith *subjects the soul to Christ*, but a *dead* faith leaves the soul *unrenewed and disobedient.* A true faith purifies the heart (Act 15:9) and overcomes the world (1Jo 5:4), and he that hath this hope in Christ "purifieth himself, even as he is pure" (1Jo 3:3). A true faith unites the soul to Christ, as the branch is united to the vine, and thereby enables the man to bring forth much fruit (Joh 15:4-5). The true believer hates every false way. He mourns over and watches, strives and prays against all the corruptions of his nature, and all the imperfections of his heart and life. There is no known sin which he indulges himself in; no known duty which he willingly neglects; no difficulty which can deter him from following Christ; no temptation which can allure him from endeavoring a conformity to the whole will of God. Not as though he had already attained or were already perfect (Phi 3:12), he has daily cause to lament his defects, but yet he can truly say that he delights in the Law of the Lord after the inward man (Rom 7:22), and accordingly endeavors, in every station and relation, in all his conduct both to God and man, as well in secret as openly, to live a life of conformity to God in all the duties He requires of him.

But on the other hand, the seeming obedience of a *false believer* is very partial, defective, temporary, and but a matter of force and constraint upon the appetites and affections. If, with Herod, he reforms and does "many things" (Mar 6:20), yet he retains some darling corruption unmortified or leaves some duty neglected. Or if by the lashes of an awakened conscience, he is driven for a time to a more general reformation from all known sin and to outward attendance upon all known duty, he finds no inward complacency in it, and therefore is like a dull[12] horse that will be kept on his way no longer than he feels a spur in his side.

Here then is a conspicuous difference between a true and false believer. The *one* has a principle of holiness, a delight in it, and an earnest and continuing desire after further proficiency[13] in the divine life. The *other* aims only at so much holiness as he thinks will save him from hell, but cares for nothing more. And what he has is excited by fear or constrained by force, contrary to the real tendency and bias of his soul. In fine, the *one* makes it the endeavor of his life to approve himself to a pure, holy, and

omniscient God. The *other* rests in endeavors to quiet conscience and silence its clamors.

5. Love to God and Man

A *saving* faith works by *love to God and man*, but a *dead* faith always falls short of both. The apostle assures us that if we have all faith, so that we could remove mountains and have not charity [or love], we are nothing (1Co 13:2). “Faith…worketh by love” (Gal 5:6); and the true believer keeps himself in the love of God, looking to the mercy of the Lord Jesus Christ for eternal life (Jude 1:21). He delights in contemplating the perfections of the divine nature. His meditations upon God are sweet and the thoughts of Him precious to his soul. If he can have the glorious God for his portion and live in the light of His countenance, he can be content with straits and difficulties, trials and afflictions. He takes peculiar pleasure in the ordinances of God and all the appointed means of a near approach into His special presence, and often enjoys sensible communion with Him. He heavily complains of his own deadness or worldliness, which separates between God and his soul, and can find no true rest or satisfaction till he returns to Him.

This is the ordinary course and tenor of the believer’s life, and if at any time he grow forgetful of God and have the prevalence of a dead, carnal, worldly frame in his soul, this darkens the evidence of his state, robs him of comfort and peace, and will at length put him upon vigorous and active endeavors for obtaining a revival of his languishing graces by a fresh supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ. Thus, the true believer has the love of God dwelling in him.

And from the same principle, he likewise loves his *neighbor* as himself. He maintains a life of justice, meekness, kindness, and beneficence[14] toward all men, bears injuries, is ready to forgive, entertains the best opinion of men’s states and actions that the case will allow, and endeavors to live in the exercise of “love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness” (Gal 5:22-23). And as he thus maintains a love of *benevolence*[15] to all men, he has, in a special manner, a love of *complacence*[16] toward those who bear marks of the divine image. These he delights in because [they are] the children of God. He loves them for their

heavenly Father's sake, as well as for those gracious qualifications which makes the righteous "more excellent than his neighbor" (Pro 12:26). He loves the company of the saints—these are the excellent in whom is all his delight (Psa 16:3). He loves their piety and studies an imitation of them wherein they follow Christ and studies to equal, if not excel them in their highest improvements in religion. He loves their persons and hopes to join in concert with them in the eternal praises of God.

The highest attainments of a *dead faith* fall short of every part of this description. The false believer may imagine that he has something of *love to God* in him, but upon a just view, it will appear that it is only to an *idol*, the creature of his own imagination. If he seems to love God under an apprehension of His goodness and mercy, he yet dreads Him on account of His justice and has an inward aversion to His purity and holiness, so that the object of his love is an imaginary being of infinite mercy without either justice or holiness. If, from the alarms of conscience or the emotions of his natural affections, he takes some pleasure in religious exercises, this pleasure is short and transient, like the principle whence it flows. He soon sinks into carelessness and forgetfulness of God, and has his affections quickly engaged in worldly and sensual pursuits. And however he may deceive himself in any supposed progress in religion, he can never satisfy his soul with having God for his portion. He can never, of course, keep up a life of spiritual-mindedness and delight in God.

The same defects are likewise found in the unsound believer with respect to his love to his *neighbor*. If he be not (as is too commonly found) unjust and deceitful, wrathful and contentious, hard-hearted and unkind, bitter and censorious, revengeful and implacable, yet he never loves the children of God as such. Whatever love he may have to any such from intimate acquaintance or from their being in the same cause, party, or persuasion with himself (which is indeed no more than the exercise of selfishness), he never loves the image of Christ in every sect or party in whom he finds it, nor can he love a conformity to the children of God in the holiness of their hearts and lives.

Here then you see a difference in these two kinds of believers. The *one* loves God above all things; and indeed, he that does not love Him with a supreme love does not love Him as God, and consequently does not love

Him at all. But the *other* seeks the favor of God from no other motive but fear of His displeasure or some desire of happiness, and not from a sense of the excellency of His glorious perfections. The *one* loves what God loves, hates what He hates, and is satisfied with himself only in proportion to his conformity to God. The *other* retains his delight in his lusts and idols, and repairs to God because he dare not do otherwise. The *one*, like God Himself, takes pleasure in doing good to all men and takes special delight in all, without distinction, who are partakers of the divine nature. The *other*, at the best, has his love to man influenced by selfish principles.

6. Humility

A *saving* faith *humbles the soul* and makes it low and vile in its own eyes, whereas a *dead* faith tends to *exalt* the mind with vain apprehensions of some sufficiency or excellence of its own. The true believer has a deep sense of the greatness and aggravations of his sins, loathes himself on account of them, and adores the long-suffering of God toward him that has kept him out of hell. He is so sensible of the great defects of his duties, of the sinfulness of his heart, the imperfections of his life, and his utter unworthiness of any favor from God that he cannot but entertain a most deep and sensible impression that it must be a wonderful display of mere sovereign grace if he obtains salvation. It is always true that the greater manifestation of God's love is made to his soul, the greater sense he has of his own nothingness and unworthiness, and the more he admires and adores the astonishing riches of free distinguishing grace to such a guilty, polluted creature as he is. Though the true believer lives in the exercise of that charity toward others which "thinketh no evil….[but] believeth all things, hopeth all things" (1Co 13:5, 7), he yet always finds occasion to condemn himself and to censure his own inward affections and outward performances, religious duties and moral conduct, and therefore cannot but esteem others better than himself. He finds occasion of renewed repentance every day. He every day finds new cause to complain of himself and new cause to commit a sinful and unworthy soul to the mere mercy of God in Christ.

On the contrary, a *dead faith* always either *puffs up the mind* with a haughty, pleasing apprehension of its own attainments, makes it censorious and uncharitable, and inspires it with that proud pharisaical language, "I

thank thee, that I am not as other men are" (Luk 18:11). Or else, from the same haughty principle, [it] either leaves the soul *secure* and *easy* in its good designs and purposes of future repentance, or *impatient* and *desponding*, through want of those good qualifications which it supposes necessary.

Conclusion

And now, to sum up the whole in a short and easy view. If you have good evidence of a *saving faith* in Christ, you must have such a *sensible impression* of the truth of the gospel as makes you feel the importance of your eternal concerns and your necessity of an interest in Christ, and puts your soul upon earnest and active desires after Him as your only hope and safety. You must heartily *approve the way of salvation* which the gospel reveals and heartily consent to the terms on which it is offered. You must *accept of Christ as a free gift*, bringing nothing with you of your own to recommend you to His acceptance. You must accept Him as your only righteousness to justify you before God and as your Prince as well as Savior, consenting as well to be governed as to be saved, to be sanctified as to be justified by Him. And as you must receive Him, so you must confidently trust in Him alone, as a sure foundation of safety and hope, and as a continuing fountain of all supplies of grace to your soul, whatever difficulties and discouragements you may meet with. And you must have this standing evidence of the sincerity of your faith that it *purifies your heart* and brings you to an earnest endeavor after habitual holiness of heart and life, that it works by *love to God and man*, and keeps up in your soul at the same time *an abasing sense of your own vileness* and utter unworthiness. This is that precious faith to which alone the promises of the gospel are made.

To conclude with a still shorter view. When a realizing belief of the gospel and a despair of all help in yourself brings you to repair to Christ as your only safety and to venture your soul, guilty as it is, upon the merit of His obedience, the sufficiency of His grace and strength, and the faithfulness of His promises, and heartily to submit to His rule and government, you cannot fail of the sanctifying influences of His Spirit to qualify you for the eternal inheritance, for "the Amen, the faithful and true

witness” (Rev 3:14) has given you His word for it that if you thus come to Him, He will in no wise cast you out (Joh 6:37).

I might sum up this important point in a yet shorter view. If you so heartily approve of and delight in the gospel way of salvation by Christ alone that you can cheerfully venture your soul and your eternal interests upon it, as the sure and only foundation of hope and safety, you have then true faith. And in this case, He that has bestowed such grace upon you will carry on His own work in your soul and will at last present you faultless before His throne with exceeding joy (Jude 1:24).

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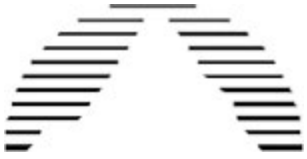
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[←1]

remonstrate – exhibit or present strong reasons against an act; expostulate.

[←2]

effected – produced.

[←3]

whence – from where.

[←4]

covert – shelter; hiding-place.

[←5]

inexorable – rigidly severe; incapable of being persuaded to mercy.

[←6]

grosser – greater.

[←7]

remiss – slack; negligent.

[←8]

acquiesce – rest satisfied.

[←9]

exigencies - pressing needs; urgent needs.

[←10]

want – lack; need.

[←11]

fine – short.

[←12]

dull – sluggish; without life or spirit.

[←13]

proficiency – advance; progress.

[←14]

beneficence – active goodness, kindness, or charity.

[←15]

benevolence – good will.

[←16]

complacence – pleasure; satisfaction.