

UPDATED TO MODERN ENGLISH

A silhouette of a person stands on a tiled floor, looking towards the right. The floor is composed of large, light-colored tiles. The text 'HUMAN NATURE IN ITS FOURFOLD STATE' is written in large, stylized, multi-colored letters (green and yellow) on the floor, appearing to be part of the environment. The person's shadow is cast on the floor to their right.

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Innocence. Nature. Grace. Glory.

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Human Nature in its Fourfold State

by Thomas Boston

STATE I

THE STATE OF INNOCENCE

Look, this is what I have discovered: God made humans upright, but they have sought out many schemes. - Ecclesiastes 7:29:

There are four essential things that everyone who desires to enter heaven must know: 1. What humanity was like in a state of innocence, as created by God. 2. What humans are like in a state of corrupt nature, as they have undone themselves. 3. What humans must become in a state of grace, being created in Christ Jesus for good works, if they are to partake in the inheritance of the saints in light. 4. What humans will be in their eternal state, as judged by God, either perfectly happy or completely miserable, and that for eternity. These are weighty matters that pertain to practical godliness, which most people, including many professing believers in these times, are

completely disconnected from. Therefore, under divine guidance, I intend to explain and apply these things.

I will begin with the first point, the State of Innocence. By considering how humans were once like a perfectly crafted palace, we can better grasp the impact of their fall. We can also appreciate the incomparable Person whom the Father has appointed as the restorer of what was broken. Moreover, we can firmly resolve to follow the path that leads to the city with unshakeable foundations.

In the text, three aspects are presented:

1. The state of innocence in which humans were created: "God made humans upright." Here, "humans" refers to our first parents, the original couple who are the ancestors of all humanity. They can be found in Genesis 5:1-2, "When God created humans, he made them in the likeness of God. He created them male and female and blessed them," and they were known collectively as Adam. The same word is used in our text. In this sense, humans were created perfectly, in harmony with the nature of God, whose work is flawless. There was no imperfection or corruption, neither in their body nor in their soul. They were created "upright," meaning their souls were aligned with the will and law of God, without any irregularity. By their very nature, they were directed towards God as their ultimate purpose. This straight inclination was symbolized by the erect posture of their bodies, a feature unique to humans among all living creatures. Just as David was described as a man after God's own heart in the Gospel, Adam was likewise a righteous and morally good man in the legal sense. God created him in this manner; he did not make him first and then grant him righteousness. Righteousness was an intrinsic part of his

creation, so that the moment he became a human, he was also a righteous human—morally good—with the very breath of life infused into him.

2. The fallen state of humanity: "But they have sought out many schemes." Adam and Eve deviated from their state of rest in God and sought their own means to improve their condition, ultimately leading to their ruin. Their downfall was self-inflicted; they did not remain as God had made them but embarked on a quest for schemes and inventions that only resulted in their own destruction.
3. The certainty and significance of these matters: "Look, this is what I have discovered." These points are the outcome of thorough investigation and earnest inquiry conducted by the wisest of men. In the preceding verses, Solomon portrays himself in pursuit of goodness in the world, but he found no satisfactory fulfillment in his search. He diligently examined everything, but "Look, this is what I have found," he says. He could not find the true good that would satisfy his inquiry. Goodness was exceedingly rare, like finding one valuable item among thousands. However, even if the experiences of others differ from Solomon's, it does not discredit his discernment or provide a conclusive answer to the question, which will remain unresolved until the final day. Amidst all the uncertainty, one point has been discovered and firmly established: "Look, this," pay close attention to it, for it is a matter deserving deep and serious consideration—the nature of human depravity. This depravity did not originate from God, who "made humans upright," but from humans themselves, who "sought out many schemes."

DOCTRINE—God made humans entirely righteous

This refers to the state of innocence in which God placed humans in the world. The Bible only briefly describes this state compared to the subsequent states since it was short-lived, resulting from humans misusing their free will. I will:

- I. Explore the righteousness of this state in which humans were created.
- II. Present some of the positive accompanying traits and consequences of this state.
- III. Apply the entire teaching.

I. Of Man's Original Righteousness.

I. Original Righteousness of Humans Regarding the righteousness of this state, we should understand that just as the righteousness of God is the supreme standard and uncreated, all created righteousness, whether of humans or angels, is measured against a law and conforms to it. A creature cannot act morally independently from God any more than it can exist naturally apart from Him. A creature, being a creature, must recognize the will of the Creator as the supreme law, for it owes its existence to Him and must live according to His will. However, no law binds until it is revealed. Thus, we can conclude that there was a law to which humans, as rational creatures, were subject from their creation, and this law was made known to them.

The text declares, "God made humans upright." This implies the existence of a law to which humans conformed at their creation. When something is made regular or according to a rule, the rule

itself is presupposed. Therefore, we can understand that this law was none other than the eternal and necessary law of righteousness, which the second Adam fully observed but was opposed by the carnal mind. Some remnants of this law can still be found among the pagans who, even without the law, act according to their own consciences (Romans 2:14). In short, this law is the same one that was later summarized in the Ten Commandments and proclaimed to the Israelites on Mount Sinai—the moral law. Humans' righteousness consisted of conforming to this law. Specifically, two types of conformity were required: habitual righteousness, which involved aligning the faculties and powers of the soul with the law, and actual righteousness, which entailed conforming all actions to the law. God made humans habitually righteous, and it was their responsibility to make themselves actually righteous. God provided the foundation, and humans were to build upon it. In essence, humans' righteousness at their creation consisted of all the faculties and powers of their soul conforming to the moral law. This is what we refer to as Original Righteousness, with three main aspects:

1. Humans possessed a fully enlightened understanding. They had perfect knowledge of the law and their corresponding duties. They were created in God's image and thus lacked no knowledge, which includes an understanding of the law (Colossians 3:10). Such knowledge was necessary to enable them to obey comprehensively, for obedience can only be true obedience when it arises from an understanding of God's commandments. Although Adam did not have the law written on tablets of stone, it was inscribed in his mind, instilled in him at his creation. God imprinted it upon his soul, making him a law unto himself, as indicated by the traces of this knowledge that can still be seen among the pagans (Romans 2:14-15). Given that humans were appointed to represent creation and glorify

God through their works, it is reasonable to believe that Adam possessed extensive knowledge of God's creations. This is evident in Adam's act of naming the animals with names that accurately reflect their nature (Genesis 2:19). To exercise his dominion over the creatures, using them responsibly in accordance with God's will, required a profound understanding of their natures. Furthermore, Adam's perfect knowledge of the law indicates his competence in governing civil affairs, which, in relation to God's law, a righteous person manages with wisdom (Psalm 112:5).

2. Humans' wills were completely aligned with God's will (Ephesians 6:6). There was no corruption or inclination toward evil within their wills, for that would constitute sin. The apostle Paul states, "I would not have known what sin was had it not been for the law. For I would not have known what coveting really was if the law had not said, 'You shall not covet'" (Romans 7:7). A propensity for evil would have contradicted the rectitude and uprightness explicitly mentioned in the text. Humans' wills were directed and naturally inclined toward God and goodness, although subject to change. Their original constitution inclined them to follow the Creator's will just as a shadow follows the body. They were not left in a state of equal balance between good and evil, as that would not constitute uprightness or conformity to the law. The law was impressed upon Adam's soul. In the context of the new covenant, which restores the image of God, this consists of two aspects: (1) Having the law in the mind, signifying knowledge of it, and (2) Writing it in the heart, indicating inclinations of the will that align with the commands of the law (Hebrews 8:10). Therefore, just as the will of the regenerate, when renewed by grace, is naturally inclined toward holiness, fulfilling every aspect of the law's demands, Adam's

will, in his original state, possessed inclinations aligned with everything commanded by the law. If believers, who partake in the divine nature according to Scripture (2 Peter 1:4), possess a will naturally inclined toward holiness, then it follows that Adam's will, when he was created by God, was endowed with inclinations toward everything commanded by the law. While the Gentiles may show some knowledge of the law in their minds (Romans 2:14-15), their hearts are inclined in a different direction. Therefore, the expression used in the present context must encompass not only notions of the mind but also inclinations of the will accompanying them. These inclinations, though tainted by corruption in the regenerate, were pure and untainted in Adam. In short, Adam knew his Master's pleasure regarding his duties, and his will was inclined toward what he knew.

3. Adam's affections were properly ordered, pure, and holy—a necessary aspect of the uprightness in which he was created. The apostle Paul petitions, "May the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God" (2 Thessalonians 3:5), meaning "May the Lord align your hearts" or make them straight in their devotion to loving God. Our text explicitly states that humans were created upright. Ephesians 4:24 affirms that "the new man is created in righteousness and true holiness." In this context, holiness, distinguished from righteousness, refers to the purity and good order of the affections. For instance, Paul urges men to "pray, lifting up holy hands, without anger or disputing" (1 Timothy 2:8). Just as turbulent waters cannot reflect the image of the sun, a heart filled with impure and disorderly affections is not receptive to divine communion. Adam's sensitive desires naturally inclined toward objects pleasing to the senses. Since humans are composed of both body and soul, and since God

created humans to glorify and enjoy Him while using His good creations subordinately, it is evident that Adam possessed natural inclinations toward both spiritual and sensory goods, with the recognition that spiritual good—the ultimate good—held primacy. Therefore, his sensual impulses and inclinations were subject to his reason and will, in perfect harmony with God's will, without any contradiction. Otherwise, he would have been internally divided—his soul naturally inclined toward God as the chief end in the higher part and toward creation as the chief end in the lower part—an impossibility since a person cannot have two ultimate ends simultaneously. Hence, Adam's affections in his original state were pure, free from defilement and disorder, as they consistently submitted to his clear reason and holy will. He possessed the power to carry out his will—a power to do the good he knew ought to be done and to fulfill the entire law of God. Otherwise, God would have required perfect obedience from him, for it would be blasphemy to accuse such a gracious and benevolent God of demanding what is unattainable (Matthew 25:24-26).

Based on the preceding discussion, it is evident that the original righteousness described was both universal and natural, albeit mutable.

1. Universal: This righteousness extended to the entire person and the entire law. It was universal in terms of the person since it permeated every aspect of human nature. No part of their being was flawed when God originally created them, even though it is fragmented now. Adam was holy in his soul, body, and spirit. The soul remained untainted, and its dwelling was kept clean and undefiled. The bodily members were consecrated vessels and instruments of righteousness. A struggle between flesh and

spirit, reason and appetite, or even the slightest inclination to sin or carnal desires within the lower part of the soul would have been incompatible with the uprightness in which Adam was created. Such notions have been invented to conceal the corruption of human nature and obscure the grace of God in Jesus Christ. They resemble the words of fallen Adam, who attributed his sin to God, saying, "The woman you put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it" (Genesis 3:12). Although this righteousness was universal concerning the person, it also extended to the law itself. There was nothing in the law that contradicted Adam's reason and will as God originally made him. Adam's soul was perfectly conformed to the commandments, which, despite being broad, corresponded to his very nature. Therefore, Adam's original righteousness was not only complete in its various aspects but also complete in degree.

2. Natural: While this righteousness was natural to humans, it was not supernatural in their original state. It was not essential to their being, for its loss would not have resulted in the loss of their existence. Rather, it was natural in the sense that humans were created with it, and it was necessary for their state of integrity. Nonetheless, it was mutable—a righteousness that could be lost, as evidenced by the tragic outcome. Adam's will was not absolutely indifferent to good and evil; God inclined it solely toward good. However, God did not firmly fix and confirm these inclinations, preventing any alteration. Instead, humans possessed the ability to change, even toward evil, through their own actions. God had given them sufficient power to maintain their integrity if they had chosen to do so. It is inappropriate to question God's works in this matter. If Adam had been unchangeably righteous, it would have been either due to his

nature or as a result of a free gift. However, he could not possess this righteousness by nature since that is exclusive to God and cannot be bestowed upon any creature. If it were a free gift, then withholding it from Adam would not have been unjust, as he could not have demanded what was beyond his nature. Confirmation in a righteous state is a reward of grace granted for remaining righteous throughout the period of testing determined by the Creator. Similarly, it is given to believers based on the merits of Christ, who was obedient even unto death. In this regard, believers have an advantage over Adam; they can never completely or finally fall away from grace.

Thus, humans were originally made righteous, created in "God's own image" (Genesis 1:27), which encompasses the positive qualities of knowledge, righteousness, and true holiness (Colossians 3:10, Ephesians 4:24). As God declared, "Everything that He had made was very good" in accordance with their respective natures (Genesis 1:31). Therefore, humans were morally good, fashioned after the image of God, who is good and upright (Psalm 25:8). Without this righteousness, humans would not have fulfilled the primary purpose of their creation—to know, love, and serve God according to His will. Indeed, they could not have been created any other way, for they either had to conform to the law in their powers, principles, and inclinations or not. If they had, they would have been righteous; if not, they would have been sinners—an absurd and repulsive notion.

II. Flowing from Man's Primitive State

II. I will present to you some of the things that accompanied or resulted from the righteousness of man in his original state.

Happiness is the outcome of holiness, and as man was holy, he was also in a state of happiness.

1. Man was a truly magnificent being. We can assume that just as Moses' face shone when he came down from the mountain, man had a bright and pleasant countenance, with a beautiful body, as there was no darkness of sin in him. Since God Himself is "glorious in holiness" (Exodus 15:11), it is certain that the spiritual beauty bestowed upon man by the Lord at his creation made him a truly magnificent being. His holy conduct radiated light, glorifying the Creator. Every action reflected a ray of the glorious and pure light that God had placed within his soul. The lamp of love, kindled from heaven, continued to burn in his heart, resembling the holy place. The law of the Lord, written on his inward parts by God's finger, was faithfully kept within him, akin to the most holy place. There was no impurity visible outwardly, no wandering gaze with lustful intent in his eyes. His tongue spoke only the language of heaven. In summary, "the King's son was all glorious within" and adorned with "clothing of wrought gold."
2. Man was God's beloved. He shone brightly in the image of God, whom He naturally loves wherever His image is present. Even when man was alone in the world, he was not truly alone because God was with him. He enjoyed communion and fellowship with his Creator directly, as there was nothing yet to turn God's face away from the work of His own hands. By God's favor, man was elevated to being a partner with heaven in the first covenant, known as the covenant of works. God transformed the law He had given in creation into a covenant, with perfect obedience as the condition. Life was the promised reward, and death was the penalty. One significant aspect of the

natural law was that man was to believe whatever God revealed and do whatever He commanded. Thus, when God made this covenant with man, He extended man's duty to include "not eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil." This extended law became the standard for man's obedience in the covenant. These terms were easy for man, who had the natural law written on his heart and inclined to obey the positive law revealed to him, possibly through an audible voice (Genesis 2:16-17). The requirement was highly reasonable since it focused on the precise point of God's will, demonstrating true obedience in an external matter where disobedience would be evident.

According to this condition, God promised man life: the continuation of natural life in the union of soul and body and spiritual life in the favor of the Creator. He also promised eternal life in heaven, which man would enter after successfully passing the earthly trial and being transported to the upper paradise by the Lord's will. This promise of life was included within the threat of death mentioned in Genesis 2:17. When God said, "In the day you eat from it, you will surely die," it was essentially saying, "If you do not eat from it, you will surely live." This promise of life in heaven is evident in the covenant because the threatening was of eternal death in hell, which man became liable to, and Christ was promised to redeem him from that death through His own death. Jesus Himself interpreted the promise of the covenant of works as eternal life when He presented the condition of that covenant to a young man who sought to enter into life through works, just as Adam was supposed to have done under that covenant (Matthew 19:17).

The penalty for disobedience was death (Genesis 2:17). The death threatened was consistent with the promised life and was justly appropriate: temporal, spiritual, and eternal death. The event

confirms this, as on the day man ate from the forbidden fruit, he was legally considered dead, but the execution was postponed due to his future descendants who were in his loins. Another covenant was prepared instead. Nevertheless, that day marked the beginning of his physical death, as his body received a mortal wound. His soul also experienced death, losing its original righteousness and the favor of God, evident in the guilt and shame that made him hide from God. He became liable to eternal death, which would have occurred if not for the provision of the Mediator, who found him bound by the cords of death like a condemned criminal. This summarizes the covenant into which the Lord brought man in the state of innocence.

One may wonder if the earth's alliance with heaven was of little significance to those who have never experienced that holy and happy state. However, it is of great importance to us because Adam was the root of all humanity, our representative and common head. God entrusted to him our inheritance and stock, which he was to keep for himself, his children, and pass on to them. The Lord consolidated all of mankind's stock as if in one ship, appointing our common father as the pilot. He placed a blessing in the root, which was meant to be diffused into all the branches. As our text indicates, when Adam was made upright, so too was man, as all mankind possessed that uprightness in him. "If the root is holy, so are the branches." However, I will elaborate on this further later. If Adam had remained obedient, no one would have disputed the representation.

III. The Doctrine of the State of Innocence Applied

USE I: For information. This teaches us several things. Firstly, it was man himself, not God, who caused his own downfall. God created

him upright, but he chose to fall. It was not the Lord's guidance and inclination towards good that led to his tragic choice. Was God so miserly with him that his pressing needs drove him to seek supply in hell? No, man was and is the cause of his own ruin. Secondly, God can justly require perfect obedience to His law from humanity and condemn them for failing to obey it perfectly, even though they now lack the ability to keep it. In doing so, God is merely gathering what He has sown. He gave man the ability to fulfill the entire law, which man lost through his own fault. However, man's sin could never diminish God's right to demand perfect obedience from His creatures and punish them for disobedience. Thirdly, this highlights the immense obligation we have to Jesus Christ, the second Adam, who, with His precious blood, purchased our freedom and freely offers it to us again. Through His sacrifice, we gain everlasting security, and our freedom can never be entirely lost (Hosea 13:9, John 10:28-29). Free grace will establish those whom free will caused to fall into the pit of misery.

USE II: This reproaches three groups of people. Firstly, those who despise genuine religion and take pleasure only in the world and their sinful desires. Such individuals are far from righteousness and hate God (Romans 1:30) because they hate His image. Upright Adam in paradise would have been a great offense to these people, just as he was to the serpent, whose seed they reveal themselves to be through their malice. Secondly, it rebukes those who bring shame to religion or feel ashamed of it when facing an ungodly world. There are those who brazenly ridicule piety and mock seriousness. Against whom do they taunt and jeer? Is it not against God Himself, whose image, partially restored in His creatures, makes them appear foolish? Let us not be mockers, for doing so will only strengthen our own bondage (Isaiah 28:22). Holiness was the glory bestowed upon man by God at creation, but now the sons of men turn that glory into

shame because they themselves glory in shameful things. Finally, it reproves the proud and self-conceited professing Christians who admire themselves in garments of rags that they have patched together. Many, after gaining scraps of religious knowledge and making some outward reforms, become filled with self-conceit. This demonstrates how heavily the effects of the fall weigh upon them, as they have not yet come to a true understanding of their own condition (Luke 15:17). They can see their own attainments but fail to recognize their own shortcomings, which should humble them. True knowledge enables individuals to see what they once were and what they are currently, leading to humility and an earnest desire to press forward, forgetting what lies behind (Philippians 3:13). Such individuals are pitiful, like someone glorying in a cottage built from the rubble of a burned-down palace, even though it is so weak that it cannot withstand a storm.

USE III: Lamentation. Here we witness a magnificent structure—man, carved like a splendid palace—now lying in ashes. Let us stand and gaze upon the ruins and shed a tear. This is a cause for lamentation and will surely bring lamentation. Would we not weep if we saw our country in ruins, transformed into a desolate wilderness by the enemy? If we witnessed our houses engulfed in flames and our possessions consumed by fire? Yet all of this falls short of the tragic sight of man, fallen from heaven like a star. Ah, can we not now say, "Oh, that we were as we once were!" when there was no stain in our nature, no cloud in our minds, no pollution in our hearts? If we had never been in a better state, the matter would be less significant. But those who were once clothed in scarlet now embrace dunghills. Where is our original glory now? Once there was no darkness in our minds, no rebellion in our wills, and no disorder in our affections. But alas! "How the faithful city has become a harlot!" Righteousness once resided in it, but now murderers are present. Our silver has

become dross, our wine is diluted. The heart that was once the temple of God has turned into a den of thieves. Let our name be Ichabod, for the glory has departed. How low has humanity fallen, we who were created to have dominion and be rulers of the world! "The crown has fallen from our head; woe to us, for we have sinned." The creatures that once served him now stand in opposition, and even the least of them, when given permission, proves too powerful for him. Waters flooded the ancient world, fire consumed Sodom, the stars fought against Sisera in their courses, frogs, flies, and lice became executioners in Egypt, and worms devoured Herod. Man must form alliances with beasts and even the stones of the field, fearing that anyone who finds him will harm him. Alas, how we have fallen! How we have plunged into a gulf of misery! The sun has set upon us, death has entered through our windows, and our enemies have extinguished our two eyes, delighting in our suffering. Let us, therefore, lie down in the dust, covered in shame and confusion. Nevertheless, there is hope for Israel in his distress, for we have a Mediator. There is a Physician for our souls, a Savior who can repair our ruins. So, come now, O sinner, turn your gaze to Jesus Christ, the second Adam. Leave behind the first Adam and his covenant; instead, approach the Mediator and Guarantor of the new and superior covenant. Let your hearts declare, "Be our ruler, and let this division be under your control." Allow your eyes to weep continuously, without interruption, until the Lord looks down from heaven and takes notice (Lamentations 3:49, 50).

STATE II

THE STATE OF NATURE

I. THE SINFULNESS OF MAN'S NATURAL STATE

And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every thought in his heart was only evil all the time. - GEN. 6:5

We have seen what man was like when God created him - a beautiful and happy being. Now let us consider how man has undone himself, and we will see him as a sinful and miserable creature. This is the unfortunate state we are brought into by the fall - a state as dark and sorrowful as the previous one was glorious. We commonly refer to this state as "The State of Nature" or "Man's Natural State," as the apostle stated in Ephesians 2:3, "And were by nature the children of wrath, even as others." There are two aspects to consider: 1. The sinfulness, and 2. The misery of this state in which all unregenerate individuals live. I will begin with the sinfulness of man's natural state, which is fully and briefly described in the text: "And God saw that the wickedness of man was great," etc.

The purpose of these words is to justify God's justice in bringing the flood upon the ancient world. The preceding verses mention two specific causes: 1. Intermarriage between believers (the descendants of Seth and Enos) and unbelievers (the cursed lineage of Cain). They did not seek the Lord's guidance in their marriages, as stated in Psalm 48:14, but instead chose based on their own desires, without considering God's will. They were enticed by the physical appearance of the unbelievers, leading to their separation from God. This was one of the causes of the deluge that wiped out the ancient world. Would that all believers in our time could claim innocence! Although this sin caused the flood, it has not eradicated it. Just as in the past, it can still be considered one of the reasons for the decline of religion in our day. Among pagans, changing gods with changing circumstances was commonplace. The Christian world also provides numerous unfortunate examples of this behavior, as if people adopted Pharaoh's belief that religion is only for those who have no other concerns, as stated in Exodus 5:17. 2. The prevalence of oppression is mentioned in verse 4. Giants, individuals of great stature, strength, and extreme wickedness, filled the earth with violence, as stated in verse 11. However, their strength and treasures of wickedness could not save them from the day of judgment. Yet, the pursuit of gain through oppression still causes many to disregard the terrifying example set by the flood. This covers the context and specific crimes of that generation. Nevertheless, not every individual swept away by the flood could have been guilty of these offenses. "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" Therefore, in my text, a general indictment is made against all of them: "The wickedness of man was great in the earth," etc. and this indictment is clearly supported by God's observation. Two things are charged against them:

1. Corruption of life, great wickedness. This refers to the wickedness of their actions, which is distinct from the wickedness of their hearts. Their outward sins were inherently grave and further aggravated by accompanying circumstances. This wickedness existed not only among the descendants of Cain but also among those of Seth who were supposed to be holy. The wickedness of man was great. Moreover, it is mentioned "in the earth" for two reasons: 1. To justify God's severity, as He not only punished sinners but also marred the beauty of the earth and wiped out its animals with the flood. Thus, just as humans had marked their impiety, God marked His indignation upon the earth. 2. To demonstrate the seriousness of their sin, as they turned the earth, which God had adorned for their use, into a cesspool of sin and a stage for their wickedness in defiance of Heaven. God witnessed this corruption of life, not only being aware of it but also making them aware that He noticed and had not abandoned the earth despite their forsaking of heaven.
2. Corruption of nature: Every thought in his heart was only evil all the time. All their wicked actions can be traced back to the root and source: a corrupted heart. The soul, once upright in all its faculties, is now wholly disordered. The heart, which was originally aligned with God's heart, is now its opposite - a workshop of evil thoughts, a reservoir of unruly affections, and a storehouse of impiety, as stated in Mark 7:21, 22. Behold the heart of a natural person as revealed in our text. The mind is polluted, the thoughts in the heart are evil, and the will and affections are defiled. The imagination of the thoughts of the heart refers to everything the heart conceives through thinking, such as judgments, choices, intentions, plans, desires, and every inner movement - or rather, the pattern of thoughts formed by the heart, which molds and shapes them, as mentioned in 1

Chronicles 29:18. Moreover, every imagination, every pattern of thoughts, is evil. The heart is constantly shaping thoughts, but none of them are right. Can't there be some good mixed in them? No, they are only evil. There is nothing genuinely good and pleasing to God in them. Nothing that emerges from this workshop can be considered acceptable, for it is not the Spirit of God but "the prince of the power of the air" who works in it, as stated in Ephesians 2:2. Any changes found within them are merely transitions from one evil to another. The imagination of the heart, or the pattern of thoughts in natural individuals, is continuously evil, day after day, in this state. From the beginning to the end, they remain in midnight darkness. There is not even a glimmer of the light of holiness within them. The unholy heart can never produce a single holy thought. What a wicked heart this is! What a corrupt nature this is! A tree that consistently bears fruit but never good fruit, regardless of the soil it is planted in or the effort invested, must be inherently corrupt. Similarly, what can we say about a heart in which every thought, every pattern of thoughts, is only evil and continuously so? Surely this corruption is deeply embedded in our hearts, interwoven with our very beings, deeply rooted in our souls, and can only be cured by a miracle of grace. This is the state of man's heart, his nature, until regenerated by grace. God, who examines the heart, saw that man's heart was in this condition. He took special notice of it, and the faithful and true Witness cannot be mistaken about our condition, although we are prone to misunderstanding ourselves and often overlook this fact.

Beware of entertaining the thought in your wicked heart that says, "What does this have to do with us? Let the generation mentioned in the text deal with it." For the Lord has recorded the account of that generation as a mirror for all subsequent generations, enabling them

to recognize their own corrupt hearts and what their lives would be like if not restrained. Just as "as water reflects the face, so one's life reflects the heart" (Proverbs 27:19). Adam's fall has affected the hearts of all humanity in the same manner. Hence, the apostle in Romans 3:10-18 establishes the corruption of human nature, hearts, and lives based on what the psalmist said about the wicked in his time, as mentioned in Psalm 14:1-3; Psalm 5:9; Psalm 140:3; Psalm 10:7; Psalm 36:1. The apostle also draws from Jeremiah's description of the wicked in his time (Jeremiah 9:3) and Isaiah's description of those who lived in his time (Isaiah 57:7, 8). He concludes in verse 19, "Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God." If the history of the flood had been passed down to us without the reason provided in the text, we could have deduced the corruption and total depravity of human nature from it. After all, what other quarrel could the holy and just God have with the infants who were destroyed by the flood since they had no actual sin? If we witnessed a wise individual who had meticulously crafted a masterpiece, fully satisfied with it upon completion, suddenly becoming furious and shattering it upon further inspection, wouldn't we conclude that the piece had been completely marred since it left their hands and no longer served its intended purpose? How much more should we deduce, when we see the holy and wise God destroying His own creation, which He had solemnly declared as very good, that its original design has been utterly spoiled and can only be restored through complete renewal or lost altogether? As stated in Genesis 6:6, 7, "The Lord regretted that he had made human beings on the earth, and his heart was deeply troubled. So the Lord said, 'I will wipe from the face of the earth the human race I have created—and with them the animals, the birds and the creatures that move along the ground—for I regret that I have made them.'" The flood did not wash away this corruption of human nature nor did

it improve the situation. In His providence, God allowed this corruption of nature to resurface even in Noah, the father of the new world, after the flood had subsided. Behold him, like another Adam, sinning through the fruit of a vineyard (Genesis 9:20, 21). Moreover, God offers the same reason against another flood that He provided in our text for bringing the flood upon the ancient world. He says, "I will not again curse the ground because of humans, even though every inclination of the human heart is evil from childhood" (Genesis 8:21). This implies that the situation cannot be rectified through such means and that if God were to follow the same course of action with humanity, He would repeatedly send floods upon the earth due to the persisting corruption of human nature. Although the flood could not wash away the corruption of human nature, it did serve as a signpost pointing to the solution: individuals must be "born of water and the Spirit," experiencing spiritual rebirth from the state of spiritual death in sin through the grace of Jesus Christ, who came through water and blood. From this new birth, a new world of saints emerges, just as the new world of sinners emerged from the waters, where they had lain buried in the ark. This is evident from 1 Peter 3:20, 21, where the apostle refers to Noah's ark and states, "In it only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water, and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also." Therefore, the waters of the flood, although dried up, continue to serve as a mirror in which we can perceive the complete corruption of our nature and the necessity of regeneration.

From the text, as explained above, a significant point of doctrine emerges, which is evident to anyone who reads it: Man's nature is now entirely corrupted. There has been a lamentable transformation, a remarkable upheaval in human nature. Where once there was nothing evil, now there is nothing good. In discussing this doctrine, I will:

I. Confirm it.

II. Describe this corruption of nature in its various aspects.

III. Explain how human nature becomes corrupted in this manner.

IV. Apply this doctrine.

I. I will confirm the doctrine of human nature's corruption. I will present a mirror to your eyes through which you can see your sinful nature, a reality that often goes unnoticed despite God's careful attention. Let us consult the Word of God, as well as human experience and observation.

For scriptural evidence, let us consider the following:

1. The Scriptures pay special attention to how fallen Adam passed on his image to his descendants. Genesis 5:3 states, "When Adam had lived 130 years, he fathered a son in his own likeness, after his image, and named him Seth." Contrasting this with Genesis 1:27, which says, "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them," we see the opposition between the original image of God in man and the image passed on through fallen Adam. Man was initially created in the likeness of God, meaning he was a holy and righteous creature. However, fallen Adam fathered a son who was not in the likeness of God but in his own likeness, meaning a corrupt and sinful Adam begot a corrupt and sinful son. Just as the image of God bore righteousness and immortality, as mentioned earlier, the image of fallen Adam bore corruption and death (1 Corinthians 15:49-50). In Genesis 5, Moses presents the first record of mortality in the world, indicating that dying Adam begot mortal offspring. Having

sinned, Adam became mortal as foretold, and he begot a son in his own likeness, sinful and thus also mortal. Sin and death passed on to all humanity. While it is likely that both Cain and Abel were begotten in Adam's likeness, it is not recorded for Abel, as he left no descendants. His martyrdom served as a sufficient testimony. Cain's likeness was not specifically mentioned, perhaps due to his wickedness and the subsequent annihilation of his descendants in the flood. However, Seth's likeness is recorded because he was the father of the holy seed, from whom all mankind after the flood descended, bearing the likeness of fallen Adam.

2. Job 14:4 states, "Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? Not one." Since our first parents were unclean, how can we be clean? How could our immediate parents be clean? How can our children be clean? The uncleanness referred to here is a sinful uncleanness that makes man's days full of trouble. It is a natural uncleanness inherited from unclean parents. Job 25:4 asks, "How then can a man be in the right before God? How can he who is born of woman be pure?" The omnipotent God, whose power is not challenged here, can bring a clean thing out of an unclean, as seen in the case of the man Christ. However, no other being can do so. Every person born according to the course of nature is born unclean. If the root is corrupt, so are the branches. Even if the parents are sanctified, they are only holy in part and by grace, not by nature. They beget their children as humans, not as holy individuals. Thus, just as a circumcised parent begets an uncircumcised child and pure grain yields chaff alongside the corn, the holiest parent begets unholy children. Many godly parents have experienced this truth in their own sorrowful journeys.

3. David confesses in Psalm 51:5, "Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me." Here, David acknowledges that his corrupt nature stems from his birth, tracing it back to the fountain of corruption. Despite being a man after God's own heart, he did not start that way. Though conceived within the bounds of lawful marriage, the lump that formed in the womb was a sinful lump. This corruption of nature is referred to as the "old man," as old as ourselves and even older than grace. It exists in those who are sanctified from birth.
4. Our Lord Jesus settles the matter in John 3:6, stating, "That which is born of the flesh is flesh." This reveals the universal corruption of mankind—all are flesh, not only in the frail sense, although that is a sad truth as well, but in the sense of being corrupt and sinful by nature. Jesus argues that because they are flesh, they must be born again to enter the kingdom of God (verses 3-5). The corruption of our nature underscores the absolute necessity of regeneration, and the necessity of regeneration serves as clear evidence of the corruption of our nature. Why would a person need a second birth if their nature were not marred in their first birth?
5. Man has certainly fallen to a great extent compared to his original state. God made him "a little lower than the angels," yet now we see him likened to perishable beasts. He heeded the voice of a brute and has become like one. Similar to Nebuchadnezzar, in his natural state, man's portion is with the beasts, his mind solely focused on earthly things (Philippians 3:19). In fact, in some aspects, brutes have the advantage over the natural man, as he is even more negligent of what matters most than the stork, turtle, crane, or swallow in their own

interests (Jeremiah 8:7). He is more senseless than the ox or ass (Isaiah 1:3). He is instructed to learn from the ant, which lacks a guide, overseer, ruler, and yet gathers food in summer and harvest (Proverbs 6:6-8). Meanwhile, the natural man possesses all these advantages but exposes himself to eternal starvation. Moreover, the Scriptures not only portray the natural man as lacking the good qualities of these creatures but also as embodying the evil qualities of the worst creatures. The fierceness of the lion, the craftiness of the fox, the unteachableness of the wild ass, the filthiness of the dog and swine, the venom of the asp, and other similar qualities converge in him. The Scriptures themselves refer to such individuals as "serpents, a brood of vipers" and even "children of the devil" (Matthew 23:33; John 8:44). Indeed, man's nature is wretchedly corrupted.

6. "By nature we are children of wrath" (Ephesians 2:3). We are deserving of and susceptible to God's wrath, and this is our natural state. Therefore, without a doubt, we are sinful creatures by nature. We are condemned even before we have done good or evil, already under the curse without even understanding it. But as Amos 3:4 asks, "Does a lion roar in the forest, when he has no prey?" In other words, would the holy and just God roar in wrath against man if man had not become prey to his wrath through sin? No, He would not and could not. Thus, according to God's Word, man's nature is corrupt.

If we turn to experience and observe the state of the world, paying attention to things evident to anyone willing to see without blindfolding themselves, we will quickly discern the fruits that reveal the root of this bitterness. I will present a few points that can serve to convince us of this fact:

1. Who doesn't see a flood of miseries inundating the world? Where can a person go without dipping their foot, and perhaps even drowning, in it? Everyone, whether in cities or countryside, in palaces or cottages, is groaning under some form of suffering. Some are oppressed by poverty, others afflicted with sickness and pain, many lamenting their losses. Each person bears their cross, no matter how comfortable their condition may seem. Ultimately, death, the consequence of sin, follows these harbingers and sweeps everything away. What opened the floodgates of sorrow if not sin? Every complaint, every sigh, every tear is evidence that man has fallen from his heavenly position. For God distributes sorrows in His anger (Job 21:17). This is a clear proof of the corruption of nature, as even those who have not yet sinned bear their share of sorrows. They enter the world weeping, as if they recognize it as a place of weeping from the moment they are born. The graveyard contains both small and large graves, and there are always those in the world, like Rachel, weeping for their children because they are no more (Matthew 2:18).
2. Observe how early this corruption of nature manifests in children. Solomon notes that "even a child is known by his acts" (Proverbs 20:11). The inclination of the heart becomes apparent early on. Even before children can walk on their own, they follow in the footsteps of their fallen parents. How much little pride, ambition, sinful curiosity, vanity, stubbornness, and aversion to good are seen in them? By the time they outgrow infancy, it becomes necessary to discipline them, using the rod to drive away the inherent foolishness bound up in their hearts (Proverbs 20:15). This indicates that if grace does not prevail, the child will resemble Ishmael, described as "a wild donkey of a

man" (Genesis 16:12).

3. Take note of the numerous flagrant outbursts of sin in the world—wickedness still prevails. The corruption of mankind is evident, as stated in Hosea 4:2: "There is swearing, lying, murder, stealing, and committing adultery; they break all bounds, and bloodshed follows bloodshed." The world is saturated with filthiness, lewdness, wickedness, and profanity of all sorts. From where does this deluge of sin upon the earth come? It stems from the breaking open of the fountains of the great deep—the heart of man. Evil thoughts, adultery, fornication, murders, thefts, covetousness, and more flow out of it (Mark 7:21-22). Perhaps you might wholeheartedly thank God for not being like other people, and indeed you have more reason to do so than you may realize. Looking into clear water, you see your own reflection; similarly, looking into your heart, you may see others' reflections, and looking into others' hearts, you may see your own reflection. Thus, the most despicable and profane wretches in the world can serve as a mirror for you to discern the corruption of your own nature. If you were to do so, you would genuinely thank God, rather than yourselves, for not living as others do, recognizing that the corruption of nature is the same in you as it is in them.

4. Cast your gaze upon the terrible turmoil caused by human lusts! Lions do not prey on other lions, nor do wolves prey on fellow wolves. But men have become lions and wolves to one another, biting and devouring one another. They readily unsheathe their swords against each other on the slightest pretext. The world has become a wilderness where even the brightest flame carried by men cannot scare away the wild beasts that inhabit it because men are not beasts. Thus, they wound one another in one way or

another. Seeing the world in such a state of unrest, with everyone attacking one another either verbally or physically, we can conclude that an evil spirit resides among them. These violent outbursts among Adam's descendants reveal a diseased body, a sick head, and a faint heart. They undoubtedly stem from an internal cause—lusts that wage war within our members (James 4:1).

5. Consider the necessity of human laws fortified with threats and punishments. We can apply what the apostle says in 1 Timothy 1:9: "The law is not laid down for the just but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and sinners." Although man was created for society, as God Himself declared that it was not good for him to be alone, the present reality is that he must be enclosed within thorny hedges even in society. To better understand the corruption of human nature, let us consider the following: Firstly, every person naturally desires complete freedom, making their own will their law. If they were to follow their natural inclinations, they would exempt themselves from all divine and human laws. Consequently, those whose power matches their natural inclination have indeed made themselves absolute rulers, beyond the reach of laws. They align with man's initial monstrous design to be like gods (Genesis 3:5). Secondly, no person willingly ventures to live in a lawless society. Even pirates and robbers have laws among themselves, although the entire society disregards all respect for law and justice. This reveals that people are conscious of the corruption of their nature, not daring to trust one another without security. Thirdly, despite the danger of breaking through the hedge, the violence of lust compels many to take the risk. They sacrifice not only their reputation and conscience (which is often undervalued in the world), but also, for the sake of fleeting pleasure followed by

internal terror, they expose themselves to the threat of death by the laws of the land in which they live. Fourthly, laws are often adjusted to accommodate people's lusts. Sometimes entire societies indulge in such extravagance that, like prisoners, they break free from their shackles and overpower their guards. The voice of the laws cannot be heard over the clamor of arms. Rarely is there a time when some individuals do not possess such great daring and power that the laws dare not confront their impetuous lusts. This is why David, in the case of Joab, who had murdered Abner, said, "These sons of Zeruah are too hard for me" (2 Samuel 3:39). Lusts sometimes overpower laws, causing them to slacken, like a dying person's pulse (Habakkuk 1:3-4). Finally, consider how often there is a need to amend existing laws and create new ones due to the proliferation of new crimes, which stem from the abundant fruitfulness of man's nature in producing evil. If men were not constantly breaking down the hedge like unruly beasts, there would be no need for its mending. The history of the Israelites, who were chosen by God from among all the nations, illustrates this well. Their story reveals appalling turmoil during the time when there was no king in Israel, as evident in the chapters from Judges 18 to 21. It was difficult to reform them even with the best of leaders, and they quickly strayed when wicked rulers assumed power. One cannot help but think that the primary purpose of this sacred history is to expose the corruption of human nature, the absolute need for the Messiah and His grace. When reading it, we should use it for that purpose. How piercing is the word spoken by the Lord to Samuel regarding Saul: "He shall restrain my people" (1 Samuel 9:17). Oh, the corruption of human nature! The awe and fear of the God of heaven do not restrain them, so they require earthly gods to do so, putting them to

shame (Judges 18:7).

6. Consider the remnants of natural corruption in the saints. Though grace has entered, corruption has not been expelled. Even though they possess the new creation, much of the old corrupt nature persists, and the two struggle within them like the twins in Rebekah's womb (Galatians 5:17). The saints find this corruption present at all times and in all places, even in the most secluded corners. If a person has a troublesome neighbor, they can move away; if they have a bad servant, they can dismiss them at the end of their term; if they have a difficult spouse, they can occasionally leave the house and find respite from their troubles. However, even if a saint were to enter a wilderness or settle on a remote rock in the sea untouched by any living being, the corruption would be with them. Even if they were caught up to the third heaven, as Paul was, it would return with them (2 Corinthians 12:7). It follows them like a shadow follows a body, leaving a blemish in their best endeavors. It is like a fig tree on a wall that continues to grow despite almost being uprooted. Its roots are deeply embedded in the heart, and as long as the saint is in the world, they are bound by chains of iron and brass. The corruption is especially active when the saint desires to do good (Romans 7:21). It is during holy duties that the spirit of a saint seems to dissipate, leaving them unexpectedly in a state where an image takes the place of a husband, as Michal experienced. There is no need to prove to the godly the presence of corruption in their nature because they groan under its weight. To prove it to them would be like holding a candle to the sun, enabling them to see its light. As for the wicked, they are quick to regard molehills in the lives of the saints as mountains, often considering them all hypocrites. However, consider these few points regarding this matter: Firstly, if corruption exists in those

who have been born again, although they were not born saints but made so by the power of regenerating grace, then how much greater must that corruption be in those without grace! Secondly, the saints groan under the burden of corruption. Listen to the apostle's words in Romans 7:24: "Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?" Although the carnal man lives in ease and tranquility, free from the burden of corruption, it is only because he is dead and does not feel the weight. Many groans are heard from a sickbed, but none from a grave. In the saint, like the sick person, there is a mighty struggle between life and death, each vying for supremacy. In the natural man, like the lifeless body, there is no sound because death reigns supreme. Thirdly, the godly resist the old corrupt nature; they strive to mortify it, yet it remains. They endeavor to starve it, thereby weakening its power, yet it remains active. If this is the case, how much more must it flourish and strengthen in a soul where it is not starved but fed? This is the condition of all the unregenerate who "make provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires." If the diligent person's garden requires constant work in cutting and uprooting, then surely the sluggard's garden is "all grown over with thorns."

7. Lastly, I will make one more observation: In every person, the image of fallen Adam is naturally manifested. Just as some children resemble their parents through the features and expressions of their faces, we resemble our first parents. Each one of us bears the image and imprint of the fall. To confirm this, I appeal to the conscience of everyone in the following aspects:

1. Isn't sinful curiosity inherent in us? And isn't this a reflection of Adam's influence? (Genesis 3:6) Naturally, humans are more eager to learn new things than to practice established truths. Our pursuit of knowledge often surpasses our pursuit of holiness, and we tend to focus on less edifying subjects. We need to control our wandering thoughts while nurturing genuine emotions.
2. When the Lord, through His holy law and providence, restricts us from something, don't our natural inclinations become sharper and more intense? Doesn't this clearly reveal that we are descendants of Adam? (Genesis 3:2-6) This principle is evident in our desire for forbidden pleasures. Even the ancient pagans recognized that humans possess this spirit of contradiction, although they didn't understand its origin. Many people indulge in things they would have restrained themselves from if God had given them permission. It's a repetition of our forefathers' mistakes as people choose to pursue forbidden fruit instead of embracing the provisions of God's good plan.
3. Isn't every child of Adam naturally inclined to heed misleading instruction? Didn't our first parents stumble because of this? (Genesis 3:4-6) Since that time, weak humans have been prone to entertaining temptations. God speaks to us repeatedly, but we often fail to perceive His voice while readily listening to Satan. If we rejected temptations with abhorrence from the beginning, many troubles would fade away. Unfortunately, we often wait until the trap is sprung and are subsequently overwhelmed by its force.

4. Don't our physical eyes often blind our spiritual understanding? Wasn't this the case with our first parents? (Genesis 3:6) We are most blind when we fixate on things that are appealing to our senses. Since our first parents opened their eyes to the forbidden fruit, human eyes have become gateways to the soul's destruction. Impure thoughts and sinful desires enter the heart, causing harm to the soul, burdening the conscience, and sometimes bringing dire consequences to entire societies, as seen in the example of Achan (Joshua 7:21). Holy Job was aware of this danger posed by the two little orbs, which a tiny speck of wood could render useless. Similar to a king who considers surrendering when faced with an adversary twice as strong (Luke 14:31-32), Job sought peace by making a covenant with his eyes.

5. Isn't it natural for us to prioritize the needs of our bodies at the expense of our souls? This was a factor in the sin of our first parents. (Genesis 3:6) How wonderful it would be if we devoted half the effort to our souls as we do to our bodies! If the question "What must I do to be saved?" (Acts 16:30) crossed our minds as frequently as "What shall we eat? What shall we drink? What shall we wear?" (Matthew 6:31), many seemingly hopeless situations would become hopeful. But in truth, most people live as if they are merely flesh and blood, as if their souls serve no purpose other than preserving their bodies like salt preserves meat. They are "flesh" (John 3:6), they set their minds on earthly things (Romans 8:5), and they live according to the flesh (Romans 8:13). If the flesh consents to an action, rarely do they wait for the approval of their conscience. Often, the body is

served even when the conscience protests.

6. Isn't everyone naturally discontent with their current circumstances in the world, or with something in it? This was also the case with Adam. (Genesis 3:5-6) There is always something lacking, and humans are creatures driven by change. If anyone doubts this, they should review all their possessions and listen to their own hearts; they will hear a secret murmuring for something more, even though, upon reflection, they might realize that it is better to be without that something. Since our first parents cast their hearts on the forbidden fruit, bringing darkness upon the world, their descendants have been plagued by a natural disease. Solomon called it "the wandering of desire" or "the wandering of the soul" (Ecclesiastes 6:9). It is a diabolical trance where the soul roams the world, feasting on countless illusory desires, grasping at created excellencies in its imagination and longing. It goes everywhere except where it should. This disease persists until conquering grace restores the soul and finds its eternal rest in God through Christ. Until then, even if humanity were placed back in the Garden of Eden, all the pleasures there would not prevent them from looking and leaping over the hedge once again.
7. Aren't we more easily influenced by evil counsel and examples than by good ones? This was Adam's downfall. (Genesis 3:6) Evil examples, to this day, remain one of Satan's main strategies to ruin people. Although humans possess more cunning than innocence, they still exhibit the same trait observed in foxes, where if one jumps into the water, the rest nearby will follow. It is natural for people to embrace an evil path when they witness others walking it

before them. Evil examples can exert a powerful influence, even diverting us from straightforward duties, especially when they come from those we hold dear. In such cases, our affection blinds our judgment, leading us to comply with actions we would otherwise abhor just to please them. It is evident that most people would rather follow the crowd than follow the righteous.

8. Which of Adam's children needs to be taught the art of sewing fig leaves together to cover their shame? (Genesis 3:7) When we have exposed our own nakedness and shame, it is natural for us to try to rectify the situation ourselves. We employ many futile methods, as foolish and insignificant as Adam's fig leaves, to cover our sins from our own conscience and to paint them with superficial justifications. When convictions arise and we can no longer deny our nakedness, it is as natural for us to resort to self-deception as it is for fish to swim in water or birds to fly in the air. Therefore, the first question asked by those convicted of sin is, "What should we do?" (Acts 2:37). How can we make ourselves worthy? What actions should we perform? We fail to recognize that the new creation is God's workmanship (Ephesians 2:10), just as Adam failed to consider that he would be clothed with animal skins (Genesis 3:21).

9. Don't Adam's children naturally hide from the presence of the Lord? (Genesis 3:8) We are just as blind as Adam was when he tried to conceal himself from God among the trees in the garden. We often believe that secret sins provide more security than sins committed openly. "The eye of the adulterer waits for twilight, saying, 'No eye will see me'"

(Job 24:15). People freely engage in secret sins that they would be ashamed to commit in the presence of a child, as if darkness could shield them from the all-seeing God. Naturally, we neglect communion with God and even resist it. There has never been communion between God and Adam's children unless the Lord initiated it. Left to ourselves, we would never seek after Him (Isaiah 57:17). We are like Adam, who walked "on in the way of his heart" (Genesis 3:8).

10. How reluctant are we to confess our sins and take responsibility for our guilt and shame? Wasn't this the case in the situation at hand? (Genesis 3:10) Adam admitted his nakedness, which was undeniable, but he didn't utter a single word about his sin. He would have hidden it if he could. It is as natural for us to conceal sin as it is to commit it. We witness numerous instances of this in the world, and at the day of judgment, when "God will judge the secrets of men" (Romans 2:16), this tendency will become even more apparent. Many mouths that currently claim, "I have done no wickedness," will be exposed.
11. Isn't it natural for us to downplay our sin and shift the blame onto others? When God questioned our guilty first parents, didn't Adam blame the woman, and the woman blame the serpent? (Genesis 3:12-13) Adam's children don't need to be taught this cunning strategy; even before they can speak fluently, if they can't deny their actions, they will craftily offer excuses to diminish their fault and shift the blame onto others. In fact, it is so natural for humans that, in their gravest sins, they will even attribute fault to God Himself. They will blaspheme His providence by

mislabeled it as misfortune or bad luck, thereby placing the blame for their sins at heaven's doorstep. Wasn't this one of Adam's tricks after his fall? (Genesis 3:12) His apology took precedence, while his confession was brief. He meticulously pointed out the woman, as if he were emphasizing the judge's knowledge of his own works (Genesis 2:22). Even though there was only one woman in the world at that time, he singled her out as if there were ten thousand. He spoke as if he had been ruined by God's gift, adding that she was given to be with him as a constant companion and helper, as if Adam wanted to suggest an ill motive on God's part. Furthermore, before completing his sentence, he used an additional demonstrative. Instead of saying, "The woman gave me," he said, "The woman she gave me," emphatically emphasizing her role in offering him the forbidden fruit. This is how Adam's descendants employ this deceitful tactic. It is evident to all. Solomon's observation remains universally valid: "The foolishness of man perverts his way, and his heart frets against the Lord" (Proverbs 19:3). Therefore, let us acknowledge Adam as our father and not deny our relationship to him, as we bear his image. To conclude, with ample confirmation from the Word of God, our own experiences, and observations, let us believe in the doctrine of our corrupted nature. Let us look to the second Adam, the blessed Jesus, for the application of His precious blood to cleanse us from guilt and for the transforming power of His Holy Spirit to make us new creations. For "unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3).

I. I now turn to explore the corruption of human nature in its various aspects. However, who can truly grasp its extent? Who can accurately

measure its breadth, length, height, and depth? "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?" (Jeremiah 17:9). Nonetheless, we can quickly discern enough of it to bring about deep humility and to recognize the absolute necessity of regeneration. In its natural state, humanity is entirely corrupt, with both soul and body tainted, as the apostle comprehensively demonstrates in Romans 3:10–18. Regarding the soul, this innate corruption has permeated all its faculties, infecting the understanding, the will, the emotions, the conscience, and the memory.

The Corruption of the Understanding

The understanding, the leading faculty, has been stripped of its original glory and covered in confusion. We have fallen into the hands of our great adversary, much like Samson fell into the hands of the Philistines, and we have been deprived of our two eyes. "There is none that understandeth" (Romans 3:11). "Their minds and consciences are corrupted" (Titus 1:15). The natural man's perception of divine matters is corrupted. "Thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself" (Psalm 50:21). His judgment is flawed, and it cannot be otherwise, considering his evil eye. Thus, the Scriptures proclaim that "every man did that which was right in his own eyes" (Judges 17:6; 21:25). His thoughts and reasoning must be cast down by the power of the Word, as they align with his flawed judgment (2 Corinthians 10:5). To illustrate this corruption of the mind or understanding in greater detail, let us consider the following points:

1. There is a natural weakness in the minds of individuals regarding spiritual matters. The apostle concludes that anyone lacking the graces of the Spirit is "blind and cannot see afar off"

(2 Peter 1:9). Therefore, the Spirit of God in the Scriptures often presents divine truths using earthly illustrations, much like parents teaching their children (Hosea 12:11). Although this does not cure the weakness, it serves as evidence of the natural feebleness in human minds. Furthermore, there are clear proofs of this weakness based on experience. For example, how difficult it is to teach many people the basic principles of our holy religion and to explain truths to them in a way they can understand. It requires repetitive instruction: "precept upon precept, precept upon precept, line upon line, line upon line" (Isaiah 28:10). However, when it comes to other matters, these same individuals prove to be "wiser in their generation than the children of light." They understand their worldly tasks and responsibilities just as well as their neighbors, but they are dull and resistant to learning when it comes to matters of God. Tell them how to improve their material wealth or gratify their desires, and they quickly comprehend. Yet, it is exceedingly difficult to make them understand how to save their souls or find peace in Jesus Christ.

2. Consider those who have far greater advantages than the majority of people. They have received a good education, instruction, and even the light of grace to some extent, as ascribed to the saints on earth. However, they possess only a small portion of knowledge concerning divine matters. Their minds still exhibit ignorance and confusion. They often struggle even with practical truths and speak as children in such matters. It is a pitiful weakness that prevents them from perceiving the things God has revealed and is undoubtedly a sinful weakness since God's law requires us to know and believe them.

3. There are numerous dangerous misconceptions among people, particularly concerning weighty matters. Woeful delusions prevail over them. It is not uncommon to witness individuals who are otherwise wise in

many areas of life but foolish when it comes to their spiritual well-being. As Matthew 9:25 states, "Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent." Many who are astute in worldly affairs become like owls and bats when it comes to matters of eternal life. In truth, the life of every natural individual is an ongoing dream and delusion from which they never awaken until, either through a new light that pierces their soul from heaven, they come to their senses (Luke 15:17), or they lift up their eyes in hell (Luke 15:23). In the scriptural account, no matter how wise they may seem, they are considered fools and simpletons.

2. The human understanding is naturally overwhelmed by gross darkness in spiritual matters. When tempted by the devil, man attempted to bring forth new light in his mind (Genesis 3:5), but instead, he opened the doors to the abyss and became engulfed in darkness. When God first created man, his mind was a lamp of light. However, in regeneration, when God sets out to recreate man, He finds darkness instead: "For ye were sometimes darkness" (Ephesians 5:8). Sin has closed the windows of the soul, and darkness covers the entire realm. It is a land of darkness and the shadow of death, where light is as darkness. The prince of darkness reigns there, and only the works of darkness are produced. We are born spiritually blind and cannot be restored without a miracle of grace. This is the case for anyone who has not been born again. To convince you of this, consider the following proofs: Proof 1. The darkness that enveloped the world before and during Christ's coming as the Sun of Righteousness. When Adam lost the original light with which he was endowed at creation due to his sin, God graciously revealed His mind and will to him regarding the way of salvation (Genesis 3:15). Adam and other godly fathers passed down this

knowledge before the flood. However, the natural darkness of the human mind prevailed to such an extent that it extinguished all true religion from the world, except for what remained in Noah's family, preserved in the ark. After the flood, as humanity multiplied, the natural darkness of the mind once again prevailed, and the light dwindled until it vanished among the majority of mankind, only preserved among the descendants of Shem. Even among them, it was on the brink of extinction when God called Abraham away from serving other gods (Joshua 24:15). God granted Abraham a fuller and clearer revelation, which he passed on to his family (Genesis 18:19). Yet, the natural darkness eventually overcame this revelation, except for its preservation among the descendants of Jacob. When they were carried into Egypt, that darkness overwhelmed them, leaving them with very little understanding of true religion. Thus, a new revelation was necessary for them in the wilderness. However, occasional clouds of darkness still obscured their understanding during the period from Moses to Christ. When Christ came, the world was divided into Jews and Gentiles. The Jews and the true light were within a specific enclosure (Psalm 147:19-20). Between them and the Gentile world stood a partition wall, namely, the ceremonial law, and on top of that, a deep-seated enmity arose between the two parties (Ephesians 2:14-15). If we look beyond the enclosure and exclude those Gentile converts who, influenced by rays of light emanating from within the enclosure, renounced idolatry and worshipped the true God without fully embracing Mosaic rites, we only see "dark places of the earth, full of the habitations of cruelty" (Psalm 74:20). Gross darkness covered the Gentile world, and they remained entirely ignorant of the way of salvation. They were immersed in superstition and idolatry, with more than thirty thousand idols worshipped in Europe alone. Regardless of

the wisdom found among their philosophers, "the world by wisdom knew not God" (1 Corinthians 1:21), and their religious pursuits were mere groping in the dark (Acts 17:27). If we turn our gaze to those within the enclosure, except for a few who longed for the consolation of Israel, we would witness gross darkness prevailing in that generation. Although "the oracles of God were committed unto them," they were corrupt in their doctrine. Their traditions multiplied, but they had lost the knowledge of those things that constitute the essence of true religion. The teachers of Israel did not understand the nature and necessity of regeneration (John 3:10). Their religion revolved around relying on their birth privileges as children of Abraham (Matthew 3:9), boasting in circumcision and external ordinances (Philippians 3:2-3), and finding rest in the law (Romans 2:17), even though they distorted it with false interpretations to fulfill it superficially (Matthew 5). Thus, darkness covered the face of the world until Christ, the true light, came into it. The same darkness shrouds every soul until the day-star, Jesus Christ, rises in the heart. The latter is evidence of the former. What but the natural darkness of the human mind could continually erase the light of external revelation on a matter crucial to eternal happiness? People did not forget how to preserve their lives, but they quickly lost knowledge of how to secure salvation for their souls, which is of infinite significance and value. When the teaching of patriarchs and prophets proved ineffective, it became necessary for them to be taught by God Himself, the only one who can open the eyes of understanding. However, to demonstrate that the corruption of the human mind runs deeper than external revelation can cure, only a few were converted by Christ's preaching, even though He spoke as no one else ever did (John 12:37-38). The great remedy still needed to be administered by the Spirit accompanying the

preaching of the apostles, who were to perform even greater works according to the promise (John 14:12). If we examine the miracles performed by our Lord, we find that by applying the remedy to heal physical ailments, such as in the case of the paralytic man (Matthew 9:2), He clearly revealed that His primary mission in the world was to heal the diseases of the soul. Another miracle worth noting is the one performed on a man born blind, which seems to have been intentionally designed to present the world with a reflection of their own condition and remedy (John 9:6). "He made clay and anointed the eyes of the blind man with the clay." What better representation of the blindness of the human mind than eyes sealed shut with earth? As Isaiah 6:10 says, "shut your eyes," a phrase that can be properly rendered as "plaster your eyes" or "cast them with mortar." Likewise, in Isaiah 44:18, it is said, "He hath shut their eyes," which literally means "he hath plastered their eyes," similar to how a house affected by leprosy is to be plastered (Leviticus 14:42). Therefore, the Lord's actions reveal the purpose behind this unusual miracle, allowing us to see our natural condition: the eyes of our understanding are naturally sealed shut. The blind man had to go and wash off the clay in the pool of Siloam; no other water would suffice for this purpose. If that pool did not represent the One whom the Father sent into the world to open blind eyes (Isaiah 42:7), the evangelist would not have provided the interpretation of its name, meaning "sent" (John 9:7). Hence, we can conclude that the natural darkness of our minds cannot be cured except by the blood and Spirit of Jesus Christ, whose eye salve alone can restore our sight (Revelation 3:18).

Proof 2. Every person's heart and life, regardless of how refined they may appear to others, is filled with darkness, disorder, and

confusion. Even the apostle Paul acknowledged his past foolishness, disobedience, and deception, indulging in various lusts and pleasures. Yet, during that time, he considered himself blameless concerning the righteousness found in the law. This clearly demonstrates that the eye is evil, and darkness pervades the entire being. Unregenerate individuals wander through life like blind men, refusing guidance and unable to guide themselves. Consequently, they stumble and fall into destruction, pursuing their covetousness, drowning in sensuality, or being crushed by pride and self-conceit. Each person stumbles upon different stumbling blocks, all heading towards the sword of justice as they eagerly follow their unrestrained passions and desires. Some lie in the way, while others stumble over them. Thus, woe to this blind world, full of offenses and errors in judgment, for it is a night where all the beasts of the forest creep forth. The unregenerate are completely mistaken about true happiness. Although Christianity has provided the principle, only overcoming grace can establish it practically. While everyone desires happiness, the unrenewed individuals hold countless opinions about the path to happiness, each turning to their own way. They resemble the blind men in Sodom, searching for Lot's door, groping different parts of the wall but never certain of finding it. Similarly, the natural person may stumble upon some good things but not the ultimate good. If you examine your unregenerate heart, you will find everything turned upside down, with earthly concerns overshadowing heavenly ones. Look at your life, and you will see yourself acting like a madman, pursuing shadows while neglecting the substance. You eagerly chase after things that do not exist while disregarding the things that do and will endure forever.

Proof 3. The natural person is like a worker left without light, engaging in frivolous activities or causing harm. Whenever you try to catch your heart, you will find it either engaging in meaningless

pursuits or, worse, indulging in sinful actions. This is a clear sign of a dark mind.

Proof 4. The natural person lacks true knowledge of spiritual matters. They do not understand the God they are dealing with, are unfamiliar with Christ, and have no understanding of sin. Even the most clever unbelievers are as blind as moles in these matters. They may speak about spiritual things with eloquence, just as the Israelites spoke about the temptations, signs, and miracles they witnessed, but they lacked the heart to perceive, eyes to see, and ears to hear. Many who bear the name of Christian may confess, like Pharaoh, "I do not know the Lord," refusing to let go of what He commands them to relinquish. God is with them, as a disguised prince among his subjects, receiving no better treatment than if they were equals. Do they truly know Christ or recognize His glory and beauty, for which He should be desired? If they did, they would not disregard Him as they do. A glimpse of His glory would dim all earthly excellence, causing them to regard Him as the ultimate and gladly embrace Him as offered in the Gospel. Do they understand the nature of sin when they harbor it in their hearts, hold onto deceit, and refuse to let go? Certainly, they may have a superficial knowledge of these things, just as the unbelieving Jews knew Christ whom they saw and interacted with. But there was a spiritual glory in Him that only believers perceived. Regarding that glory, the unbelieving world did not truly know Him. They cannot possess the spiritual knowledge of these matters; it surpasses the understanding of the carnal mind. The natural person does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, as they appear foolish to them and require spiritual discernment. They may discuss these things, but only in the same way one might talk about honey or vinegar without experiencing their sweetness or sourness. They possess some notions about spiritual truths but do not grasp the realities that lie within the words of truth.

Proof 5. The mind of man has a natural inclination towards evil. It is easier for the carnal mind to engage in evil than to pursue what is truly good. When occupied with good things, it encounters difficulties and obstacles. But when dealing with evil, it acts effortlessly, as if it is in its natural element. The carnal mind proceeds slowly when considering goodness but acts furiously when contemplating evil. While holiness restrains it, evil entices it to unrestrained thinking. Saul provides an example when he did not know what to do until the priest sought God's guidance. Once the priest was involved, Saul quickly determined his own course and refused to wait for the Lord's answer. Such diabolical dexterity characterizes the carnal mind's ability to devise ways to divert people from their duty to God.

Proof 6. The carnal mind has a tendency to twist and distort spiritual things in its imagination, perceiving everything through a fleshly lens and conforming them to its own image. This inclination is evident in the prevalence of idolatry throughout history. People naturally desire a visible deity, wanting to see and worship what is tangible. Thus, they exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for images. While the physical idolatry has been eradicated in our churches, mental idolatry persists. The unsanctified mind is even more prone to this subtler form of image worship, having horrific and distorted thoughts about God, Christ, heavenly glory, and all spiritual matters.

Proof 7. It is a challenging task to keep the carnal mind focused on good thoughts, as it is averse to entertaining them and dwells more comfortably in thoughts of worldly vanities. When individuals are engaged in serving God or present in His presence, their minds often drift away like idols with eyes that do not see and ears that do not hear. Even when physically present, their hearts wander elsewhere, preoccupied with countless vanities. The mind becomes like a bird

freed from its cage, flitting from one distraction to another. In essence, individuals do not truly come to themselves until they have distanced themselves from the presence of the Lord. Do not say that fixing the mind is impossible; it is undoubtedly difficult but not impossible. Through God's grace, it can be achieved, and suitable objects of focus can help. Just as a fascinating subject captures the attention of the inquisitive, the worldly mind is less prone to wandering when engrossed in business, financial calculations, or material possessions. If you approach someone preoccupied with such matters, they may not respond immediately, stating that they were too busy to hear you. Their mind was fixed. If we were granted an audience with a king to petition for our lives, we would not be at risk of gazing around the room. However, when the carnal mind is engaged in any spiritual matter, it is out of its comfort zone and cannot remain focused.

Proof 8. Although it is challenging to keep the mind fixed on good thoughts, it clings tenaciously to what is evil and corrupt, unable to cease from sin. Once the corrupt imagination fixates on its desired object, it becomes difficult to redirect it, even when reason and will desire a change. The mind is in its natural element, and pulling it away from impurities is akin to removing a fish from water or tearing a limb from a body. It races like a fire spreading through a trail of gunpowder, relentless until it can go no further.

Proof 9. Consider how the carnal imagination compensates for the lack of actual objects by creating imaginary pleasures to satisfy the corrupt heart's longing for happiness. The impure person indulges in speculative impurities, their eyes filled with adultery. The covetous individual fills their heart with thoughts of worldly possessions, even if their hands cannot possess them. The malicious person delights in acts of revenge within their own thoughts, while the envious person

finds satisfaction in witnessing their neighbor's downfall within the confines of their narrow soul. Every lust finds support in the corrupt imagination when needed. This occurs not only when people are awake but sometimes even in their dreams. Thus, sinful dreams manifest the desires of the heart while awake. Some may question the sinfulness of these dreams, but can they be compatible with the holy nature found in Adam, Jesus Christ, or should be in everyone? It is the corruption of nature that condemns such filthy dreams. Solomon experienced the exercise of grace in his dreams, praying and making wise choices that were accepted by God. If a person can do good and please God in their sleep, why would they not be capable of doing evil and displeasing God? Solomon warns against this and prescribes the remedy of having the law on the heart. This keeps individuals from sinning in their sleep, preventing sinful dreams. When the law is impressed upon the heart, it acts as a lamp and light, guiding one in the path of duty while also keeping them from sin. The law does not lead to peace but guides in the way of duty, protecting individuals from sin. These insights should convince us of the natural inclination of the mind towards evil.

4. In the mindset of those driven by their earthly desires, there exists a resistance to spiritual truths and a reluctance to accept them. It is not a friend to divine truths any more than it is to holiness. The truths of natural religion, which forcefully enter the minds of natural individuals, are held captive in unrighteousness, as stated in Romans 1:18. As for the truths of revealed religion, there is a wicked heart of unbelief that opposes their entrance, and it requires a powerful force to captivate the mind and make it believe in them, as mentioned in 2 Corinthians 10:4, 5. God has revealed His thoughts and will to sinners regarding the path of salvation; He has given us the teachings of His holy word. But do natural individuals truly

believe it? No, they do not. As 1 John 5:10 plainly states, "Whoever does not believe in the Son of God does not believe God." They do not believe the promises of the word; they view them merely as empty words. Yet, those who receive them become "partakers of the divine nature," as stated in 2 Peter 1:4. The promises are like cords of silver descending from heaven, drawing sinners toward God and carrying them into the promised land. However, they cast these promises aside. They do not believe the word's threats. Just as people traveling through deserts carry fire to scare away wild beasts, God has made His law a fiery law, as mentioned in Deuteronomy 33:2, surrounding it with threats of wrath. Yet, people are often more foolish than even the beasts themselves, insisting on touching the fiery, smoking mountain, even if it means being pierced with a dart. I have no doubt that many, if not all of you who are still in a state of spiritual darkness, will claim to be not guilty. However, remember that the carnal Jews in the time of Christ were just as confident as you are in believing Moses, as mentioned in John 9:28, 29. Yet, Christ refuted their confidence, boldly telling them in John 5:46, "If you believed Moses, you would believe me." If you truly believe in the truths of God, you would not reject Him as you currently do. The very difficulty you encounter in assenting to this truth reveals the unbelief that I am accusing you of. Has it not progressed to the point where some openly reject all revealed religion, their foreheads hardened with impudence and impiety? Truly, "out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks." Even if you do not openly oppose religion like they do, the same bitter root of unbelief resides in all individuals by nature, reigning within you and will continue to do so until overcoming grace brings your minds to believe in the truth. To convince you of this, consider the following three points:

Proof 1. How few have been blessed with an inner enlightenment, brought about by the special working of the Spirit of Christ, leading them to perceive divine truths in their spiritual and heavenly radiance! How have you learned the religious truths that you claim to believe? You have acquired them merely through external revelation and education, meaning you are Christians simply because you were born and raised in a Christian country rather than a pagan one. You are strangers to the inward work of the Holy Spirit, testifying through and alongside the word in your hearts. Thus, you cannot possess the assurance of faith regarding the outward divine revelation found in the word, as stated in 1 Corinthians 2:10-12. Therefore, you are still unbelievers. It is written in the prophets, "They will all be taught by God. Everyone who has heard the Father and learned from him comes to me," declares our Lord in John 6:45. Since you have not come to Christ, it follows that you have not been taught by God. You have not received such instruction, and thus you have not come; you do not believe. Consider the revelation that gives birth to faith, even in the fundamental principles of religion, as in Matthew 16:16, 17: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, for this revelation did not come to you through flesh and blood, but through my Father in heaven. If the Spirit of the Lord ever takes hold of you to work faith in you, it may well take as much time to dismantle the old foundation as it will to make you realize the necessity of His mighty power to enable you to believe even the foundational principles that you currently claim to have no doubts about, as stated in Ephesians 1:19.

Proof 2. How many professing believers have shipwrecked their faith, such as it was, in times of temptation and trial! See how they fall from grace, like stars falling from the heavens, when Antichrist prevails, as mentioned in 2 Thessalonians 2:12: "God will send them a powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie." They plunge

into damning delusions because they never truly believed the truth, even though they themselves and others believed they did. That house is built on sand, and that faith is poorly founded if it cannot withstand the storm.

Proof 3. Consider the complete inconsistency between the lives of most individuals and the principles of the religion they profess. Bringing fire close to oneself will cause burns, so people avoid it. However, most individuals live as if the gospel is a mere fable, and the wrath of God, revealed in His word against unrighteousness and ungodliness, is nothing more than an empty threat. If you truly believe in the doctrines of the word, why are you so unconcerned about the state of your souls before the Lord? Why do you show so little interest in the weighty matter of whether or not you have been born again? Many live as they were born and are likely to die in the same manner, yet they live in peace. Do these individuals truly believe in the sinful and miserable state of their natural condition? Do they believe they are children of wrath? Do they believe that there is no salvation without regeneration and that regeneration makes a person a new creation? If you truly believe in the promises of the word, why don't you embrace them and strive to enter into the promised rest? What lazy person wouldn't dig for hidden treasure if they truly believed they could find it? People are willing to work and toil for their livelihoods because they believe they will obtain it. Yet, they are not willing to exert comparable effort for the eternal weight of glory because they do not truly believe in the word of promise, as mentioned in Hebrews 4:1, 2. If you truly believe in the threatenings, why do you continue to live in sin, outside of Christ, and yet hope for mercy? Do these individuals believe that God is holy and just, and that He will not acquit the guilty? No, no, none truly believe or, at the very least, hardly anyone believes in the justice of the Lord, and how severely He punishes.

5. There is a natural inclination in the human mind toward lies and falsehoods, which aligns with its lusts. As soon as people are born, they stray and speak lies, as expressed in Psalm 58:3. This, along with the rest of our corrupt nature, originates from our first parents. God revealed the truth to them, but through the tempter's persuasion, they first doubted and then disbelieved it, embracing a lie instead. An undeniable proof of this can be found in the first article of the devil's creed: "You will not surely die," which he imposed upon our first parents, and they naturally accepted it. Their descendants clung to it until heavenly light compelled them to abandon it. This inclination permeates the lives of natural individuals who, until their consciences awaken, follow their own lusts, still holding onto the principle that "they will not surely die." This propensity often reaches such a level that individuals, despite the pronounced curse, declare, "I will have peace, even if I walk in the stubbornness of my heart, adding drunkenness to thirst," as stated in Deuteronomy 29:19. Regardless of the advantages that the truths of God may have over falsehoods, whether through education or other means, falsehood always possesses one advantage over truth for the natural individual: there is something within them that desires it to be true. Thus, their minds are receptive to accepting it. This is because true doctrine is "the doctrine that accords with godliness" and "the truth that leads to godliness," as mentioned in 1 Timothy 6:3 and Titus 1:1. Error is the doctrine that aligns with ungodliness, for there is no error or untruth proclaimed in matters of religion that does not have a connection with some corruption of the heart. This aligns with the words of the apostle in 2 Thessalonians 2:12: "They did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness." Therefore, truth and error, when presented with equal advantages for acceptance, find error more readily embraced by

the minds of individuals in their natural state. It is not surprising, then, that many reject the simplicity of gospel truths and institutions while eagerly embracing error and external pomp in religion, as they align more closely with the lusts of the heart and the vanity of the natural mind. This also explains why many adopt atheistic principles, as no one does so except to satisfy their unruly passions. Only those who would benefit from the absence of a God choose to do so.

6. Man is inherently proud, for when the gospel takes hold of him with power, it is employed to "demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God," as mentioned in 2 Corinthians 10:5. Humility is not a flower that naturally grows in the field of human nature; rather, it is planted by the hand of God in a renewed heart and learned from the humble Jesus. It is natural for humans to think highly of themselves and their possessions. The blow they received from their fall in Adam has produced a false light that causes the molehills around them to appear as mountains, and their deluded imagination presents countless illusory beauties. "Vain man would be wise," considering himself wise and desiring to be regarded as such by others, even though "man is born like a wild donkey's colt," as stated in Job 11:12. Man believes his own way is right simply because it is his own, for "every way of a man is right in his own eyes," as expressed in Proverbs 21:2. He believes his state is good because he knows no better; he lives without the law, as mentioned in Romans 7:9, and thus his hope is strong and his confidence unwavering. This is another Tower of Babel constructed against heaven, and it will not collapse as long as the forces of darkness can support it. Though the word may batter it, it remains standing. Breaches may be made in it at times, but they are quickly repaired. It may shake at times, but it

persists until either God, through His Spirit, causes a heartquake within the individual, bringing it down and leaving no stone upon another, as described in 2 Corinthians 10:4, 5, or until death demolishes it, tearing down its very foundation, as in Luke 16:23. Just as the natural individual thinks highly of himself, he thinks poorly of God, despite his pretenses. As expressed in Psalm 50:21, "You thought that I was one like yourself." The teachings of the gospel and the mysteries of Christ are foolishness to him, and his actions reflect this belief, as stated in 1 Corinthians 1:18 and 2:14. He subjects the word of God and God's works in the governance of the world to the judgment of his carnal reasoning, presumptuously criticizing and condemning them, as in Hosea 14:9. Sometimes, the ordinary restraints of Providence are removed, and Satan is allowed to stir up the carnal mind. In such instances, the mind becomes akin to an exposed and disturbed ant's nest, filled with doubts, denials, and infernal reasoning that cannot be overcome by any arguments presented against them. It is only through the power from above that the mind can be subdued and the mutiny of corrupt principles silenced.

Thus, I have presented the corruption of the understanding, which, though not fully explained, should reveal to you the absolute necessity of regenerating grace. Consider this, those of you in a state of nature, and express your despair before the Lord so that the Sun of Righteousness may arise upon you, lest you be trapped in eternal darkness. What value does your worldly wisdom hold? What worth do your religious achievements have when your understanding remains enveloped in natural darkness and confusion, devoid of the light of life? No matter the gifts or accomplishments of the natural individual, we must, like in the case of a leper (Leviticus 13:44), declare them utterly unclean, as their affliction resides in their

minds. However, that is not all; it also resides in their hearts, as I will soon explain.

II. The Corruption of the Will.

The Will, the commanding faculty that was once faithful and ruled alongside God, has now become a traitor, ruling with and for the devil. God initially planted it in humanity as a "wholly right seed," but now it has transformed into the degenerate offspring of a foreign vine. It was originally placed in proper subordination to the will of God, as mentioned earlier, but now it has completely strayed. Although some may exalt the power of free will, a spiritual understanding of the law that moral acts cannot satisfy, coupled with a deep insight into the corruption of human nature brought about by the inward working of the Spirit, convicting of sin, righteousness, and judgment, would make people realize the absolute need for the power of free grace to break the chains of wickedness from their free will. To delve into this plague of the heart, I present the following points for consideration:

1. The unregenerate will is completely incapable of what is truly good and pleasing in the sight of God. The will of the natural person is bound by Satan, confined within the realm of evil, unable to move beyond it, just as a dead person cannot raise themselves from the grave (Ephesians 2:1). We do not deny the individual's ability to choose, pursue, and act in accordance with what is morally good, in terms of its substance. However, although they can will what is good and right, they cannot will anything that is truly good and virtuous (John 15:5). Christ declares, "Apart from me," meaning separated from me like a branch from the vine, as supported by the word and context,

"you can do nothing," referring to nothing that is genuinely and spiritually good. Their very choices and desires for spiritual matters are carnal and selfish (John 6:26). He not only does not come to Christ, but "he cannot come" (verse 44). And what can he do that is acceptable to God if he does not believe in the one whom the Father has sent? To prove this incapacity for good in the unregenerate, consider the following:

Proof 1. How often does the light shine before people's eyes, making them unable to ignore the good they should choose and the evil they should reject? Yet their hearts have no more power to comply with that light than if they were arrested by an invisible hand! They see what is right, yet they follow and cannot help but follow what is wrong. Their consciences inform them of the right path and approve of it, yet their will cannot align with it. Their corruption chains them, preventing them from embracing it. Thus, they groan and regress, despite their enlightenment. If it were not so, why do the word and the path of holiness encounter such resistance in the world? Why do clear arguments and reasoning in favor of piety and a holy life, which appear to have some influence even on the carnal mind, fail to sway people to that side? Even if the existence of heaven and hell were only probable, it would be sufficient to compel the will to choose holiness if it were capable of being determined by reason alone. Yet, "knowing the righteous judgment of God, that those who practice such things are deserving of death, they not only do the same, but also approve of those who practice them" (Romans 1:31). And how is it that those who extol the power of free will do not demonstrate their opinion before the world through a practice that surpasses others in holiness, just as their belief in natural ability surpasses that of others? Or is this belief maintained solely to protect their lusts, which they can hold onto as long as they please and discard in an instant when they no longer have use for them, leaping from

Delilah's lap into Abraham's bosom? Although some may exploit this principle, it inherently provides ample shelter for wickedness of heart and life. It may be observed that the majority of gospel hearers, regardless of denomination, are afflicted with it. It is a bitter root inherent in all humanity, resulting in fearlessness about the soul's eternal state and numerous delays and excuses in the weighty matter, which only accumulates more work for a deathbed conversion in some, while others are ruined by legalistic living and neglect the life of faith and reliance on Christ for sanctification. All of this is rooted in the persuasion of sufficient natural abilities, as it aligns with corrupt nature.

Proof 2. Let those who, through the power of the Spirit of bondage, have had the law opened before them in its spiritual dimension for conviction, speak and testify whether they found themselves able to incline their hearts toward it in that state. They will confirm that the more light shone into their souls, the more they discovered their hearts' inability to comply with it. Some have reached "the breaking point" yet remain in the devil's camp, and from their experiences, they can attest that light entering the mind cannot give life to the will, enabling it to comply. They could provide their testimony here if they were willing. However, consider Paul's testimony regarding this matter. In his unconverted state, he was far from believing in his complete inability for good, but he learned it through experience (Romans 7:8–13). I acknowledge that the natural person may possess a superficial love for the letter of the law. Yet, the crucial point lies in the fact that they perceive the holy law in a carnal guise. While they embrace the product of their own imagination, they believe they have the law. But in reality, they are without the law because they do not see it in its spiritual essence. If they did, they would realize it stands in direct opposition to their nature, and their will could not align with it until transformed by the power of grace.

2. The unregenerate will possesses an aversion to good. Sin is the natural individual's element, and they are as unwilling to part with it as fish are to leave the water for dry land. They not only cannot come to Christ, but they will not come (John 5:40). They are defiled and detest being cleansed (Jeremiah 13:27), asking, "Will you not be made clean? When will it ever happen?" They are sick yet utterly averse to the remedy, loving their disease to the point of loathing the Physician. They are captives, prisoners, and slaves, yet they cherish their conqueror, jailer, and master. They cling to their chains, prison, and drudgery, having no desire for freedom. As proof of this aversion to good in the human will, I will provide specific examples:

Proof 1. Consider the rebelliousness of children. Do we not see that they naturally gravitate towards sinful freedom? How unwilling they are to be restrained! The world can attest that they are "like untamed bullocks," and it is far easier to train young bullocks to bear the yoke than to discipline young children and make them submit to restrictions on their sinful liberty. It is evident to everyone, like a mirror reflecting the truth, that humanity is inherently wild and stubborn, as Zophar observed, "Man is born like a wild donkey's colt" (Job 11:12). What more can be said? They are like colts, the colts of an ass, the colts of a wild ass. Compare it with Jeremiah 2:24, "A wild donkey used to the wilderness, snuffing up the wind at her pleasure; in her heat who can turn her away?"

Proof 2. Consider the pain and difficulty people often experience when trying to engage in religious duties, as well as the challenge of the carnal heart in remaining committed to them. It is distressing for them to detach from the world even for a brief moment to come before God. It is not easy to allocate time from various tasks and dedicate it to the one essential thing. Many approach God in their

duties with their faces turned towards the world. While their bodies are physically present in the place of worship, their hearts are found lingering at the foot of the hill, pursuing their covetousness (Ezekiel 33:31). They quickly grow weary of doing good because holy duties are incompatible with their corrupt nature. Observe them engaged in worldly pursuits, surrounded by their carnal companions, or indulging in their desires; time seems to fly by, racing furiously, so that it is gone before they realize it. But how slowly it passes when they are engaged in prayer, listening to a sermon, or experiencing the Sabbath! For many, the Lord's day feels like the longest day of the week. Consequently, they sleep longer in the morning and retire earlier at night, attempting to make the day a tolerable length. Their hearts echo the sentiment of Amos 8:5, "When will the Sabbath be over?" The hours spent in worship feel interminable. Thus, when the duty is completed, they feel relieved as if a burden has been lifted. When the sermon ends, many lack the grace or common courtesy to remain until the benediction is pronounced. They are like animals, already turning their heads away as soon as someone begins to release them. And why is that? It is because while they are engaged in religious activities, they feel as if they are "detained before the Lord" like Doeg (1 Samuel 22:7).

Proof 3. Consider how the will of the natural person rebels against the light (Job 24:13). Although light may sometimes penetrate their being because they are unable to keep it out, they prefer darkness to light. When truth forcefully enters the outer door of their understanding, the inner door of their will remains firmly shut. Lusts rise up against the light, and corruption and conscience engage in a battle on the battlefield until corruption gains the upper hand and forces conscience to retreat. Convictions are slain, and truth is taken captive, unable to cause any more disturbance. Sometimes, when the Word is preached or read, or when the hand of God is upon the

natural person, convictions are thrust upon them, and their spirit is wounded to varying degrees. Yet, as they cannot be made to yield, they flee with the arrows sticking in their conscience. Eventually, they manage to remove them and make themselves whole again. Thus, when the light shines, those who are naturally averse to it willingly close their eyes until God is provoked to blind them judicially. Then they become impervious to His Word and providences. They can go wherever they please and remain at ease, for there is no word from heaven that penetrates deeper than their ears. As Hosea 4:17 declares, "Ephraim is joined to idols; let him alone."

Proof 4. Let us observe the resistance offered by chosen souls when the Spirit of the Lord works to transfer them "from the power of Satan to God." Zion's King gains subjects only through the stroke of the sword "in the day of His power" (Psalm 110:2-3). No one comes to Him unless they are drawn by a divine hand (John 4:44). When the Lord approaches a soul, He finds the strong man guarding the house, and within, a profound peace and security while the soul slumbers in the devil's embrace. However, "the prey must be taken from the mighty, and the captive must be delivered." Therefore, the Lord awakens the sinner, opens their eyes, and strikes them with terror as dark clouds loom above and the sword of vengeance is poised at their breast. At this point, they exert considerable effort to conceal their wickedness behind a veneer of righteousness, to shake off their fears, to resist them, and to divert their thoughts from the unpleasant and unwelcome reality of their spiritual condition. If they cannot rid themselves of these fears, they call upon carnal reason for assistance, urging that there is no reason for such great fear, that everything will be fine, and that if it goes wrong for them, it will go wrong for many others. When the sinner is defeated in this argument and realizes that there is no advantage in going to hell in the

company of others, they resolve to abandon their sins. However, they cannot bring themselves to break away immediately, believing there is still plenty of time and they will do it later. Conscience admonishes them, "Today if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts" (Hebrews 4:7). Yet they cry out, "Tomorrow, Lord; tomorrow, Lord," and even "right now, Lord." Eventually, "right now" never seems to arrive. Consequently, they often leave their prayers and confessions with a conscience burdened with sharper convictions. The heart does not always cast out the sweet morsel immediately after confession is made with the mouth (Judges 10:10-16). Even when compelled by conscience to part with certain lusts, they cling to others as if they were their right eyes and right hands, expressing sorrowful looks for those they have relinquished. This resembles the Israelites who, with bitter hearts, remembered "the fish they ate in Egypt freely" (Numbers 11:5). Moreover, when pressed to admit before the Lord that they are willing to part with all their idols, their hearts contradict their words. In summary, the soul in this condition shifts from one thing to another, like a fish with a hook in its jaw, until it can no longer resist, as "a wild ass used to the wilderness" (Jeremiah 2:24).

3. Within the human will resides a natural inclination towards evil, a woeful bent towards sin. People are naturally inclined to backslide from God, as Hosea 11:7 states. They lean, so to speak, towards backsliding, like a precarious wall that suddenly collapses in an instant. If we place holiness and life on one side and sin and death on the other, and leave the untransformed will to itself, it will choose sin and reject holiness. There is no doubt about this, just as there is no doubt that water poured on the side of a hill will flow downward and not upward, or that a flame will ascend and not descend.

Proof 1. Isn't the path of evil the first path that people tread? Their inclinations clearly lean towards the wrong side, even when they lack the cunning to conceal them. From the moment we open our eyes to the world, we look askew, towards hell and not towards heaven. It becomes evident that we are not only rational beings but also sinful creatures (Psalm 58:3). Proverbs 22:15 states, "Foolishness is bound in the heart of a child, but the rod of correction will drive it far from him." Folly is tightly woven into our very nature. The knot cannot be untied; it must be broken apart through discipline. Mere words cannot accomplish this; the rod must be employed to drive away folly. If it is not driven far away, the heart and folly will reunite. It is not that the rod alone can achieve this; the painful experiences of many parents testify otherwise. Solomon himself affirms in Proverbs 27:22, "Though you grind a fool in a mortar with a pestle along with crushed grain, yet his folly will not depart from him." Folly is so deeply embedded in his heart. However, the rod is an ordinance of God appointed for this purpose. Like the Word, it becomes effective through the accompanying work of the Spirit. By the way, this underscores that parents, when administering discipline to their children, must first correct their own uncontrolled emotions. They should approach it with solemnity, relying on the Lord and following it with prayer for His blessing if they desire it to be effective.

Proof 2. How easily are people led astray into sin! Children who are not persuaded towards good are simple and easily influenced. Those whom the Word fails to draw towards holiness are "led by Satan at his pleasure." Even the cunning Esau in Genesis 25:27 was as easily deceived out of his blessing as if he were a fool or an idiot. The more natural something is, the easier it is. Christ's yoke is easy for the saints, to the extent that they partake in the divine nature. Similarly, sin is easy for the untransformed person. However, learning to do good is as difficult as changing the skin of an Ethiopian. This is

because the will naturally inclines towards evil and resists good. A child can set a round object in motion with a simple touch, but struggles to move a square object of the same weight. The roundness allows for easy motion, while the heart becomes a dead weight on the path of holiness. The reason for this lies in the natural inclination and disposition of the heart, which is prone and bent towards evil. If the will were naturally balanced between good and evil, embracing one would be as easy as embracing the other. However, experience testifies otherwise. In the sacred history of the Israelites, especially in the Book of Judges, how frequently do we find them forsaking Jehovah, the mighty God, and becoming infatuated with the idols of the nations around them! But did any of these nations grow fond of Israel's God and abandon their own idols? No, when it comes to change, though people are naturally inclined towards it, it is only from evil to evil, not from evil to good. As Jeremiah 2:10-11 states, "Has a nation changed its gods, even though they are not gods? But my people have changed their glory for what does not profit." It is clear that the will of man is not in perfect balance but leans towards the wrong side.

Proof 3. Consider how people continue in the path of sin until they are halted, and that by a force other than their own. Isaiah 57:17 states, "I was angry and went on rebelliously in the way of my own heart." If God withdraws His restraining hand and allows the sinner to follow their own desires, they have no uncertainty about which path to choose. Take note, the way of sin aligns with their heart's natural inclination. As long as God permits, they walk in their own way (Acts 14:16). The untransformed person is so firmly entrenched in their woeful choice that it is enough to say they are following their own way to demonstrate their departure from God's way.

Proof 4. Whatever good impressions are made on them do not endure. Although their hearts may be as hard as stone, even harder than a millstone, when it comes to receiving those impressions, they are as unstable as water and cannot retain them. The heart works against receiving them and, once they are received, it works to dispel them and return to its natural inclination. As Hosea 6:4 says, "Your goodness is like a morning cloud, like the dew that goes early away." A morning cloud promises a heavy downpour, but when the sun rises, it dissipates. The sun's heat evaporates the early dew, disappointing the farmer's expectations. Such is the goodness of the untransformed person. Some intense affliction or profound conviction may compel them to some degree to turn away from their wicked path. However, since their will remains unchanged, religion continues to go against the grain for them. Therefore, their temporary change dissipates (Psalm 78:34-37). Although a stone thrown into the air may remain there momentarily, its natural weight will eventually bring it back down. Similarly, untransformed individuals return to wallowing in the mire because, although they may have washed themselves, their swinish nature remains unchanged. It is challenging to ignite damp wood, and even more challenging to keep it alight. But it is even more difficult to make the untransformed will retain acquired goodness. This serves as clear evidence of the natural inclination of the will towards evil.

Proof 5. Do the saints serve the Lord now as they used to serve sin in their unconverted state? Far from it! Romans 6:20 states, "When you were slaves to sin, you were free in regard to righteousness." Sin had full control and allowed no partners. But now, as servants of Christ, are they free from sin? No, some remnants of their old selves remain, indicating that the old self is still dying within them. Consequently, their hearts often mislead them and veer towards evil when they seek to do good (Romans 7:21). They need to be watchful and diligently

guard their hearts. Their own painful experiences teach them that "Whoever trusts in his own mind is a fool" (Proverbs 28:26). If this is the case for the righteous, how much more so for the unrepentant?

4. There exists a natural opposition, direct conflict, and enmity within the human will towards God Himself and His holy will. Romans 8:7 states, "The mind governed by the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so." The will was once God's representative in the soul, appointed to govern on His behalf. However, now it stands in opposition to Him. If you desire a visual representation of its natural state, it is the complete opposite of God's will. Even if a fruit is forbidden and placed before one's eyes, it is enough to draw the heart towards it. Allow me to give an example: the sin of profane swearing and cursing, to which some individuals are so shamelessly devoted that they take pride in it. They spew out horrid oaths and curses as if their mouths were the gates of Hell, or they pepper their speech with minced oaths. And all of this is done without any provocation, although even if there were provocation, it would not excuse their behavior. Now, let me ask you a few questions:
 1. What benefit is there in this? A thief gains something for his efforts; a drunkard fills his belly. But what do you gain? Others serve the devil for pay, yet you are volunteers who expect no reward other than the satisfaction of insulting Heaven. And if you do not repent, you will receive your full reward. When you go to hell, your deeds will accompany you. The drunkard will not find a drop of water to cool his tongue there, nor will the covetous man's wealth follow him into the afterlife! You may continue your old trade there; eternity will provide ample time for you to indulge in it.
 2. What pleasure is there in this, apart from deriving satisfaction from transgressing the holy law? Which of your senses does swearing and cursing gratify? If it

pleases your ears, it can only be due to the noise it makes against the heavens. Even if you were inclined to surrender yourselves to all sorts of profanity and sensuality, there is so little pleasure to be derived from these sins that we must conclude that your love for them, in this case, is a love for them in and of themselves—a devilish, unrequited love devoid of any prospect of profit or pleasure. If someone were to claim that such individuals are aberrations of humanity, let it be so. However, alas! The world is full of such aberrations; they can be found almost everywhere. Allow me to say that they serve as the mouthpiece of the entire unregenerate world in their defiance against heaven (Romans 3:14). Their mouths are filled with curses and bitterness. Verse 19 states, "Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God." I have a charge against every unregenerate man and woman, young and old, and I will prove it through the testimony of Scripture and their own consciences. Whether they are religious or profane, if they are not born again, they are enemies of God—the enemy of God, the Son of God, the Spirit of God, and the law of God. Hear this, you carefree souls who live at ease in your natural state. (1.) You are enemies of God in your minds (Colossians 1:21). You have not yet been reconciled to Him; the inherent enmity still persists, although it may lie hidden and go unnoticed. 1. You are enemies of God's very existence (Psalm 14:1). The fool says in his heart, "There is no God." The proud individual wishes there were no one greater than themselves; the rebel desires no king. And the unregenerate person, a mass of pride and rebellion, wishes there were no God. They say it in their hearts, silently desiring it even though they are ashamed and afraid to express it openly. The fact that all unregenerate people are such fools is evident from

the apostle's quotation of a portion of this Psalm in Romans 3:10-19. I must admit that when the unregenerate individual views God as the Creator and Sustainer of the world, they do not rise up against the existence of their Benefactor due to their self-love. However, their enmity quickly becomes apparent when they regard God as the Ruler and Judge of the world, binding them under the curse to pursue holiness and subjecting them to the cords of death on account of their sin. In such cases, listen to the voice of the heart, and you will find it saying, "There is no God." 2. You are enemies of God's nature (Job 21:14). They say to God, "Depart from us! We do not desire the knowledge of your ways." People establish an idol of their own imagination in place of the true God and then bow down and worship it. They do not love God as He is revealed in His Word—the infinitely holy, just, powerful, and true Being—but rather they loathe Him. In fact, people are naturally haters of God (Romans 1:30). If they could, they would undoubtedly attempt to change His very nature. Consider this truth: everything that exists in God is God Himself. Therefore, His attributes or perfections are not separate entities from Himself. If God's attributes were not God Himself, He would be a composite being and not the supreme Being—an assertion that is blasphemous. The parts that compose such a being would precede the being itself. However, God is the Alpha and Omega, the first and the last. Now, in order to convict you, I would like to pose a few questions to your conscience. 1. How do your hearts respond to the infinite purity and holiness of God? Conscience will provide an answer that the tongue will not utter. If you do not partake in His holiness, you cannot be reconciled to it. Pagans, recognizing that they could not attain godliness, fashioned their gods in their own defiled image, revealing the type of god that the natural person desires. God is holy—can an unholy creature love His unstained

holiness? No, only the righteous can "give thanks at the remembrance of His holiness" (Psalm 97:12). God is light—can creatures of darkness rejoice in it? No, "everyone who does evil hates the light" (John 3:20). "For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness?" (2 Corinthians 6:14). 2. How do your hearts respond to the justice of God? Every person wedded to their lusts, as all unregenerate individuals are, would willingly sacrifice their own lives to eradicate that aspect of God's character. Can a criminal love their condemning judge? Can an unjustified sinner love a just God? No, they cannot. As Luke 7:47 states, "Whoever has been forgiven little loves little." Consequently, since individuals cannot erase the doctrine of God's justice from the Bible, it becomes a source of discomfort to them, and they strive to eliminate it from their minds. They ruin themselves by presuming upon God's mercy while neglecting to obtain a righteousness in which they can stand before His justice. They say in their hearts, "The Lord will not do good, nor will he do ill" (Zephaniah 1:12). 3. How do you respond to the omniscience and omnipresence of God? Naturally, people would prefer a blind idol over an all-seeing God. Therefore, they do whatever they can, like Adam, to hide from the presence of the Lord. They do not love the all-seeing, ever-present God any more than a thief enjoys having a judge witness their evil deeds. If it were up for a vote, people would vote God out of the world and confine Him to heaven. For the language of the carnal heart is, "The Lord does not see us; the Lord has forsaken the earth" (Ezekiel 8:12). 4. How do you respond to the truth and veracity of God? There are but few in the world who can wholeheartedly affirm the apostle's statement in Romans 3:4, "Let God be true though every one were a liar." In reality, many individuals hope that God will not be true to His word. There are thousands who hear the gospel and hope to be saved, believing that everything

is secure for eternity, yet they have never experienced the new birth nor do they concern themselves with the question of whether they have been born again or not—a question that is likely to disappear from our midst in this present age. Our Lord's words are plain and definitive: "Unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." So, what are such hopes but genuine hopes that God—spoken with the utmost reverence—will retract His word and that Christ will prove to be a false prophet? What else can we conclude from the sinner who, upon hearing the words of the curse, blesses themselves in their heart and says, "I shall have peace, though I walk in the stubbornness of my heart" (Deuteronomy 29:19)? 5. How do you respond to the power of God? Only new creations will truly love Him for His power when they view it in all its splendor. Others may fearfully dread Him on account of His power. There is not a natural person who would not contribute to the utmost of their abilities to construct another Tower of Babel to confine Him. Based on these grounds, I declare every unregenerate person an enemy of God.

(2.) You are enemies of the Son of God. The enmity towards Christ that resides in your hearts would have driven you to join the vineyard tenants who killed the heir and cast him out if you had faced the same temptations without any restraints. "Am I a dog?" you may ask, questioning whether you would treat your beloved Savior in such a manner. But just as Hazael asked in a different context, when faced with temptation, he acted like a dog. Many call Christ their dear Savior, yet their consciences bear witness that they derive more pleasure from their sinful desires, which are ten times dearer to them than their Savior. They hold no affection for Him except as they abuse His death and sufferings to secure the peaceful indulgence of their lusts. They want to live as they please in this world and hope to

be kept out of hell when they die. Alas! It is a distorted Christ who appears sweet to them, while their souls loathe the Christ who is "the brightness of the Father's glory and the exact imprint of his nature." Their situation is akin to that of the carnal Jews who delighted in Him while misunderstanding His purpose in coming into the world, imagining that He would be a temporal deliverer to them (Malachi 3:1). However, when He "sits as a refiner and purifier of silver" (verse 2-3) and rejects them as worthless silver, they who expected to receive great honor in the kingdom of the Messiah find their consciences troubled by His doctrine. They find no rest until they have His blood on their hands. To open your eyes to this point, which you are so reluctant to believe, I will present the enmity of your hearts against Christ in all His roles.

Firstly, every unregenerate person is an enemy of Christ in His prophetic role. He has been appointed by the Father as the great Prophet and Teacher, but not according to the world's preference, as they would have unanimously rejected Him in their natural state. Thus, when He came, He was condemned as a deceiver and blasphemer. I will provide two pieces of evidence for this enmity.

Evidence 1: Consider the reception He receives when He comes to teach souls inwardly by His Spirit. People do everything they can to block their ears, like the deaf adder, so as not to hear His voice. They consistently resist the Holy Spirit. They do not desire knowledge of His ways and bid Him to depart from them. On such occasions, the old accusation is often made against Him, as recorded in John 10:20, "He is mad; why listen to him?" Many consider the soul's exercise, prompted by the spirit of bondage, to be nothing more than madness and melancholic fits. They blaspheme the Lord's work because they themselves are out of their minds and cannot discern these matters.

Evidence 2: Consider the reception He receives when He comes to teach people outwardly through His word. His written word, the Bible, is disregarded. Christ has given it to us as a book of instruction, showing us the path we must take to reach Immanuel's land. It serves as a lamp to guide us through the dark world towards eternal light. He has commanded us to search it diligently, just as men dig into mines for silver and gold (John 5:39). But, ah! How is this sacred treasure profaned by many! They ridicule the holy word by which they will be judged on the last day. They would rather lose their souls than their jests, adorning their wanton wit with scripture phrases. In doing so, they act as madly as someone who digs into a mine to acquire metal only to pour it down their own and their neighbor's throats. Many exhaust their spirits in reading romances, and their minds pursue them like a flame does dry stubble. Yet they have no heart for the holy word and rarely pick up a Bible. What is pleasing to their vanity brings them joy, while that which commends holiness to their unholy hearts leaves their spirits dull and flat. They find pleasure in reading a profane ballad or storybook, but the Bible holds no appeal for them. Many set their Bibles aside with their Sunday clothes, and whatever use they have for their clothes, they have none for their Bibles until the next Sabbath. Alas! The dust or the finery surrounding their Bibles now serves as a witness, and on the final day, it will testify to the enmity of their hearts against Christ. Furthermore, among those who do read the scripture, how few read it as the word of the Lord to their souls and maintain communion with Him through it! They do not make His statutes their counselors, nor do they turn to their Bibles when facing specific challenges. They remain ignorant of the true comforts found in the scriptures. And when they are downcast, it is something other than the word that revives them, just as Ahab was cured of his sullenness by obtaining Naboth's vineyard.

The preaching of Christ's word is despised. The reception given by most of the world, to whom it has been proclaimed, is as described in Matthew 22:5, "They paid no attention." They hold those whom He employs to preach in contempt, despite any pretense they may put on to disguise their disdain for the ministry. John 15:20-21 states, "A servant is not greater than his master. If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they kept my word, they will also keep yours. But all these things they will do to you on account of my name." It seems that the son of Hated is not without a hidden meaning, which the world has deciphered in all ages. Yet, even though the vessels of clay in which God has placed His treasure have become vessels of no value in the eyes of many, why is the treasure itself treated with contempt? Regrettably, it is indeed scorned, especially in the present day. "Lord, who has believed what he heard from us? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?" People can consecutively have silent Sabbaths without remorse. And, alas! When they do attend religious services, it is often merely to be seen by the Lord and to go through the motions, just as a group of animals would if driven into His courts (Isaiah 1:12). Little reverence and awe of God are apparent in their spirits. Many stand like solid walls before the word, but their corrupt conduct remains unaffected by the preaching. Nay, not a few are growing worse and worse despite hearing "precept upon precept," and the result is that "they shall go and fall backward, and be broken, and snared, and taken" (Isaiah 28:13). What tears of blood are sufficient to lament that the gospel of the grace of God is received in vain! Ministers are but the voice of one crying out; the speaker is in heaven and speaks to you through men. Why do you reject Him who is speaking? God has made our Master Christ the heir of all things, and we are sent to seek a bride for Him. None is as worthy as He, and none is more unworthy than those to whom this match is proposed. Yet the prince of darkness is preferred over the Prince of Peace. A gloomy darkness

enveloped the world after Adam's fall, more dreadful than if the sun, moon, and stars had forever been cloaked in pitch-black darkness. We would have remained in eternal darkness had not the grace of the gospel appeared as a radiant sun to dispel it (Titus 2:11). Yet, we flee from it like night-owls, and like wild beasts, we seek refuge in our dens. When the sun rises, we are blinded by its light, and as creatures of darkness, we prefer darkness to light. Such is the enmity that resides in the hearts of men against Christ in His prophetic office.

Secondly, the natural person is an enemy of Christ in His priestly office. He has been appointed by the Father as an eternal priest so that sinners may have peace with God and access to Him through His sacrificial death and intercession. However, Christ crucified is a stumbling block and foolishness to the unregenerate part of humanity to whom He is preached (1 Corinthians 1:23). They do not embrace Him as the "new and living way," nor do they acknowledge Him as the High Priest over the house of God, despite what the world may say. Corrupt human nature follows a completely different path.

Proof 1. None of Adam's descendants are naturally inclined to receive the blessing through borrowed robes. They always, in the words of the spider's motto, "owe all to themselves" and attempt to climb to heaven on a thread spun by their own efforts. They desire to be under the law and strive to establish their own righteousness. Naturally, humans view God as a great master and themselves as His servants who must work and earn their way to heaven. Therefore, when their conscience is awakened, they believe that to be saved, they must fulfill the demands of the law, serve God to the best of their abilities, and seek mercy for their shortcomings. Many engage in religious duties but never go beyond them to embrace Jesus Christ.

Proof 2. As people naturally think highly of their perceived well-done duties, they expect acceptance from God based on their works rather than the merits of Christ's blood. They question why their fasting goes unnoticed, taking pride in their performances and achievements, even their religious opinions. They claim what they steal from Christ the High Priest for themselves.

Proof 3. When approaching God in their religious duties, the natural person will either go without a Mediator or seek more than the one and only Mediator, Jesus Christ. Blinded by their nature, they are bold and venture to approach God directly without Christ, rushing into His presence and presenting their petitions without being introduced by the Secretary of heaven or placing their requests in His hands. This disposition is deeply ingrained in the unregenerate heart. When engaging with many gospel hearers about their hopes of salvation, the name of Christ is rarely mentioned. When asked how they expect to obtain the forgiveness of sins, they simply beg and hope for mercy because God is a merciful God, placing all their confidence in that alone. Others seek mercy for Christ's sake, but how do they know that Christ will take up their cause? They, like the Catholics who have mediators with the Mediator, have their own reasons. They believe that Christ cannot refuse their pleas because they pray, confess, mourn, and have great desires. They have something of their own to commend themselves to Him. They have never become poor in spirit or come to Christ empty-handed, fully relying on His atoning blood.

Thirdly, the natural person is an enemy of Christ in His kingly office. The Father has appointed the Mediator as the King in Zion (Psalm 2:6). Everyone who hears the gospel is commanded, at their own peril, to "kiss the Son" and submit to Him (verse 12). However, the natural inclination of mankind is to say, "Away with Him," as seen in

verse 2 and 3 and Luke 19:14, "We will not have this man to reign over us."

Proof 1. The workings of corrupt nature seek to wrest the government from His hands. As soon as He was born, being born a King, Herod persecuted Him. And when He was crucified, they placed a sign above His head that read, "This is Jesus, the King of the Jews." Even though His kingdom is spiritual and not of this world, they do not allow Him to have a kingdom within a kingdom that recognizes no other head or supreme authority except the Royal Mediator. They boldly tamper with His royal prerogatives, changing His laws, institutions, and ordinances, shaping His worship according to the devices of their own hearts, introducing new offices and officials into His kingdom that cannot be found in "the book of the manner of His kingdom." They manipulate the external governance of His kingdom to suit their carnal desires. This is the enmity of the hearts of men against the King of Zion.

Proof 2. Naturally, people are reluctant to submit to and be constrained by the laws and discipline of His kingdom. As a King, He is a lawgiver (Isaiah 33:22) and has established external governance, discipline, and corrective measures to control the unruly and maintain order among His professed subjects. These measures are to be administered by officers appointed by Him (Matthew 18:17, 18; 1 Corinthians 12:28; 1 Timothy 5:17; Hebrews 13:17). However, these measures are highly disliked by the carnal world, who prefer sinful freedom and cry out, "Let us break their chains and throw off their shackles" (Psalm 2:3). This work, in particular, goes against the current of corrupt nature, which often leads to a state where it seems as if there is no king in Israel, and everyone does what is right in their own eyes.

Proof 3. Although natural men may feign submission to the King of saints, their lusts always retain dominion in their hearts, and they serve various lusts and pleasures. Only those in whom Christ is formed genuinely crown Him and receive His kingdom within them. His crown is "the crown His mother placed on His head on the day of His espousals." Unless conquered by a day of power, who among those whom grace has not subdued will allow Him to set up and tear down within their souls as He pleases? In contrast, any other lord will sooner rule over them than the Lord of glory. They warmly welcome His enemies but never fully surrender themselves to His rule. Thus, you can see that the natural person is an enemy of Jesus Christ in all His offices.

But oh, how difficult it is to convince people of this truth! They are reluctant to believe, and it seems that most gospel hearers are unaware of the enmity in their hearts against Christ in His priestly office. There appears to be a particular hostility in human nature towards this aspect of His role. It is worth noting that the Socinians, who are enemies of our blessed Lord, acknowledge Him as a Prophet and a King but deny His role as a Priest. This aligns with the corruption of our nature because, under the covenant of works, the Lord was known as a Prophet or Teacher and also as a King or Ruler, but not at all as a Priest. Therefore, man knows nothing of the mystery of Christ as the way to the Father until it is revealed to him. And when it is revealed, the will rises up against it because corrupt nature opposes the mystery of Christ and the great plan of salvation through the crucified Savior as revealed in the gospel. To clarify this weighty truth, consider the following four points:

1. The soul's embrace of the grand scheme of salvation through Jesus Christ and the submission of matters of salvation before the Lord is declared in the Scriptures as an undeniable mark of a

true saint who is blessed in this life and in the hereafter. How could this be if human nature could comply with such a grand design?

2. Corrupt nature stands in direct opposition to the gospel plan. In the gospel, God presents Jesus Christ as the means of reconciling man to Himself, appointing Him as the Mediator in whom He is well pleased and accepting no one else (Matthew 17:5). However, human nature rejects Him entirely (Psalm 71:11). God designated the flesh of Christ as the meeting place for reconciliation; thus, God was in Christ as the tabernacle of meeting to make peace with sinners (2 Corinthians 5:19). Yet natural men, even if it means eternal damnation, refuse to come to Christ (John 5:40). In the gospel, sinners must stand before the Lord clothed in an imputed righteousness, but corrupt nature seeks an inherent righteousness. So, to the extent that natural men pursue righteousness, they pursue the "law of righteousness" and not "the Lord our righteousness." Nature always seeks to build itself up and find grounds for boasting, while the gospel seeks to exalt grace, humble nature, and eliminate boasting. Our natural religion is to do good from and for ourselves, whereas the essence of the gospel religion is to deny ourselves and do good from and for Christ.
3. Everything in nature is against believing in Jesus Christ. What beauty can a blind person see in a crucified Savior that makes Him desirable? How can the will, naturally impotent and averse to good, choose Him? The soul can rightfully say to Him in the day of spiritual struggle, as the Jebusites said to David in a different context, "Unless you take away the blind and the lame, you shall not come in here" (2 Samuel 5:6). The way of nature is to rely on oneself for everything, adhering to the fundamental

maxim of unsanctified morality that "a man should trust in himself." Yet, according to the doctrine of faith, this is mere foolishness. As Proverbs 28:26 declares, "He who trusts in his own heart is a fool." On the other hand, faith is the soul going out of itself for everything, which nature deems as foolishness. Hence, the working of mighty power is necessary to cause sinners to believe (Ephesians 1:19; Isaiah 53:1). The promises of welcome to sinners in the gospel covenant are ample, generous, and free, with no conditions attached. If they cannot believe His word alone, He has sworn an oath to confirm it (Ezekiel 33:11), and for their greater assurance, He has given sacraments as seals of His sworn covenant. Thus, the most faithless person in the world cannot demand more to make them believe than what the Lord has graciously provided to make them believe in Him. This clearly indicates that nature opposes belief, and those who flee to Christ for refuge require strong consolation (Hebrews 6:18) to counterbalance their strong doubts and propensity for unbelief. Furthermore, it is worth noting how objections are preemptively addressed in the word sent to a secure and graceless generation, with words of grace heaped upon one another (Isaiah 55:7-9; Joel 2:13). This is because the Lord knows that when these secure sinners are truly awakened, doubts, fears, and carnal reasonings against belief will fill their hearts like dust stirred by sweeping a dry floor.

4. Corrupt nature leans towards the way of the law or the covenant of works, and every natural person who seeks salvation is engaged in that way. They will not abandon it until divine power overcomes them. However, the way of salvation by works and the way of free grace in Jesus Christ are incompatible. As Romans 11:6 states, "And if by grace, then it is no longer by works; if it were, grace would no longer be grace." Similarly,

Galatians 3:12 declares, "And the law is not based on faith; on the contrary, it says, 'The person who does these things will live by them.'" Therefore, if the human will naturally inclines towards salvation by the law, it conflicts with the gospel plan. It is evident that our hearts are naturally bent in this direction when we consider the following:

First, the law was Adam's covenant, and as the head and representative of all mankind, he knew no other covenant. We, as his descendants, were brought into that covenant and left under it by him, although without the ability to fulfill its conditions. Consequently, this covenant is interwoven with our nature, and though we have lost our father's strength, we still incline towards the path he followed as our head and representative in that covenant – the path of earning life through works. This is our natural religion and the principle that people naturally assume, as seen in Matthew 19:16 when someone asks, "What good thing must I do to get eternal life?"

Secondly, consider the opposition that has always been present in the world against the doctrine of free grace in Jesus Christ, with men instead advocating for the way of works. This reveals the natural inclination of the heart. It is evident that the primary purpose of the gospel plan is to elevate the free grace of God in Jesus Christ (Romans 4:16). All gospel truths revolve around Christ, so to learn the truth is to learn about Christ (Ephesians 4:20), and true learning entails being taught as "the truth is in Jesus" (verse 21). Throughout history, every dispensation of grace and favor from heaven, whether towards nations or individuals, has contained an element proclaiming the freedom of grace. This pattern is evident from the very first instance of divine favor, where Abel, the younger brother, was accepted while Cain, the elder brother, was rejected. This theme

runs through the entire Bible. Yet, it is true that this aspect has faced the greatest opposition from corrupt nature. One could say that of all the religious errors since the preaching of Christ, the opposition to free grace in Him, in favor of works, was the first to arise and likely will be the last to vanish. Numerous errors have arisen one after another, only to fade away as the world grew weary and ashamed of them. However, this particular error has persisted from the time of Cain, its initial proponent, to this day. It has always found adherents, even during times of great enlightenment. It is not without reason that I call Cain its author. When Abel offered a sacrificial atonement—a bloody offering of the firstborn from his flock—Cain, like the proud Pharisee in Luke 18, brought a thanksgiving offering of the produce of the ground (Genesis 4:3-4). What caused Cain's anger and led him to murder Abel? Was it not because his work was not accepted by God (Genesis 4:4-5; 1 John 3:12)? Abel's work was done in faith and accepted, whereas Cain's work was done without faith and rejected, as the Apostle teaches in Hebrews 11:4. Cain expressed his opposition to justification and acceptance with God through faith, opposing works, by shedding his brother's blood and passing down this opposition to posterity. Since then, the unbloody sacrifice has often resulted in the shedding of blood of those who rejected it. The promise made to Abraham regarding the seed through whom all nations would be blessed became overshadowed among his descendants in Egypt, and the majority of them no longer saw the need for that means of obtaining the blessing. God Himself refuted their error with the fiery law from Mount Sinai, which was added because of transgressions until the seed would come (Galatians 3:19). It is unnecessary to detail how Moses and the prophets continually labored to lead the people away from the notion of their own righteousness. The ninth chapter of Deuteronomy is entirely dedicated to that purpose. The people remained quite obstinate in this matter during our Savior's time and the apostolic era when the

doctrine of free grace was most clearly preached. That error persisted despite the presence of the clearest light, as evidenced by the Epistles to the Romans and Galatians. It has continued to this day, with Roman Catholicism being a common repository of past heresies and the heart and life of that delusion. Finally, it is worth noting that as the Church gradually lost its purity in other areas, the doctrine of free grace became increasingly obscured.

Thirdly, such is the innate inclination of man's heart to the way of the law, in opposition to Christ, that just as a tainted vessel alters the taste of the purest liquid poured into it, the natural man transforms the very gospel into a law and converts the covenant of grace into a covenant of works. The ceremonial law served as a genuine gospel to the Jews, constantly reminding them of blood, death, and the transfer of guilt as the sole means of salvation. Yet, their own practices related to the table, that is, their altar, and its accompanying ordinances became a snare to them (Malachi 1:12; Romans 11:9). They used these practices to compensate for their shortcomings in obeying the moral law and clung to them so tightly that they rejected the one to whom the altar and sacrifices pointed—just as Hagar, whose duty was to serve, was brought into her mistress's bed by their forefather, not without a divine purpose, for "these things are being taken figuratively" as "two covenants" (Galatians 4:24). Thus, the doctrine of the gospel is corrupted by Catholics and other enemies of the doctrine of free grace. Indeed, regardless of whether or not natural men's minds align correctly on this matter, as long as they remain outside of Christ, their faith, repentance, and obedience, however imperfect, are placed in the position of Christ and His righteousness. They trust in these as if by them they fulfill a new law.

Fourthly, it is exceedingly difficult for Adam's children to relinquish the law as a covenant of works. None abandon it in that regard except those whom the power of the Holy Spirit separates from it. The law serves as our first husband and captures the virgin love of everyone. When Christ comes to the soul, He finds it already married to the law, unwilling and unable to be wedded to another until it is obligated to part with the first husband, as the apostle explains in Romans 7:1-4. To give you an idea of the nature of this parting, consider the following:

Firstly, it is like a death (Romans 7:4; Galatians 2:19). Pleading and persuasion have no effect on the soul at this point. It says to the first husband, like Ruth to Naomi, "May the Lord deal with me, be it ever so severely if anything but death separates you and me." And sinners are true to their word; they die to the law before they are united with Christ. Death is difficult for everyone, but imagine the struggle a loving wife on her deathbed faces in parting with her husband, the husband of her youth, and with the dear children she has borne for him. The law is that husband, and all the duties performed by the natural man are those children. What a desperate struggle takes place in the heart before they are separated? I may touch on this later, but for now, consider the apostle's concise but powerful description of it in Romans 10:3: "For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God." They strive to establish their own righteousness, like an eager debater in a school seeking to establish a point, or like a tormentor extracting a confession under torture. They strive to make it stand, but their righteousness is like a house built on sand—it cannot stand, yet they insist on its stability. Why do they exert so much effort for a crumbling righteousness? Because, flawed as it is, it is their own. What opposes Christ's righteousness is that it would make them indebted to free grace for

everything, and the proud heart cannot submit to that. Here lies the crux of the matter (Psalm 10:4): "The wicked, through the pride of his countenance, will not seek [God]." In other words, "He cannot dig, and he is ashamed to beg." This struggle occurs before the soul dies to the law. But what is even more indicative of this woeful disposition of the heart is that nature often prevails over the disease. The soul, which was nearly dead to the law during times of intense conviction, tragically recovers from this promising and hopeful sickness. Naturally, it clings even more tightly to the law, just as a wife, brought back from the brink of death, would cling to her husband. This is the outcome of the struggles of many concerning their spiritual state. They may indeed become more diligent in performing duties, but they are as far from Christ as ever, if not farther.

Secondly, it is a violent death (Romans 7:4). "You have died to the law," as the word implies, being killed, slain, or put to death. The law itself plays a significant role in this. The husband inflicts the wound (Galatians 2:19): "Through the law I died to the law." The soul that experiences this death is like a loving wife wedded to a severe husband. She does her best to please him, yet he is never satisfied and continually harasses and beats her until her heart breaks, and death releases her. This will become more evident later on. Thus, it becomes clear that people's hearts are naturally inclined towards the way of the law and opposed to the gospel method. The second charge against those who are unregenerate is confirmed—they are enemies of the Son of God.

(3.) You are enemies of the Spirit of God. He is the Spirit of holiness, but the natural man is unholy and delights in his unholiness. Therefore, he resists the Holy Spirit (Acts 7:51). The work of the Spirit is to convict the world of "sin, righteousness, and judgment"

(John 16:8). However, men strive to ward off these convictions just as they would fend off a blow that threatens the loss of an eye or a hand. If the Spirit of the Lord pierces through and they cannot evade it, the heart reacts as if saying, "Have you found me, my enemy?" Indeed, they treat Him as an enemy, doing their utmost to suppress convictions and silence the messengers that come to prepare the way of the Lord into their souls. Some fill their hands with business to push convictions out of their minds, like Cain who set about building a city. Some postpone them with delays and empty promises, like Felix. Some dissipate them in company, and some sleep them away. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of sanctification, whose work is to subdue lusts and consume corruption. How then can the natural man, whose lusts are like his limbs and even his life, not be an enemy to Him?

(4.) You are enemies of the law of God. Although the natural man desires to be under the law as a covenant of works, choosing that path of salvation in opposition to the mystery of Christ, he is an enemy of it as a rule of life. The unregenerate are "not subject to the law of God, nor can they be" (Romans 8:7). Firstly, no unregenerate person is without some lust to which his heart is firmly attached and cannot part with. Since he cannot conform his inclinations to the holy law, he desires to lower the law to his inclinations—a clear indication of the heart's enmity against it. Therefore, "delighting in the law of God in the inner man" is presented in the Scriptures as a sign of a gracious soul (Romans 7:22; Psalm 1:2). It is this natural enmity towards the law that has given rise to all the Pharisaical interpretations that narrow its commands. By distorting the commandments, which are inherently comprehensive, they make them more agreeable to the natural disposition of the heart. Secondly, when the law confronts the natural conscience in its spiritual depth, it provokes corruption. The closer it comes, the

higher nature rises in rebellion against it. It is like oil to the fire, which instead of extinguishing it, makes it blaze even more. As the apostle says, "When the commandment came, sin revived" (Romans 7:9). What other reason can be given for this except the natural enmity of the heart against the holy law? Unmortified corruption only intensifies as it faces opposition. Let us conclude, then, that the unregenerate are heart-enemies of God, His Son, His Spirit, and His law. There is a natural contrariness, opposition, and enmity in the human will towards God Himself and His holy will.

(5.) The will of man exhibits contumacy against the Lord. The natural will is obstinate in pursuing an evil course; it insists on having its way even if it leads to ruin. It is like the Leviathan mentioned in Job 41:29: "Darts are counted as stubble; he laughs at the shaking of a spear." The Lord calls out to man through His word, saying, as Paul said to the jailer who was about to kill himself, "Do not harm yourself" (Acts 16:28). He implores the sinner, "Why will you die?" (Ezekiel 18:31). But they refuse to listen. Each one turns to their own path, "like a horse charging into battle" (Jeremiah 8:6). The promise of life is given to us in the form of a command: "Keep my commandments, and live" (Proverbs 4:4). It reveals impenitent sinners as self-destroyers, willful self-murderers. They transgress the commandment of life, as if a servant were intentionally starving himself to death or eagerly drinking a cup of poison that his master commanded him to avoid. They choose death over life, for "all who hate me [Wisdom], love death" (Proverbs 8:36). Oh, what a heart this is! It is a heart of stone (Ezekiel 36:26), hard and unyielding. It remains unaffected by mercies and unbroken by judgments. Yet, it will eventually break rather than bend. It is an insensible heart. Although the weight of sin upon the sinner makes the earth tremble and the weight of divine wrath upon him causes demons to shudder, he carries the burden lightly. He does not feel its weight any more

than a stone would until the Spirit of the Lord quickens him to the point of feeling it.

(6.) The unregenerate will is wholly perverse in relation to man's chief and highest end. The natural man's ultimate goal is not God but himself. Man's very existence is relative, dependent, and derived. He does not possess being or goodness inherently but receives everything from his God as the first cause and source of all perfection, both natural and moral. Dependence is woven into his very nature. Therefore, if God were to completely withdraw from him, he would wither away into nothingness. Since man's entire being originates from God, it follows that in everything he is, he should be for Him. Just as the waters that flow from the sea naturally return to it, man was created to direct his gaze towards God as his supreme end. However, when man fell into sin, he turned away from God and became self-oriented. Like a traitorous usurper, he seized the throne and claimed the crown for himself. This indicates a total apostasy and universal corruption in man. When the ultimate and final end is altered, there can be no goodness. This is the state of all men in their natural condition, as stated in Psalm 14:2-3: "The Lord looks down from heaven... to see if there are any who understand, who seek God. They have all turned aside" from God; they do not seek God but themselves. Although many fragments of morality can be found among them, "there is none who does good, no, not one." Even though some may appear to run well, they are still off course, never aiming for the right target. They are "lovers of themselves" (2 Timothy 3:2) more than lovers of God (verse 4). Therefore, when Jesus Christ came into the world to restore men to God, His primary purpose was to draw them out of themselves (Matthew 16:24). The godly mourn over this woeful disposition of the heart. They acknowledge it and strive against its subtle and dangerous temptations. The unregenerate, though most oblivious to it, are

under its power. Wherever they turn, they cannot move beyond the circumference of self. They seek themselves, act for themselves, and all their natural, civil, and religious actions, regardless of their source, converge and end in the dead sea of self.

Secondly, consider the opposition that has always existed in the world against the doctrine of God's free grace in Jesus Christ, with people advocating for a works-based approach, thus revealing the natural inclination of the heart. It is clear that the main purpose of the gospel is to elevate the free grace of God in Jesus Christ. Romans 4:16 states, "Therefore it is of faith that it might be according to grace." Ephesians 1:6 and 2:7-9 further emphasize this. All the truths of the gospel revolve around Christ. Therefore, to grasp the truth is to grasp Christ, as Ephesians 4:20 states, and to truly be taught is to be taught "the truth that is in Jesus" (verse 21). Throughout history, every instance of God's grace and favor, whether directed towards nations or individuals, has always showcased the freedom of grace. This can be seen from the very beginning, when God accepted Abel's sacrifice while rejecting Cain's. This theme is pervasive throughout the Bible. However, it is evident that this aspect has been vehemently opposed by corrupt human nature. One could argue that since the time of Christ, this opposition to free grace in favor of works has been the earliest and most persistent religious error. Numerous errors have arisen over time and faded away as the world grew tired and ashamed of them. Yet, the opposition to free grace remains, persisting from Cain, the initial proponent of this heresy, until the present day. Even during periods of great spiritual enlightenment, there have always been individuals who clung to this opposition. Cain can be considered the originator of this mindset. When Abel presented an atoning sacrifice of the firstlings of his flock, reminiscent of a repentant tax collector saying, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner," Cain approached with an offering of the fruits of the

ground, much like the proud Pharisee saying, "God, I thank You," and so on (Genesis 4:3-4). Wasn't Cain's anger and subsequent murder of Abel due to God's rejection of his work (Genesis 4:4-5; 1 John 3:12)? In other words, Cain rejected justification and acceptance with God through faith, opposed to works, and passed this down to future generations by shedding his brother's blood. Since then, countless lives have been lost due to the rejection of the unbloody sacrifice. The promise given to Abraham, that through his seed all nations would be blessed, was overshadowed by the Israelites' descendants in Egypt. The majority of them failed to recognize the need for that means of attaining the blessing until God Himself refuted their error with the fiery law given from Mount Sinai, which "was added because of transgressions, till the Seed should come" (Galatians 3:19). There is no need to elaborate on how Moses and the prophets had to continually steer the people away from their self-righteousness. The ninth chapter of Deuteronomy is entirely devoted to this purpose. The people's ignorance of the need for God's righteousness was evident during the time of our Savior and the apostles, when the doctrine of free grace was most clearly preached. This error emerged prominently even in the face of the clearest light, as evident in the epistles to the Romans and Galatians. And since then, it has not ceased to exist, with Roman Catholicism becoming the receptacle for past heresies and the essence of that delusion. Ultimately, it can be observed that as the Church deviated from its purity in various ways, the doctrine of free grace was proportionally obscured.

Thirdly, the natural inclination of man's heart towards the law, opposing Christ, is such that, just as a tainted vessel alters the taste of the purest liquid poured into it, the unregenerate man transforms the very essence of the gospel into law and turns the covenant of grace into a covenant of works. The ceremonial law served as a true

gospel to the Jews, constantly reminding them of blood, sacrifice, and the transfer of guilt as the sole means of salvation. However, they turned their altar and its accompanying ordinances into a snare for themselves when they used them to compensate for their shortcomings in obeying the moral law. Their attachment to these rituals led them to reject the very one to whom the altar and sacrifices pointed—the subject of all, similar to how Hagar, whose sole duty was to serve, was brought into her mistress's bed by their father. This carries a symbolic meaning, as described in Galatians 4:24, "For these are the two covenants." Thus, the doctrine of the gospel has been corrupted by Catholics and other enemies of free grace. In fact, regardless of whether the heads of unregenerate men are correct in this regard, as long as they remain outside of Christ, their faith, repentance, and obedience, however flawed, serve as substitutes for Christ and His righteousness. They trust in these actions as if they fulfill a new law.

Fourthly, it is extremely difficult for the sons of Adam to relinquish the law as a covenant of works. Only those whom the power of the Spirit of grace separates from it are able to do so. The law is their first husband, and it captures their complete devotion. When Christ comes to the soul, He finds it already wedded to the law, unwilling to be united with another until it is compelled to part ways with the first husband, as described by the apostle in Romans 7:1-4. To understand the nature of this separation, consider the following:

(1.) Firstly, it is a death (Romans 7:4; Galatians 2:19). The soul cannot be persuaded otherwise; it tells the first husband, like Ruth to Naomi, "May the Lord deal with me, be it ever so severely, if anything but death separates you and me." And sinners remain true to their word; they die to the law before they can be joined to Christ. Death is a challenge for everyone, but imagine the difficulty a loving

wife on her deathbed faces in parting with her husband—the husband of her youth—and their beloved children. The law is that husband, and all the duties performed by the natural man are his children. Before parting ways, the heart undergoes an intense struggle, akin to a battle for life. We may explore this further later on, but for now, consider the apostle's concise yet profound description in Romans 10:3: "For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God." They strive to establish their own righteousness, like an eager debater seeking to prove a point or a torturer extracting a confession. They strive to establish it, to make it stand, but their righteousness is like a house built on sand—it cannot stand, yet they persist in their efforts. Why all this trouble for a faltering righteousness? Because, flawed as it is, it is their own. What opposes Christ's righteousness? The fact that it would make them debtors to free grace for everything, something their proud hearts cannot accept. This is the crux of the matter, as expressed in Psalm 10:4: "The wicked in his proud countenance does not seek God," or put simply, "He cannot dig, and to beg he is ashamed." This highlights the struggle the soul experiences before dying to the law. Moreover, due to the insidiousness of the heart, nature often overcomes the illness. Thus, the soul that was close to parting with the law during sharp and penetrating convictions tragically recovers from this promising ailment. Inevitably, it clings even more tightly to the law, just as a wife, brought back from the brink of death, would cling to her husband's side. This is the outcome for many individuals grappling with their spiritual condition—they may indeed adhere more strictly to their duties, but they remain as distant from Christ as before, if not further.

(2.) Secondly, it is a violent death (Romans 7:4). The law itself plays a significant role in this process; it inflicts the wound. As Galatians

2:19 states, "I through the law am dead to the law." The soul that experiences this death resembles a loving wife united with a severe husband. She does her best to please him, yet he remains dissatisfied, tormenting and mistreating her until her heart breaks and death sets her free. This will become clearer as we progress. Thus, it is evident that the unregenerate person's heart harbors enmity towards the law of God. Though the natural man desires to be under the law as a covenant of works, choosing this path of salvation in opposition to the mystery of Christ, he becomes an enemy of the law in its role as a rule of life. He is "not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be" (Romans 8:7). Firstly, since every unregenerate person is bound to some form of lust that their heart cannot relinquish, they are unable to conform their inclinations to the holy law. Consequently, they yearn for the law to conform to their inclinations—a clear indication of their enmity towards it. This enmity is also responsible for the proliferation of Pharisaic interpretations that narrow the commandments, making the already comprehensive law narrower to accommodate the natural disposition of the heart. Secondly, when the law, in all its spiritual depth, confronts the unregenerate conscience, it provokes corruption. The closer it comes, the higher the rebellion within rises. It is like oil on fire, which instead of extinguishing it, intensifies the flames. As the apostle explains, "When the commandment came, sin revived" (Romans 7:9). What explanation can there be for this other than the natural enmity of the heart towards the holy law? Unmortified corruption rages more fiercely the more it is opposed. Therefore, we can conclude that the unregenerate are enemies of God, His Son, His Spirit, and His law. The will of man is inherently contrary, opposing, and hostile to God Himself and His holy will.

(3.) You are enemies of the Spirit of God. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of holiness, but the natural man is unholy and delights in his state of

sin. Consequently, he resists the Holy Spirit (Acts 7:51). The work of the Spirit is to convict the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment (John 16:8). However, individuals strive to avoid these convictions as they would dodge a blow that threatens to rob them of their right eye or right hand. If the Spirit of the Lord penetrates their defenses and they cannot evade these convictions, the heart effectively declares, "Have you found me, my enemy?" They treat the Spirit as an enemy, doing everything in their power to suppress convictions and eradicate the messengers preparing the way for the Lord's entrance into their souls. Some occupy themselves with worldly affairs to push convictions out of their minds, similar to Cain, who set about building a city. Others postpone convictions with empty promises, like Felix. Some attempt to dissipate convictions in the company of others, and some simply sleep through them. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of sanctification, tasked with subduing lusts and purging corruption. How then can the natural man, whose lusts are as vital to him as his limbs or even his life, not be an enemy of the Spirit?

(4.) You are enemies of the law of God. Although the natural man desires to be under the law as a covenant of works, choosing this path of salvation in opposition to Christ, he becomes an enemy of the law as a rule of life. He is "not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be" (Romans 8:7). Firstly, every unregenerate person is wedded to some form of lust that they are unwilling to part with. Since they cannot align their inclinations with the holy law, they desire to bring the law down to their inclinations—an unmistakable enmity towards it. This enmity has given rise to various Pharisaic interpretations of the law, distorting its broad scope to suit the natural disposition of the heart. Secondly, when the spiritual essence of the law confronts the unregenerate conscience, it stirs up corruption. The closer it gets, the more vehemently nature rebels against it. It is like oil to a fire, fueling the flames. As the apostle explains, "When the

commandment came, sin revived" (Romans 7:9). What other reason can there be for this except the natural enmity of the heart towards the holy law? Unmortified corruption grows fiercer the more it is resisted. Therefore, it is evident that the unregenerate are enemies of God, His Son, His Spirit, and His law. There is an inherent contrariness, opposition, and enmity in the human will towards God Himself and His holy will.

(5.) The will of man exhibits obstinacy towards the Lord. The natural man's will is inherently stubborn in its adherence to an evil course. He insists on having his way, even if it leads to his own destruction. It is akin to the leviathan, described in Job 41:29, for whom darts are considered as mere stubble; it laughs at the shaking of a spear. The Lord calls out to man through His word, saying, "Do not harm yourself" (Acts 16:28), and pleading, "Why will you die?" (Ezekiel 18:31). However, they refuse to listen and persist in their chosen path, rushing headlong into battle like a horse. We are given a promise of life, couched in the form of a command: "Keep my commandments and live" (Proverbs 4:4). By disregarding this command, impenitent sinners become self-destructive, willful self-murderers. They transgress the commandment of life, just as a servant would deliberately starve himself to death or greedily consume a cup of poison, which his master has commanded him to avoid. Similarly, they choose death over life (Proverbs 8:36): "All those who hate me love death." What a heart this is! It is like a heart of stone, as described in Ezekiel 36:26—hard and unyielding. Neither mercies nor judgments can soften it; yet, it will break before it bends. It is a heart devoid of feeling. Despite the weight of sin upon the sinner, causing the earth to tremble, and the weight of divine wrath upon them, making the devils shudder, they bear the burden lightly, oblivious to its weight, much like a stone. They remain oblivious

until the Spirit of the Lord quickens them to the point of feeling its weight.

(5.) The unregenerate will is wholly corrupt in relation to man's ultimate and highest purpose. The natural man's ultimate purpose is not God but himself. Man's very existence is relative, dependent, and borrowed. He possesses neither being nor goodness inherently but receives everything from God as the ultimate cause and source of all natural and moral perfection. Dependence is woven into his very nature. If God were to completely withdraw from man, he would wither into nothingness. Therefore, since man owes everything to God, it follows that in everything he is, he should be for God, like the waters that return to the sea. Thus, man was created with a direct focus on God as his ultimate purpose. However, through sin, he turned away from God and became self-centered. Like a treacherous usurper, he hoards the treasures that rightfully belong to God. This signifies a complete apostasy and universal corruption within man. When the ultimate and final purpose changes, goodness ceases to exist. This applies to all people in their natural state, as expressed in Psalm 14:2-3: "The Lord looks down from heaven...to see if there are any who understand...who seek God. They have all turned aside." They do not seek God but themselves. Although some may display outward moral behavior, there is "none who does good, no, not one." Despite appearances, they continue to stray from the right path. They are "lovers of themselves" (2 Timothy 3:2) more than lovers of God (verse 4). Therefore, when Jesus Christ came into the world to reconcile men to God, His first task was to draw them away from themselves (Matthew 16:24). The godly mourn over this woeful state of the heart, acknowledging and actively opposing its subtle and dangerous influence. The unregenerate, despite their insensitivity to it, remain under its power, unable to move beyond the confines of self. They seek themselves, act for themselves, and their natural,

secular, and religious endeavors, regardless of their motivations, all revolve around and converge upon the dead sea of self.

I have provided a rough sketch of man's will in its natural state, as depicted by Scripture and observed in personal experience. Let us no longer call it Naomi, but Marah, for it is bitter and the source of bitterness. Let us cease referring to it as free will, but rather as enslaved lust—free to do evil but not free to do good until the liberating grace of regeneration breaks the chains of wickedness. Now, since everything is distorted and nothing is upright when the understanding and will are so corrupted, I shall briefly address the inevitable consequences that follow from the corruption of these fundamental faculties of the soul.

III. The Corruption of the Affections.

The affections are corrupted. The unregenerate person's affections are completely disordered and disturbed. They resemble an unruly horse that either refuses to obey or forcefully drags away the rider. Similarly, the natural person's heart is a source of abominable thoughts and actions (Mark 7:21-22). Evil thoughts, adultery, fornication, murder, theft, and covetousness originate from within them. The natural person's affections are horribly misplaced, making them a spiritual monstrosity. Instead of focusing on heavenly matters, their hearts are fixated on earthly things. They turn their backs to heaven and face hell. God calls out to them, urging them to turn around. They love what they should hate, and hate what they should love. They rejoice in what they should mourn, and mourn what they should rejoice in. They take pride in their shame and feel ashamed of their glory. They detest what they should desire and desire what they should detest (Prov. 2:13-15). Indeed, they are like Caiaphas, who accused the apostles of turning the world upside

down (Acts 17:6). This is the work that the gospel has to do in a world where sin has distorted everything, with heaven underfoot and the earth turned topsy-turvy. If the unregenerate person's emotions are directed towards lawful objects, they are either excessive or deficient. They either don't appreciate these lawful enjoyments enough, or when they do, they indulge in them to excess. Conversely, when it comes to spiritual matters, their emotions are always deficient. In short, their emotions are never in the right place; they are always distorted and evil.

Now, there is a threefold barrier against heaven and holiness that is not easily broken. It consists of a blinded mind, a stubborn will, and disorderly and disturbed emotions. The swollen mind, inflated with self-conceit, says that man should not stoop. The will, opposed to the will of God, declares that it will not yield. And the corrupt emotions, rising against the Lord to defend the corrupt will, insist that it shall not yield either. Thus, the poor individual stands in opposition to God and goodness until a day of divine power comes and transforms them into a new creature.

IV. Corruption of the Conscience

The conscience itself is corrupted and defiled (Titus 1:15). It is like an evil eye that fills one's actions with darkness and confusion. Naturally, the conscience is incapable of fulfilling its function. It remains dormant and inactive until the Lord brings new light into the soul and awakens the conscience. The conscience can only function according to the light it has. Since the natural person cannot spiritually discern spiritual matters (1 Cor. 2:14), the conscience is ineffective in that regard. It remains in a deep slumber, and only the saving illumination from the Lord can activate it. The light of the natural conscience regarding good and evil, sin and duty, is very

deficient. While it may convict someone of gross sins, it cannot detect subtler forms of sin because it lacks the ability to discern them. Consequently, the conscience may confront individuals about specific sins such as drunkenness, swearing, neglecting prayer, or committing gross sins. Yet, those same individuals may live in the sin of unbelief, be ignorant of spiritual worship and the life of faith, and still have a profound sense of peace. The natural light, which is often feeble and limited in its reach, results in a conscience that offers weak encouragement for duty and provides lax resistance against sin. This allows the natural person to easily overcome its convictions. However, because there is a false light in the darkened mind, the natural conscience follows

III. I will now explain how human nature becomes corrupted. The ancient pagans recognized that human nature was corrupted, but they were unaware of how sin entered the world. However, the Scripture is clear on this matter (Rom. 5:12, 19): "By one man sin entered into the world. By one man's disobedience many were made sinners." Adam's sin corrupted human nature and tainted all of humanity. We decayed in Adam, our root. The root was poisoned, and thus the branches became venomous. The vine turned into the vine of Sodom, and the grapes became bitter. Through his sin, Adam not only became guilty but also corrupt. Consequently, he passed guilt and corruption to his descendants (Gen. 5:3; Job 14:4). By his sin, he stripped himself of his original righteousness and corrupted himself. We were represented by him as our moral head in the covenant of works. We were also connected to him as our natural head. Therefore, we fell in him, and by his disobedience, we became sinners, just as Levi paid tithes in Abraham's loins (Heb. 7:9, 10). His initial sin is imputed to us, and that is why we are justly deprived of his original righteousness. He received it as a representative person but relinquished it through his sin. Consequently, both he and we

experience the corruption of our entire nature. Righteousness and corruption are mutually exclusive, and one of them must always be present in human beings as they are capable of either. As Adam, our common progenitor, is corrupt, so are we. After all, "who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean?"

Although it suffices to establish the righteousness of this arrangement as being from the Lord, who does all things well, let us consider a few more points to silence the complaints of proud human nature. First, in the covenant where Adam represented us, eternal happiness was promised to him and his descendants based on his perfect obedience as the representative of all mankind. Without this covenant, they could not have claimed eternal life through their most perfect obedience. Instead, they might have been reduced to nothingness. According to natural justice, they would have been subject to God's eternal wrath in case of sin. Who, under those circumstances, would not have consented to such representation? Second, Adam possessed the power to remain upright. He was as capable of standing for himself and his descendants as anyone who came after him. The trial of humanity in their representative would have been quickly concluded, and the crown would have been secured for all of them if Adam had remained steadfast. If his descendants had been independent of him, each person left to act on their own, the trial would have continued as new individuals entered the world. Third, Adam had the strongest natural affection to motivate him as our common father. Fourth, his own destiny was tied to ours. Everything he had was at stake, and he had no separate interest from ours. If he neglected ours, he would inevitably neglect his own. Fifth, if he had remained steadfast, we would have received the light of his understanding, the righteousness of his will, and the holiness of his affections, all completely pure. We would not have fallen, and the crown of glory would have been secured for him and

his descendants forever. This is evident from the nature of federal representation, and there is no reason why, given that we are lost through Adam's sin, we should not have been saved through his obedience. Conversely, it is reasonable that since he fell, we should also bear the consequences. Sixth, those who quarrel with this arrangement must renounce their part in Christ. We are made sinners by Adam in the same way that we are made righteous by Christ, from whom we receive both imputed and inherent righteousness. We did not choose the second Adam to be our head and representative in the second covenant any more than we chose the first Adam in the first covenant.

Do not be surprised that such a horrendous change resulted from one sin committed by our first parents. Through their sin, they turned away from God, their chief end, which inevitably led to universal depravity. Their sin was a conglomeration of evils, a complete apostasy from God and a violation of the entire law. They broke all ten commandments simultaneously. First, they chose new gods. They made their own desires their god through sensuality, they made self their god through ambition, and they even made the devil their god by believing him and doubting their Creator. Second, though they received the ordinance of God regarding the forbidden fruit, they did not obey it. They disregarded the clearly given command and insisted on determining for themselves how to serve the Lord. Third, they took the name of the Lord their God in vain. They grossly desecrated the sacramental tree, abused God's Word by refusing to believe it, misused the creature they were forbidden to touch, and wrongly interpreted God's providence as if His prohibition of the tree hindered their happiness. Consequently, they suffered the righteous judgment of God. Fourth, they did not remember the Sabbath and keep it holy. They prevented themselves from properly serving God on His appointed day and failed to

maintain the state of holy rest in which God had placed them. Fifth, they neglected their relational duties. Eve acted independently without consulting her husband, leading to the ruin of both. Adam, instead of admonishing her to repent, succumbed to temptation and confirmed her in her wickedness. They forgot their responsibilities toward their posterity and dishonored their Father in heaven, resulting in shortened days in the land given to them by the Lord. Sixth, they ruined themselves and all their descendants. Seventh, they indulged in luxury and sensuality. Eighth, they took what was not theirs against the explicit will of the true Owner. Ninth, they bore false witness and lied about the Lord in the presence of angels, demons, and each other, essentially proclaiming that they were treated unjustly and that Heaven begrudged their happiness. Tenth, they were discontented with their circumstances and coveted evil desires for their household, which led to the ruin of both them and their descendants. Thus, the image of God in humanity was defaced in an instant.

IV. I will now apply this doctrine of the corruption of human nature.

USE I. For information. If human nature is wholly corrupted, then:

1. It is no surprise that the grave eagerly awaits us as soon as we are born, and the cradle becomes a coffin to receive the decaying mass. In a spiritual sense, we are all stillborn, filthy and repugnant (Psalm 14:3). Therefore, let us not complain about the miseries we encounter at birth or their continuance throughout our lives. This corruption of human nature taints all the sources of earthly pleasures we partake in. It is the root cause of the miseries found in churches, nations, families, and in the souls and bodies of individuals.

2. Look in this mirror to see the origin of all the wickedness, profanity, and religious formalism that exist in the world. It is the source of all the disorder within your own heart and life. Everything acts according to its own nature, and thus corrupt humanity acts sinfully. Do not be astonished at the sinfulness of your own heart and life, nor at the sinfulness and perverseness of others. If a person is crooked, they will inevitably limp. If a clock is set incorrectly, it cannot accurately indicate the time.
3. Understand why sin is so enticing while religion appears burdensome to carnal spirits. Sin is natural, but holiness is not. Oxen cannot graze in the sea, nor can fish thrive in fertile fields. If a swine were brought into a palace, it would soon escape to wallow in the mud. Corrupt human nature naturally inclines towards impurity.
4. Learn from this the nature and necessity of regeneration. Firstly, this reveals the nature of regeneration in two aspects: it is a total change, albeit imperfect in this life. Since your entire nature is corrupted, the cure must encompass every part. Regeneration brings not only a new mind for knowledge but also a new heart and new affections for holiness. "All things become new" (2 Cor. 5:17). If a person has received numerous wounds and is healed of all except one, they may still bleed to death from that one wound just as easily as from a thousand. Therefore, if the change does not extend throughout the entire person, it is worthless. Secondly, it shows that regeneration is not a change achieved through human effort but through the mighty power of the Holy Spirit. A person must be born of the Spirit (John 3:5). Human skill can cure accidental diseases, but natural ones require a miracle (John 9:32). The change that occurs through good upbringing or the coercion of conscience, although it may pass

as a saving change among people, is not truly so. Our nature is corrupt, and only the God of nature can change it. Just as a gardener can make an apple tree bear pears by grafting a pear branch onto it, a person can attach a new way of life to their old heart, but they can never change the heart itself.

Secondly, this also demonstrates the necessity of regeneration. It is absolutely essential for salvation (John 3:4): "Unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." No unclean thing can enter the New Jerusalem, and in your natural state, you are entirely unclean. If every joint of your body were dislocated, each one would need to be reset before the members could function properly again. This is the condition of your soul, as you have heard. Therefore, you must be born again; otherwise, you will never behold heaven, except from a distance like the rich man in hell. Do not deceive yourself; neither the mercy of God nor the blood of Christ will bring you to heaven in an unregenerate state. God will never open a fountain of mercy to wash away His own holiness and truth. Christ did not shed His precious blood to erase God's truths or to overturn God's plan for the salvation of sinners. Heaven! What would you do there if you are not born again? How are you prepared to be a member of Christ the Head? It would be a strange sight indeed—a holy Head with wholly corrupt members, a Head full of treasures of grace while the members are nothing but vessels of wickedness, a Head obedient to death while the heels kick against heaven! You are not fit for the company of the saints; in fact, you hate true holiness. At the first sight of a saint in heaven, you would cry out, "Have you found me, my enemy?" Moreover, if it were possible for an unregenerate person to enter heaven in that state, they would approach it just as they approach the duties of holiness now, leaving their hearts behind them.

USE II. For lamentation. We must truly mourn for your condition, O natural man! It is the most wretched state one can be in outside of hell. It is time to grieve for you because you are already spiritually dead, dead while you are alive. You carry a lifeless soul within a living body, and because you are dead, you cannot lament your own plight. You are repulsive in the sight of God, for you are entirely corrupt, devoid of any goodness. Your soul is a mass of darkness, rebellion, and vileness before the Lord. You may think that you have a good heart towards God, good inclinations, and good desires, but God knows there is nothing good in you. "Every intention of your heart is only evil continually." You are unable to do any good; all you can do is sin. Here's why:

1. You are a slave to sin (Rom. 6:17), and therefore free from righteousness (ver. 20). Whatever righteousness may be, you, poor soul, are exempt from it. You do not and cannot engage with righteousness. You are under the dominion of sin, a dominion where righteousness has no place. You are a child and servant of the devil as long as you remain in your natural state (John 8:44). To avoid any confusion, consider that sin and Satan have two types of servants: 1. Some are involved in coarser deeds, bearing the devil's mark on their foreheads. They have no form of godliness, being profane, grossly ignorant, mere moralists who don't even fulfill the external duties of religion. They live before the world as sons of the earth, preoccupied with earthly matters alone (Phil. 3:19). 2. Others are engaged in a more refined form of sin. They carry the devil's mark on their right hand, which they can hide from the world. These are secret hypocrites who sacrifice as much to their corrupt minds as the others do to the flesh (Eph. 2:3). They are ruined by a more covert trade of sin—pride, unbelief, self-seeking, and the like swarm in and prey upon their wholly corrupted souls. Both

groups are servants of the same household, and neither is closer to righteousness than the other.

2. How is it possible for you to do any good when your nature is entirely corrupt? Can fruit grow where there is no root? Can there be an effect without a cause? "Can a fig tree bear olives, or a vine produce figs?" If your nature is completely corrupt, as it indeed is, everything you do is equally corrupt. No effect can surpass the virtue of its cause. "Can a corrupt tree bear good fruit?" (Matthew 7:18).

Ah! What a pitiable sight it is to witness someone who can do nothing but sin! You are that person, whoever you may be, if you are still in your natural state. Listen, O sinner, to your condition.

(1.) Countless sins surround you. Mountains of guilt weigh upon you, floods of impurities overwhelm you, and living lusts of all kinds roam within the dead sea of your soul, where no good can survive due to the corruption within. Your lips are unclean; the opening of your mouth is like the opening of a putrid grave, emitting stench and decay (Rom. 3:13). Your natural actions are sin. When you eat and drink, do you not do it for yourself? (Zechariah 7:6). Your civil actions are sin (Proverbs 21:4). Your religious actions are sin (Proverbs 15:8). The thoughts and imaginations of your heart are only evil continually. A deed can be done swiftly, a word spoken in an instant, a thought passing through the heart in the blink of an eye, yet each one adds to your account. O sorrowful reckoning! Every thought, word, and action is a sin. The longer you live, the more your account swells. If a tear were shed for every sin, your head would become a fountain of water and your eyes a source of tears, for nothing but sin flows from you. Your heart only conceives evil imaginations. There is nothing in your life that is not framed by your

heart, and therefore, there is nothing in your heart or life that is not evil.

(2.) All your religion, if you have any, is in vain in terms of being accepted by God or having any saving effect on yourself. Are you still in your natural state? Truly, then your duties are sins, as previously suggested. Would not the best wine be distasteful in a vessel that brings no pleasure? That is how the religion of an unregenerate person is. Under the law, the garment in which the flesh of a sacrifice was carried did not sanctify other things it touched, but anyone who was unclean and touched something, whether common or sacred, made it unclean. Similarly, your duties cannot sanctify your corrupt soul, although they may be good in themselves. Your corrupt heart contaminates them and renders them unclean (Haggai 2:12–14). You used to categorize your works as either good or evil, but you must reconsider and place them all under one heading, for God inscribes "only evil" upon them. This is lamentable. It should come as no surprise to see those begging during the harvest who folded their hands and slept during sowing time. However, laboring alongside others in the spring and reaping nothing when the harvest comes is a truly tragic circumstance, and it will be the case for all professors who live and die in their natural state.

(3.) You cannot help yourself. What can you do to remove your sin when you are completely corrupt? Nothing but sin, indeed. If a natural person begins to feel remorse, sheds a tear for their sin, and reforms, their corrupt nature immediately claims merit. They think they have accomplished much themselves, and therefore, God must do even more for them on that account. In the meantime, all they do is sin. How then can you think to recover yourself through anything you are capable of doing? Can filth wash away filthiness? Will you purge out sin by committing more sin? "Can a clean thing come out

of an unclean? Not one" (Job 14:4). This is the condition of your corrupt soul—you cannot be restored except through Jesus Christ. "O Israel, you have destroyed yourself, but in me is your help" (Hosea 13:9). Truly, you are poor, "wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked" (Revelation 3:17). You have no refuge but a shelter of lies, no garment for your soul but filthy rags, and nothing to nourish it but unsatisfying husks. Moreover, you have suffered such a blow in the loins of Adam that remains unhealed, leaving you without strength and ungodly (Romans 5:6). You are unable to do or work for yourself. Furthermore, you cannot even think correctly but lie helpless like an infant abandoned in an open field (Ezekiel 16:5).

USE III. I urge you to believe this sorrowful truth. Alas! It is clear that very few truly believe it in the world. Few are concerned with transforming their corrupt behavior, and even fewer seek to have their nature changed. Most people do not know what they are or what kind of spirits they possess. They are like eyes that see many things but never see themselves. Until each one understands the plague of their own heart, there is no hope for their recovery. Why do you refuse to believe it? The Scriptures testify plainly to it, but you are unwilling to entertain such a negative opinion of yourselves. Alas! This is the nature of your affliction: "You do not realize that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked." May the Lord open your eyes to see it before you perish from it and lift your eyes in hell, seeing what you refuse to see now.

I shall conclude this weighty point of the corruption of man's nature with a few words regarding another doctrine from the text.

God's Special Attention to Our Natural Corruption

DOCTRINE: God specifically takes notice of our natural corruption, or the sin of our nature. He testifies to this in two ways: 1. Through

His word, as stated in the text, "God saw that every imagination of the thoughts of man's heart was only evil continually" (Genesis 6:5). See also Psalm 14:2-3. 2. Through His works. God marks His particular attention and displeasure with it, evident in many of His works, but especially in these two.

1. In the death of human infants. These infants have been subjected to numerous miseries: drowned in the flood, consumed by fire and brimstone in Sodom, slain by the sword, dashed against stones, and continue to experience ordinary deaths. What is the true cause of this? Why does a holy God pursue them in such a manner? Is it the sin of their parents? While that may be the occasion for the Lord's judgment against them, it is their own sin that is the basis for the sentence passed upon them. As God says, "The soul who sins shall die" (Ezekiel 18:4). Is it their own actual sin? They have none. But just as people kill serpents at first sight before they have the chance to do harm because of their venomous nature, so it is in this case.
2. In the birth of God's chosen children. When the Lord is about to transform their nature, He burdens their spirits with the weight of their sinful nature. When He intends to expose their corruption, He pierces their souls deeply, reaching to the root of sin (Romans 7:7-9). The flesh, or the corruption of their nature, is crucified and pierced, along with their affections and lusts (Galatians 5:24).

USE: Let us, therefore, pay special attention to the corruption and sin of our nature. God sees it, and oh, if only we could see it too and have sin ever before us! What good does it do to notice other sins while ignoring this mother-sin? Turn your gaze inward to the sin of your nature. It is to be feared that many have yet to undertake this

work; they have shut the door while the grand thief remains undiscovered in the house. This is a weighty matter, and in addressing it, I shall touch on these four points:

Men Overlooking Their Natural Sin

1. For conviction, I will highlight some evidence of men overlooking the sin of their nature, which the Lord takes particular notice of. 1. Men look at themselves with such confidence as if they are not in danger of gross sins. Many would take offense at being cautioned as Christ warned His apostles, "Take heed of surfeiting and drunkenness" (Luke 21:34). If someone were to suggest that they might engage in gross abominations, each would be ready to retort, "Am I a dog?" It would elevate their pride, but not their fear and trembling because they do not know the corruption of their nature.
2. Lack of tenderness towards those who fall. In such cases, many cast off all feelings of Christian compassion because they do not consider themselves lest they too be tempted (Galatians 6:1). Their passions often surge highest against the faults of others while sin slumbers soundly in their own hearts. Even when David was at his worst, he exhibited great fervor against the faults of others. While his conscience was asleep under the guilt of his actions involving Uriah, the Spirit of the Lord observed that his anger was greatly kindled against the man in the parable (2 Samuel 12:5). It is thought that it was at the same time he treated the Ammonites so cruelly, as recorded in verse 31, "He also brought out the people who were in it, and put them to work with saws and iron picks and iron axes, and made them pass through the brick kilns." Grace makes men zealous against sin in themselves and others, but turning their eyes inward to

the corruption of their nature clothes them with pity and compassion and fills them with gratitude to the Lord that they themselves were not the ones left as spectacles of human frailty.

3. There are many who, if they are kept from afflictions in worldly matters and from gross outbreaks in their conduct, do not know what it is to have a sorrowful heart. If they encounter a cross that their proud hearts refuse to bear, they are ready to say, "O to be gone!" But the corruption of their nature never causes them to long for heaven. While scandalous lusts breaking out at certain times may disrupt their peace, the sin of their nature never weighs heavy on their hearts.
4. Delaying repentance, hoping to undertake it later. Many have designated their own time for repentance and reformation, as if they have complete mastery over their lusts and can allow them to gain strength before overcoming them. They make resolutions to amend without considering Jesus Christ, union with Him, and the strength they can receive from Him. This plainly shows that they are strangers to themselves, and so they are left to themselves, and their flourishing resolutions wither away. They do not see the necessity or receive the benefit of the heavenly dew to water their resolutions.
5. Men freely venture into temptations and promise confidently in their own strength. They fearlessly throw themselves into temptation, confident that they will come out unscathed. But if they were aware of the corruption of their nature, they would be cautious about stepping onto the devil's ground. It would be like a person with bags of gunpowder walking amidst flying sparks, fearing they might be blown up. Self-doubt is fitting for Christians. "Lord, is it I?" Those who understand the deceit of

their own hearts will not be overly confident that they will hit the mark.

6. Ignorance of heart-plagues. Knowledge of the plagues of the heart is a rare quality. Some are indeed so clearly written that anyone can see them, but others are more subtle and few discern them. How few are there to whom the inclination of the heart towards unbelief is burdensome? Many have been deeply convicted of other sins but have never been convinced of their unbelief to this day, though that is the sin primarily targeted in a thorough conviction (John 16:8-9). A disposition to establish our own righteousness is a weed that naturally grows in every person's heart, but few make the effort to uproot it as it remains undiscovered. The inclination of the heart towards the way of the covenant of works is a hidden plague of the heart for many. Their only difficulty lies in mustering their hearts for duties; they encounter no difficulty in diverting their hearts away from duties and toward Jesus Christ. How challenging it is to turn people away from their own righteousness! Indeed, it is very difficult to convince them that they lean towards it at all.

7. Pride and self-conceit. A view of the corruption of nature would be deeply humbling and would lead one to consider themselves the foremost of sinners. It would act as ballast to their hearts, hiding pride from their eyes. The lack of thorough humility, which delves into the sin of one's nature, is the downfall of many professing believers. Digging deep makes the crucial difference between wise and foolish builders (Luke 6:48-49).

Why Original Sin Should Be Especially Noticed

III. I will present some reasons why we should pay special attention to the sin of our nature.

1. It is the most extensive and pervasive of all sins. It permeates the entire person and corrupts everything. Other sins may mar specific aspects of the image of God, but original sin immediately defaces the whole. A disease that affects a specific body part is dangerous, but one that affects the whole body is worse. The corruption of nature is like poison injected into the fountain of action, infecting every deed and every breath of the soul.
2. It is the cause of all specific lusts and actual sins in our hearts and lives. It is the spawn left by the great Leviathan in the souls of humanity, from which all the offspring of actual sins and abominations come forth (Mark 7:21). It is the bitter fountain, and specific lusts are but rivulets flowing from it, manifesting only a part and not the entirety of what lies within. The fountain always precedes the stream, and when the water is good, it is best at the source; when it is bad, it is worst there. Since the corruption of nature defiles everything, it must be the most abominable thing.
3. It is virtually all sin. It is the seed from which all sins arise; they only need an occasion to sprout, just as an effect arises from its cause. That is why it is called "a body of death" (Romans 7:24) since it consists of the various members belonging to such "a body of sins" (Colossians 2:11) whose life resides in spiritual death. It is the cursed ground capable of producing all kinds of noxious weeds. While not every sin is evident in the conduct of the vilest wretch who ever lived, if you look within your corrupt nature, you will see every sin, both in seed and root. It contains a

full measure of all unrighteousness (Romans 1:29). Atheism, idolatry, blasphemy, murder, adultery, and all vile things can be found there. Perhaps none of these appear to you in your heart, but there is more wickedness in that unfathomable depth than you realize. Your corrupt heart is like an ant's nest covered by a stone; while the stone remains, none of them are visible, but remove the stone and stir them with the tip of a straw, and you will see the swarm and their liveliness. Your heart would reveal a similar sight if the Lord were to withdraw the restraint placed upon it and allow Satan to agitate it through temptation.

4. The sin of our nature is the most fixed and enduring of all sins. Sinful actions may pass away, although the guilt and stain may remain. The drunkard is not always drinking, nor the immoral person constantly engaging in lewd behavior. However, the corruption of nature is a persistent sin. It remains with individuals in its full power day and night, without interruption, bound as if with iron and brass, until their nature is transformed by converting grace. It continues even with the godly until the body's death, though not in its reigning power. Pride, envy, covetousness, and similar sins are not always active within you, but the proud, envious, carnal nature persists. Just as a clock that is set incorrectly does not always strike the wrong time but continues in its incorrect state without interruption.
5. It is the reigning sin (Romans 6:12), "Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts." In the corrupt heart, three things can be observed. First, there is the corrupt inclination of the heart that renders people unapt for all good and prone to all evil. This is what the apostle refers to as "sin which reigns." Second, there are particular lusts or dispositions of the corrupt nature, referred to by the apostle as

"its lusts," such as pride and covetousness. Third, there is one among these, like Saul among the people, far superior to the rest, namely, "the sin which easily entangles us" (Hebrews 12:1). This is commonly referred to as the "predominant sin" because it reigns over other specific lusts, compelling them to submit. These three elements are like a river that branches into many streams, with one stream greater than the others. The corruption of nature is the source of the river, from which many specific lusts flow. However, it primarily discharges into what is commonly known as one's predominant sin. Since all these are sustained by the sin of our nature, it is evident that it is the reigning sin, never relinquishing its superiority over specific lusts that arise and perish with it. Therefore, what benefit is there in reforming other areas while the reigning sin remains in full power? What use is it to conquer some specific lusts if the sin of our nature maintains its throne, merely setting up another in its place? It is like stopping a watercourse in one place, only for it to flow forth in a different direction if the source is not closed. Some may cast off prodigality, but covetousness emerges in its place; others abandon profanity, and the corruption of nature no longer directs its primary stream in that direction, but it finds a new channel, such as a legalistic disposition, self-righteousness, and so on. Thus, people are ruined because they fail to contemplate the sin of their nature.

6. It is an inherited evil (Psalm 51:5), "In sin did my mother conceive me." Specific lusts are not inherited, but the corruption of nature is transmitted from one generation to another, making it harder to cure. Therefore, the word should be proclaimed against this sin, as it was against the King of Israel (1 Kings 22:31), "Fight neither with small nor great, save only with this."

For when this sin is broken, all other sins are broken with it, and as long as it remains intact, there can be no victory.

How to Gain a Clear Understanding of the Corruption of Nature

IV. In order to gain a clear understanding of the corruption of your nature, I would recommend three things:

1. Study and grasp the spirituality and breadth of God's law, for it serves as the mirror in which you can see yourselves.
2. Observe your hearts at all times, particularly when faced with temptation. Temptation acts as a fire that brings forth the impurities of the wicked heart. Pay close attention to the initial stirrings of corruption.
3. Approach God through Jesus Christ, seeking illumination from His Spirit. Pour out your soul before the Lord, expressing your willingness to comprehend the wretchedness of your nature. Say to Him, "Teach me what I do not know." And be receptive to receiving light from His Word. Believe, and you shall see. It is through the Word that the Spirit imparts knowledge. Without the Spirit's teaching, all other instruction is of little value. Even if the gospel were to shine upon you as brightly as the midday sun, and this profound truth were preached in the clearest manner, you would never perceive your true selves until the Spirit of the Lord kindles His light within your innermost being. The fullness and glory of Christ, as well as the corruption and baseness of our nature, are only truly comprehended when the Spirit of Christ is the instructor.

To conclude this weighty matter, let the reflection on what has been said commend Christ to all of you. Those of you who have been

delivered from your natural state of corruption and brought to Christ, be humble. Continually come to Christ and utilize your union with Him to further weaken your innate corruption. Has your nature been changed? It has only been partially so. If you have been healed, remember that the cure is not yet complete, and you still limp. Though your condition may be better than before, the remembrance of what you were by nature should keep you humble. As for those who are still in their natural state, take this with you: Believe in the corruption of your nature and hold Christ and His grace in high esteem. Oh, may you finally become serious about the state of your souls! What do you intend to do? You will die; you will appear before the judgment seat of God. Will you lie down and sleep peacefully for another night in this condition? Do not do so, for before another day dawns, you may be summoned before God's dreadful tribunal, clothed in the grave-clothes of your corrupt state, and your vile souls cast into the pit of destruction, like a corrupted lump, forever buried from God's sight. For I solemnly declare to all of you that there is no peace with God, no forgiveness, no heaven for you in your natural state. There is only a step between you and eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord. If the fragile thread of your life, which may break with a mere touch without warning, is severed while you are in this state, you are eternally ruined without remedy. But hasten to Jesus Christ: He has cleansed souls as vile as yours, and He will still "cleanse the blood that He has not cleansed" (Joel 3:21). This concludes the discussion on the sinfulness of man's natural state.

III. THE MISERY OF HUMANITY'S NATURAL CONDITION

We were by nature the children of wrath, even as others
EPHESIANS 2:3

Having demonstrated the sinful nature of humanity's natural condition, I will now present the misery inherent in it. A state of sin inevitably leads to a state of misery. Where sin prevails, wrath follows as a consequence. Corruption and destruction are so closely intertwined that the Holy Spirit refers to destruction, even eternal destruction, as "corruption" (Gal. 6:8). Whoever sows to satisfy their flesh will reap corruption, that is, total destruction, as indicated by its contrast to eternal life in the subsequent clause. After revealing to the Ephesians their true state by nature, namely, being dead in sins and transgressions, completely corrupt, the apostle informs them in the words of the text about their relational state, namely, that the pit of wrath was prepared for them while they were in that state of corruption. As they were dead in sins, they "were by nature children of wrath, even as others."

In these words, we find four aspects:

1. The misery of a natural state; it is not only a state of sin but also a state of wrath. The apostle declares, "We were children of wrath," referring to the fact that they were bound by and subject to the wrath of God, experiencing some measure of it. In wrath, they were bound for more, even its full measure in hell, where the torrents of wrath engulf the prisoners for eternity. This is similar to Saul, in his wrath, sentencing David to death (1 Sam. 20:31), and David, in his wrath, decreeing death for the man in the parable (2 Sam. 12:5), both saying of the supposed wrongdoer, "He shall surely die" or, as the original language puts it, "He is a son of death." Likewise, the natural person is "a child of wrath, a son of death." They are like guilty criminals under the law, imprisoned and held captive until the day of execution, which will inevitably come unless they obtain a pardon from their God, who is both their judge and adversary.

Through this means, children of wrath can become children of the kingdom. Although this phrase is common in the sacred language, it carries great significance. It suggests that regardless of what people are in their natural state, they are under the wrath of God, wholly consumed by wrath. Wrath is woven into their very nature and permeates every aspect of their being. They are, so to speak, a lump of wrath, children of hell, just as iron in fire is entirely fire. By nature, people are children of wrath, emerging, so to speak, from the womb of wrath, similar to Jonah's gourd being the "son of a night" (Jonah 4:10), which we interpret as "coming up in a night," as if it emerged from the womb of the night, as we read of the "womb of the morning" (Psalm 110:3). Likewise, sparks of fire are called "sons of the burning coal" (Job 5:7; Marg. Isa. 21:10). The natural person is a "child of wrath," with wrath permeating their being like water entering their bowels and oil seeping into their bones (Psalm 109:18). Although Judas was the only son of perdition among the apostles, all people, by nature, belong to the same family.

2. The source of this misery is the natural state itself. They possess it by nature. They owe it to their nature, not their substance or essence, for those are not sin and therefore cannot make them children of wrath, though they may be under wrath due to sin. It is not their nature as originally established by their Maker, but their nature corrupted and tainted by the fall. It is the vicious quality or corruption of their nature, as mentioned earlier, which serves as their principle of action and, in a state of unregeneration, the sole governing principle. It is by this nature that people are children of wrath, just as during a time of a deadly plague, one breathes in death along with the rampant disease. Thus, from the moment of their existence as children of Adam, they are corrupt children, shaped in iniquity, conceived

in sin, and consequently, from that very moment, children of wrath.

3. The universality of this misery. All are children of wrath by nature. The apostle states, "We" were children of wrath, and he includes himself and other believers. Hence, it is fitting for the people of God to frequently stand on the shore and look back at the Red Sea, symbolizing the state of wrath in which they once wallowed, just like everyone else.
4. A glorious and joyous transformation is hinted at: we were children of wrath but are so no longer. Grace has rescued us from that state. The apostle makes this declaration about himself and other believers. Thus, it is highly appropriate for the people of God to reflect on their past and recall the state of wrath from which they were delivered, just like everyone else.

DOCTRINE: The state of nature is a state of wrath. Everyone in a natural, unregenerate state is in a state of wrath. We are born as children of wrath and remain so until we are born again. In fact, as soon as we become children of Adam, we are children of wrath.

Before delving into this point, I will make a few observations regarding the universality of this state of wrath, which will help prepare the way for the message to penetrate your consciences. Wrath has spread as wide as sin itself. When angels sinned, the wrath of God flooded upon them. "God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell" (2 Pet. 2:4). This demonstrated that no natural excellence in a creature can shield it from God's wrath once it becomes a sinful creature. Even the most exquisite and delicate masterpiece of heaven's creation, if the Creator's image upon it is defaced by sin, God can and will shatter it in His wrath, unless justice is satisfied and that image is restored. Yet the sinner himself

cannot accomplish either of these. When Adam sinned, the entire human race was corrupted and condemned to the fires of God's wrath. From this text, you can learn the following:

1. Ignorance of this state cannot free people from it. The Gentiles, who did not know God, were "by nature children of wrath, even as others." It is like a man whose house is on fire, with his wife and children perishing in the flames, while he remains unaware and unconcerned. Such is the case for those of you who are ignorant of these truths. While you bless yourselves and proclaim, "We shall have peace," the silent waves of wrath are engulfing your souls. There is no surer indication that you are children of wrath than the fact that you have never seen yourselves as such. You cannot be children of God if you have never recognized yourselves as children of the devil. You cannot be on the path to heaven if you have never recognized yourselves as being naturally on the road to hell. You are grossly ignorant of your natural state and, consequently, ignorant of God, Christ, and your need for Him. Although you perceive your ignorance as protection from wrath, take heed of God's own words that it will destroy you if it is not removed (Isa. 27:11). See also 2 Thess. 1:8; Hos. 4:6.

2. No outward privileges can exempt people from this state of wrath. Even the Jews, the chosen people of God, the children of the kingdom, were "children of wrath, even as others." Whether you are church members enjoying all the privileges of the church or descendants of godly parents from esteemed and honorable families, regardless of who you are, by nature, you are heirs of hell, children of wrath.

3. No religious profession or achievements in religious practices can exempt people from this state of wrath. Paul was among the strictest sect of the Jewish religion (Acts 26:5), yet he was a child of wrath, just like everyone else, until he was converted. The outwardly hypocritical and the blatantly sinful are equal in their state, regardless of their differences in behavior. They will share the same fatal end (Psalm 125:5), "As for such as turn aside unto their crooked ways, the Lord shall lead them forth with the workers of iniquity."

4. Young people who are just beginning their journey in the world do not need to make themselves children of wrath by following the godless multitude. They are already children of wrath by nature; it is an established fact. They were born as heirs of hell, and if they do not, while they are young, flee from the wrath they were born into by fleeing to Jesus Christ, they will only increase their condemnation.

5. Whatever people may be by grace at present, they were once just like everyone else by nature. This realization can be a somber meditation for those who have lived comfortably from their youth and have experienced no significant changes.

Now that these points have been established, I will proceed with the first part: explaining what this state of wrath entails. However, who can fully describe the wrath of an angry God? No one can. Nevertheless, we can grasp enough of it to convince people of the absolute necessity of seeking refuge in Jesus Christ to escape this state of wrath. Anger in humans is a passionate agitation of the spirit in response to an offense, accompanied by a desire to retaliate. When it reaches its pinnacle and becomes fixed in one's spirit, it is called wrath. However, God does not experience passions in the same way.

Passions are incompatible with His absolute unchangeability and independence. Therefore, when Paul and Barnabas wanted to dispel the misconception of the Lycaonians who believed they were gods, they informed them that they were "men of like passions with themselves" (Acts 14:15). Thus, when wrath is ascribed to God, it should not be understood in terms of an emotional wrath but rather its effects. Wrath is a fervent fire in the affections of humans, tormenting the individual. However, there is no disturbance in God. His wrath does not in any way diminish His infinite tranquility and happiness. It is an entirely pure and undisturbed act of His will, bringing forth dreadful consequences upon the sinner. We have limited knowledge of the infinite God, but in His condescension to our weakness, He chooses to speak of Himself in terms we can comprehend. Therefore, we should consider human wrath while removing any aspects that imply imperfection, enabling us to gain a partial understanding, however limited, of God's wrath. By doing so, we can examine God's wrath against the natural man in three specific aspects:

1. There is wrath in the heart of God against the natural man. The Lord does not approve of them but is displeased with them. Every natural man is under God's disapproval, which is weightier than mountains of brass. Although the natural man may find pleasure in themselves and be pleasing to others, God regards them with displeasure.

God's displeasure is directed towards their person: "Thou hatest all workers of iniquity" (Psalm 5:5). While God finds a godly person's sin displeasing, their person is still "accepted in the Beloved" (Eph. 1:6). However, "God is angry with the wicked every day" (Psalm 7:11). A fire of wrath perpetually burns against them in the heart of God. They are as abhorrent to God

as dogs and swine. Despite their outwardly shining profession, they are detestable in His sight. They are like smoke in His nose (Isa. 65:5), lukewarm water that He wants to spit out of His mouth (Rev. 3:16), whitewashed tombs (Matt. 23:27), a brood of vipers (Matt. 12:34), and a people deserving of His wrath (Isa. 10:6).

God is displeased with everything they do. Being unbelievers, it is impossible for them to please Him (Heb. 11:6). He hates their persons and has no delight in their best works. As stated in Isa. 66:3, "he that sacrificeth a lamb, is as if he cut off a dog's neck." Their acts of duty, as performed by them, are "an abomination to the Lord" (Prov. 15:8). And just as people turn their backs on those they are angry with, when the Lord withholds communion from the natural man during their acts of worship, it is a clear indication of His wrath.

2. There is wrath in the word of God against the natural man. When wrath resides in the heart, it seeks an outlet through the lips. Thus, God fights against the natural man with the sword of His mouth (Rev. 2:16). The word of the Lord never speaks favorably of them; it always curses and condemns them. Consequently, when the natural man is awakened, reading or hearing the word often intensifies their horror.

The word condemns all their actions along with their corrupt nature. Everything they do is declared sinful by the law. It is a standard of perfect obedience from which they constantly deviate, leading to the rejection of all their deeds as sinful. The law pronounces their judgment and proclaims God's curse upon them (Gal. 3:10): "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them."

Regardless of their success in the world, heaven pronounces woes against them (Isa. 3:11). The Bible is like a quiver filled with arrows of wrath, ready to be unleashed upon their souls. God's threats in His word loom over them like a dark cloud, poised to rain down upon them at any moment. While the word is the saint's assurance against wrath, it binds the natural man's sin and wrath together, serving as a sure pledge of their destruction if they persist in that state. Thus, when the conscience is awakened and recognizes this connection established by the law, terror fills the individual's soul.

3. There is wrath in the hand of God against the natural man. They are already experiencing the heavy blows of wrath and are susceptible to even more.

(1.) Wrath befalls his physical body. It is a piece of cursed clay that wrath penetrates due to the threat of the original covenant, as stated in Gen. 2:17: "In the day that thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die." Every disease or pain that afflicts him carries within it the sting of God's indignation. They are all cords of death sent ahead to bind the prisoner.

(2.) Wrath rests upon his soul. 1. He cannot have communion with God; he is "foolish and shall not stand in God's sight" (Psalm 5:5). Just as God cast Adam out of paradise when he sinned, natural men are banished from the gracious presence of the Lord, remaining in the state Adam left them in. They have no access to Him in that state, and war exists between heaven and them, severing all communication. They are "without God in the world" (Eph. 2:12). The sun has set upon them, and they receive no hint of favor from heaven. 2. Consequently, the soul withers away in its iniquity. The natural darkness of their minds, their aversion to goodness in their

wills, the disorder of their affections, the disturbance of their consciences, and all their inherent plagues remain upon them as part of their punishment, gradually increasing. God throws them a portion of worldly goods, more or less, like a bone thrown to a dog, but alas, His wrath against them is evident in their lack of grace. The Physician of souls passes by them, healing others on either side, while they waste away in their iniquity and move closer to their utter destruction. 3. They are exposed to dreadful additional plagues on their souls, even in this life. At times, they encounter deadening blows—silent strikes from the hand of an angry God—arrows of wrath that enter their souls without making a sound. As described in Isa. 6:10, "Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes, lest they see with their eyes," etc. God contends with them for a while, and convictions reach their consciences, but they rebel against the light. As a result, they suffer a secret judgment, receiving a blow to the head that leaves them as if living and rotting above ground. Their hearts become numb, their affections withered, their consciences stupefied, and their entire souls are blighted—cast forth like withered branches (John 15:6). They are plagued with judicial blindness, willingly closing their eyes to the light, and God delivers them over to the devil, the god of this world, to blind them further (2 Cor. 4:4). Indeed, "God sends them strong delusions, that they should believe a lie" (2 Thess. 2:11). Even their conscience, like a false light on the shore, leads them to rocks upon which they are shattered. They harden themselves against God, and He leaves them to Satan and their own hearts, resulting in increased hardening. They are often "given up unto vile affections" (Rom. 1:26). The reins are placed upon their necks, and they are left to indulge in all kinds of excess driven by their raging lusts. Sometimes, they face sharp fiery strokes, causing their souls to resemble Mount Sinai, where nothing is seen but fire and smoke, nothing heard but the thunder of God's wrath and the voice of the

trumpet of a broken law growing louder and louder. Consequently, they become, like Pashur (Jer. 20:4), a terror to themselves. God takes their filthy garments of sin, in which they used to sleep securely, overlays them with brimstone, and sets them ablaze around their ears. Thus, they carry hell within them.

(3.) Wrath is upon the natural man's enjoyments. Whatever may be lacking in his house, there is one thing that is never absent: "The curse of the Lord is in the house of the wicked" (Prov. 3:33). Wrath accompanies everything he possesses—his food, his drink, and his clothing. "His basket and store are cursed" (Deut. 28:17). Some things go wrong for him, and that is due to this wrath. Other things go according to his desires, and even that is filled with wrath, for it becomes a snare to his soul (Prov. 1:32): "The prosperity of fools shall destroy them." This wrath turns his blessings into curses (Mal. 2:2): "I will curse your blessings; yea, I have cursed them already." The holy law is a killing letter to him (2 Cor. 3:6). The ministry of the gospel is a scent of death leading to death (2 Cor. 2:16). In the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, "he eateth and drinketh damnation to himself" (1 Cor. 11:29). Moreover, Christ Himself is to him "a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence" (1 Pet. 2:8). Thus, wrath follows the natural man like a shadow follows his body.

(4.) He is under the power of Satan (Acts 24:18). The devil has conquered him, and thus he is the devil's rightful captive (Isa. 49:24). The natural man is already condemned (John 3:18) and therefore under the heavy hand of "him that hath the power of death, that is, the devil." The devil keeps his prisoners confined in the prison of their natural state, bound hand and foot (Isa. 61:1), laden with various lusts that serve as chains to hold them fast. There is no need for him to be summoned, as is the case for many others, for the devil already has a firm grip on him as a child of wrath.

(5.) The natural man has no guarantee of even a moment's safety from the impending wrath of God, which will come upon him to the utmost. The curse of the law, pronounced against him, has already tied him to the stake, leaving his soul susceptible to the arrows of justice and exposed to all the miseries and plagues that flow from God's avenging wrath. He is like a target for the arrows of wrath, as stated in Psalm 7:11–13: "God is angry with the wicked every day. If he turn not, he will whet his sword; he hath bent his bow, and made it ready; he hath also prepared for him the instruments of death." Even when he lies down to sleep, there is no promise known to him or that can assure him he will not be in hell before he wakes. Justice pursues him, demanding vengeance upon the sinner, while the law continually hurls its fireballs of curses upon him. Only worn-out and exhausted patience keeps him alive. He walks amidst enemies armed against him, and his name may be Magor-missabib, meaning terror all around (Jer. 20:3). Angels, devils, men, beasts, stones, heaven, and earth stand ready, awaiting the Lord's command to bring about his ruin.

Thus, the natural man lives, but he must also die, and death is a dreadful messenger to him. It arrives armed with wrath and presents three solemn charges. First, death charges him to bid a final farewell to everything in this world, to depart from it and hasten to another realm. Oh, what a fearful charge this is for a child of wrath! He finds no comfort from heaven, for God is his enemy. As for the things of the world and the indulgence of his desires, which were the sources of his comfort, they are suddenly and permanently taken away. He is unprepared for the next world; he did not expect to depart so soon. And even if he did, he has no portion secured for him in the afterlife, except for the portion he was born into and has accumulated throughout his days—a treasure of wrath. But go he must; his earthly idol, the world, must be relinquished, and what else does he have?

There was never a glimmer of light or favor from heaven for his soul. The wrath that loomed in the threatening, like a cloud the size of a man's hand, now darkens the entire sky above him. If he looks to the earth, from where all his light used to come, he beholds nothing but trouble, darkness, and anguish; he is driven into darkness (Isa. 8:22).

Second, death charges the soul and body to part ways until the day of judgment. The soul is required of him (Luke 12:20). Oh, what a wretched separation this is for a child of wrath! Care was indeed taken to provide for the body's needs in this life, but alas, nothing was stored up for the life to come, nothing to serve as a seed for a glorious resurrection. Just as the body lived, so it must die and rise again as sinful flesh, fuel for the fire of God's wrath. As for the soul, there was never any concern to provide for it. It resided within the body, dead to God and all things truly good, and now it must be carried to the grave in the shroud of its natural state. When death comes, the sinful companions must part ways.

Third, death charges the soul to appear before God's tribunal while the body lies to be laid in the grave (Eccl. 12:7, "The spirit shall return unto God who gave it"). Hebrews 9:27 affirms, "It is appointed unto all men once to die, but after this the judgment." It would be well for the sinful soul if it could be buried together with the body. But that cannot be; it must go and receive its sentence, and it will be consigned to the prison of hell while the accursed body lies imprisoned in the grave until the day of the final judgment.

When the world reaches its appointed end, the trumpet will sound, and the dead will rise. At the command of the Judge, the weary earth will cast forth the bodies—the cursed bodies—of those who lived and died in their natural state. "The sea, death, and hell shall deliver up

their dead" (Rev. 20:13). Their miserable bodies and souls will be reunited, summoned before the tribunal of Christ, and receive that dreadful sentence: "Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels" (Matt. 25:41). Consequently, "they shall go away into everlasting punishment" (verse 46). They will be eternally confined in hell, devoid of even the slightest drop of comfort or the smallest relief from their torment. They will be punished with the loss of all, forever excommunicated from the presence of God, His angels, and His saints. Every means of grace and every hope of deliverance will be eternally severed from their sight. They will not have a drop of water to cool their tongues (Luke 16:24, 25). They will be subjected to the punishment of sense. They must not only depart from God but depart into fire—into everlasting fire! The worm that gnaws them will never die, and the fire that scorches them will never be extinguished. Throughout eternity, God will sustain them with one hand while pouring the full vials of wrath upon them with the other.

This is the state of wrath in which natural men live—under the weight of God's wrath and susceptible to even more. To further understand it, let us consider the characteristics of this wrath.

First, it is irresistible; no one can withstand it. "Who can stand in your sight when you are angry?" (Psalm 76:7). Can a worm or a moth defend itself against the one who seeks to crush it? Can frail mankind stand before an angry God? Foolish humans may defy Heaven in practice, but the Lord often opens floodgates of wrath upon them that their might cannot stop; they are carried away like a flood. How much more will this be the case in hell!

Second, it is insupportable. What a person cannot resist, they may try to endure. But who can dwell in devouring fire? Who can dwell

with everlasting burnings? God's wrath is a weight that will sink people into the deepest depths of hell. It is a burden that no one can bear. "Who can bear a crushed spirit?" (Prov. 18:14).

Third, it is unavoidable for those who persist in impenitence and die in their sinful ways. "He who, being often reprov'd, hardens his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy" (Prov. 29:1). Though one may flee from it now by seeking refuge in Jesus Christ, those who flee from Christ will never be able to escape it. Where can people flee from the avenging God? Where will they find shelter? The hills will not hear them; the mountains will be deaf to their loudest pleas when they cry out to be hidden from the wrath of the Lamb.

Fourth, it is powerful and fierce wrath (Psalm 90:11). We are inclined to fear the wrath of man more than we should, but no one can truly comprehend the dreadfulness of God's wrath. Its power can never be fully known, for it is infinite and has no limits. No matter how intense it may be on Earth or in hell, God can still intensify it further. Every aspect of God is most perfect in its kind, and therefore no wrath is as fierce as His. Oh, sinner! How will you endure the wrath that will tear you to pieces (Psalm 50:22) and grind you to powder (Luke 20:18)? The story of the two bears that mauled the children of Bethel is a dreadful one (2 Kings 2:23, 24). Yet even the combined fury of raging lions, leopards, and bereaved she-bears is insufficient to give us even a faint glimpse of the power of God's wrath (Hos. 13:7, 8).

Fifth, it is penetrating and piercing wrath. It is a burning wrath and fiery indignation. There is no pain more intense than that caused by fire, and there is no fire more penetrating than the fire of God's indignation, which burns all the way to the deepest pit (Deut. 32:22).

Arrows of human wrath can pierce flesh, blood, and bones, but they cannot reach the soul. However, God's wrath can penetrate into a person's soul, piercing them in the most tender places. It is like when a person is struck by lightning—often, there is no visible wound on the skin, yet life is extinguished, and the bones melt. Similarly, God's wrath can penetrate and dissolve a person's soul from within, even when their earthly comforts remain intact and untouched, as in the case of Belshazzar (Dan. 5:6).

Sixth, it is constant wrath, accompanying a person throughout their unregenerate state, persisting from birth to death. Few days are so dark that the sun does not occasionally peek through the clouds. But God's wrath is a continuous cloud over its targets. "The wrath of God remains on him who does not believe" (John 3:36).

Seventh, it is eternal. Oh, wretched soul! If you do not flee from this wrath to Jesus Christ, even though your misery had a beginning, it will never have an end. If devouring death were to completely engulf you and forever hold you tightly in the grave, it would be merciful. But your body will be reunited with your immortal soul, brought back to life, and never die again. Instead, you will be eternally dying in the hands of the living God. Golden death may extinguish the flames of human wrath against us if nothing else does, but God's wrath, after it has been upon the sinner for millions of ages, will still be the wrath to come (Matt. 3:7; 1 Thess. 1:10), just as the water in a river keeps flowing, regardless of how much has already passed. As long as God exists, He will pursue His quarrel.

Eighth, despite its dreadfulness and eternity, this wrath is perfectly just. It is a clear fire without even a hint of injustice. The sea of wrath, raging with its utmost fury against the sinner, is as clear as crystal. The Judge of all the earth can do no wrong; He knows no fits

of passion, as they are incompatible with His perfect nature. "Is God unjust when He inflicts wrath? (I am speaking in human terms) Certainly not! For then, how will God judge the world?" (Rom. 3:5, 6).

II. I will affirm the doctrine of the State of Wrath. Consider:

1. The threatening of the first covenant is absolute: "In the day you eat from it, you will certainly die" (Gen. 2:17). Sin and punishment are inseparable, and the veracity of God ensures that the threatening will be executed. Since all people are naturally under this covenant, the violation of it places them under the curse.
2. The justice of God requires that a child of sin be a child of wrath. When the law is broken, its sanction must be enforced. God, as the ruler and judge of mankind, cannot do anything but what is right (Gen. 18:25). Therefore, it is just for God to recompense sin with wrath (2 Thess. 1:6). He is holy and cannot tolerate evil (Hab. 1:13), and He hates all who practice iniquity (Psalm 5:5).
3. The terrors of a natural conscience serve as evidence. Conscience, within the hearts of people, tells them that they are sinners and therefore deserving of God's wrath. If individuals take a moment to reflect, they will find that they have the inner witness, knowing the judgment of God—that those who engage in such things deserve death (Rom. 1:32).
4. The agonies experienced during the new birth, the work of the Spirit on chosen souls leading to their conversion, also demonstrate this. Through this process, their inherent sinfulness and misery, as deserving of God's wrath, are clearly revealed, instilling fear of that wrath in their hearts. As it is the

Spirit's task to convict of sin, righteousness, and judgment (John 16:8), this testimony must be true, for the Spirit of truth cannot bear false witness. However, true believers, having been freed from the state of wrath, do not receive the spirit of bondage to fear but receive the Spirit of adoption (Rom. 8:15). Therefore, if fears of that nature arise after a person's union with Christ, they come from the believer's own spirit or from a worse source.

5. The sufferings of Christ serve as clear evidence for this doctrine. Why else would the Son of God have experienced the wrath of God if not because humanity, as children of wrath, were liable to it themselves? He endured God's wrath not for His own sake but for those who were deserving of it in their own persons. This not only reveals our liability to wrath but also confirms that wrath must be unleashed in the punishment of sin. If this was done to the innocent "green tree," what will happen to the guilty "dry tree"? How miserable is the condition of a sinner outside of Christ, someone not vitally united to Him or partaking in His Spirit! Surely, if God did not spare His own Son, He will not spare such an individual.

However, the unregenerate person, who does not highly value the honor of God, may rise up against this Judge and condemn His actions in their own heart. Nevertheless, since the Judge is infinitely just, the sentence must be righteous. Therefore, to silence your objections, O proud sinner, and quiet your complaints against your righteous Judge, consider the following:

1. By nature, you are a sinner, and it is highly reasonable for guilt and wrath to be as old as sin itself. Why should God not begin to vindicate His honor as soon as vile creatures attempt to undermine it? Should a snake not bite a thief as soon as he

jumps over the fence? Should the threatening not seize the sinner as soon as he casts aside the command? The poisonous nature of a serpent provides sufficient grounds to kill it as soon as it is within reach. By now, you should be convinced that your nature is a mixture of enmity against God.

2. Not only do you possess enmity against God in your nature, but you have also demonstrated it through actual sins, which, in His eyes, are acts of hostility. You have unleashed your lusts onto the battlefield against your sovereign Lord. And because you are such a criminal, your condemnation is just. In addition to the sin of your nature, you have committed acts against Heaven that, if committed against men, would cost you your life. Should not wrath from Heaven overtake you? First, you are guilty of high treason and rebellion against the King of heaven. The thoughts and desires of your heart, known to Him as well as the words from your mouth, have been, "There is no God" (Psalm 14:1). You have rejected His rule, blown the trumpet, and rebelled against Him, joining those who say, "We do not want this man to rule over us" (Luke 19:14). You have resisted and quenched His Spirit, practically disowned His laws proclaimed by His messengers, closed your ears to their voice, and sent them away in sorrow due to your pride. You have conspired with His greatest enemy, the devil. Although you are a servant of the King of glory, receiving His favors daily and living off His provisions, you have formed a friendship and alliance with His archenemy and act on his behalf against your Lord, willingly obeying "the lusts of your father the devil" (John 8:44). Second, you are a murderer before the Lord. You have placed stumbling blocks of iniquity before the blind world, leading to the destruction of others' souls through your sinful behavior. Though you may not see it now, there may come a time when you see the blood of

your relatives, neighbors, acquaintances, and others on your hands (Matt. 18:7). "Woe to the world because of its stumbling blocks! For offenses must come, but woe to that man by whom the offense comes" (Matt. 18:7). Furthermore, you are a self-murderer before God (Prov. 8:36). "Whoever sins against me wrongs his own soul; all those who hate me love death" (Prov. 8:36). God's laws condemn those who commit self-murder; so it is not surprising that God's law is severe against soul-murderers. Is it not strange that those who choose to depart from God now, regardless of the cost, will be compelled to depart from Him at last into eternal fire? But, what is even more criminal, you are guilty of the murder of the Son of God, for the Lord will count you among those who pierced Him (Rev. 1:6). You have rejected Him, just as the Jews did, and by rejecting Him, you have justified their actions. They may not have acknowledged Him as the Son of God, but you do. What they did to Him was during His state of humiliation, but you have acted against Him in His state of exaltation. These factors will intensify your condemnation. Is it any wonder, then, that the voice of the Lamb changes to the roar of the lion against the traitor and murderer!

Objection. But some may argue, "Isn't there a vast disproportion between our sin and the wrath you speak of?" I reply, "No, God punishes no more than what the sinner deserves." To correct your misunderstanding on this matter, consider the following:

1. Take into account the immense rewards that God has attached to obedience. His word is not only filled with fiery wrath against sin but also with gracious rewards for the obedience it requires. If heaven is promised, it is only fair that hell is threatened. If death is weighed against life and eternal misery against eternal happiness, then the proportion is evident. Furthermore, sin

deserves misery, while our best works do not deserve happiness. Yet, both options are presented to us: sin and misery, holiness and happiness. So, what reason is there to complain?

2. No matter how severe the threats may be, all struggle to fulfill the requirements of the law. "But I will warn you whom to fear: fear him who, after he has killed, has authority to cast into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him!" (Luke 12:5). This signifies the fear we should have of divine power and majesty. Yet, how few truly fear Him! The Lord knows that sinners are deeply attached to fulfilling their desires. They cling so tightly to their beloved sins that a gentle force is not enough to draw them away from them. Those who travel through deserts, where they face danger from wild beasts, must carry fire with them. Likewise, those who have to split knotty timber need a sturdy wedge. A holy law must be reinforced with dreadful wrath in a world steeped in wickedness. But who are those complaining about the magnitude of that wrath? Are they not the ones for whom it is insufficient to turn them away from their sinful ways? It was the servant who claimed to fear his Lord, describing him as a harsh man, who kept his pound hidden in a handkerchief. Thus, he was condemned by his own words (Luke 19:20–22). You are that person, the very one I am addressing with this objection. How can the wrath you are under and liable to be considered too great when, as of yet, it has not been enough to awaken you to flee from it? Is it time to relax the penalties of the law when people are trampling its commands underfoot?
3. Consider how God dealt with His own Son, whom He did not spare (Rom. 8:32). The wrath of God seized His soul and body, bringing Him to the brink of death. The fact that His sufferings were not eternal was due to the nature of the Sufferer Himself,

who was infinite and able to bear the entire weight of wrath at once. Therefore, His sufferings had infinite value. However, since the sufferings of a mere creature cannot have infinite value, they must be prolonged to eternity. And what confidence can a rebellious subject have to dispute his share of punishment executed on the King's Son?

4. The sinner does what he can against God: "You have done evil things as you could" (Jer. 3:5). You have not done more and worse thanks to the One who restrained you, to the chain that kept the wolf at bay, not to yourself. It is no wonder that God displays His power over the sinner who exerts power against God to the extent of his capability. The unregenerate person does not put an end to his sinful course, and he would not set limits if not restrained by divine power for wise purposes. Therefore, it is just that he remains under wrath forever.
5. Sin strikes against infinite majesty, thus making it, in a sense, an infinite evil. The merit of sin rises according to the offended party's status. If a person wounds their neighbor, they must make restitution with their possessions. But if they wound their ruler, their life is forfeit. The infinity of God makes infinite wrath the just consequence of sin. God is infinitely displeased with sin, and when He acts, He must act in a manner befitting Himself and display His displeasure through proportionate means.
6. Those who will forever remain under this wrath will eternally continue sinning and therefore must suffer eternally. This suffering is not only a result of divine judgment but also because sin is its own punishment, just as holy obedience is its own reward.

USE I. For information. If our state by nature is a state of wrath, then:

1. It is certain that we are not born innocent. The chains of wrath upon us reveal that we are born as criminals. The swaddling bands that bind infants as soon as they are born can remind us of the cords of wrath that hold them as children of wrath.
2. How desperately mad it is for sinners to continue in their sinful ways! It is nothing but adding fuel to the fire of wrath, heaping coals of fire upon their own heads. They are "treasuring up for themselves wrath on the day of wrath" (Romans 2:5). You may perish "when his wrath is kindled but a little" (Psalm 2:12). Why would you increase it even more? You are already bound with cords of death that are not easily loosed. So, stand still, careless sinner, and consider this.
3. You have no reason to complain as long as you are not in hell. "Why should a living man complain?" (Lamentations 3:39). If someone who has forfeited their life is banished from their homeland and faces many hardships, they should bear it patiently, knowing that their life is spared. Do you grumble because you experience pain and sickness? No, bless God that you are not in a place where the worm never dies. Do you envy your neighbors who are in better worldly conditions? Rather, be thankful that you are not in the state of the damned. If your wealth is gone, marvel that the fire of God's wrath has not consumed you. Kiss the rod, O sinner, and acknowledge mercy, for God "punishes us less than our iniquities deserve" (Ezra 9:13).

4. Here is a reminder for both the poor and the rich.

(1.) The poorest, who go from door to door and have not received any inheritance from their parents, are born to an inheritance. Their first father Adam left them as "children of wrath." If they remain in their natural state, they cannot escape it. "This is the portion from God for the wicked, the heritage decreed to them by God" (Job 20:29). It is an inheritance that provides them with a dwelling, even when they have nowhere to lay their heads. They shall be "cast into outer darkness" (Matthew 25:30), and "the blackness of darkness is reserved for them forever" (Jude, verse 13). Their bed shall be filled with sorrow; "they shall lie down in sorrow" (Isaiah 50:11). Their food shall be judgment, for God will "feed them with judgment" (Ezekiel 34:16), and they shall drink the red wine of God's wrath, "the dregs of which all the wicked of the earth shall drain and drink" (Psalm 75:8). I am aware that those who lack worldly goods and are devoid of knowledge and grace, who may be called the devil's poor, might say, "We hope God will make us suffer all our misery in this world, and that we will be happy in the next." As if their miserable outward condition in this life would guarantee their happiness in eternity. It is a gross and fatal mistake! They have another inheritance, namely, "lies, vanity, and things in which there is no profit" (Jeremiah 16:19). But "the refuge of lies will be swept away" (Isaiah 28:17). Do you think, O sinner, that God, who commands earthly judges "not to show partiality to the poor in their cases" (Leviticus 19:15), will pervert justice for you? No, be certain that however miserable you are in this life, you will be eternally miserable in the hereafter if you live and die in your natural state.

(2.) Many who have an abundance in the world possess far more than they realize. You, unregenerate person, may have inherited an estate, a substantial portion, a large fortune left by your father. You

have increased it, and the sun of prosperity shines upon you. You can say, like Esau, "I have plenty" (Genesis 33:9). But know that you have something far greater—an inheritance that you do not think of. You are a child of wrath, an heir of hell. That is an inheritance that will remain with you amidst all the changes of the world as long as you continue in an unregenerate state. When you leave your wealth to others, this will accompany you into the next world. It is no wonder that a well-fed ox meant for slaughter is not put to work like others (Job 21:30). "The wicked are kept for the day of calamity; they are led forth to the day of wrath" (Job 21:30). So, "rejoice, let your heart be glad, and walk in the ways of your heart and the sight of your eyes." Live above reproof and warnings from the Word of God. Show yourself to be a person of a fine spirit by casting off all fear of God, mocking seriousness, and living as you truly are—a child of wrath, an heir of hell. But know that for all these things, God will bring you to judgment (Ecclesiastes 11:9). Be assured that your "sudden calamity will come, and destruction from the Almighty will visit you in an instant" (Isaiah 30:13). "For as the crackling of thorns under a pot, so is the laughter of fools" (Ecclesiastes 7:6). The bright blaze and loud noise they make quickly fade away. So shall your mirth be. Then the wrath that is silently sinking into your soul will hiss dreadfully.

5. Woe to those who, like Moab, "have been at ease from their youth" (Jeremiah 48:11) and have never seen the dark cloud of wrath hanging over their heads. There are many who "have no struggles; their bodies are healthy and strong" (Psalm 73:4). They have lived in a good belief, as they call it, all their days. That is, they have never had the power to believe an unfavorable report about their soul's condition. Many have obtained their religion too easily, and as it came to them lightly, it will leave them when the trial comes. Do you think people flee from wrath

in a morning dream? Or will they flee from wrath they have never seen pursuing them?

6. Do not be surprised if you see someone in great distress about the condition of their soul, who used to be as cheerful and unconcerned about salvation as any of their neighbors. Can one have a right view of themselves as being in a state of wrath and not be pierced with sorrows, terrors, and anxiety? When a weight that is far beyond a person's strength lies upon them and they are alone, they cannot move a hand or foot. But when someone comes to lift it off them, they will struggle to get out from under it. Thunderclaps of wrath from the Word of God, conveyed to the soul by the Spirit of the Lord, will surely keep a person awake.
7. It is no wonder that wrath comes upon churches, nations, and even upon us in this land, and that infants and children suffer from it. The majority of society are still children of wrath, and few are fleeing from it or taking steps to prevent it. People of all ranks contribute to its manifestation. The Jews rejected Christ, and their children have suffered the consequences of wrath for the past eighteen hundred years. May God prevent the ill treatment given to Christ and His gospel by this generation from being pursued with wrath in the succeeding one.

USE II. Exhortation. Here, I will address three groups of people: 1. Those who are still in an unregenerate state. 2. Those who have been brought out of it. 3. All of you equally.

1. To those of you who are still in an unregenerate state, I want to sound the alarm and warn you to take care of yourselves while there is still hope. O you children of wrath, do not find rest in this dreadful state, but flee to Christ, the only refuge. Hurry and

make your escape there. The state of wrath is too intense for you to live in (Micah 2:10), so "Arise and depart, for this is not your resting place." O sinner, do you know where you are? Can't you see the danger you're in? The curse has penetrated your soul, wrath is enveloping you, the heavens are growing darker above your head, the earth is weary of you, the pit is opening its mouth for you, and if the thread of your life were to be cut this moment, you would be forever without hope. Friends, if we saw you about to drink a cup of poison, we would rush to you and snatch it from your hands. If we saw a house on fire while you were fast asleep inside, we would run to you and pull you out. But alas! Your danger is much greater, yet all we can do is tell you about it, invite, exhort, and beg you to take warning. We lament your apathy and stubbornness when we cannot persuade you to heed the warning. If there were no hope of your recovery, we would remain silent and not torment you before the time. But even though you are lost and undone, there is hope in Israel concerning this matter. Therefore, I cry out to you in the name of the Lord and in the words of the prophet Zechariah 9:12, "Return to your fortress, you prisoners of hope." Flee to Jesus Christ out of this natural state of yours.

Motive 1. While you are in this state, you must stand or fall according to the law or covenant of works. If you truly understood this, it would pierce your hearts like a thousand arrows. It would be better to be a slave to the Turks, condemned to the galleys, or under Egyptian bondage than to be under the covenant of works now. All of mankind was brought under it in Adam, as we heard before, and you, in your unregenerate state, are still where Adam left you. It is true that another covenant has been introduced, but what does that matter to you if you have not been brought into it? You must necessarily be under one of the two covenants: either under the law or under grace.

The fact that you are not under grace is clearly evidenced by the dominion of sin over you; therefore, you are under the law (Romans 6:14). Do not think that God has set aside the first covenant (Matthew 5:17-18; Galatians 3:10). No, He will "magnify the law and make it glorious." It is true that the covenant has been broken on your part, but it is absurd to think that your obligation has therefore been dissolved. No, you must stand or fall by it until you can present your discharge from God Himself, who is the party in that covenant. And this you cannot claim, for you are not in Christ.

Now, to give you a view of your misery in this respect, consider the following:

1. By being under this covenant, you are bound to death by virtue of the death threat in the covenant (Genesis 2:17). Since the condition has been broken, you fall under the penalty and are consequently under wrath.
2. Under this covenant, there is no salvation for you except on a condition that is impossible for you to fulfill. The justice of God must be satisfied for the wrongs you have already committed, and God has affirmed this truth with the blood of His own Son. Moreover, you must perfectly obey the law from now on. Thus says the law (Galatians 3:12), "The man who does these things shall live by them." So come, O sinner! See if you can make a ladder to reach the throne of God. Stretch out your arms and try to fly on the wings of the wind, grab hold of the clouds, and pierce through the visible heavens. Only then can you climb over or break through the jasper walls of the city above. These things you can do as well as you can reach heaven in your natural state under this covenant.
3. There is no forgiveness under this covenant. Forgiveness is a benefit of another covenant that you have nothing to do with (Acts

13:39). As for you, you are in the hands of a merciless creditor who will seize you by the throat, saying, "Pay what you owe," and cast you into prison until you have paid the last penny, unless you are wise enough to obtain a surety in time who is able to answer for all your debt and secure your release. Only Jesus Christ can do this. You remain under this covenant and plead for mercy, but on what grounds? There is not a single promise of mercy or pardon in that covenant. Do you plead for mercy's sake? Justice will step in and invoke God's covenant threat, which He cannot deny.

4. Under this covenant, there is no room for repentance that can truly help the sinner. As soon as you sin, the law imposes its curse on you, which is a heavy burden that you cannot throw off, even if your "head were waters and your eyes a fountain of tears, to weep day and night" for your sin. That is something the law cannot do because it is "weakened by the sinful nature" (Romans 7:3). You are like Esau, a profane person who has sold his birthright, and there is no room for repentance, no matter how earnestly you seek it with tears, while under the covenant.

5. Under this covenant, the will cannot be accepted in place of the deed. This covenant was not made for goodwill but for good works. Many are ruined by misunderstanding this point. They are not in Christ but remain under the first covenant, and yet they claim this privilege. It is as if a man were to prepare a feast for his own family, and when they sit down at the table, a servant who has run away from another master presumptuously comes forward and sits among them. Wouldn't the master of the feast rebuke such a stranger, saying, "Friend, how did you get in here?" and command him to leave immediately? Although a master may accept the goodwill of his own child in place of a deed, can a hired servant expect that privilege?

6. While under that covenant, you have nothing to do with Christ. According to God's law, a woman cannot be married to two husbands at the same time; either death or divorce must dissolve the first marriage before she can marry another. Likewise, we must first be dead to the law before we can be married to Christ (Romans 7:4). The law is the first husband, and Jesus Christ, who raises the dead, marries the widow who was broken-hearted and slain by the first husband. But as long as the soul remains in the house with the first husband, it cannot claim a marital relationship with Christ or the benefits of a marriage covenant that has not yet been entered into (Galatians 5:4). Peace, pardon, and similar benefits are all the benefits of the covenant of grace. Do not think that you can stand apart from Christ and the marriage covenant with Him and yet claim these benefits, just as one man's wife cannot claim the benefits of a marriage contract made with another man and his wife.

7. Look at the exclusion order issued in the court of Heaven against all those under the covenant of works (Galatians 4:30). The son of the bondwoman will not be an heir (compare verse 24). Those who are heirs of wrath cannot be heirs of glory. Whom the first covenant has the power to exclude from heaven, the second covenant cannot admit.

Objection: Then it is impossible for us to be saved. Answer: It is indeed impossible while you remain in that state. However, if you desire to be freed from that dreadful condition, hasten to escape from it. Just as a murderer who lives within the kingdom is subject to the reach of the law, but if he manages to escape and cross the sea into another prince's domain, our laws cannot apprehend him there. This is what we urge you to do: flee out of the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of God's dear Son, out of the dominion of the law

into the dominion of grace. Then the curses of the law or covenant of works will never be able to reach you.

Motive 2: O you children of wrath, your state is wretched because you have lost God, and that is an indescribable loss. You are without God in the world (Ephesians 2:12). Whatever you may possess, you cannot claim God as yours. If we look to the earth, perhaps you can say that land, house, or herd of cattle is yours. But let us look upward to heaven: is that God, that grace, that glory yours? Truly, you have no part or share in this matter. When Nebuchadnezzar boasted of cities and kingdoms, how grandly did he speak! "Great Babylon, which I have built... my power... my majesty." But when it came to speaking of God, he told a different story, saying, "Your God" (Daniel 2:47; 4:30). Alas, sinner! Whatever you possess, God has departed from you. Oh, the misery of a godless soul! Have you lost God? Then,

1. The essence and substance of all you have in the world is gone. The godless person, no matter what they possess, is ultimately one who possesses nothing (Matthew 25:29). I challenge the unregenerate person to find true soul satisfaction, no matter their possessions, since God is not their God. Throughout their days, they eat in darkness, and there is always a hidden dissatisfaction that haunts their heart, like a ghost. The soul longs for something, though it may not even know what it is, and this will continue until the soul returns to God, the source of true satisfaction.

2. You cannot accomplish anything worthwhile for yourself because God has departed, and His soul has separated from you (Jeremiah 6:8), like a dislocated leg that is useless, as the word used there signifies. Losing God means losing the source of goodness, grace, and the saving influence of His Spirit. What can you do then? What fruit can you bear, apart from being a branch severed from the vine (John

15:5)? You have become unprofitable (Romans 3:12), like a filthy, rotten thing fit only for the dung heap.

3. Death has entered your windows, yes, and settled on your face because God, in whose favor is life (Psalm 30:5), has departed from you, and thus the life of your soul has departed. How repulsive is a body when the soul is gone! Your soul is even more repulsive in this state. You are dead while you live. Do not deny it, for your speech is silenced, your eyes closed, and all spiritual movement within you has ceased. Your true friends, who see your condition, lament because you have entered the land of silence.

4. Among all the creatures of God, you have no steadfast friend because now that you have lost favor with the Master, the whole household is against you. Conscience is your enemy; the Word never speaks well of you; God's people despise you when they see what you truly are (Psalm 15:4). The beasts and stones of the field unite against you (Job 5:23; Hosea 2:18). Your food, drink, and clothes are reluctant to serve the wretch who has lost God and dishonors them. The earth groans under you, and "the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs" because of you and others like you (Romans 8:22). Heaven wants nothing to do with you, for "nothing impure will ever enter it" (Revelation 21:27). Only "Sheol from beneath is excited about you, to meet you at your coming" (Isaiah 14:9).

5. Your hell has already begun. What constitutes hell other than exclusion from the presence of God? "Depart from me, you cursed." You are already separated from God, bearing His curse. That which is now your choice will eventually become your punishment if you do not turn. Just as a state of grace is glory in its infancy, a state without grace is hell in its infancy, which, if left unchanged, will ultimately reach its full manifestation.

Motive 3: Consider the terrifying instances of God's wrath and let them serve as a wake-up call to flee from this state. Consider, firstly, how it has befallen mankind. Even in this world, many have become examples of divine vengeance so that others may fear. Wrath has swept away multitudes, who have fallen victim to the anger of God. Consider how the Lord "did not spare the ancient world, but saved Noah, one of eight people, a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood on the world of the ungodly; and turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah into ashes, condemned them to destruction, making them an example to those who afterward would live ungodly" (2 Peter 2:5-6). Yet, it is even more dreadful to think of the weeping, wailing, and gnashing of teeth among those who, in hell, lift up their eyes but cannot find a drop of water to cool their tongues. Believe these things and be warned by them, lest destruction come upon you as a warning to others.

Secondly, consider how wrath fell upon the fallen angels, whose case is utterly hopeless. They were the first to dare to transgress the Divine law, and God made them monuments of His wrath against sin. They once "left their own habitation" and were never permitted to reenter (Jude verse 6). They are "reserved in everlasting chains under darkness for the judgment of the great day."

Thirdly, behold how an angry God dealt with His own Son, who stood in the place of elect sinners (Romans 8:32). God did not spare His Son. If anyone could have obtained sparing mercy, it would surely have been His own Son. The Father's delight became a man of sorrows; the very wisdom of God was gripped by amazement and almost overwhelmed by horror. The weight of this wrath caused Him to sweat drops of blood. By the intensity of this fire, His heart became like wax melting within His bowels. Behold here, how severe God is against sin! The sun was struck blind by this terrible sight,

rocks were split, graves opened, and death, in its astonishment, released its prisoners. What are a flood, a shower of fire and brimstone on the people of Sodom, the terrifying noise of a dissolving world, and the entire fabric of heaven and earth disintegrating simultaneously, with angels cast down from heaven into the bottomless pit? What are all these in comparison to God, in human nature, suffering, groaning, and dying on a cross? Infinite holiness accomplished this to reveal the true nature of sin, which is infinitely abhorrent. And will men continue to live in comfort while exposed to this wrath?

Motive 4: Consider the nature of the God with whom you have to deal and to whom you are liable to wrath. He is the God of infinite knowledge and wisdom, so none of your sins, no matter how hidden, can escape His notice. He unfailingly discovers all means by which wrath can be executed to satisfy justice. He possesses infinite power and can do whatever He desires against the sinner. Imagine the weight of the wrathful blows inflicted by an omnipotent hand! Infinite power can make the sinner a captive, even when they are fiercely opposed to Heaven. It can gather the scattered dust from the grave, reassemble the body, reunite soul and body, summon them before the judgment seat, hurl them into the pit, and hold them up with one hand through eternity while lashing them with the other. He is infinitely just and therefore must punish; it would be against His nature to let the sinner escape wrath. Hence, the execution of this wrath is pleasing to Him. Although the Lord takes no pleasure in the death of a sinner as it means the destruction of His own creation, He delights in it as the execution of justice. "He shall rain coals, fire, and brimstone on the wicked," as it is written, "For the LORD is righteous, He loves righteousness" (Psalm 11:6-7). "I will cause My fury to rest upon them, and I will be avenged" (Ezekiel 5:13). "I also will laugh at your calamity" (Proverbs 1:26). Lastly, He lives forever

to pursue the quarrel. Let us therefore conclude that "it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God."

Therefore, be awakened, O young sinner! Be awakened, O old sinner, who are still in the state in which you were born! Your sense of security is not approved by God; it is the slumber of death. Rise from it before the pit closes its mouth upon you. It is true that you may try to protect yourself with an iron breastplate, make your brow like brass, and your heart as hard as a diamond. But God will shatter that brazen brow and cause that adamant heart to eventually crumble into a thousand pieces. You may, if you wish, attempt to push these thoughts out of your mind so that you can sleep in imagined safety, even though you are in a state of wrath. You may run away with the arrows piercing your conscience, engaging in work to distract yourself from them, or seeking solace in sleep or socializing to laugh them away. But convictions that are stifled in this way will have a terrifying resurrection, and unless you heed the warning in time, the arrows of wrath will embed themselves so deeply in your soul that you will never be able to remove them throughout all eternity.

But if anyone desires to flee from the impending wrath and, for that purpose, seeks to know what course to take, I offer them these few pieces of advice and implore and beseech them, as they value their own souls, to embrace them.

1. Retreat to a private place and there meditate on your misery. Believe it and fix your thoughts upon it. Let each person ask themselves, how can I live in this state? How can I die in it? How can I rise again and stand before God's judgment seat in this state?
2. Seriously consider the sinfulness of your nature, heart, and life. A true awareness of wrath flows from a deep sense of sin.

Those who see themselves as exceedingly sinful will have no difficulty recognizing themselves as heirs of wrath.

3. Strive to justify God in this matter. Quarrelling with God about it and raging like a wild bull in a net will only further entangle you in it. Humiliation of the soul before the Lord is necessary for escape. God will not sell deliverance but freely grants it to those who see themselves as entirely unworthy of His favor.

4. Direct your gaze, O prisoners of hope, toward the Lord Jesus Christ and embrace Him as He offers Himself in the Gospel. "Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). God is a consuming fire, and you are children of wrath. Unless the Mediator intercedes between you and God, you are eternally lost. If you wish to be safe, seek shelter under His shadow. Not a drop of that wrath can fall there, for He "delivers us from the wrath to come" (1 Thessalonians 1:10). Accept Him in the covenant in which He offers Himself to you, and the fire of wrath that burns against you will be quenched by His blood. In the white robe of His righteousness, you will find safety, for no storm of wrath can penetrate it.

I shall offer a few words to the saints. (1.) "Remember—at that time," namely, when you were in your natural state, "you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world." Recall the state you were in before and reflect upon its misery. I present five reminders to the entire congregation of saints, who are no longer children of wrath but "heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ," even though they are still in their spiritual infancy.

1. Remember that when the Lord first took you by the hand, you were no better off than others. Oh, what moved Him to choose you when He passed by your neighbors? He found you as children of wrath, just like everyone else, but He did not leave you in that state. He entered the common prison where you were shackled, just like others. From among the multitude of condemned criminals, He selected you, commanded that your chains be removed, placed a pardon in your hand, and brought you into the glorious freedom of God's children, while leaving others in the devil's shackles.

2. Remember that there was nothing in you to attract His love on the day He appeared to deliver you. You were children of wrath, just like others, fit for hell and entirely unfit for heaven. Yet the King brought you into His palace; the King's Son showed affection to you, a condemned criminal, and betrothed you to Himself on a day when you might have been led forth to execution. "Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in Your sight" (Matthew 11:26).

3. Remember that in that day, you were more deserving of loathing than of love. Marvel that when He saw you in your helpless condition, He did not turn away in disgust and pass you by. Marvel that such a time could ever be a time of love (Ezekiel 16:8).

4. Remember that you are adorned with borrowed feathers. It is His beauty that is upon you (verse 14). He removed your prison garments and clothed you in robes of righteousness, garments of salvation. You are dressed like lilies, which do not toil or spin. He removed the chains from your arms, the noose from around your neck, and dressed you in such a manner that you would be

fitting for the court of heaven, even to partake of the King's table.

5. Remember your shortcomings on this day, akin to Pharaoh's cupbearer who forgot Joseph. Reflect on how you have forgotten and treated unkindly the One who remembered you in your lowly state. Is this how you show kindness to your friend? On the day of your deliverance, did you ever think you would repay Him in this manner, your Lord?

(2.) Have compassion for the children of wrath, for the world that remains in wickedness. Can you remain indifferent towards them when you were once in the same condition? You have indeed been saved, but your companions are still in danger of perishing. Will you not provide them with all possible help for their deliverance? What they are, you once were. Let this draw pity from you and motivate you to use every means for their recovery. See Titus 3:1-3.

(3.) Marvel at that unparalleled love that brought you out of the state of wrath. Christ's love was active love; He rescued your soul from the pit of corruption! It was no easy task to redeem the life of a condemned sinner, but He gave His life for yours. He shed His precious blood to extinguish the flames of wrath that would have otherwise consumed you. People get the best view of the stars from the depths of a deep pit. From this pit of misery into which you were cast by the fall of the first Adam, you can have the best view of the Sun of Righteousness in all His glory. He is the second Adam who lifted you out of the horrible pit and the miry clay. How vast was that love that covered a multitude of sins! Consider its length, reaching from everlasting to everlasting (Psalm 103:17). Its depth, descending to deliver you from the lowest hell (Psalm 86:13). Its height, raising you up to sit in heavenly places (Ephesians 2:6).

(4.) Be humble, lower your pride, and walk with humility all your days. Do not boast about your gifts, graces, privileges, or accomplishments. Remember that you were once children of wrath, just like everyone else. The peacock walks slowly, lowering its starry feathers, while keeping its focus on its black feet. "Look to the rock from which you were hewn, and to the quarry from which you were dug" (Isaiah 51:1), and walk humbly as befits those indebted to free grace.

(5.) Be completely devoted to your Lord. Every wife is obligated to be obedient to her husband, but there is a double obligation upon one who has been rescued from a prison or a dung heap. If your Lord has delivered you from wrath, then you ought to be wholly His—acting for Him, enduring for Him, and doing whatever He calls you to do. The saints have no reason to complain about their circumstances in the world, whatever they may be. They can bear the cross for Him who bore the curse for them. They can bear the wrath of men for His sake, who has freed them from the wrath of God. They can willingly face the fire for Him who extinguished the fires of hell for them. Your soul and body, along with everything you had in the world, were once under wrath. He has removed that wrath, so should not all these be at His service? That your soul is not overwhelmed with the wrath of God is solely due to Jesus Christ. Should it not then be a temple for His Spirit? That your heart is not filled with horror and despair is only because of Him. To whom else should it be devoted but to Him alone? That your eyes are not blinded by the smoke of the pit, your hands not shackled by chains of darkness, your tongue not scorched in the fires of hell, and your feet not standing in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone—all this is solely thanks to Jesus Christ! Should not these eyes be used for Him, these hands act for Him, this tongue speak for Him, and these feet swiftly carry out His errands? To the one who believes that they were once children of wrath, just

like everyone else, but have now been delivered by the blessed Jesus, nothing will seem too much to do or suffer for their Deliverer when called to it.

3. Finally, I address a word to everyone. Let no one take sin lightly, for it exposes the sinner to the wrath of God. Do not regard the sin of our nature, which so early brings upon us the yoke of God's wrath, as insignificant. Fear the Lord because of His dreadful wrath. Tremble at the thought of sin, which stirs up God's fiery indignation. Contemplate His wrath and stand in awe, avoiding sin. Do you think this encourages a servile fear? Even if it were so, it would be better to be a slave to God with a trembling heart than a free person to the devil with a hardened conscience and an unyielding heart. However, it is not so; you can love Him and still fear Him. Indeed, you ought to do so, even if you were saints of the highest order. See Psalm 119:120; Matthew 10:28; Luke 12:5; Hebrews 12:28-29. Although you have crossed the abyss of wrath by being in Jesus Christ, it is only reasonable that your hearts tremble when you look back at it. Your sin still deserves wrath, just like the sins of others, and it would be terrifying to be in a fiery furnace, even if we were miraculously protected from harm.

IV. MAN'S UTTER INABILITY TO RECOVER HIMSELF

For when we were still without strength, at the appointed time Christ died for the ungodly.—Romans 5:6.

No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him.—John 5:44.

WE have now witnessed the complete corruption of human nature and the weight of wrath that rests upon it, the abyss of misery into which it is plunged in its natural state. But there is one aspect of its misery that requires special consideration: its utter inability to recover itself. Knowledge of this is necessary for the proper humbling of a sinner. My intention here is to present a few points that will convince the unregenerate person of this inability, so that they may see an absolute need for Christ and the power of His grace.

Just as a person who has fallen into a pit cannot be expected to help themselves out of it except through one of two ways—either by relying solely on their own efforts or by seizing and utilizing the help offered by others—likewise, an unconverted person cannot be expected to help themselves out of their natural state except through either the path of the law or the covenant of works, by relying solely on their own efforts without Christ, or through the path of the Gospel or the covenant of grace, by exerting their own strength to lay hold of and make use of the help offered by a Saviour. But alas! the unconverted person is dead in the pit and cannot help themselves in either of these ways. Not the first way, for the first passage tells us that when our Lord came to help us, "we were without strength,"

unable to recover ourselves. We were ungodly, burdened with guilt and wrath, yet "without strength," unable to endure it or remove it. Thus, all of mankind would undoubtedly have perished had not "Christ died for the ungodly" and brought help to those who could never have recovered themselves. But when Christ comes and offers help to sinners, can they accept it? Can they make use of the help when it is within their reach? No, the second passage tells us they cannot. "No one can come to me," that is, believe in me, John 6:44, "unless the Father draws him." This drawing is what enables them to come when previously they could not; it enables them to come and make use of the offered help. It is a drawing that is always effective, for it can be nothing less than "hearing and learning from the Father," which leads everyone who partakes in it to come to Christ, verse 45. Therefore, it is not merely a moral persuasion but a drawing by mighty power, Ephesians 1:12, which is absolutely necessary for those who have no power in themselves to come and take hold of the offered help.

Listen, then, O unregenerate person, and be convinced that just as you are in a most miserable state by nature, so you are utterly unable to recover yourself in any way. You are ruined, so how will you attempt to recover yourself? Which of the two paths will you choose? Will you try it alone or will you seek help? Will you follow the path of works or the path of the Gospel? I know very well that you will not even consider the path of the Gospel until you find the path of the law impracticable. Therefore, we shall begin where corrupt nature teaches people to begin, namely, with the path of the law of works.

I. Sinner, I want you to believe that your efforts will never achieve it. Work and do your best; you will never be able to work your way out of this state of corruption and wrath. You must have Christ, or you will perish eternally. Only "Christ in you" can be the hope of glory.

But if you insist on trying, then I must present to you, based on the unchanging word of the living God, two things that you must do for yourself. If you can do them, it must be acknowledged that you are able to recover yourself. But if not, then you can do nothing in this way for your recovery.

1. "If you want to enter into life, keep the commandments," Matthew 19:17. In other words, if you want to enter life through your own efforts, then perfectly keep the Ten Commandments. These words are meant to humble the pride of the person's heart and show them the absolute need for a Saviour, as it is impossible to keep the law. The response is fitting for the occasion. Our Lord rebukes the person for calling Him "Good Master," verse 16, by telling him, "There is only One who is good, and that is God," verse 17. In other words, when goodness is mentioned, both men and angels should bow before the good God. As for the person's question, which revealed their legal disposition, Christ does not answer by saying, "Believe and you will be saved," as that would not be appropriate for someone who thinks they can do well enough on their own if they only knew "what good they should do." Instead, in line with the person's mindset, He tells them to "keep the commandments," to keep them meticulously and accurately, like guards watching over prisoners to prevent any escape, lest their lives be taken for the lives of those who escape. So, see now, O unregenerate person, what you can do in this matter. For if you want to recover yourself in this way, you must perfectly keep God's commandments.

(1.) Your obedience must be perfect in terms of its principle. Your soul, the principle of action, must be completely pure and entirely without sin. For the law demands moral perfection, not only in

actions but also in nature, and therefore condemns original sin and impurity of both nature and actions. Now, if you can accomplish this, you will be able to answer Solomon's question in a way that none of Adam's descendants has ever been able to answer, "Who can say, 'I have made my heart clean?'" Proverbs 20:9. But if you cannot, the mere absence of this perfection is itself a sin, exposing you to the curse and cutting you off from life. It also renders all your actions, even your best actions, sinful. "Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean?" Job 14:4. And do you think that by sinning you can help yourself out of sin and misery?

(2.) Your obedience must also be perfect in its parts. It must encompass the entire law of God. If you lack even one thing, you are undone, for the law pronounces a curse on anyone who does not continue in everything written in it, Galatians 3:10. You must give internal and external obedience to the entire law, keeping all the commands in heart and life. If you break any one of them, it will seal your ruin. Even a vain thought or idle word will still subject you to the curse.

(3.) It must be perfect in terms of degrees, just as Adam's obedience was while he stood in his innocence. This is what the law requires and will accept—nothing less. "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind," Matthew 22:37. If you lack even one degree of that love required by the law, if any part of your obedience falls short of the highest command, it is considered a breach of the law and leaves you under the curse. Can a person bring as many buckets of water to a house on fire as they are able to carry, and yet the house may still be consumed unless they bring enough to extinguish the fire completely? Similarly, even if you were to do your best in keeping the commandments throughout your life, a single idle word or vain thought at the hour of death would

nullify all your previous righteousness and ruin you, especially in the way you seek to recover yourself.

Such is the obedience you must perform if you want to recover yourself through the path of the law. But even if you were to obey, the law still holds you under the state of wrath until another requirement is fulfilled.

2. You must pay what you owe. It is undeniable that you are a sinner, and justice must be satisfied for your sins already committed. The honor of the law must be upheld through your enduring the wrath that has been declared. Perhaps you have changed your way of life or are now resolved to do so, to keep the commands of God. But what have you done or what will you do about the old debt? Your obedience to God, even if it were perfect, is a debt owed to Him for the time in which it is performed, and it can no more satisfy for past sins than a tenant paying the current year's rent can settle all past arrears. Can the payment of new debts absolve a person from old accounts? No, do not deceive yourself. You will find that those accounts are stored up and sealed among God's treasures, Deuteronomy 32:34. Therefore, it remains that either you must bear the wrath to which you are liable for your sins according to the law, or you must acknowledge that you cannot bear it and therefore turn to the surety, the Lord Jesus Christ. Let me ask you now, are you able to satisfy the justice of God? Can you pay your own debt? Surely not, for He is the infinite God whom you have offended, and the punishment, matching the quality of the offense, must be infinite. But your punishment or suffering for sin cannot have infinite value, as you are a finite creature. Therefore, it must be infinite in duration—it must be eternal. So, all your sufferings in

this world are only a foretaste of what awaits you in the world to come.

Now, sinner, if you can answer these demands, you may recover yourself through the path of the law. But are you not aware of your inability to do any of these things, let alone all of them? Even if you don't do all, you do nothing. No matter which path of life you choose, you are still in a state of wrath. Even if you push your obedience to the utmost limit, endure whatever God lays upon you, and bear burdens without impatience, it will not satisfy the demands of the law. Therefore, you remain a ruined creature. Oh, sinner! What are you doing while you strive to help yourself but fail to receive and unite with Jesus Christ? You are toiling in vain, wearying yourself for mere vanity. You are laboring to enter heaven through a door that Adam's sin has bolted shut, a door through which neither he nor any of his lost descendants can ever enter. Can you not see the flaming sword of justice keeping you away from the tree of life? Can you not hear the law pronouncing a curse on you for all your efforts, even for your obedience, prayers, tears, and reformation of life? Because you are under the dominion of the law, your best works are not good enough to escape the curse. Believe it, sirs, if you live and die outside of Christ, without being actually united to Him as the second Adam, the life-giving Spirit, and without taking refuge under His atoning blood, even if you do everything that any person can do to keep God's commands, you can never see the face of God in peace. Even if you bid farewell to worldly joys and dedicate yourself solely to the salvation of your soul, even if you live on the grass of the field, isolating yourself in a wilderness, being companions to dragons and owls, even if you retreat to a dark cave and weep there for your sins until you cry yourself blind, even if you confess with your tongue until it cleaves to the roof of your mouth, pray until your knees become hard as horns, fast until your body becomes like a skeleton,

and even if you offer your body to be burnt—all these efforts will not change the fact that, according to the righteous word of the Lord, you will perish forever if you are not in Christ. As John 14:6 says, "No man cometh unto the Father, but by me." And Acts 4:12 declares, "Neither is there salvation in any other." Mark 16:16 warns, "He that believeth not shall be damned."

Objection: But God is merciful, and He knows that we are not able to meet these demands. Therefore, we hope to be saved if we do the best we can and keep the commands as well as we are able. Answer 1: Though you may be able to do many things, you are not able to do anything right. You cannot do anything acceptable to God, being outside of Christ. As John 15:5 says, "Without me ye can do nothing." An unregenerate person, like yourself, can do nothing but sin, as we have already proven. Your best actions are sinful and increase your debt to justice. How then can they be expected to lessen it? Answer 2: Even if God were to offer salvation to those who do all they can in obedience to His commands, it is reasonable to think that those who attempt it would never be saved. For where is the person who does as well as they can? Who does not see the many false steps they have taken, which they could have avoided? There are so many things to be done, so many temptations to lead us astray from the path of duty, and our nature is so prone to be set on fire by hell, that we are sure to fail even in some aspect within our natural abilities. Answer 3: Even if you were to do all that you are able to do, you cannot hope to be saved in that way. What word of God is your hope founded on? It is neither founded on the law nor the gospel; therefore, it is merely a delusion. It is not founded on the Gospel, for the Gospel directs the soul to Jesus Christ for everything and upholds the law, as Romans 3:31 states. Your hope cannot be established on a foundation that undermines the law, which God intends to magnify and honor. Thus, it is clear that your hope is not founded on the law either. When God

set Adam to work for his happiness and that of his descendants, perfect obedience was required of him as the condition. The curse was pronounced in the event of disobedience. The law was broken by Adam, and he and his descendants were subject to the penalty for sin, yet they were still bound to perfect obedience. It is absurd to think that man's sinning and suffering for his sin should exempt him from the duty of obedience to his Creator. When Christ came as the substitute for the elect to purchase their salvation, the terms remained the same. Justice held the elect under arrest. If He desired to deliver them, the terms were known. He had to satisfy for their sin by suffering the punishment due to it, and He had to do what they could not do—obey the law perfectly and fulfill all righteousness. He accomplished all this and became "the end of the law for righteousness to everyone that believeth" (Romans 10:4). And do you think that God will change these terms for you when His own Son received no alteration? Do not expect it, even if you were to beg with tears of blood. If such pleas prevailed, they would prevail against the truth, justice, and honor of God, as Galatians 3:10 states, "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them." And verse 12 adds, "And the law is not of faith: but, The man that doeth them shall live in them." It is true that God is merciful, but can't He be merciful without saving you in a way that is inconsistent with His law and His Gospel? Hasn't His goodness and mercy been sufficiently revealed in sending His beloved Son to do "what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh"? He has provided help for those who cannot help themselves. Yet, in your unawareness of your own weakness, you think you can recover yourself by your own works when you are no more capable of doing so than moving mountains of brass.

Therefore, I conclude that you are completely unable to recover yourself through works or by the law. Oh, that you would come to the

same conclusion about yourself!

Now, let us examine what the sinner can do to recover himself through the path of the gospel. It may be that you believe you cannot do everything on your own, but with Jesus Christ offering you help, you can embrace it and use it for your recovery. But, oh sinner, be convinced of your absolute need for the grace of Christ. Truly, help is offered, but you cannot accept it. A rope is thrown out to draw shipwrecked sinners to safety, but alas, you have no hands to grasp it. You are like infants abandoned in an open field who will starve even though their food is within reach unless someone puts it in their mouths. To convince natural men of this, let us consider:

1. Although Christ is offered in the gospel, you cannot believe in Him. Saving faith is the faith of God's elect, a special gift given to them by God through His Spirit. Salvation is offered to those who will believe in Christ, but how can you believe? As John 5:44 states, "How can ye believe, which receive honour one of another, and seek not the honour that cometh from God only?" It is offered to those who will come to Christ, but "no man can come unto me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him" (John 6:44). It is offered to those who will look to Him as lifted up on the pole of the gospel, as Isaiah 45:22 says, "Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth." But the natural man is spiritually blind, as Revelation 3:17 declares, "Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked." And as for the things of the Spirit of God, you cannot know them, for they are spiritually discerned, as 1 Corinthians 2:14 states. Furthermore, whoever wills to come is welcome, as Revelation 22:17 affirms, "And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that

heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely." But there must be a day of power upon the sinner before he can be willing, as Psalm 110:3 says, "Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power."

2. In your natural state, you have nothing with which to make use of the help brought by the gospel for your recovery. You are cast away in a state of wrath and are bound hand and foot, unable to grasp the cords of love extended to you in the gospel. The most skilled craftsman cannot work without tools, just as the most talented musician cannot play well on an out-of-tune instrument. How can you believe or repent when your understanding is darkness, as Ephesians 5:8 states? How can you repent when your heart is like stone, unyielding and unfeeling, as Ezekiel 36:26 says? Your affections are disordered and disturbed, inclined toward evil and averse to good. Your natural abilities fall short of reaching the supernatural help available to you. Consequently, those who excel in natural abilities often have the least inclination toward spiritual matters, as Matthew 11:25 testifies, "I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes."
3. You cannot bring about a saving change in yourself, yet such a change is necessary for you to believe, repent, and ultimately see heaven. No action can occur without a corresponding principle. Believing, repenting, and similar acts are products of the new nature and can never be produced by the old corrupt nature. What can the natural man do in this matter? He must be born again, begotten anew unto a living hope. However, just as a child cannot actively participate in their own conception, a person

cannot actively but only passively participate in their own regeneration. The heart is closed off to Christ, and only God can open it by His grace, as Acts 16:14 shows. You are dead in sin and need to be made alive, raised out of your grave, and who can do this but God Himself, as Ephesians 2:1–5 testifies? Moreover, you must be "created in Christ Jesus unto good works" (Ephesians 2:10). These are works of omnipotence and can only be accomplished by a power greater than any other.

4. In your depraved state, you are utterly unable to do anything truly good, as we have extensively proven before. How then can you obey the gospel? Your nature is the complete opposite of the gospel. How can you, of yourself, align with the plan of salvation and accept the offered remedy? The corruption of your nature inevitably includes complete inability to recover yourself in any way. Those convinced of their inability must acknowledge this truth, for they stand or fall together. Even if all of Christ's redemption were offered to the unregenerate person in exchange for one good thought, they cannot produce it, as 2 Corinthians 3:5 says, "Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves." If it were offered on the condition of a good word, Jesus Himself asks, "How can ye, being evil, speak good things?" (Matthew 12:35). And if left to choose what is easiest, Christ Himself tells you, "Without me, ye can do nothing" (John 15:5).
5. The natural man cannot help but resist the Lord's offer of help, yet that resistance is ultimately overcome by converting grace in the elect. Can a stony heart choose anything other than to resist? There is not only inability but also enmity and obstinacy in the will of man by nature. God knows, whether you acknowledge it or not, that "thou art obstinate, and thy neck is an iron sinew,

and thy brow brass" (Isaiah 48:4). Such resistance cannot be overcome except by Him who has "broken the gates of brass, and cut the bars of iron in sunder." Consequently, the conversion of a sinner is often a laborious process. Sometimes they seem to be caught in the net of the gospel, only to quickly slip away again. The hook catches hold of them, but they struggle and manage to break free, leaving with a bleeding wound. Even when good hopes are formed for them by those who labor in childbirth for the formation of Christ in them, oftentimes nothing is brought forth but wind. The deceitful heart devises many strategies to avoid a Savior and rob a person of eternal happiness. Thus, the natural man remains sunk in a state of sin and wrath, utterly unable to recover themselves.

Objection 1: If we are completely unable to do any good, how can God require it of us? Answer: God created man upright and gave him the power to do everything that He required of him. However, man lost this power through his own fault. We were obligated to serve God and do whatever He commanded us as His creatures. Additionally, we were bound by the covenant to fulfill this purpose. Now, since we have disabled ourselves through our own fault, should God lose His right to require our task because we have squandered the strength He gave us to perform it? Does the creditor have no right to demand payment from the debtor because the debtor wasted the money and is now unable to repay? If God can require no more of us than what we are able to do, we would need nothing more to save us from wrath than to render ourselves unable to perform any duty and incapacitate ourselves from serving God in any way, as many profane individuals frequently do. Thus, the more deeply a person is submerged in sin, the more secure they would be from wrath, for where God can require no duty of us, we would not sin by neglecting it, and where there is no sin, there can be no wrath. As for the

objection raised by the unbroken soul against the imputation of Adam's sin to us, the righteousness of that arrangement was explained previously. Moreover, unregenerate individuals continually squander the remnants of their natural abilities, the rational light and strength found amidst the ruins of humanity. Furthermore, they do not believe their own complete inability to help themselves, thus condemning themselves even by their own words. Even those who use their natural impotence as a cover for their sloth still delay turning to God, make grand promises of reformation under conviction, which they ultimately disregard, and postpone their repentance until their deathbed, as if they could suddenly save themselves, indicating their far-from-adequate understanding of their natural inability, regardless of their claims.

If God can require of us the duty we are unable to perform, He can also justly punish us for not fulfilling it, despite our inability. If He has the power to demand the debt of obedience, He also has the power to cast the insolvent debtor into prison for failing to pay. Furthermore, even though unregenerate individuals lack gracious abilities, they still possess natural abilities that they choose not to utilize for their recovery. There are many things they can do, but they do not do them because they do not want to. Therefore, their damnation is just. Moreover, their inability to do good is voluntary; they do not come to Christ (John 5:40), they do not repent, they choose death over life (Ezekiel 18:31). Thus, they will be justly condemned because they refuse to turn to God or come to Christ, preferring their chains over their liberty and darkness over light (John 3:19).

Objection 2: Why do you preach Christ to us and call us to come to Him, believe, repent, and use the means of salvation? Answer: It is our duty to do so. It is your duty to accept Christ as He is offered in

the Gospel, to repent of your sins, and to live a holy life in all aspects. These things are commanded by God, and His command, not your ability, is the measure of your duty. Furthermore, these calls and exhortations are the means by which God graciously converts His elect and works His grace in their hearts. Faith comes by hearing (Romans 10:17) for those who, like the rest of mankind, are unable to help themselves. Therefore, in obedience to God's command, we go to their graves, so to speak, and cry out in His name, "Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light" (Ephesians 5:14). Since the elect cannot be distinguished from others before conversion, just as the sun shines on the face of a blind person and the rain falls on both rocks and fertile plains, we preach Christ to all and shoot the arrow which God Himself directs as He sees fit. Furthermore, these calls and exhortations are not entirely in vain, even for those who are not converted by them. Such individuals may be convinced, though not converted. Although they may not be sanctified by these means, they may be restrained from indulging in excessive wickedness they would otherwise engage in. The means of grace serve as a preserving balm for many dead souls that are not quickened by them. Though these means do not restore them to life, they prevent them from putrefying as they would otherwise do. Finally, even though you cannot recover yourself, nor can you grasp the saving help offered to you in the Gospel, you can, by the power of nature, engage in the outward and ordinary means through which Christ communicates the benefits of redemption to ruined sinners who are utterly unable to save themselves from the state of sin and wrath. You can, if you so choose, take steps that will set you on the path toward receiving help from the Lord Jesus Christ. You can strive to come close to the kingdom of God, just as the wise scribe had done (Mark 12:34), even if it appears that he lacked supernatural abilities. Although you cannot heal yourself, you can approach the pool where many such diseased individuals like yourself have been

cured. Although there is no one to put you in, you can lie by its side. Who knows whether the Lord may return and leave a blessing behind? Just as in the case of the impotent man recorded in John 5:5–8. I hope that Satan does not confine you to your homes or restrict you to your fields on the Lord's day. You are at liberty to wait at the doorposts of wisdom if you so desire. When you come, God does not beat drums at your ears, preventing you from hearing what is said. There is no external force compelling you to apply everything you hear to others. You can apply what pertains to your own state and condition. When you return home, you are not imprisoned in your houses, where religious conversations are absent. You can retreat to a separate place where you can meditate and examine your conscience, asking appropriate questions based on what you have heard. You are not afflicted with a mute demon that prevents you from opening your mouth in prayer to God. You are not so overwhelmed by your worldly pursuits that you cannot find time for prayer. You are not so driven by your worldly business that you cannot pause to pray for the salvation of your soul. You can examine your own soul in a solemn manner in the presence of God, discerning that you lack grace and that you are lost and condemned without it. You can cry out to God for His mercy. These actions fall within the realm of natural abilities and can be practiced even in the absence of grace. It is a grave indictment of your guilt that you are not willing to exert such efforts concerning the state and condition of your precious soul. If you fail to do what you can, you will be condemned not only for lacking grace but also for despising it.

Objection 3: All of this is unnecessary since we are completely unable to help ourselves out of the state of sin and wrath. Answer: Do not succumb to the delusion that separates what God has joined together—the use of means and a recognition of our own impotence. If the Spirit of God graciously influences your soul, you will become keenly

aware of your absolute inability and yet embark on a vigorous use of means. You will act as if you are responsible for your own salvation while simultaneously disregarding all your efforts as if they amounted to nothing. Do not refrain from doing anything for yourself simply because you cannot do everything. Do not arrive at such impious conclusions against your own soul. Do what you can, for perhaps while you are doing what you can for yourself, God will do for you what you cannot do for yourself.

Consider the example of Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch. When Philip asked the eunuch, "Understandest thou what thou readest?" the eunuch replied, "How can I, except some man should guide me?" (Acts 8:30-31). He could not understand the scripture he was reading, but he could still read it. He did what he could by reading, and while he was reading, God sent him an interpreter. Similarly, when the Israelites faced a dire situation at the Red Sea, with mountains on one side and the pursuing enemy on the other, and Pharaoh's army closing in from behind, what could they do? The Lord said to Moses, "Speak unto the children of Israel, that they go forward" (Exodus 14:15). Why should they go forward? Could they part the sea and create a passage for themselves? No, but the Lord commanded them to go forward. Although they could not turn the sea into dry land, they could still move forward toward the shore. And so they did. While they did what they could, God did for them what they could not do.

Question: Has God promised to convert and save those who, in the use of means, do what they can towards their own relief? Answer: We must not speak falsely for God. Natural individuals, who are unaware of the covenant of promise (Ephesians 2:12), do not have such a promise made to them. However, it is irrational for them not to utilize their abilities and do what they can. For, 1. There is a

possibility that this course of action may succeed for them. If you do what you can, it is possible that God will do for you what you cannot do for yourselves. This is enough to convince a person in a matter of great importance, such as this one (Acts 8:22). "Pray God, if perhaps the thought of thy heart may be forgiven thee." (Joel 2:14) If there is a chance of success, then the attempt should be made. For instance, in a shipwreck, if all the sailors and passengers cling to broken boards in order to save themselves, and if one of them witnesses the others perishing despite their utmost efforts, the mere possibility of escape through that means would compel that individual to continue doing their best with their board. So, why don't you reason with yourselves as the four lepers did, who sat at the gate of Samaria? (2 Kings 7:3-4) Why don't you say, "If we sit still," not doing what we can, "we die"? Let's put it to the test. If we are saved, "we shall live"; if not, "we shall only die."

2. It is probable that this course of action may succeed. God is good and merciful. He delights in surprising people with His grace and is often "found by those who did not seek Him" (Isaiah 65:1). If you do this, you are already on the path of duty, using the means that the Lord typically blesses for the spiritual recovery of individuals. You place yourselves in the way of the great Physician, and it is probable that you may be healed. Just as Lydia went with others to the place "where prayer was customarily made" and "the Lord opened her heart" (Acts 16:13-14). You sow seeds and plough, even though you cannot be certain of reaping a harvest. You use means to regain your health, even though you are uncertain of their success. In such cases, probability guides your actions. So why not in this case as well? We see that persistence has a significant impact on people. Therefore, pray, meditate, desire God's help, spend ample time at the throne of grace, supplicating for grace, and do not grow

weary. Even though God may not regard you in your present state, as you are a mass of sin, universally corrupt, and vitiated in all the faculties of your soul, He may still regard prayer, meditation, and other means appointed by Him and bless them to you. Therefore, if you refuse to do what you can, you are not only spiritually dead but also declare yourselves unworthy of eternal life.

In conclusion, let the saints marvel at the freedom and power of grace, which came to them in their helpless condition, caused their chains to fall off, opened the iron gate for them, raised fallen creatures, and rescued them from the state of sin and wrath in which they would have remained and perished had they not received merciful visitation. Let the natural man recognize his complete inability to recover himself. Know that you are without strength and cannot come to Christ unless drawn. You are lost and cannot help yourself. If you have never truly grasped your absolute need for Christ and His grace, but instead believe that you can contrive your own salvation through civility, morality, idle wishes, and self-imposed duties, as well as through a faith and repentance that have arisen from your natural abilities without the power and efficacy of the grace of Christ, then this may shake the foundation of your hopes. Be convinced of your absolute need for Christ and His overcoming grace. Believe in your utter inability to recover yourself so that you may be humbled, shaken out of your self-assurance, and lie down in dust and ashes, groaning over your wretched state before the Lord. A proper understanding of your natural impotence, the impotence of depraved human nature, would be a step towards deliverance. This concludes the discussion of man's natural state, the state of complete depravity.

STATE III

THE STATE OF GRACE

I. ON REGENERATION

Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which lives and abides forever. - 1 PETER 1:23

We now move on to the state of grace, the state of initial recovery of human nature, into which all who will partake in eternal happiness are eventually translated while in this world. It is the outcome of a gracious change that occurs in those who will inherit eternal life. This change can be understood in two aspects: 1. In contrast to their natural condition of corruption, there is a change made in them through regeneration, which alters their nature. 2. In contrast to their natural state of condemnation, there is a change made in them through their union with the Lord Jesus Christ, which places them beyond condemnation. Therefore, I wish to discuss these two great and comprehensive changes that occur in a sinner, bringing them into the state of grace: regeneration and union with Christ.

The text provides us with the first of these changes, along with the outward and common means through which it occurs. The apostle, in order to encourage the saints to pursue holiness, particularly brotherly love, reminds them of their spiritual origin. He tells them that they were born again, not of corruptible seed but of

incorruptible, which is the word of God. This reveals that they are brethren, sharers of the same new nature, which is the source from which holiness, including brotherly love, springs. We were once born as sinners, but we must be born again in order to become saints. The term "regeneration" means "to be begotten" and can also be understood as "to be conceived" or "to be born." In the context of the text, it encompasses all these ideas. Therefore, regeneration is a supernatural and real change that occurs in the whole person, appropriately compared to natural birth, as we will see later. The ordinary means of regeneration, referred to as the "seed" from which the new creature is formed, is not corruptible seed. Our physical bodies are generated from corruptible seed, but the spiritual seed from which the new creature is generated is incorruptible—the word of God, which lives and abides forever. The sound of the word of God may pass like other sounds, but the word itself lasts, lives, and abides through its eternal effects on all those it impacts. This "word, which is preached by the gospel to you" (1 Peter 1:25), when infused by the Spirit of God, becomes the means of regeneration, by which dead sinners are brought to life.

DOCTRINE. All people in a state of grace are born again. All gracious individuals, namely, those who are in a state of favor with God and endowed with gracious qualities and dispositions, are regenerate individuals. In discussing this subject, I will explain what regeneration is, why it is called such, and then apply the doctrine.

I. The Nature of Regeneration. To better understand the nature of regeneration, we must acknowledge that just as there are misconceptions in the natural realm, there are also misconceptions in the realm of grace. Many are deceived by these misconceptions, mistaking some partial changes in themselves for this great and thorough change. To address these misunderstandings, consider the

following points: (1.) Many claim the church as their mother, but God does not acknowledge them as His children (Song of Solomon 1:6). Not all who are baptized are born again. Simon was baptized but remained "in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity" (Acts 8:13, 23). In places where Christianity is the dominant religion, many are called by the name of Christ but possess nothing more than the name. It is no surprise, as the devil has his goats among Christ's sheep, even in regions where only a few profess the Christian faith. As stated in 1 John 2:19, "They went out from us, but they were not of us." (2.) Good upbringing does not equate to regeneration. Education may restrain people's sinful desires but cannot change their hearts. A wolf remains a ravenous beast even when in chains. Joash was devout during the lifetime of his good mentor Jehoiada, but he quickly revealed his true spirit through his sudden apostasy (2 Chronicles 24:2–18). While good examples have a powerful influence in changing outward behavior, such change often dissipates when a person changes their company. Numerous sorrowful instances of this can be found in the world. (3.) Transitioning from open immorality to civility and sobriety falls short of this transformative change. Some individuals may indulge in loose behavior, especially in their youth, but eventually reform and abandon their wicked ways. While this is a change, it is a change that can be found in individuals completely devoid of God's grace, whose righteousness falls short of even that of the scribes and Pharisees. (4.) One can engage in all outward religious duties and still not be born again. Though lead can be molded into various shapes, it remains a base metal. People can avoid the pollutions of the world and yet be nothing more than dogs and swine (2 Peter 2:20–22). All external acts of religion can be within the realm of natural abilities. Hypocrites can even display a counterfeit of all the graces of the Spirit, as indicated by the references to "true holiness" (Ephesians 4:24) and "unfeigned faith" (1 Timothy 1:5), which imply the existence of counterfeit holiness

and feigned faith. (5.) Individuals may progress to a great degree of strictness in their own religious practices and yet remain strangers to the new birth, as exemplified by Paul's statement in Acts 26:5: "According to the strictest sect of our religion I lived a Pharisee." Nature has its unsanctified strictness in matters of religion. The Pharisees possessed so much of it that they regarded Christ as little more than a libertine. When a person's conscience is awakened and they live under the influence of the covenant of works, they will do anything within their natural abilities to secure their life. It is true, though it comes from a wicked mouth, that "skin for skin, yes, all that a man has he will give for his life" (Job 2:4). (6.) A person may experience intense soul-searching and agonies yet ultimately perish in the birth. Many have endured great pain but have only "brought forth wind," experiencing convictions of conscience that amount to nothing in the end. Pharaoh and Simon Magus had convictions that led them to seek the prayers of others on their behalf. Judas experienced remorse, returned the ill-gotten pieces of silver, and yet died in his sins. Not all that glitters is gold. Trees may blossom beautifully in spring but bear no fruit in harvest, and some may undergo intense soul-searching that is nothing more than a glimpse of hell.

The new birth, although it may appear to have a hopeful beginning, can be spoiled in two ways. Some individuals experience sharp convictions for a time, but these fade away, and they become as indifferent to their salvation and as profane as ever, usually even worse than before. "Their last state has become worse than the first" (Matthew 12:45). They receive awakening grace but not converting grace, and gradually, it diminishes like the fading light of the day until it culminates in utter darkness. Others emerge prematurely; they are born like Ishmael, before the time of the promise (Genesis 16:2; compare Galatians 4:22, etc.). They settle for a mere experience

of the law, not waiting for the promise of the gospel. They hastily seek consolation without waiting for it to be given to them and foolishly find comfort in the law that wounded them. They apply the healing remedy to themselves before their wound has been adequately examined. The law, a stern husband, severely beats them and heaps curses and condemnation upon their souls. Then they turn to reforming, praying, mourning, promising, and making vows until this ghost is laid to rest. Consequently, they fall back asleep in the arms of the law, never being shaken out of their reliance on themselves and their own righteousness, nor brought forward to Jesus Christ. Great movements of the affections can occur in souls that are untouched by regenerating grace. In the absence of grace, floods of tears may flow, as was the case with Esau, who "found no place of repentance, though he sought it diligently with tears" (Hebrews 12:17). There can be great outbursts of joy, like the hearers in the parable of the sower on the stony ground who "immediately receive it with joy" (Matthew 13:20). There can also be intense desires for good things and great delight in them, as seen in the hypocrites described in Isaiah 58:2: "Yet they seek Me daily, and delight to know My ways... they take delight in approaching God." Look at how high these individuals may rise, only to fall away later (Hebrews 6:4–6). They may be "enlightened, have tasted the heavenly gift, become partakers of the Holy Spirit, tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come." Common operations of the divine Spirit, like a land-flood, can cause a strange upheaval of things, but once they pass, everything returns to its ordinary course. All these things can occur in individuals who remain unsanctified, with a heart of stone that remains unaffected, resulting in the withering of these affections due to their lack of root.

However, regeneration is a genuine and profound transformation in which a person becomes a new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17). The

Lord God, like a goldsmith who melts down a dishonorable vessel and turns it into an honorable one, makes the creature anew. In terms of one's spiritual state, the fall has completely disrupted humanity; every aspect of the soul feels dislocated. But in regeneration, the Lord realigns and sets right every joint. Now, let's explore the nature of this change that takes place in regeneration:

1. It is a change of qualities or dispositions, not a change of the soul's substance. Vicious qualities are removed, and in their place, contrary dispositions are instilled. "The old man is put off" and "the new man is put on" (Ephesians 4:22, 24). By sin, humanity did not lose its rational faculties; understanding still remained, although it was darkened, and the will persisted, although it opposed God's will. Thus, in regeneration, a new substance is not created, but new qualities are infused—light replaces darkness, and righteousness replaces unrighteousness.
2. It is a supernatural change. One who is born again is born of the Spirit (John 3:5). While great changes can occur through the power of nature, especially when assisted by external revelation, they do not make a person entirely new, as was the case with Saul (1 Samuel 10:6). However, in regeneration, nature itself undergoes a transformation, and we become participants in the divine nature. This must necessarily be a supernatural change. How can we, who are dead in trespasses and sins, renew ourselves any more than a deceased individual can resurrect from their grave? Only the sanctifying Spirit of Christ can shape Christ within a soul, transforming it into His likeness. Only the Spirit of sanctification can grant a new heart. When we witness such a change in someone, we can rightfully declare, "This is the work of God!"

3. It is a change into the likeness of God (2 Corinthians 3:18). Everything begets its own kind: a child bears the image of their parent. Similarly, those who are born of God bear God's image. In their natural state, humans resemble the devil, just as a child resembles their father (John 8:44). However, when this blessed change occurs, the image of Satan is defaced, and the image of God is restored. Christ Himself, who radiates His Father's glory, serves as the model according to which the new creature is formed (Romans 8:29). Hence, it is said that Christ is formed in the regenerate (Galatians 4:19).
4. It is a universal change; "all things become new" (2 Corinthians 5:17). It is a blessed leaven that permeates the entire being—the spirit, soul, and body. Original sin infects the entire person, and regenerating grace, the remedy, extends as far as the disease. The fruit of the Spirit manifests in all goodness—goodness of the mind, goodness of the will, goodness of the affections, goodness of the whole person. Through regeneration, one acquires not only a new head to comprehend religion or a new tongue to speak of it but also a new heart to love and embrace it in all aspects of life. When the Lord opens the floodgates of grace on the day of a soul's new birth, the waters purify and make the whole person fruitful. In the aforementioned natural changes, it is as if pieces of new cloth are patched onto an old garment or new life is breathed into an old heart. However, the gracious change is thorough—a change of both heart and life.
5. Yet, despite every part of a person being renewed, none of them is perfectly renewed. Just as an infant possesses all the parts of a grown adult but has yet to reach full growth, regeneration brings forth the perfection of parts, which gradually unfolds in the progress of sanctification. As newborn babes, the regenerated

desire the pure milk of the Word, that they may grow thereby (1 Peter 2:2). Although heavenly light illuminates the mind through regeneration, some darkness still remains. Even though the will is renewed, it is not perfectly renewed; remnants of the old inclination to sin persist. This will continue until what is incomplete is done away with and the light of glory arrives. Adam was created in his full stature, but those who are born must grow up. Thus, those who are born again emerge into the new world of grace as newborn infants. Adam, being created upright, was perfectly righteous from the beginning, without the slightest trace of sinful imperfection.

6. Nevertheless, it is a lasting change that never fades away. The seed is incorruptible, as the text says, and so is the creature formed by it. The life bestowed in regeneration, regardless of any decay it may experience, can never be completely lost. "His seed remains in him" who is born of God (1 John 3:9). Even if the branches are cut down, the root remains in the earth, and when watered with the dew of heaven, it will sprout again. "The root of the righteous shall not be moved" (Proverbs 12:3). Let us now move on to the specifics.

In regeneration, the mind is enlightened in a saving manner. Understanding is infused with light, so that those who were once in darkness are now in the light of the Lord (Ephesians 5:8). The beams of life's light penetrate the dark dungeon of the heart, signaling the end of the night and the arrival of the morning light, which shines brighter and brighter until the perfect day. At this point, the individual is illuminated in several ways:

1. Knowledge of God: Their perception of God undergoes a significant change. The Spirit of the Lord prompts them to

reconsider the question, "Who is God?" and reexamines this crucial aspect, leading them to declare, "I have heard about You with my ears, but now I see You with my own eyes" (Job 42:5). The spotless purity of God, His perfect justice, His all-sufficiency, and other glorious perfections revealed in His Word are now clearly revealed through this newfound light. The clarity and certainty of this knowledge far exceed what they had previously known, surpassing mere hearsay with undeniable evidence. They now see what they had only heard before.

2. Knowledge of sin: Their perception of sin changes. Previously, they couldn't see through the cover Satan had placed over it. However, through the work of the Spirit, that cover is removed, the paint and varnish wiped away, and sin is revealed in its true colors as the most heinous of evils (Romans 7:13). Formerly beloved lusts now appear as deformed monsters. If they were right eyes, they would pluck them out; if they were right hands, they would consent to their removal. They see how offensive sin is to God and how destructive it is to the soul. They consider themselves foolish for fighting against the Lord for so long and for harboring sin as a close companion.
3. Knowledge of oneself: Regenerating grace leads individuals to a deep understanding of themselves. They become fully aware of the plague within their own hearts, as they are filled with eyes that see the truth (Luke 15:17). With saving enlightenment, they recognize the desperate corruption of their nature, the enmity against God and His holy law that has long resided within them. Their souls recoil in disgust. They view themselves as more vile and loathsome than an open sepulcher (Ezekiel 36:31). They remember their past evil ways and unrighteous deeds and loathe themselves in their own sight. They are not worse than they

were before, but the sun is now shining, exposing the impurities that were previously concealed, just as the dawn reveals the breaking day of grace.

4. Knowledge of Jesus Christ: They are enlightened in their understanding of Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 1:23-24). Unregenerate individuals, though capable of preaching about Christ, do not truly know Him. They only hold opinions, however favorable, of Him, similar to one's opinion on disputed doctrinal points where certainty is lacking. It is like meeting a stranger on the road who behaves decently, giving you a favorable impression, leading to a pleasant conversation. However, you would never entrust your money to that person because, although you have a positive opinion of them, they are still a stranger to you; you do not know them. The same applies to their thoughts about Christ. On the other hand, saving illumination takes the soul beyond mere opinions to a certain knowledge of Christ and His excellency (1 Thessalonians 1:5). The light of grace reveals the suitability of the mystery of Christ to divine perfections and to the sinner's condition. As a result, the regenerated individuals admire the glorious plan of salvation through Christ's crucifixion, placing their complete dependence on it and wholeheartedly embracing it. To them, Christ is "the power of God and the wisdom of God." However, the unregenerate, unable to see this, take offense at Him. They are unwilling to risk their souls in that vessel and instead rely on their own broken boards of righteousness. This light of grace also reveals a surpassing worth, a transcendent glory and excellence in Christ that eclipses all created excellencies, just as the rising sun makes the stars fade away. It motivates the soul to willingly give up everything for the sake of obtaining the one pearl of great price. They are content to take Christ for all and in

place of all. An unskilled merchant, when offered a pearl of great price in exchange for all his small wares, would hesitate to accept the deal because although he believes the pearl may be worth more than all he possesses, he cannot be certain. However, if a jeweler comes and assures him that the pearl is worth twice the value of all his wares, he would eagerly make the trade, gladly parting with everything for that pearl. Similarly, this illumination in the knowledge of Christ reveals to individuals a fullness in Him that is sufficient to meet all their needs, satisfying the boundless desires of their immortal souls. They are convinced of this fullness and that it is meant to be shared. They rely on it as an undeniable truth, finding their eternal rest in Him.

5. Knowledge of the vanity of the world: Regenerating grace opens their eyes to the emptiness of the world (Psalm 119:96). The soul is elevated and transported to the spiritual realm, causing this earthly world to appear small, indeed, very insignificant—just as heaven appeared when the soul was still attached to the earth. Grace introduces them to a new world where this current world is seen as a stage of emptiness, a desolate wilderness, and a valley of tears. God has placed a sign of vanity on all worldly enjoyments, yet people continue to flock to them, desperately seeking satisfaction, even though they have been repeatedly informed that true satisfaction cannot be found there (Isaiah 57:10). Why are people so foolish? The answer lies in the fact that they do not see this sign of vanity through the light of grace; they do not spiritually discern it. They may have made rational discoveries in the past, but can that truly wean their hearts from the world? No more than painted fire can burn away a prisoner's shackles. However, the light of grace is a powerful and efficacious light of life.

6. In summary, regeneration brings enlightenment to the mind in the knowledge of spiritual things (1 John 2:20). Those who are born again, even if they are not learned in books, are Spirit-taught. All such individuals are taught by God (John 6:45). The Spirit of regeneration imparts knowledge that was previously unknown and, even when known through hearing, is now seen with spiritual eyes. The light of grace overcomes obstacles, leading individuals to assent to divine truths based solely on God's testimony. It is not easy for the human mind to fully embrace divine revelation. Many may claim to hold the Scriptures in high regard, yet they are unwilling to let go of their preconceived opinions when faced with clear scriptural testimony. However, this illumination causes minds to willingly follow Christ's chariot wheels as willing captives, allowing Him to cast down imaginations and every lofty thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God (2 Corinthians 10:5). It brings them to receive the kingdom of God with childlike trust, believing anything their Father says to be true.

The will is renewed. The Lord removes the hardened heart and replaces it with a heart of flesh (Ezekiel 36:26), thus raising up children for Abraham from stones. Regenerating grace is powerful and effective, giving the will a new direction. It doesn't force the will, but gently and yet powerfully draws it so that His people willingly follow Him in the day of His power (Psalm 110:3). The Mediator's lips possess heavenly eloquence to persuade sinners (Psalm 45:2), for "grace is poured upon your lips." In His hands are the cords of a man and the bands of love to draw them to Himself (Hosea 11:4). Love creates a net for the elect souls, capturing them infallibly and bringing them to safety. The cords of Christ's love are strong because every sinner is heavier than a mountain of brass, and Satan, along with the heart itself, pulls in the opposite direction. However, love is

as strong as death, and the Lord's love for the soul He died for is the most powerful love, ensuring victory.

1. The will is cured of its complete inability to desire what is good. While the gospel proclaims the opening of the prison for those who are bound, the Spirit of God comes and opens the prison door, approaches the prisoner, and by the power of His grace, breaks the chains. He shatters the bonds of iniquity that held the person in sin, rendering them unable to will or do anything truly good. The person is brought into a spacious place, with God working in them to both desire and carry out His good pleasure (Philippians 2:13). At this point, the soul that was fixated on earthly matters can now direct its focus heavenward, and the withered hand is restored and capable of reaching out.
2. A fixed aversion to evil is instilled in the will. Through regeneration, a person receives a new spirit within them (Ezekiel 36:26), and this spirit wrestles against the flesh (Galatians 5:17). The person now loathes the sweet morsel of sin that was once greedily consumed, desiring to be rid of it just as one would eagerly vomit after ingesting poison. When a spring is blocked, the mud remains undisturbed in the well. However, once the spring is cleared, the water springs forth, gradually washing away the mud. Similarly, when an unregenerate person continues in their state, sin resides comfortably in their heart. But when the Lord strikes the stony heart with the rod of His strength on the day of conversion, grace becomes "a well of water springing up to eternal life" (John 4:14), working to remove natural corruption and progressively purify the heart (Acts 15:9). The renewed will rises up against sin, striking at its root and branches. Lusts now become burdensome, and the soul strives to starve them. Recognizing that corrupt nature is the

source of all evil, the soul frequently brings it before the Great Physician. Oh, the sorrow, shame, and self-loathing that fill the heart on the day when grace triumphantly enters! The prodigal has come to his senses, and the remembrance of his foolishness cannot help but pierce his heart.

3. The will is endowed with an inclination, a bent, and a propensity toward good. In its depraved state, the will leaned entirely toward evil, prone and bent on wickedness alone. But now, through the operation of the omnipotent and all-conquering arm of God, it is drawn away from evil and turned toward good. This new inclination is natural in relation to the new nature given in regeneration, which strives for holiness just as the corrupt nature lusts for sin (Galatians 5:17). The renewed will points towards God and godliness. In the original creation of man, his will was directed toward God as the ultimate purpose, and his choices aligned with God's will. However, when man corrupted himself, his will was completely reversed. He made himself the chief end, and his own will became his law. Yet, in regeneration, grace rectifies this disorder to some extent, although not perfectly, as we are only partially renewed in this world. It brings the sinner back to God as the ultimate purpose, exclaiming, "Whom have I in heaven but You? And there is none upon earth that I desire besides You" (Psalm 73:25). "For me to live is Christ" (Philippians 1:21). It causes the person to deny themselves and habitually turn toward God, who is the center of the gracious soul, their home, and their dwelling place for all generations (Psalm 90:1). Through regenerating grace, the will conforms to the will of God. It aligns with His preceptive will, possessing holy inclinations that are in agreement with His commands. The entire law is imprinted on the gracious soul, with every part of it written on the renewed heart. Although

remaining corruption may mar the inscription, making it sometimes illegible to the person themselves, the One who wrote it can read it at all times. It is never completely erased and never will be. What God has written, He has written, and it shall endure. "For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my laws into their minds, and write them on their hearts" (Hebrews 8:10). It is an everlasting covenant, like a covenant of salt. The will is also conformed to God's providential will, so that the person no longer seeks to control their own destiny or carve out their own path. They sincerely say from their heart, "May the will of the Lord be done." "He shall choose our inheritance for us" (Psalm 47:4). Thus, the will is disposed to align with those things that, in its depraved state, it could never be reconciled to.

Particularly,

1. The soul is reconciled to the covenant of peace. The Lord God presents sinners with a covenant of peace, a covenant He Himself has crafted and recorded in the Bible. However, they are not pleased with it. In fact, unregenerate hearts cannot find pleasure in it. If they were given the opportunity to shape it according to their own desires, they would remove many things that God has included and add many things that God has omitted. But the renewed heart is completely satisfied with the covenant (2 Samuel 23:5). They declare, "He has made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure; this is all my salvation, and all my desire." They find nothing in it that they would remove, and nothing is absent from it that they would add.
2. The will is inclined to receive Christ Jesus as Lord. The soul willingly submits to Him. Regenerating grace undermines and

humbles the prideful imaginations of the heart that oppose its rightful Lord. It breaks the iron sinew that prevented the sinner from bowing before Him and inclines them to no longer be stubborn but to yield. They are willing to bear the yoke of Christ's commands, to take up the cross, and to follow Him. They are content to accept Christ on any terms (Psalm 110:3). "Your people will offer themselves freely on the day of your power."

With the mind being savingly enlightened and the will renewed, the sinner is determined and enabled to respond to the call of the gospel. The primary work of regeneration is accomplished—the stronghold of the heart is taken. There is now room for the Lord Jesus Christ in the innermost parts of the soul, as the inner door of the will is opened to Him, just as the outer door of understanding. In short, Christ is passively received into the heart. He enters the soul through His life-giving Spirit, granting spiritual life to the one who was dead in sin. The initial vital act can be seen as an active reception of Jesus Christ, discerned in His glorious excellencies. It is a belief in Him, an embracing of Him as He is discerned, offered, and presented in the word of His grace, the glorious Gospel. The immediate result is union with Him (John 1:12-13). "But to all who did receive Him, who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God." (Ephesians 3:17) "so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith." Once Christ has taken the heart by storm and triumphantly entered it in regeneration, the soul yields itself to Him through faith, as expressed in 2 Chronicles 30:8. Thus, this glorious King, who entered the heart through His Spirit, dwells in it through faith. The drawn soul runs, and the effectively called soul comes.

3. In regeneration, there is a joyful transformation of the affections —they are both rectified and regulated.

(1.) This transformation rectifies the affections, directing them toward suitable objects. "May the Lord direct your hearts to the love of God." The desires of the regenerated person are realigned, focused on God Himself and heavenly things. The one who used to cry out with the world, "Who will show us any good?" has changed their tune and now says, "O Lord, let the light of Your face shine upon us" (Psalm 4:6). What was once unseen beauty in Christ, desired by the person, has now become their sole desire. Christ is altogether lovely to them (Song of Solomon 5:16). The main current of their desires now flows toward God, for He is the one thing they desire (Psalm 27:4). They desire to be holy as well as happy and would rather be gracious than great. Their hopes, which were once low and confined to earthly things, are now elevated and set on the glory that will be revealed. They have the hope of eternal life, anchored in the promises of God (Titus 1:2). This hope serves as an anchor for their soul, providing stability in times of trial (Hebrews 6:19). It motivates them to purify themselves, just as God is pure (1 John 3:3). They are born again into a living hope (1 Peter 1:3). Their love is elevated and directed towards God Himself (Psalm 18:1), His holy law (Psalm 119:97), and His ordinances (Psalm 84:1). Even though it may clash with their most cherished sins, they declare, "The law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good" (Romans 8:12). They love the people of God, known as the brethren (1 John 3:14), and they love all men. As a child of God, they love even their enemies. Since their heavenly Father is compassionate and benevolent, causing His sun to rise on the evil and the good and sending rain on the just and the unjust, they are likewise disposed to love their enemies (Matthew 5:44-45). Their hatred is directed towards sin, both in themselves and in others (Psalm 101:3). They groan under its

weight and long for deliverance, exclaiming, "Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?" (Romans 7:24). Their joys and delights are found in God the Lord, in the light of His countenance, in His law, and in His people because they resemble Him. Sin, which used to bring them pleasure, has now become a fountain of sorrow.

(2.) This transformation regulates the affections placed on appropriate objects. When our affections are directed towards the created world, they naturally tend to be excessive. We tend to experience extreme joy or excessive sorrow in relation to it. However, grace curbs these affections, trims their wings, and keeps them within proper boundaries to prevent them from overflowing. It causes a person to "hate his father and mother and wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life" in comparison to the love for God (Luke 14:26). Grace also rectifies lawful affections, bringing them forth from right principles and directing them toward proper ends. It is possible to have unholy desires for Christ and His grace, such as when someone desires Christ not out of love for Him but purely out of self-interest. Like the foolish virgins who requested oil from the wise virgins because their lamps were going out, they desire Christ (Matthew 25:8). There can also be unsanctified sorrow for sin, when one grieves over sin not because it is displeasing to God but only because of the associated consequences, as in the case of Pharaoh, Judas, and others. Similarly, a person can love their father and mother solely on the basis of natural instincts, without considering God's command to love them. However, grace sanctifies these affections, redirecting them to flow in a new channel of love for God, obedience to His commands, and devotion to His glory. Furthermore, grace elevates affections that may have been too low. It places God in the highest position, humbling all other competitors, whether people or things, and causing them to bow at His feet.

"Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you" (Psalm 73:25). God is loved for who He is, and other people or things are loved for His sake. Whatever is lovely in them, to the regenerated heart, is seen as a reflection of the divine goodness. Gracious souls perceive them only by the borrowed light of God. This explains why the saints love all men but hate those who hate God and despise the wicked as contemptible individuals. They hate and despise them because of their wickedness, which contains nothing of God and thus lacks any lovability or honourability. However, they love them for their commendable qualities or perfections, whether natural or moral, because anything good found in them originates from God and can be traced back to Him as their source.

Finally, regenerating grace firmly directs the affections towards God, to the extent that a person is willing, at God's command, to let go of everything else in order to hold onto Christ. They are even willing to hate their father and mother in comparison to their love for Christ (Luke 14:26). Even lawful enjoyments are held loosely, like Joseph's mantle, so that they can be released when there is a danger of becoming ensnared by them.

If the stream of our affections has never been redirected, then undoubtedly we are heading downstream towards destruction. If the lust of the eye, the lust of the flesh, and the pride of life reign in our hearts, instead of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; if our love for God is always less than our love for ourselves; if sin has been somewhat bitter to us but never as bitter as suffering or the pain of being weaned from it; then we are truly strangers to this saving transformation. Because when grace enters the heart, it turns the affections upside down.

4. The conscience is renewed. In regeneration, a new light is kindled in the soul, enlightening, instructing, and informing the conscience. That candle of the Lord (Proverbs 20:27) is now trimmed and shining brightly, penetrating even the deepest corners of the heart. It reveals sins that were previously unknown to the soul, especially exposing the corruption and depravity of human nature from which all actual sins originate. This leads to the new lament, "Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?" (Romans 7:24). The conscience, which previously lay dormant, is now awakened and makes its voice heard throughout the entire soul. There is no rest for the sluggard anymore; they must rise up, act, and "hasten and escape for their life." The conscience powerfully urges obedience, even in the most spiritual acts that may not be evident to the natural conscience. It also strongly restrains from sin, including those sins that are hidden from the world's observation. It emphasizes the supreme authority of God, to which the heart is now reconciled and willingly acknowledges. This compels the person to fulfill their duty, regardless of the risks posed by the world. The fear of God fills their heart to such an extent that the fear of man loses its power. This has led many to put their lives on the line and to embrace the cause of religion, which they once despised, walking resolutely in the path they previously abhorred (Galatians 1:23). Guilt now causes the conscience to ache. It brings bitter remorse for past sins, filling the soul with anxiety, sorrow, and self-loathing. Each reflection on these sins reopens the wounds, causing fresh pain and regret. The conscience becomes sensitive to sin and duty, fearing to break the hedge where it was previously bitten by the serpent. Ultimately, the renewed conscience drives the sinner to Jesus Christ as the only Physician who can remove the sting of guilt. Only His blood can cleanse the conscience from dead

works, rejecting any other offered relief. This is evidence that the conscience is not only awakened but also anointed with regenerating grace.

5. The memory, which was also tainted by depravity, is improved by regenerating grace. The memory is weakened concerning things that are unworthy of remembrance, and individuals are taught to forget injuries and let go of resentments (Matthew 5:44-45), behaving as true children of their heavenly Father. On the other hand, the memory is strengthened for spiritual matters. Solomon provides a remedy for a faulty memory in Proverbs 3:1: "My son, do not forget my law." How can it be kept in mind? "Let your heart keep my commandments." Grace creates a heart-memory, even in those who may lack a good head-memory (Psalm 119:11). When the heart is truly moved by the powerful sweetness of truth, it assists the memory in retaining what is deeply appreciated. If divine truths made a deeper impression on our hearts, they would be imprinted with greater force on our memories. Grace sanctifies the memory. Many have large memories that are unsanctified, serving only to gather knowledge that will aggravate their condemnation. However, the renewed memory serves to remember God's commandments in order to obey them (Psalm 103:18). It is a sacred storehouse from which a Christian is equipped for the journey to Zion. It provides faith and hope during dark times. It stores past experiences, which serve as waymarks for the believer, helping them discern their location even in times of darkness (Psalm 42:6). It also facilitates godly sorrow and self-loathing, presenting old guilt before the conscience and causing it to bleed anew, even though the sin has already been forgiven (Psalm 25:7). When unpardoned guilt weighs on the sleeping conscience, a single word can instantly awaken the entire soul,

as when Peter remembered the words of Jesus and went out to weep bitterly (Matthew 26:75). The Word of God, stored in a sanctified memory, enables a person to resist temptations, equips them with the sword to fight against spiritual enemies, and serves as a guiding light in the paths of righteousness and true religion.

6. There is a change in the body and its members in terms of their purpose; they are dedicated to the Lord. Even the body is "for the Lord" (1 Corinthians 6:13) and is the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19). The members of the body, which were once instruments of unrighteousness for sin, become instruments of righteousness for God (Romans 6:13), serving righteousness and holiness (Romans 6:19). The eyes, which used to convey sinful thoughts into the heart, are now under a covenant not to do so anymore. Instead, they serve the soul by beholding the works of God and reading His Word. The ears, which had often served as the gateway for sin and death, now become the gate of life, through which the Word of life enters the soul. The tongue, which previously set the whole course of nature on fire, is restored to its intended purpose by the Creator: to be an instrument that glorifies Him and proclaims His praise. In summary, the whole person, in soul and body, is now dedicated to God through this blessed transformation.
7. This gracious change is manifested in one's conduct. Even the outward person is renewed. A new heart results in a new way of life. When "the king's daughter is all glorious within, her clothing is of fine gold" (Psalm 45:13). A single eye makes the whole body full of light (Matthew 6:22). This change is evident in every aspect of a person's conduct, particularly in the following areas.

(1) The change is evident in the company one keeps. Previously, the company of saints was despised, but now they bring delight. They become companions of those who fear God, joining with them in their shared purpose and journey to the promised land. They converse in the language of faith. It is futile to claim religion while choosing to associate with the ungodly, for "a companion of fools will be destroyed" (Proverbs 13:20). True godliness makes a person cautious about entering ungodly households or maintaining unnecessary familiarity with wicked individuals, just as a healthy person avoids entering an infected house.

(2) In their various relationships, they become new individuals. Grace makes them gracious in their roles and guides them in conscientiously fulfilling their relational duties. It not only makes them good men and women but also good citizens, spouses, children, and servants. In short, it transforms them into good members of the church, society, and family. It is a valid criticism of many who profess religion that they fail to be good relatives. They may be poor husbands, wives, masters, servants, etc. How can we demonstrate that we are new creatures if we remain unchanged in our various roles? "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!" (2 Corinthians 5:17). Genuine godliness is affirmed by the consciences of one's closest relations, who, despite being aware of their sinful weaknesses, acknowledge their fear of the Lord.

(3) There is a significant change in the way they approach their worldly business. It no longer consumes their entire being as it once did. Though they engage in worldly affairs like everyone else, their hearts are not fully absorbed by them. It is evident that they are conducting business with heaven as well as with the earth. They consider their worldly employment as a duty assigned by the Lord of

all, and they carry out their lawful work as an act of obedience to God's will (Ephesians 6:7), remembering the command, "You shall not steal."

(4) They have a special concern for the advancement of Christ's kingdom in the world. They prioritize the interests of religion and hold Jerusalem in higher regard than their own personal joys (Psalm 137:6). Even if they live privately, grace instills in them a public-spiritedness. They actively involve themselves in the work of God, the preaching of the Gospel, and the well-being of God's people, even those they have never met. As children of God, they naturally care about these matters. They develop a deep concern for the spiritual welfare of others. Having experienced the evil of sin, they pity the world engulfed in wickedness. They eagerly seek to rescue those who are lost, mindful that they themselves were once plucked from the fire. They strive to commend religion to others through both their words and actions. They are willing to deny themselves liberties in indifferent matters rather than use them uncharitably and cause harm to others (1 Corinthians 8:13).

(5) Their use of lawful pleasures undergoes a significant change. They do not find ultimate satisfaction in them but view them as aids on their journey. They derive their true contentment from higher sources, even when lesser pleasures are present. Just as Hannah rejoiced not so much in the gift of a son but in the Giver Himself (1 Samuel 2:1), they find their joy in the Lord. Even when the comforts of life are stripped away, they can still rejoice in the Lord, even if the fig tree does not blossom (Habakkuk 3:17-18). Grace teaches them to view the conveniences of this life as pilgrims, displaying holy moderation in all things. They become cautious of excessive pleasure, aware of the dangers they may pose. Like the dogs of Egypt

that lap their water warily from the Nile, fearing the crocodiles within, they exercise caution with these earthly comforts.

(6) This transformation is evident in their performance of religious duties. Those who previously neglected such duties will no longer do so once the grace of God enters their hearts. If a person is born anew, they will desire the pure milk of the Word (1 Peter 2:2-3). When the Spirit of grace touches a formerly prayerless individual, a spirit of supplication will be awakened within them (Zechariah 12:10). It is as natural for a regenerated person to pray as it is for a newborn baby to cry. Acts 9:11 declares, "Behold, he is praying!" Their hearts become a temple for God, and their homes become places of worship. Their devotion, once superficial and formal, becomes spiritual and vibrant, as their hearts and tongues are touched with a live coal from heaven. They no longer view the mere performance of duties as a mere task to be completed, but in every duty, they seek communion with God in Christ. They consider them as means ordained by God for that purpose, feeling a sense of disappointment if they fail to experience such communion.

II. I will now explain why this change is called regeneration, or being born again. It is referred to as such due to the similarities between natural and spiritual generation, which can be seen in the following aspects.

1. Both natural and spiritual generation are mysterious. Just as the wind blows without us knowing its origin or destination, so it is with everyone born of the Spirit (John 3:8). The work of the Spirit is felt, but the way in which He operates remains a mystery beyond our comprehension. A new light shines in the mind, and the will is renewed, but how that light is conveyed or how the rebellious will is transformed into a willing captive is

beyond our understanding. It is like the growth of bones in a womb, a process we cannot comprehend. In the same way, one hears the sound of the wind but cannot grasp where it begins or ends; likewise, those born of the Spirit experience the change but do not fully comprehend how it is brought about. They may know that whereas they were once blind, they now see, but they do not know how the seed of grace sprouts and grows (Mark 4:26, 27).

2. In both cases, the creature comes into a new existence. A child does not exist until it is born, and a person has no gracious being, no existence in grace, until they are regenerated. Regeneration is not merely the healing of a sick person but the reviving of a dead person (Ephesians 2:1–5). In their depraved state, humans are nothing in terms of grace, and they are brought into a new existence by the power of the One who calls things into being even when they do not exist. They are created in Jesus Christ for good works (Ephesians 2:10). In order to provide hope for the wretched and miserable state of the Laodiceans, our Lord Jesus presented Himself as the beginning of God's creation (Revelation 3:14), the active beginning, for He made all things in the beginning (John 1:3). This suggests that just as He created them when they were nothing, He could recreate them when they were worse than nothing. The same hand that made them creatures can make them new creatures.
3. Just as the child is passive in natural generation, the child of God is passive in regeneration. The child contributes nothing to their own generation, and likewise, the child contributes nothing to their own regeneration in terms of effectiveness. Although a person can position themselves at the pool, they have no power to move the water or perform the cure. One person is born as the

child of a king, another as the child of a beggar, and the child has no say in this distinction. God leaves some in their depraved state while bringing others into a state of grace or regeneration. If one is honored in this way, it is not due to their own efforts, for who makes them different from another? What do they possess that they did not receive? (1 Corinthians 4:7).

4. There is a remarkable complexity in both births. The human body is a marvel of design, with a variety of organs, each serving its purpose without anything lacking or superfluous. The psalmist, contemplating his own body, marvels at the craftsmanship, saying, "I am fearfully and wonderfully made" (Psalm 139:14). He recognizes the intricate work, just as needlework is meticulously crafted. Similarly, in regeneration, the psalmist states, "She shall be brought to the King in robes of needlework" (Psalm 45:14), referring to the curiously woven garments. This is the same word used in both instances. The apostle explains that these garments are the new man created after God in righteousness and true holiness (Ephesians 4:24). This is the raiment we are instructed to put on, without excluding the imputed righteousness of Christ. Both the human body and the new creature are intricately designed masterpieces, revealing the manifold wisdom of God. The new creature displays a wonderful combination of graces, a glorious creation made anew in the image of God. It is the grace in Christ that completes this new person (John 1:16), just as a child has the same members as the parent, albeit in proportion.
5. In both cases, the entire process originates from something small and insignificant. The power of God is revealed in creating a living being from corruptible seed, and even more so in bringing forth the new creature from such humble beginnings. It

is like the small cloud, initially the size of a man's hand, that spreads until the sky becomes dark with clouds and brings forth heavy rain (1 Kings 18:44, 45). A person may hear a word in a sermon that hundreds of others hear but disregard. However, that word remains with them, working within them until their world is turned upside down, transforming them into a new person. It is like the vapor that entered Ahasuerus's head, causing him to lose sleep (Esther 6:1), resulting in a series of events that led to Mordecai's triumph and Haman's downfall. The grain of mustard seed becomes a tree (Matthew 13:31, 32). God delights in bringing great things out of small beginnings.

6. Both natural generation and regeneration occur gradually. Job 10:10 asks, "Did you not pour me out like milk and curdle me like cheese?" The same applies to regeneration. The soul, in ordinary circumstances, undergoes a process akin to that of the blind man cured by Jesus, who initially saw people as trees walking but eventually saw them clearly (Mark 8:23–25). While regeneration is, strictly speaking, a passage from death to life, the soul is quickened in an instant, just as the lifeless lump receives the infused soul when the embryo reaches maturity in the womb. However, we can imagine a process similar to conception in spiritual regeneration, where the soul is prepared for quickening, allowing the new creature to grow (1 Peter 2:2) and experience abundant life (John 10:10).
7. In both cases, new relationships are formed. The regenerate can call God their Father, for they are His children (John 1:12, 13), and the bride, the Lamb's wife, which refers to the Church, becomes their mother (Galatians 4:26). They are also related as brothers and sisters to angels and glorified saints, forming a heavenly family. They belong to the heavenly lineage, even the

lowliest among them, the base things of the world (1 Corinthians 1:28), those who cannot boast of noble ancestry, are closely connected through their new birth with the righteous on earth.

8. There is a likeness between the parent and the child. Every creature generates its own kind, and the regenerate become partakers of the divine nature (2 Peter 1:4). The moral perfections of the divine nature are, to some extent, communicated to the renewed soul, restoring the divine image. Thus, just as a child resembles their parent, the new creature resembles God Himself, being holy as He is holy.
9. Just as there is no birth without pain for both the mother and child, there is great pain in bringing forth the new creature. The children experience birth pains to varying degrees, being "pricked in their hearts" (Acts 2:37). The soul undergoes intense pain during conviction and humiliation. "Who can bear a wounded spirit?" The mother, Zion, goes through pain and labor, sighing, groaning, and crying, in her ministers and members, to bring forth children to her Lord (Galatians 4:19). She joyfully experiences the birth of her children, feeling a deep sense of joy when a new child is born into the world. Remarkably, we not only read about the "travail" and toil of our Lord Jesus Christ's soul (Isaiah 53:11), but we also find a direct reference to His "pains" or pangs, comparable to those of a woman in childbirth (Acts 2:24). He truly experienced the pains of birth, from strong crying and tears (Hebrews 5:7) to agony and bloody sweat (Luke 22:44). In the end, He died from these agonizing pangs, which became the pains of death (Acts 2:24).

I will now apply this doctrine.

USE I. Based on what has been said, you can examine whether you are in a state of grace or not. If you have been delivered from the state of wrath or destruction and brought into a state of grace or salvation, then you are new creatures, born again. But you may ask, how can we know if we have been born again? The answer is simple. If you were to ask me whether the sun has risen and how you can know if it has, I would tell you to look up at the sky and see it with your own eyes. Similarly, if you want to know if the light has risen in your heart, look inward and see. Grace is like light; it reveals itself. Examine your mind and see if it has been illuminated with the knowledge of God. Have you been inwardly taught who God is? Have you turned your gaze inward to see yourself, the sinfulness of your fallen state, the corruption of your nature, and the sins of your heart and life? Have you gained a deep understanding of the great sinfulness of sin? Have your eyes beheld the beauty of King Jesus, the manifold wisdom of God in Him, His surpassing excellence, and His absolute fullness and sufficiency, while realizing the vanity and emptiness of all else? Next, consider the change that has taken place in your will. Have the chains that once bound your will from aspiring towards heaven been removed? Has your will undergone a transformation? Do you find yourself averse to sin and inclined towards righteousness in your heart? Has your soul turned towards God as your ultimate purpose? Has your will been reshaped to conform, to some extent, to God's preceptive and providential will? Are you wholeheartedly reconciled to the covenant of peace and firmly disposed to receive Christ as He is offered in the gospel? In terms of your affections, have they been realigned and fixed on proper objects? Do your desires gravitate towards God and the remembrance of Him (Isaiah 26:8)? Are your hopes placed in Him? Is your love directed towards Him, while your hatred is directed against sin? Does offending a good God fill your heart with sorrow, and do you fear sin more than suffering? Are your affections

regulated? Have you brought them down with regard to worldly comforts, recognizing that they were once held too high, and have you raised them up with regard to God in Christ, understanding that they were once held too low? Does He now occupy the foremost position in your heart, while all your lawful worldly comforts and enjoyments are placed at His feet? Has your conscience been enlightened and awakened, seeking only peace through the application of the blood of a Redeemer? Has your memory been sanctified, and is your body consecrated to the service of God? Are you now walking in newness of life? Through these examinations, you can determine whether or not you have been born again.

However, to further assist you in discerning your regeneration, I will discuss another sign: the love of the brethren. This is an evidence that has brought comfort to even the weakest and most timid saints when other signs may have provided little or no consolation. The apostle addresses this in 1 John 3:14, stating, "We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren." It should be noted that by "brethren" in this context, the apostle does not refer to brethren by mere natural relation to Adam, but rather to the second Adam, Christ Jesus. While it is true that a renewed soul exhibits universal benevolence, a goodwill towards all humanity, as it reflects the divine image, the entire context of the passage refers to those who are "the sons of God" (verse 1, 2), "children of God" (verse 10), and "born of God" (verse 9). It distinguishes between "the children of God" and "the children of the devil" (verse 10) and between those who are "of the devil" (verses 8, 12) and those who are "of God" (verse 10). The passage itself serves as a reason why we should not be surprised that the world hates the brethren, the children of God (verse 13). It is illogical to expect this love among worldly individuals who are spiritually dead in their trespasses and sins. Consequently,

by "brethren" in this passage, the apostle refers to brethren by regeneration.

To shed further light on this sign of regeneration, consider the following: Firstly, this love for the brethren is a love for them as such. We love them in the sense of the text when the grace or image of God within them is the primary motive for our love towards them. When we love the godly for their godliness, the saints for their sanctity or holiness, we love God in them, and this indicates that we have been born of God. "Everyone who loves Him who begot also loves him who is begotten of Him" (1 John 5:1). Hypocrites may love saints for reasons related to civil relationships, their pleasant company, their agreement on outward religious matters, or various other such reasons that might induce wicked individuals to love the godly. But blessed are those who love the saints purely for the grace within them, for their heaven-born disposition and character. They can perceive this precious quality even through their weaknesses and faults, grasp hold of it, and love them for it. Secondly, this love is bestowed upon all in whom the grace of God is evident. Those who love one saint because they are a saint will also have "love for all the saints" (Ephesians 1:15). They will love all those who, in their view, bear the image of God. Those who cannot love a godly person in rags but restrict their love to those who are adorned with worldly possessions do not possess this love for the brethren. Those who confine their love to a particular group to which God has not confined His grace have hearts too narrow to be counted among the children. Regardless of any differences in opinions or practices, if others demonstrate love for God, love for our Savior Jesus Christ, and bear His image, we shall love them as brethren if we belong to the heavenly family. Thirdly, if this love exists within us, the more grace a person possesses, the more we will love them. As the holy fire of grace burns more intensely in someone, the hearts of true

Christians will be increasingly warmed in love towards them. The love of saints differs from that of many others who measure others by their own standard. They love others only to the extent that they resemble themselves. However, if others appear to surpass and overshadow them, their love turns to hatred and envy, and they seek to diminish the well-deserved praise of exemplary piety. Their hearts, tainted with serpentine grudges, cannot appreciate any practice of religion that surpasses their own measure. Any manifestation of life and power in the practice of religion by others serves only to fuel the envy in their pharisaical hearts. In contrast, those who are born again have their love and affection for the brethren proportional to the degree of the divine image they perceive in them.

Now, if you desire to gain a deeper understanding of your own spiritual condition, I offer the following advice: Firstly, set aside dedicated time at home to review your case and examine your state based on what has been discussed. Many find comfort and clarity regarding their spiritual condition during sermons, only to lose it shortly afterward. This occurs because while they hear the preached word and make immediate applications, they do not take the time to reflect and consider these matters more thoroughly and leisurely when alone. The impact is often abrupt and fleeting, offering little lasting comfort and sometimes leading to undesirable consequences. Therefore, engage in this introspective work at home, after fervent and sincere prayer to God, seeking His assistance in this endeavor. Do not complain about a lack of time when the night follows the busy day or a lack of a suitable place when fields and outbuildings can be utilized. Secondly, renew your repentance before the Lord. Unrepented guilt weighing on the conscience can obscure all your evidences and marks of grace. It provokes the Spirit of grace to withdraw, and when He departs, our light diminishes. It is not a

suitable time for a saint to examine their evidences when the candle of their conscience has been extinguished by unresolved guilt. Thirdly, exert the powers of the new nature within you. Allow the graces of the divine Spirit to reveal themselves through action. If you want to know if the sacred fire burns within your heart, you must blow on the coal. Even if it exists and is alive, if it remains buried beneath the ashes, it will not provide you with light. Therefore, establish in your heart a firm resolve, through the grace found in Christ Jesus, to fulfill every known duty and guard against every known sin. Be ready and willing to receive instruction in areas where you lack knowledge. If those who have been transformed by grace manage their self-examination in this manner, they are likely to experience a positive outcome. Similarly, if others engage in such a solemn review and test their spiritual state by impartially examining themselves before the tribunal of their consciences, they may receive a timely revelation of their own sinfulness. Neglecting self-examination leaves many individuals under the grip of dangerous delusions regarding their spiritual state and deprives numerous saints of the joyful sight of God's grace within them.

However, in order to provide further assistance to true Christians in their inquiries about their spiritual condition, I will present and briefly address some cases or doubts that may potentially hinder individuals from experiencing a comforting assurance of their happy state. The bread of the children should not be withheld, even though dogs may attempt to snatch at it.

CASE 1: "I doubt if I am born again because I do not know the exact moment of my conversion, nor can I trace the specific steps of how it came to pass." Answer: Although it is desirable to be able to provide a detailed account of the beginning and gradual progress of the Lord's work in our souls, as some saints can do, the manner in which

the Spirit works is still a mystery. However, this knowledge is not necessary to prove the reality of God's grace. Blessed is the person who can say, in this situation, like the blind man in the Gospel, "One thing I know, that though I was blind, now I see." Just as we know there is fire when we see flames, even if we do not know how or when it started, the truth of God's grace can be discerned in us, even if we do not know how or when it was infused into our hearts. If you can perceive the blessed change that has taken place in your soul, if you find that your mind is enlightened and your will is inclined to obey God in all things, especially embracing the divine plan of salvation through a crucified Redeemer, then you are troubling yourself in vain and rejecting comfort simply because you do not know the exact details of how it happened.

CASE 2: "If I were a new creation, sin would not prevail over me as it does." Answer: While we must not provide pillows for hypocrites to rest their heads on, who indulge in their sins and misuse the doctrine of God's grace to satisfy their lusts, content to remain in the bondage of iniquity like those who cherish golden chains, it must be acknowledged that "the righteous person falls seven times a day," and iniquity may prevail against the children of God. However, if you are burdened by the weight of the body of death, the corruption of your nature, if you detest the sins of your heart and life, if you strive to mortify your desires, if you daily flee to the blood of Christ for forgiveness and rely on His Spirit for sanctification, then even if you are compelled to say with the Psalmist, "Iniquities prevail against me," you can also add with him, "As for our transgressions, you will forgive them" (Psalms 65:3). The new creation does not yet possess the house alone; it coexists with an undesirable neighbor, namely, remaining corruption, the remnants of our depraved nature. They struggle for supremacy: "For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh" (Galatians 5:17).

Sometimes, corruption prevails, leading the child of God into captivity under the law of sin (Romans 7:23). Therefore, do not conclude in this case that you are not one of God's children just because corruption prevails. Instead, let it humble you, make you more watchful, and intensify your thirst for Jesus Christ, His blood, and His Spirit. That very disposition demonstrates a principle of grace within you, which seeks the destruction of sin that often prevails against you.

CASE 3: "I find that the impulses of sin in my heart are more intense since the Lord began His work in my soul than they were before. Can this coexist with a change in my nature?" Answer: It is a dreadful state for many individuals who, after God has remarkably dealt with their souls to bring about their reformation, cast off all restraints and become openly immoral and profane, as if the devil had returned to their hearts with even worse companions. All I can say to such individuals is that their condition is exceedingly dangerous, and they are in danger of sinning against the Holy Spirit. Therefore, let them repent before it is too late. However, if this is not the case for you, if corruption is stirring more vigorously than before, as if all the forces of hell were mobilized to hold onto or reclaim a fugitive, then these stirrings can coexist with a change in your nature. When the restraint of grace is freshly placed upon corruption, it is not surprising that it acts more forcefully than before, warring against the law of the mind (Romans 7:23). The impulses of sin may truly be most intense when the new principle is introduced to drive it out. Just as sunlight shining through a window reveals the dust particles and their movements that were previously unseen, the light of grace may expose the stirrings and actions of corruption in a different manner than the individual had ever observed before, even though they are not truly more vigorous. Sin is not completely dead in the regenerated soul; it is dying, albeit a lingering death, being crucified.

It is no wonder that great conflicts arise when it is sick at heart and death is at the doorstep. Furthermore, temptations may increase in number and strength when Satan strives to bring back those who have escaped, compared to when he merely tried to keep them. The apostle addressed the Hebrews, saying, "After you were illuminated, you endured a great struggle with sufferings" (Hebrews 10:32). Therefore, do not let this case cause you to question the foundations of your trust. Instead, empty yourself of self and be strong in the Lord and in His mighty power, and you will emerge victorious.

CASE 4: "But when I compare my love for God with my love for certain worldly pleasures, I find that my affections are stronger towards the creature than the Creator. How can I then call Him Father? Moreover, those inward turnings of my heart and fervent affections for Him that I once had are now gone, making me fear that all the love I ever had for the Lord was merely a temporary and superficial affection, similar to that of hypocrites." Answer: It cannot be denied that a predominant love for the world is a definite sign of an unregenerate state (1 John 2:15, "If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him"). However, the strongest affections are not always the most intense. A person's affections may be more stirred by an object that is generally overlooked than by something they hold dear, much like how a small brook can sometimes make more noise than a great river. The strength of our affections should be measured by the firmness and steadfastness of their foundation, not by the intensity of their expressions. For instance, if someone meets a long-lost friend after an extended absence and feels their affections more vehemently towards that friend on that occasion than towards their own spouse and children, would they then claim to love their friend more than their family? Certainly not. Similarly, although a Christian may experience stronger emotional responses in their love for the creature compared to their love for God, it does not

mean that they love the creature more than God. Love for God is always more deeply rooted in a gracious heart than love for any created enjoyment. This becomes evident when a choice must be made between the two. So, if you want to know your true condition, look deep into your heart and weigh the two affections, determining which one holds greater sway. Ask yourself, in the presence of God, whether you would be willing to part with Christ for the sake of the creature or to part with the creature for the sake of Christ if you were faced with such a choice. If you find that your heart inclines to give up what is dearest to you in the world for the sake of Christ when He calls, then you have no reason to conclude that you love the creature more than God. On the contrary, it indicates that you love God more than the creature, even if you do not feel the same intense emotions in your love for God as you do for some created thing (Matthew 10:37, "Anyone who loves their father or mother more than me is not worthy of me"; Luke 14:26, "If anyone comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, even their own life—such a person cannot be my disciple"). From these texts, we can infer that someone who is willing to part with their father and mother for the sake of Christ, in our Lord's view, loves them less than Him rather than loving them more than Him. Furthermore, consider that there are two types of love for Christ. Firstly, there is a heartfelt love that is felt as a piercing dart in the heart, causing a holy lovesickness in the soul due to either the absence of enjoyment (as seen in the case of the bride in Song of Solomon 5:8, "I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem, if you find my beloved, that you tell him I am lovesick") or the abundance of it (as expressed in Song of Solomon 2:5, "Strengthen me with raisins, refresh me with apples, for I am faint with love"). These fervent affections are often experienced by new converts, who are typically inclined to "rejoice in their youth" (Hosea 2:15). When a young convert is fervently devoted, they may look at others whom they

consider to be godly and, not finding them in a similar state or disposition, are quick to criticize and believe that there is far less genuine religion in the world than there actually is. However, when their own cup of experience settles below the brim and they discover within themselves the same flaws that made them doubt the spiritual condition of others, they become more humbled and increasingly recognize the necessity of daily seeking the forgiveness of Christ's blood and the sanctification of His Spirit. This leads them to grow in humility, self-loathing, and self-denial. Secondly, there is a rational love for Christ that, even without the intense emotions experienced in the previous case, reveals itself through a respectful regard for divine authority and obedience to His commands. When someone possesses such love for Christ, even if the fervent emotions are absent, they genuinely strive to avoid offending a gracious God, seek to live a life that pleases Him, and feel deep sorrow in their hearts for anything that displeases Him (1 John 5:3, "For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments"). Therefore, even if the intense emotional love is not always present, as long as the rational love remains within you, you have no reason to consider it a hypocritical fit. It is similar to a loving and faithful wife whose fondness may subside without questioning her love for her husband.

CASE 5: "The achievements of hypocrites and apostates frighten me and weigh heavily on my mind when I'm on the verge of believing, based on the signs of grace I see in myself, that I am truly in a state of grace." Answer: These things should indeed prompt us to a serious and unbiased self-examination, but they should not keep us in constant uncertainty regarding our state. Friends, you can observe the outward actions, duties, gifts, and even tears of hypocrites, but you cannot discern their hearts or the true inclination of their spirits. Based on what you see of them, you can make a charitable judgment concerning their state, and it is good to exercise such charity since

you cannot know the hidden motives behind their actions. However, you are seeking and should have a definite judgment concerning your own state. Therefore, you must look within yourself, at that aspect of religion that only you can truly perceive in yourself and that you cannot see in others. A hypocrite's outward appearance may seem more impressive than that of a sincere soul, but what impresses people most often holds little value before God. I would rather express one of those groans mentioned by the apostle in Romans 8:26 than shed tears like Esau, possess the prophetic spirit of Balaam, or experience the temporary joy of the shallow-ground hearer. The fire that will test every person's work will evaluate not its quantity but its quality (1 Corinthians 3:13). Although you may know the extent of someone else's religion and find it greater than your own, God does not regard that. So why do you make such a big deal out of it? Without divine revelation, it is impossible for you to certainly know the true nature of another person's religion. However, you can certainly know the nature of your own without extraordinary revelation. Otherwise, the apostle would not exhort the saints to "make their calling and election sure" (2 Peter 1:10). Therefore, the attainments of hypocrites and apostates should not disturb you in your earnest inquiry into your own state. Let me tell you two things in which even the humblest saints surpass the most polished hypocrites: Firstly, in self-denial, renouncing all confidence in themselves and their own works, finding contentment in and entrusting their souls to God's plan of salvation through Jesus Christ (Matthew 5:3, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven"; Matthew 11:6, "Blessed is the one who is not offended by me"; Philippians 3:3, "For we are the circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh"). Secondly, in a genuine hatred of all sin, being willing to part with every sinful desire without exception and to fulfill every duty that the Lord reveals or will reveal to them

(Psalm 119:6, "Then I shall not be put to shame, having my eyes fixed on all your commandments"). Examine yourselves in light of these standards.

CASE 6: "When I see myself falling so far short of the saints mentioned in the Scriptures and of several remarkable individuals I know, I can hardly consider myself part of the same family as them." Answer: It is indeed humbling to realize that we do not progress to the degree of grace and holiness that we see is attainable in this life. This should motivate us to strive harder toward that goal. However, it is surely from the devil that weak Christians torment themselves with comparisons to the achievements of the strong. Giving in to such temptation is as unreasonable as a child denying his relationship to his father because he is not as tall as his older siblings. In Christ's family, there are saints of various levels of maturity—some are fathers, some are young men, and some are little children (1 John 2:13, 14).

CASE 7: "I have never read in the Bible or known of any child of God who has faced the same temptations and abandonment by God as I have. Since no saint's situation resembles mine, I can only conclude that I am not among their number." Answer: This objection arises from ignorance of the Scriptures and the experiences of Christians. In such cases, it is beneficial to confide in an experienced Christian friend or a godly minister. This has brought peace to many individuals who discovered that their seemingly unique situation had actually been experienced by other saints. The Scriptures provide examples of saints facing dreadful temptations. Job was tempted to blaspheme, as the devil's main aim in Job's case was to make him curse God (Job 1:11; 2:9). Asaph was tempted to believe that being devoted to God was in vain, essentially abandoning all religion (Psalm 73:13). Even Christ Himself was tempted to throw Himself

down from the pinnacle of the temple and to worship the devil (Matthew 4:6–9). Many children of God have not only been attacked by gross temptations but have also yielded to them temporarily. Peter denied Christ and vehemently denied knowing Him (Mark 14:71). Paul, when he was a persecutor, even compelled saints to blaspheme (Acts 26:10, 11). Many saints can bear witness, based on their own painful experiences, to facing shocking temptations that troubled their spirits, made their flesh tremble, and even affected their physical well-being. Satan's fiery darts wreak havoc, and it requires great effort to extinguish them by firmly wielding the shield of faith (Ephesians 6:16). Sometimes, the attacks are so relentless that the afflicted saint feels like they are running frantically, attempting to put out the fireballs constantly hurled into their home by an enemy seeking to burn it down. However, these injections, these dreadful temptations, are not the sins of the tempted unless they consent to them. If they are not consented to, the tempter alone bears responsibility for them, just as a chaste man cannot be held guilty for a bastard left at his door. Even if you cannot find anyone, whether a minister or a fellow Christian, who has experienced the same situation as yours, you should not conclude that your case is unique, nor should you lose hope. It is unreasonable to assume that every godly minister or Christian has encountered every possible situation that a child of God may face. Undoubtedly, there are distressing experiences known only to God and the consciences of certain individuals, and to others, these distresses may appear as if they never occurred. Although the Scriptures provide suitable guidance for every situation a child of God may encounter, along with numerous examples, it is not realistic to expect that every specific case incident to the saints is perfectly illustrated in the Scriptures. Therefore, even if you cannot find an exact example of your situation in the Scripture, bring your case to it, and you will find appropriate remedies prescribed. Rather than dwelling on whether

anyone else has been in your situation, focus on making use of Christ, who has a remedy for all afflictions. Even if someone were to show you an undeniable example of a saint facing a situation identical to yours, it cannot be guaranteed that it would bring you relief, as a scrupulous conscience would likely find some difference. And if your satisfaction depends on finding someone else's case that perfectly matches yours, it will be difficult, if not impossible, to satisfy you. People's cases are similar to their physical appearances—while all faces share a common structure, and some bear a striking resemblance to one another, upon closer examination, each face has distinguishing features that set it apart from all others, even if one cannot pinpoint what those features are. Therefore, I conclude that if you can find in yourselves the signs of regeneration presented to you in the Word, you should conclude that you are in a state of grace, even if your case appears unique, which is highly unlikely.

CASE 8: "The afflictions I encounter are strange and unusual. I doubt whether any child of God has ever been tried with such providential dispensations as I have." Answer: Much of what was said in the previous case can be helpful here. Holy Job faced this temptation when he was asked, "To which of the saints will you turn?" Yet he resisted and maintained his integrity. The apostle suggests that Christians may be tempted to find the fiery trial "strange," but they need to have a broader experience than Solomon's to make such a claim of novelty. Solomon observed that even though things may happen to you according to the actions of the wicked, you can still be righteous (Ecclesiastes 8:14). Sometimes we travel on paths where we cannot see the footprints of humans or animals, but we should not conclude that no one has traveled that road before us. Even if that were the case, someone among the saints must be the first to drink from every bitter cup that the others have experienced. You or I have no authority to limit the actions of the

Holy One of Israel to a well-trodden path in His dealings with us. "Your way was through the sea, your path through the great waters; yet your footprints were unseen" (Psalm 77:19). If the Lord were to lead you to heaven through an unconventional route, so to speak, you would have no grounds for complaint. Learn to give sovereignty its due freedom, fulfill your duty, and do not let any affliction overshadow any other evidence you may have of being in a state of grace. "No one knows whether love or hate awaits them" (Ecclesiastes 9:1).

USE II: Those of you who are strangers to this new birth, be convinced of its absolute necessity. If everyone in a state of grace is born again, then those who are not born again have no part or share in it. I must tell you, in the words of our Lord and Saviour, and oh, that He would speak these words to your hearts! "You must be born again" (John 3:7). For your conviction, consider a few things:

1. Regeneration is absolutely necessary to qualify you to do anything that is truly good and acceptable to God. Without being born again, your best works are nothing more than sins disguised as good deeds. Consider that (1) without regeneration, there is no faith, and "without faith, it is impossible to please God" (Hebrews 11:6). Faith is a vital act of the newborn soul. The evangelist, in illustrating the different responses our Lord Jesus received from different individuals—some accepting Him, some rejecting Him—points to regenerating grace as the true cause of that difference. He tells us that "all who did receive him—those who believed in his name—he gave the right to become children of God" (John 1:11–13). Unregenerate individuals may presume, but they cannot truly have faith. Faith is a flower that does not grow in the field of nature. Just as a tree cannot grow without roots, a person cannot believe without the new nature,

of which the principle of faith is a part. (2) Without regeneration, a person's works are dead works. As the principle is, so are the effects. If the lungs are diseased, the breath will be foul, and if a person is dead in sin, their works will be dead works at best. "To the defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure; their very minds and consciences are defiled. They profess to know God, but they deny him by their works. They are detestable, disobedient, unfit for any good work" (Titus 1:15-16). Even if we were to say that someone is more blameless in their life than anyone else in the world, that they discipline their body with fasting and pray continually, but they are not born again, that exception negates everything. It would be like saying, "Here is a well-proportioned body, but the soul is gone; it is nothing more than a lifeless lump." This is a sobering thought. You may do many things that are materially good, but God says they count for nothing as long as He sees the old nature reigning in you. "For neither circumcision counts for anything nor uncircumcision, but a new creation" (Galatians 6:15). If you are not born again, (1) all your reformation is worthless in God's sight. You may have closed the door, but the thief is still in the house. Perhaps you are not what you once were, but you are not what you must be to see heaven, for "unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3). (2) Your prayers are an "abomination to the Lord" (Proverbs 15:8). Others may admire your seriousness and fervency, but to God, your words are like an open grave (Romans 3:13). Others may be moved by your prayers, as if they could tear open the heavens, but to God, they are like the howling of a dog: "They do not cry to me from the heart but wail upon their beds" (Hosea 7:14). Others may consider you a wrestler and prevailer with God, but He takes no delight in you or your prayers: "Whoever slaughters an ox is like one who kills a person; whoever sacrifices a lamb is like one who

breaks a dog's neck; whoever presents a grain offering is like one who offers pig's blood; whoever makes a memorial offering of frankincense is like one who blesses an idol. These have chosen their own ways, and their soul delights in their abominations" (Isaiah 66:3). Why? Because you are still "in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity!" (3) Everything you have done for God and His cause in the world, even if it is followed by temporal rewards, is lost in terms of divine acceptance. This is evident in the case of Jehu, who was indeed rewarded with a kingdom for carrying out God's command to execute vengeance on the house of Ahab, as you can see in 2 Kings 9:7. However, he was also punished for it in his descendants because he did not do it in the right manner (Hosea 1:4). God primarily looks at the heart, and if that is the case, even if the outward appearance is better than that of many others, the hidden person of your heart is repulsive. You may appear righteous in the eyes of people, but you are not fair to God, as the marginal note in Acts 7:20 puts it. Oh, what a difference there is between the characters of Asa and Amaziah! "Although the high places were not taken away, Asa's heart was wholly true to the Lord all his days" (1 Kings 15:14). "Amaziah did what was right in the eyes of the Lord, yet not with a whole heart" (2 Chronicles 25:2). Perhaps you are zealous against sin in others, admonishing them for their duty and reproving them for their sins, and they hate you for doing your duty. But I must tell you that God hates you too because you do not do it in the right manner, and you can never do it while you are not born again (Isaiah 1:4). (4) All your struggles against sin in your own heart and life are in vain. The proud Pharisee afflicted his body with fasting, yet God condemned his soul (Luke 18). Balaam wrestled with his covetous nature to the point that, even though he loved the wages of unrighteousness, he would not curse Israel for them, yet he died the death of the

wicked (Numbers 31:8). All that you do in an unregenerate state is ultimately for yourself, and therefore it will be like a subject who, after defeating the rebels, puts the crown on his own head but loses all his good service and his head as well.

Objection: "If that's the case, then we need not perform any religious duties at all." Answer: That conclusion is unjust. Your inability does not excuse you from the duty laid upon you by God's law, and omitting your duty is more evil than performing it. However, there is a difference between omitting a duty and performing it as you currently do. Suppose a person instructs masons to build a house. If they neglect the work entirely, it will not be accepted. If they build on the old, decaying foundation, that too will be displeasing. They must demolish the foundation and build on solid ground. "Go and do likewise." In the meantime, it is not in vain for you to seek the Lord. Even though He may not regard you personally, He may still respect His own ordinances and bring you good through them, as mentioned earlier.

2. Without regeneration, there is no communion with God. There is a community on earth whose "fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ" (1 John 1:3). But all the unregenerate are excluded from that community, for they are enemies of God, as previously discussed in detail. Can two walk together unless they agree? (Amos 3:3). They are all unholy, and "what fellowship has light with darkness—Christ with Belial?" (2 Corinthians 6:14-15). They may appear to have holiness, but they are strangers to true holiness and are therefore "without God in the world." How tragic it is to engage in religious duties yet have no communion with God in them! Just as you would not be satisfied with your food unless it nourishes you or with your clothing unless it keeps you warm, how can you be content

with your duties when you have no communion with God in them?

3. Regeneration is absolutely necessary to qualify you for heaven. Only those who are made fit for heaven can enter it (Colossians 1:12). Just as Solomon's temple was built with stones prepared beforehand (1 Kings 6:7), the same is true for the temple above. It is constructed with "living stones" (1 Peter 2:5) that have been fashioned for that purpose (2 Corinthians 5:5). They cannot be placed in that glorious building just as they are, straight from the quarry of depraved nature. Jewels of gold are not suitable for swine, and much less are jewels of glory suitable for unregenerate sinners. Beggars in rags are not fit for royal palaces, and sinners are not fit to enter the King's palace without the garment of needlework (Psalm 45:14-15). What wise person would bring fish out of the water to graze in their meadows or send their oxen to graze in the sea? Likewise, the unregenerate are not fit for heaven, nor is heaven fitting for them. It would never be enjoyed by them.

The unregenerate would find fault with heaven on several accounts. Firstly, they would argue that it is a foreign land. Heaven is the native country of the renewed individual; their Father is in heaven, and their mother is Jerusalem above (Galatians 4:26). They are born from above (John 3:3) and consider themselves strangers on this earth, with their hearts yearning for their true home (Hebrews 11:16). In contrast, the unregenerate person belongs to the earth (Psalm 10:18), written in the dust (Jeremiah 17:13). They value their earthly possessions (Philippians 3:19). There is a particular sweetness in our homeland, and it is difficult for people to be persuaded to leave and dwell in a foreign country. This is especially true in the case of the

unregenerate, who would abandon their claims to heaven if they believed they could make a better deal elsewhere.

Secondly, they would argue that there is nothing in heaven that they find pleasing to their carnal hearts. Revelation 21:27 states, "Nothing impure will ever enter it." When Muhammad proclaimed a paradise filled with sensual pleasures, his religion was eagerly embraced because that is the type of heaven people naturally desire. If the greedy person could obtain bags of gold in heaven and the pleasure-seeker could indulge in sensual delights, they might be reconciled to heaven and consider themselves fit for it. However, since that is not the case, although they may speak kindly about it, their hearts have little affection for it.

Thirdly, every aspect of heaven is filled with what they least desire—holiness, true holiness, perfect holiness. If someone who detests pork were invited to a feast where all the dishes were made from that type of meat but prepared in various ways, they would find fault with each dish on the table, despite all the efforts made to make them appetizing. It is true that there is joy in heaven, but it is holy joy; there are pleasures in heaven, but they are holy pleasures; there are places in heaven, but it is holy ground. The unregenerate would find the presence of holiness in every corner of heaven to be a source of dissatisfaction.

Fourthly, if they were taken to heaven, they would not only change their location, which would be deeply distressing, but they would also change their company. They would never enjoy the company in heaven, as they do not value communion with God here on earth nor appreciate the fellowship of His people, particularly in the vital aspects of practical godliness. Many unregenerate individuals associate themselves with the godly in order to gain a reputation and

conceal the sinfulness of their hearts, but such deceit would not be possible in heaven.

Fifthly, they would dislike the activities in heaven because they currently have little interest in them. The pursuits of the saints in heaven would be unbearable to them, as they are not aligned with their natural inclinations. Engaging in beholding, admiring, and praising the one who sits on the throne and the Lamb would be work that is unsuitable and distasteful to an unregenerate soul.

Lastly, they would find fault with the eternal nature of heaven. The everlasting continuance of heaven would be unbearable to them. Those who currently find the Sabbath burdensome would not be able to endure the eternal Sabbath celebration in heaven.

4. Regeneration is absolutely necessary for admission to heaven (John 3:3). There is no heaven without it. Even if carnal individuals could tolerate all the aspects that make heaven unsuitable for them, God will never bring them there. Therefore, you must be born again, or you will never see heaven; you will suffer eternal damnation. Firstly, there is an exclusionary verdict against you and everyone of your kind in the heavenly court—"Unless a man is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3). This barrier cannot be overcome by men or angels. To hope for heaven in the face of this unequivocal sentence is to hope that God will retract His word and sacrifice His truth and faithfulness for your sake—a hope that surpasses even the hope "that the earth will be forsaken for you, and the rock will be removed from its place."

Secondly, there is no holiness without regeneration. It is the "new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness" (Ephesians 4:24). And there is no heaven without holiness, for

"without holiness no one will see the Lord" (Hebrews 12:14). Will the gates of pearl be opened to admit dogs and pigs? No, their place is outside (Revelation 22:15). God will not welcome those who refuse to receive Christ into their hearts. Instead, He will "laugh at their calamity" as they currently "despise all his counsel" (Proverbs 1:25, 26).

Thirdly, there is an infallible connection between a finally unregenerate state and damnation, based on the nature of these things and the unchanging decree of heaven, as immovable as mountains of brass (John 3:3; Romans 8:6). "To be carnally minded is death." An unregenerate state is hell in its infancy, the seed of eternal destruction growing daily, even if you do not perceive it. Death is already portrayed on many fair faces in this life. Depraved nature makes people fit to share in the inheritance of the damned, dwelling in utter darkness. Firstly, the heart of stone within you is a sinking weight. Just as a stone naturally falls downward, the hard, stony heart gravitates toward the bottomless pit. You are resistant to reproof, refusing to acknowledge or believe the danger you are in. But remember, a seared conscience is a dreadful omen of eternal punishment.

Secondly, your lack of fruitfulness under the means of grace makes you fit for God's judgment. "Every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire" (Matthew 3:10). The withered branch is fuel for the fire (John 15:6). Tremble at this, you who despise the Gospel. If you are not made fit for heaven, you will be like barren ground, producing only thorns and destined for cursing and burning (Hebrews 6:8).

Thirdly, your sinful disposition and profane lifestyle make you fit for the realm of horror. A sinful life will have a wretched end. "Those

who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God" (Galatians 5:19–21). Consider this, you who neglect prayer, mock religion, curse and swear, engage in impurity and injustice, lacking even moral integrity to prevent lying, cheating, and stealing. What kind of tree do you think bears such fruit? Is it a tree of righteousness, planted by the Lord? Or is it a useless tree that will be uprooted for fuel in the fire of His wrath?

Fourthly, being spiritually dead makes you fit to be enveloped in the flames of sulphur like a burial shroud and buried in the bottomless pit. Great was the cry in Egypt when the firstborn in each family died. But are there not many families where all are dead together? Indeed, there are many who are twice dead, uprooted by the root. Sometimes their consciences stir within them, and they consider amending their ways. But alas! They are in chains, unable or unwilling to break free. They are bound by the heart; their lusts cling to them so tightly that they cannot, or will not, shake them off. This is the state of the unregenerate, and it indicates their proximity to eternal darkness.

Fifthly, the darkness of your minds foreshadows eternal darkness. Oh, the dreadful ignorance that afflicts some! Others possess rational understanding but lack spiritual enlightenment in their hearts. If you truly knew your condition, you would cry out, "Oh! Darkness! Darkness!"—making way for eternal blackness. Only Jesus Christ can prevent this execution. He can remove the veil from the face of the condemned and offer a pardon in His hand (Isaiah 25:7). He will "destroy in this mountain the face of the covering cast over all people," the covering that conceals the condemned, as in the case of Haman (Esther 7:8).

Finally, the chains of darkness that bind you in the prison of your corrupt state (Isaiah 61:1) make you fit to be cast into the burning fiery furnace. How wretched! Sometimes, your conscience stirs, and you contemplate amending your ways. Yet, you are bound by chains; you cannot, or will not, break free. These chains signify your impending doom. If left unregenerate, you will be cast into eternal flames.

Reflect deeply on these truths and diligently apply them. Remember, regardless of who you are, you must be born again. Otherwise, it would have been better for you never to have been born. Therefore, if any of you live and die in an unregenerate state, you will be without excuse, having been clearly warned of your danger.

The text states that the Word is the seed from which the new creature is formed. Therefore, take heed of it and embrace it as your life. Engage in reading the Scriptures. If you cannot read, have others read it to you. Be diligent in attending the preaching of the Word, as it is divinely appointed as the means of conversion. "For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe" (1 Corinthians 1:21). Do not cast yourself out of Christ's path; do not reject the means of grace, lest you find yourself unworthy of eternal life. Pay careful attention to the preached Word. Listen to each sermon as if you were listening for eternity, ensuring that the birds of the air do not snatch away the seed sown. "Devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching" (1 Timothy 4:13). Receive it not as the word of men but, as it truly is, the Word of God (1 Thessalonians 2:13). Listen with attentiveness, considering it as a message sent from heaven specifically to you, though not exclusively (Revelation 3:22). Store it in your heart, meditate on it, and do not be like the unclean animals

that do not chew the cud. Through earnest prayer, ask for the dew of Heaven to fall upon your heart, that the seed may sprout and grow.

Specifically, (1) accept the testimony of the Word of God regarding the misery of an unregenerate state, its sinfulness, and the absolute necessity of regeneration. (2) Accept its testimony about the holiness and justice of God. (3) Examine your ways in light of the Word—your thoughts, words, and actions. Look back at different stages of your life and see your sins in light of the Word's commands. Consider the consequences of these sins according to its warnings. (4) Use the same Word of God to examine the corruption of your nature, seeing it as a mirror that clearly reveals our ugly faces. If these truths take root in your heart, they may be the seeds of fear and sorrow regarding your spiritual state, preparing and motivating you to seek a Savior. Fix your thoughts on Jesus Christ, offered to you in the Gospel, as He perfectly satisfies God's justice through His obedience to death and provides everlasting righteousness. This may produce humility, desire, hope, and faith within you, leading you to stretch out your withered hand to Him, as He commands.

Let these truths penetrate your heart and diligently apply them. Remember, regardless of who you are, you must be born again. Otherwise, it would have been better for you never to have been born. Therefore, if any of you live and die in an unregenerate state, you will be without excuse, having been clearly warned of your danger.

II. MYSTICAL UNION BETWEEN CHRIST AND BELIEVERS

I am the vine; you are the branches.—JOHN 15:5.

After discussing the change brought about by regeneration in those who will inherit eternal life, as opposed to their natural state of degeneracy, I will now address the transformation that occurs when they unite with the Lord Jesus Christ, in contrast to their natural state of misery. The doctrine of the saints' union with Christ is clearly and extensively elaborated upon in this chapter's first eight verses, as part of our Lord's farewell sermon to his disciples. Their hearts were filled with sorrow, and they were likely wondering what would become of them once their Master was gone. Who would instruct them, resolve their doubts, support them through difficulties and discouragements, and how would they live without their usual interaction with him? Thus, our Lord Jesus Christ fittingly introduces them to the mystery of their union with him, comparing himself to a vine and them to its branches.

He makes two comparisons:

1. Himself to a vine. "I am the vine." He had just celebrated the sacrament of his supper with his disciples—a symbol and confirmation of their union with him—and informed them that he would no longer drink the fruit of the vine until he did so anew with them in his Father's kingdom. He then reveals himself as the vine from which the wine of their consolation would flow. The vine may lack the beauty of other trees, but it is incredibly fruitful, aptly symbolising our Lord's humble state while leading many to glory. His main goal in likening himself to a vine is to portray himself as the supporter and nourisher of his people, through whom they live and bear fruit.

2. He compares them to branches; they are the branches of that vine. They are connected to and growing from this source, drawing life and

sustenance from it. It is an elegant analogy, as if he were saying, "I am like a vine, and you are like the branches of that vine." There are two types of branches: 1. Natural branches that initially sprout from the trunk. These branches have always been part of the tree. 2. Grafted branches, which are detached from the tree that first nurtured them and then inserted into another to grow upon it. This process results in branches being part of a tree that they did not originally belong to. The branches mentioned in the text are of the latter type; they are separated from the tree that initially sustained them, as the original language implies. None of humankind's offspring are natural branches of the second Adam, Jesus Christ, the true vine; they are the natural branches of the first Adam, the degenerate vine. However, all of the elect are eventually broken away from their natural source and grafted into Christ, the true vine.

DOCTRINE: Those who are in a state of grace are grafted onto and united with the Lord Jesus Christ. They are removed from their natural origin and are now grafted into Christ as their new source.

In general, to understand the union between the Lord Jesus Christ and his elect, who believe in and rely on him, I observe:

1. It is a spiritual union. In marriage, a man and woman become one flesh through their union; Christ and true believers become one spirit through this union, as stated in 1 Corinthians 6:17. Just as one soul or spirit animates both the head and the members in a natural body, the one Spirit of God dwells in Christ and the Christian. For "if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, they do not belong to him," Romans 8:9. Earthly unions are formed through contact, like the stones in a building, but this is a union of a different nature. If it were possible for us to physically eat the flesh and drink the blood of Christ, it would

not benefit us, as mentioned in John 6:63. It was not Mary's physical act of bearing him in her womb but her faith in him that made her a saint, as seen in Luke 11:27-28.

2. It is a real union. Due to our weaknesses in our current state and our immersion in sin, we tend to create mental images of everything presented to us, and whatever is denied to us, we are inclined to suspect as mere fiction. However, nothing is more real than what is spiritual, as it closely resembles the nature of God, the source of all reality. We cannot see the union between our own soul and body with our eyes, nor can we accurately imagine it as we do with tangible things, but the reality of it is undeniable. Faith is not a fantasy but "the substance of things hoped for," Hebrews 11:1. The union between Christ and believers, established through faith, is not imaginary but highly real: "For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones," Ephesians 5:30.
3. It is a close and intimate union. Believers, those who are regenerated and rely on Christ, have put on Christ, as stated in Galatians 3:27. If that is not enough, he is in them, as mentioned in John 17:23, and is formed within them like a child in the womb, according to Galatians 4:19. He is the foundation (1 Corinthians 3:11), and they are the living stones built upon him (1 Peter 2:5). He is the head, and they are the body (Ephesians 1:22-23). Furthermore, he lives in them, as their very souls live in their bodies (Galatians 2:20). And most significantly, they are one with the Father and the Son, just as the Father is in Christ and Christ is in the Father (John 17:21).
4. Although it is not merely a legal union, it is a union supported by law. Christ, as the guarantor, and Christians as the principal

debtors, are one in the eyes of the law. When the elect incurred a debt to God's justice along with the rest of humanity, Christ became their guarantor and paid the debt. When they believe in him, they are united to him in a spiritual marriage union. This union is so effective that what Christ did and suffered for them is considered, in a legal sense, as if they had done and suffered it themselves. Hence, they are said to be crucified with Christ (Galatians 2:20), buried with him (Colossians 2:12), and even raised up together with Christ and made to sit with him in heavenly places (Ephesians 2:6), which can only be understood in a legal context.

5. It is an indissoluble union. Once united with Christ, the bond remains forever. He never leaves the heart where he has taken residence. Nobody can break this blessed connection. Will Christ himself dissolve it? No, he will not, as he says in Jeremiah 32:40, "I will not turn away from them." Can sinners sever the bond? No, they cannot, for God declares, "they shall not depart from me." Can devils do it? No, unless they are stronger than Christ and his Father, for Christ declares in John 10:28-30, "neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand," and "none is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand." Even death, which separates husband and wife and the soul from the body, cannot dissolve this union. As seen in Romans 8:38-39, the Apostle Paul is convinced that neither death nor life, angels nor demons, the present nor the future, nor any powers, height nor depth, nor anything else in creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Just as death separated Christ's soul from his body but could not separate either from his divine nature, so too will the saints remain united to Christ in both life and death, for they "sleep in Jesus" (1 Thessalonians 4:14) and "he keeps all their bones" (Psalm 34:20). Union with

Christ is the grace in which we stand, firm and stable like Mount Zion, which cannot be moved.

6. It is a mysterious union. The gospel is a doctrine of mysteries. It reveals to us the substantial union of the three persons in one Godhead (1 John 5:7), "These three are one;" the hypostatic union of the divine and human natures in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ (1 Timothy 3:16), "God was manifest in the flesh;" and the mystical union between Christ and believers, which is also a great mystery (Ephesians 5:32). Oh, what mysteries are here! The head in heaven, the members on earth, yet truly united! "Christ in the believer, living in him, walking in him:" and "the believer dwelling in God, putting on the Lord Jesus, eating his flesh, and drinking his blood!" This makes the saints a mystery to the world and even to themselves.

I now come to speak more specifically about this union with, and grafting into, Jesus Christ.

- I. I will consider the natural stock from which the branches are taken.

- II. The supernatural stock they are grafted into.

- III. Which branches are cut off from the old stock and placed into the new.

- IV. How this process occurs.

- V. The benefits that flow from this union and grafting.

- I. The Natural Stock:

An Examination of the Roots from Which the Branches Are Taken

I. Let's examine the stock from which the branches are taken. The two Adams, that is, Adam and Christ, are the two stocks. The Scripture speaks of these two as if there were no other people in the world (1 Corinthians 15:45), "The first man Adam was made a living soul, the last Adam was made a life-giving spirit;" (verse 47) "The first man is of the earth, earthy: the second man is the Lord from heaven." The reason is that everyone has been a branch of one of these two, with all people belonging to either one stock or the other. In these two categories, all humankind is divided (verse 48), "As is the earthy, such are they also that are earthy; and as is the heavenly, such are they also that are heavenly." The first Adam, then, is the natural stock on which the branches are initially found growing, which are later cut off and grafted into Christ. The fallen angels, having no relation to the first Adam, have none to the second.

There are four things to remember here. (1) All of humanity, except for the man Christ, are naturally branches of the first Adam (Romans 5:12), "By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin: and so death passed upon all men." (2) The bond that connected us to the natural stock was the covenant of works. Adam, being our natural root, was also our moral root, representing all his descendants in the covenant of works. "By one man's disobedience many were made sinners" (Romans 5:19). There had to be a unique relationship between that one man and the many to provide a basis for imputing his sin to them. This relationship did not arise from the natural bond between him and us, as a father to his children. Our immediate parents' sins are not imputed to us as Adam's sin is. Instead, it arose from a moral bond between Adam and us, the bond of a covenant – the covenant of works – where we are united to him as branches to a stock. Consequently, Jesus Christ, though a descendant of Adam

(Luke 3:23-38), was not one of these branches. Since he did not come from Adam in virtue of the blessing of marriage given before the fall (Genesis 1:28), "Be fruitful, and multiply," but in virtue of a special promise made after the fall (Genesis 3:15), "The seed of the woman shall bruise the serpent's head," he could not be represented by Adam in a covenant made before his fall. (3) As it is impossible for a branch to be in two stocks at once, no person can be in both the first and second Adam simultaneously. (4) Hence, it is evident that all who are not grafted into Jesus Christ are still branches of the old stock and partake of its nature. Now, regarding the first Adam, our natural stock, consider:

First, consider what a stock he was originally. He was a vine planted by the Lord, a choice vine, a noble vine, wholly good. There was a consultation of the Trinity at the planting of this vine (Genesis 1:26), "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness." There was no decay at the core of it. It had enough sap and nourishment to support all its branches, enabling them to bear fruit for God. In other words, Adam was created capable of perfectly keeping God's commandments, which would have secured eternal life for himself and all his descendants. As all die due to Adam's disobedience, all would have had life through his obedience if he had remained steadfast. Consider,

Secondly, what that stock is now. Alas! It is most unlike what it was when planted by the Author of all good. A blast from hell and a bite from the venomous teeth of the old serpent have made it a degenerate stock; a dead stock; even a killing stock.

1. It is a degenerate, evil stock. Therefore, the Lord God said to Adam on that fateful day, "Where are you?" (Genesis 3:9). In what condition are you now? "How have you turned into a

degenerate plant of a strange vine for me?" Or, "Where were you?" Why not in the place of meeting with me? Why so long in coming? What does this fearful change, this hiding from me, mean? Unfortunately, the stock has degenerated, become completely ruined, and now produces wild grapes. Communion with the devil is preferred over communion with God. Satan is believed, while God, who is truth itself, is disbelieved. He who was once God's friend now conspires against Him. Darkness has replaced light; ignorance prevails in the mind where divine knowledge once shone; the will, once righteous and regular, has become a rebel against its Lord, and the whole person is in dreadful disorder.

Before I go further, let me pause and observe: Here is a mirror for both saints and sinners. Sinners, stand here and consider what you are; and saints, learn what you once were. You, sinners, are branches of a degenerate stock. You may indeed bear fruit, but now that your vine is the vine of Sodom, your grapes must be bitter (Deuteronomy 32:32). Scripture speaks of two types of fruit that grow on the branches of the natural stock, and it is evident that they share the nature of their degenerate stock. (1) The wild grapes of wickedness (Isaiah 5:2). These grow in abundance, influenced by hell. See Galatians 5:19-21. At its gates are all kinds of these fruits, both new and old. Storms come from heaven to check them, but still, they grow. They are struck at with the sword of the Spirit, the word of God; conscience gives them many a secret blow, yet they thrive. (2) Fruit for themselves (Hosea 10:1). What else are all the unrenewed person's acts of obedience, reformation, sober behaviour, prayers, and good works? They are all done chiefly for themselves, not for the glory of God. These fruits are like the apples of Sodom, fair to look at but full of ashes when handled and tested. You may think you have not only the leaves of a profession but also the fruits of a holy

practice; however, if you are not separated from the old stock and grafted into Christ Jesus, God neither accepts nor regards your fruits.

Here, I must take the opportunity to tell you that there are five flaws that will be found in your best fruits in heaven. 1. Their bitterness; your "clusters are bitter" (Deuteronomy 32:32). There is a spirit of bitterness with which some people approach the Lord in religious duties, living in malice and envy; and which some believers harbour against others because they outshine them in holiness of life or because they hold different opinions. This, wherever it reigns, is a frightening sign of an unregenerate state. However, I'm referring more to the common issue among all branches of the old stock, namely, the leaves of hypocrisy (Luke 12:1), which sour and embitter every duty they perform. Wisdom, full of good fruits, is without hypocrisy (James 3:17). 2. Their unpleasant odour. Their works are abominable because they are corrupt themselves (Psalm 14:1). All of their actions have the scent of the old stock, not the new. It is the unique privilege of the saints that they are to God a sweet aroma of Christ (2 Corinthians 2:15). The unregenerate person's fruits do not have the scent of love for Christ, nor of Christ's blood, nor of the incense of His intercession, and therefore will never be accepted in heaven. 3. Their unripeness. Their grapes are unripe (Job 15:33). There is no influence from the Sun of Righteousness to bring them to perfection. They have the appearance of fruit, but nothing more. The substance of duty is in them, but they lack the right principles and goals: their works are not in God (John 3:21). Their prayers fall from their lips before their hearts are imbued with the vital sap of the Spirit of supplication; their tears fall from their eyes before their hearts are genuinely softened; their feet turn to new paths and their ways change, while their nature remains unaltered. 4. Their lightness. When weighed in the balances, they are found lacking

(Daniel 5:27). As evidence, note that they do not humble the soul but instead lift it up in pride. The good fruits of holiness weigh down the branches they grow on, causing them to bow down to the ground (1 Corinthians 15:19), "I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me." But the blighted fruits of unrenewed people's performances hang lightly on branches soaring up to heaven (Judges 17:13), "Now I know that the Lord will do me good since I have a Levite as my priest." They look too high for God to see them: "Why have we fasted, they say, and you do not see?" (Isaiah 58:3). The more duties they perform, and the better they seem to carry them out, the less they are humbled, and the more they are lifted up. This disposition of the sinner is the exact opposite of what is found in the saint. For those who are not in Christ and are not concerned about being found in Him, their duties are like floating buoys with which they think they can swim ashore to Immanuel's land; but these will inevitably burst, and they will sink because they do not take Christ as the lifter of their heads (Psalm 3:3, 5). They do not provide all manner of pleasant fruits (Song of Solomon 7:13). Christ, as a king, must be served with variety. When God makes the heart His garden, He plants it with trees bearing all kinds of fruits (Ecclesiastes 2:5). As a result, it produces the fruit of the Spirit in all goodness (Ephesians 5:9). However, the ungodly are not like this; their obedience is never universal; there is always some aspect or another that is lacking. In short, their fruits are the products of a bad tree that cannot be accepted in heaven.

2. Our natural stock is a dead stock, according to the threat in Genesis 2:17, "In the day you eat of it, you will surely die." Our root is now rotten; it's no wonder the blossom turns to dust. The blow has struck the heart, the sap has drained, and the tree has withered. The curse of the first covenant, like a fiery bolt from heaven, has struck it, and ruined it. It is now cursed like the fig

tree in Matthew 21:19, "Let no fruit grow on you ever again." Now it is good for nothing but to clutter the ground and provide fuel for hellfire.

Let me elaborate a little here as well. Every unrenewed person is a branch of a dead stock. When you see, O sinner, a dead tree trunk, devoid of all its sap, with branches in the same condition, consider it a vivid representation of your soul's state. 1. Where the stock is dead, the branches must be barren. Unfortunately, the barrenness of many professed believers reveals the stock on which they are growing. It is easy to claim faith, but "show me your faith without your works!" if you can (James 2:18). 2. A dead stock can't supply sap to the branches to help them produce fruit. The covenant of works was the bond of our union with the natural stock; but now it has become weak through human depravity (Romans 8:3). It is strong enough to command and to impose heavy burdens on those not in Christ, but it provides no strength to bear them. The sap that was once in the root is now gone: the law, like a merciless creditor, apprehends Adam's heirs, demanding payment when their resources are already squandered. 3. All efforts and expenses are wasted on a tree whose life is gone. In vain do people try to get fruit on the branches when there is no sap in the root. The gardener's efforts are lost: ministers waste their time on the branches of the old stock while they remain on it. Many sermons are preached to no effect because there is no life to give sensation. Sleeping people can be awakened, but the dead cannot be raised without a miracle; likewise, the dead sinner must remain if not restored to life by a miracle of grace. The influences of heaven are wasted on such a tree: in vain does the rain fall on it, and in vain is it exposed to winter cold and frost. The Lord of the vineyard digs around many a dead soul, but it does not improve. "Though a fool is beaten in a mortar, his folly will not depart." Even though he encounters many difficulties, he still clings to his vices: let

him be confined to a sick bed, and he will lie there like a sick animal, groaning in pain but not mourning for or turning away from his sin. Let death itself stare him in the face, and he will presumptuously maintain his hope, as if he could intimidate the grim messenger. Sometimes there are common operations of the divine Spirit performed on him: he is sent home with a trembling heart and with arrows of conviction piercing his soul. But in the end, he overcomes these things and becomes as secure as ever. Summer and winter are alike to the branches on the dead stock. When others around them are budding, blossoming, and bearing fruit, there is no change in them: the dead stock has no growing season at all. It might be difficult to tell, in winter, which trees are dead and which are alive, but spring reveals the truth. There are some seasons in which there is little life to be perceived even among the saints; yet times of revival eventually come. But even when "the vine flourishes, and the pomegranates bud forth," when saving grace is revealing itself through its lively actions wherever it exists, the branches on the old stock remain withered. When the dry bones are coming together, bone to bone among the saints, the sinner's bones still lie near the grave's entrance. They are trees that clutter the ground, ready to be cut down, and will be cut down for the fire if God's mercy does not intervene by removing them from that stock and grafting them into another.

3. Our natural stock is a deadly stock. If the stock dies, how can the branches live? If the sap is gone from the root and core, the branches must inevitably wither. "In Adam all die," 1 Cor. 15:22. The root died in Paradise, and all the branches within it and along with it. The root is poisoned, and from it, the branches become infected; "death is in the pot," and all who taste the pulse or pottage are killed.

Understand, then, that every natural person is a branch of a deadly stock. Our natural root not only fails to provide life, but it has a lethal power that extends to all its branches. There are four things the first Adam passes on to all his branches, and they remain in those branches that are not grafted into Christ: 1. A corrupt nature. Adam sinned, and his nature became corrupted and depraved, and this corruption is passed down to all his descendants. He was infected, and the contagion spread throughout his offspring. 2. Guilt, which is an obligation to punishment, Rom. 5:12, "By one man, sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for all have sinned." The threats of the law, like cords of death, are wrapped around the branches of the old stock to pull them over the hedge and into the fire. Until they are cut off from this stock by the pruning knife, the sword of vengeance hangs over their heads, ready to cut them down. 3. This deadly stock transmits the curse to the branches. The stock, as the stock (for I am not speaking of Adam in his personal and private capacity), being cursed, so are the branches, Gal. 3:10, "For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse." The curse affects the whole person and everything they possess, working in three ways: 1. As poison, infecting; thus, their blessings are cursed, Mal. 2:2. Whatever a person enjoys can only bring harm, not good, as it is poisoned by the curse. Their worldly prosperity destroys them, Prov. 1:32. The ministry of the gospel becomes a savour of death unto death for them, 2 Cor. 2:16. Their apparent achievements in religion are cursed; their knowledge serves only to inflate them, and their duties keep them away from Christ. 2. It works as a moth, consuming and wasting little by little, Hos. 5:12, "Therefore, I will be to Ephraim as a moth." There is a worm at the root, slowly consuming them. The curse pursued Saul until it wormed him out of all his enjoyments and even the semblance of religion he had. Sometimes they decay like the fat of lambs and melt away like snow in the sunshine. 3. It acts as a rampant lion, Hos.

5:14, "I will be to Ephraim as a lion." The Lord "rains on them snares, fire and brimstone, and a terrible tempest," in such a manner that they are swept away by the current. He tears their enjoyments from them in his wrath, pursues them with terrors, rips their souls from their bodies, and throws the dead branch into the fire. Thus, the curse devours like fire, which none can extinguish. 4. This deadly stock transmits death to the branches upon it. Adam took the poisonous cup and drank it off, resulting in death for himself and for us. We entered the world spiritually dead, thereby exposed to eternal death and absolutely subject to temporal death. This root is like the Scythian river, which, they say, produces small bladders every day, out of which emerge tiny flies that are born in the morning, develop wings by noon, and die at night – a striking metaphor for our mortal state.

Now, is it not absolutely necessary to be detached from our natural stock? What will our seemingly impressive profession or our performance of duties amount to if we remain branches of the degenerate, dead, and destructive stock? Unfortunately, few among us are concerned with questions like, "Have I been separated from the old stock or not? Am I grafted into Christ or not?" Why is there so much unnecessary commotion surrounding religion among many who cannot give a good account of having laid a solid foundation, being entirely unfamiliar with experiential religion? I fear that if God does not mercifully undermine the religion of many of us and let us see that we have none at all, our root will be found rotten, and our blossom will turn to dust in our dying hours. Therefore, let us examine our state so that we are not discovered to be fools in the end.

II. The Supernatural Stock:

An Exploration of the New Roots in Which the Branches Are Ingrafted

Now let us consider the supernatural stock into which the branches are grafted after being cut off from the natural stock. Jesus Christ is sometimes called "The Branch" (Zechariah 3:8). He is so in respect to his human nature, being a branch and the leading branch of the house of David. Sometimes he is called a Root (Isaiah 11:10). We find both of these titles in Revelation 21:16, "I am the root and the offspring of David;" David's root as God and his offspring as man. The text tells us that he is the vine, meaning that he, as a mediator, is the vine stock of which believers are the branches. As the sap flows from the earth into the root and stock, and from there is spread throughout the branches, so through Christ as mediator, divine life is conveyed from the source to those united to him by faith (John 6:57). By Christ as mediator – not as God only, as some have claimed, nor as man only, as the papists generally maintain – but as mediator, God and man (Acts 20:28, Hebrews 9:14). The divine and human natures have their distinct actions but a joint operation in his performance of the mediator's role. This is illustrated by the metaphor of a fiery sword that both cuts and burns simultaneously: cutting while burning and burning while cutting; the steel cuts, and the fire burns. Therefore, Christ, God-man, is the stock of which believers are the branches, and they are united to a whole Christ. They are united to him in his human nature, as being "members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones" (Ephesians 5:30). And they are united to him in his divine nature, as the apostle speaks of this union (Colossians 1:27). Those who belong to Christ have the Spirit of Christ (Romans 8:9), and through him, they are united to the Father and the Holy Spirit (1 John 4:15). Faith, the bond of this

union, accepts a whole Christ, God-man, and so unites us to him as such.

Observe here, O believers, your elevated privilege. You were once branches of a degenerate stock, just like others, but through grace, you have become branches of the true vine (John 15:1). You have been cut from a dead and destructive stock and grafted into the last Adam, who was made a life-giving spirit (1 Corinthians 15:45). Your loss through the first Adam is compensated, with considerable advantage, by your union with the second. Adam, at his best, was only a shrub compared to Christ, the tree of life. He was merely a servant, while Christ is the Son, the Heir, and Lord of all things, "the Lord from heaven." It is undeniable that grace was demonstrated in the first covenant, but it is far surpassed by the grace of the second covenant, as the twilight is by the brightness of midday.

What branches are taken from the natural stock and grafted into this vine? The answer is the elect, and no one else. They, and only they, are grafted into Christ, and as a result, only they are cut off from the destructive stock. For them alone he intercedes, "That they may be one in him and his Father" (John 17:9-23). Faith, the bond of this union, is given to no one else; it is the faith of God's elect (Titus 1:1). The Lord overlooks many branches growing on the natural stock, cutting off only specific ones and grafting them into the true vine, according to the determination of free love. He often chooses the most unlikely branch, leaving the topmost boughs, bypassing the mighty and noble, and calling the weak, base, and despised (1 Corinthians 1:26-27). Moreover, he frequently leaves the fair and smooth branches, taking the rugged and knotty ones instead; "and such were some of you, but you are washed," &c. (1 Corinthians 6:11). If we inquire why this is the case, we find no other reason but that they were chosen in him (Ephesians 1:4) and "predestined to the

adoption of children by Jesus Christ" (verse 5). Thus, they are gathered together in Christ, while the rest are left growing on their natural stock, to be later bound up in bundles for the fire. Therefore, to whomever the Gospel may come in vain, it will have a blessed effect on God's elect (Acts 13:48), "as many as were ordained to eternal life, believed." Where the Lord has many people, the Gospel will have much success, sooner or later. Those who are to be saved will be added to the mystical body of Christ.

III. Cutting Ties with the Old Stock:

Which Branches Are Selected for the New Stock

I will now explain how branches are cut off from the natural stock, the first Adam, and grafted into the true vine, the Lord Jesus Christ. We should be grateful to the Gardener, not the branch, for being cut off from its natural stock and grafted into a new one. The sinner, in his departure from the first stock, is passive and cannot and will not leave it on his own accord, but clings to it until almighty power causes him to fall off (John 6:44), "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws them." And in John 5:40, "You are unwilling to come to me so that you may have life." The grafted branches are "God's field" (1 Corinthians 3:9) and "The planting of the Lord" (Isaiah 61:3). The usual means God employs in this work is the ministry of the word (1 Corinthians 3:9), "We are co-workers with God." However, the effectiveness of it is entirely from Him, regardless of the minister's abilities or piety (verse 7), "Neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God who makes things grow." The apostles preached to the Jews, yet the majority of that people remained in unbelief (Romans 10:16), "Who has believed our message?" Even Christ himself, who spoke like no

one else, said about the success of his own ministry, "I have laboured in vain, I have spent my strength for nothing" (Isaiah 49:4). Branches may be pruned by the preaching of the word, but the cut will never be complete until it is driven home by the omnipotent arm. Nevertheless, God's usual method is "to save those who believe through the foolishness of preaching" (1 Corinthians 1:21).

The cutting of the branch from the natural stock is performed by the pruning knife of the law in the hand of the Spirit of God (Galatians 2:19), "For through the law, I died to the law." As I mentioned earlier, we are connected to our natural stock through the bond of the covenant of works. Therefore, as a wife who is unwilling to be separated clings to the marriage tie, so do people cling to the covenant of works. They hold on to it like a man who held a ship with his hands; when one hand was cut off, he held it with the other; and when both were cut off, he held it with his teeth. This becomes apparent when we examine the Lord's work on people in bringing them away from the old stock, which I will outline in the following points:

1. When the Spirit of the Lord comes to deal with a person, to bring them to Christ, it finds them in Laodicea's situation, in a deep sleep of security, dreaming of heaven and God's favour, despite being full of sin against the Holy One of Israel (Revelation 3:17), "You do not realise that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked." Therefore, the Spirit shines some light into the dark soul and lets the person see that they are lost if they do not change their ways and embrace a new course of life. By the Spirit of the Lord acting as a spirit of bondage, a personal court of conscience is established within them, where they are arraigned, accused, and condemned for breaking God's law, "convicted of sin and judgment" (John 16:8). Now they can

no longer sleep securely in their former way of life. This is the first cut that the branch receives in order to be severed.

2. As a result, the person abandons their previous sinful ways, such as lying, swearing, breaking the Sabbath, stealing, and other similar practices. Though these habits are dear to them, they would rather give them up than risk their soul's ruin. They start to feel better about themselves, thinking they are a better servant to God than many others (Luke 18:11), "God, I thank you that I am not like other people – robbers, evildoers, adulterers," and so on. But they soon receive another cut from the law's axe, showing them that only those who do what is written in the law can be saved by it, and that their negative holiness is an insufficient shield from God's wrath. Now, their sins of omission join their sins of commission in weighing heavily on their conscience, accompanied by a host of law curses and vengeance. Each of the Ten Commandments unleashes a storm of wrath against them for their failure to carry out required duties.
3. At this point, the person turns to a positively holy way of life. They not only abandon their sinful ways but also perform religious duties: they pray, seek knowledge of religious principles, strictly observe the Lord's Day, and, like Herod, do many things and gladly listen to sermons. In a nutshell, there is a significant outward change in their behaviour, which aligns with both tables of the law. This transformation is noticeable to their neighbours, who readily accept them into their religious circle as a praying person. They can discuss religious matters and even soul exercises with them, which some are not familiar with, and the good opinion of others reinforces their self-esteem. Many people stumble at this stage in their spiritual journey and never progress further. But for the elect branch, the Lord

delivers another blow. Their conscience torments them for some missteps in their conduct, the neglect of some duty, or the commission of some sin that mars their behaviour. Then the fiery sword of the law appears again over their head, and the curse resounds in their ears, because they "do not continue to do everything written in the law" (Galatians 3:10).

4. Because of this, the person is compelled to seek another solution for their spiritual ailment. They turn to God, confess their sins, seek forgiveness, and promise to guard against future transgressions. They find relief and believe they are justified in doing so, considering the scripture states, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins" (1 John 1:9). They fail to realize that they are claiming a privilege that belongs only to those grafted into Christ and under the covenant of grace, which branches still growing on the old stock cannot claim. Sometimes, there are formal and explicit vows made against specific sins and obligations to certain duties. Many people continue this way throughout their lives, knowing no other religion than to perform duties, confess, and pray for forgiveness, promising themselves eternal happiness even though they are complete strangers to Christ. Many chosen individuals have been brought low, and many non-elect have been defeated in this state, but the wounds of neither are deep enough to sever them from their natural stock. However, the Spirit of the Lord delivers a deeper cut to the branch that is to be removed, revealing to the person that they are merely an outwardly religious individual and exposing the hidden vices that reside in their heart, which they had not previously noticed (Romans 7:9), "When the commandment came, sin sprang to life and I died." They then see their heart filled with sinful desires, covetousness, pride, malice, impurity, and more. As

soon as they are made aware of the secret chambers of their heart and the darkness within, their outward religion is exposed as insufficient, and they learn a new religious lesson: "A person is not a Jew who is one only outwardly" (Romans 2:28).

5. Upon this revelation, the person delves deeper into their faith, embracing inner spirituality. They redouble their efforts, mourn the evils of their heart, and strive to suppress the weeds growing in their previously neglected spiritual garden. They work to curb their pride and anger and to banish impure thoughts. They pray more fervently, listen attentively, and endeavour to have their heart affected by every religious duty they perform. Consequently, they come to view themselves as not only an outwardly religious person but also an inwardly spiritual one. This should not be surprising, as there is nothing beyond the power of human nature or what someone may achieve under the strong influence of the covenant of works. Therefore, another, even deeper cut is given. The law confronts the person's conscience, reminding them that they have been a transgressor since birth, that they entered the world as a guilty being, and that they have committed numerous sins during their time of ignorance and even after their eyes were opened. These sins have either been entirely overlooked or not adequately mourned over, and their spiritual wounds have not been healed by the blood of Christ but merely superficially covered. Thus, the law seizes them by the throat, demanding, "Pay what you owe."
6. In response, the sinner pleads in their heart, "Have patience with me, and I will pay you all," and sets to work to appease an offended God and atone for their sins. They renew their repentance, bear the afflictions placed upon them, and even deny themselves the use of their lawful comforts. They sigh

deeply, mourn bitterly, and cry with tears for forgiveness until they convince themselves they have obtained it. Having done penance for their past, they resolve to be a devoted servant to God, committing to both outward and inward obedience. However, the cut must go even closer to the heart before the branch can fall off. The Lord reveals to them through the law how they sin in everything they do, even when they are doing their best, and thus the dreadful sound of the curse returns (Galatians 3:10). The Lord questions the sincerity of their fasts, their wandering thoughts during duties, and their flawed affections. They realize that they cannot satisfy the demands of the law.

7. Feeling defeated, the sinner tries to negotiate with their creditor. Desperate for ease and comfort, they do what they can to fulfill the law, and when they fail, they trust that God will accept their intentions as sufficient. Through doing their duty and wishing to do better, they deceive themselves into believing in the goodness of their state, and this leads to the downfall of many. The chosen, however, receive another blow that weakens their resolve in this matter. The law demands perfect obedience, and wishing to do better will not suffice. The curse sounds again, emphasizing that only actions, not wishes, will be accepted.
8. Having lost all hope of negotiating with the law, the sinner resorts to borrowing. They realize that their efforts to obey the law and their desire to improve will not save their soul. Consequently, they turn to Christ, asking that his righteousness compensate for their shortcomings and cover the flaws in their actions and sufferings so that God may accept them and be reconciled. By doing their best to fulfill the law and relying on Christ to make up for their deficiencies, they eventually find

security again. Many people are lost in this way, as seen in the error of the Galatians, which Paul addresses in his letter to them. The Spirit of God also breaks the sinner's grip on this belief by revealing the truth (Galatians 3:12) that the law and faith cannot be combined in this matter. The sinner must choose one and let go of the other. The ways of the law and faith are so different that it is impossible for the sinner to walk in one without abandoning the other. If they choose to do, they must do everything alone, as Christ will not do a part for them if they do not do it all. A garment made from different types of righteousness is not suitable for the heavenly court. Thus, the person is like one in a dream who thought they were eating but, upon being awakened by a blow, finds their soul faint and their heart sinking, unable to bear the burden alone or find help under it.

9. What can a person do when they must pay a debt but lack the means, cannot borrow enough, and are too ashamed to beg? They might try to sell themselves, as a man would under the law when facing poverty (Leviticus 25:47). Therefore, the sinner, having been beaten from so many positions, attempts to make a bargain with Christ and metaphorically sell themselves to the Son of God. They solemnly promise and vow to serve Christ as long as they live if He will save their soul. They often make a personal covenant with Christ on these terms and participate in sacraments to secure the agreement. The individual's primary concern is obeying Christ and keeping His commandments to fulfill their bargain. For a while, their soul finds false and unstable peace until the Spirit of the Lord intervenes to cut them off from this deceptive refuge. When they fail to uphold their duties and fall into the sin they had covenanted against, their conscience reminds them that their covenant is broken, leading

to the loss of comfort and a resurgence of terror, as one who has broken their covenant with Christ. Typically, the person renews their covenant but breaks it again, as before. This cycle of making and breaking covenants continues throughout their lives because they remain on the same flawed path.

Objection: Some might argue that everyone sins and fails to uphold their duties. If this method is considered unsound, then who can be saved? Answer: True believers will be saved, namely, all who have faith in God's covenant. The kind of covenant described here is one created by people themselves, not the covenant revealed in God's gospel of grace. Making such a covenant is equivalent to making a covenant of works with Christ, which confuses the law and the gospel. Christ will never endorse this covenant, no matter how sincerely we sign it. According to Romans 4:14, 16, and 11:6, faith and grace are necessary for the promise to be sure for everyone. God's covenant is everlasting, and its mercies are unwavering (Isaiah 55:3). In contrast, the previously mentioned covenant is unstable and prone to being broken daily. It is a servile covenant that offers service in exchange for salvation, while God's covenant is filial, freely offering Christ and salvation, making the recipient a child of God (John 1:12). As a child of God, they serve their Father not to obtain the inheritance but because it is already theirs through Jesus Christ (Galatians 4:24).

Entering the false covenant is like buying from Christ with money, while taking hold of God's covenant is buying without money and without price (Isaiah 55:1), which is to say, begging. In the false covenant, individuals work for life; in God's covenant, they come to Christ for life and work from life. When a person under the false covenant fails in their duty, everything is lost, and the covenant must be remade. Under God's covenant, although someone may fail in

their duty and face the consequences, the righteousness of Christ remains intact, and the covenant is secure (Romans 7:24-25; 8:1).

Although some individuals spend their lives repeatedly making and breaking their own covenants, the terror of breaking them gradually weakens until it causes little or no distress. However, a person who experiences genuine growth and is cut off from their old ways will find these covenants to be like fragile ropes that snap with every touch. The terror of God intensifies on their spirit, and as they repeatedly fail, they are forced to abandon such covenants and seek help in other ways.

10. Ultimately, the person turns to Christ's mercy, but they remain a proud beggar, relying on their personal worth. Like the way Catholics use mediators to plead on their behalf with the one true Mediator, these individuals still cling to something they believe may commend them to Christ and persuade Him to take up their cause. They cannot fathom approaching the spiritual marketplace empty-handed. They resemble individuals who have lost their wealth but still carry the pride of their former status. As a result, they believe they deserve special consideration and become resentful when they are treated like ordinary beggars.

Despite receiving many common blessings from God, the unhumbled sinner remains unsatisfied unless they are seated at the table with God's children. They have yet to accept that God is justified in condemning them according to their true deserving (Psalm 51:4). The person may consider their reformation, repentance, grief, and tears, as well as their earnest desires for Christ and their prayers for mercy, as worthy of earning mercy. However, the Spirit of the Lord

exposes the inadequacy of these beliefs and forces the individual to recognize that they are no better than anyone else.

The person's faults in their reformation are revealed, and their repentance appears no better than Judas's or Esau's tears. Their desires for Christ seem selfish and repulsive, resembling those who sought Christ only for the loaves (John 6:26). God's response appears to be, "Away, proud beggar, how can I place you among the children?" The individual is now confronted with the severity of their unbelief and the sin of disregarding Jesus Christ. They become acutely aware of their ignorance and the way they have trampled upon the blood of the Son of God throughout their life. Consequently, they see themselves as a miserable object of both legal and gospel vengeance.

11. When the person is humbled to this extent, they no longer argue that they are deserving of Christ's help. Instead, they see themselves as unworthy of Christ and God's favour. This can be compared to the young man in Mark 14:51-52, who followed Christ with only a linen cloth wrapped around him. When others grabbed him, he left the cloth behind and fled naked. Similarly, the individual had been pursuing Christ, trusting in their own worthiness as a thin and inadequate covering. The law captures them through their own self-reliance, and they flee naked, not towards Christ but away from him. If you tell them they are welcome to Christ, they might reply, "How can a vile and unworthy wretch like me be welcome to the holy Jesus?" When offered comfort, they reject it, saying, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord" (Luke 5:8).

No one needs to remind them of their repentance or tears, as they are well aware of their imperfections. They argue against themselves,

believing that they cannot, will not, and should not come to Christ. They feel they must improve their situation before believing. Consequently, they pray more fervently, mourn more bitterly, fight sin more vigorously, and watch more closely in hopes of eventually being fit to approach Christ.

It may seem like the person is now humbled, but deep pride still hides beneath this apparent humility. They remain unwilling to submit to God's righteousness (Romans 10:3) and refuse to approach the market of free grace without something to offer. They are invited to the wedding feast of the King's Son, where the bridegroom provides all guests with wedding garments, stripping them of their own. Yet, they will not attend because they lack a wedding garment, even though they are busily trying to prepare one. This situation is dire, and they need a more profound awakening, or they will be lost.

This awakening comes from the law's provocative power. As the law binds the soul with the cords of death and demands obedience under the threat of a curse, God withdraws His restraining grace. As a result, corruption intensifies, and sinful desires become more violent. The more they are resisted, the more they rage. Previously unseen corruptions surface, and the person experiences thoughts of atheism, blasphemy, and other horrors concerning God and faith. Their heart becomes like hell itself. In attempting to cleanse their heart without gospel grace, previously unnoticed corruptions are stirred up like dust.

The person's efforts to repair the breaches in their life are like trying to mend a riverbank while a massive flood sweeps away both their new and old efforts. Read Romans 7:8-13. This experience cuts deeply, and their hope of making themselves more fit to approach Christ is shattered.

12. The moment arrives when the individual, caught between hope and despair, decides to approach Christ as they are. Like a dying person drawing their last breath, they gather the shattered pieces of their soul, attempt to believe, and in some way grasp onto Jesus Christ. Now, the person's faith barely clings to the old foundation through a single thread of natural belief, born from their own determination under extreme duress (Psalm 78:34-35; Hosea 8:2). However, the Lord consistently completes His work, and another revelation comes, severing the last connection. The Holy Spirit powerfully reveals the sinner's utter inability to do anything good, and they die to themselves (Romans 7:9). They hear the words, "How can you believe?" (John 5:44) and realise that they can no more believe than reach up to heaven and bring Christ down. Finally, they see that they can neither help themselves by working nor by believing, and with no remaining attachment to the old foundation, they fall away. As they find themselves on the brink of being swept away by God's wrath, unable to even grasp a branch from the tree of life, they are taken up and grafted into the true vine—Jesus Christ, who gives them the Spirit of faith.

I do not intend to distress or torment tender consciences with this discussion. Although there are few such people today, I would not wish to offend any of Christ's little ones. Regrettably, a deep slumber has enveloped this generation, and they refuse to awaken no matter how close we come to the core of the issue. I fear that a different type of awakening awaits this sermon-resistant generation, one that will make the ears of those who hear it tingle. Nevertheless, I do not present this as the sole method God uses to separate sinners from their old foundations. What I maintain as a certain truth is that all who are in Christ have been detached from these various confidences, and those who have never been separated from them

remain in their natural state. However, if the house is demolished and the old foundation is destroyed, it matters little whether it was taken down piece by piece or whether it crumbled all at once.

IV. The Ingrafting Process:

How the Branches Are Transplanted to the New Stock

Now the individual is grafted into Jesus Christ. Just as the law, in the hands of the Holy Spirit, was the instrument used to sever the person from their natural foundation, so the Gospel, guided by the same Spirit, is the instrument employed to graft them into the supernatural foundation (1 John 1:3; see Isaiah 61:1-3). The Gospel is the silver cord sent down from heaven to rescue perishing sinners. Although the preaching of the law prepares the way for the Lord, it is through the word of the Gospel that Christ and a sinner meet. In the spiritual grafting process, just as in the natural one, the individual is united with Christ, becoming one with Him (Philippians 3:12).

First, Christ, through His Spirit, captures the sinner and draws them close (1 Corinthians 12:13). The same Spirit that resides in the Mediator is shared with the chosen at the appropriate time, never leaving them but remaining as a source of life. Now in the hands of the Lord of life and filled with the Spirit of life, the soul cannot help but live. The individual gains a captivating view of Christ's excellence through the lens of the Gospel, recognizing Him as a complete, fitting, and willing Saviour. They are given a heart to accept Christ as the ultimate substitute. The Spirit of faith provides the means to approach and receive Christ. What was once impossible by nature, they can now achieve through grace, as the Holy Spirit powerfully works within them to develop their faith.

Secondly, the sinner, once captured, grasps Christ through faith and unites with the blessed foundation (Ephesians 3:17). The soul that previously tried many escape routes but failed now looks with the eye of faith, which provides healing. Just as Aaron's rod, stored in the tabernacle, sprouted and produced buds (Numbers 17:8), the lifeless individual, captured by the Lord of life and joined to the glorious, life-giving foundation through the Spirit of life, blossoms in actual belief in Jesus Christ. This union is then completed. "Having the same Spirit of faith, we believe" (2 Corinthians 4:13). In this way, the foundation and the graft are united, Christ and the believer are married, with faith being the soul's acceptance of the spiritual marriage covenant. This covenant, proposed in the Gospel to all sinners indiscriminately, is demonstrated, confirmed, and personally brought to the individual by the Holy Spirit. Thus, they are joined to the Lord and become one spirit with Him.

Through this union, believers live in and for Christ, and Christ lives in and for the believer (Galatians 2:20). The bonds of this blessed union are the Spirit on Christ's part and faith on the believer's part.

Both the souls and bodies of believers are united with Christ. "Whoever is united with the Lord becomes one with him in spirit" (1 Corinthians 6:17). The bodies of believers are honoured as "the temple of the Holy Spirit" (verse 19) and "the members of Christ" (verse 15). When they sleep in the dust, they sleep in Jesus (1 Thessalonians 4:14), and it is through this union that they will be resurrected from the dust (Romans 8:11). In recognition of this mystical union, the church of believers is called by the name of its Head and Husband (1 Corinthians 12:12).

From what is said, we may draw the following conclusions:

1. The preaching of the law is essential. Whoever wants to graft must use a pruning knife. Sinners have many ways to keep them from Christ and many things by which they maintain their connection to the natural foundation. Therefore, they need to be closely pursued and driven out of their hiding places and refuges of lies.
2. However, it is the Gospel that completes the work. "The law makes nothing perfect." The law exposes the wound, but it is the Gospel that heals it. The law "strips a person, wounds them, and leaves them half dead," while the Gospel "binds up their wounds, pouring in wine and oil" to heal them. The law breaks us off, but it is through the Gospel that we are taken up and implanted in Christ.
3. "If anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, they do not belong to him" (Romans 8:9). We are told of a natural anomaly, having two bodies with different emotions, but so united that they were served by the same limbs. Similarly, people may cling to Christ, "calling themselves citizens of the holy city and relying on the God of Israel" (Isaiah 48:2), and may be bound as branches in him (John 15:2) through the outward ties of sacraments. However, if the Spirit dwelling in Christ does not dwell in them, they are not one with him. There is a significant difference between adhesion and grafting. The ivy wraps and twists around the oak, but it is not one with it, as it continues to grow on its own root. Similarly, as Isaiah 4:1 suggests, many believers "take hold" of Christ, "eating their own bread and wearing their own clothes, only they are called by his name." They rely on him but grow on their own root; they turn to him for support, but their desires lie elsewhere.

4. The union between Christ and his mystical members is strong and unbreakable. If it were the case that the believer only grasped Christ, but Christ did not grasp them, we could promise little about the stability of such a union; it might quickly dissolve. But as the believer grasps Christ by faith, Christ grasps them by his Spirit, and no one shall take them from his hand. If a child only held onto their caregiver, they might eventually grow weary, let go, and fall away. However, if the caregiver has their arms around the child, there is no risk of falling away, even if the child is not actively holding on. So, whatever sinful interruptions may occur in the exercise of faith, the union remains secure due to the constant indwelling of the Spirit. Blessed Jesus! "All your saints are in your hand" (Deuteronomy 33:3). It is observed by some that the word "Abba" is the same whether read forwards or backwards; whatever the believer's situation, the Lord is still their Abba, Father.

5. Those who have not been grasped by Christ through his Spirit have an unstable connection to him. Many half-hearted relationships exist, where the soul grasps Christ, but is not grasped by him. Consequently, many fall away and never rise again; they lose their grip on Christ, and when that is gone, everything is lost. These are "the branches in Christ that do not bear fruit, which the gardener removes" (John 15:2). Question: How can that be? Answer: These branches are attached to the foundation through a profession or an insincere, hypocritical faith; they are tied to it through the external use of the sacraments, but they never truly unite with the foundation, and therefore cannot bear fruit. They do not need to be cut off or broken off; they are merely removed, or as the primary meaning of the word suggests, lifted up and taken away because there is

nothing holding them; they are indeed tied to the foundation but were never united with it.

Question: How can I know if I am grasped by Christ? Answer: You can find satisfaction in this inquiry if you consider and apply these two things:

1. When Christ connects with a person through his Spirit, they are so drawn that they come to Christ with their whole heart, as true believing involves believing with all the heart (Acts 8:37). The Lord's followers are like those who initially followed Saul, people whose hearts God had touched (1 Samuel 10:26). When the Spirit pours in powerful grace, they pour out their hearts before him (Psalm 62:8). They flow towards him like a river (Isaiah 2:2), signifying not only the abundance of converts but also their disposition in coming to Christ. They come willingly and freely, drawn by love (Jeremiah 31:3). They are willing in the day of his power (Psalm 110:3), meaning they are free, ready, open-hearted, and devoted to him. When the bridegroom has the bride's heart, it is a true marriage. However, some give their hand to Christ without giving their heart. Those driven to Christ by fear alone will certainly leave him when the fear subsides. Fear may break a heart of stone, but the shattered pieces remain stone; fear cannot soften it into a heart of flesh. Nevertheless, fear may begin the work that love completes. The strong wind, earthquake, and fire may precede the still, small voice in which the Lord is present.

When Jesus seeks sinners to join him, they are resistant and stubborn, not engaging with him until he has wounded them, made them captives, and bound them with the cords of death. Once this is done, he comes to them and wins their hearts. The Lord tells us

(Hosea 2:16-20) that chosen Israel will be married to him. To win the bride's consent, he will first bring her into the wilderness, as he did with the Israelites when he brought them out of Egypt (verse 14). There, she will face hardships, thirst, and snake bites before he comforts her, speaking to her heart. The sinner is first driven and then drawn to Christ. This is similar to Noah's dove, which returned to the ark as it had nowhere else to rest. It would have remained outside the ark if Noah had not pulled it in (Genesis 8:9). The Lord sends his avenger of blood to pursue the criminal, who, with a heavy heart, leaves their city and parts with old friends because they cannot stay with them. They flee for their life to the city of refuge. This choice is not entirely their own, as necessity takes precedence. However, upon arriving at the gates and seeing the beauty and loveliness of the place, they are charmed and enter willingly, declaring, "This is my rest, and here I will stay." In another context, it was said, "I would have perished if I hadn't perished."

1. When Christ grasps a soul, the heart is disengaged from and turned against sin. In cutting off the branch from the old foundation, the idol of self is brought down, and the person learns to deny themselves. Similarly, in grasping the sinner by the Spirit, the union between the person and their sinful desires is dissolved (Romans 7:5). Their heart is detached from them, although they were once as dear as body parts, and instead of taking pleasure in sin, they long to be free of it. When Jesus comes to a soul during the conversion process, he finds it drawing its nourishment and satisfaction from sin. However, he severs this connection so he can impart his own consolations and give the soul rest in himself. In this way, the Lord wounds the head and heart of sin, and the soul turns to him, saying, "Surely our ancestors inherited falsehood, futility, and things that bring no benefit" (Jeremiah 16:19).

V. The Benefits of Union:

The Advantages and Blessings That Flow from the Branches' Connection to the New Stock

I now discuss the benefits that true believers gain from their union with Christ. The primary benefits they receive include justification, peace, adoption, sanctification, growth in grace, fruitfulness in good works, acceptance of these works, establishment in the state of grace, support, and special guidance from providence. Communion with Christ is an immediate consequence of union with him, encompassing all other benefits. As a branch connected to its source shares in all that it contains, a believer united with Christ shares in his abundance, launching into a sea of happiness and discovering a paradise of pleasures. They gain a saving interest in the hidden treasures of the Gospel and the unsearchable riches of Christ. As soon as a believer unites with Christ, they possess him, with all his fullness (Song of Solomon 2:16), "My beloved is mine, and I am his." And "how shall he not with him freely give us all things?" (Romans 8:32). "Whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come, all are yours" (1 Corinthians 3:22). This communion with Christ is the overarching blessing that flows from our union with him. Now, let's consider the specific benefits mentioned earlier.

The first specific benefit a sinner receives through union with Christ is justification. Being united to Christ, they share in his righteousness (1 Corinthians 1:30), "But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom and righteousness." They are no longer condemned but justified before God, as they are in Christ (Romans 8:1), "There is therefore now no condemnation to

them which are in Christ Jesus." The aspects of this benefit are the pardon of sin and personal acceptance.

1. A believer's sins are pardoned, and the guilt removed. The obligation to repay their debt is cancelled. God the Father, using his Son's blood, crosses out the sinner's accounts and erases them from his record. A sinner without Christ is subject to God's wrath; they are legally required to enter the hellish prison and remain there until their debt is fully paid. This comes from the severe consequence of breaking the law, which is nothing less than death (Genesis 2:17). So, the sinner is like Shimei in another case, deserving of death (1 Kings 2:42). However, when united with Christ, God says, "Deliver him from going down to the pit; I have found a ransom" (Job 33:24). The sentence of condemnation is overturned, the believer is absolved, and they are placed beyond the reach of the condemning law. Their sins, once visible to the Lord (Psalm 90:8), are now taken and thrown behind his back (Isaiah 38:17), and even cast into the depths of the sea (Micah 7:19). What falls into a stream may be retrieved, but what is cast into the sea cannot be recovered.

Even if there are shallow places in the sea, their sins are not cast there but into the depths, where they will never resurface. Their sins will be forcefully sunk, like lead in the mighty waters of the Redeemer's blood. Not only are their sins forgiven, but they are also forgotten (Jeremiah 31:34). Though their future sins may still deserve punishment and make them subject to temporary consequences and fatherly discipline according to the covenant of grace (Psalm 89:30-33), they can never be actually liable to eternal wrath or the law's curse, for they are dead to the law in Christ (Romans 7:4). They can never fall away from their union with Christ, nor can they be in Christ and under condemnation at the same time

(Romans 8:1). This concept is based on the doctrine of a believer being dead to the law, as explained by the Apostle in Romans 7:1-6, which is evident from the second, third, and fourth verses of the eighth chapter. In this regard, the justified person is blessed, as the Lord does not hold their iniquity against them (Psalm 32:2), just as someone who has no intention of charging a debt does not record it in their account book.

2. The believer is accepted as righteous in God's sight (2 Corinthians 5:21). They are "found in Christ, not having their own righteousness, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith" (Philippians 3:9). A believer could never be accepted by God as righteous based on their own righteousness because, at best, it is imperfect. True righteousness, which can withstand judgement before God's throne, must be perfect. The term righteousness implies perfection, as only works that are entirely in line with the law can be considered right. Thus, imperfect works cannot make a person righteous before God, whose judgement is based on truth. Yet, if justice demands righteousness for one in Christ, they can confidently say, "In the Lord, I have righteousness" (Isaiah 45:24). The law is fulfilled, its commands obeyed, and its sanctions satisfied. The believer's surety has paid the debt, and it was exacted and answered for.

Thus, the person united with Christ is justified. The entire process can be understood as follows: Christ, as the Saviour of lost sinners, captures the criminal through the Spirit and draws them to Himself. The sinner, in turn, clings to Christ through faith. As a result, the Lord our righteousness unites with the unrighteous individual. This union with Christ leads to communion in His unsearchable riches and, consequently, His righteousness – the white garments provided

to clothe the naked (Revelation 3:18). Christ's righteousness becomes the believer's, and because it is rightfully theirs, it is imputed to them. God's judgement, which is always true, considers it as belonging to the believer. The believing sinner, having a righteousness that fully satisfies the law's demands, is pardoned and accepted as righteous (see Isaiah 45:22-24; Romans 3:24; and Romans 5:1). Now, they are free. Who can accuse those whom God justifies? Neither justice nor the law can, as they have been satisfied and have obtained their demands in Jesus Christ (Galatians 3:20).

The believer's sins, once recorded as a debt, have been blotted out by Christ (Colossians 2:14). Even if justice were to look for the record again, Christ has removed it. The believer may wish for the record to be torn apart, and indeed, it has been pierced by the nails that drove through Christ's hands and feet. The torn record cannot be reassembled, for it was nailed to the cross, which was buried with Christ and will never rise again, as Christ dies no more. The condemned person's veil has been destroyed (Isaiah 25:7). Death, which once threatened the sinner, has been swallowed up in victory (Isaiah 25:8). Glory be to Him who "loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood."

The second benefit that arises from union with Christ, and comes through justification, is peace; peace with God and peace of conscience, according to the level of awareness the justified have of their peace with God (Romans 5:1). "Therefore, being justified by faith, we have peace with God." (Romans 14:17), "For the kingdom of God is not about eating and drinking, but righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit." Whereas God was their enemy before, now He is reconciled to them in Christ: they have a covenant of peace with Him; and, like Abraham, they are friends of God. He is well pleased with them in His beloved Son. His word, which previously spoke

terror to them, now speaks peace if they correctly understand the language. Love is present in all aspects of their lives, working together for their good. Their consciences are cleansed of the guilt and filthiness that burdened them: the conscience-purifying blood of Christ flows through their souls due to their union with Him (Hebrews 9:14), "How much more shall the blood of Christ—purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God!" The bonds placed on their consciences by the Spirit of God, acting as the Spirit of bondage, are removed, never to be imposed again (Romans 8:5), "For you have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear." The conscience finds peace as soon as the soul becomes aware of the application of that blood, which occurs sooner or later, depending on the level of faith and the timing God deems appropriate.

Unbelievers may have troubled consciences, which they may temporarily ease: but, unfortunately, their consciences become peaceful before they become pure, so their peace is merely a seed for greater horror and confusion. Neglect may provide temporary relief to a tormented conscience; people ignoring its wounds, which close on their own before the impurities are removed. Many bury their guilt in the grave of a poor memory: conscience stings for a moment; eventually, the person forgets their sin, and that is the end of it; but this is only a temporary reprieve. Business or life's affairs often provide relief in such cases. When Cain is banished from the presence of the Lord, he starts building cities. When the evil spirit comes upon Saul, he does not call for his Bible or the priests to discuss his situation; instead, he calls for music to play it away. Many, when their consciences begin to feel uneasy, fill their minds and hands with business, seeking to distract themselves and regain peace at any cost. Some will sin against their convictions and thus gain some relief for their consciences, as Hazael eased his master by smothering him. The performance of duties may also provide some

relief to troubled consciences; and this is all that legalistic believers resort to for calming their consciences. When their conscience is wounded, they will pray, confess, mourn, and resolve not to do it again: and so they become whole again, without applying the blood of Christ through faith. But those whose consciences are rightly calmed come to the blood of sprinkling for peace and purification. Sin leaves a sting behind it, which will, at one time or another, cause them significant pain.

Elihu shows us both the situation and the solution in Job 33. Consider the situation a person may be in, to whom God has thoughts of love. He sends convictions into their conscience, making them stick so firmly that they cannot free themselves (verse 16), "He opens the ears of people and seals their instruction." Their very body becomes sick (verse 19), "They are chastened with pain on their bed, and with constant distress in their bones." They lose their appetite (verse 20), "Their life loathes bread, and their soul dainty food." Their body wastes away, leaving only skin and bones (verse 21), "Their flesh is so wasted away that it cannot be seen, and their bones, once invisible, now stick out." Though they are not prepared for death, they have no hope of life (verse 22), "Their soul draws near to the pit, and their life to the messengers of death." They are expecting every moment for devils, these destroyers (Revelation 9:11), these murderers (John 8:44), to come and carry their soul to hell. What a dreadful situation! Is there any hope for such people? Yes, there is hope. God will "restrain their soul from the pit" (Job 33:18), even if He brings them to the brink of it.

Now, observe how the sick person is healed. The physician's skill is insufficient here; the illness lies deeper than their medicine can reach. It is soul trouble that has brought the body into this disorder; therefore, the remedies must be applied to the person's soul and

conscience. The physician for this case must be a spiritual physician, using spiritual remedies such as righteousness, ransom, and atonement. Upon applying these, the soul is healed, the conscience is quieted, and the body recovers (verses 23-26), "If there is an angel at their side, a mediator, one out of a thousand, to tell a person what is right for them, to be gracious to them and say, 'Spare them from going down to the pit; I have found a ransom for them'—then their flesh is renewed like a child's; it is restored as in the days of their youth. They pray to God and find favour with Him; they see God's face and shout for joy."

The appropriate physician for this patient is a messenger, a mediator (verse 23), which some interpreters, not without reason, understand to be the great physician, Jesus Christ, whom Job had called his Redeemer (Job 19:25). He is a messenger, the "messenger of the covenant of peace" (Malachi 3:1), who comes at the right time to the sick person. He is a mediator, the great mediator of God's plans of love for sinners (Job 33:23), "one in a thousand," even "the foremost among ten thousand" (Song of Solomon 5:10). "One chosen from the people" (Psalm 89:19). One to whom "the Lord has given the tongue of the learned—to speak a word in season to the weary" (Isaiah 50:4). It is He who is with them, by His Spirit, now, to "convince them of righteousness" (John 16:8), as He was with them before, to "convince them of sin and of judgment." His work now is to show them their uprightness or righteousness, that is, the mediator Christ's righteousness, which is the only righteousness arising from the payment of a ransom, and upon which a sinner is delivered from going down to the pit (verse 24). Thus, Christ is said to declare God's name (Psalm 22:22) and to preach righteousness (Psalm 40:9). The phrase is remarkable: it is not to show the person, but to show humanity, their righteousness. This subtly suggests that He is more than just a human being, who reveals or declares this righteousness.

Compare Amos 4:13, "He who forms the mountains, creates the wind, and reveals to humanity what their thoughts are." There seems to be a sweet allusion to the first declaration of this righteousness to humanity or, as the word is, to Adam after the fall, while he lay under terror from the wrath of God. This declaration was made by the messenger, the mediator, namely, the eternal Word, the Son of God, called the voice of the Lord God (Genesis 3:8), and likely appearing in a human form.

Now, while He, through His Spirit, preaches righteousness to the individual, it is assumed that the person accepts the offered righteousness. As a result, the ransom is applied to them, and they are delivered from going down to the pit, for God has a ransom for them. This is indicated by the words, "Deliver them" (Job 33:24). Thus, their conscience, purified by the blood of atonement, is pacified and gently quieted. "They shall pray to God... and see His face with joy" (verse 26), which they had previously beheld with horror. In New Testament terms, this means "having a high priest over the house of God, they shall draw near with a true heart, in full assurance of faith, having their heart sprinkled from an evil conscience" (Hebrews 10:21-22). But then, what happens to the body, the weak and weary flesh? "Their flesh shall be fresher than a child's, they shall return to the days of their youth" (Job 33:25). Indeed, "all their bones," which were chastened with strong pain (verse 19), "shall say, 'Lord, who is like you?'" (Psalm 35:10).

A third benefit stemming from union with Christ is adoption. Believers, being united to Christ, become children of God and members of the heavenly family. Through their union with Him, who is the Son of God by nature, they become the sons of God by grace (John 1:12). Just as when a branch is cut off from one tree and grafted onto another, the grafted branch, through its union with the

adopting branch, becomes a part of the same stock into which it is grafted. So, sinners, being grafted into Jesus Christ, whose name is the Branch, have His Father as their Father, His God as their God (John 20:17). This way, those who are by nature children of the devil become children of God. They receive the Spirit of adoption (Romans 8:15), namely, the Spirit of His Son, which brings them to God, as children to a Father, to pour out their complaints in His embrace and seek necessary supplies (Galatians 4:6). Under all their weaknesses, they receive fatherly pity and compassion (Psalm 103:13).

Though they were once abandoned, they are now cherished as "the apple of His eye" (Deuteronomy 32:10). Whoever pursues them, they have a refuge (Proverbs 14:26). In times of common calamity, they have protective chambers where they can hide until the danger has passed (Isaiah 26:20). He is not only their refuge for protection but also their portion for provision within that refuge (Psalm 142:5). They are provided for in eternity (Hebrews 11:16), and whatever they need for the present, they shall not lack (Matthew 6:31-32). Timely correction is also their privilege as children, so they are not allowed to continue in their faults like others who are not children, but servants of the family, who will eventually be turned away for their misdeeds (Hebrews 12:7). They are heirs of, and shall inherit the promises (Hebrews 6:12). They are heirs of God, who Himself is the portion of their inheritance (Psalm 16:5), and joint-heirs with Christ (Romans 8:17). Since they are children of the great King and heirs of glory, they have angels as their attendants, sent forth to minister to those who will be heirs of salvation (Hebrews 1:14). The angels serve as their guardians and protectors, ensuring their well-being and assisting them on their journey towards eternal life. This privilege further emphasizes the remarkable benefits that come from being united with Christ and adopted as children of God.

A fourth benefit is sanctification (1 Corinthians 1:30), "But of him are you in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification." Being united to Christ, they partake of His Spirit, which is the Spirit of holiness. There is a fullness of the Spirit in Christ, and it is not like the fullness of a container that only holds what is poured into it; rather, it is the fullness of a fountain for diffusion and communication, which is always sending forth its waters and yet remains full.

The Spirit of Christ, the spiritual sap in the stock that is communicated to the branches, is the Spirit of grace (Zechariah 12:10). Where the Spirit of grace resides, a confluence of all graces will be found. Holiness is not just one grace, but all the graces of the Spirit; it is a constellation of graces, the essence of all graces in their seed and root. As the sap conveyed from the stock into the branch flows through every part of it, the Spirit of Christ sanctifies the whole person. The poison of sin spread throughout the spirit, soul, and body of a person, and sanctifying grace pursues it into every corner (1 Thessalonians 5:23). Every part of the person is sanctified, although no part is perfectly so.

The truth by which we are sanctified is not confined to the head, but runs with its sanctifying influences through the heart and life. While there are some graces in every believer that stand out above the rest, such as meekness in Moses and patience in Job, every child of God possesses a holy principle that aligns with the holy law, loving and approving of it. This is evident from their universal respect for God's commands. It is clear that they are endowed with all the graces of the Spirit because there cannot be less in the effect than there was in the cause.

Now, this sanctifying Spirit, which believers partake, serves two purposes for them. Firstly, it is a spirit of mortification; "through the Spirit, they mortify the deeds of the body" (Romans 8:13). Sin is crucified in them (Galatians 5:24). They are united with Christ in the likeness of his death, which was a lingering death (Romans 6:5). Sin in a saint, though not entirely dead, is dying. If it were dead, it would be removed from sight, but it still hangs there, working and struggling under its mortal wounds. When a tree receives a strike that reaches its core, all the leaves and branches begin to fade and decay. Similarly, when the sanctifying Spirit comes and breaks the power of sin, there is a gradual ceasing from it and dying to it in the whole person, so they "no longer live in the flesh to the lusts of men." They do not make sin their trade and business; their main goal is not to seek themselves and satisfy their corrupt inclinations. Instead, they are seeking Immanuel's land and walking in the highway to it, the path known as the way of holiness, even though the wind from hell, which was on their back before, now blows directly in their face, making their journey difficult and often driving them off the highway.

Secondly, this Spirit is a Spirit of vivification for them; it is the Spirit of life, making them live unto righteousness (Ezekiel 36:27), "And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes." Those who have been "united" with Christ "in the likeness of his death shall also be in the likeness of his resurrection" (Romans 6:5). At Christ's resurrection, when his soul was reunited with his body, every member of that blessed body was enabled to perform the actions of life. Likewise, the soul, influenced by the sanctifying Spirit of Christ, becomes more and more capable of performing all the actions of spiritual life. As the entirety of the law, not just fragments of it, is inscribed on the holy heart, believers are enabled to transcribe that law in their lives. Although they cannot write a single

line of it without blemishes, God, for Christ's sake, accepts their performance in terms of sanctification; they are disciples of his own Son and led by his own Spirit.

This sanctified Spirit, communicated by Jesus to his followers, is the spiritual nourishment that branches receive from the source they are grafted into. This nourishment preserves, continues, and activates the life of grace given to them in regeneration. It is the nourishment by which the new being lives and grows towards perfection. Spiritual life needs to be fed and must receive a supply of nourishment. Believers obtain this from Christ, their head, whom the Father has appointed as the source of influence for all his followers (Colossians 2:19). This supply is "the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ" (Philippians 1:19).

Saints feed richly on Christ's flesh and blood for their spiritual nourishment, yet the Lord himself teaches us that "it is the Spirit that gives life" (John 6:63). The human nature is united with the divine nature in the person of the Son, and, like the bowl in Zechariah's candlestick (Zechariah 4), it lies at the fountainhead as the glorious means of conveying influences from the fountain of Deity. Christ receives the Spirit without measure, having a fullness of the Spirit due to that personal union. Hence, believers, being united to the man Christ, partake more and more of that Spirit for their spiritual nourishment by effectively applying Christ to their souls through faith.

God's holiness cannot admit an immediate union with a sinful creature, nor can it have immediate communion with it. Yet, the creature cannot live the life of grace without communion with the source of life. To provide for both God's holiness and the salvation of

sinners, the second person of the Holy Trinity took a sinless human nature into personal union with himself. This holy, harmless, and undefiled humanity could immediately receive the fullness of the Spirit, which Christ could then communicate to his followers by his divine power and efficacy.

Imagine a tree with its roots in the earth and its branches reaching to heaven. The vast distance between the root and the branches would not interrupt the communication between them. Likewise, the distance between Christ in heaven and his followers on earth cannot hinder their communication. Although the parts of the mystical Christ, namely the head and the members, are not physically joined, the union is still real and effective. Our Lord himself shows us that even if we were to consume his flesh in a physical and carnal way, it would not benefit us (John 6:63).

The followers of Christ on earth are united with their head in heaven through the invisible bond of the same Spirit dwelling in both. In Christ, the Spirit dwells as the head, and in his followers, as the members. The wheels in Ezekiel's vision were not contiguous to the living creatures, yet they were united by an invisible bond of one Spirit in both. When the living creatures moved, the wheels moved with them. When the living creatures were lifted up, the wheels were lifted up as well (Ezekiel 1:19-20).

We can see the difference between true sanctification and the mere semblance of it, found among some strict followers of Christianity who are not genuine Christians and have not been regenerated by Christ's Spirit. This false sanctification is similar to what has appeared in many morally upright non-Christians. True sanctification results from the soul's union with the holy Jesus, the first and immediate recipient of the sanctifying Spirit. Through their

union with Jesus, his followers receive sanctifying influences. In contrast, false sanctification is a product of a person's own spirit, which may appear to possess elements of true holiness but does not arise from supernatural principles or aim towards the high goals of genuine holiness. Instead, it originates from and returns to the self, lying as far from true holiness as nature does from grace.

Those who possess this false holiness are like common boatmen who rely on their own efforts to move forward, while the ship bound for Immanuel's land sails with the divine Spirit's guidance. How can there be true sanctification without Christ? Can we achieve true sanctification without partaking of the Spirit of holiness? Can we partake of that Spirit except through Jesus Christ, "the way, the truth, and the life?" The falling dew has as much chance of penetrating a solid rock as the influences of grace have of reaching sinners in any way other than through Jesus, whom the Father has appointed as the source of influence (Colossians 1:19; 2:19).

This is why many people fall away from their apparent sanctification and never recover: they are not genuinely connected to the true vine. In contrast, others recover from their setbacks due to their union with the life-giving source and the revitalizing Spirit (1 John 2:19).

A fifth benefit is growth in grace. "Receiving nourishment, they grow with God's growth" (Colossians 2:19). "The righteous will flourish like a palm tree; they will grow like a cedar in Lebanon" (Psalm 92:12). Grace has a growing nature; on the way to Zion, they progress from strength to strength. Although the holy person may initially be a child in grace, they eventually become a young adult and then a parent (1 John 2:13). Sometimes they may only crawl towards heaven, but later they walk, run, and soar with wings like eagles

(Isaiah 40:31). If a branch grafted into a stock never grows, it is evident that it has not connected with the stock.

Some may ask, "If all true Christians are growing, what about those who seem to be regressing instead of growing?" I reply that there is a significant difference between a Christian growing continuously and growing at all times. All true Christians do grow, but they do not necessarily grow constantly. A tree that has life and nourishment grows to its full potential, but it does not always grow – it doesn't grow during winter. Christians also have their winters when the influences of grace, necessary for their growth, cease (Song of Solomon 5:2).

It is through faith that the believer receives gracious influences from Jesus Christ, as each lamp in the candlestick gets oil from the bowl through the connecting pipe (Zechariah 4:2). If the pipe is blocked or the believer's faith is dormant and inactive, other graces will dim and appear ready to be extinguished. As a result, the depraved nature will gain strength and become active. What then will become of the soul? There is still one sure ground of hope. The believer's faith is not like the hypocrite's, which is like a pipe disconnected from the fountain. The faith still serves as a bond between Christ and the soul, and because Christ lives, the believer will also live (John 14:19). The Lord Jesus clears the means of conveyance, and then influences for growth flow, and the believer's graces look fresh and green again (Hosea 14:7). Even in the worst of times, saints have a principle of growth within them (1 John 3:9), and they will revive again after their declines when the winter is over and the Sun of Righteousness returns with warm influences.

Mud thrown into a pool may settle there, but if it is thrown into a fountain, the spring will eventually clear it out and run as clear as

before. Secondly, Christians may misunderstand their growth in two ways: 1) By judging their situation based on their current feelings. They may not perceive themselves to be growing, but that is no reason to conclude they are not growing (Mark 4:27). If a person were to stare at a growing tree, they would not see it grow, but if they compare the tree's present state to its past state, they will see the growth. Similarly, Christians can determine whether they are growing or declining by comparing their current and former conditions. 2) Christians may misunderstand their growth by measuring it only by the advances of the top, not the root. Even if a person is not growing taller, they may be growing stronger. If a tree is connecting with the ground, establishing itself in the earth, and spreading its roots, it is growing even if it is not taller than before. Likewise, even if a Christian lacks the sweet consolations and strong affections they once had, if they are growing in humility, self-denial, and dependence on Jesus Christ, they are a growing Christian Hos. 14:5, "I will be as the dew unto Israel, he shall cast forth his roots as Lebanon."

Question: "Do hypocrites grow at all? And if so, how can we distinguish between their growth and true Christian growth?"

Answer: To the first part of the question, hypocrites do grow. Tares have their growth, as well as wheat: the seed that fell among thorns did spring up (Luke 8:7). However, it brought no fruit to perfection (Luke 8:14). Indeed, a true Christian may have a false growth. James and John seemed to grow in the grace of holy zeal when their spirits grew so fervent for Christ's cause that they wanted to set fire to an entire village for not receiving their Lord and Master (Luke 9:54). But it was not genuine growth; hence, Jesus rebuked them (Luke 9:55), saying, "You do not know what kind of spirit you are of."

To the second part of the question, true Christian growth has a unique beauty that distinguishes it from all false growth: it is universal, regular, and proportional. It is a "growing up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ" (Ephesians 4:15). The growing Christian grows proportionally in all aspects of the new self. Under the kind influences of the Sun of Righteousness, believers "grow up like calves of the stall" (Malachi 4:2). It would be considered a monstrous growth if a creature's head grew without its body or if one leg grew while another did not; if all parts did not grow proportionally. Yet, such is the growth of many in religion. They grow like rickety children with large heads and slender bodies; they gain more knowledge but no more holiness in their hearts and lives.

They grow very active outwardly but remain cold inwardly, like someone experiencing an ague. They are more concerned with the externals of religion than ever before, yet remain as ignorant of the power of godliness as ever. If a garden is watered by hand, some plants will receive much water, some little, and some none at all; therefore, some will wither while others flourish. However, after rain from the clouds, all plants grow together. Similarly, all the graces of the Spirit grow proportionally by the special influences of divine grace.

Branches grafted into Christ, growing correctly, grow in all aspects of growth simultaneously. They grow inward, becoming more closely united with Christ (Ephesians 4:15) and clinging more firmly to Him as the source of all influences, which is the foundation of all other true Christian growth. They grow outward in good works, in their life and conduct. Like Naphtali, they give goodly words, and like Joseph, they are fruitful boughs. They grow upward in heavenly-mindedness and contempt for the world, as their conversation is in heaven (Philippians 3:20). Finally, they grow downward in humility and

self-loathing. The branches of the most significant growth in Christ, in their own eyes, are "less than the least of all saints" (Ephesians 3:8), "the worst of sinners" (1 Timothy 1:15), and "more brutish than any man" (Proverbs 30:2). They recognize that they can do nothing, not even "think anything as of themselves" (2 Corinthians 3:5), that they deserve nothing, being "unworthy of the least of all the mercies shown unto them" (Genesis 32:10), and that they are nothing (2 Corinthians 12:11).

A sixth benefit is fruitfulness. The branch grafted into Christ is not barren but bears fruit (John 15:5): "Whoever abides in me, and I in them, bears much fruit." Souls are united to Christ so that they may bear fruit for God (Romans 7:4). Those who are barren may be branches in Christ by profession, but not by true implantation. Whoever is united to Christ bears the fruit of gospel obedience and genuine holiness. Faith is always accompanied by good works. The believer not only emerges from the grave of their natural state but also sheds their grave-clothes, the dominating lusts in which they walked like a ghost, dead while living in them (Colossians 3:7-8). For Christ has said of them, as of Lazarus, "Unbind them and let them go."

Now that the believer has put on Christ, they embody Him, so to speak, like an actor in borrowed robes portraying a king on stage, walking as Christ also walked. Now the fruit of the Spirit in them is found in all goodness (Ephesians 5:9). The fruits of holiness will be evident in the hearts, speech, and lives of those who are united to Christ. The hidden person of the heart is not only a temple built for God and consecrated to Him but also used and employed for Him, where love, fear, trust, and all other aspects of unseen religion are exercised (Philippians 3:3). The heart is no longer the devil's common ground, where thoughts roam free; even vain thoughts are

detested (Psalm 119:113). Instead, it is God's enclosure, a garden protected for Him (Song of Solomon 4:16). It is true that there are still weeds of corruption because the ground is not yet perfectly cleared, but the person, on the day of their new creation, is set to tend and maintain it.

A live coal from the altar has touched their lips, and they are purified (Psalm 15:1-3). There may indeed be a smooth tongue where there is a false heart. The voice may resemble Jacob's, while the hands belong to Esau. But, "If anyone among you thinks they are religious and does not bridle their tongue but deceives their heart, their religion is in vain" (James 1:26). The power of godliness will govern the tongue, even if it is a world of iniquity. If someone is a follower of Christ, their speech will reveal it; they will speak the language of Canaan, not the language of Ashdod. They will neither be silent in their religion nor let their tongue run unchecked, given that grace has added a third guard to the tongue's natural double guard.

The fruits of holiness will be evident in their outward behaviour, for they have clean hands and a pure heart (Psalm 24:4). They are a godly person, dutifully observing the commandments of the first table of the law, and a righteous person, honestly fulfilling the duties of the second table. In their conduct, they are both a good Christian and a good neighbour. They act towards God as if people's eyes are upon them, and towards others, believing that God's eyes are upon them. They dare not separate in their practice what God has joined in His law.

Thus, the branches in Christ are full of good fruits. These fruits are a collection of vital actions for which Jesus Christ is both the source and the goal. He is the source because He lives in them, and "the life they live is by faith in the Son of God" (Galatians 2:20). He is the goal

because they live for Him, and "for them, to live is Christ" (Philippians 1:21). Religious duties are like orphaned children in rags; some people will not accept them because they never loved them nor their Father; some take them in because they might be useful to them. However, the saints accept them for their Father's sake, that is, for Christ's sake, and they are lovely in their eyes because they resemble Him. This new life of the saints could never have been shaped from the natural abilities of their souls by any combined force of all created power. They would have remained eternally barren if they had not been "married to Christ, bringing forth fruit unto God" (Romans 7:4).

If you ask me, "How can your nourishment, growth, and fruitfulness be advanced?" I offer these few suggestions:

1. Ensure your genuine connection with the foundation through unfeigned faith and beware of hypocrisy: a branch that is not sound at its core will certainly wither. The Lord's trees are trees of righteousness (Isaiah 61:3). So, when others fade, they bear fruit. Hypocrisy is a disease in the core of religion that will eventually consume everything. It is a leak in the ship that will surely sink it. Sincerity of grace will make it lasting, however weak; just as the smallest twig that is sound at its core will draw nourishment from the foundation and grow, while the most massive branch that is rotten can never recover because it receives no nourishment.
2. Strive to be steadfast in the truths and ways of God. An unsettled and wavering judgment is a great enemy of Christian growth and fruitfulness, as the apostle teaches (Ephesians 4:14-15). A rolling stone gathers no moss, and a wavering judgment makes for a fruitless life. Although a tree may be sound, how can it grow or

bear fruit if you are continually moving it from one soil to another?

3. Endeavour to remove the suckers, as gardeners do, to help their trees thrive. These are unmortified lusts; therefore, "mortify your members that are upon the earth" (Colossians 3:5). When the Israelites obtained meat for their lusts, they brought leanness to their souls. Those who have many hungry children to feed will struggle to feed themselves. To prosper, one must resist the cravings of excessive desires.
4. Utilise the ordinances of God for these purposes. The trees of righteousness flourish in the courts of our God (Psalm 92:13). The waters of the sanctuary are the means appointed by God to help His people grow like willows by the watercourses. Therefore, "long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up" (1 Peter 2:2). Approach these wells of salvation not just to look at them, but to draw water from them. The sacrament of the Lord's Supper is specially appointed for these ends. It is not only a solemn public declaration and a seal of our union and communion with Christ, but also a means of intimate communion with Him, strengthening our union with Him, our faith, love, repentance, and other graces (1 Corinthians 10:16, 12:13). Dedicate yourself to prayer; open your mouths wide, and He will fill them. By using these means, the branches in Christ may be further nourished, grow, and bear much fruit.

A seventh benefit is the acceptance of their acts of holiness before the Lord. Even though they may be quite imperfect, they are accepted because they are connected to Christ, the blessed foundation on which the branches grow. In contrast, the acts of others are rejected by God, as seen in Genesis 4:4-5 and Hebrews 11:3. The believer sees

many faults in their best performances, but the Lord graciously accepts them.

There is no grace in the heart without a corresponding weakness of corruption. Even their sincerity has a mixture of duplicity or hypocrisy, as seen in Galatians 2:13. Hence, there are shortcomings in the exercise of every grace and the performance of every duty. Yet, this does not hinder their acceptance, as described in Song of Solomon 6:10. The dawning of grace and goodwill to Christ is pleasant and acceptable to Him.

Despite the remnants of unbelief causing the hand of faith to shake, the Lord is so pleased with it that He employs it to obtain pardons and supplies of grace. The faith of the man who cried out, "Lord, I believe, help thou mine unbelief!" in Mark 9:24 was effective. Although the remnants of worldly affections make their love's flame weak and smoky, He focuses on the beauty of the flame, as seen in Song of Solomon 4:10.

Their good works are accepted, and even the smallest acts done in faith and from faith are considered significant. If they cannot offer gold, silver, or precious stones, their smaller contributions will not be rejected, as they are dipped in faith and the Mediator's blood. Even a cup of cold water given in the name of a disciple will be rewarded (Matthew 10:42). Not a single good word or tear shed for Christ will go unnoticed (Malachi 3:16, Psalm 56:8).

Their intentions are accepted for the actions, and their sorrow for the lack of intention is accepted as intention itself, as seen in 2 Corinthians 8:12. Their groanings are heard in heaven, and their meaning is well understood there. Their small contributions are more valuable than other people's large offerings. Their stammering

and broken sentences are more pleasant to their Father in heaven than the most eloquent speeches of those not in Christ.

The Mediator takes their petitions, adjusts them, and presents them to the Father, resulting in their acceptance in the heavenly court.

Every true Christian is a temple for God. If you look for sacrifices, they are present; they offer the sacrifice of praise and do good deeds. With such sacrifices, God is well pleased, as stated in Hebrews 13:15-16. Christ himself is the altar that sanctifies the gift (verse 10). If we look for incense, it is there too. The graces of the Spirit are found in their hearts, and the Spirit of the crucified Christ fuels them and puts them into action. As the fire was brought from the altar of burnt offering to set the incense alight, their graces ascend heavenward like pillars of smoke (Song of Solomon 3:6). However, even the best of incense will leave ashes behind; our great High Priest takes away the ashes and refuse of all the saints' services through his mediation on their behalf.

An eighth benefit of union with Christ is stability. The Christian cannot fall away but must persevere until the end, as stated in John 10:28. Indeed, if a branch does not connect with the trunk, it will fall away when strong winds blow. However, the branch connected to the trunk stands firm regardless of the wind. Sometimes a stormy wind of temptation blows from hell and shakes the branches in Christ, the true vine. Still, their union with him is their security; they may be shaken but never removed. The Lord will provide a way of escape along with the temptation (1 Corinthians 10:13).

Calm periods are rarely prolonged; there is almost always some wind blowing, so branches are rarely entirely at rest. However, sometimes violent winds arise, threatening to tear them from their trunk. Similarly, saints face daily temptations, and sometimes the wind

from hell rises so high and blows so fiercely that it makes even the strongest branches touch the ground. Yet, being connected to Christ, they rise again, despite the most violent efforts of the prince of the power of the air (Psalm 94:18).

The Christian grows through these trials, benefiting from them as they reveal the soul's connection to Christ and Christ's connection to the soul. Just as the wind in the bellows, which could extinguish a candle, instead fuels a fire, such temptations often invigorate the true Christian, awakening the graces of the Spirit within them. This reveals both the reality and the strength of grace in them. As Martin Luther, that great man of God, said, "One Christian who has had experience of temptation is worth a thousand others."

Sometimes a stormy wind of trouble and persecution from people in the world blows upon the vine, which is Christ in a mystical sense. However, union with the trunk provides sufficient security for the branches. During times of peace and outward prosperity for the church, while the angels hold back the winds, many branches are attached to the trunk without truly connecting or drawing life from it, even though they are bound by external ordinances. These branches may remain on the trunk for a while and stand with ease during calm periods. But when storms arise and winds blow, they will begin to fall off one after another. The stronger the wind, the greater the number of branches that will fall. Some large branches, when they fall, may even drag others down with them and bruise or press down some true branches. These true branches would also fall if it weren't for the strong grip the trunk has on them.

In these situations, many branches that were once high and prominent are found lying on the ground, withered and ready to be gathered up and thrown into the fire (Matthew 13:6; John 15:6).

However, no matter how violently the winds blow, none of the truly grafted branches that are connected with the trunk are missing when the storm turns into a calm (John 17:12). The smallest twig growing in Christ will endure and survive when the tallest cedars growing on their own roots are knocked down (Romans 8:35, 36-39). However severely Israel is "sifted," not even the smallest grain or "little stone" will fall to the ground (Amos 9:9). This is an allusion to the sifting of fine pebble stones from heaps of dust and sand. Though the sand and dust fall to the ground or are blown away by the wind and trampled underfoot, not even a small stone will fall, reflecting the precision of the sieve and the care of the sifter.

There is nothing more prone to fall to the ground than a stone. Yet, if people professing religion are living stones built on Christ, the cornerstone, even if they are small stones, they will not fall to the ground, whatever storm beats upon them (1 Peter 2:4-6). All the good grain in the church of Christ is of this kind: they are stones in terms of solidity and living stones in terms of activity. If people are solid, substantial Christians, they will not be like chaff tossed about by every wind, having so much liveliness that they have nothing of the stone. And if they are active Christians, whose spirits stir within them, as Paul's did when he saw the city wholly given to idolatry (Acts 17:16), they will not lie like stones, to be turned over, cut, and carved according to the whims of others, having so much of the stone that there is no liveliness left in them.

Our God's house is vast, containing not only vessels of gold, but also of earth, as mentioned in 2 Timothy 2:20. Both kinds of vessels are susceptible to becoming dirty. Therefore, when God brings affliction upon the church, He has regard for both. The vessels of gold are not destroyed but instead, refined by the fiery trials of affliction, much like goldsmiths refine gold. As stated in Isaiah 1:25, "And I will turn

my hand upon thee, and purely purge away thy dross." Conversely, vessels of earth are destroyed, being broken into pieces, as if they were pottery. As Isaiah 1:28 declares, "And the destruction," or breaking "of the transgressors, and of the sinners, shall be together." This passage may allude to the law that required the breaking of vessels of earth when unclean, whereas vessels of wood and gold only needed to be rinsed (Leviticus 15:12).

The ninth benefit of being grafted into Christ is support. If you are a branch grafted into Christ, the root supports you. The believer leans on Christ as a weak woman on her beloved husband during a journey, as expressed in Canticles 8:5. He relies on Him as a feeble old man relies on his staff, as described in Isaiah 50:10. He rolls his burdens onto Him, much like a person unloads a weight that is too heavy to carry alone, onto another who can bear it, as noted in Psalm 22:8. Many weights can hang upon and press down the branches in Christ, the true vine. Nevertheless, no matter what weight the branches bear, the stock supports both the branch and the weight upon it.

1. Christ supports believers in Him under the weight of outward troubles. This is a large promise found in Isaiah 43:2, "When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you." Look at how David was supported under a heavy load in 1 Samuel 30:6. His city Ziklag was burnt, his wives were taken captive, and his men spoke of stoning him. Nothing was left him but his God and his faith. By his faith, he encouraged himself in his God. The Lord comes and lays His cross on His people's shoulders. It presses them down, and they are likely to sink under it, and therefore cry, "Master, save us, we perish." But He supports them under their burden. He bears them up, and they bear their cross. Thus the Christian,

with a weight of outward troubles upon him, goes lightly under his burden, having the everlasting arms underneath him. The Christian has a spring of comfort that he cannot lose, and therefore never lacks something to support him. If a man has all his riches in money, robbers may take it away. Then what does he have left? But even though a landed proprietor may be robbed of his money, his lands remain for his support. Those who build their comfort on worldly goods may quickly be comfortless, but those who are united to Christ shall find comfort when all the streams of worldly enjoyments are dried up. In Job 6:13, he asks, "Is not my help in me? And is wisdom driven quite from me?" That is, though his substance is gone, his servants, children, health, and soundness of body are all gone, yet his grace is not gone too. Though the Sabeans have driven away his oxen and asses, and the Chaldeans have driven away his camels, they have not driven away his faith and his hope too. These are yet in him. They are not driven from him. So by them, he can fetch comfort from heaven when he can have none from earth.

2. Christ supports his people under a weight of inward troubles and discouragements. Often, their "heart and flesh fail them," but then "God is the strength of their heart," as in Psalm 73:26. They may have a weight of guilt pressing them down, making their backs bend, and their spirits sink, but Christ takes it off and gives them a pardon as they cast their burden upon Him. It is as if He takes the soul, as one marries a widow under a burden of debt, and pays it all off. When creditors come to Christ's spouse, she carries them to her husband, confesses the debt, declares she is unable to pay, and lays it all upon Him. Sometimes, due to carelessness, the Christian may lose their discharge, and when the law takes the opportunity to proceed

against them for a debt already paid, and they cannot find their discharge, they are distressed. Many arrows go through the heart now, and they read and acknowledge the long accounts laid before them. Often, they see the officers coming to apprehend them, and the prison door open to receive them. Yet, the everlasting arms of the Mediator are underneath them, and they rely on the great Surety, which keeps them from sinking utterly under discouragements. They may also have a weight of strong lusts pressing upon them, and a body of death upon them. A leg or an arm of death, if I may so speak, would be a terrible load, and sometimes one lively lust lies so heavy on a child of God that they can no more remove it than a child could throw a giant from off him. Yet, their support is from that root which bears them, from the everlasting arm that is underneath them, and "His grace is sufficient for them," as in 2 Cor. 12:9. The great stay of the believer is not the grace of God within them, which is a well whose streams sometimes run dry, but it is the grace of God without them, the grace that is in Jesus Christ, which is an ever-flowing fountain to which the believer can never come amiss. The apostle tells us in the same verse that it is "the power of Christ." In this combat, the believer, like the eagle, first flies aloft by faith and then comes down on the prey. Lastly, they have a weight of weakness and wants upon them, but they "cast over that burden on the Lord," their strength, "and he sustains them," Psalm 55:22. With all their wants and weakness, they are cast upon Him, as the poor, weak, and naked babe coming out of the womb is cast into the lap of one appointed to take care of it, Psalm 22:10. Though they may be destitute, like a shrub in the wilderness, which the foot of every beast may tread down, the Lord will regard them, Psalm 102:17. It is not surprising that the weakest plant should be safe in a garden, but

our Lord Jesus Christ is a hedge for protection to His weak and destitute ones, even in a wilderness.

Objection: "But if the saints are so supported, how is it that they often fall under temptation and discouragements?"

Answer: 1. However low they may fall, they never fall off, and that is a significant matter. They "are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation," 1 Pet. 1:5. Hypocrites may fall so that they fall off and fall into the pit, like a bucket falling into a well when the chain breaks. But even if a child of God falls so low that the waters go over their head, there is still a bond of union between Christ and them; the chain is not broken, and they will not go to the ground. They will be drawn up again, as Jesus said to Simon in Luke 22:31-32: "And the Lord said, 'Simon, Simon, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: but I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not.'"

Answer 2. The falls of the saints come from their failure to utilize their union with Christ, their failure to use Him by faith to stay or bear them up. Psalm 27:13 says, "I had fainted, unless I had believed." Just as a nurse holds a child in her arms so that it cannot fall to the ground, yet if the unwary child does not hold onto her, it may fall backward in her arms and be hurt. David's fall broke his bones, Psalm 2:8, but it did not break the bond of union between Christ and him; the Holy Spirit, the bond of that union, was not taken from him, verse 11.

I shall list the final benefit of being united with Christ, which is the special care of the Husbandman, as mentioned in John 15:1-2, "I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit." By virtue of their

union with Christ, believers are the objects of God's special care and providence. Christ is God's vine, and the saints are His vineyard that He has a special interest in and concern for, as stated in Song of Solomon 8:12, "My vineyard, my very own, is for myself." The Keeper of the vineyard does not slumber nor sleep and watches over it day and night. He waters it with the dew of heaven, as mentioned in Isaiah 27:3, and dresses and weeds it to increase its fruitfulness, as stated in John 15:2. The luxuriant twigs that hinder fruitfulness are cut off, mainly through the ministry of the Word and cross or afflictions. Believers require the ministry of the Word, as emphasized in 1 Corinthians 3:9, "For we are God's fellow workers. You are God's field, God's building," as well as the cross, as mentioned in 1 Peter 1:6.

Therefore, if we were to consider the cross as one of the benefits that flow to believers from their union with Christ, I believe that we would not be wrong. Surely, in their sufferings, they "suffer with him," Rom. 8:17. The assurances they have of the cross have more the nature of a promise than a threat, Psalm 89:30-33, "If his children forsake my law...then will I visit their transgression with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes. Nevertheless, my loving-kindness will I not utterly take from him, nor suffer my faithfulness to fail." This looks like a tutor's promise to a dying father to take care of the children left with him, and to give them both nurture and admonition for their good. The covenant of grace truly turns the spears of affliction into pruning hooks for those in Christ, Isa. 28:9, "By this therefore shall the iniquity of Jacob be purged, and this is all the fruit to take away his sin." So why should we be angry with our cross? Why should we be frightened by it? The believer must take up his cross and follow his leader, the Lord Jesus Christ. He must take up his cross every day, Luke 9:23, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily." Yes, he must also take

up his cross on special days, Lam. 2:22, "Thou hast called, as in a solemn day, my terrors round about." For a long time, the Jewish church had many pleasant meetings at the temple on solemn days for the worship of God, but they experienced a solemnity of a different nature when God called the Chaldean army to burn the temple and lay Jerusalem in ruins. And since the church of God is still militant in this lower realm, how can it be that the clouds will not return after the rain? But the cross of Christ, which is the name given to the saint's troubles, is a kindly name to the believer. It is a cross indeed, not to the believer's graces, but to his corruptions. The hypocrite's seeming grace may indeed breathe its last on a cross, as the grace of the stony-ground hearers did in Matthew 13:6, "When the sun" of persecution, verse 21, "was up, they were scorched, and because they had no root, they withered away," but never has one of the real graces in a believer died on the cross. In fact, as the candle shines brightest at night, and the fire burns most fiercely in intense frost, so the believer's graces are usually most vigorous in times of trouble.

The cross has a certain pleasure and sweetness for those who can discern and find it. It is pleasant for a Christian to be tried for heaven and stand as a candidate for glory. It is a joy to travel over mountains where the Christian can see the footprints of Christ and the flock who have gone before them. It is sweet for a saint to exercise their grace and see how a good God crosses their corrupt inclinations and prevents their folly. It is refined pleasure to observe how God pinches unruly lusts, taking away their provision, so that the Christian can govern them. Truly, there is a paradise within this thorn-hedge. Often the people of God are in bondage, which is not loosed until they are bound with cords of affliction. God throws them into a fiery furnace, which burns off their bonds, and then, like the three children, they are loose, walking in the midst of the fire. God gives

His children a potion with one bitter ingredient, and if that does not work, He puts in a second, a third, and so on, as needed, to work together for their good. With cross winds, He hastens them to their labour. They are often found in such ways that the cross is the happiest thing that they can meet with. Worldly things often slow the Christian down on their way to heaven. God sends a wind of trouble that blows the burden off the Christian's back, allowing them to walk more speedily on their way. After God has drawn some gilded earth from the Christian's heart that was drawing them away from God, they can trust in the name of the Lord. It has been observed that "no history makes mention of any man who has been made better by riches." I doubt whether modern histories can supply the defect of ancient histories in this point. But many have been worse off for riches: thousands have been hugged to death in the embraces of a smiling world, and many good men have been wounded by outward prosperity, wounds that must be cured by the cross. Sometimes, spiritual imposthumes gather in the breasts of God's people in times of outward prosperity and are broken and dispersed by the cross. It is kind for believers to be healed by stripes, although they are usually so weak as to cry out for fear at the sight of the pruning-hook, as if it were the destroying axe. They think that the Lord is coming to kill them, when He is actually coming to cure them.

Final Words to Saints and Sinners

I will now conclude by addressing a few words, first to believers, and then to sinners.

To those of you who are believers, I say:

First, strive to obtain and maintain a continuous relationship and fellowship with Jesus Christ, which means continually drawing fresh grace from Him by faith and making a suitable return of exercising grace and holy obedience. Be cautious of creating a divide between Christ and your soul. If it has already happened, which appears to be the case with many today, make every effort to remove it. Many people in the world disregard Christ, even though you must not. Many who seemed destined for heaven have turned away from Him. The warmth of outward peace and prosperity has caused some to abandon their faith, even though they clung to it when the wind of hardship was blowing upon them. "Do you want to go away too?" (John 6:67). By slighting communion with Christ, you show the basest ingratitude, as Jeremiah 2:31 attests, "Have I been a desert to Israel, a land of darkness? Why do my people say, 'We are free to roam; we will come to you no more?'" Beloved, is this how you treat your friend? It is inappropriate for any wife to disregard conversation with her husband, but especially for you, who was taken from a prison or a dunghill by your Lord. This is not the time for you to be outside your chambers (Isaiah 26:20). Those who are closest to God now may have a hard time standing when the trial comes, so how difficult will it be for others who are caught off guard by troubles while guilt remains unremoved from their conscience? It is a terrifying trial to be awakened from a deep sleep and thrown into a raging sea like Jonah. Feeling the trouble before we see it coming, and being past hope before we experience any fear, is a sad situation. Therefore, tear down your idols of jealousy, put to death those lusts, unruly appetites, and desires that have stolen your hearts away, leaving you like Samson without his hair, and say, "I will go and return to my first husband, for it was better for me then than it is now" (Hosea 2:7).

Secondly, walk in a manner that befits your union with Christ. Demonstrate your connection with Him by "walking as He also walked," 1 John 2:6. If you have been delivered from the power of darkness, let your light shine before others. "Shine as lights in the world, holding forth the word of life," just as a lantern holds a candle, which then shines through it, Philippians 2:15-16. Now that you profess Christ to be in you, let His image shine through your actions. Remember that the purpose of your life is to prove, by practical evidence, what you profess.

1. You are aware of the character of a wife: "She that is married cares how she may please her husband." Therefore, you should "walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing," Colossians 1:10. This is the chief objective of life; you must please Him, even if it displeases the entire world. What He hates must be hateful to you, since He hates it. Deny any lust that seeks to win your heart, for you are joined to the Lord, and the grace of God has instructed you to do so. Let Him be a covering to your eyes, for your choice has already been made, and you must not dishonor your head. A man cares for his feet because if he catches a cold there, it moves up to his head. "Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them the members of a harlot? God forbid," says the apostle in 1 Corinthians 6:14. Will you take that heart of yours, which is the dwelling-place of Christ, and give lodging to His enemies there? Will you take that body, which is His temple, and defile it by using its members as instruments of sin?
2. Strive to bring forth much fruit. A branch that is well-laden with fruit is the glory of the vine and the husbandman. Jesus said in John 15:8, "Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples." A barren tree is safer in a

forest than in an orchard. Branches in Christ that do not bear fruit will be taken away and cast into the fire.

3. Keep your mind focused on heavenly things and have contempt for the world. You are united to Christ, who is your head and husband and is in heaven. Therefore, your hearts should be there also. Colossians 3:1 says, "If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God." Let the descendants of the serpent continue to crawl on their bellies and eat the dust of the earth, but let the members of Christ be ashamed to bow down and feed with them.
4. Live and act with dependence on Jesus Christ. That which grows on its own root is a tree, not a branch. It is the nature of a branch to depend on the stock for everything and to derive all its sap from there. Depend on Jesus for life, light, strength, and all spiritual benefits. Galatians 2:20 says, "I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me; and the life which I live now in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God." In the mystical union, strength is united to weakness, so that death and earth may mount up on borrowed wings. Depend on Him for temporal benefits also; Matthew 6:11 says, "Give us this day our daily bread." If we have trusted Him with our eternal concerns, we should be ashamed to distrust Him in the matter of our provision in the world.
5. Be of a meek disposition, and strive to unite with your fellow members of Christ's body, as you are united to the meek Jesus, the blessed center of union. There is a prophecy to this purpose concerning the kingdom of Christ in Isaiah 11:6, "The wolf shall dwell with the lamb; and the leopard shall lie down with the

kid." This alludes to the beasts in Noah's ark. The beasts of prey that were used to kill and devour others, when they came into the ark, lay down in peace with them. The lamb was not in danger from the wolf there, nor the kid from the leopard. There was a beautiful fulfillment of it in the early church, Acts 4:32, "And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul." And this unity prevails in all the members of Christ according to the measure of the grace of God in them.

Man is born naked: he comes naked into this world, as if God designed him for the picture of peace. And surely, when he is born again, he does not come into the new world of grace with claws to tear, a sword to wound, and fire in his hand to burn up his fellow members in Christ, because they cannot see with his light. It is sad to see Christ's lilies as thorns in one another's sides, Christ's lambs devouring one another like lions, and God's diamonds cutting one another. Sin is not a proper cement for the members of Christ, though Herod and Pontius Pilate may be made friends that way. The apostle's rule is plain, Heb. 12:14, "Follow peace with all men, and holiness." Pursue peace not only to the extent of your own interests and preferences, but beyond them if it conforms to the Divine will. Do not pursue peace beyond holiness, which is conformity to the Divine will. Peace is precious, but it may be bought too dearly. Therefore, it is better to lack peace than to obtain it at the expense of truth or holiness. Otherwise, it cannot be bought too dearly, and it will always be precious in the eyes of the sons of peace.

And now to sinners, (those who are not yet in the state of grace), what can I say? I have shown you some of the privileges that belong to those who are united to Christ, but unfortunately, they are not yours because you are not His. The sinfulness of an unregenerate state belongs to you, as well as the misery that comes with it. You do

not share in the righteousness of Christ, and therefore, there is no true peace for you - no peace with God or peace of conscience. You are not a part of God's family, and you do not have the adoption that was spoken of earlier. The Spirit of sanctification is not within you, and, in short, you have no inheritance among the sanctified.

All I can say to you is that the situation is not hopeless. You can still have a share in these privileges. As it says in Revelation 3:20, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come into him, and will sup with him, and be with me." Heaven is still offering a union with earth; the Potter is still making a plea to His own clay, and the gates of the city of refuge are still open. Oh, if only we could compel you to come in! This concludes what I have to say about the state of grace.

STATE IV

THE ETERNAL STATE

I. DEATH

For I know that thou wilt bring me to death and to the house appointed for all living. - JOB 30: 23

I now turn to discuss the eternal state of man, which he enters through death. Job contemplates this transition seriously and solemnly in the words of the text, which convey a general truth and his personal application of it. The general truth is assumed: every person must depart from this world through death; they must die. But where must they go? They must go to the house appointed for all the living, to the grave—the dark, somber, solitary abode in the land of forgetfulness. Wherever the body is laid until the resurrection, death brings us home, as if to a dwelling place. While we are in the body, we are merely lodging in an inn, on our way back home. When we arrive at our grave, we arrive at our true home, our everlasting dwelling place (Ecclesiastes 12:5). All living beings, regardless of their goodness or wickedness, their age or youth, are destined to become inhabitants of this house. Man's life flows like a river into the devouring depths of death. Those who currently dwell in palaces will have to leave them behind and find their home in this house. And those who have nowhere to lay their heads will finally have a place. It is appointed for all by the unfailing counsel of God. This appointment cannot be evaded; it is an unbreakable law that mortals

cannot disobey. Job personally applies this general truth to himself with the following words: "I know that thou wilt bring me to death," etc. He knew that he had to face death, that his soul and body would inevitably part ways, and that God, who had determined the timing, would undoubtedly see it through. At times, Job even invited death to come and take him to its house, to the point where he was in danger of rushing to it prematurely (Job 7:15). But here he acknowledges that God would bring him to it, or rather, bring him back to it, as the word implies. This suggests that we only have life in this world as fugitives from death, which reaches out its cold arms to receive us from the womb. Although we narrowly escape its grasp at birth, we cannot escape it for long; we will be brought back to it. Job knew this as an undeniable fact and eagerly anticipated it.

DOCTRINE: Everyone must die. Although this doctrine has been confirmed by the experience of every generation since Abel entered the house appointed for all the living, and even though the living know that they will die, it is necessary to discuss the certainty of death so that it may be impressed upon the mind and duly considered.

Therefore, consider the following:

1. There is an unalterable decree of death under which all men are bound. "It is appointed for men to die once" (Hebrews 9:27). Death is reserved for them, just as parents set aside something for their children. They can expect it and cannot avoid it, for God has ordained and reserved it for them. There is no uncertainty about it; "we must indeed die" (2 Samuel 14:14). Despite some people's unwillingness to acknowledge death, every person will undoubtedly experience it (Psalm 89:48). Death is an opponent with whom everyone must contend. We

enter the arena to face it, and it emerges as the victor (Ecclesiastes 8:8). "No one has power over the wind to contain it; so no one has power over the day of his death." Those who are found alive at Christ's coming will be changed (1 Corinthians 15:51). However, that change will be equivalent to death and serve the same purpose. Everyone else must follow the common path, the way of all flesh.

2. Let us consider daily observations. "For all can see that wise men die; the foolish and the senseless alike perish" (Psalm 49:10). Despite the multitudes that came before us, there is still enough room on this earth for us. They have departed to make room for us, just as we must depart to make room for others. Death has been transporting men to another world for a long time, and countless multitudes have already gone there. Yet the work continues; death still claims new inhabitants every day for the house appointed for all the living. Who has ever heard the grave say, "Enough!"? It has been collecting for a long time, but it still demands more. This world is like a bustling fair or market where people are constantly entering and leaving. The assembly is in chaos, and most do not know why they have gathered together. It is also like a town situated on the road to a great city, where some travelers have passed through, some are passing through, and others are only just arriving (Ecclesiastes 1:4). "One generation passes away, and another generation comes; but the earth abides forever." Death is an inexorable, unstoppable messenger who cannot be swayed by the power of the mighty, the riches of the wealthy, or the pleas of the poor. It does not show reverence for the aged nor pity for the innocent child. The bold and daring cannot defy it, nor can the faint-hearted secure an exemption from this battle.

3. The human body is composed of perishable materials. "Dust you are, and to dust you shall return" (Genesis 3:19). Even the strongest among us are like fragile clay vessels easily shattered into pieces. While the soul temporarily resides in this mortal body, it dwells in a house not built of stone but of clay, and the mud walls are bound to crumble away. This is especially true because the foundation is not on a rock but in the dust. We are crushed before the moth, despite the moth's delicate nature, as a mere touch can dispatch it (Job 4:19). These principles are like gunpowder; the slightest spark can ignite them and destroy the house. A stone in a raisin or a hair in a glass of milk has choked people and reduced the house of clay to dust. If we consider the intricate design and structure of our bodies, how fearfully and wonderfully we are made, and how our lives depend on the precise balance of fluids and humors, we will realize that death has as many entry points as the body has pores. When we compare the soul and body, we may conclude that there is something more astonishing about our life than our death, and that it is more unusual to see dust walking on dust than lying down in it. Although the lamp of our life may not be extinguished abruptly, the flame will eventually fade due to a lack of oil. What are the diseases and ailments to which we are susceptible but messengers of death that come to prepare its way? They greet us as soon as we enter this world, reminding us that our arrival signifies our departure. Nevertheless, some are snatched away in an instant without being forewarned by sickness or disease.

4. We possess sinful souls, and therefore, we have mortal bodies. Death follows sin just as a shadow follows the body. The wicked must die as a result of the covenant of works' curse: "For when you eat of it you will surely die" (Genesis 2:17). The righteous

must also die so that, just as death entered through sin, sin may be eradicated through death. Christ has removed the sting of death for the righteous, although He has not yet abolished death itself. Therefore, although it may seize them like a viper seizing Paul's hand, it will not harm them. However, since the leprosy of sin is present in the walls of the house, they must be torn down, and all the materials must be removed.

5. According to the Scriptural account, man's life in this world is only a few steps removed from death. The Scriptures depict life as vain and fleeting, short in its duration and swift in its passing.

First, man's life is a futile and empty thing. It exists for a fleeting moment and then ceases to be. Job declares, "My days are vanity" (Job 7:16). If one suspects that afflicted Job is biased in this matter, listen to the wise and prosperous Solomon's description of the days of his life as "vanity" (Ecclesiastes 7:15). Moses, a man of great activity, compares our days to a sleep, stating, "They are as a sleep" (Psalm 90:5), which goes unnoticed until it is over. This comparison is apt, for few people truly grasp the meaning of life until death awakens them. We begin to realize that we were truly alive. "We spend our years as a tale that is told" (Psalm 90:9). Like an idle tale, it may captivate for a moment, but once it is finished, it is quickly forgotten. Similarly, a person is forgotten when the story of their life concludes. Life is like a dream or a vision of the night, lacking substance. When one awakens, it all vanishes. Job expresses this idea, stating, "He shall fly away as a dream, and shall not be found; yea, he shall be chased away as a vision of the night" (Job 20:8). Life is but a fleeting illusion or image (Psalm 39:6). In this world, man is like a walking statue, his life a mere imitation of life, as death pervades it.

If we examine life in its various stages, we find it to be a collection of vanities. "Childhood and youth are vanity" (Ecclesiastes 11:10). We enter the world as the most helpless of creatures. Young birds and animals can fend for themselves to some extent, but an infant is completely reliant on others for assistance. Our childhood is spent in trivial and insignificant pleasures that become the subject of ridicule in later years. Youth is a fleeting bloom, quickly fading away. It is a period marked by recklessness, foolishness, and thoughtlessness, as we indulge in a variety of meaningless pursuits, navigating a flood of vanities. Yet, before we know it, this stage is over, and we find ourselves in middle age, surrounded by a cloud of worries that we must navigate. We face thorny challenges as we strive to fulfill the plans and schemes of our mature thoughts. The more we find solace in earthly pleasures, the more bitterness we experience when parting from them. Then comes old age, accompanied by its own set of infirmities, labor, and sorrow (Psalm 90:10), bringing us closer to the grave. In short, "All flesh is like grass" (Isaiah 40:6). Every stage of life is vanity. Even in one's prime, when the fervor of youth has subsided and the burdens of old age have not yet arrived, "man at his best state is altogether vanity" (Psalm 39:5). Death claims some in childhood, others in the prime of youth, and still others when they have reached maturity. Few remain standing until they, like ripe grain, depart from the earth. All eventually experience death.

Secondly, man's life is short. It is not just a vanity but a fleeting vanity. Consider how the Scriptures measure the length of human life. Although it was once counted in hundreds of years, no one has ever reached a thousand, which still pales in comparison to eternity. Now, hundreds have been reduced to scores. The maximum length is seventy or eighty years (Psalm 90:10), but few reach such a milestone. Death rarely waits until one is bowed down by old age to claim them. As if "years" were too generous a term for such a brief

existence on earth, our lives are measured in months. Job remarks, "The number of his months are with thee" (Job 14:5). Our journey, like that of the moon, is completed in a short time. We are always waxing or waning until we disappear. Often, our lives are counted in days, and even then they are few. Job states, "Man, that is born of a woman, is of few days" (Job 14:1). In fact, Scripture reduces it to a single day, a hired worker's day, who diligently observes when their workday ends and ceases their labor (verse 6). Our lives are even compared to a moment (2 Corinthians 4:17). Although our light affliction may last a lifetime, it is but for a moment. In another passage, it is reduced even further, as low as one can go, when the Psalmist declares, "Mine age is as nothing before thee" (Psalm 39:5). Similarly, Solomon mentions "a time to be born, and a time to die," but does not mention a time to live, as if our life were merely a leap from the womb to the grave. Moreover, consider the various similes used in Scripture to convey the brevity of man's life. Hezekiah describes his age as being removed from him like a shepherd's tent, comparing it to a weaver cutting off a completed piece of cloth (Isaiah 38:12). The shepherd's tent is swiftly packed up, for the flock cannot graze in one place for long. Such is a person's life on earth—here today, gone tomorrow. It is like a weaver's shuttle, moving with incredible speed, thrown from one side of the loom to the other. However swift the shuttle may be, "our days are swifter than a weaver's shuttle" (Job 7:6). How quickly man is hurled through time into eternity! Job vividly depicts the rapid passing of time, stating, "Now my days are swifter than a post; they flee away, they see no good. They are passed away as the swift ships; as the eagle that hasteth to the prey" (Job 9:25-26). He compares his days to a footpost—a runner who swiftly carries news without delay. Yet, even if the post were as fast as Ahimaaz, who outran Cush, our days would still surpass its speed. Our days fly away like a person fleeing for their life from a pursuing enemy. They run with all their might, but

our days move just as swiftly. Even someone fleeing for their life must occasionally stand still, lie down, or seek shelter, as Sisera did in Jael's tent, to rest. However, our time never pauses. It is likened to ships that sail continuously, night and day, until they reach their destination—a desired haven or a pleasure ship that outpaces cargo vessels. Our time, on the other hand, always flows rapidly. Therefore, it is compared to an eagle in flight, not with its ordinary pace, but when it swoops down upon its prey with extraordinary swiftness. Thus, our days flee away.

Having discussed death, let us reflect on its implications in discerning the vanity of the world, enduring with Christian contentment and patience through all trials and difficulties, mortifying our desires, and remaining steadfastly devoted to the Lord, prepared for the approach of death.

1. Let us, therefore, use death as a mirror to behold the vanity of the world and all the things within it that people value and esteem, upon which their hearts are set. Both the rich and the poor are equally engrossed in this world, bowing down to it, yet it is nothing more than a clay idol. People pursue this substantial vanity and eagerly chase after its shadows. The rich are ensnared by its embraces, and the poor exhaust themselves in the futile pursuit. Is it any wonder that the world's approval overwhelms us when we pursue it so ardently, even as it scorns us? But look into the grave, O mortal! Consider and be wise. Listen to the teachings of death and learn that no matter how tightly you hold on, you will eventually be forced to let go of the world. Even if you accumulate wealth and possessions, when you crawl into your final resting place, the underground house appointed for all the living, you must bid a final farewell to the enjoyments of this world. Your possessions will pass on to

another. "And whose shall those things be which thou hast provided?" (Luke 12:20) Soon, your share of these things will be minimal. If you lie down on the grass and stretch out, observing the impression your body leaves, you can see how much of this earth will ultimately belong to you. Perhaps you will receive a coffin and a burial shroud, but you cannot be certain. Many wealthy individuals have departed without as much as a small fraction of their wealth. Nevertheless, even if you do receive them, you can expect nothing more. Saladin's dying words offer a sobering lesson. He summoned his standard-bearer and instructed him to take his burial shroud on a pike and go to the camp, telling them that of all his conquests, victories, and triumphs, he had nothing left but that piece of linen to wrap his body for burial. "This world is a false friend," which abandons a person in their greatest hour of need and flees when they have the most to do. When you lie on your deathbed, no friends or relatives can rescue you. No wealth can ransom you or buy you an extra day or even an hour. Furthermore, the more you possess of this world's goods, the greater your sorrow is likely to be at the time of death. Although one may live more comfortably in a palace than in a cottage, it is often easier to die in a cottage, where there is very little to attach one to life.

2. It can serve as a source of Christian contentment and patience in the face of worldly losses and hardships. Reflecting on the doctrine of death can help alleviate distress and bring solace to a troubled heart. Just as Job, after experiencing great losses, sat down contented with the realization that he came into the world with nothing and will leave with nothing, saying, "Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither: the Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away: blessed be the name of the Lord" (Job 1:21). When misfortune strikes, such as the

loss of livestock due to disease or mortality, one is prone to fret and complain. However, contemplating one's own mortality, which is brought to mind by such events, can help silence complaints and bring peace to the spirit. Look to the "house appointed for all living" and learn: 1. "You will face a more severe blow than the loss of worldly possessions." Do not lament a wound in the leg or arm, for soon there will be a mortal blow to the heart. You may lose your closest relations—husbands may lose wives, wives may lose husbands, parents may lose children, and children may lose parents. But if any of these trials befall you, remember that you will eventually lose your own life. "Wherefore doth a living man complain?" (Lamentations 3:39) It is always profitable to consider, in times of affliction, that our situation could be worse. Whatever is consumed or taken from us, "It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed" (Lamentations 3:22). 2. "We spend only a short time in this world." In the brief span of our lives, our needs require only a small portion of time. When death comes, we will no longer require any of these things. Why should we torment ourselves with worries about tomorrow when we do not even know if we will be in need then? If a person's provisions for a journey are nearly exhausted, they are not troubled if they believe they are close to home. Are you working by candlelight, with little of the candle remaining? It may be that there is just as little sand left in your hourglass, and if so, you have little use for it. 3. "You have weightier matters that demand your attention." Death is at the door, so beware of losing your soul. When blood breaks out in one part of the body, a vein is often opened in another part to divert and stop the flow. Similarly, the Spirit of God sometimes cures people of sorrow for earthly matters by opening the vein of the heart, causing them to bleed for their sins. If we pursued heavenly things more fervently when our worldly affairs are

troubled, we would gain a twofold advantage: our sorrow for worldly matters would be redirected, and our greatest treasure would increase. 4. "Crosses of this nature will not last long." The smiles and frowns of the world will soon be buried together in everlasting forgetfulness. Smiles vanish like foam on water, and frowns are like passing stitches in one's side. Time flies swiftly, carrying away both earthly comforts and crosses. Neither of them will accompany us into "the house appointed for all living." There, the wicked cease from troubling, and the weary find rest. Prisoners rest together, free from the voice of the oppressor. The small and the great are there, and the servant is free from his master (Job 3:17–19). Look into eternity, and you will see that afflictions here are but momentary. Indeed, our time is so short that it does not allow our joys or sorrows to come to full fruition. Therefore, "let them that weep be as though they wept not; and they that rejoice as though they rejoiced not" (1 Corinthians 7:29–31). 5. "Death will level all people." Kings and beggars will dwell in the same house when they reach the end of their journey, regardless of their differing accommodations along the way. "The small and the great are there" (Job 3:19). We are all like actors on a stage in this world, and it matters little whether one plays the role of a prince or a peasant, for when they have finished their parts, they must both go behind the curtain and never appear again. 6. If you are not in Christ, whatever afflictions you experience now, "far worse troubles await you in the next world." Death will transform your crosses into pure, unadulterated curses. In that moment, you would gladly return to your former state of affliction and purchase it at any cost if there were any possibility of doing so. However, if you are in Christ, you can bear your cross with fortitude, as death will put an end to all your troubles. If a person is on a journey and their accommodations for the night are not satisfactory, they will not

be overly concerned because it is not their home. You are on the road to eternity, so do not be disturbed by the hardships you encounter in this world's inn. Do not fret because your circumstances are not as favorable as others'. One person travels with a cane, while another has only a common staff or stick—either will suffice. It matters little which one is yours, as both will be set aside when you reach your journey's end.

3. It can serve as a restraint to curb all kinds of lusts, especially those pertaining to the body. A serious contemplation of cold death and the solitary abode of the grave can be useful in suppressing them.

(1.) It can help diminish excessive concern for the body, which is the bane of many souls. Often, questions such as "What shall we eat? What shall we drink? And wherewithal shall we be clothed?" leave no room for the more important question of how to approach the Lord. The soul is tormented to answer these trivial questions in favor of the body while neglecting its own eternal interests. But why are people so preoccupied with repairing a crumbling cottage while leaving the inhabitant to bleed to death from neglected wounds? Why such great care for the body at the expense of the concerns of the immortal soul? O, do not be so anxious for that which can only serve your physical needs, for soon the cold clods of earth will suffice for your back and belly as well.

(2.) It can humble your pride regarding physical attributes, which vain individuals tend to boast about. Do not pride yourself in the bloom of youth, for even in your prime, you are merely ripening for the grave. Death strikes without

regard for age. Do not glory in your strength, for it will quickly fade. The time will come when you cannot even turn over in bed, and you will be carried by grieving friends to your final resting place. And what significance does your healthy constitution hold? Death does not always strike earliest where it first knocks at the door. It can dispatch some in a few hours as swiftly as others in many years. Do not pride yourself in your beauty, for it will "consume in the grave" (Psalm 49:14). Remember the transformation that death brings to even the fairest face, as Job says, "Thou changest his countenance, and sendest him away" (Job 14:20). Death renders the greatest beauty so repulsive that it must be buried out of sight. If a looking glass could be used in "the house appointed for all living," it would terrify those who gaze into it more often than they do their Bibles. And what of the finest clothing? They are nothing more than emblems of our sin and shame, soon to be exchanged for a burial shroud as the body becomes a feast for worms.

(3.) It can serve as a deterrent to sensuality and carnal desires, as urged in 1 Peter 2:11, "I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul." It is challenging to ignite wet wood, and once the fire takes hold, it is quickly extinguished. Sensuality renders a person unfit for divine communion and effectively extinguishes the spirit. Intemperance in eating and drinking hastens both the ruin of the soul and the body, and it accelerates death while making a person unfit for it. Therefore, "Take heed to yourselves lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting and drunkenness, and so that day come upon you unawares" (Luke 21:34). How often does the soul suffer a fatal blow in gratifying the

senses? Destruction enters through these doors. Thus, Job made a covenant with his eyes (Job 31:1). "The mouth of a strange woman is a deep pit; he that is abhorred of the Lord, shall fall therein" (Proverbs 22:14). "Let him that standeth, take heed lest he fall" (1 Corinthians 10:12). Beware of lasciviousness and strive for modesty in your attire, words, and actions. Eventually, the ravens of the valley of death will pluck out the wanton eye, and the obscene, filthy tongue will find peace in the land of silence. Embraced by grim death, the body's cold touch will effectively quell the heat of all carnal desires.

(4.) In short, it can check our earthly-mindedness and simultaneously vanquish "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life." Ah, why are we this way when we must die? Why are we so attached to temporal things, so eager to acquire them, so deeply affected by their loss? Allow me, upon contemplating "the house appointed for all living," to address the materialistic individual with the words of Solomon: "Wilt thou set thine eyes upon that which is not?" For riches indeed grow wings and "fly away as an eagle towards heaven." Riches and all worldly possessions are but empty illusions—they are "that which is not." They are not what they appear to be; they are merely gilded vanities that deceive the eye. In comparison, they are nothingness, with far more absence and nonexistence than actual being or reality. What is the world and everything in it but a facade or fleeting spectacle, like actors on a stage, a passing show (1 Corinthians 7:31)? Royal splendor is considered mere show or appearance in God's eyes (Acts 25:23). The best name they can acquire is "good things," but remember, they are only the possessions of the wicked, as

Abraham tells the rich man in the parable: "Thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things" (Luke 16:25). The people of this world may rightly call these things their own, for there is no other goodness in them, around them, or accompanying them. Therefore, why should you fix your eyes upon empty shadows and illusions? O mortal, there is no good reason to do so. This world is a vast inn on the road to eternity, to which you are traveling. The things of this world serve as attendants, like servants of the inn where you temporarily lodge. They cater to your needs while you are here, but when you depart, they will accompany you to the door before returning to serve other strangers, just as they did for you.

4. It can serve as a source of Christian determination to cling to Christ, adhere to His truths, and persist in His ways, regardless of the suffering we may endure for doing so. It would greatly diminish the fear of man, which ensnares us. "Who are you to be afraid of a mortal man?" (Isaiah 51:12). Regard persecutors as fragile clay vessels that will be shattered. Then you will despise them as mortal foes, whose terror in the land of the living will quickly fade with their demise. Reflecting on the brevity of our time and the certainty of death teaches us that any advantage we gain through apostasy during times of trial is not worth it. It is not worth deviating from our path to obtain it. And what we refuse to relinquish for the sake of Christ may be swiftly taken from us by death. However, we can never lose it as honorably as when we lose it for the cause of Christ and His gospel. What glory is there in surrendering what we possess in the world when God takes it away from us through death, whether we desire it or not? This realization teaches us to undervalue life itself and choose to forfeit it rather than to sin. The worst that people can

do is to take away the life that we cannot retain for long, even if the whole world conspires to help us keep our breath. If we refuse to offer it up to God when He calls for it in defense of His honor, He can take it from us in another way, as happened to someone who could not burn for Christ but was later consumed by an accidental fire in their house.

5. It can serve as a spur to motivate us to prepare for death. Consider the following: 1. Your eternal state will correspond to the state in which you die. Death will open the doors to heaven or hell for you. As the tree falls, so it shall remain for eternity. If an infant is stillborn, the entire world cannot bring it back to life. And if someone dies outside of Christ, in an unregenerate state, there is no hope for them. 2. Seriously contemplate what it means to enter another world—a world of spirits with which we are unfamiliar. How terrifying is the interaction with spirits for us mortals in this life! And how dreadful is the situation when people are hastily transported into another world, uncertain if demons will be their eternal companions! Let us, therefore, exert every effort to acquaint ourselves with the Lord of that world and deepen our relationship with Him. 3. You have only a short time to prepare for death. Therefore, it is now or never, as the time allotted for preparation will soon come to an end. "Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might, for there is no work or device or knowledge or wisdom in the grave where you are going" (Ecclesiastes 9:10). How can we be idle when we have such a significant task to accomplish and so little time to do it? Although the work of preparing for death is arduous, it will not last long if the time is short. The evening shadows inspire the laborer to work cheerfully, knowing that the time is near when they will be called in from their toil. 4. A significant portion of our short time has already passed, and even the

youngest among us cannot guarantee that there is as much time ahead as has already elapsed. Our life in this world is but a brief preface to a long eternity, and much of the tale has been told. Oh, should we not redouble our diligence when so much of our time has been spent and so little of our great work has been accomplished? 5. The present time is slipping away, and we cannot reclaim the past; it has bid us an eternal farewell. The future time is not ours, and we have no assurance of sharing in it when it arrives. The only thing we can truly claim as our own is the present moment, and even that is fleeting. We do not know how soon our time may come to an end. We must die, but who can tell us when? If death had a fixed time for everyone, we would not be at risk of a sudden surprise. However, daily observation shows us that this is not the case. Now, the fleeting shadow of our life allows no time for idleness. Rivers flow swiftly into the sea, their place of origin, but not as swiftly as man returns to dust, from whence he came. The stream of time is the swiftest current, rushing toward eternity. 6. Once death takes us, there is no coming back to rectify our affairs. "If a man dies, shall he live again?" (Job 14:14). Dying is something we can only experience once. "It is appointed for men to die once" (Hebrews 9:27). Considering that this crucial act can only be done once, yet its significance determines our entire future, we need to diligently ensure that we do it well. Therefore, prepare for death. If you, as an unregenerate person, ask me what you should do to prepare for death and die safely, I reply that I have already told you what needs to be done. Your nature and state must be changed; you must be united with Jesus Christ through faith. Until this transformation occurs, you are not capable of receiving further instructions that pertain to dying comfortably. We may discuss such matters at a later time and in the appropriate context.

II. DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE RIGHTEOUS AND THE WICKED IN THEIR DEATH

The wicked person is driven away in their wickedness, but the righteous have hope in their death. - Proverbs 14:32

This passage resembles the cloud that stood between the Israelites and Egyptians, with a dark side facing the latter and a bright side facing the former. It illustrates death as Pharaoh's jailer, releasing the chief butler to be restored and the chief baker to be executed. It highlights the distinction between the godly and the ungodly in their death, just as they lead different lives, they also have different exits in death.

Concerning the death of a wicked person, there are several aspects to consider. First, their manner of departure from this world. They are "driven away" - this is evident from the contrast in the opposing clause. They are forcefully expelled from their place in this world, driven away like chaff before the wind. Secondly, their state of departure. They die in a state of hopelessness, while "the righteous have hope in their death." This clearly indicates the lack of hope for the wicked when they die. This does not mean that every wicked person dies without any hope and in despair. Sometimes that may be the case, but often it is not. Foolish virgins, for example, may hold on to hope until their last breath. However, the false hopes they entertain will be uprooted by death, leaving them eternally miserable.

On the other hand, when a righteous person dies, they have hope. This is emphasized by the contrasting conjunction "but," indicating the removal of the dreadful circumstances associated with the

wicked, who are driven away in their wickedness. The righteous do not experience the same manner of departure from this world. They are not driven away like chaff before the wind, but rather led away like a bride to the marriage chamber, carried by angels into Abraham's bosom (Luke 16:22). Similarly, their state at the time of passing is different. The righteous person dies in a state of holiness, not in sin. Throughout their life, they have been shedding their old self, changing their garments of bondage, and now, in death, the remnants of those garments are removed, and they are adorned with robes of glory. Their state is one of hope, as they possess the grace of hope and a well-founded expectation of better things than what they experienced in this world. Although their hope may seem shallow at the time of death, they still have enough to entrust their eternal interests to the Lord Jesus Christ.

DOCTRINE 1: The wicked, when they die, are driven away in their wickedness and in a state of hopelessness.

In addressing this doctrine, I will discuss how and in what sense the wicked are "driven away in their wickedness" at death. I will also prove the hopelessness of their state at death. Finally, I will apply these teachings.

I. How and in what sense are the wicked "driven away in their wickedness"? To understand this, we must consider three aspects. First, the wicked are taken away suddenly, without warning. Not all wicked individuals die suddenly, nor does a sudden death necessarily imply wickedness. However, death often comes unexpectedly, surprising them just as the flood surprised the people of the old world, despite being warned beforehand. Death seizes them like a creditor seizing a debtor, dragging them to their place of imprisonment, Psalm 55:15. It arrives when they least expect it, like a

thief entering through a window while they are preoccupied with worldly thoughts. Secondly, the unregenerate person is forcibly removed from this world. Driving is a violent action. They are "chased out of the world" (Job 18:18). Although they may desire to stay, death drags them away like a criminal being led to execution. They sought no other portion than the profits and pleasures of this world, and their departure is a result of being driven away against their will.

Question: "Can a wicked person be willing to die?" Answer: They may express willingness to die, but there are only three situations in which they demonstrate such willingness. First, in a fit of passion due to impatience with a troublesome situation. In such instances, their desire to be gone is momentary, and if death were to come at that moment, they would quickly reveal their lack of earnestness. Second, when they are overwhelmed by despair. Saul took his own life, and Spira wished to be in hell to experience the full extent of what he believed he deserved. In these cases, individuals may seek death, but it eludes them. However, the violence they experience due to the terrors of God is frightful. Third, when they dream of happiness after death. Foolish virgins, deluded about their true state, may be willing to die, unaware of the sorrow awaiting them. Many die in darkness while sleeping, appearing peaceful on the surface but heading towards eternal damnation.

Thirdly, the unregenerate person is taken away irresistibly. They must go, even against their will. Death brooks no refusal or delay. Despite the physician's assistance, the groans of friends, the cries of spouse and children, and the individual's own efforts to cling to life, their soul is demanded, and they have no choice but to leave this world. Even if they have not yet lived half their expected lifespan, death will not wait. If they refuse to submit, they will be broken. If

they resist, the house will collapse around them. They cannot stay. Although they may desire to do so, they have no choice. The soul and body embrace one another, but death arrives like a whirlwind, tearing them apart. Death takes their spirit, and they are left with no place to rest except in a bed of fire and brimstone. They may fight, but they cannot retain their spirit.

4. Death renders their state utterly and irreversibly hopeless. Once death arrives, there is no chance to rectify or amend matters. You see,
 1. Time, once gone, can never be reclaimed. No amount of cries, tears, sacrifices, or suffering can bring back lost time. Even if the wicked man were to weep tears of blood or groan for countless ages, time would not return. The sun will not pause its course for the lazy person to wake up and embark on their journey. And once the sun sets, they should not expect the night to transform into day for their sake. Instead, they will dwell through the endless night of eternity with the time they had left.
 2. There is no returning to this life to correct past mistakes. This life is a period of probation and trial that ends with death. Once we die, there is no coming back to this life again. We live only once, and we die only once. Death takes the wicked person to "his own place" (Acts 1:25). This life is our day of work, and death marks the end of our day and our work. We might entertain the idea that the wicked could have some hope in their death if, after death opens their eyes, they could return to life and have one more chance to experience a Sabbath, receive an offer of Christ, have a single day, or even just one more hour to make peace with God. However, "man lieth down, and riseth not till the heavens be no more; they shall not awake, nor be raised out of their sleep" (Job 14:12).
 3. In the afterlife, individuals have no means to rectify their ruined state and condition, no matter how fervently they desire it. "For there is no work, nor

device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest" (Ecclesiastes 9:10). In this life, one can flee from the impending wrath and find refuge. But once death has accomplished its work, "the door is shut." There are no further offers of mercy or pardons. Once the tree has fallen, it remains there.

Take time to carefully ponder what has been said, and let me exhort you:

First, be cautious not to entertain hopes of heaven unless they are founded on a solid and secure foundation. Tremble when you consider how death sweeps away fair hopes of happiness, much like cobwebs. Many have had their hopes abruptly cut off when they believed they were on the threshold of heaven, only to find themselves carried by devils into the company of the damned in hell, to a place of torment and horror. I implore you to beware of the following: 1. Hoping on ground that has never been cleared. A wise builder digs deep (Luke 6:48). Have your hopes of heaven never been shaken? Have you always possessed unwavering hope? Unfortunately, this may indicate that your hope is built upon an unstable foundation. Perhaps you have only repaired some breaches in the old structure of your hope, relying on your own ways and means. I assure you that, no matter how impressive your hope may appear, it is not trustworthy unless you have demolished your old hopes and built upon an entirely new foundation. 2. Beware of a hope that shines brightly in the darkness but loses its lustre when exposed to the light of God's word. When examined and tested against divine revelation, such a hope may falter. John 3:20-21 states, "For every one that doth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved. But he that doth the truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that

they are wrought in God." A hope that cannot withstand the scrutiny of Scripture, that crumbles when subjected to the truth of God's Word, is nothing but an illusion, not a genuine hope. God's Word always supports the graces of His Spirit and opposes deception. 3. Beware of a hope that lacks support from scriptural evidence. Many harbor hopes without any genuine grounds in Scripture. You may hope that all will be well with you after death, but on what word of God have you based this hope (Psalm 119:49)? What scriptural evidence can you provide to prove that your hope is not the hope of a hypocrite? After impartial self-examination, as in the sight of God, what have you found within yourself that the Word of God determines to be a sure evidence of possessing eternal life? Countless individuals have been ruined by hopes that lack support from Scripture. People cling stubbornly to these hopes, but death will demolish them, leaving the self-deceived utterly hopeless. 4. Beware of a hope for heaven that does not transform and prepare you for heaven, a hope that fails to make your soul more holy. 1 John 3:3 states, "Every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure." The hope of many individuals primarily revolves around escaping pain and torment in the afterlife, rather than aspiring to true happiness whose nature is not understood and discerned. Consequently, their hope remains dormant and unproductive, lacking the power to inspire mortification and a heavenly life. They are so far from truly hoping for heaven that, if they express their genuine sentiments, their fear rather than hope prevails when it comes to departing this world for any other place. The glory of the heavenly city fails to attract their hearts, and they do not lift their heads with joy in anticipation of reaching it. If they truly possessed the hope of the marriage day, like the bride, the "Lamb's wife," they would be actively preparing themselves for it (Revelation 19:7). However, their hopes are fostered by their own sloth, and their sloth is nurtured by their hopes. I urge you, sirs, to beware of these

hopes! Uproot them now and build upon a new foundation, lest death leaves not one stone of them upon another, and you are left without hope forever.

Secondly, sinners, hasten out of your wickedness, your sinful state, and your wicked life if you do not want to be driven away in your wickedness at the moment of death. Reflect upon the grim fate of the wicked, as depicted in the text. I understand that the death of the wicked varies in its circumstances, but what they all share in common is being driven away in their wickedness. Some die with resolute defiance, scorning fear. Some die in raging despair, consumed by horror, as if already in hell. Others die in sullen despondency, oppressed by fears, their hearts sinking at the recollection of misspent time and the vision of eternity. They lack the capacity or motivation to do anything for their own relief. Still, others die in a state of numbness, living and dying like beasts, without any concern for their eternal state. They may groan under physical distress, but they are oblivious to the peril of their souls. Speaking to them is as futile as speaking to a stone, for nothing said to them can move or teach them. Discoursing with them about the joys of heaven or the torments of hell is like plowing on a rock or beating the air. Some die like the foolish virgins, deluded by dreams of heaven, their foreheads shielded from the fears of hell by presumptuous hopes of heaven. The task of those who seek to be of help to them is not to address doubts about the state of their souls but to expose their false hopes. Regardless of how the unconverted person dies, they are "driven away in their wickedness." It is a dreadful plight! Allow the contemplation of such a horrific departure from this world to compel you to flee to Jesus Christ, the all-sufficient Savior, the almighty Redeemer. Let it move you to abandon your wickedness and embrace holiness of heart and life. Although you may consider wickedness pleasurable, you cannot deny that

dying in wickedness is bitter. If you do not forsake it in time, you will continue in your wickedness and proceed to hell, its rightful abode, where it will be firmly established. When you pass from this world, all your sins, from the first to the last, will surround you, cling to you, and accompany you to the next world like furious tormentors.

Thirdly, be concerned for others, particularly your relatives, that they may not remain in their sinful state but be brought into a state of salvation, lest they too be driven away in their wickedness at death. Think of what lengths you would go to prevent any of your friends from meeting an untimely and violent death. Yet, do you not see them at risk of being driven away in their wickedness? Is not death approaching them, even the youngest among them? And are they not still strangers to true Christianity, remaining in the same state they were born into? Hurry to rescue them from the fire, lest they be consumed. The death of loved ones often leaves a sting in the hearts of those left behind because they did not do for their souls what they had the opportunity to do, and now that opportunity is forever lost.

DOCTRINE II. The state of the godly in death offers hope. We have explored the dark side of the cloud that looms over the ungodly as they depart from this world. Now let us turn our gaze to the bright side, shining upon the godly as they enter their eternal state. As I expound upon this subject, I will affirm this doctrine, address an objection to it, and conclude with some practical reflections.

To provide confirmation, let it be noted that although the passage from this world through death may appear terrifying to poor mortals, and the consequences of failure in it undoubtedly dire, the following circumstances make the state of the godly in death both happy and hopeful.

1. They have a trustworthy and good Friend awaiting them in the other world. Jesus Christ, their greatest Friend, is the Lord of the land to which death carries them. Just as Joseph sent wagons to bring his father Jacob down to Egypt, saying, "God has made me lord over all Egypt," (Genesis 45:9), and Jacob's spirit was revived when he saw the wagons, resolving to undertake the journey, so too, when the Lord calls a godly person out of the world, He sends them glad tidings and extends a kind invitation into the other world. Upon seeing the wagon of death that comes to carry them there, their spirit must surely be revived, for they have faith to believe in the joyful news. Indeed, there is a weighty trial they must undergo—the judgment after death. However, the case of the godly is entirely hopeful, for the Lord of the land is their husband, and their husband is the judge. "The Father has entrusted all judgment to the Son" (John 5:22). Surely, the case of the wife is hopeful when her own husband serves as her judge, especially a husband who abhors divorce. No husband is as loving and tender towards his spouse as the Lord Christ is towards His. One can hardly imagine a land that a wife would not willingly go to if her husband were the ruler and judge. Furthermore, their judge is their advocate (1 John 2:1), and they need not fear being condemned or cast aside. How could they think that the very one who pleads their cause would pass judgment against them? Moreover, their advocate is their Redeemer; they have been "redeemed with the precious blood of Christ" (1 Peter 1:18-19). When He pleads for them, He is advocating for His own cause. Though an advocate may neglect the interests of the one who employs him, he will surely do everything in his power to defend his own rights, which he has purchased with his own money. Will not their advocate, then, defend the purchase made with His own blood? Above all, their Redeemer is their head, and they are His

members (Ephesians 5:23, 30). Even if someone were foolish enough to let their own purchase go without standing up to defend their rights, they would never part with a limb of their own body. Thus, is not the state of the godly in death hopeful, considering their close connection and alliance with the Lord of the other world, who holds "the keys of hell and of death"?

2. They shall experience a safe passage to the other world. While they must pass through "the valley of the shadow of death," which may seem dark and gloomy, it will be a valley of hope to them. They will not be driven through it as if in danger, but they will journey in perfect safety, fearing no evil (Psalm 23:4). Why should they fear? They have the Lord of the land's safe-conduct, sealed with His own blood—the blessed covenant that provides comfort on their deathbed (2 Samuel 23:5). Even if their own house is not as they would have it with God, they possess an everlasting covenant ordered in all things and sure, which is their salvation and their heart's desire. Who, then, can harm them? It is safe to ride in Christ's chariot both in life and in death. They have honorable attendants, a guard of angels, surrounding and encamping about them throughout their lives, and surely they will not abandon them in the hour of death. These blessed ministering spirits attend to the Lord's bride and will undoubtedly escort her safely to His house. As friends solemnly stand by the dying saint's bedside, waiting to witness their last breath, angels eagerly await the arrival of the soul to carry it into Abraham's bosom (Luke 16:22). The captain of the saint's salvation is the captain of this holy guard. He guided them unto death, and He will guide them through it as well (Psalm 23:4). They can cross the river without fear, confident that it will not overflow them, and they can walk through the fire without being burned by it.

Death cannot harm them; it cannot even harm their bodies. Though it separates the soul from the body, it cannot separate the body from the Lord Jesus Christ. Even in death, they are asleep in Jesus (1 Thessalonians 4:14). They remain members of Christ even in the grave. Their dust is precious, laid up in the grave as in their Lord's treasury. They rest in the grave, like precious fruit waiting to be brought forth at the resurrection. Just as a farmer has grain stored in the barn as well as grain sown in the ground, considering the latter more precious because of the anticipated increase, so too are the dead bodies of the saints valued by their Savior. They are sown in corruption to be raised in incorruption, sown in dishonor to be raised in glory (1 Corinthians 15:42-43). Death cannot harm their souls either. It is like the voyage of Paul and his companions, as recorded in the book of Acts. The ship was destroyed, but the passengers safely reached the land. When a dying saint's speech ceases, their eyes close, and their last breath is drawn, their soul departs into the heavenly paradise, leaving the body to return to the earth but with the joyful hope of being reunited at the glorious resurrection. But how can death harm the godly? It is a defeated enemy. If it casts them down, it is only to raise them up more glorious. "Our Savior Jesus Christ has abolished death" (2 Timothy 1:10). Death has lost its power; it is but a mere shadow that may frighten but cannot harm the saints. It is merely the shadow of death to them, not death itself. Their dying is like dying or somewhat resembling it. The apostle tells us, "It is Christ who died" (Romans 8:34). Stephen, the first Christian martyr, though stoned to death, fell asleep (Acts 7:60). Certainly, the nature of death has been completely changed with regard to the saints. It is not to them what it was to Jesus Christ, their head. It is not the venomous, destructive force enveloped in the curse of the first covenant: "In the day that you eat of it, you shall surely die" (Genesis 2:17). Death comes to the godly without a sting. They may meet it with the greeting, "O death, where is your sting?" Is

this Mara? Is this bitter death? Death went out into the world in full force when the first Adam opened the door to it, but the second Adam has rendered it empty for His own people. A dying day is, in itself, a day of joy for the godly. It is their day of redemption, when captives are set free, when prisoners are released. It is the day when pilgrims return home from their pilgrimage, when heirs of glory return from their journey to their own country and their Father's house, entering into the actual possession of the glorious inheritance. It is their wedding day—the time of espousals. Yet, on that day, the marriage is consummated, and a never-ending wedding feast begins. Therefore, is not the state of the godly in death hopeful?

Objection: "But if the state of the godly in their death is so hopeful, why is it that many of them, when dying, are filled with fears and have little hope?" Answer: It must be acknowledged that not all saints die in the same manner. There is diversity among them, just as there is among the wicked. However, even the worst case of a dying saint is indeed a hopeful one. Some die triumphantly, with full assurance of faith. As the apostle Paul declared, "The time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness" (2 Timothy 4:6-8). They taste the joys of heaven while still on earth and begin to sing the songs of Zion even in a foreign land. Others die with a solid reliance on their Lord and Savior. Though they may not sing triumphantly, they can confidently say, "The Lord is my God." Though they may not triumph over death as Simeon did when holding the infant Jesus in his arms and saying, "Lord, now let your servant depart in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation" (Luke 2:29-30), they can say with dying Jacob, "I have waited for your salvation, O Lord" (Genesis 49:18). The left hand of the Lord is under their head, supporting them, even if His right hand does not embrace them. They firmly

believe, even if they are not filled with joy in their belief. They can rely on the covenant and cling to the promises, even if their circumstances with God are not as they would desire. However, the dying day of some saints may be like the day mentioned in Zechariah 14:7, neither day nor night. They may die in the midst of doubts and fears, seemingly setting in a cloud and entering heaven in a mist. They may depart from this life without the sun, never experiencing a spiritual high until death strips it away from them. They may journey to heaven through the borders of hell, pursued by the devouring lion right up to the gates of the new Jerusalem. They may resemble a ship on the verge of shipwreck, yet miraculously reaching the harbor safely. As the apostle Paul wrote, "If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire" (1 Corinthians 3:15). There is safety amidst their fears, while there is danger in the strong confidence of the wicked. Even in their greatest sorrows, there is a blessed seed of gladness. "Light is sown for the righteous, and joy for the upright in heart" (Psalm 97:11).

Nowadays, saints can experience confusion and distress during their final moments because, although they are true Christians, they are still human beings with emotions. Death is inherently daunting, regardless of its appearance. Its stern countenance towards mortals is bound to make them recoil. Additionally, saints are especially self-conscious. They contemplate eternity and the judgment more deeply than others. For them, dying is a weightier matter than most people realize. They possess a greater understanding of the deceitfulness of the heart and the subtleties of human depravity. Thus, they may struggle to maintain hope on their deathbed, while others pass away peacefully, like sheep to the slaughter. Furthermore, Satan, who cunningly sustains the hopes of hypocrites, will go to great lengths to disturb the peace and intensify the fears of the saints. Lastly, the distressed state of mind and unfavorable circumstances in which

death sometimes seizes a true Christian can cause this confusion. Though being in a state of grace ensures their ultimate safety, there is still a need for their spirit to be in good condition in order to be adequately prepared and die comfortably.

Consequently, there are three scenarios in which death cannot help but be highly uncomfortable for a child of God. First, if death comes while the guilt of a particular unrepented sin burdens their conscience, it causes great consternation. This was the case for many of the Corinthian believers, as mentioned in 1 Corinthians 11:30: "That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died." If a person is taken by surprise by death while carrying the weight of an unpardoned sin, it is bound to cause immense distress. Second, when death catches them off guard, like the frightful cry in the middle of the night for sleeping virgins. It is comparable to a person sleeping in a crumbling house who only awakens when the timbers begin to crack and stones start falling around them. They may manage to escape safely, but not without fearing being crushed by the collapsing structure. Similarly, when a Christian has been living in a state of complacency and backsliding, and only wakes up when death arrives at their bedside, it is not surprising that they experience a fearful awakening. Third, when they have lost sight of their assurance of salvation in Christ and cannot produce evidence of their claim to heaven. Facing death without clear evidence of their eternal life is challenging. It is difficult to traverse the dark valley without the guiding light of the Lord. It is a terrifying venture to embark on the journey into eternity without any certainty of where they will end up, whether in heaven or hell.

Nevertheless, the state of the saints in death is always inherently hopeful. The presumptuous hopes of the ungodly cannot make their state hopeful, nor can the fears of a saint make their state hopeless.

God judges according to the truth, not based on people's opinions. Therefore, the saints can never be entirely without hope, just as they can never be entirely without faith. Their faith may be weak, but it never fails, and their hope may be low, but they will always have hope until the end. Even when the godly appear to be overwhelmed by doubts and fears, there is still hope present, which motivates them to reach out and grasp the tree of life growing on the banks of the river, as described in Jonah 2:4: "Then I said, 'I am driven away from your sight; yet I shall again look upon your holy temple.'"

This brings comfort to the godly, assuaging their fear of death. A godly person may be considered happy even before their death because, regardless of what befalls them in life, they will certainly find happiness in death. Those who are in Christ, true Christians, can find hope in their end. This hope can provide solace against the fears that arise from the contemplation of death. I will now address some specific cases briefly:

Case 1: Some saints may be uneasy about the prospect of death, uncertain about what will happen to their family when they are gone. The righteous can have hope for themselves and their families. Even if they currently have little to live on, as many of God's chosen ones have experienced, they can confidently entrust their family to a covenant God who will take care of them.

Case 2: The fear of being separated from dear friends and not being able to partake in the blessed ordinances of the Lord is a valid concern. However, death will reunite them with their best Friend, the Lord Christ. The friends left behind will be reunited in heaven, and there will be no more separation. Though death takes them away from earthly temples, it brings them to the heavenly temple. It

extinguishes their earthly candle but leads them to a place without darkness, where an eternal day awaits.

Case 3: Some may struggle with the idea of having sufficient assurance of their genuine conversion and being a true Christian. In such cases, they should increase their diligence in making their calling and election sure. They should strive for growth in knowledge, walk closely with God, engage in self-examination, and earnestly pray for the Holy Spirit's guidance. By diligently pursuing their spiritual concerns, even if their life feels uncertain, they may find light at evening time.

Case 4: Concerns about spiritual decline are valid. While it is possible for a godly person to find peace in such circumstances, it is uncommon. Typically, a cry comes to awaken sleeping virgins before death arrives. Just as Samson ground at the mill until his strength returned, those experiencing spiritual decline should stir themselves up to strengthen what remains. By doing so, they can minimize their fear by being awakened from spiritual slumber before death approaches, and they should not waste time as they do not know when death may strike.

Case 5: The fear of the unknown realm of spirits is understandable. However, the Lord Christ, their best friend, reigns over that realm. Abraham's bosom extends its kindness even to those who have never seen his face. After death, the soul gains the ability to converse with the blessed inhabitants of that world. The spirits of the righteous were once like their own spirits, and the angels, though superior in nature, are servants of the Lord and fellow servants to the saints.

Case 6: The pains of death may be terrifying, but they are less dreadful than the pains of conscience caused by guilt and the apprehension of divine wrath. Each pang of death brings sin closer to

its end, and with the last breath, the body of sin breathes its last. The pains of death are fleeting, and the Lord God will support and not forsake them.

Case 7: The fear of being cut off prematurely in the prime of life is valid. However, it should be seen as an advantage, as it delivers them from the evil to come. An early departure from this world prevents further sin and misery. Those who receive the remaining years of their life in Immanuel's land have no cause for complaint.

Case 8: The fear of sudden death is understandable. While sudden death is a possibility, it cannot catch them out of Christ, and therefore, it cannot condemn them to the prison of hell. Sudden death may expedite their journey to heaven but cannot harm them.

Case 9: Dying without the exercise of reason is a possibility for a child of God. However, this poses no danger to their eternal state. Disease may rob them of reason, but not of their faith. Just as a person embarking on a long voyage may board the ship while sleeping, unaware of their surroundings until they awaken on the vessel, the godly who die in such a state may die uncomfortably but not unsafely.

Case 10: Naturally timid individuals may find the thoughts of death terrifying. Paradoxically, the more one contemplates death, the less frightening it becomes. By familiarizing themselves with death through frequent meditation, they can alleviate their fears. By focusing on the positive aspects, such as the city with foundations or the hope found in Christ, they can find comfort in the face of death. They should also reflect on the body of sin and death, the interruptions in communion with God, and the glory that awaits on the other side of death. Such reflections can help overcome slavish fear.

It is unfortunate that saints often cling to life when they should always be prepared to embrace death. Considering everything, it should be expected that every child of God, every regenerated person, would echo the sentiments expressed by Job: "I loathe it; I would not live always" (Job 7:16). To cultivate this mindset, consider the following additional thoughts.

1.

Consider the sinfulness that accompanies life in this world. While you are alive here, you sin and witness others sinning. You breathe contaminated air and reside in a place of pestilence. Is it not reasonable to detest such a life? 1. Your own plague sores fester upon you. Does not the sin of your nature cause you daily groaning? Are you not aware that although the cure has begun, it is far from complete? Has not the leprosy penetrated the walls of the house, which cannot be eradicated without tearing it down? Is not your nature so corrupted that only the separation of soul from body can eliminate the disease? Do you not have sores on the outside as well as sickness within? Do you not leave marks of your pollution on everything you touch? Are not all your actions tainted and marred by defects and imperfections? Who, then, should be enamoured with life except those whose sickness is their health, and who take pride in their shame? 2. The repulsive sores of others are always in your sight, no matter where you go. The follies and wickedness of humanity are evident everywhere and create an unpleasant scene. This sinful world is an unsightly gathering, an unpleasant crowd where the most loathsome are the most numerous. 3. Do not your own sores often resurface after healing? Frequent relapses should cause a decline in our fondness for this life. Constantly struggling and repeatedly falling into the mire is wearisome. Do you not sometimes long for a cold death to effectively cool the

heat of these lusts, which ignite even after a flood of godly sorrow has washed over them? Do you not occasionally infect others, and are you not infected by others? There is no society in the world in which every member does not occasionally place a stumbling block before the rest. Even the best carry within them the tinder of a corrupt nature, which they cannot be rid of while alive, and which is susceptible to ignition at all times and in all places. Moreover, they are prone to inflame others and become occasions of sin. Undoubtedly, these factors are likely to embitter this life for the saints.

2. Consider the misery and troubles that accompany it. Rest is desirable but cannot be found on this side of the grave. Troubles plague all individuals in this life. This world is a sea of trouble where one wave rolls upon another. Those who believe they are beyond the reach of trouble are mistaken. No state or change of life is exempt from it. Even the crowned head is surrounded by thorny cares. Often, honor leads to deep disgrace, and riches are often kept to the detriment of their owners. The most beautiful rose has thorns, and the heaviest cross is sometimes concealed within the greatest earthly comfort. Spiritual troubles afflict the saints in this life. They resemble travelers journeying on a cloudy night, where the moon occasionally emerges from one cloud only to hide again under another. It is no wonder they long for their journey to end. The sudden fluctuations to which even the best disposition of the spirit is susceptible, the perplexing doubts, overwhelming fears, fleeting joys, and enduring sorrows, which are inherently connected to this present life, inevitably create in the saints a desire to be with Christ, which is far superior.

3. Consider the significant imperfections that accompany this life. While the soul resides in this mortal body, bodily needs are numerous, constantly demanding attention. The mud walls of this dwelling must be repaired and patched daily until the clay cottage eventually collapses for good. Eating, drinking, sleeping, and the like are, in themselves, menial tasks for a rational being and are regarded as such by a soul born of heaven. They serve as reminders of imperfection and, as such, are unpleasant to a mind aspiring to the life and immortality revealed through the gospel. If this state of affairs were to continue indefinitely, it would be exceedingly burdensome. Does not the gracious soul often find itself yoked to the body, unable to keep pace with it? When the spirit is willing, the flesh is weak. When the soul yearns to ascend, the body acts as a hinderance, akin to a stone tied to the foot of a bird attempting to fly. The truth is, O believer, that your soul in this body is, at best, like a diamond in a ring, where much of its brilliance is obscured. It is deeply submerged in the vile clay until relieved by death.

I conclude this discussion with a few guidelines on how to prepare for death so that we may die comfortably. Here, I do not speak of the habitual preparation for death, which a true Christian, by virtue of their gracious state, never lacks from the moment they are born again and united with Christ. Instead, I refer to actual preparation, or readiness, with regards to one's specific circumstances, frame of mind, and disposition. The lack of such preparation renders even a saint ill-suited to face death.

First, make it your constant endeavor to maintain a clean conscience, "a conscience free from offense toward God and man" (Acts 24:16). Beware of having an ongoing dispute with God on account of some iniquity cherished in your heart. Just as an upright individual about

to leave their homeland settles accounts with those they have dealt with and devises methods to pay off their debts in due time, lest they be regarded as bankrupt and pursued by an officer as they depart, so too does guilt weighing on the conscience become a source of fear and sting sharply when death looms before the guilty party. That is why many, even among God's children, passionately desire and eagerly wish to live longer in order to do what they ought to have done before. Therefore, walk closely with God, be diligent, strict, and precise in your conduct. Beware of loose, careless, and disorderly behavior if you wish to avoid storing up anguish and bitterness of spirit for your dying moments. And because, due to the lingering weakness in our present state of imperfection, we all stumble in many ways, renew your repentance daily and continually wash in the Redeemer's blood. As long as you are in the world, you will need to cleanse your feet (John 13:10), that is, repeatedly apply the blood of Christ to purge your conscience from the guilt of daily failures. May death find you at the fountain, and if so, it will find you ready to respond to its call.

Second, remain vigilant, eagerly anticipating your change, "like servants waiting for their master to return from a wedding banquet, so that when he comes and knocks, they can immediately open the door for him" (Luke 12:36). Beware of "slumbering and sleeping while the bridegroom delays." To be awakened from spiritual slumber by a sudden call to transition into the next world is a deeply unsettling experience. However, those who await the coming of their Lord daily will receive the grim messenger with comfort, for they behold Him ushering in the One whom they can confidently proclaim as "my God, whom I have waited for." The path to dying comfortably is to die daily. Make frequent attempts, as it were, to die. Familiarize yourself with death by frequently visiting the grave through serious contemplation. This was Job's practice (Job 17:13-14), and you

should follow suit. When death arrives, you will have nothing to do but lie down. "I have said to corruption, 'You are my father,' and to the worm, 'You are my mother and my sister.'" Speak these words as well, and you will be better prepared to go to their abode. Regularly reflect on your conduct and consider the kind of life you desire to be found in when death calls you. Act accordingly. When performing your duties in life or engaging in acts of worship, remind yourself that this may be the last opportunity and therefore do it as if you will never have another chance. When you lie down at night, compose your spirit as if you will not awaken until the heavens cease to exist. And when you awaken in the morning, consider that new day as your last and live accordingly. Surely that night is approaching that you will never see the morning of, or that morning that you will never see the night of. However, you do not know which morning or night it will be.

Third, dedicate yourself to weaning your heart from the world. Just as a person preparing to go abroad busies themselves with bidding farewell to their loved ones, let the attachments to earthly pleasures be loose around you so that they can be easily let go when death arrives to carry you away to another world. Moderate your affections for the lawful comforts of life; do not allow your heart to be overly captivated by them. It would be unwise for a traveler to become so enamored with the conveniences of the inn where they lodge that their necessary departure from it becomes grievous. "Eat with trembling, and walk through the world as pilgrims and strangers." As the grain is harvested when it departs from the ground, and as the ripe fruit falls easily from the tree, so too does a heart truly weaned from the world become prepared for death, which will then be easier to face. A heart disentangled from the world is a heavenly heart. When our heart is already in heaven, we are ready for heaven (Matthew 6:21).

Fourth, diligently gather and accumulate evidence of your entitlement to heaven to support and comfort you in the hour of death. Neglecting this task diminishes the joy and solace that some Christians could otherwise experience in their final moments. Therefore, frequently examine yourself regarding your spiritual state so that hidden and unnoticed evidence may be brought to light and acknowledged. To engage in this task effectively, approach it solemnly and earnestly. Set aside dedicated time for it. After fervent prayer to God through Jesus Christ, seeking the enlightening influence of the Holy Spirit, which enables you to understand His Word and recognize His work in your soul, examine yourself before the tribunal of your own conscience so that you may judge yourself in this weighty matter.

And first of all, establish the marks of a regenerated state based on the word of the Lord. Refer to specific texts for this purpose, such as Proverbs 8:17, "I love those who love me." Compare it with Luke 14:26, "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple." Also, consider Psalm 119:6, "Then I shall not be put to shame, having my eyes fixed on all your commandments." And Psalm 18:23, "I was blameless before him, and I kept myself from my guilt." Compare this with Romans 7:22-23, "For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being, but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind." Additionally, 1 John 3:3 states, "And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure." Furthermore, Matthew 5:3 proclaims, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." Lastly, Philippians 3:3 declares, "For we are the circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh." The essence of the evidence derived from these texts lies in this: a genuine Christian loves God for who He is, not just for

His blessings. This love is supreme, surpassing all other affections for individuals and things. A true Christian regards God's commands with reverence and impartiality. They strive against the sin that easily entangles them. They approve and love the holy law, even when it confronts their cherished desires. Their hope of heaven motivates them to pursue universal holiness, aiming for perfection even though it cannot be fully attained in this life. They serve the Lord not only in acts of worship but in their entire conduct, and in both realms, their service is characterized by spiritual principles, motives, aims, and ends. However, they do not place their trust in themselves but rely on Christ and His fullness. Their confidence is rooted in Christ alone, both for justification and acceptance before God and for sanctification as well. Anyone who possesses these traits has a rightful claim to heaven according to the Word. It is beneficial and profitable to mark such texts for this specific purpose as you come across them while reading the Scriptures or listening to sermons. Once the marks of a regenerated state have been established, impartially examine and test your own hearts by them, in the sight of God, relying on Him for spiritual discernment to determine whether these marks are present within you or not. When you find them, deliberately and clearly conclude that you have been regenerated and have a rightful claim to heaven. In this way, you can gather evidence. However, be sure to turn to God in Christ through earnest prayer for the testimony of the Spirit, whose role is to "bear witness with our spirit that we are children of God" (Romans 8:16). Additionally, carefully observe how providence unfolds in your life and consider how your soul responds to its various stages. Compare both with the doctrines, promises, threats, and examples found in Scripture. In doing so, you will discern if the Lord is dealing with you as He typically does with those who love His name and if you are following in the footsteps of the flock. This can provide you with comforting evidence. Walk cautiously and attentively, and the Lord

will reveal Himself to you, as promised in John 14:21, "Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him." However, attempting self-examination without living a disciplined and upright life will prove futile. Lastly, diligently carry out the tasks assigned to you during your day and generation. "David, after he had served the purpose of God in his own generation, fell asleep" (Acts 13:36). God has assigned us specific tasks of this nature that must be completed before our time for work is over. Ecclesiastes 9:10 advises, "Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might, for there is no work or thought or knowledge or wisdom in Sheol, to which you are going." Galatians 6:10 instructs, "So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith." Just as a passenger who boards a ship and realizes that they neglected to finish important business on land will feel uneasy, reflecting on neglected seasons and missed opportunities in the hour of death will surely trouble a Christian. Therefore, diligently and promptly perform whatever is incumbent upon you for the honor of God and the good of others, whether it is the duty of your station or a unique opportunity placed in your hands, if you desire to die comfortably.

III. ON THE RESURRECTION

Marvel not at this: for the time is coming when all who are in the graves will hear his voice and come forth: those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of damnation.—John 5:28, 29.

These words are part of the defense that our Lord Jesus Christ makes for himself when he was persecuted by the Jews for healing the paralyzed man and instructing him to carry his bed on the Sabbath. He also vindicates his actions when accused by them of violating the sanctity of that day. On this occasion, he not only asserts himself as the Lord of the Sabbath but also as the Lord of life and death. He declares, in the words of the text, that the resurrection of the dead will occur through his power. He introduces this with a solemn preface: "Do not be surprised at this strange discourse of mine. Do not wonder to hear me, who appears so insignificant to you, speak in this manner. For the day is coming when the dead will be raised by my power." Let's observe in this text:

1. The affirmation of the doctrine of the resurrection: "All who are in the graves will hear his voice and come forth." The lifeless bodies, reduced to dust, will revive and show signs of life by hearing and moving.
2. The author of this resurrection is Jesus Christ, referred to as "the Son of Man" in verse 27. The dead will hear his voice and be raised by it.

3. The number of individuals who will be raised: "All who are in the graves," meaning all the deceased bodies of people, regardless of how they were laid to rest in various types of graves. This includes all the dead, both the good and the wicked. Not all of them are buried in traditional graves; some are reduced to ashes, some are drowned and buried within the bellies of fishes. But wherever the matter or substance that composed their bodies can be found, they shall come forth.

4. There will be a significant distinction made between the righteous and the wicked. Both will experience resurrection. None of the godly will be left behind, even if they had no burial or a very humble one. All the wicked will come forth from their sealed tombs as soon as the voice is uttered. However, the former will have a joyful resurrection to life, while the latter will face a dreadful resurrection to damnation.

5. The occurrence of this great event is predetermined. There is an appointed hour or fixed period of time determined by God. Although we are not informed of the exact timing, we know that it is coming. This knowledge serves as a reminder for us to always be prepared. DOCTRINE: There will be a resurrection of the dead.

In discussing this subject, I will: 1. Demonstrate the certainty of the resurrection. II. Explore its nature. And, finally, make some practical applications of the whole.

I. To demonstrate the certainty of the resurrection, I will prove:

1. God has the ability to raise the dead.

2. He will indeed do it.

These are the two foundations laid down by Christ himself when debating with the Sadducees, as recorded in Matthew 22:29: "Jesus answered and said to them, 'You are mistaken, not knowing the Scriptures nor the power of God.'" I. Since God is almighty, it is evident that He can raise the dead. We have examples of this powerful work of God in both the Old and New Testaments. The son of the widow in Zarephath was raised from the dead (1 Kings 17:22), as was the Shunammite's son (2 Kings 4:35), and the man who was thrown into Elisha's tomb (2 Kings 13:21). We can observe a progression in these miraculous events, with the second being more remarkable than the first, and the third surpassing the second. The first person was raised shortly after death, with the prophet Elijah present at the time of his passing. The second person was raised after a significant period of time had elapsed—while his mother traveled from Shunem to Mount Carmel, a distance of about sixteen miles, and returned home with Elisha, who raised him. The last person was not raised until he was being buried, and his body was thrown into the prophet's tomb. Similarly, in the New Testament, Jairus's daughter (Mark 5:41) and Dorcas (Acts 9:40) were both raised to life shortly after death. The widow's son in Nain was raised as they were carrying him out for burial (Luke 7:11–15), and Lazarus was raised from the grave even after his body had started to decompose (John 11:39–44). If people can create intricate glass objects from ashes, how much more can the great Creator, who made all things from nothing, raise the body of a human after it has turned to dust? If someone objects, "How can human bodies be raised again after they have been reduced to dust, with the ashes of many generations mixed together?" Scripture and reason provide the answer: "With men, this is impossible, but not with God." It is illogical for people to deny that God can do something simply because they cannot comprehend how it is possible. We have such limited knowledge of His ways and are utterly incapable of fully grasping the extent of His almighty power

and understanding His actions and methods. I have no doubt that many uneducated individuals are just as skeptical about certain chemical experiments as some learned individuals are about the doctrine of the resurrection. And just as the latter group is inclined to ridicule the former, "the Lord will have them in derision." Was it not a mystery to the Indians how Europeans could communicate with each other over great distances using just a piece of paper? Were they not astonished to witness the Europeans produce thunder and lightning at will with their guns, killing people from a distance? Some individuals perform feats that appear miraculous to others who cannot comprehend them. Yet, should human beings limit the infinite power of God within the narrow boundaries of their own limited understanding in a matter that is not contrary to reason? An inferior nature has only a flawed perception of the power of a superior one. Animals cannot fathom the workings of reason in humans, and humans themselves have only imperfect notions of the power of angels. Therefore, how low and inadequate must our understanding be of the power of the infinite? Although we cannot comprehend how God acts, we should still believe that He can do more than we can think or conceive.

Wherefore, let the bodies of men be laid in the grave. Let them decay there and be reduced to the tiniest particles. Or let them be cremated, and the ashes scattered in rivers or thrown into the air to be carried away by the wind. Let the dust of countless generations mix together, and let the vapors of the deceased roam in the air. Let birds or wild animals consume the bodies, or let the fish of the sea devour them, so that the elements of human bodies, thus destroyed, become integral parts of birds, animals, or fish. Then, let our modern Sadducees present their questions in these cases, just as the ancient Sadducees did regarding the woman who had been married to seven husbands consecutively (Matthew 22:28). Our answer, as our blessed

Lord and Saviour gave, is this: "You are mistaken, not knowing the Scriptures nor the power of God" (verse 29). We believe that God is all-knowing and all-powerful, infinite in knowledge and power. Therefore, according to reason, we conclude that the resurrection is possible, even in the situations presented. Material things may change their forms and shapes, being reduced to their constituent elements. However, they are not annihilated or reduced to nothingness, nor can they be by any created power. God is all-knowing, possessing infinite understanding. Thus, He knows all things—what they were, what they are, and where they can be found. Even though a countryman entering an apothecary's shop may not find the specific drug they seek, the apothecary himself knows what he has in his shop, where it came from, and where it can be found. Similarly, a skilled gardener can distinguish between different seeds in a mixture. Why then would Omniscience not be able to distinguish between particles of dust? Can He, who knows all things perfectly, make a mistake about His own creations? Those who believe in an infinite understanding must acknowledge that no mass of dust is so jumbled together that God does not perfectly comprehend and infallibly know how each minute particle should be matched. He knows the whereabouts of each particle of every dead body, whether in the earth, sea, or air, regardless of how scattered they may be. It is certain that the bodies of men, like those of all other animals and living creatures, are in a constant state of change. They grow and are sustained through daily nourishment, much of which evaporates unnoticed through perspiration. Even the nourishing part of food, once assimilated and incorporated into the body, evaporates through perspiration but is replenished by consuming other food. Yet, the body is still considered one and the same body. From this, we can conclude that it is not necessary for every particle of matter that was once part of a human body to be restored when it is raised from death to life. If that were the case, the size of human bodies would

become so enormous that they would bear no resemblance to the individuals themselves. It is sufficient to consider it the same body that died if the resurrected body is formed in its original proportions, composed of the same particles of matter that were once its constituent parts, albeit refined. Just as we consider it the same body that has withered away during a long illness, which then becomes healthy and robust again upon recovery. Now, when we combine this infinite understanding with infinite power, whereby God is able to bring all things under His control, this magnificent work appears most reasonable. If Omniscience can discover every minute particle of dust, knowing its whereabouts and how it should be matched, can't Omnipotence gather and reassemble them in their proper order? Can a watchmaker pick up the various pieces of a watch, lying in a jumbled heap before them, and place each one in its correct position? Can't God put the human body in order after its dissolution? Did He speak the world into existence out of nothingness? Can't He then form the human body out of its preexisting matter? If He can call into being things that do not exist, surely He can call into being things that have dissolved, returning them to their former state before the compound was broken down into its constituent parts and elements. Therefore, God can raise the dead. And as it is asked, "Why should it be considered incredible for God to raise the dead?" (Acts 26:8), there is no reason to doubt it.

2. God will do it. Not only can He do it, but He will do it because He has said so. Our text is very clear on this matter: "All that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth: they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation." These words refer to and explain a portion of Daniel's prophecy: "And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt"

(Daniel 12:2). This prophecy was intended to counter the teachings of the Sadducees, which were prevalent during the persecution under Antiochus. There are many other texts in the Old and New Testaments that could be cited here, such as Acts 24:15, "And have hope toward God, which they themselves also allow, that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust." And Job 19:26-27, "And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God: whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another; though my reins be consumed within me." However, there is no need to provide numerous testimonies on a matter that is clearly and frequently taught in sacred Scripture. Our Lord and Saviour Himself proves it when debating with the Sadducees, as recorded in Luke 20:37-38: "Now that the dead are raised, even Moses shewed at the bush, when he calleth the Lord the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. For he is not a God of the dead, but of the living: for all live unto him." These holy patriarchs were dead, yet the Lord Jehovah is referred to as their God, based on the covenant of grace and its implications. In this sense, the phrase encompasses all blessedness, as guaranteed by the covenant to those who are part of it. Hebrews 11:16 states, "But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city." God is not only called the God of their souls but also their God—the God of their persons, souls, and bodies. By virtue of His truth and faithfulness, the covenant's promises must be fulfilled completely. Although their bodies are still in the grave, they are still considered alive in relation to Him. In His power, He can restore them to life, and according to His covenant, He has declared His will and purpose to do so. His promise cannot fail. Therefore, in keeping with the covenant,

their death is akin to sleep, from which, by virtue of the aforementioned covenant that guarantees blessedness for their entire being, they will undoubtedly and certainly awaken. The apostle Paul provides a comprehensive proof of the resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15 and demonstrates that it is a fundamental article of faith. To deny it is to undermine Christianity. As he states in verses 13-14, "But if there be no resurrection of the dead, then is Christ not risen: and if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain."

To help us grasp the concept, the Scripture provides us with examples of the resurrection of the dead, such as the vision of the dry bones coming to life (Ezekiel 37) and Jonah being delivered from the belly of the whale (Matthew 12:40). Nature also offers us symbols and resemblances of the resurrection, like the setting and rising of the sun, day and night, winter and summer, sleeping and waking. Swallows, dormant in winter and then revived in the spring, lying lifeless in crumbling buildings and underground caves, serve as reminders. Similarly, seeds die in the ground and then sprout anew. Although these examples and others are not intended as proofs, they serve as memorials of the resurrection, which we are assured of in Scripture (1 Corinthians 15:36: "Thou fool, that which thou sowest is not quickened, except it die.")

II. Now, let us explore the nature of the resurrection, addressing the questions: Who shall be raised? What shall be raised? and How shall the dead be raised?

1. Who shall be raised? Our text provides the answer: "all that are in the graves," referring to all humanity who have died. As for those individuals who are alive at the second coming of Christ, they will not experience death and subsequent resurrection.

Instead, a sudden transformation will occur within them, substituting for the process of dying and rising again. Thus, their bodies will become like those bodies raised from the grave (1 Corinthians 15:51-52: "We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed: in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye"). The judgment at the final day distinguishes between the living and the dead (Acts 10:42). All the dead shall rise, whether righteous or wicked, just or unjust (Acts 24:15), regardless of age. The entire human race, even those who never witnessed the sun, shall be resurrected (Revelation 20:12: "And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God"). The sea and earth shall surrender their dead without exception.

2. What shall be raised? The bodies of humanity. When a person dies, it is the separation of the soul from the body, with the soul returning to God (Ecclesiastes 12:7). Thus, strictly speaking, the resurrection pertains to the body alone. Furthermore, the same body that dies will rise again. At the resurrection, individuals will not appear with different bodies, in substance, from those they possess now and which lie in the grave. Rather, they will have the very same bodies, but endowed with different qualities. The idea of resurrection implies this, as something can only rise again if it has fallen. To illustrate this further: 1. It is evident from Scripture. The apostle affirms that "this mortal" must "put on immortality" (1 Corinthians 15:53) and that Christ will transform "our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body" (Philippians 3:21). In Scripture, death is often referred to as sleep, and the resurrection as an awakening from that sleep (Job 14:12), indicating that the body rising is the same body that died. 2. The equity of divine justice, both for the righteous and the wicked, supports this notion. It is not considered fair among humans for one person to do the work

while another receives the reward. Although the glorification of the saints' bodies is not strictly a reward for their earthly service or suffering, it is evident that it is not in accordance with divine dispensation for one body to serve God while another is glorified, or for one body to engage in spiritual warfare while another receives the crown. How could it be imagined that "the temples of the Holy Ghost," referring to the bodies of believers (1 Corinthians 6:19), should always lie in ruins while others are raised in their place? That the members of Christ (ver. 15) should perish completely while other bodies take their place? No, it is indeed the same body that currently occupies the thoughts of individuals, providing for its needs, that will be resurrected to suffer in hell. The tongue that currently engages in swearing and lying will require water to cool it in eternal flames. The same feet that presently walk in the way of sinners and participate in ungodly acts will stand in the burning lake. And the same covetous and lustful eyes will receive the fire and smoke of the pit.

3. How will the dead be raised? The same Jesus who was crucified within the walls of Jerusalem will be declared both Lord and Christ on the final day. He will appear as the Judge of the world, accompanied by his mighty angels (2 Thessalonians 1:7). "He shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet of God" (1 Thessalonians 4:16). Whether this shout, voice, and trumpet signify an audible sound or merely the workings of divine power for the purpose of raising the dead and fulfilling other awe-inspiring events on that day, though the former seems likely, I cannot definitively determine. There is no doubt that the coming of the Judge of the world will be more majestic and terrifying than we can comprehend. Yet, the solemn grandeur, majesty, and splendour

displayed during the giving of the law, with thunder, lightning, a thick cloud on the mount, the Lord descending in fire, and the mount quaking violently, accompanied by the sound of the trumpet growing louder and louder (Exodus 19:16-19), can help us form a suitable image. Nevertheless, the sound of this trumpet will reverberate throughout the world, reaching the depths of the sea and the earth. At this resounding alarm, bones will come together, each bone finding its counterpart. The scattered dust of all the deceased will be gathered, particle by particle. No one will be left behind or pushed aside. Every soul will return to its own body, never to be separated again. The dead can no longer remain in their graves but must bid farewell to their earthly resting places forever. They will hear His voice and come forth to receive their final judgment.

Given the vast differences between the righteous and the wicked in life and death, these distinctions will also be evident in their resurrection. The righteous will be raised from their graves by the power of the Spirit of Christ, the blessed bond that unites them to Him (Romans 8:11). Just as Christ, the firstfruits, arose from the dead (1 Corinthians 15:20), so those who belong to Christ will follow at His coming (ver. 23). They will emerge from their graves with indescribable joy. The Scripture's promise in Isaiah 26:19, originally addressing the Babylonian captivity, will find its complete fulfillment in its broader meaning: "Awake and sing, ye that dwell in the dust." As a bride beautifully adorned for her husband emerges from her chamber for the wedding, so the saints will emerge from their graves for the marriage of the Lamb. Joseph joyfully emerged from prison, Daniel from the lion's den, and Jonah from the belly of the whale. Yet, these examples pale in comparison to the saints' emergence from the grave at the resurrection. They will sing the triumphant song of Moses and the Lamb with the highest praises, as death is

completely swallowed up in victory. While in this life, they sometimes sang, by faith, a triumphant song over death and the grave, declaring, "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?" (1 Corinthians 15:55). But at the resurrection, they will sing this song from firsthand experience, having been freed from doubts and fears that once troubled and unsettled their minds.

May we not imagine that the soul and body of every saint, embracing each other, rejoice and celebrate their blissful reunion? The body speaks to the soul in this manner: "Oh, my soul, have we come together again after such a long separation! Have you returned to your old dwelling place, never to depart again? What a joyful reunion! Our current state is so unlike the past, when we were separated by death. Our mourning has turned into joy, and the light and gladness that were sown before have now blossomed. It is an everlasting spring in the land of Immanuel. Blessed be the day when I was united with you, who cared most about having Christ within us as the hope of glory, and making me a temple for His Holy Spirit. Oh, blessed soul, during our earthly pilgrimage, you kept your eyes fixed on the land that was once far away but is now within reach. You led me to secret places where we bowed our knees before the Lord, participating in humble worship together. Now is the time for me to be exalted. You employed this tongue in confession, supplication, and thanksgiving, but from now on, it shall be used for eternal praise. You caused these eyes, which once shed tears, to sow seeds of joy that will never cease to grow. You guided and restrained me, while others indulged their flesh and made their bellies their gods, leading to their own destruction. But now, I rise gloriously to take my place in the heavenly mansions, while they are dragged out of their graves to be cast into fiery flames. Now, my soul, you shall no longer complain of a sick and pained body. You shall no longer be burdened by weak and weary flesh. I shall now join you in praising our God

forever." And the soul may respond, "Oh, happy day when I return to dwell in that blessed body, which was, is, and will be forever a member of Christ and a temple of the Holy Spirit! Now, we shall be eternally united. The silver cord will never be loosed again. Death shall never separate us. Rise, my body, and let us depart! Let these eyes, which used to weep over my sins, now behold with joy the face of our glorious Redeemer. Behold, this is our God, and we have waited for Him. Let these ears, which once heard the word of life in earthly temples, now listen to the hallelujahs in the heavenly temple. Let these feet, which carried me to the gatherings of saints on earth, take their place among the saints in heaven. And let this tongue, which confessed Christ before men and always praised Him, join the heavenly choir in eternal praise. You shall no longer fast, but partake in an everlasting feast. You shall no longer weep, and your countenance shall not be clouded. Instead, you shall shine forever like a star in the firmament. We fought together, so let us go together to receive and wear the crown."

On the other hand, the wicked shall be raised by the power of Christ, acting as a just Judge who will execute vengeance upon His enemies. The same divine power that confined their souls in hell and kept their bodies in the grave as in a prison will bring them forth. Together, soul and body will receive the dreadful sentence of eternal damnation and be confined together in the prison of hell.

They will emerge from their graves with unspeakable horror and dread. They will be dragged out like criminals from a dungeon, led to their execution, crying out for the mountains and rocks to fall on them and hide them from the face of the Lamb. The cries in Egypt on the night when the destroying angel passed through and killed the firstborn were fearful. The shouts were dreadful when the earth opened its mouth and swallowed Dathan, Abiram, and all their

possessions. But how much more terrible will the cries be when, at the sound of the last trumpet, the earth and sea open their mouths and cast forth all the wicked, delivering them to the fearsome Judge! They will cry, roar, and tear themselves apart. Their former companions in revelry will weep, wail, and curse one another. The earth will be filled with their mournful shrieks and lamentations as they are dragged out like sheep for the slaughter. Those who lived profane, debauched lives, worshipped worldly possessions, or were hypocrites will now, in anguish, clasp their hands, beat their chests, and bitterly lament their fate. They will roar their complaints, calling themselves beasts, fools, and madmen for acting so foolishly in not believing what they once heard. They were cast away in their wickedness at death, and now all their sins rise up with them, entwining like serpents around their wretched souls and bodies, which have a horrifying reunion after a long separation.

Then, we may suppose the wretched body speaks to the soul, saying, "Have you found me again, O my enemy, my worst enemy, savage soul, more cruel than a thousand tigers? Cursed be the day we met. Oh, if only I had never possessed senses, life, or movement! I would rather have been the body of a toad or serpent than yours, for then I would have remained still and would not have witnessed this terrible day. If I had to be attached to you, I would rather have been your donkey or one of your dogs, for then you would have taken better care of me. Oh, cruel kindness! You have embraced me unto death, nourished me for slaughter. Is this the result of your concern for me? Is this what I reap from your efforts and care? What good are riches and pleasures now when this dreadful reckoning has come, as you were forewarned? Oh, cruel grave! Why didn't you keep me forever? Why did you not hold onto your prisoner? Why did you shake me out when I was lying still and at rest? Cursed soul, why didn't you remain in your place, engulfed in flames of fire? Why have you returned to

take me down to the depths of hell? You used this tongue to mock religion, curse, swear, lie, backbite, and boast, withholding it from glorifying God. Now it won't even have a drop of water to cool it in the flames. You turned my ears away from hearing sermons that warned of this day. You found ways to prevent me from paying attention to timely exhortations, admonitions, and rebukes. But why didn't you stop me from hearing the sound of this dreadful trumpet? Why didn't you roam and fly away in the realm of imagination, thereby transporting me away during these frightful events, as you used to do when I attended sermons, communions, prayers, and godly conversations, so that I would have as little awareness of those as I now have of these horrors? But alas! I must burn forever because of your love for your lusts, profanity, sensuality, unbelief, and hypocrisy." Yet, no complaints will avail at that time. Oh, that people were wise and understood this, that they would consider their ultimate destiny!

Regarding the qualities with which the bodies of the saints will be endowed at the resurrection, the apostle tells us that they will be raised incorruptible, glorious, powerful, and spiritual. Currently, like the bodies of others, they are subject to decay, filled with the seeds of disease and death. When they die, even their closest friends find them repulsive and bury them out of sight in the grave. Some of them are unsightly even while alive, afflicted by loathsome sores and diseases. However, at the resurrection, they will leave all traces of corruption behind in the grave and rise incorruptible. They will be immune to any form of illness, sickness, or soreness, and most importantly, they will be incapable of dying. External violence and internal sources of pain will cease. They will no longer feel them. Moreover, they will possess everlasting youth and vitality, free from the deterioration associated with old age in this life.

Their bodies will be glorious, not only beautiful and well-proportioned but also radiant and brilliant. The most beautiful face and well-proportioned body currently found in the world cannot compare to the body of the lowliest saint at the resurrection. For "the righteous will shine like the sun" (Matthew 13:43). If Moses' face shone with dazzling glory when he descended from the mountain, and if Stephen's face resembled that of an angel when he stood before the council, how much more beautiful and glorious will the faces of the saints be, exuding majestic charm, once they are rid of all corruption and shine like the sun! However, note that this beauty is not confined to their faces alone but radiates throughout their entire bodies. The entire body will be raised in glory and fashioned like the glorious body of their Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. During His transfiguration, not only did His face shine like the sun, but His clothing also became as white as light (Matthew 17:2). Any defects or deformities that the bodies of the saints had when they were placed in the grave, resulting from accidents or inherent factors during their formation, will be eradicated when they rise from the grave. However, suppose the marks of the Lord Jesus—scars or wounds—that some of the saints received while on earth for His sake remain in their bodies after the resurrection, just as the nail prints remained in the body of the Lord Jesus after His resurrection. In that case, these marks will serve as distinguishing features and add to their glory rather than detract from their beauty. Nonetheless, it is certain that Isaac's eyes will not be dimmed, Jacob will not limp, Leah will not be tender-eyed, and Mephibosheth will not be lame. Like a goldsmith melting down an old, worn-out vessel and casting it into a new mold, bringing it forth with renewed luster, so too will the lowly bodies that lay dissolved in the grave emerge at the resurrection in perfect beauty and proportion.

They will possess powerful and strong bodies. The strongest men on earth, despite their might, are frail and mortal, and therefore, can be considered weak and feeble. Their strength, no matter how great, is quickly exhausted and consumed. Some of the saints currently have weaker bodies than others, but on that day, to borrow from Zechariah 12:8, "the feeble among them shall be like David, and the house of David shall be like God." One divine scholar stated that at the resurrection, one person will be stronger than a hundred or even thousands are now. Surely, the strength of glorified bodies must be great, surpassing imagination, as they will bear an immeasurable and eternal weight of glory. Mortal bodies are ill-suited for such a state. If transports of joy and excessive grief can lead to death, how can they endure the weight of glory? How can they exist in union with a soul filled with the rapture of heaven? Clearly, they cannot. Mortal bodies would collapse under such a burden, and such overwhelming joy would cause the earthen vessel to shatter into pieces.

The Scriptures clearly tell us that our present frail flesh and blood, even if it were the flesh and blood of a giant, cannot inherit the kingdom of God (1 Corinthians 15:50). Imagine the strength that our physical eyes must possess to behold the dazzling glory and splendor of the New Jerusalem, and to gaze upon the radiant brightness of Jesus Christ, the Lamb and the light of that city, where the inhabitants will shine like the sun! Currently, the Lord veils the face of His throne and shrouds it with clouds so that mortals are not overwhelmed by the rays of His glory (Job 26:9). But in the resurrection, the veil will be lifted, and we will be able to behold His glory, bringing us unspeakable joy. Our bodies in that glorious state will be strong, never resting day or night, continually engaged in the worship of God in the heavenly temple, singing His praises without ever growing weary, a weakness that plagues our mortal bodies but not the glorified body.

These bodies will be spiritual bodies, not transformed into spirits, but possessing qualities and characteristics akin to the spirit. Our bodies will be completely subservient to the soul, subject to its influence and no longer hindering its activity. The animal appetites and the need to suppress them will no longer be a struggle. In this life, our souls are so influenced by the body that they are called carnal in Scripture. However, in the resurrection, our bodies will be spiritual, serving the soul in heavenly pursuits alone, as if they have no connection to the earth. We will no longer require the sustenance of food, drink, or clothing. There will be no hunger or thirst (Revelation 7:16), and marriage will no longer exist, for we will be like the angels of God in heaven. The saints will be strong without the need for physical nourishment, warm without garments, perpetually healthy without medicine, and eternally vibrant and vigorous, never needing sleep as they serve God day and night in His temple (Revelation 7:15). These things will be unnecessary for the glorified bodies, just as they are unnecessary for spirits. We will be agile and active like spirits, possessing a refined constitution. Our bodies, currently cumbersome and heavy, will become exceedingly agile and spirited. There will be no trace of melancholy to weigh down our hearts or cause our spirits to flag and sink. I will not delve further into this matter, as the day of resurrection will fully reveal its wonders.

Regarding the qualities of the bodies of the wicked at the resurrection, the Scripture provides limited information. Whatever their needs may be, they will not receive a drop of water to cool their tongues (Luke 16:24, 25). Though their bodies may be weak, they will continue to live forever, enduring the weight of God's wrath without succumbing to faintness. "The smoke of their torment ascends forever and ever. And they have no rest day or night." Surely, they will not partake in the glory and beauty experienced by the saints.

Their glory will perish with them and never rise again. Daniel tells us that they will awaken to shame and everlasting contempt (Daniel 12:2). Shame accompanies sin as the shadow follows the body. In this world, the wicked often walk in darkness and disguise, but when the Judge appears in flaming fire on the last day, their true nature will be exposed. Their masks will be removed, and the shame of their nakedness will be evident to themselves and others, filling their faces with confusion. Their shame will be too deep for blushing, as all faces gather blackness on that day when they emerge from their graves like criminals released from prison for execution. Their resurrection is a resurrection of condemnation. The greatest beauties who now pride themselves on their physical appearance, disregarding their deformed souls, will appear with a ghastly, grim, and death-like visage. Their countenance will be horrifying, and they will be dreadful sights, emerging from their graves like infernal furies from the pit. They will rise to everlasting contempt, becoming the most contemptible creatures, despised by God as vessels of dishonor, regardless of the honorable positions they held in this world. They will also be despised by humanity, becoming utterly despicable even to those who previously honored them due to their high status, God-given talents, or shared humanity. Their bodies will be repugnant carcasses, and people will look upon them with disgust. Indeed, "they shall be an abhorrence to all flesh" (Isaiah 66:24). The word translated here as "abhorrence" is the same as the word rendered "contempt" in another text, and Isaiah and Daniel both refer to the repulsiveness of the wicked at the resurrection. They will be repugnant even to one another. Those who were once close companions in sin will loathe each other, and the great and honorable individuals who were wicked will no longer be respected by their subjects, servants, or slaves. They will be regarded as filth in the eyes of all.

USE I. This brings comfort to the people of God. The doctrine of the resurrection is a source of solace and joy for believers. When you find yourselves mourning the loss of your godly relatives or friends, remember not to grieve like those who have no hope. You will be reunited with them (1 Thessalonians 4:13, 14). They have merely laid down to rest in their graves for a short while (Isaiah 57:2), but in the morning of the resurrection, they will awaken and emerge from their tombs. The vessel of honor may have been coarse and contained impurities, too weak, dim, and inglorious for the heavenly realm, despite its luster in the earthly realm. It may have been cracked and defiled, necessitating refinement and a more glorious form. Wait patiently, and you will witness its emergence from the earthly furnace, radiating brightness akin to the stars or even the sun at its zenith. Have you buried your infant children? You will see them again. God calls Himself "the God of your offspring," which, as explained by Jesus, guarantees the glorious resurrection of the body. Therefore, take comfort in the covenant you have embraced, confidently expecting that by its virtue, you will be raised in glory. Do not be disheartened by a weak and ailing body; a day will come when you will be completely whole. In the resurrection, Timothy will no longer be plagued by his frequent illnesses; his weak and sickly body, even in youth, will be raised in strength. Lazarus was healthy and whole, his body raised incorruptible. Though your present weakness may prevent you from traveling even a short distance to participate in public worship, the day will come when your body will no longer hinder you. You will "meet the Lord in the air" alongside the saints rising from their graves (1 Thessalonians 4:17). The experience of the saints rising from the grave will resemble that of the Israelites coming out of Egypt, where "there was not one feeble person among their tribes" (Psalm 105:37). If you possess an unattractive or deformed body, remember that there is a hidden glory within that will set everything right on the outside, fulfilling the desires of your

heart. You will rise with a glorious, beautiful, handsome, and well-proportioned body. The unattractiveness or deformities that accompany your current body may accompany it to the grave, but they will not return. Oh, if only those who are eager to be physically beautiful and attractive would not hasten to achieve it through foolish and sinful means! Instead, let them focus on the heavenly art of adorning the body by seeking to become inwardly glorious through God's gracious virtues. This pursuit will ultimately make them truly admirable and eternally beautiful. Believer, you will indeed confront death and experience the initial defeat, but you will rise again and emerge victorious in the end. You will go down to the grave, but it will not be your eternal abode. You will not hear the voices of your friends there, but you will hear the voice of Christ. Your friends may leave you in the grave, but your God will not. Just as God said to Jacob when he went down to Egypt (Genesis 46:3, 4), He says to you as you descend to the grave, "Do not fear to go down—I will go down with you—and I will also surely bring you up again." This is solid comfort and glorious hope. Therefore, "comfort yourselves and one another with these words" (1 Thessalonians 4:18).

USE II. This should strike terror in the hearts of all unregenerate individuals. Those of you who remain in your natural state, contemplate the eternal state described here and consider what awaits you if you are not brought into a state of grace in time. Ponder the day when the trumpet will sound, shattering the bars of the pit, flinging open the doors of the grave, causing the depths of the sea to yield their dead, and compelling the earth to release its own. Death, astonished, will relinquish its prisoners, and your wretched soul and body will be reunited to stand before God's judgment seat. In that moment, if you had a thousand worlds at your disposal, you would gladly surrender them all to lie undisturbed in your grave,

experiencing even a fraction of the ease with which you have sometimes lounged at home on the Lord's day. Alternatively, if that cannot be attained, you would desire to be a mere spectator of the events of that day, as you have been at significant occasions and rich gospel feasts. And if even that is unattainable, you would wish for a mountain or a rock to fall upon you and shield you from the face of the Lamb. Alas, how foolish are people to waste their precious lives, giving little thought to death, as if they were mere perishable beasts! Some are preoccupied with determining the location of their graves, while failing to seriously consider whether their graves will be beds from which they awaken joyfully on the morning of the resurrection or prisons from which they are brought forth to receive a dreadful sentence. Remember, now is the time for sowing, and as you sow, so shall you reap. God's sowing time begins at death, and at the resurrection, the bodies of the wicked, sown "full of sins that lie down with them in the dust" (Job 20:11), will spring forth, sinful, wretched, and vile. At death, God will cast aside your bodies, which currently serve as instruments of sin, consigning them to fire, and at the resurrection, He will bring them forth to face the flames. The body of the drunkard will stagger under the weight of God's wrath, akin to being intoxicated with the wine of His fury, without any dilution. Those who indulge in revelry and pleasure-seeking will reel in a different manner when they hear the sound of the last trumpet instead of their songs and music. Many exhaust themselves for worldly gain but are unwilling to exert themselves for the benefit of their souls. They engage in labor that is unreasonably strenuous, rendering themselves unfit for God's service. Once finished, they deem themselves too tired to engage in worship, using their weariness from other activities as a justification for neglecting their duties. However, a day is approaching when they will experience even greater distress. Many will travel great distances for worldly pursuits but will not traverse half the distance for the sake of their

immortal souls. Many will be sick and unable to attend to spiritual matters on the Lord's day, yet they will be tolerably well during the rest of the week. But when that trumpet sounds, the dead will find their feet, and not one person will be absent from that assembly. When the bodies of the saints shine like the sun, the persecutors will wear frightful expressions. Those who imprisoned and persecuted the saints, branding them, burning them to ashes, hanging them, and displaying their heads and hands in public places to intimidate others from walking the path of righteousness for which the saints suffered—fearful will be their plight. Many fair faces will gather blackness on that day. Those who were once admired and flattered for their beauty, which harbors a worm of deformity within—a sorry facade, a superficial veneer—will be exposed as even more repugnant before the flaming fire in which the Judge will be "revealed from heaven, taking vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel" (2 Thessalonians 1:7, 8). They will be stripped of all their adornments and left with nothing to cover their nakedness. Their corpses will be abhorrent to all, accentuating the beauty and glory of the righteous.

Now is the time to secure your place in the resurrection of the righteous. To do so, unite with Jesus Christ through faith, rising spiritually from sin, and glorifying God with your bodies. He is the "resurrection and the life" (John 11:25). If your bodies are members of Christ, temples of the Holy Spirit, they will undoubtedly rise in glory. Enter into this covenant now, and you will emerge with joy in the new world. Rise from your sins; cast away the burial garments and rid yourselves of former lusts. How can anyone imagine that those who remain spiritually dead while living will experience the resurrection of life? That privilege belongs to all who, having first consecrated their souls and bodies to the Lord through faith, glorify

Him in both their physical and spiritual lives, living and acting for Him and suffering for His sake when called to do so.

IV. THE GENERAL JUDGMENT

When the Son of Man comes in his glory, accompanied by all the holy angels, he will sit on the throne of his glory. All nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate them from one another, just as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats. He will place the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. Then the King will say to those on his right, "Come, you who are blessed," etc. To those on his left, he will say, "Depart from me, you who are cursed," etc. And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life. - Matthew 25:31-34, 41, 46

After the dead are raised and those who are alive at the coming of the Judge are transformed, the general judgment follows, as vividly and solemnly described in this portion of Scripture. We shall observe the following details:

1. The coming of the Judge, "When the Son of Man shall come in his glory," etc. The Judge is Jesus Christ, referred to as "the Son of Man," who, in his divine power as God, will raise the dead. He is also known as the King, as stated in verse 34, for judging the world is an act of the royal Mediator's kingly office. He will come in glory, radiating glory in his own person and accompanied by a

glorious retinue of all the holy angels, who will serve him during this momentous occasion.

2. Ascending the tribunal. As a King, he will sit on a throne, a magnificent throne. "He shall sit upon the throne of his glory" (verse 31).
3. The appearance of all parties. All nations, without exception, regardless of size or status, from every nation that has ever existed or will exist on Earth, will be gathered before him, summoned to his tribunal.
4. The separation of the parties. The elect sheep and the reprobate goats will be divided, each group standing on their own, just as a shepherd who grazes his sheep and goats together during the day separates them at night (verse 32). The righteous will be placed on the right, signifying the most honorable position, while the wicked will be on the left (verse 33). However, both groups will stand before him (verse 32). This imagery seems to allude to a Jewish legal custom, where one person sat on the right side of the judge to write the sentence of absolution, while another person sat on the left to write the sentence of condemnation.
5. The pronouncement of the sentences, based on their deeds. The righteous will receive absolution, while the wicked will be condemned (verses 34-41).
6. The execution of the sentences, as the wicked are driven away to hell and the righteous are transported to heaven (verse 46).

DOCTRINE: There will be a general judgment. I will now, I. Confirm this doctrine; II. Explain it; and then apply it.

I. Confirmation of the truth that there will be a general judgment:

1. It is evident from clear Scripture testimonies. Throughout the ages, the world has been informed of it. Enoch, before the flood, prophesied about it, as recorded in the book of Jude, verses 14-15: "Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousands of his holy ones, to execute judgment on all," etc. Daniel also describes it in chapter 7, verses 9-10: "I watched till thrones were put in place, and the Ancient of Days was seated... a fiery stream issued and came forth from before him... and the books were opened." The apostle Paul is explicit in Acts 17:31, "He has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed." See also Matthew 16:27, 2 Corinthians 5:10, 2 Thessalonians 1:7-10, Revelation 20:11-15. God not only spoke of it but also solemnly swore to it, as stated in Romans 14:10-11, "We will all stand before the judgment seat of God... For it is written, 'As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God.'"
2. The perfect justice and goodness of God, the supreme ruler of the world, necessitate a general judgment, as they require the righteous to be rewarded and the wicked to be punished. Yet, we often witness wickedness being exalted while truth and righteousness are trampled upon; piety being oppressed while profanity and irreligion triumph. This occurrence is so prevalent that anyone who sincerely embraces the path of holiness must expect and accept the loss of all that can be taken away from them by the world, as Jesus stated in Luke 14:26, "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple." However, it is incongruous with God's justice and goodness for the affairs of humanity to

remain in their apparent state from one generation to the next, without each person being rewarded according to their deeds. Since this does not occur in this present life, there must be a future judgment. "Since indeed it is just for God to repay with affliction those who afflict you, and to grant relief to you who are afflicted, as well as to us, when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven" (2 Thessalonians 1:6-7). There will come a day when the tables will turn, and the wicked will be called to account for their sins and receive their just punishment, while the righteous will prosper. As the apostle argues for the blessed resurrection of the saints, "If in this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied" (1 Corinthians 15:19). It is true that God sometimes punishes the wicked in this life, so that people may know "that he is a God who executes judgment in the earth." However, much wickedness remains unpunished and undiscovered, serving as a pledge of the future judgment. If none of the wicked were punished in this life, they would conclude that God had abandoned the earth entirely. If all of them were punished in this life, people might think that there is no further reckoning. Therefore, in God's wisdom, some are punished now, and some are not. Sometimes the Lord strikes sinners in the very act of their transgressions, demonstrating to the world that He is a witness to all their wickedness and will hold them accountable. At other times, He delays striking them, revealing to the world that He does not forget their evil deeds, even if He does not immediately punish them. Additionally, the sins of many outlive them, and the impure legacy they leave behind persists long after their death. This can be seen in the case of Jeroboam, the first king of the ten tribes of Israel, whose sin continued until the downfall of that unfortunate kingdom (2 Kings 17:22-23), "The people of Israel walked in all the sins that

Jeroboam did. They did not depart from them, until the Lord removed Israel out of his sight."

3. The resurrection of Christ provides undeniable proof that there will be a day of judgment. The Apostle Paul used this argument to persuade the Athenians that Jesus Christ will be the Judge of the world. He said, "He has given assurance of this to all by raising him from the dead" (Acts 17:31). The Judge has already been identified, his authority has been documented and confirmed. Indeed, it has been proclaimed to all through his resurrection from the dead. God has provided assurance through this act of raising Christ from the dead, displaying his credentials as the Judge of the world. Even during his days of humiliation, when he was brought before a tribunal, accused, and condemned by men, he openly spoke of this judgment. In Matthew 26:64, he declared, "Hereafter you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven." Now that he has been raised from the dead, despite being condemned as a blasphemer on this very account, is it not an undeniable heavenly proof of the truth of his assertion? Furthermore, this was one of the primary purposes of Christ's death and resurrection. As stated in Romans 14:9, "For this very reason, Christ died and returned to life so that he might be the Lord of both the dead and the living."
4. Every person carries within them an internal witness to this truth. Romans 2:15 tells us that their conscience bears witness to the work of the law written on their hearts, while their thoughts either accuse or excuse one another. Within every individual, there is a tribunal where conscience acts as accuser, witness, and judge, binding the sinner over to God's judgment. This fills even the most wicked individuals with horror and internal anguish

when they commit heinous crimes, effectively summoning them to answer for their actions before the Judge of the living and the dead. This holds true even when the crime is secret and hidden from the world's eyes. It reaches those whom human laws cannot touch due to their power or cunning. Individuals may escape the judgment of their fellow human beings, but wherever they go, conscience, as the officer of the supreme Judge, retains its hold on them, reserving them in chains for the judgment of the great day. Whether they elude punishment from men or meet their end through public justice, when they sense death approaching, they hear from within themselves the call to account for their actions, compelled to listen during these profound moments of their lives. If there are individuals in whom this witness does not appear, we have no reason to conclude that the judgment to come is not a reality any more than we would conclude that someone is not in pain simply because they do not groan or that death is a mere joke because there have been those who seemed to treat it lightly. An outward appearance may mask an unrepentant conscience. The more hopeless someone's situation, the more they may find it in their best interest not to reflect upon their state and condition. However, anyone who earnestly examines themselves will discover within themselves the witness to the coming judgment. Even the pagans had a notion of it, although mixed with their own fictions. Therefore, although some Athenians "mocked" when they heard about the resurrection of the dead, there is no account of them mocking when they heard about the general judgment (Acts 17:31-32).

II. In explanation, the following details may provide some insight into the events of that great day.

1. God will judge the world through Jesus Christ. As stated in Acts 17:31, "He will judge the world in righteousness by the man he has appointed." The Psalmist tells us that God is the judge himself (Psalm 50:6). The holy blessed Trinity, consisting of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, serves as the Judge in terms of judicial authority, dominion, and power. However, the incarnate Son is the Judge in terms of administration and the special exercise of that power. The judgment will be carried out by him as the royal Mediator, for he has received delegated authority from the Father as his servant, "his King," whom he has "set upon his holy hill of Zion" (Psalm 2:6), and to whom he has entrusted all judgment (John 5:22). This is part of the Mediator's exaltation, bestowed upon him as a result of his voluntary humiliation (Philippians 2:8-10). He humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore, God highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, which signifies power and authority over all. "So that at the name of Jesus, every knee should bow" (Romans 14:10-11). The Apostle himself explains this as referring to standing before the judgment seat of Christ. Thus, he who was judged and condemned by men will become the Judge of men and angels.

2. Jesus Christ, the Judge, will descend from heaven to the air (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17). As stated in Matthew 24:30, "He will come on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory." This coming will be a tremendous surprise to a world steeped in deep complacency. The foolish virgins will be sleeping, and the wise ones will be dozing. The world will be indulging in much luxury and debauchery, lacking sobriety and watchfulness. It will be a time of bustling activity but a scarcity of faith and holiness. As Jesus said, "As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the

coming of the Son of Man. For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man" (Luke 17:26-30). The Judge's coming will catch some in the marketplace engaged in buying and selling, others at the table indulging in food and drink, and others preoccupied with their new plantings or construction projects. Even the wedding day of some will become their own judgment day and the judgment day of the world. But the Judge is coming! The marketplaces will be disrupted, buyers will abandon their purchases, sellers will cast away their money. People will be lifted from their tables, and their merriment will be instantly extinguished. Even if a tree is planted in the ground, the gardener will not have time to cover its roots. Workers will discard their tools when a building is only halfway constructed, and the owner will pay it no further attention. The bridegroom, bride, and guests will have to leave the wedding day behind and appear before the judgment seat. "Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him" (Revelation 1:7). His coming will be most glorious, for he will come "in the glory of his Father with the holy angels" (Mark 8:38). When he came in the flesh to die for sinners, he laid aside the robes of his glory and was despised and rejected by men. However, when he comes again to judge the world, his visible glory and majesty will surpass all earthly splendor, filling even his greatest enemies with fear and dread. No prince or potentate in the world has ever had such a glorious retinue as this Judge will have. All the holy angels will accompany him to honor and serve him. Therefore, the One who was led to the cross by a band of soldiers will be magnificently

escorted to the place of judgment, not by a multitude, but by the entire host of angels— "all his holy angels," as the text states.

3. At the coming of the Judge, the parties will be summoned by the sound of the last trumpet. This trumpet will cause the dead to be raised, and those who are alive will be transformed (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17). Oh, the resounding trumpet that will be heard simultaneously in every corner of the earth and sea! What a wondrous sound that will not only disturb those who sleep in the dust but will effectively awaken them, rousing them from their slumber and bringing them back to life! If trumpets were sounding now, drums beating, fierce soldiers crying out and killing, women and children running and shrieking, the wounded groaning and dying, even then those in the graves would remain undisturbed as if the world were in a state of profound peace. Even if stormy winds were toppling mighty oaks, the seas roaring and swallowing up ships, dreadful thunder rumbling through the heavens, and lightning flashing everywhere, even if the earth were trembling, quaking, and splitting open, engulfing entire cities and burying multitudes at once, the dead would still enjoy perfect repose and continue to sleep soundly in the dust, even if their own graves were disrupted. However, at the sound of this trumpet, they will all awaken. The morning has come, and they can no longer sleep. It is time for the dead to be judged. They must rise from their graves and appear before the Judge.
4. The Judge will take his seat on the tribunal, sitting on the throne of his glory. Previously, he stood before an earthly tribunal and was condemned as a criminal. Now, he will sit on his own tribunal and judge the world. Once, he hung on the cross, covered in shame, but now he will sit on a throne of glory.

Whether this throne will be a radiant cloud or something else, I will not speculate. Our eyes will eventually provide the answer to that question. John "saw a great white throne" (Revelation 20:11). As Daniel described it, "His throne was like a fiery flame, and its wheels were like burning fire" (Daniel 7:9). Whatever form it takes, it will undoubtedly be a throne of indescribable glory, surpassing the most splendid earthly thrones. Its sight will astonish both kings who sat on thrones in their earthly lives and beggars who sat on dung heaps. It will be a throne of unparalleled grandeur and majesty, befitting the One who will sit upon it. No judge has ever had such a throne, and no throne has ever had such a judge.

Leaving the discovery of the nature of the throne until that day, it is more pertinent for us to consider the characteristics of the Judge who will sit upon it. On this point, we are not left to uncertain conjectures. The Judge on the throne will be:

1. A Judge visible to our physical eyes (Revelation 1:7). When God gave the law on Mount Sinai, the people "saw no form, only heard a voice." However, when He calls the world to account for their observance of His law, we will see our Judge with our own eyes. This vision will either bring eternal comfort or eternal confusion, depending on the reception we have given Him in this life. The very body that was crucified outside the gates of Jerusalem, between two thieves, will be seen on the throne, shining in glory. We currently symbolically see Him in the sacrament of the Eucharist, and the saints see Him through the eye of faith. But on that day, everyone will see Him with their physical eyes.

2. A Judge possessing full authority and power to render judgment according to each person's deeds. Christ, as God, has inherent authority. As the Mediator, He has received judicial power and authority from the Father according to the covenant made for the redemption of sinners. His divine glory will illuminate His commission for this honorable task. He has been given all power in heaven and on earth (Matthew 28:18) and holds the keys to Hades and death (Revelation 1:18). There can be no appeal from His tribunal. Once a sentence is passed, it stands forever. There is no higher court to which a person can bring their case. This judgment is the judgment of the Mediator and, therefore, the final judgment. If the Intercessor is against us, who can be for us? If Christ condemns us, who will absolve us?
3. A Judge of infinite wisdom. His eyes will penetrate and discern even the most intricate cases. His omniscience qualifies Him to judge not only words and actions but also the most secret thoughts. No cunning sinner will be able to deceive Him or disguise their crimes through artful manipulation. He is the searcher of hearts to whom nothing can be hidden or perplexed; everything is exposed and open before His eyes (Hebrews 4:13).
4. A most just Judge, a Judge of perfect integrity. He is the righteous Judge (2 Timothy 4:8), and His throne is a great white throne (Revelation 20:11). Only pure and spotless judgments will proceed from it. The Thebans depicted Justice as blind and without hands to emphasize that judges should not show favoritism or accept bribes. The Areopagites judged in the dark so as not to be influenced by the identity of the speaker but solely by the substance of what was spoken. With the Judge on His throne, there will be no favoritism. He will not regard the rich or the poor but will administer just judgment in every case.

5. An omnipotent Judge, capable of executing His judgments. The combined force of devils and wicked men will be powerless against Him. They cannot delay the execution of the sentence against them for even a moment, let alone prevent it entirely. "Thousand thousands of angels minister to Him" (Daniel 7:10). By the breath of His mouth, He can drive the cursed herd wherever He pleases.

6. The parties who will appear before the Judge are men and devils. Although the fallen angels were subjected to God's wrath from the moment they sinned and were cast down to hell, it is evident that they are reserved for judgment (2 Peter 2:4; Jude verse 6). They will be solemnly and publicly judged for their sins and their role in tempting others to sin. They will receive the due punishment for dishonoring God and causing harm to humanity. These wicked spirits, though currently not in strict custody and free to roam like roaring lions seeking whom they may devour, will receive their final sentence and be confined to their den, imprisoned in extreme and unspeakable torment for all eternity (Revelation 20:10). In anticipation of this, the devils said to Christ, "Have you come here to torment us before the time?" (Matthew 8:29).

However, what we should primarily note is the situation of humanity on that day. All people must appear before this tribunal. Men and women of every age, status, and condition, whether great or small, noble or common, none will be exempted. Adam and Eve, along with all their descendants who have had or will have a living soul united to a body until the end of the world, will comprise this vast assembly. Even those who have refused to come to the throne of grace will be compelled to stand before the bar of justice. There will be no hiding from the all-seeing Judge, no escape from the omnipresent One, and

no resistance against the Almighty. "We must all stand before the judgment seat of Christ" (2 Corinthians 5:10). "All nations shall be gathered before Him," as the Scripture says. This gathering will be accomplished through the ministry of angels. They will gather the elect (Mark 13:27), and they will also gather the reprobate (Matthew 13:40-41). From every corner of the world, its inhabitants will be gathered to the place where the Judge will establish His throne for judgment.

6. There will be a separation between the righteous and the wicked. The righteous, resembling a company of elect sheep, will be placed on Christ's right hand, while the wicked goats will be on His left. This separation does not need to wait until the trial is complete since the parties will rise from their graves with evident outward distinctions, as mentioned before. The separation seems to be accomplished through the double gathering previously mentioned: one for the elect (Mark 13:27) and the other for those who commit iniquity (Matthew 13:41). The elect, caught up together in the clouds, will meet the Lord in the air (1 Thessalonians 4:17) and be positioned on His right hand. The reprobate, left on the earth, will be placed on the Judge's left hand. This marks a complete separation of two parties who were always opposed to each other in their principles, goals, and way of life. When they were together, they burdened one another, causing groaning and rage. But now they are permanently divided and will never come together again. The righteous and the wicked, like iron and clay that cannot mix (Daniel 2:41-43), are completely separated. The righteous are drawn up into the air by the attracting power of the "stone cut out of the mountain," namely, Jesus Christ, while the wicked are left on the earth to be trampled underfoot.

Now, let us turn our gaze to the right hand, where we will behold a glorious company of saints shining like stars in their orbits. With joyful countenances, they will behold the One who sits upon the throne. Here, we will witness two remarkable sights that the world has never seen before. Firstly, a great congregation of saints where not a single hypocrite will be found. In Adam's family, there was a bloody Cain; in Noah's family, a cursed Ham; in Christ's own family, a treacherous Judas. However, in this company, only those who are sealed, who are members of Christ and share one Father, will be present. This sight is reserved for that day. Secondly, all the godly will be on one side. Rarely, if ever, do the saints on earth achieve such harmony as there are always some discordant notes among them. It is not to be expected that people who see only in part, though all journey to the same city, should agree on every step along the way. We should not anticipate such unity in this state of imperfection. But on that day, Paul and Barnabas will meet in peace and unity, though their contention was once so sharp that they parted ways (Acts 15:39). Divisions will cease, and the believers from different factions will stand together. Despite their differences in minor matters while in the world, they united in one Lord Jesus Christ through true and living faith and walked in the way of holiness and practical godliness. On the other hand, vile hypocrites from various factions will be led forth with the workers of iniquity.

Now, let us direct our gaze to the left hand, where we will see the accursed goats, all the wicked ones from Cain to the last ungodly person who will exist in the world. They will be gathered together in one wretched congregation. Although there are many assemblies of the wicked now, on that day, there will be only one. All of them will be present, brought together as one herd for slaughter, bellowing, roaring, weeping, and howling due to the miseries that have come upon them and will continue to come. And remember, you will not

be a mere spectator observing these two distinct groups. Rather, you will take your place among one of the two and share the destiny of that company. Those who currently abhor the company of the saints the most will long to be allowed to join them, even if it means lying at their feet. However, not a single weed will be found among the wheat; the floor will be thoroughly cleansed. Many who held prominent positions in this world will find themselves in the lowest position on that day. Many who insisted on having the right-hand position over those who were better than them will be turned to the left, regarded as the most despicable wretches. Oh, how terrible this separation will be for the ungodly! How dreadful it will be to gather them all into one miserable company! They will see what they refuse to believe—that only a few are saved. They currently find it sufficient to be in the company of the majority and comfortably follow the crowd. But the multitude on the left hand will offer them no solace. The sight of being placed on the same side as Turks and Pagans will sting the ungodly Christian. Profane Protestants will be grieved to stand with idolatrous Papists, while praying people will be grouped with their profane neighbors who mocked religious exercises. Formal professors, ignorant of the new birth and the power of godliness, will be counted among persecutors. Currently, there are many opposing factions in the world, but on that day, all the ungodly will be united. How dreadful will the faces of companions in sin be to one another! The scene will be filled with lamentations as drunkards, who have spent many joyful days together, lock eyes; husbands and wives, parents and children, masters and servants, and neighbors, who have been snares and stumbling blocks to one another, leading to the ruin of their own souls and the souls of their loved ones, reunite in this miserable society. Curses will replace greetings, and instead of the usual embraces, they will tear at themselves and rage against one another.

7. The parties will undergo a trial. The trial won't be difficult since the Judge is omniscient, and nothing can be hidden from Him. However, to make His righteous judgment evident to all, He will bring the hidden things of darkness into the clearest light during the trial (1 Corinthians 4:5).

Men will be tried in two aspects:

1. Their works will be examined, for "God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil" (Ecclesiastes 12:14). The Judge will scrutinize every person's conduct and reveal their deeds performed in the body, along with all the accompanying circumstances, in true clarity. Many actions that were praised and admired by people as good and just will be exposed as evil and abominable in God's sight. Conversely, many works that are currently condemned by the world will be approved and commended by the Judge as good and just. Secret things will be brought to light, and what was concealed from the world will be revealed. Wickedness, which has remained hidden despite human investigation, will be brought forth to glorify God and confound unrepentant sinners who concealed it. The world may appear vile now to those who practice godliness, but it will become a thousand times more vile when every secret deed is exposed. Every good action will be remembered, and the hidden acts of righteousness and good works that the saints diligently concealed from human eyes will no longer remain hidden. Although the Lord will not allow individuals to boast of their own goodness, He will Himself reveal it in due time.
2. Their words will be judged, for "by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned" (Matthew 12:37). Not a single word spoken for God and His cause in the

world out of love for Him will be forgotten. They are all carefully recorded and will be presented as evidence of faith and one's relationship with Christ. In Malachi 3:16-17, it is written, "Then they that feared the Lord spake often one to another, and the Lord hearkened and heard it; and a book of remembrance was written before him. And they shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels." The words that were spoken without purpose, neither for God's glory nor for the good of oneself or others, are idle words. These idle words will also be accounted for on the day of judgment (Matthew 12:36). If idle words have to be accounted for, how much more will men's wicked words, including sinful oaths, curses, lies, filthy speech, and bitter words, be brought up again on that day? Many will be condemned by their own tongues.

3. Men's thoughts will be brought into judgment. The Judge will expose the counsels of the hearts (1 Corinthians 4:5). Thoughts escape human judgment but not the judgment of the heart-searching God who knows men's thoughts without relying on signs to discern them. The hidden motives behind people's actions will be brought to light, and sins that never manifested beyond the heart will be exposed. Oh, what a spectacle man's corrupt nature will present when his innermost self is laid bare, and all his speculative impurities are revealed! The rottenness concealed within many whitewashed tombs, the speculative filthiness and lustfulness, murder and malice lurking in men's hearts like hidden chambers of imagery, will be uncovered. The good that resided in anyone's heart will no longer remain concealed. If it was in their hearts to build a house for the Lord, they will hear that it was good that the desire was in their hearts.

This trial will be righteous, impartial, thorough, clear, and evident. The Judge is the righteous Judge, and He will do what is just for

everyone. He possesses a fair balance for weighing good and evil actions, as well as honest and deceitful hearts. The fig-leaf cover of hypocrisy will be blown away, and the hypocrite's true nature will be exposed, just as when the Lord came to judge Adam and Eve "in the wind of the day" (Genesis 3:8). The fire that tests all things most exquisitely will scrutinize every person's work to determine its nature (1 Corinthians 3:13). Human judgment often becomes confused and muddled, but in this trial, the entire process will be clear and evident, like words written with a sunbeam. It will be clear to the Judge, for whom no case is too intricate, and it will be clear to the parties involved, who will be convinced (Jude verse 15). Furthermore, the multitude on both sides will witness the Judge's clarity in His judgment, for "the heavens shall declare his righteousness" in the presence of the whole world, making it universally known (Psalm 50:6).

In Scripture, this trial is portrayed as the "opening of books," and it is said that men will be "judged out of those things written in the books" (Revelation 20:12). The Judge of the world, who infallibly knows all things, does not need books to be presented before Him to prevent any mistakes regarding the law or facts. However, this expression highlights the meticulous, accurate, just, and well-founded nature of His proceedings. Four books will be opened on that day.

1. The book of God's remembrance or omniscience (Malachi 3:16). This book is an exact record of every person's state, thoughts, words, and deeds—both good and evil. It is like a daily ledger in which the Lord records everything that occurs in people's hearts, lips, and lives. It meticulously keeps track of their sins and good works, whether secret or public, along with all the accompanying circumstances. It also registers their temporal

and spiritual privileges, which are frequently made readily available to them, as well as the warnings, admonitions, and rebukes delivered by teachers, neighbors, afflictions, and their own consciences. Everything is recorded in its proper order. In the case of the ungodly, this book will serve as an indictment. However, for the godly, it will be a memorial of their good deeds. The opening of this book signifies the Judge bringing to light what is written within it, reading the indictment and memorial aloud for all to hear.

2. The book of conscience will be opened, acting as a thousand witnesses to testify to the facts (Romans 2:15). Conscience accompanies every person, recording their deeds committed in the body as if noting them in a book. Although much is currently written in it, which cannot be read at present due to the blindness, muteness, and deafness of conscience, the seals will be broken, and the book will be opened. Among the ungodly, there will be no more silent or seared consciences. Their consciences will become keenly perceptive and alive on that day. No one will call good evil or evil good. Ignorance of sin and what constitutes sinful behavior will have no place among them. The subtle reasoning people use to justify their lusts will be forever confounded by their own consciences. None will have the privilege of remaining under the soft cover of delusion; instead, all will be convicted by their consciences. Whether they like it or not, they will have to look upon this book, read it, be confounded, and stand speechless, realizing that nothing is falsely charged against them since this is a book they themselves kept. The Judge will make every person see themselves in the mirror of their own conscience, hastening the process.

3. The book of the law will be opened. This book serves as the standard and rule by which right and wrong are known, as well as the sentence that should be pronounced accordingly on those subject to it. When this book is opened, it aligns with the opening of the book of conscience. Conscience, established by the sovereign Lawgiver in every person's heart, acts as a private teacher to reveal the law and a personal pastor to apply it. On that day, conscience will perfectly fulfill its role, presenting the person with accurate but dreadful lectures on the law. The specific aspect of the book of the law being opened likely refers to the part that determines the reward for people's works. The law currently promises life in exchange for perfect obedience, but no one on the right or left hand will claim such obedience once the book of conscience is opened. The law threatens death for disobedience and will effectively bring it upon all who remain under its dominion. This portion of the book of the law, determining the reward for works, is opened to reveal the portion of the ungodly so that they can read their sentence before it is pronounced. However, it is not opened for the saints' sentencing since no sentence absolving a sinner can be derived from it. The law promises life, not as a rule of actions, but as a covenant of works. Innocent humans could not have demanded life based on their obedience until the law was established as a covenant, as previously explained. The saints, having entered into a new covenant—the covenant of grace—during their earthly lives, have died to the law as a covenant of works, and the law has died to them. Therefore, they need not fear death from the law and cannot hope for life from it since "they are not under the law but under grace" (Romans 6:14). Instead, "another book is opened" for their sentencing.

Thus, the book of the law is opened to pronounce judgment against those on the left hand, enabling them to clearly see the justice of their condemnation and the Judge's lawful proceedings. Nevertheless, there is a distinction. Those who had only the natural law and did not live under any specific revelation will be judged according to the law of nature written in their hearts. This law declares that "those who commit such things" as they will be convicted of "are worthy of death" (Romans 1:32). On the other hand, those who had the written law and received the Word of God proclaimed in the visible church will be judged by that written law. As the apostle states in Romans 2:12, "For as many as have sinned without the written law shall also perish without the written law, and as many as have sinned in the law"—that is, under the written law—"shall also be judged by the written law."

(4) "Another book" will be "opened, which is the book of life," Rev. 20:12. In this book, the names of all the chosen ones are written, as Christ said to his disciples, Luke 10:20, "Your names are written in heaven." This book contains God's gracious and unchanging purpose to bring all the chosen ones to eternal life. To accomplish this, they are redeemed by the blood of His Son, effectively called, justified, adopted, sanctified, and raised up by Him on the last day without sin. Currently, it is in the possession of the Mediator, like the book that describes "the manner of the kingdom." Having completed the work given to Him by the Father, He will produce and open the book on the great day. He will present the individuals named in it as faultless before the presence of His glory, as mentioned in Jude verse 24. They will have no blemish, wrinkle, or anything impure. None of those named in the book will be missing. They will be found qualified according to the order of the book, redeemed, called, justified, sanctified, and raised up without blemish. So, according to the same book, they will obtain the ultimate goal: everlasting life. We can infer

this from the precious promise in Rev. 3:5, "He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments," signifying their glory. "I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life, but I will confess his name before My Father," indicating that their names will be read among the rest of God's chosen ones, "and before His angels." Therefore, this forms the basis of the saints' absolution, the foundation of the blessed sentence they will receive. With the opening of the book of life, it will become known to all who are chosen and who are not. This concludes the discussion on the trial of the parties.

8. Then the Judge will pronounce this blessed sentence on the saints: "Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world," Matt. 25:34. It is highly likely that the man Christ will pronounce it with an audible voice, which both the saints and the wicked will hear and understand. One can hardly fathom the indescribable joy with which the blessed ones will hear these words. It is beyond imagination the overflowing joy that will fill their hearts upon hearing these words. And one cannot comprehend the extent of anguish that will be unleashed in the hearts of the ungodly by these heavenly words. Certainly, this sentence will be pronounced before the sentence of damnation. "Then the King will say to those on His right hand, 'Come, you blessed of My Father,' etc., verse 41. There is no need for this order so that the saints can hear the other sentence against the reprobate without fear. Those who are raised in glory, caught up to meet the Lord in the air, presented without blemish, and whose souls, for the most part, have been in heaven for a long time, will not be capable of such fear. But this orderly arrangement will bring them to sit in judgment as Christ's assessors against the ungodly, whose torment will be intensified by it. It will be a hell for them to be kept out of hell until they see the gates of heaven

open to receive the saints who once lived in the same world as them, perhaps in the same locality, country, or town, and sat under the same ministry. Thus, they will see heaven at a distance, which will make their hell even more unbearable. This is similar to the experience of the unbelieving lord in 2 Kings 7:19-20. They will "see" the abundance but not partake of it. Every word of the blessed sentence will pierce their hearts like a venomous arrow as they witness what they have lost and realize what awaits them.

This sentence is based on the works of the saints, as mentioned in Rev. 20:12, but not because of their works or their faith, as if eternal life were earned by them. The sentence itself refutes this absurd notion. The kingdom they are called to was "prepared for them from the foundation of the world," not something they had to earn, considering their recent existence. They inherit it as sons, not acquire it as servants do their wages. They were redeemed by the blood of Christ and clothed with His spotless righteousness, which is the true cause of the sentence. They were also prepared for heaven through the sanctification of the Holy Spirit, hence the reference to their works. Thus, the ungodly world will now see that the Judge of the living and the dead rewards those who are good. This is why it is added to the sentence, "For I was hungry and you gave Me food," etc., verse 35-36. These examples do not indicate the grounds but rather the evidence of their entitlement to heaven. It's like a judge declaring a debtor not guilty because witnesses testify that the debt has already been paid. Similarly, the apostle says in 1 Cor. 10:5, "But with many of them, God was not well pleased; for they were overthrown in the wilderness." Their downfall in the wilderness was not the reason for God's displeasure with them, but it served as evidence of it. Thus, our Lord teaches us the necessary connection between glory and good works, specifically works that are in

accordance with the Gospel, works done in relation to Jesus Christ and out of faith and love for Him. Without these elements, they will not be considered on that day. The saints will be judged according to such works, and the degrees of glory among them will be determined by these works. It is an eternal truth that "he who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly" (2 Cor. 9:6).

The good works of the godly will have a glorious yet gratuitous reward—a reward of grace, not of obligation. This will fill them with wonder at the abundance of free grace and the Lord's willingness to take notice of their poor and insignificant works. This seems to be the meaning behind their response, "Lord, when did we see You hungry?" (verses 37-39). Can they not marvel at being seated at the marriage supper of the Lamb and hearing Him acknowledge even the smallest act of kindness they showed to a hungry fellow believer? Oh, the bountiful harvest that follows the seed of good works! Rivers of delight in exchange for a cup of cold water given to a disciple in the name of a disciple! Everlasting mansions of glory in exchange for providing lodging for a saint who was a stranger! Eternal robes of glory in exchange for a new or perhaps old coat given to a fellow believer lacking necessary clothing! A visit to a sick saint repaid by Christ Himself, coming in the glory of His Father with all His holy angels! A visit made to a poor prisoner for the sake of Christ repaid with a visit from the Judge of all, who takes the visitor to the palace of heaven to be with Him forever! These things will be a source of everlasting wonder and should motivate everyone to sow generously while the opportunity for good works exists. But it is Christ's endorsement of good works that gives them value in the eyes of our gracious God. This seems to be the meaning behind our Lord's response in verse 40, "Inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me."

9. Now that the saints have received their own sentence, they shall judge the world (1 Cor. 6:2). This was not fulfilled when the empire became Christian and Christians held positions as magistrates. No, as the psalmist tells us, "This honor have all the saints" (Psalm 149:9). The apostle, in the aforementioned passage, adds, "Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world will be judged by you, are you unworthy to judge the smallest matters?" (verse 3). They come forward to receive their kingdom in the presence of angels and humanity. They transition from the courtroom to the throne, for "To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne" (Rev. 3:21). They will not judge the world in communion with Christ, comparing their works with those of the ungodly or testifying against them. Instead, they will serve as assessors to Jesus Christ the Judge, giving their consent to His just judgment and saying "Amen" to the verdict against all the ungodly. This is akin to the response of the saints upon the judgment of the great prostitute in Rev. 19:1-2, "Hallelujah! For true and righteous are His judgments." Therefore, the upright will exercise dominion over the wicked in the morning of the resurrection (Psalm 49:14). Only then, and not before, will Psalm 149:6-9 be fully realized: "Let the high praises of God be in their mouth, and a two-edged sword in their hand, to execute vengeance on the nations, and punishments on the peoples... This honor have all His saints." Oh, what a remarkable reversal of fortunes will be witnessed! How astonishing it will be to see wicked men, who once unjustly judged them, stand as criminals before the saints they once condemned as heretics, rebels, and traitors! To witness wealthy and powerful individuals pale-faced before those whom they oppressed! To see the mocker tremble before those he once ridiculed! The worldly wise person standing before those he deemed foolish! Then the despised faces of the

saints will be terrifying to the wicked, and those who were once the subject of drunkards' songs will become a terror to them. Every wrong will be rectified in due time, and each person will be placed in their rightful position.

10. The Judge will pronounce the sentence of damnation upon the ungodly multitude. "Then He will also say to those on the left hand, 'Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels'" (verse 41). It is a dreadful judgment coming from the same mouth that uttered the words of absolution earlier. It will magnify the misery of the wicked, just as it was an added affliction for the Jews to be destroyed by someone who was regarded as the darling of the world. Oh, the intensified wretchedness of the ungodly that Christ Himself will pronounce this sentence! To hear the curse from Mount Zion will be truly terrifying. To be condemned by the One who came to save sinners will be a twofold damnation. Yet, this will be the reality. The Lamb of God will roar like a lion against them. He will excommunicate them and cast them out of His presence forever through a sentence from His throne, saying, "Depart from Me, you cursed." They will be consigned to everlasting fire and eternal association with the devils. We presume that this sentence will also be pronounced audibly by the man Christ. And all the saints will say, "Hallelujah, true and righteous are His judgments." Even their closest relatives will show them no pity. The righteous wife will affirm the justice of the Judge in condemning her ungodly husband. The godly husband will say "Amen" to the condemnation of his wife, who once lay in his embrace. The godly parents will rejoice at the passing of the sentence against their ungodly child, and the godly child will wholeheartedly approve the condemnation of their wicked parents—the father who begot them and the mother who bore

them. The sentence is just, for they are judged "according to their works" (Rev. 20:12). No injustice is done to them, for our Lord says, "For I was hungry and you gave Me no food; I was thirsty and you gave Me no drink; I was a stranger and you did not take Me in, naked and you did not clothe Me, sick and in prison and you did not visit Me" (verses 42-43). These examples highlight not only their ungodly and cursed state but also serve as fitting grounds for their condemnation. While good works do not earn salvation, evil works merit damnation. Only sins of omission are mentioned here, not because these are the only sins that will be revealed, for all the books will be opened, but because these omissions alone are sufficient to condemn unpardoned sinners. And if people are condemned for neglecting acts of charity and mercy toward the afflicted members of Christ, it implies that this judgment primarily concerns those who have heard of Christ through the Gospel and that the rejection of Christ will be the main cause of the ruin of those who hear the Gospel. The enmity of the wicked hearts towards Christ Himself is evident in how they treat His members.

In vain will they say, "When did we see You hungry or thirsty?" etc. (verse 44). The Lord takes into account, and will continue to take into account, the world's unkindness towards His people as unkindness towards Himself. "Inasmuch as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me" (verse 45). Oh, what a tragic waste of food and drink when a member of Christ was in need of it! Oh, the unfortunate neglect of not welcoming the stranger saint! It would have been better for them to leave their own rooms and beds than for him to go without lodging. Oh, accursed clothing, may the wicked say, that was in my house, locked up in my chest or hanging in my wardrobe, and was not given to clothe someone in

need! Oh, that I had stripped myself instead of letting him go without clothing! Cursed be the business that diverted me from visiting such a saint! Oh, that I had spent whole nights watching over him! Wretch that I was! Why did I sit comfortably in my house when he was in prison, and not visit him? But now the tables have turned: Christ's servants will eat, but I will be hungry; His servants will drink, but I will be thirsty; they will rejoice, but I will be ashamed (Isaiah 65:13). They will be welcomed, but I will be cast out and told to depart; they will be clothed in glorious robes, but I will "walk naked, and they will see my shame" (Revelation 16:15). They will be exalted high above sickness and pain, but I will "lie down in sorrow" (Isaiah 50:11). They will enter the palace of heaven, but I will be sent to the prison of hell.

If our Lord is so displeased with those who neglect to help His people in these and similar distresses, what can those who cause and perpetrate such neglect expect? If those who did not feed the hungry will be fed with wrath, what will become of those who robbed and plundered them? What a full cup of wrath awaits those who not only refused to provide food and drink but also made it a crime for others to offer assistance, and even intoxicated themselves with the blood of the saints! They will be lodged with devils forever, those who did not welcome the Lord's people as strangers. What kind of lodging will those have who drove them out of their own homes, out of their native land, and made them into strangers? If not clothing the naked will be severely punished, how much heavier will the sentence be for those who stripped them and left them without clothing? If neglecting to visit them in sickness or in prison warrants severe punishment, those who cast them into prisons and subjected them to hardships that harmed their health, caused sickness, and shortened their lives, whether in prison or outside, will not escape a severe judgment.

To justify such wicked practices, men will pretend to honor Christ and religion while treating His members—who walk in His ways and uphold the truth—in this manner. They will claim, "When did we see You hungry or thirsty, a stranger or naked, sick or in prison, and did not minister to You?" (verse 44). As if they were saying, "We refused bread, drink, lodging, clothing, and visits, not to Christ Himself, but to a group of men with bad reputations—men who 'turned the world upside down' (Acts 17:6), who troubled Israel (1 Kings 18:7), a peculiar and rebellious people with different laws from everyone else, factious and rebellious. They did not obey the king's laws and were therefore dangerous individuals. It was not in the king's best interest to tolerate them" (Esther 3:8). Although men falsely accuse and slander the godly, giving them ill names to treat them as criminals, all these excuses will be of no avail on the great day before the righteous Judge, nor will they convince their own consciences. The true reason for their hostility towards the saints will, to their own conviction, be found in their enmity towards Christ Himself. This seems to be the meaning of the objection raised by the damned (verse 44) and the response to it (verse 45), "Inasmuch as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me."

11. Once the sentence is passed on both parties, the full execution of the sentence follows (verse 46): "And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life." The condemned will receive no reprieve but will go immediately to their designated place. They will be driven away from the judgment seat into hell, while the saints will "enter into the palace of the King" (Psalm 45:15), namely, heaven, the abode of the blessed. But our Lord Christ and His glorious company will remain in that day, witnessing the defeat of all their enemies, for the condemned will depart first.

On this day of the Lord, the great day, there will be a general conflagration. The visible heavens, the earth, and the sea will pass away. This does not mean they will be annihilated or reduced to nothing, as fire does not operate in that way. Instead, they will be dissolved and purified by the fire, removing all the effects of sin and the curse upon them. They will then be renewed and made even more glorious and stable. The apostle Peter speaks of this conflagration in 2 Peter 3:10: "But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up." See also verses 7 and 12. He also mentions the renewal of the world in verse 13: "Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells."

It seems most consistent with the Scriptures and the nature of the event to understand that this conflagration will occur after the general judgment. The sentence will be pronounced on both parties before it takes place. It is likely that it will coincide with the execution of the sentence against the damned, so that they will depart according to their sentence, and the heavens and the earth will pass away together and simultaneously, driven away by a furious rebuke from the throne, casting them out of the world (in this fire) and into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels. Just as during the flood, which the apostle Peter compares to the conflagration or burning of the world (2 Peter 3:6-7), the world itself and the wicked on it perished together, with the same water that destroyed the earth sweeping away the inhabitants. It is unlikely that the wicked will have any place on the new earth "in which righteousness dwells" (2 Peter 3:13). As for this earth, it will "flee away," indicating a swift disposal, and it will "flee from the face of Him who sits on the throne" (Revelation 20:11): "Then I saw a great

white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away." The execution of the sentence on the wicked is also described in Revelation 20:14-15, where not only are the reprobate "cast into the lake," but "death and Hades" are also thrown into it: all the consequences of sin and the curse are removed from the world, and for this reason, the conflagration will take place. They will be confined to the place of the damned. Furthermore, it is evident that the end of the world will be brought about by the conflagration, as the apostle Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 15:24-25: "Then comes the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power. For He must reign until He has put all enemies under His feet." This work must be completed before the end, and it appears to be accomplished through the execution of the sentence pronounced on the wicked in the day of judgment.

If the burning of Sodom and Gomorrah, which are cited as examples in Jude verse 7, was so dreadful, how much more terrifying will that day be when the entire world is engulfed in flames! How will worldly individuals react when their beloved world is consumed by fire! Strong castles and grand palaces, along with all their luxurious possessions, will be reduced to ashes alongside the humblest cottages. No heart can fully comprehend the terror that will grip the wicked on that day when the entire structure of heaven and earth is dissolved by the fire. The wretched sinners will be driven from the judgment seat to the pit, surrounded by fire within and awaiting them in the lake. It is possible that this fire, for all we know, may also pursue them.

As for the specific location of this judgment, while some point to the valley of Jehoshaphat, when asked by His disciples, "Where, Lord?" our infallible Lord simply said, "Wherever the body is, there the

eagles will be gathered together" (Luke 17:37). After such a response, it is too audacious for humans to persist in asking the question. As for the time of this event, it is futile for people to search for what the Lord has purposely kept hidden (Acts 1:7): "It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority." The apostle Paul, after vividly describing the second coming of Christ in 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17, adds in chapter 5:1-2, "But concerning the times and the seasons, brethren, you have no need that I should write to you. For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night." Nevertheless, throughout various ages, some have been brazen enough to speculate about the timing, and several specific years that have now passed were proclaimed to be the end times by those who sought to uncover God's secrets. Time has proven their recklessness and foolishness, and it is likely that those who await their determined time will be no more successful. Let us rest in the knowledge that "He is coming." God has concealed the specific day from us so that we may be prepared every day for His arrival, as stated in Matthew 25:13: "Watch, therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming." And let us remember that the last day of our lives will determine our fate on the last day of the world, and as we die, so shall we be judged.

I will now conclude this topic with some practical application of what has been discussed.

APPLICATION I: Comfort for all the saints. There is abundant consolation for all those who are in a state of grace. Whatever afflictions you may face in this world, this day will make up for all your losses. "Though you have been in the midst of hardships, you will soar like a dove covered in silver and adorned with gold feathers" (Psalm 68:13). Even if the world reproaches, judges, and condemns

you, the Judge will absolve you on that day and bring forth your righteousness like the shining light. The world's foolish ones will then be revealed as the only wise individuals who truly existed. Though the cross may be heavy, you can bear it with confidence, knowing that the righteous Judge will reward you with the crown of righteousness. If the world despises you and treats you with contempt, do not be discouraged. The day will come when you will sit with Christ on His throne. Do not be disheartened by the multitude of temptations. Resist the devil with the assurance of complete victory, for you will judge the tempter in the end. Although you may currently struggle against the power of sin and the fear of death, in the end, you will overcome all your enemies and stand blameless before the presence of God's glory. Do not let the fear of that day discourage you when you think about it. Let those who have disregarded the Judge and continue to oppose Him and His path of holiness be dismayed and ashamed when they contemplate His coming. But you, lift up your heads with joy, for the last day will be your best day. The Judge is your Head, Husband, Redeemer, and Advocate. You will appear before the judgment seat, but you "will not come into condemnation" (John 5:24). His coming will not be against you but for you. He came in the flesh to remove the legal obstacles to the spiritual marriage through His death. He came to you in the gospel to betroth you to Himself. And He will come, finally, to celebrate the marriage and bring the bride home to His Father's house. So be it. Come, Lord Jesus.

APPLICATION II: Terror for all unbelievers. This should awaken a complacent generation, a world steeped in wickedness, as if they would never be called to account for it. They mock the Mediator, as if He will not judge them. Ah! How few have a vivid awareness of the impending judgment! Most people live as if the words spoken about it in the Scriptures are mere idle tales. The profane lives of many

indicate that they are far from taking it to heart. They openly mock it before the world, saying, "Where is the promise of His coming?" Others hypocritically deceive the world by appearing as splendid professions of faith while actually being goats of the devil. It shows that the great separation of the sheep from the goats is not seriously considered. How many indulge in secret wickedness, which they would be ashamed of if witnessed by others, not realizing that their most hidden thoughts and actions will be exposed on that day before the entire assembly! How eagerly people cling to the world as if it were their eternal abode! They undervalue the sacred gatherings and public worship services where the Judge is present, transacting peace with the guilty. Many hearts float like feathers in the waters of the sanctuary but sink like stones to the bottom when it comes to worldly concerns. They are serious about trivial matters in this world but treat the most serious and weighty matters of the next world with frivolity. Oh, consider the approaching day when Christ will come to judge! The world will be summoned by the sound of the last trumpet to appear before His tribunal. The Judge will sit on His throne, and all nations will be called before Him. The separation between the righteous and the wicked will be made, the books will be opened, and the dead will be judged according to their deeds. One group will receive eternal life, while the other will face everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels based on their works.

It would be an astonishing sight if you could hide yourself in a dark cloud or the crevice of a tall rock and witness wicked kings, princes, judges, and powerful individuals emerging from their marble tombs and standing before the bar to answer for their cruelty, injustice, oppression, and profanity. There would be no distinctions except those imposed by their wickedness. Profane, unholy, and unfaithful ministers would be pursued by the curses of their ruined congregations, from their graves to the judgment seat, charged with

the blood of souls to whom they failed to give faithful warning. Mighty men would tremble before the Judge, unable to regain their former boldness, outwitted by their cunning or defended by their strength. Delicate women would be cast out of their graves like abominable branches, dragged to the tribunal to account for their ungodly lives. The ignorant would suddenly realize the consequences of their ignorance, and the learned would be exposed as fools and trivial pursuers. The atheists would be convinced, the hypocrites unmasked, and the profane forced to take their eternal state seriously. Secret murders, adulteries, thefts, frauds, and other hidden works of darkness that defied human investigation would be revealed before the world, down to the smallest details. The rich would receive no special treatment, and the poor would find no pity. The scales of the world would be balanced, with oppressed and despised piety exalted and prosperous wickedness finally brought low. Everyone who is not found in Christ would be arraigned, convicted, and condemned without favoritism, cast from the judgment seat into the pit, while those found in Him would be absolved before the world and go with Him into heaven. However, you cannot escape in this manner. Whoever you are, if you are not in Christ, you will play a part in this tragic and alarming scene.

Sinner, the same Lord Christ whom you now despise, whom you wound through His messengers, and whom you prioritize below your desires, will be your Judge. The neglected Savior will be a severe Judge. Oh, on what mountain or rock will you seek refuge, hoping to hide from the face of the One who sits on the throne? You currently have a rock within you, a heart of stone, that counts the arrows of the Word as mere straw and laughs at the shaking of the spear. But that rock will split at the sight of the Judge, that hardened heart will break, and you will weep and wail, though your weeping and wailing will be in vain. The bonds of death will be broken, and the grave will

cast you out. The mountains will skip away from you, and the rocks will refuse to crush you to powder. How will these cursed eyes endure the sight of the Judge? Behold, He is coming! Where is the profane swearer who inflicted wounds upon Him? The wretched materialist, now abandoned by his God? The hypocrite who pretended to be His sheep but was truly a goat of the devil? The despiser of the gospel who sent Him away through His messengers, profaned His ordinances, and trampled upon His precious blood? Oh, murderer, the one you killed will be your Judge. Behold the neglected Lamb of God appearing as a lion against you. How will your heart withstand the fiery gaze of His eyes? That stony heart that resists Him now will crumble, and your face, which now refuses to blush, will turn black. Arrows of wrath will pierce where arrows of conviction cannot penetrate now. What will you answer when He rises and charges you with your unbelief and impenitence? Will you claim that you were not warned? Conscience within you will testify against you, and the secret groans and weariness of those who warned you will prove otherwise. If a child or a fool told you that your house was on fire, you would immediately rush to extinguish it. But in matters of eternal significance, people first fill their hearts with prejudices against the messengers and then cast their message aside. But these feeble excuses and pretenses will not avail on the day of the Lord. How will these cursed ears, now deaf to the call of the gospel that invites sinners to come to Christ, bear the dreadful sentence, "Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels!" No one will be indifferent then, and no one's heart will wander. Their hearts and eyes will be fixed on their misery, which they now refuse to believe. Oh, that we would understand the things that pertain to our peace in this present day!

Lastly, I urge you to believe this great truth and believe it in a way that prompts you to prepare for the judgment ahead of time. Establish a secret tribunal within your own heart and frequently hold yourself accountable. Make the Judge your friend by embracing Him through the offer of the gospel, and strive to be found in Christ on that day. Cast off the works of darkness and live as if you are always under the watchful eye of your Judge, who will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing. Be fruitful in good works, knowing that you will reap what you sow. Seek godliness toward God and righteousness and charity toward others. Store up acts of charity and mercy for those in need, especially fellow believers, so that they may serve as evidence that you belong to Christ on that day. Do not withhold your mercy from the needy now, lest you find no mercy then. Take care that all your works are sincere and done with singleness of heart, aiming for the glory of the Lord, demonstrating your love for Him, and obeying His commands. Leave it to hypocrites, who have already received their reward, to boast about their own goodness and trumpet their charitable deeds. It is a base and unchristian spirit that cannot find satisfaction in a good work unless it is displayed before others. It is utterly unworthy of someone who believes that the last trumpet will summon the entire world and before whom the Judge Himself will proclaim truly good works, no matter how secretly they were done. Live with a faithful expectation of the coming of the Lord. Let your loins be girded and your lamps burning, so that when He comes, whether in the last day of your life or in the last day of the world, you may joyfully declare, "Behold, this is our God; we have waited for Him."

V. THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN

Then the King will say to those on His right hand, "Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." - Matthew 25:34

Having discussed the general judgment based on this portion of Scripture, I will now speak of the eternal happiness of the saints and the everlasting misery of the wicked. I will focus on the respective sentences to be pronounced upon them on the great day. I will address them in the order they are presented to us, noting that while the sentence is first passed upon the righteous, its execution may begin before it is fully completed.

The words of the text contain the joyful sentence itself, along with an introduction that provides an account of the Judge who pronounces the sentence - Jesus Christ, referred to as "the King." It also identifies the recipients of the sentence - "those on His right hand," and specifies the time of pronouncement - "then," immediately following the trial. I have already discussed these aspects. Now we shall consider the sentence itself: "Come, you blessed of My Father," etc. Step aside, you profane goats! Depart, all unregenerate souls not united to Jesus Christ! This is not for you. But come, you saints who have been brought out of your natural state into the state of grace! Behold the glory that awaits you. Here is a description of the glory in words and syllables - a mirror in which you can see your everlasting happiness, a blueprint of your Father's house, which contains many mansions.

This glorious sentence conveys two things. First, the complete happiness to which the saints are assigned - "the kingdom." Second, their solemn admission to this kingdom - "Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit," etc. Firstly, their complete happiness is described as a kingdom. A kingdom represents the pinnacle of earthly felicity, surpassing all other earthly realms. Therefore, the incomparable weight of glory in heaven is depicted through this concept. However, it is not an ordinary kingdom; it is "the kingdom" - the kingdom of heaven, exceeding all earthly kingdoms in glory, honor, profit, and pleasure. Its superiority to their lowly and inglorious state is immeasurable, just as the state of a beggar in rags on a dunghill falls far short of worldly kingdoms. Secondly, the saints are ceremoniously admitted into this kingdom, as Jesus Christ, the heir of all things and possessing "all power in heaven and on earth," inaugurates them before the entire world - in the presence of angels, humans, and devils. Their right to the kingdom is formally acknowledged and recognized. They are granted access as unquestionable heirs of the kingdom, destined to possess it by inheritance or lot, as the term properly denotes. This is because, in ancient times, inheritances were determined by casting lots, such as the inheritance of Canaan by Israel, known as God's "firstborn" in Exodus 4:22. Furthermore, as this kingdom belongs to the Father, their admission publicly acknowledges them as the blessed ones of Christ's Father. Although they had received this blessing long before the pronouncement of this sentence, it is now officially recognized and confirmed to them by the Mediator, in the name of His Father. It is worth noting that He does not say, "You blessed of the Father," but rather, "You blessed of My Father." This emphasizes that all blessings are derived from the Father, the source of blessing, who is also known as "the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" through whom we receive blessings (Ephesians 1:3). Lastly, they are admitted to this kingdom, which was "prepared for them from the foundation

of the world" in God's eternal purpose even before they or anyone else existed. This serves as a testimony for all to see that eternal life is truly a free gift from God.

DOCTRINE: The saints will experience complete happiness in the possession of the kingdom of heaven.

I will now investigate two aspects: I. The nature of this kingdom. II. The admission of the saints into it. Afterward, I will provide some practical reflections on the entire subject.

1. Regarding the nature of the kingdom of heaven, our understanding of it is limited. As stated in 1 Corinthians 2:9, "Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him." In order to help us comprehend heavenly happiness, which surpasses earthly understanding, God graciously employs similes drawn from earthly things that are considered glorious by human standards. If the heavenly glory were revealed without earthly comparisons, its brilliance would overwhelm our feeble eyes, and we would become lost in its radiance. Therefore, our ability to discuss these matters is akin to that of children, as the full revelation will only occur on the appointed day.

The state of glory is depicted as a kingdom, since earthly kingdoms encompass the greatest number of worldly blessings. In the heavenly kingdom, each saint will inherit a kingdom and become a king. While the great King will not relinquish His sovereignty, He will grant His children a share in His kingdom.

1. The saints will receive power and authority befitting kings. Our Lord does not confer empty titles upon His favored ones; He genuinely makes them kings. The dominion of the saints will far

exceed that of the greatest earthly monarch. They will have absolute mastery over sin, which once ruled over them. They will exercise complete control over their own spirits and fully govern their affections and inclinations, which currently cause them much trouble. The turbulent roots of corrupt affections will be permanently expelled from the kingdom, never again able to disturb them. They will have power over the ungodly nations and "rule them with a rod of iron" (Revelation 2:26-27). The wicked of the world will be utterly defeated before them, and Satan will be crushed under their feet (Romans 16:20). He will never be able to tempt them again; instead, he will be judged by them and, in their presence, cast into the lake of fire along with the reprobates. Thus, the saints will reign over their oppressors. Having fought the good fight and emerged victorious, Christ will welcome them just as Joshua received his captains, allowing them to "come near and put their feet on the necks of kings" (John 10:24).

2. They will be adorned with regal symbols. Christ will grant them a throne, allowing them to "sit with Him on His throne" (Revelation 3:21). They will be elevated to the highest honor and dignity of which they are capable, and in this exalted state, they will enjoy eternal and undisturbed rest after the trials they endured on their journey to the throne. They will receive a crown, a "crown of glory that does not fade away" (1 Peter 5:4). This will not be a perishable crown of flowers, like those received by victorious subjects, but an imperishable crown of glory. Earthly kings may wear crowns of gold, yet even such crowns are often tarnished and can never bring true happiness to those who wear them. The saints, however, will be adorned with a crown of glory. This crown of glory is a crown of life (Revelation 3:10), representing eternal life that knows no end. It

will remain steadfast upon their heads, impervious to the attempts of death to remove it. It will be an enduring crown, for it is a "crown of righteousness" (2 Timothy 4:8). It was acquired for them through the imputed righteousness of Christ, bestowed upon them, and secured by God's faithfulness. They will possess a sceptre, a rod of iron (Revelation 2:27), striking fear into the hearts of the wicked. They will also wield a two-edged sword in their hands, to execute vengeance upon the heathen and punishments upon the people (Psalm 149:6-7). Additionally, they will be clothed in royal apparel, symbolized by white robes (Revelation 3:4). Walking with Christ in white robes signifies the indescribable glory of the saints' heavenly state.

The Lord often represents the glorious state of the saints by depicting them clothed in white garments. It is promised to the conqueror that they will be "clothed in white garments" (Revelation 3:5). The elders around the throne are "clothed in white robes" (Revelation 4:4). The multitude before the throne are "clothed with white robes" (Revelation 7:9), "arrayed in white robes" (Revelation 7:13), and "made white in the blood of the Lamb" (Revelation 7:14). Although the last two references primarily pertain to the saints' earthly state, the terms are borrowed from the heavenly state. All garments, as traditionally understood, symbolize sin and shame. In the saints' heavenly state, such garments will be discarded. However, when we consider the occasions on which white garments are worn, we can perceive their deep significance.

1. When the Romans emancipated their bondservants, they bestowed upon them white garments as a symbol of their freedom. Similarly, on that day, the saints will receive their white robes as it marks the day of "the glorious liberty of the children of God" (Romans 8:21), the day of "the redemption of

their body" (Romans 8:23). They will no longer experience bondage or dwell among hardships. When we compare the state of the saints on earth with that of the wicked, we indeed see freedom in the former and servitude in the latter. However, in comparison to their heavenly state, the earthly state is still one of servitude. A saint on earth may be a young prince and an heir to the crown, but their motto could be "I serve" since "he does not differ at all from a slave, though he is master of all" (Galatians 4:1). The groans of a saint, the menial and base tasks they sometimes engage in, and the tattered garments they wear all signify this relative servitude. However, once the saints attain the crown, they will experience complete freedom and will serve no more. They will be entirely liberated from sin, the worst of all evils both in itself and in their perception. The freedom they will obtain will render the Egyptians they see today never to be seen again forever. They will be free from all temptation to sin, as Satan will no longer have access to them, nor will he be able to tempt them directly or through his agents. Their petition, "Lead us not into temptation," will be fully answered. No hissing serpent will enter the heavenly paradise, and no snares or traps will be laid to ensnare the saints' feet. They will walk without fear, as there will be no lion's dens or mountains of leopards in the promised land. Moreover, they will be removed from the possibility of sinning and will be confirmed in goodness. Their wills will be perfectly aligned with God's will, blessed with angelic purity that remains steadfast. Their affections will not experience disorder or irregularity, as they will possess an unwavering purity that can never be lost. They will be purified from all earthly impurities and forever reflect only heavenly virtues. Even if they were placed amidst the temptations of an evil world, they would remain untainted, like the sun shining upon a dunghill yet remaining untarnished, or like the angels

who preserved their purity amidst the wickedness of Sodom. Their graces will be perfected, and all imperfections that currently cling to them will be abolished. They will no longer lament the weakness of their grace, nor complain about their sinful hearts or corrupt natures. "It has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him" (1 John 3:2).

2. White garments have traditionally signified purity. Thus, "the Lamb's wife is arrayed in fine linen, clean and white" (Revelation 19:8), and those before the throne "washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb" (Revelation 7:14). The saints will be clothed in robes of perfect purity, shining with unblemished holiness like the sun at its zenith, unobstructed by any clouds. Absolute innocence will be restored, and every trace of sin will be banished from the heavenly kingdom. While the guilt and reigning power of sin have been removed from the saints in their current state, sin still dwells within them (Romans 7:20). However, in the heavenly kingdom, sin will be completely eradicated. The corrupt nature will be entirely removed, and the root of bitterness will be uprooted, leaving no vestiges in their souls. Their nature will be entirely pure and sinless. Their minds will be free from darkness, and their understanding will shine as a sphere of pure and untainted light. Their wills will be devoid of any aversion to good or inclination towards evil; they will perfectly conform to the will of God, blessed with angelic purity that remains steadfast. Their affections will not experience any disorder or irregularity, as they will possess a fixed habit of purity that can never be lost. They will be refined from all earthly impurities and will forever embody heavenly qualities. While garments, in their conventional sense, symbolize sin and shame, the saints

will discard all such garments when they enter their heavenly state.

3. Among the Jews, individuals desiring to enter the priestly office, after being tested and found to be of the priestly lineage and without blemish, were clothed in white garments and enrolled among the priests. This is alluded to in Revelation 3:5, "He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life." Thus, the saints will not only be kings but also priests, for they constitute a "royal priesthood" (1 Peter 2:9). They will serve as priests on their thrones. Through the trial they have endured, they have been found to be descendants of the Great High Priest, begotten by Him through His Spirit, incorruptibly begotten by the Word, and without blemish. Therefore, they are admitted as priests in the heavenly temple, where they will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. No earthly kingdom can match the glory of this reality. The "general assembly and church of the firstborn" (Hebrews 12:23), possessing both priesthood and the double portion, appearing in their white robes of glory, will be a revered and magnificent assembly. On that day, it will be evident that the Lord has chosen them from among all the tribes of the earth to draw near to Him and enter His temple, His holy place. Their priesthood, which began on earth, will reach its culmination as they offer the sacrifice of praise to God and the Lamb for all eternity. While the other tribes received their portions on earth, the Lord Himself became the portion of the priests, and He will be their double portion throughout the ages of eternity.

(4.) In times of triumph, people used to wear white garments. This is also alluded to in Revelation 3:5, "He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments." And what is heaven but an eternal triumph?

Only those who fight and overcome can reach there. Just as the Israelites had to conquer Canaan before possessing it, the saints, in this world, are in a battlefield, often wearing garments stained with blood. But the day is approaching when they will "stand before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes and holding palm branches in their hands" (Revelation 7:9), having achieved a complete victory over all their enemies. The palm branch is a symbol of victory, as it remains upright even under heavy weights. Palm trees were also carved on the doors of the most holy place, representing heaven. The saints' joy and peace in their white robes are remarkable. The joy that arises from reflecting on past dangers, riches, and honors acquired at the very doorstep of death deeply touches the heart. This joy will be an essential component of the eternal happiness of the saints, which could not exist in the heavenly state of innocent Adam and his sinless descendants. Surely, the glorified saints will not forget the experiences they had in the world. It will bring glory to God to remember it and heighten their joy. Just as the Sicilian king, born to a potter, wisely chose to be served with earthen vessels at his table, which added sweetness to his meals that a born heir to the crown could never taste. Can food ever be as sweet to anyone as it is to a hungry person? Can anyone appreciate abundance as much as someone who has experienced scarcity? The more difficulties the saints have encountered on their journey to heaven, the sweeter the destination will be for them. Every victorious battle in the spiritual warfare will be a jewel in their crown of glory. Each triumph over sin, Satan, and the world will elevate their triumphant joy even higher. The memory of the cross will enhance the glory of their crown, and the recollection of their journey through the wilderness will add an extra radiance to the fields of glory as they walk through them, looking back on the days when they walked in darkness.

(5.) White garments were worn on festival days as a sign of joy. Similarly, the saints will be clothed in white garments because they will enjoy an eternal Sabbath unto the Lord (Hebrews 4:9), a perpetual day of rest. The Sabbath, in the view of the saints, is the queen of days, and they will experience an everlasting Sabbath in the kingdom of heaven. Thus, their garments will always be white. They will have an eternal rest accompanied by uninterrupted joy. Heaven is not a place for slumbering through eternity; there, the saints neither rest day nor night. Their work is their rest and continuous recreation, where toil and weariness find no place. Their rest is found in God, who is the center of their souls. In heaven, they find the fulfillment and satisfaction of all their desires, fully enjoying God's presence and uninterrupted communion with Him. This is the ultimate goal that, until the soul attains it, it will remain restless. But upon reaching it, the soul finds rest, as it has reached the ultimate destination where it can no longer understand, will, or desire more. It has everything that corresponds to its boundless desires. This is the blessed end of all the saints' labors, as their toil and sorrows culminate in joyful rest. The wicked, on the other hand, begin with a day of rest and pleasure but end in a night of everlasting toil and sorrow. The saints experience their gloomy night first, and then their day of eternal rest. As Abraham observed in the parable, "Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony" (Luke 16:25).

(3.) If anyone wonders where the kingdom of the saints is located, it is not in this world. It resides in a superior country, "a heavenly one" (Hebrews 11:16), a land better than the best of this world—the heavenly Canaan, Immanuel's land, where nothing is lacking to complete the happiness of its inhabitants. This is the blessed country blessed with perpetual spring, providing everything necessary,

convenient, and delightful. In that land, the saints shall eat angelic food and be served with hidden manna (Revelation 2:17) without the toil of gathering it. They will be abundantly fed with the produce of the land, without any labor on their part. In that land, eternal daylight prevails, and there is "no night there" (Revelation 21:25). The eternal sunshine adorns this better country, yet it is not plagued by scorching heat. There are no eternal clouds, but the trees, planted by the Lord, are situated by the rivers of water and shall never lack moisture. They will have an eternal supply of the Holy Spirit through Jesus Christ from the Father. This is the country from which our Lord came and where He has returned, the country that the holy patriarchs and prophets anticipated during their time on earth. It is the country to which all the saints who preceded us fought their way and where the martyrs joyfully traversed a sea of blood. This earth is the place of the saints' pilgrimage, while that heavenly country is their true homeland, where they find everlasting rest.

(4.) The royal city is the great city, the holy Jerusalem, described extensively in Revelation 21:10 onwards. While some learned theologians place this city on earth, the details of the description seem to support the view that it belongs to the other world. The saints will reign in this city, whose walls are made of jasper and adorned with foundations of precious stones. Its streets are pure gold. Thus, the saints will walk on what people in this world value most. This is the city prepared by God for His people, a city with foundations, an enduring city that will stand and flourish even when all the cities of this world have turned to ashes and the foundations of the world have crumbled. None of its inhabitants will ever be removed from it, for life and immortality reign there, and death cannot enter. It is a city blessed with perfect and eternal peace, impervious to disturbance from without. Therefore, its gates are never shut by day, and there is no night there. Nothing from within

can cause trouble either. There is no scarcity or want of provision, and discord among the inhabitants is absent. Whatever contentions exist among the saints now, none of the previous conflicts will persist in heaven. Love for God and one another will be perfected, and even those who were distant from each other in this life will joyfully embrace and delight in one another there.

(5.) The royal palace is the house of Christ's Father, where "there are many mansions" (John 14:2). It is there that the saints will dwell forever. This is the house prepared for all the heirs of glory, even those who currently reside in the humblest cottages or have nowhere to lay their heads. As the Lord calls His saints to a kingdom, He will provide them with a house suitable for the dignity He bestows upon them. Heaven will be a spacious, glorious, and suitable dwelling place for those whom the King delights to honor. This house was purchased at a great price, the redemption of the Mediator's blood. Nothing less could be afforded for them. There was much to be done to prepare the inhabitants for this house. By nature, the saints were completely unfit for it, and human efforts could not make them suitable. However, the Father gives the chosen inhabitants to the Son to be redeemed by Him. The Son pays the price of their redemption with His precious blood, and justice grants them access to the house. The Holy Spirit sanctifies them by His grace so that they may be fit to enter a place where no unclean thing can enter. It is no wonder, for it is the palace of the King, where Psalm 45:15 declares, "They shall enter the King's palace." It is the house of the kingdom, where the great King holds court, where His throne is established, and where His glory is displayed in an extraordinary manner beyond mortal comprehension.

(6.) Paradise is their palace garden. Our Savior spoke of this when He said to the repentant thief on the cross, "Truly, I say to you, today

you will be with me in paradise" (Luke 23:43). Heaven is a paradise of pleasure and delight, where there are trees and rivers. "A pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, flows from the throne of God and of the Lamb. On either side of the river is the tree of life, bearing twelve fruits, yielding its fruit every month" (Revelation 22:1-2). How happy could innocent Adam have been in the earthly paradise where nothing was lacking for his use or delight! Eden was the most pleasant place on the uncorrupted earth, and paradise was the most delightful spot in Eden. But what is earth in comparison to heaven? The glorified saints have been elevated to the heavenly paradise. There, they will not only see but also eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God (Revelation 2:7). They will behold the glory of the Mediator and be satisfied with His goodness. There will be no flaming sword to guard the way to the tree of life; they will freely eat from it and live forever. They will "drink from the river of [God's] delights" (Psalm 36:8), experiencing the purest and sweetest pleasures that Immanuel's land offers. They will swim in an ocean of unmixed delight for eternity.

(7.) They will possess royal treasures sufficient to support their elevated dignity. Since the streets of the royal city are made of pure gold and its twelve gates are twelve pearls, their treasure must surpass gold and pearls. It is an "eternal weight of glory" (2 Corinthians 4:17). Oh, what a precious treasure! It is not subject to corruption by moths or rust, and no one can steal it from them (Matthew 6:20). No kingdom has ever offered such a valuable treasure, nor a treasure as diverse. "He who overcomes will inherit all things" (Revelation 21:7). Earthly treasures cannot contain all things. Even if they were combined into one, it would lack more valuable things than it possesses. This is the unique treasure of the kings who inherit the kingdom of heaven. They will lack nothing that contributes to their complete satisfaction. While they are currently

rich in hope, they will possess their riches in hand. All things belong to them in terms of rightful ownership, and in heaven, they will possess them in full. They will roam Immanuel's land forever, beholding its glory and riches, knowing that everything they see is their own. It is a pity for those who are restless due to the lack of earthly goods when they can be certain that they will ultimately inherit all things.

(8.) Although there is no physical temple or use of ordinances to worship God in the heavenly kingdom, the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb Himself are the temple of this kingdom (Revelation 21:22). Just as the temple was the glory of Canaan, the celestial temple will be the glory of heaven. The saints will enter as a royal priesthood to dwell in the house of the Lord forever. Jesus Christ will make each saint "a pillar in the temple of [God], and he shall go out no more" (Revelation 3:12), unlike the priests and Levites who left the physical temple after their assigned duties. In the heavenly temple, the saints will have the cloud of glory, the divine presence, and intimate communion with God. They will have Jesus Christ as the true ark, wherein the law will be forever hidden from their sight. They will have the mercy seat, from which only everlasting peace and goodwill toward them will be breathed. They will have the cherubim, the company of holy angels, who will join them in eternal admiration of the mystery of Christ. They will have the golden candlestick, with its seven lamps, as "the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp" (Revelation 21:23). They will have the incense altar in the intercession of Christ, who "always lives to make intercession" for them (Hebrews 7:25), eternally displaying the manner of His death and suffering and perpetually willing that those whom the Father has given Him be with Him. And they will have the table of shewbread in the eternal feast they will enjoy together in the presence of God. This leads me to consider the society in this kingdom more closely.

(9.) The essence of the kingdom's happiness lies in the blessed society the saints will enjoy there. What would royal power, authority, regal symbols, and abundant treasures avail without comforting companionship? Some crowned heads have led wretched lives due to the lack of it, with their palaces becoming prisons and their honors feeling like chains. Hated by all, they had no one they could trust or with whom they could find true fellowship. However, the greatest part of heavenly happiness is found in the blessed society the saints will have there.

(1.) The fellowship among the saints will be a significant source of happiness in heaven. The communion of saints on earth is highly valued by those who are journeying through the world towards Zion. The pleasure and delight experienced by the Lord's people in praying together and discussing matters that the world is unfamiliar with surpasses any enjoyment found among companions in sin. However, currently, the number of saints gathered together is small, and some find themselves in a situation where they feel alone, lacking access to those with whom they can freely share their spiritual concerns. They sigh and lament, feeling as if they are left without companionship. But in the grand assembly of all the saints in heaven, none of those who have ever lived or will live on earth will be absent. They will all be together in one place, sharing the same kingdom and partaking in the marriage supper of the Lamb. In heaven, the imperfections that currently hinder the saints' fellowship will be no more. They will be perfect, without any spot or blemish. Both their natural and sinful imperfections will be removed, and they will shine with the brightness of the firmament.

There, we will see Adam and Eve freely partaking of the tree of life in the heavenly paradise. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and all the holy patriarchs will find their eternal rest, no longer wandering from land

to land. The prophets will feast their eyes on the glory of the One they prophesied about. The twelve apostles of the Lamb will sit on their thrones. The holy martyrs will be adorned in long white robes with crowns on their heads. The godly kings will be exalted to an unshakable kingdom, and those who have led many to righteousness will shine like stars forever and ever. We will reunite with our godly friends, family, and acquaintances, who will be pillars in the temple of God and never leave us again. It is highly probable that the saints will recognize one another in heaven, at least their loved ones, relatives, and those they knew on earth, especially those who were prominent in the Church. However, this knowledge will be purified from all earthly thoughts and attachments. Such understanding is a part of the perfected happiness that the saints will experience. If Adam recognized Eve instantly when God brought her to him, there is no reason to doubt that husbands and wives, parents and children, will know each other in glory. If the Thessalonians, converted through Paul's ministry, will be his source of rejoicing in the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ, it is reasonable to conclude that ministers will know their people, and the people will know their ministers in heaven. Just as the disciples on the mount of transfiguration recognized Moses and Elijah, whom they had never seen before, we have reason to believe that we will recognize them and others like them when we reach heaven. The communion among the saints will be most intimate there, as they will sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. Lazarus was embraced by the angels and carried to Abraham's bosom, signifying a close and familiar association. Although diversity of tongues will cease, there will likely be communication in heaven, and the saints will glorify God not only in their spirits but also in their bodies, praising Him audibly. The specifics of the heavenly language will be understood when we arrive there. When Paul was caught up to the third heaven, the abode of the blessed, he heard inexpressible words

that cannot be uttered. Moses and Elijah spoke with Jesus on the mount of transfiguration, discussing His impending death in Jerusalem.

(2.) The saints will also enjoy the company of the holy angels in heaven. An innumerable company of angels will be their companions in their glorified state. The shepherds who heard the heavenly host sing when Christ was born were indeed fortunate, but those who join their voices with the saints and angels in the heavenly choir when Christ is glorified will be even more blessed. In heaven, we will become acquainted with those blessed spirits who have never sinned. How brilliantly these morning stars will shine in the holy place! They served as ministering spirits to the heirs of salvation, loving them for the sake of their Lord and encamping around them for protection. They will joyfully welcome the saints to their eternal dwelling places and rejoice in their arrival in the kingdom, just as a tutor rejoices in the success of his pupils. The saints will no longer fear the angels, as they sometimes did on earth. Having shed their mortal bodies and the weaknesses of the flesh, they will be like the angels of God, fit to enjoy communion and fellowship with them. United under the leadership of the Lord Jesus Christ, they will join together in praising God and the Lamb with a resounding voice, declaring the worthiness of the slain Lamb. Although the diversity of languages will cease, it is reasonable to believe that communication between angels and saints will not be cut off forever.

(3.) The saints will experience intimate communion with God Himself in heaven, which is the ultimate fulfillment of happiness. I will discuss communion with God and the man Christ together because just as we receive grace from the Lamb, we will also receive glory from Him. The man Christ, if I may use the expression, is the focal point of the divine glory in heaven, radiating it to all the saints.

This is evident in the Scriptures that describe the happiness of heaven as "being with Christ." When Jesus promised the thief on the cross that he would be with Him in paradise, He expressed the essence of eternal life. In His prayer to the Father, Jesus requested that those given to Him would be with Him to behold His glory. Similarly, the apostle Paul states that when Christ returns, the Thessalonians converted through his ministry will be his source of rejoicing in the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is clear that the saints will be with the Lord Christ, whom they will meet in the air. The Scriptures also speak of God and the Lamb, the slain Savior, together when referring to the saints' happiness in heaven. The Lamb, situated in the center of the throne, will feed and lead them to living fountains of water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes. The tabernacle of God will be with humanity, and He will dwell with them, just as He dwelt in the flesh of Christ, as John 1:14 indicates. The Lord God Almighty and the Lamb will be the temple of the heavenly city. The greatest happiness of the saints in heaven lies in this communion with God and the Lamb, without which they could never be truly happy, despite being in that glorious place and having the company of angels. I will describe this communion with God in three aspects:

Firstly, the saints in heaven will experience the glorious presence of God and the Lamb. God Himself will be with them, as stated in Revelation 21:3, and they will be forever with the Lord. Although God is present everywhere in terms of His essence, the saints on earth enjoy His special gracious presence. In heaven, they will experience His glorious presence. They will draw near to the throne of the great King, standing before Him as He reveals His unimaginable glory. They will have the tabernacle of God, where the cloud of glory rests—the glorious human nature of Christ, in whom the fullness of the Godhead dwells. This glory will not be veiled as it

was during His earthly humiliation but will shine through His blessed flesh, causing it to radiate more brilliantly than a thousand suns. Therefore, the heavenly city will not require the light of the sun or the moon; instead, "the glory of God will illuminate it, and the Lamb will be its light," or rather, its radiant source. The Lamb will serve as the luminary or luminous body that illuminates the city, just as the sun and moon currently provide light for the world or a candle brightens a dark room. The light emanating from this glorious luminary is the glory of God. Although the candle may burn dimly at times on earth, hidden under a bushel, occasionally emitting rays that dazzle observers, it is now elevated high above in the city of God, shining and continuing to shine in perfect glory. Once disregarded like a rejected stone, it now serves as the light, or luminary, of that city, comparable to a precious jasper stone, clear as crystal.

Who can fathom the joy of the saints in the presence chamber of the great King, where He sits on His majestic throne, manifesting His glory prominently through the man Christ? His gracious presence already brings a significant transformation to the saints in this world. In heaven, His glorious presence will undoubtedly perfect their virtues and elevate their capacities. The saints have experienced how God's presence, filled with grace, can turn a wretched place into a little heaven. Therefore, the glory of heaven, with His glorious presence shining in all its splendor upon the streets of the city paved with pure gold, must be unimaginable. This glorious presence of God in heaven will bestow a glorious nature upon the saints themselves. Even the most beautiful garden loses its charm in the darkness of night, but the radiant sun brings glory to the darkest mountains. Similarly, when those who are currently like bottles in the smoke are placed in the glorious presence of God, they will be glorious in both soul and body.

Secondly, the saints in heaven will fully enjoy the presence of God and the Lamb. This is the ultimate satisfaction for rational beings and the everlasting rest of the saints. It will fulfill all their needs and satisfy the desires of their souls, which, even after all they have obtained in this life, continue to cry out for more, albeit with some anxiousness because their enjoyment of God is not yet complete. The manner of this enjoyment is elucidated by Jesus in John 17:3, where He states that eternal life consists of knowing the only true God and Jesus Christ whom He has sent. Two forms of knowledge provide the most perfect and satisfying understanding of a desirable object: knowledge through sight and knowledge through experience. Sight satisfies the intellect, while experience satisfies the will. Thus, we can say that the saints in heaven enjoy God and the Lamb through both intuitive knowledge and experiential knowledge, both of which will be perfect in terms of the creature's capacity. Naturally, a finite creature's perfect knowledge of an infinite Being is impossible. Currently, the saints on earth enjoy God through their knowledge acquired from His holy Word, which they believe and accept as truth. They also catch glimpses of Him, albeit dimly, through the lens of ordinances, which serve as a representation or shadow of the Bridegroom while He is absent. Additionally, they have experiential knowledge of God, tasting His goodness and graciousness. However, the saints in heaven will no longer require a favorable report about the King since they will see Him face to face. Faith will no longer be necessary as they will behold Him directly; hence, ordinances will cease to exist. They will no longer need a mirror or a glass to catch a reflection. Instead, they will drink deeply and abundantly from what they have already tasted. Therefore, hope will be fulfilled as they reach the ultimate limit of their desires.

(1.) The saints in heaven will enjoy God and the Lamb through a perfect and direct sight, unlike our current limited perception. Here

on earth, our vision is like looking through a dim glass, where we see only the reflections or images of things, not the things themselves. However, in heaven, we will have an immediate and unobstructed view of God and the Lamb. Our knowledge on earth is obscured and incomplete, but in heaven, it will be clear and devoid of any darkness. Currently, the Lord interacts with His saints through the ordinances and means of grace, but in heaven, we will be in His presence chamber. While on earth, God's glorious face is veiled to us, but in heaven, that veil will be completely removed, and we will behold His glory with unimaginable brilliance. We shall see His face, as stated in Revelation 22:4. This expression draws on the honor bestowed upon attendants in royal courts who are close to the king's person. In heaven, the great King holds court, and all the saints will be His courtiers, ever near His person, beholding His face. Revelation 22:3-4 affirms that "the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and his servants shall serve him. They shall see his face."

We will see Jesus Christ, both God and man, with our physical eyes, for He will never discard His human nature. We will behold His glorious and blessed body, which is united with the divine nature, exalted above all principalities, powers, and every name. In heaven, we will see with our own eyes the very body that was born in Bethlehem and crucified in Jerusalem between two thieves—a blessed head crowned with thorns, a face spat upon, hands and feet nailed to the cross—all radiating with unimaginable glory. The glory of the man Christ will captivate the gaze of all the saints, and He will forever be present in every believer. If every star in the sky shone as brightly as the midday sun, and the light of the sun itself increased to the point where the stars, in relation to the sun, retained the same proportion of light they currently possess, it might vaguely resemble the difference between the glory of the man Christ and that of the

saints. Although the saints will "shine like the sun," the Lamb alone will be "the light of the city." The wise men worshiped Him when they saw Him as a young child in the house with Mary, but the sight of Him in His kingdom, seated on His throne at the right hand of the Father, will be an utterly captivating spectacle. "The Word became flesh" (John 1:14), and the glory of God will shine through that flesh, bringing forth the joys of heaven to the saints who will see and enjoy God in Christ. Since the union between Christ and the saints is unbreakable, with believers remaining His members forever, and as members cannot live without the vital influence of the head, anything that exists independently of the head, regarding vital influence, cannot be considered a true member. Therefore, Jesus Christ will remain the everlasting bond of union between God and the saints, the source from which their eternal life will spring (John 17:2-3). The Lamb, who is in the midst of the throne, will feed them and lead them to living fountains of waters (Rev. 7:17).

When we behold Him who died for us, enabling us to live eternally, whose unparalleled love led Him through the Red Sea of God's wrath, making a path for us to safely reach the land of Canaan, then we will see how glorious He truly is, having endured all this for our sake. We will witness the reception He had in the heavenly abode, unaffected by the hallelujahs of angels as He heard the cries of a perishing multitude on earth and descended to help them. We will perceive the glory He set aside for us. Our hearts will leap within us, burning with seraphic love, like coals of juniper, and the arch of heaven will resound with our songs of salvation. During the feast of tabernacles, the most joyous of all Jewish celebrations, which lasted seven days, the people would encircle the altar once each day, singing hosanna while holding branches of myrtle, palm, and willow—symbols of victory and chastity—bending the branches toward the altar. As chaste virgins presented to Christ and conquerors holding

palm branches, we will joyfully surround the altar forever, singing our hosannas, or rather our hallelujahs, bending our palms toward it, acknowledging that all we owe is to the Lamb who was slain and who redeemed us with His blood. This aligns with John's vision in Revelation 7:9-10, where "a great multitude...stood before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, 'Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!'"

The saints will see God, as Jesus taught in Matthew 5:8. They will be blessed with a perfect and complete understanding of God and divine matters, surpassing the capabilities of the human mind. This is known as the beatific vision and represents the pinnacle of understanding. Our perception of God's glory on earth is limited and obscure, comparable to catching a glimpse of "His back parts" (Exod. 33:23). However, in heaven, we will see His face (Rev. 22:4). Our understanding will be illuminated by the light of glory, serving as a comprehensive commentary on the Scriptures and resolving all intricate theological questions. There is no earthly joy that can match the elation derived from the revelation of truth, especially when it concerns scriptural truth communicated to the soul by the Spirit of the Lord. As the psalmist proclaims, "I rejoice at your word like one who finds great spoil" (Psalm 119:162). Yet, our current knowledge remains imperfect. How rapturous it will be, then, to witness the unveiling of all the hidden treasures contained within the Scriptures! We will also gain understanding of God's works—the beauty of creation and providence—fully illuminated by the light of glory. Natural knowledge will reach its pinnacle as the divine masterpiece of providence, encompassing the Church and all humanity, is laid before the eyes of the saints. It will appear as a marvelous composition, prompting them to declare together, "He has done all things well." However, the work of redemption will hold a special

place of wonder for the saints. They will forever marvel and praise the glorious plan, perceiving its perfect alignment with the divine attributes and its suitability for the salvation of sinners. They will clearly comprehend the eternal covenant made between the Father and the Son for their redemption. Their souls will eternally rejoice and praise, considering God Himself, their election by the Father, their redemption through the Son, and the application of salvation to them by the Holy Spirit.

(2.) The saints in heaven will experience the enjoyment of God in Christ through direct and experiential knowledge, where the object itself is given and possessed. This represents the complete participation in divine goodness, which is the ultimate fulfillment of the will. As stated in Revelation 7:17, "The Lamb shall lead them to living fountains of waters." These waters refer to God Himself, "the fountain of living waters," who will fully and generously reveal Himself to them. He will eternally pour out His goodness into their souls, and they will have a vivid sensation, deep within their beings, of all the goodness they have heard of and believed in, as well as what they will see in Him through the light of glory. This will serve as an everlasting and practical exposition of the promise that God Himself will be their God (Rev. 21:3). God will fully communicate Himself to them, and they will no longer taste of His goodness through ordinances as they did before. Instead, they will drink directly from the source. They will no longer be satisfied with mere sips and drops, but will be filled with the fullness of God. This will be the experience of every saint. While in created things, what is given to one may be withheld from another, this infinite good can fully reveal itself to all and satisfy all. Those who are heirs of God, the great inheritance, will enter into full possession of their inheritance. The Lord will open His treasures of goodness to them, ensuring their enjoyment is complete. There will be no limits imposed; their enjoyment will extend as far as

their expanded capacities can reach. Just as a narrow vessel cannot contain the ocean, finite creatures cannot fully comprehend the infinite good. Yet, there will be no set measure to their enjoyment, only that which corresponds to the capacity of the creature. Therefore, while there will be varying degrees of glory, all will be filled and receive what they can hold, even if some can hold more than others. None will lack anything; all will be fully satisfied and experience perfect blessedness through the complete enjoyment of divine goodness according to their expanded capacities. Just as bottles of different sizes are filled, with some containing more and others less, all will have what they can contain. The glorified saints will find complete fulfillment in God, satisfying all their desires. Created things cannot fulfill all our desires; clothes may warm us but not nourish us, and light may bring comfort but not sustain us. However, in God, we will find fulfillment for all our desires, and we will desire nothing apart from Him. The truly desirable will be the sole object of our desires, and we will have all that we desire. God will be everything to the saints—life, health, riches, honor, peace, and all good things. He will freely communicate Himself to them, and the door of access to Him will never be closed even for a moment. They may partake of the fruit of the tree of life whenever they desire, for it will be found on both sides of the river (Rev. 22:2). There will be no veil separating God from them; His fullness will always be open to them. There will be no doors to knock on in heaven, no need to ask before receiving. The Lord will grant His people unrestricted intimacy with Himself in that realm.

Currently, believers have become "partakers of the divine nature" to some extent, but then they will fully partake in it. In other words, God will communicate His own image to them, imprinting all His goodness not only before them but within them, reflecting all His perfections in them to the fullest extent possible for creatures. This

will result in a perfect likeness to Him in all aspects. This is what the psalmist anticipates in Psalm 17:15, when he says, "I shall be satisfied when I awake with Your likeness," signifying the attainment of God's image following the beatific vision. Similarly, John declares in 1 John 3:2, "We shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is." This intimate union between God and the saints will be most profound and perfect, as God will be in them and they in God. Their dwelling in love will reach its zenith, for "God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him" (1 John 4:16). How closely united the saints will be with God and He with them when they see nothing in themselves but His own image! Their love, purified from the impurities of self-love, will be utterly pure. They will love nothing but God and will love everything in God. It will no longer be faint and feeble but burn with the intensity of juniper coals. Their love will be radiant and unobscured, a flaming fire without smoke. Just as a live coal, once all its moisture has evaporated, is entirely fire, the saints will be wholly consumed by love when they attain the full enjoyment of God in heaven through intuitive and experiential knowledge, by sight and complete participation in divine goodness.

Thirdly, this glorious presence and enjoyment will give rise to an indescribable joy that will fill the saints. "In Your presence is fullness of joy" (Psalm 16:11). At times, the saints enjoy God in the world, but when their eyes are veiled and they fail to perceive it, they do not fully experience the comfort of that enjoyment. However, once all misunderstandings are removed, they will not only enjoy God but rest in that enjoyment with inexplicable delight and satisfaction. Desires for earthly things cause torment, and their enjoyment often leads to disillusionment. But although the glorified saints will continually desire more of God, their desires will be free from any hint of anxiety, as the fullness of the Godhead will always be accessible to them. Thus, they will never hunger again, experiencing

no discomfort in their eternal longing for the hidden manna. Likewise, continuous enjoyment will not result in weariness; they will never think they have received too much. As Revelation 7:16 states, "The sun shall not strike them, nor any heat." The enjoyment of God and the Lamb will be perpetually fresh and new to them throughout eternity. They will drink from the ever-flowing living fountains of waters (Rev. 7:17), where new waters constantly spring forth in abundance. They will eat from the tree of life, which yields twelve different kinds of fruit, always new and fresh, as it produces fruit every month (Rev. 22:2). Their joy will be pure and untainted, without any traces of sorrow. It will not be superficial and momentary but substantial and everlasting, without interruption. They will enter into the joy of their Lord (Matt. 25:21). The expression used here is somewhat uncommon and brings to mind the words of our suffering Redeemer in Mark 14:34, "My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death." His soul was overwhelmed by sorrow, as the original word suggests; floods of sorrow surrounded Him from every direction. Sorrow confronted Him from heaven, earth, and hell all at once. He was engulfed in sorrow, as expressed in Psalm 69:2, "I have come into deep waters, where the floods overflow me." Why did He endure all this? So that His own may enter into joy. While joy may presently enter into us, it struggles to gain access while we are encompassed by sorrow. But then, joy will not only enter into us, but we will enter into joy itself, forever immersed in an ocean of joy where joy meets our gaze in every direction. The presence and enjoyment of God and the Lamb will fully satisfy us with eternal pleasures. The glory emanating from our souls and bodies, derived from this presence, will provide everlasting delight. The spirit of heaviness, no matter how closely it clings to any of the saints now, will be shed in that realm. Weeping will be transformed into songs of joy, and bottles of tears will be transformed into rivers of pleasure. Blessed are those who now sow

in tears, for they will reap joy in heaven, and their heads will be encircled with a weight of glory.

Lastly, the kingdom will endure forever. Just as everything within it is eternal, the saints will possess unwavering certainty and full assurance of its eternal duration. This is an essential component of perfect happiness, for even the slightest uncertainty regarding the continuation of any good brings about fear, anxiety, and torment, rendering perfect happiness unattainable. However, the glorified saints will never fear or have any reason to fear any loss. They will be "forever with the Lord" (1 Thess. 4:17). They will possess an unwavering conviction that nothing will separate them from the love of God or hinder them from fully enjoying Him for eternity. The inheritance "reserved in heaven" is incorruptible; it possesses no inherent principle of decay and endures forever. It is undefiled; its beauty remains untarnished by external factors, and there is nothing within it that could offend those who partake in it. It does not fade away but retains its original splendor and pristine beauty (1 Pet. 1:4). This concludes our discussion of the nature of the kingdom of heaven.

II. Now let us discuss the entrance of the saints into their new kingdom. I will briefly address two aspects: 1. The formal admission, through the call from the Judge to enter their kingdom. 2. The equality with which they are admitted and introduced to it.

1. The text reveals that their admission comes through a voice from the throne. The King calls to them from the throne, before angels and men, commanding them to come into their kingdom. "Come" and "Go" may be short words, but they carry profound implications that will engage the thoughts of all humanity

throughout eternity. Everlasting happiness depends on one word, while eternal misery hinges on the other.

Even now, our Lord invites the worst of sinners who hear the gospel to come to Him, but most refuse to come. Only a few, whose hearts are touched by His Spirit, embrace the call and respond, "Behold, we come to You." They surrender themselves to the Lord, forsaking the world and their sinful desires. They bear His yoke and do not cast it off, even when it feels heavy and causes them to sweat drops of blood. "Behold the fools!" exclaims the carnal world. "Where are they going?" But wait a moment, O foolish world! From the same mouth that issued the initial call they now follow, another call will come that will make up for everything: "Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom."

The saints will find indescribable sweetness in this call to come. Firstly, Jesus Christ demonstrates His desire for their company in the celestial abode, where they will be with Him forever. He reveals His heart to them, just as He did to the Father concerning them, saying, "Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am" (John 17:24). The travail of His soul before the throne includes not only the souls but also the bodies He has redeemed. They must come, for His satisfaction must be complete. Secondly, they are solemnly invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb. They were invited to the lower table by the voice of the servants and the workings of the Holy Spirit within them, and they responded and partook of the feast of divine communion in the earthly realm. Now, in person, Jesus Christ Himself will invite them, before the whole world, to the grandest banquet. Thirdly, through this call, He admits them into the mansions of glory. The keys of heaven hang at the belt of our royal Mediator. He possesses "all authority in heaven" (Matt. 28:18), and none enter except by His

admission. When they lived on earth alongside the rest of the world, He opened the doors of their hearts, entered, and shut them again, ensuring that sin could never regain its dominion. Now He opens the doors of heaven to them, drawing His doves into the ark and sealing them inside. The law, death, and hell can never reclaim them. In this life, the saints labored to enter that rest, but Satan always pulled them back, and their sinful nature continually dragged them down. At times, they were left hanging by a thread of promise, fearing they might fall into the lake of fire. But now, Christ gives the word for their admission, bringing them in and securing them against all danger. Fourthly, He speaks to them as the one who introduces them to the kingdom, the presence-chamber of the great King and His throne. Jesus Christ is the chief administrator of heaven, responsible for bringing the saints into the gracious presence of God both now and, ultimately, into His glorious presence in heaven. Truly, heaven would be a strange place without Jesus, but the Son will lead His brethren into His Father's kingdom, and they will enter "with Him to the wedding" (Matt. 25:10).

2. Let us consider the capacity in which He introduces them.

(1.) He brings them in as the blessed of His Father. Thus, the call from the throne declares, "Come, you blessed of My Father," etc. They are entering Christ's Father's house, and He reminds them that they are not only blessed by Himself but also cherished by the Father. This is what makes heaven their true home: it belongs to the Father of Christ, and they can be certain of a warm welcome since they are united with the Son and were chosen by the Father for this very purpose. Christ brings them into the kingdom for the sake of His Father as well as His own. They are the blessed of the Father, who, as the source of the divine essence, is also the fountain from which all blessings flow to humankind. They are the ones whom God

loved from eternity, blessed in His eternal plan, elected for eternal life. Their names were recorded in the book of life, ensuring that their entrance into the kingdom aligns with the Father's eternal design. Through the Son's redemptive work, they are saved according to the Father's purpose (2 Tim. 1:9). They are those to whom the Father has spoken well. He spoke well to them through His Word, and now His promises will find their complete fulfillment. They had received His promise of the kingdom, living and dying in faith, and now they come to receive what was promised. He has done well to them, and His gift is genuine, just like Isaac's blessing that made Jacob his heir. They have been justified, sanctified, and enabled by grace to persevere to the end. Now, they are raised up in glory and stand before the judgment seat. What remains is for God to crown His own work of grace in them, granting them their kingdom and the full enjoyment of Himself for eternity. Finally, they are the ones whom God has consecrated, a blessed state in itself (1 Cor. 10:16). God has set them apart to be kings and priests unto Him, and the Mediator introduces them in their rightful capacity as they enter their kingdom and priesthood.

(2.) Christ introduces them as heirs of the kingdom, granting them actual possession. "Come, you blessed, inherit the kingdom." They are the children of God through regeneration and adoption. "And if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ" (Rom. 8:17). Now, the assembly of the firstborn stands before the throne. Their period of minority has passed, and the appointed time for them to receive their inheritance from the Father has arrived. The Mediator acquired the inheritance for them with His own blood, their rights and evidence were established long ago and recorded in the Bible. Moreover, they have a representative investment of their inheritance in Christ Himself, who ascended into heaven as their proxy, as it is written: "Where the forerunner has entered for us,

even Jesus" (Heb. 6:20). Only one thing remains: they must personally enter into possession, a process that begins at death and culminates on the final day when the saints, both in soul and resurrected bodies, enter their kingdom.

(3.) They are introduced as those for whom the kingdom was prepared from the foundation of the world. The kingdom was established for them in God's eternal plan before they or any of them even existed. This demonstrates that it is a gift of free grace to them. From eternity, it was God's purpose to establish this kingdom for the elect, and all obstacles that could hinder their access to it were removed. Likewise, through the eternal decree, each individual's place in the kingdom was determined and reserved for them. Thus, as each child returns home to their Father's house, they will find their designated place awaiting them, ready and prepared, just as David's place remained empty at Saul's table when he was absent (1 Sam. 20:25). Now, the appointed time has arrived, and they are brought in to assume their rightful positions in glory.

APPLICATION: I will conclude my discourse on this subject with a word of application: 1. To all who claim a right to this kingdom. 2. To those who truly possess a right to it. 3. To those who have no right to it.

1. It is evident that entrance into the kingdom of heaven is not granted to everyone indiscriminately. Only those whose claim is solemnly examined by the great Judge and proven to be valid are admitted. Therefore, it is necessary for all of us to examine ourselves and evaluate whether, according to the laws of the kingdom as outlined in the Holy Scriptures, we can establish and substantiate our claim to this kingdom. The hopes of heaven that many harbor are built on shaky foundations and will

crumble under scrutiny. These hopes are based solely on deluded imaginations and will ultimately leave those who hold them bitterly disappointed. Hence, it is not only our duty but also our utmost interest to subject our claim to a fair trial while there is still time. If we discover that we have no right to heaven, we are still on the path and can obtain what we lack. However, if we find that we do indeed possess a rightful claim, we will have the comforting assurance of a blissful outlook into eternity, the greatest solace one can experience in this world. If you wonder how to ascertain whether you have a right to heaven, the answer lies in the state you are currently in. If you are still in your natural state, you are a child of wrath and not a child of this kingdom. That state, for those who live and die in it, leads to eternal misery. However, if you have been brought into the state of grace, you have a legitimate claim to the state of glory, as grace will inevitably lead to glory in the end. This kingdom is an inheritance that only the children of God can rightfully claim. We become children of God through regeneration and union with His Son. "And if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ" (Rom. 8:17). These are the critical factors on which our evidence for the state of glory depends. Therefore, I refer you to the discussion on the state of grace to determine your right to glory.

If you are heirs of glory, "the kingdom of God is within you" through your regeneration and union with Christ. Firstly, if you have a rightful claim to the kingdom, its throne resides in your heart. Christ dwells within you, and God dwells within you. By choosing Him as your portion, your soul has found its eternal rest in Him, finding true solace in no other. It inclines habitually toward Him, driven by the new nature, the divine nature shared by the heirs of glory. As the psalmist declared, "Whom have I in heaven but You? And there is

none upon earth that I desire besides You" (Psalm 73:25). Secondly, if you are heirs of heaven, the laws of heaven are established in your heart. The Spirit of the Lord, the instructor of all the heirs of glory, has enlightened your mind with knowledge of the kingdom's laws. Even if you lack human instruction, the heirs to a crown certainly won't be deprived of divine teaching. "It is written in the prophets, 'And they shall all be taught by God'" (John 6:45). Furthermore, your heart has undergone transformation, bearing the image of God characterized by righteousness and true holiness (Eph. 4:24). Your soul is reconciled with the entirety of God's law, waging war against all known sin. Those who lack holiness in heart and conduct cannot truly lay claim to the holy kingdom. "Without holiness, no one will see the Lord" (Heb. 12:14). If heaven is a place of rest, it is reserved for those who engage in spiritual labor rather than idleness. If it is an eternal triumph, those who avoid spiritual warfare, who neglect to subdue their sinful nature, resist temptation, and press through the opposition presented by the devil, the world, and the flesh, are not on the path to attain it. Thirdly, if you are heirs of glory, the treasure in heaven is of utmost value and desire to you. Your treasure, where your heart is also located (Matt. 6:21), is not in the visible realm but in the unseen realm. You prioritize obtaining the things that are not seen above all else. You engage in heavenly transactions, making it your primary concern. This indicates that your treasure is indeed in heaven, for your heart is there. Conversely, those who question why so much emphasis is placed on heaven and eternal life, as if lesser things would suffice, are likely to have no connection to it whatsoever. Carnal individuals value their earthly treasures above all else, weighing down the things that are not seen with the things that are seen. No losses affect them as deeply as worldly losses. In contrast, those who are heirs of the crown of glory esteem their heavenly treasures most highly. They do not place their personal possessions on the same scale as their kingdom, and the loss of

earthly belongings does not trouble them as much as the thought of losing their heavenly inheritance. The absence of these first fruits of heaven serves as irrefutable evidence that one is an heir of wrath, deserving no part in the kingdom.

2. Let those who are heirs of the kingdom conduct themselves in a manner befitting their character and dignity. Live with the faith and hope of this glorious kingdom in mind. Let your words and actions reflect the heavenly realm, and let your way of life resemble the country to which you are destined. May it be said of you, as it was said of Gideon's brethren, "Each one resembled the children of a king" (Judges 8:18). Maintain a holy disregard for the world and its pursuits. While others may set their hearts on earthly things that are ultimately fleeting, you should place your feet on them, knowing that your true treasures are above. This world is merely a transient stop on your journey to Immanuel's land. Therefore, pass through it as pilgrims and strangers, without becoming entangled in its burdens and hindrances that may impede your progress. It is unworthy of someone born to a palace to set their heart on a cottage and dwell there. It is equally unworthy of an heir to the kingdom of heaven to be ensnared by the things of this world when they should be pressing on to receive their crown. The prize set before you demands your utmost zeal, activity, and diligence. Holy courage, determination, and magnanimity are becoming of those who are destined to inherit the crown. You cannot attain it without facing external and internal challenges along the way. However, the kingdom that awaits you is more than sufficient to outweigh all obstacles, even if you are called to resist to the point of shedding blood. Choose Christ's cross over the world's crown, and embrace deprivation in the path of duty rather than seeking ease and wealth through sinful means. "Choose rather to suffer

affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin" (Heb. 11:25). In a common inn, strangers may fare better than the children, but here is the distinction: the children receive everything without payment, whereas the strangers receive their bill and must fully settle their accounts. If we consider the ultimate reckoning that awaits the wicked for all the temporary comforts they enjoy in this world, we will not begrudge them their blessings here nor take offense at God's timing in granting us our greatest blessings last. Heaven will make up for all the losses endured by the saints, and there, every tear will be wiped away from their eyes.

It is worth noting that Scripture presents a diverse array of conceptions of heavenly happiness, capable of providing solace for every affliction experienced by the saints. Are they oppressed? The day will come when they shall reign. Has their honor been diminished? They will be given a throne to sit upon, a crown upon their head, and a scepter in their hand to restore their honor. Have they been reduced to poverty? Heaven is a treasure awaiting them. Even if they are forced to leave their earthly homes, they have a heavenly dwelling prepared by Christ's Father. Are they driven into the wilderness? There is a city prepared for them. If they are banished from their native land, they shall inherit a better country. If they are deprived of public worship, in heaven, the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb will be their temple, a temple that no one can shut. If their earthly life is filled with bitterness, heaven offers an abundance of pleasures. If they struggle with the remnants of spiritual bondage, there is a glorious liberty awaiting them. If their defiled garments cause them shame, the day will come when their robes will be pure, white, and spotless. The battle against spiritual forces may be intense, but a glorious triumph awaits them. If the toil and labor of the Christian life are great, there is an everlasting rest

awaiting them in heaven. If they are deemed unworthy of the company of angels in heaven or if their communion with God is frequently interrupted, in heaven, they will go out no more and will behold His face forever. If they experience darkness in this life, eternal light awaits them in heaven. If they grapple with death, they shall receive everlasting life. In summary, "He who overcomes shall inherit all things" (Rev. 21:7). They shall possess peace and abundance, profit and pleasure—everything desirable to fully satisfy their greatest aspirations. Therefore, let those who anticipate heaven lift their heads with joy, gird their loins, and run in such a way as to obtain the crown, trampling on anything that may hinder their progress towards the kingdom. Let them never consider any duty too difficult, any cross too burdensome, or any sacrifice too great if it means attaining the crown of glory.

3. Let those who have no rightful claim to the kingdom of heaven be stirred to seek it diligently. Now is the opportune time for the children of wrath to become heirs of glory. When the path to eternal happiness is open, it is not a time for idleness and complacency. Direct your hearts towards the glory that is to be revealed and cease searching for lasting rest in this perishable earth. What good will all your worldly possessions do for you if you have no solid grounds to expect heaven once this life is over? Riches, honors, profits, and pleasures that must be left behind and cannot accompany us into the next world are pitiful inheritances that will ultimately leave individuals without comfort. Ah, why are people so eager to receive their earthly rewards during their lifetime? Should they not be more concerned with securing a place in the kingdom of heaven, an inheritance that can never be taken away, granting them everlasting happiness throughout eternity? If you desire honor, in heaven, you may have the highest honor, which will endure

when the world's honors are laid to rest. If you seek riches, heaven will provide you with a treasure, and there are pleasures forevermore. Oh, do not despise the pleasant land, nor deem yourselves unworthy of eternal life. Embrace Christ as He is offered to you in the gospel, and you shall inherit all things. Walk in the path of holiness, for it will lead you to the kingdom. Fight against sin and Satan, and you shall receive the crown. Forsake the world, and the doors of heaven will open wide to welcome you.

VI. ON HELL

Then he will also say to those on the left hand, "Depart from me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels." - Matthew 25:41

If there were no other place for eternal dwelling besides heaven, I would have concluded my discussion on man's eternal state. However, since in the other world there is a prison for the wicked as well as a palace for the saints, we must also explore the state of everlasting misery. Even the worst of men should bear with this knowledge without lamenting, "Have you come to torment us before the time?" for there is still an opportunity to escape the impending wrath. Yet, all that can be said about it falls short of what the damned will truly experience, for "who can know the power of God's anger?"

The last act of our Lord before he ascended from the earth was to lift up his hands and bless his disciples (Luke 24:50-51). However, the last act he will perform before departing from his throne is to curse and condemn his enemies, as revealed in the text which contains the dreadful sentence declaring the everlasting misery of the wicked. There are three aspects to note: Firstly, the quality of the condemned: "you cursed." The Judge finds them under the curse of the law as transgressors and sends them away with it from his presence into hell, where it will be fully executed upon them. Secondly, their punishment to which they are sentenced and to which they were always bound by the curse. It is twofold: the punishment of loss, in separation from God and Christ, "Depart from me," and the punishment of torment, in excruciating and extreme suffering, "Depart from me into fire." Thirdly, the intensification of their torments. Firstly, these torments are ready for them; they should expect no respite. The fire is prepared and awaiting to consume those who are cast into it. Secondly, they will have the company of devils in their torments, enclosed with them in hell. They must depart into the same fire prepared for Beelzebub, the prince of devils, and his angels, which refers to other fallen angels who became devils alongside him. It is said to be prepared for them because they sinned and were condemned to hell before the fall of man. This adds further terror to the damned, knowing they must endure the same torments and dwelling place as the devil and his angels. They listened to his temptations, and now they must share in his torments. They engaged in his works, and now they must receive the wages of death. In this life, they aligned themselves with devils in enmity against God, Christ, and the path of holiness, and in the next life, they must dwell with them. Thus, all the goats shall be shut up together, as the term "goats" is used interchangeably for devils and wicked men in Scripture. Lastly, the ultimate exacerbation of their torment is its eternal duration; they must depart into everlasting fire.

This is what completes their misery, knowing that it will never come to an end.

DOCTRINE: The wicked will be confined under God's curse in eternal misery, alongside the devils in hell.

After establishing the truth of bodily resurrection and a universal judgment, it is unnecessary to prove the reality of future punishment. The inner conscience in people, which acknowledges a future judgment, also attests to the truth of future punishment. (And as we will see in our discussion, the punishment of the damned will not be annihilation or reduction to nothingness.) In examining this dreadful subject, I will address four aspects: 1. The curse that will imprison the damned. 2. Their misery under this curse. 3. Their association with devils in this wretched state. 4. The eternity of it all.

I. Concerning the curse that will confine the damned in hell, it is the dreadful sentence of the law that binds them to God's wrath as transgressors. This curse does not seize them only when they stand before the judgment seat to receive their sentence. They were born under it, lived their lives under it in this world, died under it, and rose from their graves with it. When the Judge finds them, He sends them away with this curse into the pit, where it will persist throughout eternity. By nature, all people are under the curse. However, for the elect, it is removed through their union with Christ. But for the rest of sinful mankind, it remains, and they are condemned to destruction, set apart for evil, as described in Deuteronomy 29:21: "And the Lord shall separate him to evil." Thus, the damned will forever be individuals devoted to destruction, set apart and distinguished from the rest of humanity as vessels of divine wrath, targeted by the arrows of God's vengeance.

This curse exhibits its initial effects on earth, serving as a foretaste of what is to come. Therefore, just as temporal and eternal blessings are expressed together in the promises made to the Lord's people (Isaiah 35:10, "And the ransomed of the Lord shall return and come to Zion," etc., referring to their return from Babylon and their eternal rest in heaven), temporal and eternal miseries for the enemies of God are sometimes encompassed within a single expression of judgment (Isaiah 30:33, "For Tophet is ordained of old; yes, for the king it is prepared; he has made it deep and large: the pile thereof is fire and much wood; the breath of the Lord, like a stream of brimstone, kindles it," referring to the temporal and eternal destruction of the Assyrians who perished by the hand of the angel before Jerusalem). See also Isaiah 66:24. What is the judicial blindness to which many are subjected, "whose minds the god of this age has blinded" (2 Corinthians 4:4), but the firstfruits of hell and the curse? Their sun is setting at noonday; their darkness intensifies as if it will not cease until it culminates in utter darkness. Conscience inflicts countless lashes upon the wicked in secret, unheard of by the world. Is this not the never-dying worm that has already begun to gnaw at them? Each of these torments may be called Joseph, for "the Lord shall add another," or rather Gad, for "a troop comes." These drops of wrath are terrifying forebodings of the deluge that awaits them. At times, they are abandoned to their vile affections, having no control over them (Romans 1:26). Thus, their lusts grow ever closer to perfection, so to speak.

As grace reaches its pinnacle in heaven, sin attains its zenith in hell. As sin progressively consumes a person, they draw nearer and resemble hell. Three alarming signs manifest in this regard. Firstly, when everything that could benefit their souls turns to naught, transforming their blessings into curses (Malachi 2:2). Sermons, prayers, admonishments, and rebukes, which are efficacious for

others, prove entirely ineffective for them. Secondly, when individuals persist in sinning despite clear rebukes from the Lord through ordinances and providences. God confronts them with rods in their sinful paths, striking them backward, yet they obstinately press forward. What is more reminiscent of hell, where the Lord perpetually strikes, and the damned perpetually sin against Him? Lastly, when everything in one's circumstances fuels their lusts. Adversity and prosperity, poverty and wealth, the absence or presence of ordinances—all serve to nourish the corruptions within many. Their wicked hearts corrupt everything they receive, amplifying the toxic humors.

Yet, the full harvest follows—the misery they will endure forever in hell—the complete execution of wrath resulting from the curse. This dark cloud descends upon them, and the dreadful thunderbolt strikes them as they hear the terrifying voice from the throne, "Depart from me, you cursed," etc. This will provide the wicked world with a horrifying glimpse into the depths of the curse. It is, firstly, a voice of extreme indignation and wrath, a vehement rebuke from the Lion of the tribe of Judah. His countenance will be most dreadful to them, His eyes emitting fiery flames, and His words piercing their hearts like venomous arrows. As He banishes them from His presence forever and commands them to depart, they will witness the burning fury in His heart against them for their sins. Secondly, it is a voice of utmost disdain and contempt from the Lord. There was a time when they were pitied, advised to show compassion to themselves, and to belong to the Lord. Yet, they despised Him and rejected Him. Now, they will be cast out of His sight, forever held in contempt. Thirdly, it is a voice of extreme hatred. Through this, the Lord shuts them out of His loving and merciful embrace. "Depart, you cursed." I cannot bear to look upon you. There is not a single benevolent intention in My heart towards you, nor will you ever hear another word of hope from

Me. Lastly, it is a voice of eternal rejection from the Lord. He commands them to leave and casts them away forever. The doors of heaven are closed to them, an impassable chasm separates them, and they are driven to the pit. Even if they were to cry out with utmost earnestness, "Lord, Lord, open to us," all they will hear is, "Depart, depart you cursed." Thus, the damned will be confined under the curse.

USE 1: All those who, still in their natural state, remain under the curse should reflect on this and seek refuge in Jesus Christ while there is still time, so that they may be delivered from it. How can you sleep while under the curse? Jesus Christ is calling out to you, saying, "Come, you cursed, I will remove the curse from you and give you blessing." The waters of redemption are flowing to heal the cursed ground. Take heed and use them to restore your own souls, fearing the consequence of gaining no spiritual benefit. Remember that "the miry places," emblematic of hypocrites, and "the marshes," unable to breed fish or bear trees, remain unhealed by the waters of redemption. They are left in barrenness, given over to eternal desolation, serving as monuments of God's wrath and forever under the curse (Ezekiel 47:11).

2. Let all those who curse themselves and others consider this. Those who "clothe themselves with cursing" will find the curse entering their very being, permeating their bones like oil and water in their bowels (Psalm 109:18), unless repentance prevents it. Their imprecations against themselves will be fully answered on the day they stand before God's judgment seat. They will experience the weighty curse of God, which they now disregard.

II. Now, I turn to discuss the misery of the damned under this curse, a misery that no human tongue or angelic voice can adequately express. God consistently acts in accordance with His nature. His favors are unparalleled, as are His wrath and terrors. Just as the saints in heaven experience the highest level of happiness, the damned in hell reach the pinnacle of misery. I will cautiously explore two aspects: the punishment of loss and the punishment of suffering in hell. However, since these are matters that no eye has seen nor ear has heard, we must, like geographers, leave a significant blank space for the unknown land that will be revealed in due time.

1. The punishment of loss experienced by the damned is their separation from the Lord, as we learn from the text, "Depart from me, you cursed." This separation will be like a stone sealing their grave, as heavy as a talent of lead (Zechariah 5:7-8), keeping them confined forever. They will be eternally separated from God and Christ. Christ is the pathway to the Father, but for them, the way will be perpetually blocked. The bridge will be withdrawn, and an insurmountable gulf will be fixed. Thus, they will be imprisoned in a state of eternal separation from God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. They will be spatially separated from the person of Christ and will never enter the abode of the blessed, where He manifests His glory. Instead, they will be cast into utter darkness (Matthew 22:13). Although they cannot be spatially separated from God, for He is and will be present everywhere, they will endure immeasurable suffering due to their relational separation from Him. Even as they are engulfed in fiery flames and complete darkness, God will be present within the depths of their souls, so to speak. Yet, His presence will only serve to feed them with the vinegar of His wrath and punish them with the emanations of His avenging justice. They will never again taste His goodness and bounty, nor glimpse

even a glimmer of hope from Him. They will perceive that His heart is utterly estranged from them and that His disposition towards them is one of everlasting indignation. They will be deprived of the glorious presence and enjoyment of God. They will have no share in the beatific vision, perceiving nothing in God towards them except an incessant deluge of wrath. This will result in unending floods of sorrow. They will never taste the rivers of pleasure that the saints in heaven enjoy, enduring an eternal winter and perpetual night due to the absence of the Sun of Righteousness. Heaven's happiness is immeasurable, and so will be their loss, for they will forever be deprived of it.

This separation of the wicked from God will be, firstly, an involuntary separation. While they currently choose to depart from Him, refusing to come to Him despite being called and entreated, then they will be forcibly driven away when they would desperately wish to remain with Him. The question, "What is your Beloved more than another beloved?" frequently asked by those who despise the gospel, will find no place among the damned. They will realize that true happiness can only be found in the enjoyment of God and that the loss of Him is an irreparable loss.

2. This separation will be total and absolute. Though the wicked are presently separated from God in this life, there exists a certain level of interaction between them. He bestows many blessings upon them, and they, at least, offer some words of gratitude. Therefore, peace is not entirely hopeless. However, in hell, there will be an absolute separation. The damned will be cast into complete darkness, where not a single glimmer of light or favor from the Lord will penetrate. Consequently, all their fair words to Him will cease.

3. It will be a final separation. They will part ways with God, never to be reunited, imprisoned in everlasting horror and despair. The union between Jesus Christ and unbelievers, a relationship that has been initiated and terminated numerous times, will be permanently dissolved. No message of favor or goodwill will ever pass between the two parties again.

This punishment of loss, encompassing a total and final separation from God, is a misery that exceeds mortal comprehension and can only be fully understood through the dreadful experience of the damned. However, in order to gain some understanding of its horror, consider the following:

1. God is the ultimate good, making separation from Him the ultimate evil. We deem it a great evil to be deprived of our homeland, our loved ones, or our lives, for these are considered good. The greater the goodness, the greater the loss when it is taken away. Therefore, since God is the supreme good and no good can compare to Him, there can be no loss greater than the loss of God. The complete enjoyment of God represents the highest pinnacle of happiness attainable for a created being. Thus, to be completely and finally separated from Him represents the lowest depth of misery to which a rational creature can be reduced. To be rejected by fellow humans, especially the virtuous, is distressing, but what then must it be to be rejected by God Himself, the epitome of goodness?
2. God is the source of all goodness. All goodness and perfection, both natural and moral, in any creature emanates from God and depends on Him, just as light originates from and depends on the sun. Every created being is inherently dependent. Consequently, a complete separation from God, in which all

pleasant communion between God and the rational creature is entirely cut off, inevitably results in a total eclipse of all light, comfort, and ease. Just as a house plunged into darkness when its only window or opening is shut, so too will the absence of God extinguish all sources of comfort. Our Lord tells us in Matthew 19:17, "There is only One who is good." No good or comforting thing originates from the creature. Whatever good or comforting experiences we find within ourselves, such as bodily health or peace of mind, or the sweetness, rest, pleasure, or delight we derive from other creatures such as food, drink, arts, or sciences, are all but feeble reflections of divine perfections communicated by God to the creature. They depend on a constant influence from Him for their preservation. If that influence were to cease, they would vanish. It is impossible for any created thing to be more or better to us than what God makes it to be. All the rivulets of comfort we drink from, whether internal or external, spring from God as their source. If the flow of these rivulets is interrupted, they will inevitably dry up. Therefore, when God is removed, all that is good and comforting departs with Him—every peace of body and mind, all joy, every sense of ease and tranquility, all hope, and even the common operations of the Holy Spirit that currently restrain the wicked. Consequently, sin will reach its zenith. Thus, we are confronted with a distressing sight: the horrifying spectacle of sin and misery when a creature is completely separated from God and left to itself. This separation constitutes the very essence of hell.

Being separated from God, the damned are deprived of all that is good. The cherished possessions they hold dear in this world will be beyond their reach. The covetous cannot enjoy their wealth, the ambitious cannot revel in their honors, and the sensual cannot

indulge in their pleasures. They will not even find a drop of water to cool their tongues (Luke 16:24-25). There will be no sustenance to strengthen the weak, no respite to refresh the weary, and no music or pleasant company to console and uplift the sorrowful. As for the good things they disregarded in this world, they will never hear of or see them again. There will be no offer of Christ, no forgiveness, no peace, no wells of salvation in the pit of destruction. In short, they will be deprived of everything that might bring them comfort, as they are completely and finally separated from God—the source of all goodness and comfort.

(3) Human beings naturally desire happiness, recognizing that they are not self-sufficient. They always long for something outside of themselves to make them happy. By its very nature, the soul is capable of enjoying God, and nothing else can fulfill its desires. True and lasting rest can only be found in the enjoyment of God. Even in hell, this desire for happiness cannot be cast aside. While the wicked are on earth, they seek satisfaction in created things. When one fails, they move on to another, deceiving themselves with vain hopes. But in the afterlife, when all comfort in earthly things fails and the shadows they pursue vanish, they will be completely and permanently separated from God. They will realize the loss they have incurred, finding both the doors of earth and heaven shut against them. This realization will cause indescribable anguish as they live with an eternal, insatiable hunger for happiness, knowing it can never be satisfied in the slightest. How can one imagine the deep cutting of this separation from God? How will they roar and rage under it? How will it sting and gnaw at them throughout eternity?

(4) The damned will be aware that there are some who are perfectly happy, enjoying God from whom they themselves are separated. This will intensify their sense of loss, knowing they can never share in the

happiness of those blessed ones. Being separated from God, they are also separated from the fellowship of glorified saints and angels. They may catch a glimpse of Abraham from afar and Lazarus in his bosom (Luke 16:23), but they can never join their company. They will be cast out like unclean lepers, excommunicated from the presence of the Lord and all His holy ones. Some believe that everyone in heaven or hell will hear and see all that transpires in both states. While we cannot be certain of this, it is evident from the Scriptures that the damned will have a keen awareness of the happiness of the saints in heaven. What else can be meant by the rich man in hell seeing Lazarus in Abraham's bosom? In any case, their own torments will give them a notion of the happiness of the saints, just as a sick person understands the concept of health or a prisoner yearns for liberty. As they reflect on the happiness of those in heaven, without any hope of finding contentment in their own condition, every thought of that happiness will magnify their loss. It would torment a hungry person to see others feasting abundantly while they remain chained up, unable to satisfy their gnawing appetite. Similarly, the songs of the blessed in their enjoyment of God will cause the damned to mourn under their separation from Him.

(5) They will remember that there was a time when they could have been partakers of the blessed company of saints, enjoying God. This will further intensify their sense of loss. They will recall that there was once a possibility of it, when they were in the world and the way of salvation was presented to them. They may wish they had traveled the world seeking it out. Those who despised the gospel will bitterly remember that Jesus Christ, with all His benefits, was offered to them. They were exhorted, entreated, and urged to accept, but they refused. They were warned of the misery they would experience and urged to flee from the wrath to come, but they did not listen. The

rejection of the gospel will become a burning hell, and the loss of an offered heaven will weigh heavily on the spirits of unbelievers in the pit. Some will recall that there was a likelihood of their eternal happiness, that they seemed to be on the verge of it, and were not far from the kingdom of God. They almost consented to the blessed covenant, as if they were about to sign the marriage contract between Christ and their souls. But tragically, they dropped the pen and turned back to their lusts. Others will remember how they thought they were assured of heaven, but due to pride and self-conceit, they considered themselves above ordinances and beyond instruction. They refused to examine their own state, which led to their downfall. They will vainly wish that they had regarded themselves as the lowest of the congregation, cursing their foolish self-conceit and the opinions others held of them. Thus, the damned will be tormented by the awareness that they could have escaped this loss.

(6) They will realize that the loss is irreparable, and they will be eternally subjected to it, never able to recover what has been lost. If the damned could regain what they have lost after millions of ages in hell, there might be some hope. However, the prize is gone and can never be regained. Two things will pierce them to the heart: Firstly, they never knew its worth until it was irretrievably lost. If a person were to give away a clay pot filled with gold for a trifling sum, not realizing its contents until it was gone forever and beyond recovery, how would this foolish action torment them upon the discovery of the riches within it? This case may faintly resemble the situation of those who despise the gospel when they lift up their eyes in hell and behold to their torment what they refused to see for their salvation. Secondly, they have lost it for worthless things. They traded their share of heaven and gained nothing in return. The drunkard has lost his cups, the covetous person has lost their gain, the pleasure-seeker has lost their carnal delights, and the lazy one has lost their ease.

Nothing remains to comfort them now. The happiness they forfeited still exists, but they can never partake in it for eternity.

APPLICATION: Sinners, I urge you to come to God through Jesus Christ, uniting with Him through the Mediator, so that you may be saved from this dreadful separation. Fear living in a state of separation from God, for what you now choose may become your eternal punishment in the future. Do not reject communion with God; do not cast off fellowship with the saints, for it will be the torment of the damned to be cast out from that communion. Cease building the wall of separation between God and yourselves by continuing in sinful ways. Repent in time and tear down that wall, lest the topstone be placed upon it, forever standing between you and happiness. Tremble at the thought of rejection and separation from God. When people are rejected by others on Earth, they usually find some pity. But if you are separated from God, all doors will be shut against you. You will find no pity from anyone in heaven. Neither saints nor angels will have pity on those whom God has completely rejected. There will be no pity for you in hell, where there is no love, only loathing. Everyone is loathed by God, loathing Him and loathing one another. This is a day of losses and fears. I am showing you a loss that you would do well to fear in time. Be afraid of losing God, for if you do, eternity will be spent in lamenting this loss. What horrid stupidity! People are greatly concerned about preventing worldly losses, but they are in danger of losing the enjoyment of God forever and ever. Yet they are as careless in that matter as if they were incapable of thought. Oh, compare this day with the day our text refers to! Today, heaven is open for those who have previously rejected Christ, and there is still room if they will come. But on that day, the doors will be shut. Now, Christ is saying to you, "Come," but then He will say, "Depart," since you refused to come when you were invited. Now, there is pity shown to you. The Lord pities you, and His

servants pity you, warning you that the pit lies before you, urging you not to harm yourselves. But then, you will receive no pity from God or man.

2. The damned will be punished in hell with the punishment of sensory torment. They must depart from God into everlasting fire. I have no desire to debate the nature of this fire and whether it is physical or not. Experience will more than satisfy the curiosity of those who are inclined to dispute rather than seek how to escape it. Nor will I delve into the question of where it is located. It is sufficient to know that impenitent sinners will find the undying worm and unquenchable fire somewhere. First, I will prove that whatever kind of fire it is, it is more intense and terrifying than any fire we are familiar with on Earth. Second, I will discuss some of the characteristics of these fiery torments.

Burning is the most dreadful punishment, inflicting the greatest pain and torment. What reward could induce a person to hold their hand in a candle flame for even one hour? No amount of earthly pleasures could persuade the most indulgent person to spend just thirty minutes in a blazing furnace. Likewise, on much lesser terms, most people effectively expose themselves to everlasting fire in hell, a fire more intense and terrifying than any fire known on Earth.

(1) Just as grace reaches its perfection in heaven, so do profit and pleasure. In the same way, sin reaches its pinnacle in hell, and the evil of punishment reaches its perfection there. Therefore, the joys of heaven surpass any earthly joys experienced by the saints, and in the same manner, the torments of hell must exceed any earthly sufferings. This is true not only in terms of their duration but also in terms of their intensity and exquisite nature.

(2) Why are the realities of the afterlife depicted to us in earthly terms? It is because our limited understanding requires it, and the Lord graciously accommodates to our limitations. It is always understood that the things of the spiritual realm are more perfect than their earthly representations. When heaven is portrayed as a city with gates of pearl and streets of gold, we do not expect to find literal gold and pearls there, as precious as they are on earth. Rather, we anticipate something even more excellent than the finest and most precious things of this world. Similarly, when we hear of hell-fire, it is necessary to understand it as something more intense, piercing, and tormenting than any fire witnessed by our earthly eyes. It is worth noting that the torments of hell are portrayed in various other ways besides fire alone. The reason for this is evident—each representation of hell supplies what may be lacking in horror in another representation. Why is the happiness of heaven depicted as a treasure, a paradise, a feast, or a rest? It is because none of these individual concepts can fully express it. Similarly, the torments of hell are represented by fire into which the damned are cast. Truly, it is a terrifying depiction, yet it is insufficient to express the misery of sinners in that place. Thus, we also hear of "the second death" (Rev. 20:6), for the damned in hell will be in a constant state of dying. We read of the "winepress of the wrath of God" (Rev. 14:19), in which they will be trampled upon and crushed under the Lord's fury (Isa. 63:3). They will be eternally gnawed by the "worm that does not die" (Mark 9:44). They will sink endlessly into a "bottomless pit" (Rev. 20:3). Hell is not simply referred to as "a fire," but as "the lake of fire and brimstone" (Rev. 20:10), a lake of fire burning with brimstone (Rev. 19:20). One can imagine nothing more dreadful. And because fire brings light, and as Solomon observed, light is sweet (Eccles. 11:7), there will be no light there—only darkness, utter darkness (Matt. 25:30). For the damned, there will be everlasting night, devoid of anything remotely comforting or refreshing.

(3) Our earthly fire cannot affect a spirit except through its connection to the body. However, hell-fire will not only penetrate the bodies of the damned but also directly pierce into their souls. It is prepared for the devil and his angels—those wicked spirits whom no earthly fire can harm. Job, in his lament under God's fatherly discipline, expressed deep distress, saying, "The arrows of the Almighty are within me, the poison of which my spirit drinks" (Job 6:4). But how much more will the spirits of the damned be pierced by the arrows of avenging justice! How will they be consumed by the poison of these arrows! The fire that directly pierces into the soul, the most lively and sensitive part of a person, where wounds or pains are most unbearable, must be exceedingly intense.

(4) The preparation of this fire demonstrates its indescribable intensity and dreadfulness. The text refers to it as "prepared fire," emphasizing its uniqueness. Just as the three children were not cast into ordinary fire but into a specially prepared fire, one that was exceptionally hot, with the furnace heated seven times more than usual (Dan. 3:19–22), so the damned will encounter in hell a prepared fire unlike any fire crafted by human hands. It is a fire prepared by God Himself, the product of infinite wisdom and designed for a specific purpose—to manifest the strictest and severest divine justice against sin. This sufficiently reveals the unimaginable intensity of hell's torment. God always acts in a manner befitting His infinite greatness, whether for or against His creation. Therefore, just as the things He has prepared for those who love Him are indescribably great and good, one can conclude that the things He has prepared for those who hate Him are exceedingly great and terrible, surpassing human words and thoughts. The pile of Tophet is described as "fire, and much wood" (Isa. 30:33). The coals of that fire are "burning coals of juniper," a type of wood that burns fiercely when ignited (Psalm 120:4). The breath of the Lord, like a

stream of brimstone, kindles it (Isa. 30:33). The violence of a fire depends on its fuel and the force of the wind that fans it. Considering this, how can one fully comprehend the horror of coals of juniper inflamed by the breath of the Lord? Moreover, God Himself will be a consuming fire (Deut. 4:24) to the damned, intimately present as a devouring fire in their souls and bodies. It is indeed a fearful thing to fall into a fire or be confined in a fiery furnace on earth, but such terrors pale in comparison to falling into the hands of the living God, which is the fate of the damned. For "Who among us can dwell with the consuming fire? Who among us can dwell with everlasting burnings?" (Isa. 33:14).

Regarding the second point in question, namely, the nature of the fiery torments in hell:

(1) These torments will be all-encompassing, affecting every part of the individual immersed in the flames. Just as fire penetrates the core when one is cast into a fiery furnace, leaving no limb untouched, the damned will experience the burning and scorching of their bodies eternally. They will be tormented in every aspect, with no respite. Separated from God and deprived of any refreshment from Him, they will remain in the throes of the second death—constantly dying but never dead. As the soul was primarily involved in sinning, it will also be the primary target of suffering, filled to the brim with the wrath of God seeking vengeance. The damned will be continually under the weight of God's vindictive justice, and the fire will consume their souls like melting wax. We cannot fully comprehend the power of the wrath that had such an effect on the Mediator, who stood in place of sinners and exclaimed, "My heart is melted like wax within me" (Psalm 22:14). Their minds will be filled with dreadful apprehensions of God's implacable wrath, and every thought of the past, present, or future will only intensify their torment and anguish.

Their wills will be forever frustrated; just as their will was contrary to God's precepts, God will wage war against their will in the afterlife. They will never obtain what they desire, but they will be subjected to what they reject without any remedy. Consequently, no pleasant emotions will ever arise in their hearts again. Their capacity for complacency, joy, and delight in any object will be completely uprooted, replaced by hatred, fury, and rage against God, themselves, and all other creatures—whether they are happy in heaven or miserable in hell, just as the damned are. They will be engulfed in sorrow, tormented by anxiety, filled with horror, and consumed by despair. This will lead them to weep, gnash their teeth, and blaspheme for eternity. "Bind him hand and foot, and cast him into outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Matt. 22:13). "And great hailstones, about one hundred pounds each, fell from heaven on people; and they cursed God for the plague of the hail, because the plague was so severe" (Rev. 16:21). Their conscience will be like a worm, constantly gnawing and devouring them. Remorse for their sins will grip and torment them endlessly, and they will be unable to shake it off as they once did. "In hell, where their worm does not die" (Mark 9:44, 46). Their memories will only serve to exacerbate their torment, and each new recollection will bring another pang of anguish. "But Abraham said, 'Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things'" (Luke 16:25).

(2) The torments in hell are manifold. Imagine a person enduring the simultaneous intensity of gout, kidney stones, and every disease and pain imaginable—all concentrated within one body. Even then, the torment of such an individual would pale in comparison to the torments of the damned. In hell, there is an absence of all that is good and desirable, while a convergence of all evils occurs. This is because all the effects of sin and the curse culminate there after the

final judgment: "Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire" (Rev. 20:14). The damned will find themselves imprisoned without any possibility of escape, immersed in a lake of fire where they will burn and swim perpetually. They will descend into a bottomless pit. The undying worm will consume them as it does buried bodies, and the unquenchable fire will devour them like bodies consigned to the flames. Their eyes will be enveloped in unrelenting darkness, without even the faintest glimmer of light. Their ears will be filled with the horrifying cries of the infernal horde. They will taste nothing but the bitterness of God's wrath, drinking the dregs of the cup of His fury. The stench of the burning lake of brimstone will pervade the air, and they will experience extreme and unceasing pain.

(3) These torments will be exceedingly intense and vehement, resulting in "weeping, wailing, and gnashing of teeth" (Matt. 13:42, 22:13). They are likened to the sharp and excruciating pains of childbirth. As the rich man in hell declared, "I am in anguish in this flame" (Luke 16:24), signifying the agonizing pain akin to a woman in labor. These are dreadful and horrendous pains, where both soul and body suffer together—a helpless, hopeless, and endless travail. The term used for hell in Matthew 5:22 and other New Testament passages properly refers to the Valley of Hinnom. This valley was named after the place where the children of Hinnom dwelt and where Tophet was located (2 Kings 23:10). This was where idolaters sacrificed their children to Moloch. Moloch was a large bronze idol with arms resembling those of a man. The idol was heated from within, and children were placed in its burning arms. To drown out the screams of the dying children, drums were beaten during these horrific rituals, giving the place its name. This vividly portrays the intensity of the torments in hell. Some individuals on earth have endured severe tortures with astonishing resilience and unflinching

bravery. However, the courage of men will fail them when they find themselves in the hands of the living God, with no hope of escape. While there will be degrees of torment in hell—"It will be more bearable on the day of judgment for Tyre and Sidon than for you" (Matt. 11:21, 22)—even the slightest measure of wrath there will be unbearable. How can a creature's heart endure or their hands be strong when they are faced with God Himself, who is a consuming fire? When the tares are gathered into bundles for burning, there will be bundles of the covetous, drunkards, profane swearers, unclean individuals, formal hypocrites, unbelievers, and despisers of the gospel, among others. These bundles will be cast into the fires of hell, with some burning more vehemently than others, depending on the heinousness of their sins. The flames will be fiercer for the profane than for the unsanctified moralists; the furnace will be hotter for those who sinned against greater light than for those who lived in darkness. "That servant who knew his master's will but did not get ready or act according to his will, will receive a severe beating. But the one who did not know, and did what deserved a beating, will receive a light beating" (Luke 12:47, 48). However, the sentence common to all—"Bind them in bundles to burn them"—indicates the intense vehemence even of the lowest degree of torment in hell.

(4) These torments will be uninterrupted, with no respite or ease, not even for a moment. The damned will be tormented day and night forever and ever (Rev. 20:10). While few individuals in this world experience constant turmoil, they do find moments of rest. The damned will find no rest; they already had their rest during the time allotted by God for their labor. Storms are rarely without intervals between showers, but in the storm that befalls the wicked in hell, there will be no respite. There, wave upon wave of wrath will continually roll over them, with the heavens perpetually black and a

never-ending night. "And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever, and they have no rest, day or night" (Rev. 14:11).

(5) They will be without pity. Even the punishments inflicted upon the most heinous criminals on earth draw some measure of compassion from spectators, but the damned will find no pity from anyone. God will not pity them; He will laugh at their calamity (Prov. 1:26). The blessed company in heaven will rejoice in the execution of God's righteous judgment, singing while the smoke of destruction ascends eternally: "Once more they cried out, 'Hallelujah! The smoke from her goes up forever and ever'" (Rev. 19:3). No compassion can be expected from the devil and his angels, who delight in the ruin of humanity and are perpetually devoid of pity. Moreover, in hell, no one will pity another because each individual will be weeping and gnashing their teeth, consumed by their own unbearable anguish and pain. Natural affection will be extinguished—parents will not love their children, nor will children love their parents. Mothers will show no pity to their daughters in the flames, and daughters will show no pity to their mothers. Sons will disregard their fathers, and servants will disregard their masters. Each person will be groaning under their own torment.

(6) To complete their misery, their torments will be eternal: "And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever" (Rev. 14:11). Oh, what a frightful predicament—to be tormented in both body and soul, not with a single torment but with many, all of which are exquisitely painful, and all without any respite or pity from others! What heart can conceive of such things without experiencing horror? Furthermore, if this most wretched state were eventually to come to an end, it would provide some comfort. However, the torments of the damned will be endless, as will be discussed later.

APPLICATION: From this, we learn several important lessons. First, we recognize the enormity of sin. It is a current that will carry the sinner until they are swallowed up by the sea of wrath. The pleasures of sin are purchased at a great cost—eternal burning. What good did the rich man's luxurious clothing and sumptuous feasts do him when he found himself surrounded by purple flames in hell, unable to find a drop of water to quench his thirst? Alas, that people should indulge in sin, which ultimately brings such bitterness! Why do they eagerly drink from the poisonous cup and embrace the serpent in their bosom, knowing it will sting them to the core? Second, we come to understand the nature of the God with whom we have to reckon. He is a God who hates sin and punishes it severely. We must recognize that the Lord is not like us but is both just and merciful. Let us dispel this fatal misconception before it is too late: "You thought that I was one like yourself. But now I rebuke you and lay the charge before you" (Psalm 50:21, 22). The fire prepared for the devil and his angels, as dark as it may be, reveals God to be a severe avenger of sin. Third, we grasp the absolute necessity of seeking refuge in the Lord Jesus Christ through faith, repentance, and a life of holiness. The avenger of blood pursues you, O sinner; hasten and escape to the city of refuge. Wash yourself in the fountain of the Mediator's blood, lest you perish in the lake of fire. Open your heart to Him before the pit closes its mouth over you. Abandon your sins, for they will be your ruin. Put them to death, or they will bring about your eternal destruction.

Do not let the terror of hellfire cause you to harden your heart further, as it might if you entertain the wicked thought, "There is no hope" (Jer. 2:25), which is perhaps more common among gospel hearers than many realize. But there is hope even for the worst of sinners who come to Jesus Christ. If you have no good qualifications, as no natural man or any man has apart from what is received from

Christ, know that He has not made your acceptance dependent on any good qualifications. Take Him and His freely offered salvation. "Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely" (Rev. 22:17). "The one who comes to me I will by no means cast out" (John 6:37). It is true that you are a sinful creature and cannot repent or make yourself holy. You have tried to repent, forsake sin, and be holy, but you have always failed. Therefore, do the first thing that honors God—believe the testimony He has given of His Son, that eternal life is in Him. Honor the Son of God by believing in Him, embracing and accepting the free offer of Christ and His salvation from sin and wrath presented to you in the gospel. Trust in Him confidently for righteousness for your justification and for sanctification, for "of God He is made to us" both "righteousness and sanctification" (1 Cor. 1:30). If you give as much credit to the word of God as you would give to the word of an honest person offering you a gift and saying, "Take it, it's yours," then believe that God is your God, Christ is yours, His salvation is yours, your sins are forgiven, and you have strength in Him for repentance and holiness. All these are made available to you in the free offer of the gospel. By believing in the Son of God, you are justified, and the curse is removed. While the curse remains upon you, how can you bear the fruits of holiness? But with the curse removed, the death that came upon you through the first Adam, according to the threat in Genesis 2:17, is taken away. As a result, you will find the bonds of wickedness that now hold you firmly in impenitence broken, just as the bonds of death will be broken. You will be able to truly repent from the heart. The spirit of life will return to your soul, and with its departure, the death that followed. From that point on, you will be empowered to live righteously. No one's situation is so bad that it cannot be improved in this way, in time, to be made completely right for eternity. And no one's situation is so good that, by taking another path, it will not be ruined for both time and eternity.

III. The damned will have the company of devils in their miserable state in hell, for they must go into the "fire prepared for the devil and his angels." What a horrific company! What a frightful association! Who would choose to dwell in a palace haunted by devils? To be confined to the most beautiful place on earth with the devil and his infernal furies would be an incredibly dreadful imprisonment. How would people's hearts fail and their hair stand on end to find themselves surrounded by the hellish crew! But ah, how much more terrible it must be to be cast into one fire with the devils, locked up with them in one dungeon, and trapped with them in one pit! To be enclosed in a den of roaring lions, surrounded by venomous serpents and venomous asps, with vipers devouring the heart all at once, is too feeble a comparison to convey the misery of the damned trapped in hell with the devil and his angels. The devils now roam about like roaring lions, seeking whom they may devour, but then they will be confined in their den with their prey. They will be filled with God's wrath and experience the full torment that they tremble in anticipation of (James 2:19) when they are cast into the fire prepared for them. How the lions will roar and tear! How the serpents will hiss! How the dragons will breathe out fire! What horrible anguish the damned will experience when they find themselves in the lake of fire with the devil who deceived them, drawn there by the silky cords of temptation wielded by these wicked spirits and bound with them in everlasting chains under darkness (Rev. 20:10).

Oh, if only people would consider this in time, renounce the devil and his desires, and align themselves with the Lord in faith and holiness! Why do people choose such company in this world and delight in such society that they would not desire to associate with in the afterlife? Those who do not enjoy the company of the saints on earth will have none of it in eternity. Those who find delight in godless company now will have their fill of it later when they have

eternity to spend in the roaring and blaspheming society of devils and reprobates in hell. Let those who are accustomed to invoking the devil to take them seriously consider that the company they often invite will be terrifying in the end when it arrives.

IV. Lastly, let us consider the eternity of it all—the everlasting duration of the miserable state of the damned in hell.

1. If I could, I would explain what eternity is—the eternity of creatures, that is. But who can measure the waters of the ocean? Who can count the days, years, and ages of eternity, which are infinitely more numerous than the drops in the ocean? Only the eternal God can comprehend eternity. Eternity is an ocean with no shore in sight, a bottomless deep, a labyrinth from which we cannot escape, where we will forever lose our way. There are two things we can say about eternity. 1. It has a beginning. God's eternity has no beginning, but the eternity of creatures does. Once there was no lake of fire, and those who have been there for hundreds of years were once in time, just as we are now. But 2. It will never have an end. The first to enter into the eternity of woe is as far from its end as the last to go there will be at their entrance. Those who have gone the furthest into that ocean are as far from land as they were the first moment they entered it. Thousands of ages later, they will be just as far from it as ever. Therefore, the eternity that lies ahead of us is a duration that has a beginning but no end. It is a beginning without a middle, a beginning without an end. Even after millions of years have passed in eternity, it is still a beginning. God's wrath in hell will always be the wrath to come. However, there is no middle in eternity. When millions of ages have passed, what is past bears no proportion to what is still to come. Not even one drop of water falling from the tip of a finger bears any relation to all the

waters of the ocean. There is no end to it. As long as God exists, eternity will endure. It is an entry without an end, a continuous succession of ages, a perpetually flowing glass that will never run dry.

Consider the continual succession of hours, days, months, and years, how one always follows another. Then think of eternity, where there is an unending succession. When you go out at night and behold the countless stars in the sky, think of the ages of eternity. Also, remember that while there is a definite number of stars, there is no number that can represent the ages of eternity. When you see water running, consider how futile it would be to sit by and wait for it to run out so that you can cross. Observe how new water constantly replaces what has passed. In this, you have an image of eternity, a river that never dries up. Those who wear rings have a symbol of eternity on their fingers, and those who handle a wheel have an emblem of eternity before them. No matter which part of the ring or wheel you look at, there is always another part beyond it. And whichever moment of eternity you meditate upon, there is always another moment beyond it. When you are in the fields and see the blades of grass covering the ground, too numerous to count, think to yourself that if there were as many thousands of years to come as there are blades of grass, even those would eventually come to an end. But eternity will never end. The same can be imagined for all the mountains on Earth or even the entire globe. The grains of dust that make up the whole are not infinite, so eventually the last grain would be carried away. However, eternity would still be, essentially, just beginning.

These are some crude illustrations of eternity. Now, add misery and woe to this eternity. What tongue can express it? What heart can conceive it? In what balance can that misery and woe be weighed?

2. Let us consider what is eternal in the state of the damned in hell. Everything encompassed within the fearful torments of their state is everlasting. Therefore, all the sorrowful elements of their miserable state will never end. The text explicitly declares that the fire they must enter is eternal fire. Furthermore, our Lord tells us that in hell, the fire will never be extinguished (Mark 9:43), using the imagery of the Valley of Hinnom. In addition to the fire used to burn children as offerings to Molech, there was another fire in that valley that continuously consumed the corpses and filth of Jerusalem. By comparing hellfire to the fire in that valley, the Scriptures not only depict it as excruciating but also everlasting. Since the damned must depart into eternal fire as cursed individuals, it is evident that:

(1.) The damned themselves will be eternal; they will exist forever and will never be completely destroyed or annihilated. Why would the fire be eternal if those cast into it were not eternally within it? Clearly, the everlasting nature of the fire intensifies the misery of the damned. If they were annihilated or utterly destroyed, it would make no difference to them whether the fire was everlasting or not. However, they depart into eternal fire to be eternally punished in it (Matt. 25:46). The execution of the sentence reveals its meaning. The worm that never dies must have a subject to live in. Those who will have no rest day or night but will be tormented forever and ever (Rev. 14:11, 20:10) will undoubtedly exist forever and ever, never reaching a state of eternal rest through annihilation. Indeed, they will be destroyed, but their destruction will be everlasting (2 Thess. 1:9). It will be a destruction of their well-being but not of their existence. What is destroyed is not annihilated. When the devil encountered Jesus Christ, he said, "Have you come to destroy us?" (Luke 4:34). The devils fear torment, not annihilation (Matth. 8:29). The state of the damned is indeed a state of death, but it is a death

that is only opposed to a blissful life, as evidenced by other aspects of their state mentioned earlier. Just as those dead in sin are dead to God and holiness but alive to sin, those dying in hell will live but separated from God and His favor, which is life (Psalm 30:5). They will forever be gripped by the pangs of death, constantly dying but never completely dead or devoid of life. Such a death would be desirable to them, but it will forever elude them. Even if they could kill each other or tear themselves apart with their own hands, their misery would be swiftly ended. But there, they must live, having chosen death and rejected life. For in hell, death lives, and the end always begins.

(2.) The curse will rest upon them eternally, like an everlasting chain that binds them to the eternal fire. This chain will never be loosened, for it is forever fastened around them by the dreadful verdict of the eternal judgment. This unbreakable chain, which defies the combined efforts of even the devils, is too strong to be shattered by human beings who, having been solemnly cursed and devoted to destruction, can never be restored for any other purpose.

(3.) Their punishment will be eternal. In Matthew 25:46, it is said, "These shall go away into everlasting punishment." They will be separated from God, Christ, the holy angels, and the saints forever. There will be an impassable gulf fixed between them, as mentioned in Luke 16:26. Abraham, in the parable, tells the rich man in hell, "Between us and you, there is a great gulf fixed: so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot; neither can they pass to us, that would come from thence." They will be in the company of the devil and his angels forever. There will be no change of company in that place of darkness. Their torment in the fire will be everlasting. They will have to live in it forever. Some ancient and modern authors speak of earth-flax or salamander's hairs, which, when cast into fire,

are not burnt or consumed but made clean. Whether this is true or not, what is certain is that the damned will be tormented forever in hellfire and will not be substantially destroyed, as stated in Revelation 20:10. Indeed, nothing is annihilated by fire; it only dissolves. Whatever the nature of hellfire may be, the same God who protected the bodies of the three children in Nebuchadnezzar's fiery furnace can also preserve the bodies of the damned from any dissolution by hellfire that would result in the loss of life.

(4.) Their knowledge and awareness of their misery will be eternal, and they will know with certainty that it will be eternal. How desirable would it be for them to have their senses perpetually locked up and to lose consciousness of their own misery! Some may speculate that this could eventually happen to certain individuals, as in the punishment of death inflicted upon them on Earth or with some mentally ill people. However, this does not align with the concept of eternal torment or the idea of the undying worm. On the contrary, they will always have a vivid sense of their misery and a deep understanding of God's wrath upon them. The dreadful realization of the eternal nature of their punishment, pronounced by their Judge in their sentence, will leave an indelible impression on their minds that they can never shake off. This will perpetuate their everlasting despair, a tormenting passion that will continually torment their hearts as if being torn into a thousand pieces. To witness unending floods of wrath and to be in perpetual torment while knowing that there will never, never be any relief will be the ultimate culmination of the damned's misery. If "hope deferred makes the heart sick" (Proverbs 13:12), then the complete annihilation of hope, being utterly extinguished and buried forever, will be devastating for the damned. This will fill them with hatred and rage against God, their irreconcilable enemy whom they know.

They will continually roar like wild bulls in a net and fill the pit with blasphemies forevermore.

I could explain the reasonableness of the eternal punishment of the damned. However, since I have already discussed it while defending God's justice in subjecting human beings in their natural state to eternal wrath, I will simply remind you of three things. First, the infinite dignity of the party offended by sin necessitates an infinite punishment to uphold his honor, as the gravity of sin corresponds to the dignity and excellence of the person it is committed against. The offended party is the great God, the ultimate good, while the offender is a vile worm, infinitely distant from God in terms of perfection and indebted to Him for any good or perfection they possess. This demands an infinite punishment for the sinner, which, since the sinner cannot offer anything of infinite value, must be infinite in duration, that is, eternal. Sin is a form of infinite evil as it wrongs an infinite God, and the guilt and defilement of sin are never removed but endure forever unless the Lord in His mercy removes them. God, who is offended, is eternal, and the sinful soul is immortal; the sinner will live forever. Since the sinner is powerless to atone for their guilt, the offense remains unless the Lord Himself removes it, as He does for the elect through His Son's blood. Therefore, with the offended party, the offender, and the offense all remaining, the punishment can only be eternal. Second, if God had not intervened by causing death, sinners would have continued their provocations against Him forever. As long as they were capable of opposing Him in this world, they did so. Hence, it is just for Him to act against them as long as He exists, which means eternally. God, who judges the will, intentions, and inclinations of the heart, can justly respond to sinners in punishment as they would have acted against Him in sinning. Third, while I don't emphasize this point, it is just and reasonable for the damned to suffer eternally since they will continue

to sin eternally in hell. They will gnash their teeth under pain, consumed by rage, envy, and resentment, as described in Matthew 8:12. They will blaspheme God in Revelation 16:21 while being "driven away in their wickedness" (Proverbs 14:32). It is just for the wicked to be punished for their wickedness, and it is not inconsistent with justice for the creature's existence to be continued eternally. Therefore, it is just for the damned, who persist in wickedness eternally, to suffer eternally for their sins. The misery in which they sin cannot free them from the obligation to obey or excuse their sinful actions; it cannot render them blameless. As creatures, they are bound to obey their Creator, and no punishment inflicted upon them can exempt them from this duty, just as a prisoner's confinement, shackles, or whipping do not grant them freedom to commit the crimes for which they are imprisoned or whipped. Likewise, the torments of the damned cannot excuse or make blameless their horrifying sins committed under those torments, just as intense pain inflicted on individuals on Earth does not excuse their murmuring, complaining, and blaspheming against God. The true cause of their sinning under torment is not the wrath of God but their own wicked nature. Jesus Himself bore the wrath of God without a single inappropriate thought toward God, let alone an inappropriate word.

Now let me offer some practical applications. Here is a measuring reed: I wish that people would apply it. First, apply it to your time in this world, and you will realize how short it is. Many souls are ruined by the illusion of having an abundance of time ahead. People often count their time in years, like the rich man in Luke 12:19-20, not realizing that there may be only a few hours left. But no matter how you count it, when you measure your time against the backdrop of eternity, you will see how insignificant your age is. Compared to eternity, sixty, eighty, or even a hundred years are minuscule. The

disparity between them is greater than that between a hair's breadth and the circumference of the entire Earth. So why do we waste precious time while risking the loss of eternal rest? Second, apply it to your efforts for salvation, and you will find them lacking. When people are urged to be diligent in their pursuit of salvation, they often respond, "What's the point?" Unfortunately, if we judge our aspirations based on our level of diligence, it would be impossible to deduce that we have eternity in mind. If we truly grasp the concept of eternity, we would conclude that no means appointed by God should be left untried until we secure our salvation. We should not seek rest or comfort in anything until we find shelter under the wings of the Mediator. We should pursue our ultimate interest with utmost vigor, forsaking beloved sins and facing all difficulties, fighting against the opposition of the devil, the world, and the flesh. All of this combined is still insufficient for eternity.

Here is a balance of the sanctuary that reveals the insignificance of what is mistakenly considered weighty and the weightiness of things that many deem light. First, some things may appear weighty but, when weighed in this balance, prove to be light. (1) Weigh the world and everything in it—the desires of the flesh, the desires of the eyes, and the pride of life—and you will find them to be light compared to eternity. Evaluate all worldly profits, gains, and advantages, and you will quickly realize that a thousand worlds would not be enough to compensate for the eternal cost of damnation. "For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul?" (Matthew 16:26). Weigh the transient pleasures of sin against the everlasting fire, and you will see the foolishness and madness of risking one for the other. (2) Weigh your afflictions in this balance, and even the heaviest of them will appear light in comparison to eternal anguish. Impatience under affliction, especially when worldly troubles so consume our spirits that we cannot appreciate the good news of the

gospel, reveals a profound disregard for eternity. Just as a small loss would not greatly trouble someone who knows they are on the brink of losing their entire estate, troubles in this world will seem light to those who have a vivid view of eternity. Such individuals will gladly bear their cross, whatever it may be, considering it a small price to pay to escape eternal wrath. (3) Weigh the most difficult and challenging religious duties here, and you will no longer regard the yoke of Christ as unbearable. Repentance and deep sorrow for sin on Earth are light when compared to eternal weeping, wailing, and gnashing of teeth in hell. Wrestling with God in prayer, shedding tears and seeking His blessing while there is still time, is far easier than enduring the curse for all eternity. Mortifying even the most beloved sins pales in comparison to the second death in hell. (4) Weigh your convictions in this balance. Oh, how heavy they weigh on many individuals who desperately try to shake them off! They long to be free of the burden, but the worm of a guilty conscience will neither die nor sleep in hell, even though it may be temporarily lulled to sleep now. It is undoubtedly easier to endure intense convictions in this life if they lead us to Christ than to have them permanently fixed in our conscience and to be eternally separated from Him in hell.

On the other hand, (1) weigh sin in this balance, and although it may seem light to you now, you will find it weighty enough to unleash eternal wrath upon you. Even idle words, vain thoughts, and unproductive actions, when weighed in this balance and considered in the context of eternity, will each be heavier than the sands of the sea. Wasting time on Earth will result in an eternity of weariness. Now is the time of sowing; our thoughts, words, and actions are the seeds we plant, and eternity is the harvest. Though the seeds may currently lie dormant, overlooked by most people, each tiny seed will eventually sprout, and the fruit will correspond to the seed sown (Galatians 6:7-8). "For the one who sows to his own flesh will from

the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life." (2) Weigh your time and opportunities for grace and salvation in this balance, and you will find them immensely weighty. Precious time and seasons of grace such as Sabbaths, communions, prayers, sermons, and the like are often trivialized in our present age. However, a day will come when one of these moments will be more valuable than a thousand worlds to those who currently hold them in low esteem. Once they are gone forever, and the loss cannot be recovered, those who now value them the least will recognize their worth.

In conclusion, I urge you to take this warning seriously and be motivated to flee from the wrath to come. Fix your mind on eternity and diligently pursue your salvation. What are you doing if you are not doing this? Is heaven a mere fabrication, or is hell an unfounded scare? We are destined to live eternally, yet we exert so little effort to escape everlasting misery. Will feeble wishes seize the kingdom of heaven? Can lackluster endeavors, which most people content themselves with, be considered fleeing from the wrath to come? To those who have already fled to Christ, arise and be proactive. To those who have begun the work, continue and do not procrastinate. "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling" (Philippians 2:12). "Fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell" (Matthew 10:28). Remember, you have not yet ascended to heaven; you are still in the midst of your journey. The everlasting arms have pulled you out of the abyss of wrath into which you were plunged in your natural state, and they will continue to support you so that you never fall back into it. However, you have not yet reached the pinnacle of the mountain. The depths below are dreadful; look at them and hasten your ascent. As for those still in their natural state, lift your eyes and contemplate the eternal state. Rise up, you profane individuals, you ignorant ones, you hypocrites who know nothing of

true godliness—flee from the wrath to come. Young ones, do not venture to delay a moment longer, and the elderly should not put off this work any further. "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts" (Hebrews 4:7), lest He swear in His wrath that you will never enter His rest. It is not the time to linger in a state of sin, as the people of Sodom did when fire and brimstone rained down upon them from the Lord. Take heed while there is still time. Those in hell are not troubled by such warnings; instead, they are filled with regret because they disregarded the warnings when they had the chance.

Consider the following:

1. How uncomfortable it is to spend a whole night on a soft bed in perfect health, desperately longing for sleep that eludes us. How often do we wish for rest! We toss and turn restlessly. But alas! How dreadful must it be to lie in torment, engulfed in scorching flames for all eternity, in a place where there is no rest day or night!
2. How terrible would it be to endure excruciating pain from colic or kidney stones for forty or sixty consecutive years without respite! Yet, that is but a trifling matter compared to eternal separation from God, the undying worm, and the unquenchable fire.
3. Eternity is a daunting thought. Oh, the long, long, endless eternity! But won't every moment in the eternity of misery feel like a month, and every hour like a year in that most wretched and desperate condition? Thus, eternity will seem like a double eternity. The sick person, tossing and turning in bed at night, feels as if the day will never break, complaining that the pain never subsides. If these short-lived eternities, which people

imagine in their minds, are so grievous, then how unspeakably burdensome and insufferable must a real eternity of misery and all forms of torment be!

4. In eternity, there will be ample time to reflect on all the sins of our hearts and lives that we currently neglect to consider. We will see that all the warnings about the dangers facing impenitent sinners were true, and even their severity was understated. In eternity, there will be sufficient time for delayed repentance, to regret one's follies when it is too late. We will futilely express fruitless wishes: "Oh, if I had never been born! If the womb had been my grave and I had never seen the sun! If I had never heard the gospel, if I had lived in a corner of the world where a Savior and the great salvation were not even mentioned!" But all in vain. What is done cannot be undone. The opportunity is lost and can never be regained. Time has slipped away, never to return. Therefore, make the most of your time while you still have it and do not willfully ruin yourself by closing your ears to the call of the gospel.

And now, if you desire to be saved from the impending wrath and avoid entering this place of torment, do not find comfort in your natural state. Acknowledge and believe in its sinful and miserable nature, and strive to escape from it promptly by placing your faith in Jesus Christ. Sin within you is the seed of hell, and if its guilt and reigning power are not removed in due time, they will lead you to eternal damnation. The only way to have them removed is by accepting Christ as He is presented in the gospel, for both justification and sanctification. He is currently offering Himself to you along with His complete salvation, as stated in Revelation 22:12, 17: "Behold, I am coming soon, bringing my recompense with me, to repay each one for what he has done... And let the one who is thirsty

come; let the one who desires take the water of life without price." Jesus Christ is the Mediator of peace and the source of holiness. He is the one who rescues us from the wrath to come. "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death" (Romans 8:1). The terrors of hell, as well as the joys of heaven, are presented to you in order to stir your heart to wholeheartedly receive Him and His salvation, and to guide you towards the path of faith and holiness, which are the only means of escaping the everlasting fire. May the Lord Himself make these truths effective for that purpose!

This concludes the discussion on man's eternal state, which, being eternal, does not allow for any subsequent state to follow for all eternity.

MONERGISM BOOKS

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ePub, .mobi & .pdf Editions June 2023 Requests for information should be addressed to: Monergism Books, PO Box 491, West Linn Or, 97068

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