



Monergism

THE GOLDEN SCEPTER

HELD FORTH TO THE HUMBLE

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By the Late Learned Divine, JOHN PRESTON, D.D. & Chaplain in Ordinary to His Majesty, Master of Emmanuel College in Cambridge, and Former Preacher at Lincoln's Inn.

London: Printed by R. Badger for N. Bourne, A. Boler, and R. Harford, available at the Royal Exchange, the Marigold in Paul's Churchyard, and the Bible in Queen's Head Alley, Pater Noster Row.
1639.

Further revision and editing done by Monergism.

Delivered in Sundry Sermons in Cambridge for the Weekly Fasts,
1625

PSALM 45:6 "Thy throne, O God, is forever and ever; the scepter of thy kingdom is a right scepter."

JEREMIAH 3:14 "Return, O backsliding children, for I am married unto you."

HOSEA 2:7 "I will go and return unto my first husband, for then it was better with me than now."

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RICHARD KNIGHTLEY

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**TO THE TRULY VIRTUOUS AND
RELIGIOUS Gentleman, RICHARD
KNIGHTLEY, Esquire.**

SIR,

It has been our custom hitherto, as representatives of the Author in this task, to dedicate the various treatises we have published to some of his closest friends. This practice not only serves as evidence of our faithfulness in fulfilling the trust placed in us but also as a symbol of the Author's remarkable abilities. For if, in every ordinary and minor letter, a person commits parts of their soul to paper, they unquestionably do so to a greater extent in their carefully crafted works. In these, they cannot help but believe that their memory may persist and a part of themselves may endure, remaining cherished by future generations.

If a poet could confidently declare "non omnis moriar" (I shall not wholly die) because of their poetry and consider their poem to be "perennius aere" (more lasting than bronze), an everlasting monument impervious to the passage of time, then how much more can one assert this when they depict themselves in an immortal form? They write characters that are not subject to decay and disappearance. As it is written: "For all flesh is grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass: the grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away, but the word of the Lord endureth forever. And this is the word which by the Gospel is preached unto you" (1 Peter 1:24-25).

Therefore, since God has chosen to preserve these pieces and, after much delay and desire, bring them to public view, we have decided to

dedicate them to you in a special manner. We release them to the world under the protection and shelter of your name. Considering that it pleased the Author to spend his final days at your residence, where he shed his decaying and weakening body, it is fitting and appropriate to send these living and enduring parts of his soul to accompany it. Especially since his body had so faithfully served his soul in the past, a service that, in all likelihood, might have prolonged his life.

There is no doubt that these vibrant and meaningful expressions of his spirit will find a receptive audience, just as his languid and eventually breathless body did. In particular, these pieces can be considered his own more than anything previously made public. We confidently assert that these writings capture the essence of the Author more vividly than any other.

Those who knew him during his lifetime or have since delved deeply into his writings will discover three recurring themes throughout these treatises: the ugliness of sin, the generosity of grace, and the completeness of duty. While these themes are scattered throughout his other works, here they are systematically and clearly presented under distinct headings.

The first theme highlights the danger and ugliness of sin, leading the spouse to express herself in low and sorrowful terms, similar to the command given in Deuteronomy 21:11-13 where virgins were instructed to shave their heads, pare their nails, and mourn for their father and mother. In this context, this represents the acknowledgment of one's natural and inherent flaws and corruptions.

The second theme showcases the glorious and generous grace of Christ, who, like the great King in Esther 5:2, extends the golden

scepter of His love and mercy to this dejected and humbled captive. This scepter not only grants pardon and forgiveness for all her sins but also bestows upon her an inheritance of all things, for "all are hers, whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come, all are hers, because she is Christ's" (1 Corinthians 3:21-22).

The third theme emphasizes the completeness of her duty. The grace of God, which brings salvation, teaches every believer to renounce ungodliness and worldly desires and to live a life of sobriety, righteousness, and godliness in the present world (Titus 2:11-12). Just as Ahasuerus purified the virgins who approached his bed with various costly powders and perfumes (Esther 2:12, etc.), so Christ, when a soul is faithfully espoused to Him, purifies and cleanses her with His precious blood, adorning her with a variety of graces. He does this so that He may present her as a glorious spouse, "not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blame" (Ephesians 5:27).

Now, all that remains is for these treatises to seek refuge and protection under your patronage. Does not your humble disposition entitle you to the first theme? Your high regard for free grace to the second? And your virtuous and blameless conduct to the third? With such a just claim, along with other obligations, it is only right to associate your name with them. By accepting this dedication, you will show kindness to this posthumous work and, in particular, bind

Your already greatly obliged and committed,

THOMAS GOODWIN. THOMAS BALL.

THE GOLDEN SCEPTER

"If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land." - 2 CHRONICLES 7:14

These words contain God's response to Solomon's Prayer, made when he dedicated the Temple. Solomon prayed that when they prayed on earth, God would hear in heaven. In the words I have just read, God promises to grant Solomon's request, and this promise comprises three parts.

First, God declares that He will hear in heaven, signifying either His power to fulfill what He consents to do (since people are said to hear on earth because they can do little, while God is in heaven), or that despite seeming distant from His people, even in heaven, He will eventually listen.

The second part is that He will pardon their sins, which is the greatest of all mercies because sin obstructs all good things and opens the door to all evils. As David said, "Blessed is the man whose sin is forgiven." It is the greatest request we can make and the greatest grant God bestows.

Thirdly, He will heal their land and remove their affliction. Note the sequence here: before He does this, He pardons their sins.

This promise is further explained by two factors.

First, the recipients of this promise are the people of Israel and Judah, identified by two attributes: first, they are His people, and

second, they are called by His name, just as a wife takes her husband's name or sons bear their father's name. Similarly, we are called Christians from Christ, as they were in Antioch.

Secondly, the promise is contingent on certain conditions, for the Lord often attaches promises to conditions.

First, if they humble themselves and seek humility.

Secondly, if this humility is not confined to their hearts but expressed through prayer and confession of sins.

Thirdly, if they seek His face, desiring reconciliation and His presence above all else, not seeking material possessions but God Himself.

Fourthly, if they renounce their sins while seeking, for they cannot maintain communion with Him otherwise. God dwells in light, and those who walk in darkness cannot have fellowship with Him. Thus, you have an analysis of the words. In our exposition, we will not employ this method but instead, address the words as they appear and derive three doctrines from them.

If my people, called by my Name

First, God sends severe afflictions upon His own people, as evidenced by the context, for in the preceding verses, God speaks of sending plagues, and then He addresses "my people."

Secondly, the Lord remains tender and full of compassion towards His people even during these trials. The endearing term "my people" attests to this. It is as if He is saying, "I cannot forget you, for you bear my name, and you are mine, even as I chastise you."

Thirdly, the Lord's name is invoked upon His people. Regarding the first point, the Scriptures provide numerous examples of such instances, making it unnecessary to cite specific verses, as they are already well-known.

Now, let us consider why this is the case, why God acts in this manner.

First, He sends severe afflictions upon them because He loves them. They belong to Him, and the reason for this is that "Ira est tam ex amore quam ex odio" (Anger arises as much from love as from hatred). It may sound paradoxical, but it's a true principle. When one person loves another, they expect much from the beloved and desire much from them. Therefore, a rebellious or obstinate action from the beloved provokes anger more than it would from anyone else. For instance, it wounds more deeply when it comes from a son, a friend, or a spouse. That's why God describes Himself as a jealous God. Jealousy is a complex emotion involving both love and anger. In essence, it means that if God perceives His people's affection drifting away from Him, He reacts much like a jealous husband would in a similar situation. His anger is not in vain, and He ensures to send sharp affliction as a consequence.

Secondly, He does it to prevent His Name from being blasphemed. This was His reason for punishing David when he committed adultery. The Lord must take action for the sake of those who observe and bear witness to these events. It demonstrates to them that He cannot tolerate such transgressions, not even from His own people.

Thirdly, He does it because He has declared that He will be sanctified by all who approach Him. He wants them to understand that He is a holy God who abhors iniquity. He expects those who draw near to

Him to have pure hearts and clean hands. This was the reason why He sent fire upon Korah, Dathan, and Abiram. Moses told them, "The Lord has separated you, and you are among the heads of the people, therefore, He will not overlook you." While God may exercise patience with those who are distant from Him, those who are consecrated to the Lord and draw near to Him in profession and in the eyes of others must either sanctify themselves by presenting holy hearts before Him or face His punishment. God will not allow them to persist in impurity.

Fourthly, He does it because they are His people with whom He walks and dwells. While God is omnipresent, He is with them in a unique way, like a man in his own house among his sons and daughters, observing everything closely. Because He is always with them, He tolerates no uncleanness among them. This is why, in the camp, He commanded every man to carry a paddle with him when he went aside to relieve himself, so that no outward filthiness would appear. He did it to demonstrate that we should conceal what is abhorrent to Him, namely, sin and impurity. When His house and people became loathsome due to uncleanness, God loathed them, departed from them, and brought His judgment upon them.

However, you may object and say that you often see saints sin without immediate affliction following.

I reply that this does happen frequently, and the reason is that God finds His work already accomplished. If they thoroughly plough their own hearts, God won't need to do it for them. However, if they are half-hearted in their efforts (as often happens, leaving many uncultivated areas behind), then God invariably intervenes with afflictions. The less you leave unploughed in your hearts, the less God will afflict you. If you humble yourselves fully, you can escape

affliction, except in cases of scandal. In instances of scandal, God must act for the sake of those who are watching. In David's case, God wanted the whole world to witness His punishment upon him, just as they knew of his sin. Nevertheless, you can take comfort in the fact that even if you have sinned greatly (but not scandalously), if you humble yourselves thoroughly, you can escape affliction.

Learn from this to fear the Lord and tremble at His words. Since He tolerates no uncleanness in His own people, stand in awe and avoid sin. Strive to condition your hearts to possess such reverence that you fear to neglect any good duty or commit the slightest sin. This must be emphasized because it is the root cause of the laxity and looseness in our faith – our failure to fear the Lord as we ought. If we kept the fear of the Lord before our eyes (as the Apostle says in Romans 3), meaning if we saw the Lord in such a way that we truly feared Him, we would walk circumspectly, carefully considering each step we take. The reason you often exhibit inconsistency and do not live up to your potential is due to a lack of the fear of the Lord. The Apostle's use of the phrase "the fear of God is said to be before your eyes" stems from the nature of fear. Just as a person who is busy with something important keeps an eye on it, so too does the fear of the Lord work – it keeps our eyes fixed on Him. If the Lord were continually before our eyes in fear, we would walk more consistently with Him. Therefore, those who are in a covenant with the Lord, who know themselves to be within the covenant, should reflect on this and learn to fear.

To aid you in this, consider two passages of Scripture. First, 1 Peter 1:7: "If you call on the Father who judges without partiality according to each one's work, conduct yourselves throughout the time of your stay here in fear." In other words, since you have a Father who judges every person, even His own children, He will certainly afflict you if

you offend Him. Therefore, fear to do so. Second, Hebrews 12:28-29: "Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. For our God is a consuming fire." Our God, whom we worship, is not solely merciful; He possesses other attributes as well. To you, He is a consuming fire. If you do not serve Him with fear, not necessarily to be utterly consumed immediately but to be afflicted and have your lusts consumed, then it is dangerous to neglect Him and meddle with the One who is a consuming fire.

Consider how sharply God dealt with David, who was even closer to Him than any of us. First, God took away David's child, a severe affliction for him since he was a tender father who cherished his child's life, as evidenced by his fasting and similar actions concerning Absalom, who had rebelled against him. Then, almost all the people turned against him when he was an elderly king. He endured the open abuse of concubines, and the sword never departed from his house. All these trials deeply affected him and came close to his soul. Furthermore, his sin was exposed to the entire world, as seen in Psalm 51. Shouldn't we then spend our time in fear, considering how God dealt with David? Do not say that God may not deal with you as He did with David when you offend Him. Is He not a Father who judges all His children without partiality, as the Apostle says? Reflect also on what happened to Jacob and Rebecca for their consultation and agreement to secure the blessing through deceit. Although their intention was good and they had a warrant for their actions, they resorted to deceit, which led to severe consequences. Jacob had to spend twenty years away from his mother's house, a consequence of his impatience in fulfilling God's promise. Instead of waiting for God's timing, he hastened it. Similarly, God promises riches and all good things to His children, but they must not rush ahead; patience is required. Despite the apparent insignificance of some afflictions,

they can be quite painful. Conversely, other afflictions may appear significant to others but not to the one bearing them. In either case, it is dangerous to be neglectful of God and meddle with the consuming fire.

Consider how God dealt with Moses, who was more beloved to Him than any other person on Earth. Moses spoke to God face to face, unlike anyone else, yet God intended to kill him when he failed to circumcise his child. Moses was also afflicted due to another sin at the waters of Meribah. God chose an affliction for him that most opposed his desires – He denied Moses the opportunity to enter the land of Canaan. Perhaps it was a minor affliction in appearance, like the one mentioned earlier, but it stung deeply. God can deal with us similarly. Recall Eli, a zealous man (may we be as zealous in these days). When he received news that his sons were dead and many people were slain, he was more distressed that the Ark of the Lord had been captured. This so overwhelmed him that he fell backward and broke his neck. Despite his holiness, he had favoured his sons over the Lord and had not properly governed them. Consequently, God not only took Eli's life and the lives of his sons, but He also removed the priesthood from his family forever. Shouldn't we all be filled with fear? How did God deal with the good prophet who was killed by a lion because he believed another man's word, even though he had God's word expressly given to himself? This sin was akin to Eve's sin, who believed the devil's word instead of God's when she had God's word explicitly. Therefore, let us cling closely to the Word of the Lord. Despite Gideon being a worthy man, included among the worthies in Hebrews 11, God dealt harshly with him for making an ephod. Consider what judgment befell his children in Judges 9, and his whole house was cut off.

These examples are valuable for you to contemplate so that you may know and fear the Lord. The lack of this fear is the reason for the negligence and looseness in our faith, preventing us from adequately considering our actions. Saint Paul, a holy man who had a close relationship with Jesus Christ, greatly feared. In 2 Corinthians 5, he wrote, "We, knowing the terror of the Lord, persuade men." Job, who led an exemplary life, as seen in Chapter 31, attributed his righteous conduct to the fear of punishment from the Lord. In verse 23, he states, "For destruction from God was a terror to me." Job's fear of the Lord influenced his actions, such as when he refused to gaze upon a maiden because he pondered, "What portion then shall I have with the Almighty?"

This fear of the Lord is essential in times when God's anger is evident in the land, resulting not only from the gross sins of the wicked but also from the sins of the saints. It is your coldness, negligence, and laxity. I have two grounds for this assertion. First, in Revelation 2, Ephesus had fallen from its initial love, leading to the removal of its candlestick, symbolizing the entire church among them, which would be carried into captivity. Secondly, in Revelation 3, Laodicea's lukewarmness led to God spitting them out of His mouth. While you may believe that the sins of wicked individuals are solely responsible for this plague, God knows that they cannot pray and have no spiritual life, as you do. Although their sins are a significant cause, as seen in the case of the Amorites, whom God punished when their sins were full, I say that these troubles are also due to your sins. Therefore, when it is evident that God has a dispute with a kingdom and the churches, and signs of His wrath are proclaimed from heaven, each individual must take action. Fear the Lord, be zealous, repent, and return to your initial works. Begin now to mend your pace toward heaven. It is not only a lack of zeal that concerns me. Isn't it true that zealous individuals are often ridiculed and

ostracised, like owls among us? The excellence of this place has significantly diminished, and its zeal has faded. The Lord has departed from us. Learn to be more zealous, and God will return and revive you. When God looks upon a people, it is akin to springtime for the earth, but when He departs, they become withered trees in winter. Where is the zeal of former times, the communion of saints, the stirring and sharpening of one another through mutual exhortations? Where is the boldness for the Lord? Those holy prayers, those former times have passed, and only the light remains, not the heat. Therefore, I beseech you to stir yourselves up, especially during these times of fasting, when there must be an extraordinary renewal of your covenant with God. Do not be as cold and diluted as before. Since you have longed for public days of humiliation, make an effort to spend them with care, diligence, and a quickened spirit. Recognize that the most crucial work is to be done within yourselves. The purpose of these days is to humble yourselves, which you will not achieve until you examine your specific sins. Rise early in the morning when your spirits are alert. Spend that time alone, contemplating your particular sins, the holy duties you neglect, and renew your repentance. Enter into a covenant. Then, when you come here, you will find that the word of the Lord has a different impact on you than usual.

If God is so willing to punish His own children, and to do so severely, it underscores the sin of those who are fearless and careless. This greatly provokes God, as seen in Zechariah 4:15, where He says, "I am very displeased with the nations that are at ease." The heathens had plenty of sins to provoke the Lord, but this particular sin did so more than the others. This should not be surprising, as it is a philosophical rule, and a true one, that contempt is the greatest provocation to anger. Therefore, when God's wrath is revealed to the entire land and every individual in it, neglecting Him will kindle His

anger against us. Even if God spares the kingdom, any individual who neglects Him and is careless will fare worse. In Psalm 50, after pronouncing severe threats in the preceding verses, it concludes with a warning: "Consider this, O all ye that forget God." Neglecting God is a form of contempt, as it implies taking no notice of His dealings. Jeremiah 5:12-14 conveys a similar message: "You say that His words are but wind, but they shall be as fire, and you as dry wood, and they shall devour you." People often fear things they should not, such as creatures, poverty, and disgrace, but they are reluctant to fear the Lord.

In Revelation 2:12, God speaks to the Church, saying, "Fear not the things thou shalt suffer." Do not fear the things the world fears; instead, fear not the things you shall suffer. These are not the things you should fear. Fear those things you ought to do, and who is afraid of them, lest they should provoke God? Christ also instructs us not to fear men, not even those with the power of life and death. If we should fear anyone, it should be them. Remember the commendation of Moses; he did not fear Pharaoh's wrath. When you misplace your fear like this, it becomes a trap, diverting your hearts toward worldly matters when they should be focused on the Lord. However, when your fear is directed toward God, it greatly benefits you. To illustrate, you can find David greatly struck with the fear of the Lord when Ziklag was burnt; no incident had ever astonished him so much. When he fled before Absalom, he handled it much better, yet that fear drove him to pray. Jehoshaphat's fear also helped him when he heard of a great army coming against him; it prompted him to pray and averted the judgment. Therefore, the things you fear, when your fear is directed toward God, seldom come to pass. This motivates people to take action to prevent them, whereas irrational fear often brings about the very thing it dreads. Saul greatly feared the armies of the Philistines, which led him to consult a witch,

ultimately causing his downfall. Jeroboam feared losing his kingdom, and that fear led him to set up the golden calves, resulting in the actual loss of his kingdom. Therefore, learn to fear the Lord. Nothing invites judgment more than the absence of fear. Security is the precursor to judgment. Laish was a secure people, and when an army came against them, they and their city fell like ripe figs from a tree into their enemies' mouths. Security precedes every person's judgment. Isaiah 66:2 says, "To him that fears me," says God, "and trembles at my words, to him will I look to keep him safe; if not, I will neglect him as much as he neglects me. I will have no eye to save him, just as he has no eye to fear and tremble before me." But you may ask, "How can I bring my heart to fear the Lord?" I answer, firstly, pray to the Lord to instill a fear of Him in your heart.

It is God's work to bring the fear of Himself upon us, just as He brings the fear of one person upon another. He instilled fear in all the nations of the land when the Israelites entered Canaan. How much more should you fear Him? Emotions are such that only the Lord can influence them. Therefore, go to the Lord and say, "Lord, I am unable to fear You. You have promised to give the Holy Spirit to those who ask, and the Spirit works every grace. If you seek Him persistently, even if you have the hardest, most unyielding heart in the world, He will eventually teach you to fear Him." Jeremiah 32:40 declares, "I will plant my fear in your hearts so that it shall not depart from me." You see that God takes this upon Himself; it must be His doing. He has also promised to do it.

This is not all; there is something we must do ourselves.

Therefore, secondly, observe the Lord's dealings with His own, learn to know Him in His ways, and that will be a means to instill fear in you. When any of His children sin, He never lets them go, for that

would allow them to thrive in evil and prosper in sin. However, if they meddle with sin, they shall undoubtedly find bitterness in the end. When a person's heart is overly attached to worldly desires, and these desires are filled with thorns, grasping too much or too tightly, they shall find it to be painful. God's children are trained not to get away with sin. If they are overly drawn to sinful desires, they shall encounter a cross in those pursuits. You can observe this pattern in Psalm 30. David experienced many afflictions, as seen in verse 5. He cried out to God, and God returned to him, bringing joy. What did David think then? He believed in his heart that he would never be moved. His heart grew complacent, but God did not allow him to continue that way. God turned His face away again, and David was troubled. As seen in verse 7, he found himself in trouble once more. David cried out again in verses 8 and 10, and God turned his mourning into joy again. This pattern can be observed throughout the Scriptures. I mention Psalm 30 because it illustrates this pattern clearly. Therefore, pay attention to the ways of the Lord in your life. Those who are not yet familiar with His ways should examine what He has done to others throughout the world and in neighbouring churches. When God gave a bill of divorce to Israel, Judah did not fear. Now, when God has struck our neighbouring churches, do you think He will be pleased if we remain idle spectators? Therefore, when He has afflicted another place, learn to fear.

If He afflicts His own children so severely, consider what will happen to those who are not His. Whether they are gross sinners, openly profane individuals, of which there is no doubt, or mere worldly people and formal professors in whom the grace of God has no power. If He is this severe with His own Church, His anger will be seven times hotter against you. Although it may be delayed longer, as is His custom, when He does strike, He will strike at the root, not just the branches, and He will not strike a second time. Consider what is

said in Psalm 50: "lest he tear you in pieces." As for those who live openly in profanity and openly oppose the Lord, are you stronger than Him? Those who live openly in sin and those who are merely worldly but secretly sinning, who still enjoy health, wealth, and worldly acclaim, it is a sign that God has no good intentions for them. He would not allow His own garden to remain unplowed for so long.

As for the second group, the professors, those who do not live according to their profession, beware. "He who is not with me is against me." You may not be an enemy and not actively involved in evil, but because you are not wholeheartedly with God, because your hearts are not fully devoted, on the last day, you will be counted as against Him. Christ will come against you earnestly as an adversary. While your hope lies in God's mercy and Christ as a Savior, know that this Jesus, whom you hope will save you, will become your fiercest adversary. "Kiss the Son, lest he be angry." The Son can be angry, as described in Revelation 2, with eyes like flames of fire and feet like fine brass, ready to tread you to powder. He shall come against you, especially if you are formal in your faith. Understand that Jesus Christ is not only a Savior but also a Lord. He came into the world to be a Prince, and the government rests on His shoulders. You may have overlooked this aspect of His role, forgetting that half the purpose of Christ's arrival in the world was to govern. If you wish to understand the type of ruler He is, consider Exodus 23:21: "I will send my Angel with you," says God (referring to Christ). "Beware of him and obey his voice, and provoke him not, for my name is in him." Christ shares the same spirit and disposition as His Father, and they both detest sin. Beware of Him, for He accompanies you, and He will not spare you, as the Lord has entrusted all authority to Him.

Let it not appear strange that God has or would deal this way with His Churches abroad. What if the candlestick has been removed from the Palatinate because they became lukewarm and departed from their first love? What if He did it in France? What if in England or the Low Countries? Should we find it surprising? It is His way to do so. He frequently moved Judah and Jerusalem from their places. We should not be offended if He does or should do the same with us, thinking that it signifies our religion isn't the true one or that He doesn't love His Churches. Indeed, He often afflicts those He loves most, for judgment begins at the house of God. He looks upon the entire world, such as Europe today, and when He sees His house, He starts with them. Others are used to afflict them, so He starts with them first. As in Amos 2:2, "You have I known of all the Nations, therefore will I afflict you soonest and frequentliest," although not more severely than others. Even if the Church is submerged, she shall rise again. I mention this because people tend to be offended by it. I remember Bellarmine making an argument based on their victories against the Protestants, claiming that theirs is the true Church because they have been victorious while our Church has been frequently down. However, by that argument, captivity should not have befallen Judah but rather Nebuchadnezzar's people.

Doct. 2. God pities his people in affliction.

The second doctrine is that although God sends severe afflictions upon His own people, His kindness and compassion towards them are exceedingly great. He calls them "my people," as if to say, "You are mine, and I cannot forget you." A person loves what belongs to them, and much more so does God, who is all love. This doctrine needs to be added to the former.

Now, there are three reasons and demonstrations of this:

Firstly, God is exceedingly slow to afflict and takes a long time before doing so. He makes many offers before He afflicts, as if He were reluctant to do it at all. As in Psalm 78:38, it is said, "He, being full of compassion, forgave their iniquity, yea, many times did he call back his anger when his hand was up to give the blow." He called it back again as if He couldn't bring Himself to do it. And when He does afflict, He doesn't stir up all His wrath; He allows some drops of it to fall but does not unleash the full storm. The reason for both is that "they are but flesh." Indeed, His primary purpose is to show mercy, and He afflicts only when provoked and provoked greatly.

His compassion is evident in sustaining His people in their afflictions and helping them in the midst of them. In Daniel 11:33-34, when His people are to fall by the sword and flame, it is said they shall be helped with a little help, enough to sustain them. Similarly, in Zechariah 13:9, it is stated, "I will bring a third part through the fire, and they shall come out refined, as Gold and Silver is refined, losing nothing but their dross." Thus, He sustains them and upholds them. He does so by doing two things: first, by moderating their affliction, and second, by shaping their hearts in such a way that they can bear them.

He moderates them; they are still within measure and not beyond their strength. In Revelation 2:10, Christ says to the Church of Smyrna, "Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer; behold Satan shall cast some of you into prison, that you may be tried, and you shall have tribulation ten days." It's as if He's saying, "I will moderate this persecution and determine the time for you—only ten days and no more. Therefore, do not fear." You will neither have as much as Satan desires, for he would never stop, nor as little as you

wish, for then you would not be afflicted at all. If you wonder what it means to be afflicted in measure, I answer that if afflictions lead His children to engage in wickedness, then it's excessive. However, if they endure without grumbling or faltering, it is not excessive. He has promised to adjust afflictions so that they won't push His people into wickedness. As stated in Psalm 125:3, "The rod of the wicked shall not rest upon the lot of the righteous, lest he put forth his hand to iniquity." It will not last long enough to disrupt their spirits or cause them to act out of character. It may initially stir up their spirits, as it did with Job when it became intense, and he spoke unwisely, but it won't cause substantial turmoil. In this context, compare it with Psalm 129:3-4, where God likens the oppressors of His people to plowers tilling His ground (the Babylonians and other enemies were merely God's plowers). They will not harm His people any more than is necessary for His advantage and the benefit of His Churches. They won't go any further because God will cut their cords, and when the traces are cut, the plow will cease, no matter what the horses do.

The second way He sustains them is by shaping their hearts so that they can bear their burdens effectively. Even if the burden is great, if they have the strength to carry it, it becomes lighter. We often marvel at God placing such heavy afflictions on His children, yet we do not consider their inner strength and ability to bear them.

Firstly, He shapes their hearts to pray and not to complain. The greatest affliction is mitigated if they can pray. Romans 8:26 mentions this as a comfort amid afflictions, as the Spirit helps our weaknesses and teaches us to pray.

He molds their hearts to repent, ensuring that they do not sin against Him. If sin is not mingled with affliction, it is not bitter when

accompanied by a clear conscience. Sin wounds the soul, and when affliction is added, it causes pain.

He fashions their hearts to be patient, which keeps their spirit whole and allows them to possess their souls and remain composed. In contrast, impatience takes the soul off its hinges and unsettles it. When a person's spirit is strong and composed, it can bear its weaknesses. However, impatience cannot bear anything. When afflictions are accompanied by prayer, repentance, a clear conscience, and patience, they become easy to bear, and God mixes their cup accordingly. Christ said, "Shall not I drink of the cup which my Father hath mingled?" Even if the cup is bitter, the ingredients God adds make it sweet. God mixes a cup differently for His people than for others. Consider how He mixed a cup for Ahithophel; it wasn't a significant event in itself, merely the rejection of his counsel. Yet, an ingredient was added, a perception allowed by God's providence (for though God was not the author, He permitted Satan to act), which broke Ahithophel's heart, leading him to hang himself. On the contrary, consider David when Ziklag was burnt—an unexpected and significant affliction. He endured it well because he found comfort in the Lord, an added ingredient that strengthened him in God. Similarly, when he fled before his own son Absalom—an immense and bitter affliction—he bore it with such composure as if he had been asleep in his bed. This is evident in Psalm 3, composed on that occasion when ten thousand were encamped against him. He feared no more than if he had no enemies at all. "I will lay me down and sleep."

Thirdly, His compassion is demonstrated by bringing them through their trials and granting them a good outcome and comforting fruit from all of it. This is evident in the passage from Zechariah 13:9 where it says, "I will bring a third part through the fire, and they

shall come out refined as gold," indicating that God carries them through the trials, purifying them like gold, leading them out, and causing them to lose only their impurities, much like how wheat loses only the chaff in the winnowing process.

Another excellent reference can be found in Isaiah 27:8, which speaks of God's measured dealings with His people. He promises that Israel will grow like a fruitful tree and flourish, and even though He afflicts them, it won't be like the afflictions of others. Has He smitten them as He smote those who afflicted them? No, He has smitten them in the branches, not in the root, so that they may grow even more. God compares Himself to a man who prunes his tree but does not touch the root or the trunk, only the branches, and He does it precisely where and when it is needed, ensuring that the tree will grow more vigorously. This is what it means to do it in moderation. It is necessary to prune the tree to encourage new growth, and it would be spoiled if He did not deal with it this way. In contrast, He strikes others at a time when they are most unprepared, hitting them at the root, causing them to wither and lose out, as seen in the case of King Joram in 2 Kings 6:33, who blamed God for their dire situation, and King Ahaz in 2 Chronicles 28:22, who sinned even more against the Lord in times of distress.

However, some may object, saying, "I do not see the fruit of my afflictions."

It might not be apparent at the moment, but if you wait patiently until God has finished His work, you will discover that the affliction you deemed most severe, for which you saw no reason and from which you initially gained no benefit, will eventually prove profitable and advantageous to you. In the winter, when trees wither, an unwise person might be surprised by the apparent loss, but when spring

arrives, the benefits become clear. You would not have had such a fruitful spring without a harsh winter. Similarly, the various afflictions and setbacks that God leads you through, the sins, and the setbacks that seem initially disadvantageous, will ultimately lead to a fruitful season, for all things work together for good. Do not judge based on one particular experience; wait until God has completed His work, and you will see that it is for your good. This is why Saint James instructs us in James 1:2 to "count it all joy when you fall into various temptations," not gradually but suddenly, and not just one but various afflictions at once—afflictions in wealth, health, family, and more. Yet, he urges us to rejoice and be exceedingly glad, just as a merchant is delighted to see his ships returning from the Indies laden with riches and treasure. These afflictions should prove exceedingly beneficial in the end; otherwise, he would not encourage us to rejoice in them.

Now, if you ask why God deals with His children in afflictions in this manner, I can answer from the text.

First, He says they are His people, and therefore He is full of compassion toward them, just as a man is to his own child because it is his. This is seen in Hosea 11:8, "Thou art mine, and I cannot deal with thee as with a stranger, for my bowels are turned within me." When it came to casting away His child, He could not do it. Similarly, in 1 Samuel 12:22, it says, "The Lord will not forsake you, for you are His people." And in Micah 7:18, "Who is a God like unto our God, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of His heritage?" There lies the reason; they are a remnant, chosen out of the rest of the world, and to them He is so merciful that there is none like Him. It is truly astonishing.

They are a people called by His name. He has chosen them to be His, and He has acknowledged them. His name is upon them by profession, and therefore He will spare them for His name's sake, because others stand by and take notice of them. For if He were to deal harshly with them, no one would serve Him. When servants are mistreated, who would willingly serve such masters? Moses uses this argument in Numbers 14:16 when he pleads, "Lord, spare them, and if it be, but for Thy name's sake." He emphasizes that the reputation of God's name is at stake, and what will all the nations say if He deals unkindly or weakly with His own people?

But you may object, saying, "We see the opposite in daily experience. Great and severe afflictions befall God's people. Some among us have felt and tasted of great afflictions."

I answer, you may be mistaken about afflictions. They are not always as they seem; they do not always have the weight they appear to carry. It's like saying the Sun, "*Sol non patitur eclipsin, sed videtur tantum pati,*" meaning the Sun does not actually undergo an eclipse; it only appears to. Similarly, many afflictions that seem great to us are, in reality, nothing at all. The Apostle Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 6 that they "seem to be men sorrowful, yet always rejoicing, seem to be poor, but possessing all things." All the hardships he endured were nothing to him. Affliction is often a matter of perception. Many of the severe trials and tortures experienced by martyrs and God's children may seem great to us, but I believe they were nothing to many of them.

If you still say, "This is not my case; I feel the sting of it."

I would reply, first, that God does not impose afflictions on you until there is a need for them. Just as a physician understands a patient's body better than the patient does, God knows the intricacies of the

soul, which often has more hidden ailments than the body. He sees your secret pride, security, and other issues, even when you may not see them in yourself. For instance, Hezekiah did not recognize his own pride. So, when you see no reason for a sharp affliction, like a purging medicine, God does, and He administers it only when there is a need.

Secondly, God does not go beyond your need, and this can be illustrated with two excellent similes from Isaiah 28 (for there can be no better expressions than those found in the Word if we have the eyes to see their glory). In Isaiah 28:24 and onwards, the text uses two similes:

First, consider the plowman who plows all day to sow. After breaking the clods of his ground and making it plain, he does not plow endlessly. Instead, he scatters the fitches, cummin, wheat, and rie as the Lord has instructed him. The farmer, you see, plows only where he intends to sow and reap a harvest. The plow is used only until the clods are broken. Shouldn't God have the same discretion? Do you think that God plows you longer than necessary? No, it's only until the clods, the stiffness of your spirit, are broken. While you might believe your heart is soft enough, God has various seeds to sow—wheat and rie—and what is soft enough for one may not be for another.

Secondly, when it comes to the harvest, to maturity, God uses various instruments to thresh it, as mentioned in verse 27. Fitches are not threshed with a threshing instrument, nor is the cartwheel turned over the cumin. Instead, they are beaten out with a staff and a rod. But bread-corn, wheat, is bruised with the wheel, but not constantly threshed. God observes each person's strength and knows which affliction is most suitable for them. He selects the right

instrument for each grain. His purpose is to separate you from the husk of your circumcision, from certain lusts that cling closely to the heart. Just as the wheat and husk are closely connected, the wheel is applied until the separation is complete. When God has loosened the heart and the sin, the husk and the wheat, He stops. He declares, "This is from the LORD, who is wonderful in counsel and excellent in working." Just as you would consider a farmer wise for his methods with his ground and grain, God is also wise in His ways.

But you might argue that despite these explanations and the positive portrayal, we see and experience that the saints fare no better than the worst when general afflictions like plagues, wars, or captivity strike. They are swept away just like everyone else. What afflictions are there that do not affect the saints as well as others?

In response, it is true that overwhelming afflictions, such as those that engulf entire countries, affect saints and sinners alike. However, there is a difference. Jeremiah 24 provides an illustration where all were carried into captivity by the same king, but in different baskets—one for the bad figs and another for the good figs. This difference signifies that the condition of one group was distinct from the other. First, the Lord knows the good figs, and His eyes are upon them for their good. He ensures that no harm befalls them that would be true harm. Second, He sends them into captivity as one might send someone on an errand, but the others are led as condemned individuals to jail. Third, He plans to bring them back once they have completed the purpose for which they were sent into captivity, once they have humbled themselves and sanctified His name more. The Lord has many similar purposes, but the others, He utterly destroys, and they never return.

Some might say, "The afflictions I endure are of an extraordinary nature. No one has suffered as I have." It's common for people to complain this way. You might feel that your afflictions are unique, and they are not just one but many. These afflictions have persisted for a long time.

I reply, it is true that your afflictions may often be of an extraordinary nature, and there is a good reason for it. A small affliction may not lead you back to God. Just as a minor headache or a scratch from a pin doesn't send someone running to the physician, small afflictions may not draw you to seek help from God. That's why these afflictions are often intense and long-lasting.

They are intense because you have many deep-rooted issues and sinful desires that require diverse and powerful afflictions to address. If God did not change the nature of your afflictions, they would become familiar to you, losing their effectiveness. Afflictions need to be varied to achieve their purpose.

They are long-lasting because some sins cling tightly and are not easily removed. The stain of sin can be deep, requiring prolonged cleansing. In Daniel 11, it is mentioned that many will fall by the sword, famine, and other trials, and these trials are of many kinds and extended duration, designed to purify them. If individuals were more willing to be purified and sought sanctification sooner, these trials might not have to be so lengthy.

I have elaborated on this point because it may be of great importance to many of us. We don't know what the future holds, so it's valuable to store up this knowledge to better bear what comes our way. Ignorance often makes afflictions unbearable when they arrive.

Now, let's turn to the practical applications.

Learn from this not to be discouraged, no matter how difficult your situation may seem. Whether you've been afflicted by slander, causing you to doubt whether you'll ever regain your reputation, or by physical ailments, making you believe you'll never regain your health, or by spiritual doubts, leading you to believe you are in a hopeless state, remember the great kindness of the Lord. Know that He is capable of easily scattering your afflictions.

Don't fall into the trap of thinking that your prosperity will always continue or that your afflictions will never end. Both are in God's hands. Just as God can change the weather, turning winter into summer, He can also change your circumstances. While it may be a storm now, the sun will shine again soon. God's anger doesn't last forever, as stated in Micah 7:8, "for mercy pleaseth him." When you approach God during His moments of anger, it won't last long. His consistent disposition is one of mercy. Remember that what delights a person, they do frequently. Thus, if God delights in mercy, He will often bestow it.

You might think your affliction is too great and impossible to remedy without divine miracles. While that may be true, remember that when God decides to afflict, nothing can stop Him. In Zechariah 1, there were four horns surrounding the children of Israel to afflict them. No matter which way they turned, there was no escape. However, these horns were there to drive them back to the Lord. Despite the strength of these horns, they were eventually knocked off by carpenters, and the nations that had opposed Judah were all frightened away. When God decides to scatter affliction and lift you up, nothing will hinder Him, no matter how great the affliction.

So, don't lose heart. Even if the storm rages violently, one word from God can calm it. Just as in Mark 5, a single word from Jesus quelled

a great storm. Even the most severe and powerful enemies of the Church, like Haman, cannot harm you if God speaks a word to them. Just as in Mark 4, when the disciples feared a great storm, Jesus said, "Why are you afraid, you of little faith?" It's not the magnitude of the storm that causes fear but the smallness of your faith. When all the people murmured at the Red Sea, Moses remained calm because he had faith. He knew that God's salvation was coming. The difference lay in Moses' belief, while the others lacked faith.

So, the trouble doesn't arise from the magnitude of the affliction but from the smallness of your faith. When afflictions come, do not be discouraged. Do not lose yourselves; instead, possess yourselves with patience. Remember this sure conclusion against all objections: God will be merciful to His people.

Why is the Lord so full of pity and compassion towards His people? Learn to come to the Lord when you have offended Him. If God had a hard heart that never relented, then when you sinned, you might seek comfort elsewhere. But come back to the Lord with the assurance of a good outcome. We see Samuel making use of this in a similar situation with the people of Israel in 1 Samuel 12. They had committed a great sin, even casting away the Lord. God had shown His wrath through storms from heaven. Yet, in verse 20, Samuel says, "Fear not, ye have done all this wickedness, yet turn not aside from following the Lord." He provides two reasons. First, seeking comfort elsewhere would be in vain because other sources were empty. Second, the Lord will not forsake His people for the sake of His great name since He has chosen them to be His people. Samuel essentially says, "Do not diminish the seriousness of your sin or seek excuses; you have committed a grave transgression, but do not forsake the Lord." Samuel emphasizes this because discouragement keeps people away from the Lord. Many people might approach God

if they had a voice from Heaven assuring them that their sins would be forgiven upon coming in. The main thing that keeps them away is the belief that God is not ready to receive and pardon them. Therefore, Samuel tells them, "You are His people, and the Lord cannot forsake His own." Just as a parent cannot easily forsake their troublesome child, even when it causes frustration, because it is their own, the Lord's affections continue even when His people provoke Him repeatedly. If you wonder why you are in a better condition than others, it is simply because it pleased God to make you so. God's love does not depend on merit. This should teach us to look beyond ourselves and into the attributes of God. In Jeremiah 3, God invites those who have played the harlot many times to return to Him. He compares God's mercy to that of a man, illustrating that God's heart is much larger, and so are His mercies.

If God is exceedingly merciful and compassionate, it should lead people to repentance, as Romans 2:4 suggests. When God expresses His mercies through His actions and dealings with us or when His ministers offer His mercies to us, it should lead us to repentance. Unfortunately, it often has the opposite effect in the world, leading people away from God rather than towards Him. Many turn God's grace into license for sin. However, you should use God's mercies to stir up a heartfelt sorrow for your sins. Consider that you deserved to be cut off long ago and that you have committed sins for which many have been in hell for a long time. God expects this from you. During days of humility, the primary purpose of which is to humble yourselves, use the meditations of God's mercies to stir up a more sincere sorrow for your sins. Recognize that you should have been cut off long ago, and many are in hell for less. God expects humility from you, not only through the proclamation of His judgments but also through expressions of His mercies.

A digression concerning Fasting, on the occasion.

There are two manners of performing this duty: one is entirely public, which should occur from morning till night, observed publicly by the entire land, allowing everyone to confess and humble themselves collectively for its sins. This is more exceptional. However, for those days that are observed from week to week in this manner, it is well-arranged that the time for public exercises is limited, allowing time for private ones. Individual repentance progresses better in this way. These public exercises serve the purpose of leading to private confession and repentance. After all, what are the means without the end being achieved? In other words, everyone should mourn individually. This was evident in Zechariah 12 when mourning was the focus; every family mourned separately, even husbands and wives, despite their closeness. The husband and wife are the closest, and one would think they should be together, but during this time, they were required to be apart. The reason for this is that nothing humbles us more than individual sins. These sins wound the heart, which is not as openly confessed in public but is usually acknowledged only in a general sense. When you are alone, you can consider your own sins, your actions, and the circumstances surrounding them. You can examine your hearts and your ways, reflecting on yourselves, and that is the primary purpose and duty of these days.

Some may say, "I don't know how to spend my time in private when I am not at church." But consider this: Have you not committed many sins? Ponder them. Can you not confess and admit them, saying, "Lord, I confess that I have fallen into this sin again and again"? After you have done this, seek reconciliation earnestly. Your heart will do this when it is touched by a sense of sin and when you consider the multitude, circumstances, and aggravations of your sins.

Reconciliation will become your greatest request, and you must be most earnest in seeking it. God often withholds assurance to teach people what it means to be reconciled to Him, and fasting intensifies your prayers, making them more fervent. Renew your covenants, reflect on the sins you are most inclined to and the occasions that draw you to commit those sins, and vow against them. Consider the good duties you have neglected the most and the areas where your heart is most prone to fail. Promise to be more obedient in these areas. It's not enough to make a promise; you must also strive to genuinely desire to forsake those sins and genuinely commit to performing those duties. When the heart is strongly inclined in one direction, it is difficult to change it, and it's not easy to cultivate an inward willingness. Therefore, you must engage in substantial self-examination and reasoning with your heart. When your heart has been brought into a good state, it is still susceptible to becoming disordered again. Your affections may become too entangled in worldly matters, and your love, fear, and grief may become too excessive in certain areas. It is challenging to bring the soul back to a balanced state, so you must invest significant effort into managing your heart.

That which is said of Ministers, *fullones animarum*, fullers of men's souls, is now applicable to every individual. Each person must take it upon themselves to wash away the stains of their hearts and make their souls purer, as in Daniel 11. This act will either dissuade God from bringing afflictions or prompt Him to remove them. Therefore, cleanse your hearts from all impurities of flesh and spirit. Understand that removing deep-seated stains will require significant effort; you must scour until your souls ache, even if it causes the skin to peel. If you do this work on your own and plow your own hearts, God will not need to do it through afflictions. So, engage in this process and do not give up until you have accomplished it. Ensure

that your hearts are thoroughly humbled in the process, as this is a crucial means to achieve it.

You may wonder how to go about this. Some may ask, "How should we cleanse our hearts?" The answer, as found in James 4, is to afflict yourselves, mourn, and let your laughter turn into mourning. Be willing to be alone, avoid company, and refrain from your former liberties. Mourn and humble yourselves, and do so consistently. It is not just bowing your head for a day that matters; God values continual sorrow. Do it diligently and purposefully, for the lack of ongoing humility is the reason for the coldness and indifference in our faith. Continual humility is the foundation of every grace and its growth. Just as seeds sown in broken soil thrive and prosper, all instruction given to an unbroken heart yields no fruit. If you were truly humbled, we would see remarkable growth in our ministry. Dedicate yourself to this task for one day, and you will be better equipped for it the next. Sorrow should flow like a constant spring, day in and day out. The sorrows of many are like flash floods, so take care not to slacken your efforts due to the continuity of this duty. Do not let your determination waver. If you think you're losing a day's work, remember, is there any work more necessary than the salvation of your soul? Is there any study more valuable than having the image of God's salvation stamped on your heart?

From this, we are encouraged to choose the Lord as our God. When you hear that He is such a merciful God, consider making this choice. No one ever served the Lord without first choosing Him as their Master. When people reach an age of understanding and autonomy, they contemplate whether to serve God or the world. All of God's saints have made a distinct choice to serve the Lord and no other. For example, when Moses had to choose between the pleasures of Egypt and God and His afflicted people, he chose the latter over the

former, as mentioned in Hebrews 11:25. David, too, made a choice: "I have chosen the way of truth; Your judgments I have laid before me" (Psalm 119:30). To choose is to consider something before you and then take it. Joshua declared, "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." Now I urge you, since you are faced with a choice, and knowing that God is so exceedingly merciful, choose Him to be your God. What motivates a person to choose one path in life over another? It is the pursuit of happiness and what one believes will bring them the greatest happiness.

Now, if people were convinced that choosing God is the path to the greatest happiness, they would undoubtedly choose Him. Surely, if God is such a kind and merciful God, then our ultimate happiness must be found in Him alone. There is no husband or friend as loving as He, no father as kind and tender-hearted. He surpasses all human beings in love, tenderness, and kindness. Every drop of kindness found in any man or woman originates from God. The natural affection in parents and others cannot compare to the boundless ocean of kindness in Him. If kindness is an excellence in them, then it surely exists in Him. If the Lord has commanded us to be amiable, full of compassion, and easy to entreat as part of His image and the holy disposition that should be within us, then it undoubtedly exists in Himself even more. However, let me not merely exhort you without providing some reason.

Consider how merciful the Lord has been to us and how gracious He is to those who choose Him. First, He grants them the comfort of His presence, and there is no comfort greater than that. Joy and comfort result from the alignment of a thing with a person's mind (*applicatio convenientis convenienti*). Nothing aligns better with the human mind than the presence and countenance of God. Lusts and pleasures are soul diseases, and the pleasures associated with them

destroy the soul. Furthermore, when you are reconciled to Him, you are freed from all debt and danger. He will calm your restless soul and set it at ease. Moreover, when you have the Lord as your God, you have someone to whom you can turn and confide, seeking advice when you cannot turn to anyone else in the world. You have someone from whom you can draw comfort when you find none elsewhere. He is your refuge when you are overwhelmed by opposition, slander, and ill reports. In addition to the glory we will experience in heaven, consider that there is nothing your heart desires that He will not do for you. If you have any tasks to accomplish, God will accomplish them better for you than you could on your own. The Lord works all our works in us and for us (Isaiah 26:12). Are you a scholar with studies to complete? A tradesman with ventures to undertake? Are you in dire straits? He will respond to your entreaties and do all for you better than you could with all your cunning.

Furthermore, if you have fallen into poverty, sickness, or disgrace, you will find Him exceedingly kind. When you are sick, He will be caring and watchful over you, as David acknowledges in Psalm 31:7: "I will be glad and rejoice in Your mercy, for You have considered my trouble; You have known my soul in adversities." When others overlook and forget you in times of adversity, as the butler did with Joseph, God will not abandon you; instead, He will care for you. Again, if you are persecuted and have enemies to contend with (as who does not when living godly?), you will find God standing by your side, as He did for Saint Paul, delivering you from the mouths of lions. He will be a rock and a place of defense, shielding you from their attacks and preventing their plots and malice from harming you. David had many experiences with God in this regard. Moreover, if you lack anything, He has promised to grant whatever you ask. Even if you say, "I provoke Him day by day," know that He is exceedingly kind and will overlook many weaknesses because He

understands our human nature. One transgression does not cause Him, as it does with humans, to forget previous actions. The Lord keeps for us the sure mercies of David, not only being our God while we are alive but also to our descendants after we have passed away. Such a God you will find Him to be. Therefore, choose Him as your God and your husband. If people truly knew Him, they would choose Him. Just as Saint Paul said to Agrippa, "I would that thou wert altogether as I am," meaning that if you knew Him as I do and His service, you would not be half a Christian but wholly committed to Him. Try His service, and see if you do not like it. Those who are experienced in both conditions holding steadfast may be seen as an argument of His kindness toward all His children. This should also motivate us to choose Him as our Master.

As for the previous use, which was directed towards those outside the covenant, this use is meant for all those who are already within it. It aims to encourage them to strengthen their commitment to God, to become increasingly convinced of His goodness, and to love Him more and more, clinging ever closer to Him. Just as a married woman may love her husband dearly but, by continually seeing more and more of his excellencies, becomes more assured in her choice, so should we grow in our love and confirmation of our choice to follow God. In the midst of all afflictions, strive to maintain a positive view of God and a critical view of yourselves. This was the praise of David, as he always sought to exalt God in every situation, holding firm to the conclusion that "yet God is good to Israel." We often fall short in this regard, tending to think that God deals harshly with us and His people. However, we must correct this error and cultivate a positive opinion of Him, extolling His mercy. This will not happen until we acknowledge two things: first, God's exceedingly great kindness; and second, our exceedingly rebellious nature. You tend to focus only on God's dealings, leading you to believe that He has been harsh, but

you rarely consider how abominably you have behaved towards Him. Learn to understand that, even in your worst condition, He is a God full of compassion, and that you have deserved even worse treatment. Strive to grasp this concept for yourselves and for the Church. God has shown mercy to the Church throughout all ages and continues to do so. He has been its habitation from one generation to the next, from the time of Abraham to their period in Egypt, through the wilderness, and during the era of the Judges. The Church has often appeared to be on the brink of extinction, such as during the great massacre in France, yet the Lord remained its habitation, preserving a remnant that grew stronger than before. Even during Queen Mary's reign, although the storm briefly overtook them, it soon passed, and God protected them from being destroyed. He has also been an habitation for Bohemia and the Palatinate. However, His favour has been most evident in our Church, as our nation has been like Gideon's fleece: while all others around us have been soaked in blood, we have remained dry. Therefore, strive to recognise how good God is and how unworthy we are. Beware of abusing His kindness, as this could lead to our nation being soaked in blood while others enjoy peace. To maintain His favour, remember His blessings and humble ourselves before Him in gratitude. This concludes the discussion of this doctrine.

Doct. 3. The Lord's name is called upon his people.

The next point is the third doctrine:

The Lord's Name is invoked upon His people, which means they are called by His Name. To understand this, we must first recognise that it is the Lord who places His Name upon them. Who would dare to bestow this honour except those upon whom the Lord Himself

chooses to bestow it? This is no small matter; when God places His Name upon someone, it brings something significant with it.

Therefore, secondly, it is not an empty title, a mere label without substance. When God bestows His Name on anyone or any people, He also gives Himself to them, and everything He possesses becomes theirs because they belong to God. As 1 Corinthians 3 concludes, just as a husband, when he bestows his name upon his wife, also gives himself to her. In Scripture, the Lord's Name and the Lord Himself are often used interchangeably, so having the Lord's Name called upon us is a tremendous privilege.

To further explore this concept, consider who else is called by another's name among human beings:

First, wives are called by the names of their husbands.

Second, children bear the names of their parents.

Third, temples are given the names of the deities to whom they are dedicated.

Lastly, those who align themselves with a particular individual and follow their opinions are called by that person's name, such as the Platonists, Aristotelians, Ramists, and so on, named after their respective masters.

In the same manner, those who are called by God's Name include those who are married to Him, those who are born of Him (for they are His children), and all those who serve as His temples, dedicated to His service. Lastly, they are all who are devoted to following Him, just as Joshua declared, "I and my house will serve the Lord," and as Jacob professed, "Thou shalt be my God, and I will serve thee." All of

these individuals are called by the name of the Lord, and the Lord is called by their names. This is why He is known as the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and so on. It appears that there is a kind of union between them, a mutual agreement and relationship, akin to that between a husband and a wife or a father and a son. Therefore, if you are one who is spiritually united with Christ, if He has transformed your heart and regenerated you through His Word, and if you are consecrated to His service as His temple, then you are called by His Name.

The sole reason for this is His choice of you; there is no other reason. When He looked upon all the earth, He singled you out to have His Name called upon you. This is similar to what is said of the Temple in Jerusalem, that He chose that place above all others to establish His Name there. The same rationale applies when His Name is invoked upon an entire church, as when He surveyed Europe and chose the reformed churches to have His Name there. Wherever the Lord puts His Name, He resides, such that one can be substituted for the other. There are two places where God dwells, as stated in Isaiah 57:15: "Thus saith the high and lofty one that inhabiteth eternity, whose Name is holy, I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also who is of a contrite and humble spirit." The highest heavens and the humblest hearts are the primary dwelling places of God. While He dwells elsewhere as well, in these two places, His presence is particularly marked by grace and comfort. In the same verse, He declares that He revives the spirit of the humble and the heart of the contrite ones. He reveals Himself to them, sharing His secrets, which are concealed from all others, and fills their hearts with joy and comfort.

If we are among those who bear the Name of God, then we must learn to be obedient to Him and wholly devote ourselves to Him. For

this is implied by being called by His Name, as seen in Scripture when we are said to be baptized into the Name of Jesus Christ. Through our baptism, we profess that we give ourselves to His service, relinquishing our own names and natures. A person called by the Name of the Lord is no longer his or her own master. Just as someone who serves another wrongs that person to the extent that they serve themselves, so it is for us when we bear the Name of the Lord.

The reason a wife leaves her own name when she marries is to signify her submission and obedience to her husband. She is no longer her own, not free, but rather depends on her husband, much like ivy clinging to a tree without its own root. In the same way, when we take upon ourselves the Name of the LORD, we must understand that we are no longer free; we abandon our own names and must not root ourselves in our own will but in the will of the Lord. Therefore, those who bear the Name of the Lord should not do so merely in profession but should live according to what the Name requires. This means no longer following our own desires but following God.

When a wife marries, she leaves behind her father and mother to cleave to her husband. If her parents and husband have conflicting commands, she forsakes her parents' wishes and cleaves to her husband's. Leaving father and mother implies relinquishing the affection she bears them in comparison to her husband. Similarly, to be united with Christ, you must divorce yourself from all else in the world, including that which is near and dear to you. You must even hate and deny your own soul. When your soul desires one thing and Christ desires another, you must deny it and detach from yourself, finding your root not in yourself but in the Lord, for He is able to sustain you.

Wives are not obligated to destroy themselves for their husbands, but this bond is even closer. In Ephesians 5:31-32, the near union between man and wife is likened to a shadow of the union between Christ and His Church, which is flesh of His flesh and bone of His bone. Just as a wife leaves her father and mother to cleave to her husband, so we must leave all to cleave to Christ and be subject to Him, meaning that our will must be subject to the Lord's. Whenever you have a journey or plan, you should say, "If the Lord wills," acknowledging your marriage to Him. You have every reason to do so because Christ loves us as His spouse and body, and you should never forsake Him.

If anyone objects, saying, "I am a sinful wretch, an unfit match for Him," consider that, despite your shortcomings, being united with Christ means He covers your imperfections with His righteousness and washes you from your corruptions, just as a man covers his sores and washes his wounds because they are his own body. Thus, if you have taken Christ as your husband, you have every reason to remain faithful to Him.

Let the Name of the Lord not only be upon you but also within you. In Exodus 23:21, referring to the Angel who went with them in the wilderness, it is said, "My Name is in him." This signifies that not only is His Name upon Him, but His Name is within Him. Likewise, we should strive to have the Lord's Name within us, reflecting His character, His nature, and His will. We should be so minded and affected as He is, having a heart after His heart. By doing so, we become His glory, just as a wife is the glory of her husband when she displays his wisdom and virtues through her behaviour. In the world, behave like your husband's glory, demonstrating the virtues of Christ, as described in 1 Peter 2:9. Act in such a way that you reflect the image of God, and you shall be His glory. Consider this deeply:

you are called by God's Name. If you treat this as an empty title, you will gain no real benefit from it. However, if you earnestly cleave to Him and follow Him, then He is yours, and you are His, and all that is His belongs to you.

Nothing works to humble our hearts more than love, and nearness to God will surely make us love Him. Just as a wife loves her husband and vice versa because they are close to each other, when the Name of the LORD is called upon us, it is a sign of our proximity to Him. Therefore, let this soften your heart, and consider how unworthy it is to behave contrary to this nearness. This realization struck David's heart when he contemplated the kindness and love the Lord had shown him. When the LORD intends to humble His people, He often reminds them of the closeness between Him and them, as seen in Jeremiah 2:2-3, where the Lord says, "I remember thee, the kindness of thy youth, the love of thine espousals." When we see the Lord taking this approach, we should follow suit. In 2 Samuel 12:7-8, Nathan was sent to humble David, and he reminded him of God's kindness in anointing him as king and delivering him from the hand of Saul. This reminder was a significant factor in David's confession of sin in Psalm 51. When a person sins, there are two aspects to consider: first, that they have violated God's law, seeing the wrong in sin, and second, that they have sinned against God Himself, which carries a sense of injury and unkindness. To truly humble oneself, one must recognize both aspects of sin: its deformity in violating God's law and its unkindness in rebelling against God's person, akin to rebellion against one's husband.

To achieve humility, go through all the specific ways God has dealt with you and remember His special kindnesses, deliverances, and mercies throughout your life. Recount His mercies, especially during times of fasting. Once you have done this, consider your sins not only

as transgressions against God's law but also as injuries and unkindness against His person. Add to this the consideration of God's patience, how He has been patient despite your sinful behaviour. Even though you may have acted as a wretch and a harlot, God has been patient and kind, inviting you to return. Reflecting on all of this will melt your heart toward Him. Strive to do this more and more.

There is an exercise of humility that involves recognizing the Lord's kindness to you and your injuries against Him, comparing the two. If you find your heart hardened and unable to melt, exercise yourself in this manner. The reason hearts become hard is often due to idleness and unwillingness to recount God's mercies. Do not claim your heart is hard; instead, admit that you are sluggish. This is something you should do, especially at this time. Leviticus 23:29 designates a specific time for the Israelites to practice this duty of humiliation, a day to afflict their souls. Those who did not were to be cut off from among the people. Remember that the consideration that we are called by the Name of the Lord is a means to facilitate this process of humility.

But you may say, "I have done all this, and yet my heart remains hardened."

It may indeed be the case that your heart is still hard despite your efforts. Nevertheless, I say this to comfort you: if you continue to do this, the Lord accepts it. However, if you neglect it, the responsibility will be on your own head. We only require that you strive to do it, and the Lord will accept your effort, even if you are unable to soften your own heart. Secondly, take comfort in knowing that God will join you in this endeavour. If you labour in this way with your heart, He will send the spirit of humility upon you. Just as the disciples toiled

all night but eventually received Christ's help, so too, if you labor for many days and feel you are making no progress, know that God will eventually come to your aid. He will not allow you to engage in vain pursuits when He has commanded you to do so. Therefore, have confidence in His promises. In Luke 11:13, it is said, "If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children..." You will never be able to soften your heart on your own, without the Holy Ghost, but keep knocking, and the Lord will give you the Holy Ghost, even if you are strangers. So, every person can approach God and say, "Lord, You have made this promise, and You cannot go back on Your word, so do not deny me." Be earnest with God, and He cannot deny you. The woman of Canaan was not a Jew, but because she knew that Jesus was the Messiah, she would not be turned away. So, follow her example, and in the end, you will find that your heart is softened. The longer you wait, the greater measure of the Spirit you will receive, and when you have Him, He will humble your heart, as stated in Zechariah 12:10. "I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and supplications, and they shall look upon him whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him as one mourneth for an only son." In this passage, the people of Israel were encouraged to mourn and separate themselves, actions similar to those performed on every fast day. God says that if you seek Him sincerely, you must have the Spirit. God promises to do His part and pour out the Spirit, which can also be translated as the "spirit of bowels." This means that when the Spirit of God is upon you, you will be tenderly affected towards the Lord, just as a mother is towards her child. Then, you shall look upon Him whom you have pierced and mourn for Him as bitterly as one mourns for an only son. You will remember your rebellions, and the memory of them will be bitter to your soul, just as bitter things taste to your tongue. Josiah's heart melted and he wept when he heard the book of the Law read because he had the spirit of bowels.

Every one of us should have this spirit. Job, after encountering God, said, "Now I have seen thee, I abhor myself" (Job 42). He had not felt this way before. He was a holy man, but this was a new work in him. He had previously only heard about God, but now he had seen Him. He had an experiential understanding of God. He abhorred himself because God's Spirit had given him a new light, enabling him to see God's love and kindness and his own unkindness in vivid colours.

If the Lord's Name is called upon us, we should learn from this to keep His Name pure and unblemished. It was said of Saint Paul that he was a chosen vessel to carry God's Name. Therefore, we must be cautious not to defile His Name or provide opportunities for it to be blasphemed. When you commit evil, it reflects upon the Name of the Lord. A small thing is significant in your case; one fly can spoil a box of ointment. However, many flies in a barrel of pitch or tar are considered insignificant. Similarly, many sins in a wicked person do not dishonour God's Name as much as a single sin in a saint. When a saint behaves unbecomingly, it tarnishes the Name of the Lord. God's Name is never tarnished in itself, but it may appear that way to others. Prior to regeneration, sins are like blots on a canvas before a picture is painted; they are not noticed. However, after God's image is renewed in a person, their sins are more apparent and can lead to the blasphemy of God's Name by others.

This should teach us not to be ashamed of God and the profession of His Name. The Lord is not ashamed of us, as He demonstrates when He is willing to put His Name upon us. So, why should we be ashamed of Him? It is unreasonable and unfair for a child to be ashamed of their father, for a wife to be ashamed of her husband, and similarly for us to be ashamed of the Lord, whose Name we bear.

This issue deserves attention because it is a common fault among us, although often overlooked.

However, most people would say, "We are not ashamed of religion; in fact, we consider it a glory to be called Christians."

Allow me to question you with these two queries. Firstly, are you not ashamed of the strictest aspects of religion? There is a common form of religion that you need not be ashamed of because everyone supports and praises it. However, some particular religious acts may bring shame upon those who perform them. Just as when David danced before the Ark, it seemed absurd to Michal for a king to do such a thing, yet David said, "I will be yet more vile." Some ways of God may seem distasteful to wicked people, and shame is attached to the power of religion because the majority follow a different path. Now, what is unique often carries shame. Just as in fashion, if the majority adopt an unattractive trend, it is not considered shameful, but if a few choose to wear a more attractive yet different garment, they may be shamed. Similarly, shame is cast upon holiness and sincerity because the majority do not embrace holiness. Holy individuals are like the gleanings after the harvest or the grapes left after the vintage—exceedingly few, not enough to make godliness fashionable. Therefore, if you wish to know whether you are ashamed of God, examine whether you are ashamed of any of the distinctive acts of religion that are often met with shame among people.

The second question I would ask is this: Are you ashamed of God, or of any task or duty, or of His people when shame may harm you in some way? Consider whether you are not ashamed of Religion among sinners. In Mark 8:38, there is a phrase inserted for a reason: "Whosoever shall be ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous generation." It's as if He were saying, "You might not be

ashamed of me among Saints, but if you are ashamed of me among the worst of people, during dangerous and ignominious times to be a Christian (as it was then), I will be ashamed of that person on the day of the Resurrection." Therefore, examine what you do before wicked men and what you do before great men when professing Christ or any of His truths may result in loss to you. Understand that this is not a trivial matter. We must profess Christ in our times, making the Word of God the guide of our lives.

Perhaps you think that as long as your heart is pure and you don't stray into sinful paths like others, the matter of profession is of little consequence, just like the leaves of godliness. But remember Romans 10:10: "With the heart man believeth unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation." The lack of profession can be as damning as the gravest sins. The Scripture is clear; we must profess God's Name at all times, even when it endangers our lives. Daniel did so in peril of his life, and it concerned his life significantly.

To encourage you to do this willingly, consider why people are ashamed of this profession. Why? Because others speak ill of you. But is this a valid reason? No, for they do so out of ignorance, as stated in 1 Peter 4:4: "Wherein they think it strange, that ye run not with them into the same excess of riot, speaking evil of you." If they understood the basis of your actions, they would not speak ill of you. They witness your actions but remain unaware of the principles guiding those actions, which is why they speak ill of you. Should we be discouraged by this? Consider this: What if a geometer were drawing lines and figures, and a countryman entered, seeing him and laughing at him? Would the geometer abandon his art due to ridicule? Surely not, for he knows the laughter stems from ignorance, as the countryman doesn't comprehend the art and its foundations.

Is it not equally foolish for us to be ashamed of godliness because those who do not understand it speak ill of it? Indeed, it is. Remember David's two reasons when he performed an act for which his wife reviled him. He said, "I did it for the Lord that chose me," as if to say, "The Lord deserved it; He loved and chose me, so I did it." Likewise, the Lord has chosen you among many thousands of others; therefore, do it for the Lord.

Another reason David had was, "It makes for my honour in the eyes of those who are good." (2 Samuel 6:24) People may think it brings no honour because they will not gain any credit for it among men. But understand this: When people shy away from God, He fulfils the rule, "Them that honour me, I will honour." Anyone who makes a profession of godliness but later falls away, God never allows such a person to escape; He punishes them in one way or another. Therefore, in Deuteronomy 4:6, Moses exhorts the people to keep God's statutes and to do them, for "this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the nations." Why should you hesitate to bear the shame the world casts upon you? Does not God observe all, looking on with approval? Does not God tell the Church of Ephesus in Revelation 2:2, "I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience"? When someone casts shame upon you for the sake of religion, it is a persecution that God will record. As Luther said when others spoke ill of him, "This will be accounted on my reckoning at the last day." We should all consider and weigh such speech. God knows your patience; therefore, do not be ashamed, but be bold in the profession and fear of God, doing those things that are glorious in the eyes of God and those who judge matters correctly.

If the Name of the Lord is invoked upon us, this should bring comfort to us regarding both ourselves and the Church of God. Where God's Name is called upon in any church, nation, or

individual, you can be certain that He will defend them. He is engaged to do so to prevent His Name from being defiled. When His people suffer, the Lord's reputation suffers as well. Therefore, whoever you are, whether rich or poor, be confident that God will defend you in all your sufferings. A man will not allow his wife to be wronged, for she is his wife, and he considers it an injury when any harm befalls her. Similarly, God sees Himself as wronged when any harm befalls you, on whom His Name is called. As Isaiah 4:5-6 states, even though His people may appear helpless, God will create a cloud by day and a flaming fire by night. He will work without the need for means, creating them out of nothing. He will be both their guide and their protector, as the cloud and fire in the wilderness led the Children of Israel and shielded them from the sun's heat. "Upon all the glory shall be a defence," meaning that the Church, despite its humble appearance, is glorious, and this protection extends to everyone within the Church.

However, if the objection arises, "Why do we see them afflicted? Don't they often suffer storms and endure the scorching heat of reproach?" The Lord responds that just as His people face various persecutions, He will provide various means of help. He will be a shelter for them, like the Cities of Refuge where those pursued by avengers of blood sought refuge. He will be a place of safety in the midst of the storm, shielding them from rain and calamity. When the Saints face persecution or any calamity, they are like people under a shelter, while others are exposed to the storm. Rest assured that the Lord will not forsake His people; they are like the apple of His eye. A man may endure much, but he will not allow you to touch the apple of his eye. Similarly, God may allow much, but He will avenge those who wrong His people. This concludes this teaching.

Doct. 4. Without humiliation no mercy.

Now, we turn to 2 Chronicles 7:14: "If my People, that are called by my Name, do humble themselves." We have reached the conditions upon which mercy and forgiveness are promised in this verse, the first of which is humility. I will address this in two ways:

First, Negatively, emphasizing that without humility, individuals cannot claim these promises.

Second, Affirmatively, explaining that if they do humble themselves, God will show them mercy and forgive their sins.

To address the first point, I derive this doctrine from the words: "That without Humiliation no man shall obtain mercy." We can see that God links mercy to humility here, making it an essential condition for receiving mercy. Thus, this must be considered a matter of great significance and deserving of detailed exploration.

I express the doctrine using a broader and more general term, "humiliation," which encompasses both passive humiliation (being humbled) and active humiliation (humbling ourselves). The primary focus of the text is on self-humbling, which is what I intend to emphasise in the course of this discussion. However, I include both aspects here in this negative part of the discourse because they are often interconnected in their operation. The latter typically presupposes the former, making it necessary to address both. In this negative aspect, it applies equally to both forms of humiliation, as it is equally true that no one attains mercy without first experiencing humiliation and humbling themselves. Thus, they converge in this negative part.

While the affirmative part mentioned pertains specifically to active humiliation, as the promises of attaining mercy are directed towards those who humble themselves, not to all who are humbled (since

many who are deeply humbled do not receive mercy), I primarily unite both aspects in this initial part. This is because they are interlinked in their functioning, and understanding one is essential to comprehend the other. To understand what it means to humble ourselves, which is my main focus, we must also grasp what it means to be humbled. They are interconnected, with one serving as a preparation for the other. Therefore, we will encompass both aspects in this first doctrine to clarify their scope and distinctions.

Now, in our exploration of this doctrine, we will accomplish two objectives:

First, we will demonstrate that individuals must experience humiliation and humble themselves before they can partake in the promises outlined in the text.

Second, we will define what it means to humble oneself and to be humbled.

For the first objective, this passage alone provides sufficient foundation. God would not have imposed such a condition without reason, and it is a prerequisite for all. Moreover, we can observe the practice of skilled builders of souls, who made it their initial task (just as it is the primary condition here) to humble individuals so that they would eventually humble themselves. To omit other examples, we find that all three Persons of the divine trinity endorse this method.

This was God the Father's method in the first sermon ever preached, which He Himself delivered as a pattern for all ministers to follow. When He wanted Adam and Eve to seek the promise of mercy, He first discussed the matter with them to humble them for their sin and then revealed the promise of the Messiah.

Secondly, Jesus Christ, the second Person, in His initial Gospel sermons, such as in Luke 4:7, demonstrated His approval of this method by making it the primary subject of His first sermon. This is evident from the text He chose for His Gospel message, but to whom did He preach? To those who were already humble and broken in heart. "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he hath anointed me to preach the Gospel to such as are poor and broken in heart."

And the Holy Ghost, the third Person, as foretold by Christ, would follow the same order when working on people's hearts through the ministry of the Apostles, etc. In John 16:8, it is said, "He shall convince the world of sin," which refers to the necessity of humiliation as His first work. Then, "of righteousness," for justification, and finally, "of judgment," which relates to the sanctification of those justified.

Now, let's delve into the explanation and reasons for this point. We will:

1. Show the necessity of this humiliation for the other conditions that follow.
2. Explain its order as the first of all the rest.

Firstly, it is indeed true that the Lord could bring people to Himself without requiring this humiliation. He could simply say, "Let there be grace," and it would be so, without the thunder and tumult. However, just as He could have led the Children of Israel from Egypt to the Land of Canaan without taking them through the wilderness, He chose to humble and test them in the process.

The necessity for this can be understood by considering its relation to the other conditions and promises mentioned in the text. We will align the following reasons with these conditions and promises.

Firstly, without this humiliation, people will not seek out and come to Christ. They will not seek His face, that is, His person. The Law acts as our schoolmaster, bringing us to Christ through the process of humbling us. People will not come to Him unless they are driven to do so. They will not seek Him unless they acknowledge they are lost. They will not receive Him unless they are first humbled. It is the poor who receive the Gospel, the poor in spirit.

It is necessary in the context of receiving and seeking mercy, pardon, and forgiveness, which are the main promises here. "I will be merciful to their sins." Without this, our preaching of pardon and its promises would be in vain. Men would respond as those invited to the Marriage Feast in Matthew 22:5-6, making light of it. Similarly, we find that when we preach the great aspects of the Gospel, such as justification and forgiveness of sins, people often regard them lightly. The reason is their lack of humility. Those who are not humbled will not value Christ or the promise of forgiveness by Him. A person might be content to have Christ's righteousness as a bridge to Heaven but won't prize it as Paul did, who considered all else as dross and dung compared to being found in Christ.

This necessity can be drawn from its relation to the other conditions and promises mentioned in the text. We will align the following reasons with these conditions and promises.

Firstly, without humility, people will not seek and come to Christ. They will not seek His face, which refers to His person. The Law acts as our schoolmaster, bringing us to Christ by humbling us. People will not come to Him unless driven to do so. They will not seek Him unless they acknowledge they are lost. They will not receive Him unless they are first humbled. It is the poor in spirit who receive the Gospel.

Secondly, humility is necessary because without it, people will not truly turn from their evil ways or obey Christ in their lives. An unbroken heart is like an untamed horse that won't endure the bridle, or an untamed heifer that won't accept the yoke. Such a person may be commanded by God, but they will do as they please, acting as stubborn servants. Pride is the root cause of disobedience. High thoughts must be cast down, and every thought must be brought into obedience to Christ. All disobedience comes from pride and stubbornness, while all obedience comes from humility. A humbled heart becomes pliable to God, making it responsive to His commands. When pride is eradicated, the heart becomes obedient to Christ, choosing Him freely as Lord and Husband.

Those who make the choice themselves will serve, otherwise not. They will condemn themselves for making such an unsuitable choice. It teaches a person to highly value Christ and forgiveness of sins. This will set all your desires in motion, causing you to refuse no obedience, whether active or passive. People do not obey their lusts because they value pleasures and hold honours in high esteem. Likewise, valuing Christ will lead to doing anything for Him, even counting your life dear for His sake.

Without humility, people would not remain constant and steadfast. If they came to Christ and were obedient for a while, they might eventually return to their old ways. People will not stay with Him unless they are humbled. Unhumbled individuals may initially respond with joy but may not endure. If there's any reservation or holding back, they may ultimately go astray. True repentance, born from godly sorrow and genuine humility, is called repentance never to be repented of. Other forms of sorrow may lead to repentance, but it's a kind that people later regret.

People easily grow weary of Christ's yoke when they haven't felt the grievousness of the yoke of sin and Satan. To someone who has experienced the burden of sin, Christ's yoke is easy and sweet.

The last reason relates to the final promise of taking away judgments and healing the land. God wouldn't receive praise for His judgments and mercy in removing them unless people were humbled. If God were to afflict people and then remove the affliction without humility, they might think that God had wronged them before and was only now righting the wrong. However, when God humbles them to the point of acknowledging His justice in their affliction and their own deserving of it, and when they confess that it's only by His mercy they weren't consumed, and when they humble themselves under His mighty hand—only then, if the judgment is removed and His wrath subsides, will they give Him praise for His mercy and judgments.

Now, regarding the order of humility as the first condition, the general reason is that nothing is acceptable to God until the heart is humbled. You may pray, which is another condition, and you may hear, and so on, but all your actions are in vain unless they come from a broken heart.

Firstly, a broken heart is the only acceptable sacrifice to God, without which no sacrifice is accepted. This can be seen in Psalm 51:16-17: "Thou desirest not sacrifice, else I would give it thee; thou delightest not in burnt offerings. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise." David knew that until his heart was broken, all his good deeds and holy duties would be in vain. He essentially said, "Lord, before my heart was humbled and broken, as I've expressed earlier in this Psalm, You didn't desire any sacrifice from me, nor did You delight in burnt offerings from me.

But the sacrifices that please You are a broken spirit, and other duties are only acceptable when they originate from this brokenness." This broken spirit is the primary sacrifice, and without it, nothing else is acceptable. All other deeds are sanctified only when they are offered on this low altar of a broken heart.

This brokenness not only makes an acceptable sacrifice for God but also makes us fit priests for God. Before we can offer an acceptable sacrifice, we must first become priests to God. And we don't become priests to God until we've offered ourselves as a sacrifice, as stated in 2 Corinthians 8:5. To be true priests, we must be slain and broken, becoming a sacrifice ourselves.

Nothing is accepted until the Holy Spirit dwells in the heart. Until a person is humbled, the Spirit of God does not dwell in their heart. Therefore, whatever they do before that does not reflect the Spirit but rather a carnal heart, which is not acceptable. Until a person is humbled, they keep the door closed to the Lord and His Spirit. There is someone else within, and their heart is already full. They dwell in their own heart, so it is said in Isaiah 57:15 that the Lord dwells in a contrite heart alone, as there is only room for Him to work as He pleases in all its chambers.

Until a person is obedient in all things, nothing they do is acceptable. Proverbs 28:9 says, "He that turns his ear from the Law, his prayer shall be abominable." Someone who is not thoroughly humbled may be obedient in many things, including prayer, but they will still have their own ways and will not have fully renounced themselves. Such a person is not truly humbled, and unless their obedience is comprehensive, nothing is acceptable.

Now, we come to the second part of what we proposed to discuss: what this humility is. In particular, we want to understand what it

means to humble oneself. However, because discovering this depends on understanding what it means to be humbled, we will first discuss what it means to be humbled, and from there, we can better grasp the true humility required of us. To find this out, we will start by examining the examples in Scripture of those who humbled themselves or were humbled.

For example, in 2 Chronicles 33, we find the story of Manasseh, who humbled himself greatly in his affliction, and the Lord was entreated of him. Similarly, in Acts 9, we see the account of Saul (Paul) being humbled when he trembled and was astonished, saying, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" Another example is found in Acts 2:37, where those who were pricked in their hearts cried out, "What shall we do to be saved?" The jailer in Acts 16 also came trembling and astounded, and he would have killed himself. The parable of the prodigal son in Luke 15, though a parable, illustrates the condition of a humbled soul. The prodigal son, in his state of humiliation, came to himself, realizing his need.

From these examples, we can identify two main aspects of humility: passive humility and active humility. The first paves the way for the second and may be found in an unregenerate person, while the second, which is the fruit of sanctification, is the one referred to in this context, and it is the one to which the promise is made. Both aspects coexist in the godly, and he who possesses the second never lacks the first to some degree, although many may have the first without the second.

The first aspect, passive humility, involves a sense of sin and an awareness of God's wrath for it, as seen in examples like being pricked in the heart, which is essentially a wounding of the heart and

spirit. Along with this comes trembling fear and self-awareness, as illustrated in the parable.

This passive legal humiliation can be broken down into several aspects:

1. **Sensibleness of Sin:** Before this work of humility, a person is like someone in a deep slumber – they don't feel the impact of their actions or hear the words spoken to them; they are numb to everything. However, this work of humiliation awakens them to a deep sense of sin. They are now wounded and keenly aware of their sinfulness. Just as the earthquake shook the foundation of the jailer's prison, this awakening shakes the very core of one's being.
2. **Fearfulness of One's Estate:** Prior to this experience, a person might have been bold and fearless in their actions, often leading to punishment. This work of humility changes that perspective. It instills a fear of one's spiritual state, making a person realise the peril they are in. It's as if a bold individual suddenly recognises the danger they are facing.
3. **Consideration of One's Estate:** Humiliation leads a person to seriously consider their spiritual condition. Before this, they may have thought themselves righteous or in a good state, having a false sense of worth. However, this work reveals their true poverty, nakedness, and worthlessness. It's akin to the prodigal son coming to his senses, realising he had nothing.

This initial work of humiliation is primarily achieved through the Law and its curses. The Law serves as the standard of righteousness, with all specific rules deriving from it. The Law's threats are like lightning, revealing sin, while its curses are like thunderbolts,

striking fear of God's judgment into the heart. The Law acts as an indictment and the sentence of a judge combined. Both aspects contribute to the humbling of a person. The Law commands what must be done but provides no strength to achieve it. This reveals human sinfulness and incapacity for any good. The curse, akin to the taskmasters of Egypt, punishes those who fail to meet the Law's demands. Together, these elements bring about legal humiliation. By the Law, it's not just the Ten Commandments spoken at Horeb that are meant, but also their explanations found throughout the Scriptures. The Law encompasses the righteousness required by the entire Bible.

Furthermore, the help of the Holy Spirit is needed alongside the Law to bring about humility. The Spirit is referred to as the "spirit of bondage" because it enlightens a person to see their bondage to sin and Satan, and their submission to God's wrath. The Spirit doesn't make a person bondage; rather, it reveals this bondage. Moreover, it leads a person to believe in it. Faith is necessary for both humbling and comforting. Often, we disregard the threats and don't believe them. For example, a person who swears doesn't truly believe in the threatening, "The Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain." When the Spirit illuminates a person to see their sins and helps them believe the threats against those sins, then true humility is achieved.

Yet, even though these threats are presented through the Word and made effective by the Spirit, it is often some affliction that breathes life into them. We can observe this in the cases of Manasseh and Saint Paul. Saint Paul, for instance, was first struck off his horse to the ground, while the jailor believed all his prisoners had escaped, making him believe his own life was at risk, leading him to contemplate suicide. These afflictions may be real or imagined,

stemming from a perception of judgment, shame, poverty, or misery. God employs such afflictions to give vitality to the threats, which in turn infuse life into the Law. Consequently, the Law is brought home to the conscience, and sin is exposed. When people are conscious of their miseries, they often turn to the Law of God to seek its cause. When the Law confronts their conscience, sin comes to life. Saint Paul wrote that sin became apparent as sin when he was humbled, whereas previously, it was like colours in the dark. This experience of sin coming alive leads to a recognition of one's spiritual death due to sin. This comprises the two aspects of the initial form of humiliation, setting the stage for the second form.

So, this is what it means to be humbled. Now, we move on to the second aspect: what it means to humble oneself. This begins where the previous aspect ends. At this stage, a person seeks a remedy, much like those who cried out, "What shall we do to be saved?" as seen in the second aspect of those examples. Those who are part of God's election go even further. They experience a different kind of evangelical humiliation, which is a product of sanctification. When God intends to save someone, He sends the Spirit of adoption into their heart—the Spirit of grace, as referred to by Zechariah. This Spirit gives them a secret hope that they will be received with mercy if they return. This is the beginning of faith to some degree, accompanied by the thought that they should return to God, change their ways, surrender to Him, and serve Him. This can be seen in the examples mentioned earlier, particularly the prodigal son in Luke 15, who, driven by hope, reaches the resolution to return to his father. In Manasseh's case, he humbled himself greatly, driven by hope of mercy. A person doesn't reach this form of active self-humiliation unless there is hope of mercy. The start of faith is associated with a hope of mercy, motivating a person to approach God and confess their sins, acknowledging their unworthiness.

Now, four pairs of ingredients contribute to this second type of humiliation, encouraging us to humble ourselves.

- 1. Hope of Mercy and Sense of Misery:** Both are essential. While a sense of misery brings a person to self-awareness, hope of mercy, when combined with it, compels them to turn to God actively. Without hope of mercy, a sense of misery only brings one to self-awareness, while hope of mercy drives a person toward the active self-humiliation we are discussing.
- 2. Sense of Emptiness and Perception of God's All-Sufficiency:** This can also be seen in the prodigal son's experience. He sensed that he would starve and perish if he stayed where he was, but he believed there was an abundance of bread in his father's house. He looked to the all-sufficient fullness of God to meet his needs. As long as individuals find something within themselves, they stand on their own strength without experiencing humility. However, when they recognize their emptiness and perceive God's all-sufficiency, they begin to seek a new foundation. When they see that the only solid ground is in God alone, they turn to Him. People will not abandon their own foundation until they see another one to stand on.
- 3. There must be a sense of a man's own sinfulness** and the righteousness of the Lord Jesus, and so a light comes in that reveals both. Thus, when Saint Paul was humbled, there was a light that shone about him, which was an outward symbol of the new light that shone within him, revealing Christ and his own sinfulness.

A sense of the love of God and Christ, combined with a sense of a man's unkindness toward God, whereby we view sins as injuries done to God and an unkindness shown therein.

Now, let's explore the difference between these two works or aspects of humiliation so that we can better understand what it means to humble ourselves.

Firstly, they differ in the matter they concern. In the first form, a man is properly humbled but for the punishment. A man is indeed humbled for sin, yet primarily because it relates to punishment; it is guilt that affects him. He is not humbled for sin as it is contrary to God and His holiness but as it is contrary to himself and his own well-being. We are not truly humbled until we come to love God and have a light that reveals the holiness and purity of His nature, which is worked in one who is genuinely humbled.

They differ in their underlying principles and origins.

The first arises from self-love and is merely a work of nature, though to some extent, a work of God to arouse self-love through a sense of misery and to awaken it. However, any irrational creature would be sensitive to danger when in peril. So, when a person begins to sense the threat of hell and death in their conscience, it's no wonder they become apprehensive and wounded. The other form of humiliation arises from the love of God kindled in the heart through hope of grace and mercy.

They differ in the instrumental causes that bring them about. The first is wrought by the spirit of bondage, through enlightenment solely to recognize one's bondage, with the soul fearing God as a master. There is no deeper understanding than seeing God as a Judge. On the other hand, the latter is brought about by the spirit of adoption, making the Gospel effective and revealing God as a father.

They differ in their outcomes:

The first drives a man away from God, but the latter leads a man to seek God and Christ. It cultivates an affection for Christ, similar to the love the Church in the Canticles had for Him. This soul, thus humbled, will not cease seeking Him, even when faced with numerous obstacles. Just as a stone has no rest until it reaches its own center, this humbled soul finds no rest but in God. Therefore, it persists in seeking Him, even in the face of multiple denials.

The first type of sorrow breeds death, a sense of acedia, deadness, and listlessness. It makes a man like a log, unmoved in prayer towards God. It worked this way in Nabal and Achitophel, leading to discouragement that often ends in spiritual death. Worldly sorrow (which includes all sorrow where God is not the ultimate end) results in death. However, when sorrow is genuine, true, and directed towards sin, it fulfills its purpose by quickening a person to do what they ought to do. Similarly, fear, when right, works to produce the desired effect, as do all other affections placed in the soul to stir it towards what is right, for God's sake and one's own good. Therefore, genuine sorrow for sin quickens a person to seek God when it is righteous.

The first type of sorrow breeds fierceness and turbulence in a person's spirit. This is evident in individuals whose consciences are awakened to their sins, causing them to become more agitated than before. Guilt vexes their spirits, and where there is no sense of mercy from God, there is none towards others. In contrast, someone who is broken by their sin directs their anger towards themselves, primarily fretting over their own unworthiness and vileness. The peace of God, which their heart senses, makes their spirit gentle, peaceable, and receptive to persuasion. They become amenable to Scripture, and even a child could lead and persuade them. The rough aspects of their character are smoothed, just as the rough and froward

dispositions of the heart and every mountain-like affection are brought down. This transformation occurs through the ministry that humbles and prepares hearts for Christ, as exemplified by Saint John's ministry.

These two forms of sorrow differ in their duration. The former is a mere passion and arises from the flesh, sharing the same fleeting nature as the roots from which it springs. Despite entering the heart like a violent torrent and surging beyond its banks, it is akin to a temporary flood. In contrast, the latter is like a constant river with a spring, staying within its bounds and not overflowing as much as the former, yet flowing steadily and increasing in size the further it goes.

Now, let's discuss some properties of the humiliation to which the promise is given in this text, further distinguishing it:

Let's examine the fruits of this humiliation found in the text. Firstly, it leads a person to pray, and secondly, to seek God's face and turn from their evil ways. These are its consistent consequences:

1. **Prayer:** Judas experienced a form of humiliation, but he had no inclination or ability to pray; the spirit of prayer was absent. In contrast, genuine humiliation enables a person to pour out their soul to God. Prayer is not the work of memory and intellect but the proper function of a broken heart.
2. **Seeking God's Face:** This true humiliation severs a person from their own root and foundation, compelling them to seek the Lord alone. This seeking is often expressed in prayer. In contrast, the other form may lead a person to seek mercy but not God's face. True humiliation seeks God as set apart from all else. Even if such a soul were assured of being spared from hell, it would not suffice unless they beheld God's face.

That which Absalom imitated (as he knew it to be a genuine expression of a loving and humble child toward a father) when he sought to see his father's face, even if it meant his own death, is the mark of a truly humbled soul towards God. On the contrary, as God says in Hosea, others seek mercy but do not turn to Him; they do not seek Him.

True humiliation leads a person to turn away from their evil ways, while the other merely causes them to abandon those ways temporarily while they are sick of them. They often return to their sins, like a dog returning to its vomit, as seen in 2 Chronicles 33:23. It is said that Amon did not humble himself as Manasseh, his father, had done. A true humbling experience implies that when a person is humbled as they should be, they no longer transgress as they once did. Manasseh humbled himself so profoundly that he transgressed no more. It makes a person stronger against the sin they have transgressed, like a bone that becomes stronger when properly set after a break. True humiliation particularly leads a person to humble themselves for and turn away from their beloved sin, and consequently from all others.

Another characteristic is that it makes a person cling firmly to Christ, drawing near to Him in all the duties of obedience, obeying Him consistently, comprehensively, and wholeheartedly. Some people may experience light wounds to their hearts that do not drive them to the Physician. Such awakenings may stir them briefly, but they fall asleep again. However, when God humbles a person to the extent of salvation, He fixes the apprehension of their misery so securely that they are brought to Christ. God sends the avenger of blood to pursue them relentlessly, not for a mile or two, but until they reach the City of Refuge. True humiliation achieves this effect and consequence, while the other form lacks it due to an inherent deficiency.

To distinguish between the two and identify the deficiency in the other form, consider how true humiliation accomplishes this in someone who is not entirely cut off but still clings, hanging by a thread, with some hidden veins and strings that keep the old man alive, preventing Christ from entering their heart. Christ does not enter until a person is entirely detached from themselves, realizing they cannot find happiness within themselves or within their own abilities. They understand that everything can be found in and through the Lord Jesus. Until then, they will not leave themselves or fully cleave to the Lord Jesus Christ.

The other form of humiliation is deficient in this regard because it does not detach a person enough from themselves. The foundation is not lowered sufficiently, lacking the necessary depth of soil. It provides enough earth to produce a green blade of profession and a foundation for a superficial structure. However, it does not reach the depth required to support a substantial building that can withstand all challenges. True humiliation carries two essential components:

1. A person sees no foundation within themselves.
2. They see a foundation outside of themselves to stand upon. They cast themselves upon it, embrace Christ entirely, and wholly adhere to Him. Consequently, they draw all their sap and life from Him, just as a branch draws from the root. This results in the resolution and ability to cleave to the Lord and please Him in all things.

As the resolve to do so, all his ability to follow through with it; for when joined to CHRIST, the spirit of grace (referred to as the virtue of CHRIST'S death because it works a virtue similar to His death) enters the heart. However, when the heart is not yet broken in this manner, many form intentions and good desires but are unable to

maintain them because they relied on their own strength. Whereas if the heart were broken free from itself and grafted into CHRIST, such intentions made in His strength would flourish and thrive. For if the soil is prepared and suitable plants are planted, they will undoubtedly thrive. In a good heart, these desires planted there flourish and do not wither or fall from their foundation. Therefore, those who have embarked on a good path for a year or a month but do not continue on it, lack proper humbling. He who is truly humbled does not regress; Manasseh did not, nor did Saint Paul. When he asked, "Lord, what wilt thou have me do?" he meant it, and he was as good as his word. Therefore, recognise, those of you who fall away, what the deficiency has been and in what manner. It will help set you right and lead to your recovery.

Another property of Humiliation is to have all affections moderate, with diminished delight in worldly things and heightened focus on grace and sin. True affection consumes false affection. A humbled person values spiritual things highly while considering all other things insignificant. If you ask them what they desire above all else, they will tell you: Christ, God's favour, the graces of the Spirit, the mortification of their lusts, and the pardon of their sins. In comparison, they care little about the things of this life, whether they are poor or rich, bound or free (although they may use a better condition if given the choice), much like a person condemned to die. They pay little regard to their possessions or worldly concerns, as their thoughts are occupied with greater matters. Give them pardon and take everything else. A person truly humbled regards God's favour so highly that they consider all else light in comparison. When people exhibit excessive affection towards worldly things, displaying strong desires, delights, and pursuits for them, it is a sign that they lack humility.

Another property is to love God and Christ deeply. Mary loved much because much was forgiven her. Not simply because much was forgiven her, but because she had a sense of it, apprehended it as much, and recognised her great sin through an act of humiliation. Thus, she regarded it as significant to be pardoned. Likewise, when a person has apprehended death, hell, and God's wrath as rightfully belonging to them, and God suddenly says, "You shall live," when they expected nothing but death, it causes them to love God deeply and value Christ. This is what made Saint Paul love Christ so much, being overwhelmed by Christ's love for him despite being a persecutor and blasphemer, with Christ forgiving him a great debt.

A truly humbled person will be content with any condition, similar to the Prodigal Son who said, "I am content to be as a hired servant, unworthy to be called a son anymore." He was content to serve, live, and occupy the lowest position in the family. Saint Paul also considered himself the least of all the saints, believing he could never humble himself enough. This contentment pertains to two aspects:

Firstly, contentment in the absence of outward blessings, being content with the simplest services and the lowest wages, and lacking wealth, reputation, and talents. Jacob, who was truly humbled, said, "I am less than the least of thy mercies," despite having many blessings. In contrast, another person who is not humbled and thinks highly of themselves considers themselves too great for their blessings, believing the disproportion favours them. Jacob, despite having many mercies, believed that even the smallest mercy outweighed him and was greater than he.

It is exercised in bearing crosses. One who is truly humbled still blesses God, as Job did, and accepts the punishment for their iniquity willingly and cheerfully. We see this as a condition in

Leviticus 26:41: "If their uncircumcised heart be humbled, and they bear or accept the punishment of their iniquity, if the Lord lays upon them a severe affliction (such as the plague, disreputation, poverty), they bear it willingly and cheerfully. When a person genuinely believes, as stated in Ezekiel 36, that they deserve to be destroyed, anything less than destruction from God is a cause for blessing God and rejoicing that they have escaped it.

The humble person is, therefore, content and cheerful in all conditions, always blessing God. If they have good things, they consider them more than they deserve. If they experience evil, even if it is severe, they regard it as less than destruction and what they deserve. In contrast, an unbroken heart is always restless and believes it is not treated fairly, murmuring in secret.

Now, I should proceed to apply this doctrine. However, before I do so, I must address a common question and concern that troubles many hearts.

The question at hand is whether true and genuine humility requires a solemn humiliation and a specific degree of sorrow and intense legal contrition to precede it.

There are two types of sorrow that can arise in the hearts of individuals. One is a violent and tumultuous sorrow that stems from the fear of hell and punishment. This kind of sorrow is rooted in self-love and is often experienced by those who are suddenly enlightened and overwhelmed by their sins, such as Saint Paul when he was struck on the road to Damascus. In such cases, the severity of the sin becomes apparent instantly, and it can lead to a deep sense of guilt. However, it is worth noting that not all who experience this intense sorrow go on to attain true humility, as seen in the example of Judas.

God may use this type of sorrow to bring individuals to a point of humility, as He did with Saint Paul.

On the other hand, some individuals experience a deep and abiding attachment to God, a commitment to a holy life, and a constant desire to please Him in all things without undergoing this intense and troubling sorrow. Many who have felt their hearts deeply wounded, alarmed, and frightened, forming significant resolutions that ultimately come to nothing, were motivated by intense passion. In these cases, the root withered, and so did the fruit. However, a genuine understanding and conviction of sin, which represents the greatest misery in itself and draws the heart closer to Christ, can lead to humility. Therefore, it is not always necessary to undergo such intense sorrow, or to remain in a state of manifest wrath for an extended period, although there must always be a proper understanding of sin that leads to humility. This is evident for the following reasons:

1. The greatest sorrow is not always the most violent. Although it may appear so, the most profound sorrow is not always the kind that leads to tears. Similarly, the greatest joy is not always the most openly expressed in laughter. The intensity of emotion does not necessarily equate to the depth of sorrow. There exists a solemn, silent, and quiet sorrow that penetrates deeper, wets more gradually, and seeps into the heart, making it more fruitful in the end. This sorrow arises from a more spiritual understanding of judgment and the evil of sin, and though it may be accompanied by less passion, it evokes a stronger and more profound sense of sorrow. It is called deeper because it is more enduring, purposeful, and constant, akin to a spring rather than a flash flood.

Consider the case that such intense sorrow should be greater, yet it is not always equally necessary, neither on God's part nor on man's.

Not on man's part; just as some diseases do not require as sharp and swift a remedy as others, and some individuals have tougher flesh to heal than others. Likewise, some hearts are more stubborn due to their sinful ways, making them worse than their original state, while others remain as they were at birth. Therefore, the same work can be accomplished in them with less effort.

On God's part, it is not always so necessary, but it is tailored to God's purposes, which vary in relation to different individuals.

He intends to bestow a greater measure of grace upon one person than upon another. When He plans to construct a larger building, He digs a deeper foundation. Some individuals are used as means to comfort others, and therefore, God allows them to see and feel the bitterness of sin more deeply so that they can later comfort others with the same comfort they have received.

God varies the means He uses to achieve His purposes. Even if He intends to bring individuals to the same level of grace, He does not always use the same approach. Sometimes, He accomplishes this without affliction, while at other times, He employs affliction. Just as different routes can lead a person to the same destination, some may reach the desired haven calmly, while others are driven by a storm. Regardless of how they arrive, the promise is made to those who reach it.

Another consideration is that the lack of intense sorrow in some individuals does not necessarily result from a deficiency in the depth of their humility. Instead, it may be due to certain circumstances within the process itself. For instance,

Firstly, the light of comfort may enter some hearts sooner than others. They receive healing immediately after the wound is inflicted. God, having broken the heart, binds it up promptly. Some individuals may experience a deep wound, but a mitigating remedy reaches the core of the ailment swiftly and facilitates quicker healing. In contrast, another person's wound may not receive the remedy until much later, requiring a longer healing process. This occurs because the light of comfort arrives sooner for some than for others. When there is a sudden and tangible transformation in one's circumstances (human nature being sensitive to significant changes), an excessive and turbulent sense of joy is often experienced. For example, imagine a person who has been condemned to death for high treason, brought to the executioner's block, and genuinely expects to die, but then receives a pardon at the last moment. The dramatic shift in their circumstances produces an overwhelming sense of joy. Now, consider another individual who has committed the same offence, knows that they will lose their life if they do not receive a pardon, but is granted a pardon immediately after their sentence is passed. They will equally value their pardon, although their emotional response may not be as turbulent as the first person's.

This variation occurs due to the differing levels of knowledge individuals had before their experience of humility. Some individuals lived in ignorance and were suddenly enlightened to understand their spiritual condition. In contrast, others were brought up in knowledge and had their awareness of their spiritual misery gradually deepened. This gradual awakening leads to differences in emotional responses. It can be likened to two people passing through a forest, where one is unexpectedly ambushed by thieves, while the other is warned in advance of the danger. The second person, forewarned and aware of the peril, values the deliverance just as

much as the first, even if their emotional reactions of fear or joy are less intense. Nonetheless, they genuinely rejoice in their deliverance and feel just as indebted to the one who rescued them.

I have spoken these things because some are scrupulous about this point and believe they cannot safely claim the Promise because they have not experienced the same level of sorrow as others.

However, let no one allow their assurance to be weakened due to this, for a person can hold Christ in high esteem and have a deep conviction of sin even if they have not undergone the intense work that God performs in some individuals. This work involves a profound sense of God's wrath, leaving them in distress before speaking peace to their souls. These are distinct acts and are caused by different factors, often occurring far apart from each other. Therefore, their sorrow is evident, and their subsequent joy is also evident. In others, God works differently so that as soon as they see their sin, they also see God pardoning it.

Even in those who initially experience this intense emotional awakening during their first experience of Humiliation, much of that intensity will diminish over time, leaving only what is substantial. In the end, they also come to a solid conviction of judgment that is constant and enduring. Therefore, do not let your assurance waver because you have not had the same intense experience. Faith unites you to Christ and establishes you in righteousness.

But you may ask, "Is it not good to have a keen and palpable sense and sight of sin?"

I answer, yes, for this purpose God leads you through trials and allows you to fall into sin. This helps you see the vanity of the created world and the sinfulness of your own nature. When you eventually

reach heaven, you can testify from your own experience that it was not your own righteousness that brought you there. So, while it is good to have this sense of sin, let God work in His own way and manner, whether through Legal terror or otherwise. He knows what is best for you to humble you. Use means to understand the Law, your own heart, and your actions. As you fall into new sins, strive to realize the dire state you would be in if Christ had not delivered you. However, do not let your assurance be weakened, for you must understand that there are only two main purposes of humiliation. If these are achieved in you, you need not doubt your salvation.

Firstly, it makes you willing to unite with Christ. We, as Christ's spokespersons, invite you every Sabbath, but we find that the world is like those who consider themselves beautiful and wealthy, believing they have plenty of suitors. They are content to have Christ as their heavenly husband, but not on earth with all the crosses that come with Him.

Humiliation makes individuals willing to marry Christ when they see and say, "I do not possess what I imagined, no riches, etc. Instead, I am in debt, facing arrest and imprisonment, and my life may be forfeit unless Christ marries me." When a person realizes they will be protected from all arrests by Christ, they become willing to unite with Him, even if many trials follow in this life after the marriage. Therefore, if you find that you can sincerely say, "I am willing to accept Christ and submit to Him in all things, to follow Him in all circumstances, and to give my full consent to take Him, just as I see that He, in the Word, has given His full consent to take me," then you are truly humbled. Otherwise, you are not. If you had taken Christ impulsively and not through sound judgment, you would have regretted it by now.

The second purpose of humility is for sanctification, just as the first aided in justification. It is meant to break and mortify every unruly desire within you, making you fear to transgress and making you obedient to the Lord in all things. An unbroken person quarrels with everything, deeming the work too burdensome and the rewards too meager. They question why they should go against the ways of the world. In contrast, a humbled person does all this cheerfully, like a tamed horse that turns at every tug of the reins, while an unbroken one might throw its rider.

Do you find that you tremble at the word of God, fear to commit sin, and dare not engage in it? Are you similarly cautious about neglecting your duties? If this has been your experience throughout your life, then surely the work of humility has taken place in your heart. Even if you cannot see the fire, if you feel the heat, it has been there. These are the effects of humility. While I say this to comfort those who have not experienced intense sorrow, let me also say to those who may have had fits of sorrow: if you find an unwillingness to submit to Christ, if your neck is stiff against the Lord's yoke, and you cannot live without satisfying certain lusts, even if you can sin and justify it, then let your past sorrows, no matter how great, be considered insufficient. Let individuals examine themselves by their effects, for people can be deceived on both sides.

Now, let's move to its use for exhortation, directed at two types of individuals: those who are already truly humbled and those who are strangers to it.

First, to those who are already humbled and have received assurance of the forgiveness of their sins: you must continue in humility, for if the Lord's promise is suspended at this point, then the duty of sanctification must be performed daily. When God demands a duty

of sanctification (and His promises are only made to such), no one can make an excuse. There might be a hindrance in preparatory humility, as one might be overwhelmed with excessive sorrow, but not in the sanctification duty. Understand that all degrees of grace stem from varying degrees of true humility. Let me explain: faith and love are the major foundational virtues, with all others being branches that sprout from them. As these virtues grow, there is an addition made to them, just as there is an addition to our humility.

First, consider faith, which is essentially the act of seizing Christ. The stronger a person grasps Christ and values Him, the more they recognize their own sinfulness and empty themselves. Even if someone genuinely accepted Christ at their initial conversion, there are degrees to valuing Him. After the marriage, so to speak, they may discover more reasons to love each other more deeply. Similarly, toward Christ, the will and affections can be elevated to a higher level, achieved through a greater degree of humility. Faith is essentially seizing Christ, and an empty hand takes a firmer hold. The more we are detached from our own self-sufficiency, the more closely we cling to Christ. Think of a person in a river on the verge of drowning, who has a rope thrown to them. They will grab onto it as tightly as possible without needing to be told. Therefore, Christians are continually taught by the Spirit to see the vanity of the created world and the wickedness of their own nature, leading them through the wilderness to humble them, so that Christ may hold a higher place in their hearts.

Furthermore, the greater the thirst, the deeper the drink. By adding to your humility, your thirst for Christ increases, and you will draw deeper from the fountain of life and receive more nourishment from Him.

Secondly, it increases your love because it makes you realise how much you owe to God, having had a greater debt forgiven. What caused Mary to love much was her awareness that much had been forgiven. Therefore, strive to be more and more humbled, especially when you fall into new sins. The Lord often allows this to happen to bring about greater humility. The more light a Christian gains to recognize their own wretchedness and the emptiness of worldly pursuits, the stronger they will grow in grace and be more firmly established in doing good.

Now, for those who are strangers to this grace of Humiliation, so that they may become humbled, observe these two rules. Firstly, labour to see the greatness of sin. Secondly, see your own weakness and inability to help yourselves.

For the first, do not judge the weight of sin by common opinion. Do not deal with your souls as some do with their bodies when their beauty fades. They try to hide it from themselves using distorted mirrors and from others through cosmetics. Similarly, many try to hide their sins by putting a gloss on them or offering feigned excuses. However, be impartial in self-examination and strive to see sin in its full vileness. To achieve this:

Firstly, focus on a significant sin and contemplate it. Just as Christ humbled Paul by reminding him of his persecution, and Peter humbled the Jews by recalling their crucifixion of Christ, so you can select a major sin for consideration. This is the method that God employs when He wants to humble us, and it is wise for us to do the same. I do not suggest that you neglect other sins when singling one out, but rather consider all your transgressions, no matter how small. The multitude of sins will help to humble you as much as the magnitude of a single sin. When a person realizes they have many

small debts, like sixpences and shillings, the total sum can amount to a significant quantity, making them see themselves as bankrupt. Therefore, set your sins in order before you and give each sin its due weight, with a special focus on the major sins. Some sins are inherently greater, such as fornication, swearing, and drunkenness, while others become significant due to circumstances, such as committing them with knowledge and deliberation, as in Saul's sparing of the Amalekites and his sacrifice before Samuel arrived, contrary to a clear command. So, do not assess sins solely by their number but also by their gravity, especially when committed against many promises and resolutions, resulting in a hardened heart.

Secondly, strive to make sins present in your mind, even if they were committed long ago. Look at them as if they had just occurred. Although our sins may be great, if we perceive them from a distance, they do not move us. This is why people are not greatly affected by the thought of death when they are healthy, even though it is considered one of the greatest evils and is perceived as such when they are on the brink of death. The reason is that death is considered distant and does not disturb people. Similarly, sins committed long ago are often viewed as insignificant because they are distant in our perception. There is no close connection and application of the object (sin) and the feeling (regret). They are not brought near, and people tend to regard sins from the distant past as inconsequential, even though, in reality, they are just as grave in themselves and in God's eyes as when they were first committed. Therefore, they should be the same to you. Just as a person who committed treason twenty years ago can be executed for it now, Joseph's brothers remembered their sin as if it had just occurred, making it present in their consciences. However, we often consider past sins as if they were not truly ours. Job said that the Lord made him possess the sins of his youth, signifying that he took ownership of them, looking at them as

his own. Why is it that people in peril, such as during a storm at sea or in times of sickness, find their sins so terrible and fearsome? It's because they perceive them as present. What God accomplishes through affliction, we should strive to achieve through meditation, looking at our sins as if they were present. Turn the lens of your perception that brings them near to you. Strive to have a true understanding of their enormity and that they are the same, for true humility lies in having a righteous judgment that esteems them as the greatest evil, even if it is not accompanied by violent and turbulent sorrow.

When you have made your sins thus present, do not rush to finish the process. Allow sorrow to remain in your hearts because this work is not quickly completed. You may encounter obstacles unless you are persistently pursued and followed by the apprehension of your sins until you reach the City of Refuge. Do as David did in Psalm 51; he set his sin before him. Follow the example of Saint Paul, who always remembered his sin of persecution and frequently spoke of it. In this situation, learn from the Devil's tactics. When he seeks to engulf a person in sorrow, he keeps their sins continually before them, never letting them rest. Therefore, in 2 Corinthians 12, these troubles are called the buffetings of Satan because he repeatedly delivers blows to discourage and dismay a person. Now, learn from his practice to dwell on meditations of your sins and frequently present them to your souls. Your green wood may not burn without much blowing. Frequent and intense arguments stir the emotions. So, keep the object (your sins) near the faculty (your soul), and eventually, it will have an effect. Do not view your sins sporadically, and do not let worldly joys or pleasures interrupt this process. Follow the counsel of Saint James in James 4: "Be afflicted, and mourn and weep." Let your laughter be turned into mourning, and your joy into heaviness. Humble yourselves. If you want your hearts to be

humbled, abstain from lawful pleasures for a time and find solitude. In Joel 2, the prophet instructs them to set apart a day without interruption. If that doesn't work, sanctify another day. Do not let one spark go out before another is ignited, or else you will be continually starting but never arrive at true humility.

To truly lay your sins to heart and be affected by them, make sure you are not deterred by false reasoning and excuses that prevent humility and keep your sins from weighing on you. For instance, when considering your sins, you might think, "But I am in a good spiritual state already, and my sins are forgiven because I have good intentions and mean no harm to anyone." These thoughts can prevent you from seeing yourself as a child of wrath. However, consider that you may possess all these good qualities and more, yet still be a child of wrath. These qualities may reflect the work of the Holy Spirit within you but not necessarily ensure your salvation. They may not overcome the evil that still resides in you. Even with all these good qualities, you may continue to engage in Sabbath profanation, drunkenness, and other sins. If these good qualities do not overcome every sin, they are insufficient for your salvation. They would have driven out the darkness if they were effective. Therefore, all your good qualities and good moments may even contribute to your condemnation because you did not cultivate the truth in your heart. Allowing such talents to remain unused makes you an unprofitable servant.

Another factor that should be added to your recognition of your sins to humble you is an awareness of the misery and emptiness within yourself. We observe that people may admit they are great sinners, but they resist humbling themselves. This resistance arises from a lack of awareness of their own misery and emptiness. Even though we preach to them about their misery repeatedly, they remain

unmoved. However, when death approaches, they are humbled. Why is this? Because at that moment, they see what God is and what they are. Death reveals the vanity of the creature. To be humbled, you must understand how incapable you are of finding happiness within yourself. To achieve this, consider:

Firstly, reflect on the greatness of God and His power, as well as the terrors of the Almighty. Recognize that God holds your life, ways, and everything in His hands. Realize that unless you take your sins seriously, this God is your adversary, and you have to deal with Him forever.

Consider what a weak creature you are. Think to yourself that sickness may strike your body, adversity may befall your estate, and even the apprehension of your soul could consume you. Above all, realize that you have an immortal soul in a fragile vessel of clay. Ponder what will become of your soul when that vessel is shattered. This contemplation should bring you to the prodigal's state of mind. Belshazzar saw this truth when he witnessed the writing on the wall. Shouldn't he have recognized it sooner? You may be well now, but you cannot predict the changes that may occur in the future. You would be better off leaving a thousand tasks undone than neglecting this.

Thirdly, all of the above will not suffice unless the Spirit of God descends upon you. Humbling a person is a mighty task. Even if Elijah were to preach to you, or if all the sons of thunder were to come, they would not be able to humble you without the Spirit's influence. Even God Himself descended from heaven on Mount Sinai with tremendous terrors, but the people remained unbroken, though they were momentarily astonished. When Christ spoke to Saint Paul and struck him off his horse, Saint Paul would not have been

humbled if he had not had an inner revelation in addition to the external one. Similarly, the jailer would not have been humbled if there had not been an earthquake in his heart as well as in the earth. Jeroboam witnessed a great miracle, yet it did not lead him to give up his sin. The common factor in these cases is that while there was a miracle in each, the Spirit was not present. Even if we were to perform miracles for you every day, unless God sends His Spirit of conviction, you will not be humbled. This underscores the necessity of the Spirit's assistance in admonitions. Amaziah received admonition from a prophet, but he was not humbled, just as David was admonished by Nathan, but he was. We observe that some are humbled by afflictions, while others are not. Therefore, pray for God to send His Spirit to convict you, and do not be offended when your consciences are troubled by our preaching of the Law. It is the Spirit that troubles you; otherwise, our words would not trouble you. Do not be angry with us, and do not delay the duty of humbling your hearts, for you are not capable of humbling yourself. Seize the opportunities when the Spirit stirs your heart.

However, you might say that this discourages you from the work, as you must wait for the tide and the wind like mariners. It might seem better to sit still, for you may go about it in vain since the Lord must do it.

I reply that if you were to begin this work and shut yourself in private for a day, and then another day, eventually, God would send His Spirit. When Christ told the disciples to go and row, even though they had been rowing all night without success, Christ eventually came, and they arrived on the other side. You may engage in this effort for a month or two before you sense the Spirit's arrival, but He will come in the end, and then the work will be thoroughly done. God has made a promise of the Holy Spirit, who will baptize with the Holy

Ghost as with fire, not only to His disciples but also to those who have never received it. This promise is not only for the increase of grace but also to initiate grace. If God has given you a heart to pray and consider this promise, and if you have resolved to wait and engage in this work, then the Spirit is already in your heart, and the work has begun, even if you do not realize it. Do not argue that you cannot do it without the Spirit. I ask you this question: Have you ever committed a sin and said that you did it against your will? Have you ever had a thought about doing a duty and claimed you could not do it? Your heart will tell you that you have not.

Therefore, engage in this duty, which is of utmost importance. We have emphasized this because it is like a nail driven into a wall on which other virtues hang. This and faith are the primary concerns of master builders and the foundation that you must prioritize. Our exhortations should remain within you like firmly planted forked arrows, not fleeting like other arrows that only wound.

We have finished discussing the negative aspect, which is that those who do not humble themselves have no claim to the promises. Now we turn to the affirmative part, which offers comfort: if anyone humbles themselves, God will hear their prayers, forgive their sins, and more.

Doct. 5. The Lord is merciful to the humble.

The doctrine is this: The Lord will be merciful to the humble.

I had intended to leave earlier, but the Lord's Supper is approaching, a time of reconciliation, much like the Feast on the tenth day of the seventh month when the people gathered, and Aaron the Priest confessed their sins over the scapegoat, which symbolized Christ taking away our sins. This is also represented when we partake in the

Sacrament. One condition required of the people during that time was humility, and anyone who did not humble themselves would be cut off (Leviticus 23:27-30). The release of the scapegoat happened simultaneously (Leviticus 16:20-31).

To get to the point, Scripture provides ample evidence of God's favour towards the humble. James 4:6 states that God grants grace to the humble, both sanctifying grace and saving knowledge. Psalm 25 tells us that He reveals His secrets to the humble, and Isaiah 57:15 tells us that He dwells with them and has a special regard for them. He promises to fill them with good things, bestowing honour and preferment upon the humble and meek. He pays such close attention that even when wicked men humble themselves, they do not go away without some mercy. For example, when Ahab humbled himself in 2 Chronicles 12, God promised not to bring disaster during his days. Conversely, God withdrew His favour from even His most faithful servants when they failed to humble themselves, as in the case of David. No force in the world can keep an humble person down, nor can all the supports in the world keep a proud person elevated.

Why does God esteem humble men so highly?

An humble person attributes all glory to God, and God says, "Those who honour me I will honour." Just as Joab did not take credit for victory but sent for David (2 Samuel 11), and the apostles acknowledged in Acts 3 that "Jesus has made this man whole," humility is the wise approach in all actions. An humble person does not seek self-exaltation but says, "It doesn't matter how I am regarded; what matters is that God is glorified." God will honour such individuals. In His prayer, Christ used this as a basis for God's glorification (John 17), saying, "I have glorified you on earth; now, Father, glorify me." God will deal similarly with His saints.

Humility keeps a person within their proper boundaries, whereas pride elevates a person beyond their measure, causing disorder and destruction. Therefore, humility has been defined by some of the ancients as that which, by acknowledging God and one's self, keeps a person grounded. While pride causes a person to exceed their measure, like a swollen member in the body taking up more space than it should, humility realigns everything, giving the Creator His due and placing the creature where it belongs. This is why God loves humility.

Humility makes a person sociable, useful, and beneficial to others. Just as one would not want a stubborn horse that refuses to work in a team, or tall trees that overshadow others and prevent them from growing, or unproductive livestock, a proud person is undesirable. Only humble individuals live profitably among their neighbours and do not overstep their boundaries.

An humble person possesses a heart that the LORD delights in. Such a person is fearful of offending, always obedient, ready to serve, content with any reward, full of love, abounding in thankfulness, and clings to the LORD because they have no self-sufficiency. They subdue their lusts because they know the bitterness of sin, surrender their hearts to follow the LORD in all things, and become the objects of the LORD's desire. It is said of Daniel, when he humbled himself, in Daniel 9, that he became such a person as the LORD desired. This humility makes one suitable for God's favour, and when a person is fitting for favour, they are certain to receive it because God is generous.

Has the LORD declared it from heaven that if a person humbles themselves, He will forgive them? This is a matter of great comfort. Consider it as news from heaven. To compare this spiritual truth

with something more tangible, imagine that you committed high treason against the King, and as a result, you forfeited your life and possessions. If someone came from the King to inform you that if you went to him and humbled yourself, your pardon would be granted, what comfort would that bring? Our situation is similar; we are guilty of eternal death and have forfeited everything. Therefore, when God Himself says, "If you humble yourself, your sins shall be forgiven," what a source of comfort this is! Such a word should not be taken lightly. A person who knows the bitterness of sin would eagerly await and treasure such a word from the LORD's mouth. Obtaining such a word from God is no small matter. Only a favourite could receive it, and not even God's Son could obtain it without His death. If Christ had not secured this Charter for us, everyone would have perished in their sins. Now we can confidently declare, based on God's promise through Christ, that even though your sins are great and you have committed them under the worst circumstances, if you humble yourself, you will be forgiven. You can challenge God with this promise, and He cannot deny it. This is a significant matter, and one would think that the Gospel, which offers reconciliation with the Almighty Governor of the World, should be considered good news.

However, you may still say, "I do not yet know precisely what it means to humble myself, and I do not know how to do it. It is an exceedingly difficult thing." Therefore, I will explain it to you once more so that you may understand it. Why should we not thoroughly examine and adapt it for your benefit and understanding in such an important matter? This way, you will not consider it more difficult than it is, as the Devil uses this misconception to deter many.

You can understand what it means to humble yourself from the expressions of those who have done so. For instance, when David humbled himself after numbering the people, he said, "Lord, I have

sinned and done exceedingly foolishly." Josiah's heart melted before the Lord, as stated in 2 Kings. In Daniel 9, Daniel said, "Lord, we have done very wickedly, and shame belongs to us," expressing his shame. Job, when he humbled himself, said, "Lord, I abhor myself in dust and ashes." The prodigal son, when he humbled himself, said, "I have sinned against heaven and against you and am no longer worthy to be called your son." They are described as "weary and heavy-laden." There are many other expressions, but I will summarise them under two categories. To humble oneself is simply to bring one's heart and mind to these two actions.

Humbling oneself is an expression of a sense of unworthiness before the Lord. It involves saying to the Lord, "Oh Lord, I have committed exceedingly wicked acts and deserve to be destroyed. I have gone astray and acted very foolishly. Your ways are righteous, and You are just. I have been ungrateful and unfair to You, even though You have been so good to me." This is what melted Josiah's heart and caused Job to abhor himself, considering himself as lowly as the dust he walks on or as worthless as ashes. This first act involves acknowledging one's own unworthiness and vileness. The second act is about recognizing one's worthiness to be destroyed, one's inability to help oneself, and the vanity of all other things. A person must also acknowledge, "I am not only unworthy but also deserving of death. My sins are overwhelming, and I am unable to bear their weight. When I consider all the supports in my life, such as health and riches, I see that they are in vain, like reeds and feathers, and like hollow ground where I cannot find solid footing. Therefore, Lord, be my rock on whom I can build and anchor myself." It is necessary to have this awareness of our own incapacity, as seen in 1 Timothy 6:17, "Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not high-minded, nor trust in uncertain riches." Trusting in riches is often linked with pride, and when a person trusts in them, their heart is set

on them, leading them to neglect the Lord. This is why afflictions humble people, as they make individuals see the emptiness of all things, causing them to cry out like the prodigal son, "I am starving, and these things cannot sustain me." This compels them to hold fast to the Lord, especially when they have nothing else to hold onto. When you are moved to genuinely express these sentiments, that is what it means to humble yourself.

From this, we should learn to strengthen our faith. If you have humbled yourself, confessed your sins, and resolved to forsake them, you will receive mercy, as promised in Proverbs 28:13, "He that confesseth and forsaketh shall have mercy."

However, those who have humbled themselves often bring two objections that hinder their comfort. First, they may claim they cannot mourn for their sins, and second, they may say they fall into the same sins repeatedly, which makes them doubt if they have truly humbled themselves. To address the first objection, if you are convinced in your judgment of your sin, misery, and inability to help yourself, to the extent that it has turned the course of your will, leading you to say, "I will humble myself before my Father, change my ways, confess, and forsake my sins," even if your emotions do not seem stirred, this is enough to bring you into a state of grace. Mourning and weeping are required to awaken a person and draw them close to God in the manner described. When you exhibit these effects, you have achieved the purpose of mourning, and that is sufficient to save you.

Although your emotions may not be greatly stirred, consider that the promises are made to those who come to Christ and believe in Him, not to the stirring of emotions. In these words, the promise is made to humbling oneself based on a solid judgment. It does not matter

how you come to take hold of Christ; the important thing is that you come to Him. It is like reaching your destination whether by land or water, on horseback or on foot; the method matters less than reaching the goal.

If you find that you are doing the things that a humble person should do, even if your emotions do not seem to be stirred, it is a sign that your affections have indeed been moved and changed. For what are affections but various positions and inclinations of the will, like the feet it walks upon? They are the different motions and inclinations by which the will directs itself towards its objects. Now, look at the direction in which your will is resolved, and that is where your affections are also set. If you see someone waking up early and going to bed late to avoid poverty and gain riches, a wise person would conclude that their aim and heart are set on wealth, as their actions demonstrate, even if they claim not to feel such fervour. Therefore, if you find your affections seemingly still, but you are doing the same things that those who mourn and weep do, you can be certain that your affections are indeed moved.

Furthermore, it is not a hindrance if your affections are not sensibly stirred, and yet your humility is genuine. This is because affections naturally flow towards their objects silently, like water and wind. They run smoothly when there are no obstacles, but when they encounter obstacles, like trees, the wind rises, or when the tide meets the wind, waves are stirred. Similarly, if your affections are crossed, you will definitely feel them. If you had not some hopeful assurance of your condition, you would likely experience mourning and sadness. However, it may be that the work of grace in you has always progressed steadily, with the stream running calmly and quietly. Yet, in some sudden circumstances or close encounters when the Lord

makes an impression on you, you may then feel the stirring of your affections.

To conclude, know and resolve that the fluctuation of your affections is not what your salvation depends on. Rather, it is the solid conviction of your judgment that turns your will and makes you cleave fast to Christ.

Regarding your objection that you fall into the same sins repeatedly, I answer that you may indeed fall into those sins again and again, even grave ones for which you have been genuinely humbled. We should not speak against what the Scriptures do not, but with this caveat: you should engage in a constant battle against those sins, akin to Israel's battle against the Amalekites, never yielding to them. You should view your sins as your greatest enemy, never to be reconciled with, even if you fall into them repeatedly. True humility considers sin the greatest misery. If a man values anything more highly, such as wealth, they would rather fall into sin than lose their wealth. This misplaced valuation is what leads to deceit in the heart. Humility, however, makes a person regard sin as the ultimate evil, something they would rather endure anything than make peace with. The ordinary power of grace in a person's life is not seen in preventing all relapses entirely, but in setting the heart against sin, causing a constant conflict. If you find that your heart is always at odds with sin, maintaining a disposition to fight against it, then your assurance can remain strong. It is a mistake to weaken your assurance due to daily failings and weaknesses, and Satan often seeks to exploit this. If your assurance and hope waver, your walk becomes uneven, like a ship without an anchor or rudder. You might sometimes feel hardness, carelessness, stubbornness, or anger in your heart when you should be meek and humble. However, if the constant disposition of your mind is to fight against sin and never be

reconciled to it, like a lamb to a wolf, you should not weaken your assurance. Instead, renew your humility and strengthen your assurance. Hold it firm, for it draws you closer to communion with God and further from sin. It establishes you in good deeds and makes you abound in the work of the Lord.

Learn from this that it's not sufficient for a person to merely endure afflictions with patience; they must also humble themselves under them. We shouldn't just bear the cross but willingly and cheerfully acknowledge God's justice in it, along with our own sin. To be humbled goes beyond mere patience. In 2 Chronicles 12:6, when the people were left in the hand of Shishak, they humbled themselves by acknowledging God's righteousness, which is more than patience. God expects this in all afflictions. As 1 Peter 5:6 says, "Humble yourselves (and not just be patient) under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time." Many might claim patience in affliction, but they must humble themselves further by confessing their sinfulness and their deserving of more punishment. They should marvel not at God's judgment but at His forbearance, that things aren't even worse. This is true humility. Naomi demonstrated this in Ruth 1:20-21, acknowledging her affliction and God's hand in it and vowing to adjust her attitude accordingly. David did likewise when fleeing from Absalom in 2 Samuel 15:26, saying, "Let the Lord do with me what seems good in his eyes." Eli also exhibited humility in 1 Samuel 3:18, declaring, "In all this, the Lord is good," implying that God's judgment is just and deserved.

If the Lord promises to be merciful to the humble, then we should humble ourselves even more and lower our hearts further. Tremendous and generous promises are made to the humble, and just as the Lord links His promises to humility, they will be fulfilled when we perform this act. The degree to which these promises are

fulfilled depends on our level of humility. So, we should strive to be increasingly humble. When we humble ourselves, the Lord fills our hearts with good things. An humble person cannot be held down by all the world, for the Lord lifts them up. Conversely, a proud person cannot be lifted up, as the Lord works to lower and humble them. When a wall swells, it is unlikely to stand for long. When a joint is dislocated and swollen, it cannot be set right until the swelling subsides. God respects the lowly estate of His servants, as Mary the Virgin said in Luke 1:48. The Lord deals similarly with others, like Naomi, whom He humbled before raising her up, or Job, whom He doubled the blessings after humbling. God's consistent pattern is to humble individuals before bestowing blessings upon them. Consider Joseph's humility before God fulfilled the promise that even his family would bow to him. Jacob, too, had to be humbled before God appeared to him when he was fleeing from his brother. When a person is humbled, it paves the way for promotion in one way or another. Therefore, it's wise to continually humble ourselves, given the significant benefits that result from it, as stated in Proverbs 22:4: "By humility and the fear of the Lord are riches, and honours, and life." This rule holds firm, and the Lord fulfils it. When a person is humble and fears God by avoiding sin, the Lord will bring blessings in due time.

You may argue that proud individuals are often elevated while humble ones are suppressed, that the proud have riches while the humble are poor. You might even use the saying that "where the hedge is lowest, there all the beasts go over" to suggest that people trample on the humble.

First, I'll answer by saying that the Lord gives outward, ostentatious things to proud individuals, but He bestows His jewels upon the humble. He reveals His secrets to them. Humble people are like

princes who walk on foot, while the proud are like servants riding on horseback.

But that's not the entirety of my response. Secondly, I would like to point out that the Lord does indeed exalt the humble and bring down the proud, even in matters of this life. However, it's crucial to note that this happens in due time, when things reach maturity. As the Apostle Saint Peter says in 1 Peter 5:6, "Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time." God doesn't act suddenly. When the proud, like ripe corn, are ready, He then puts in the sickle, cuts them down, and throws them into the fire. A swollen wall must have time to crumble and fall. Conversely, there is also a specific time for the exaltation of the humble. So, if you say, "I have humbled myself, but I haven't been healed, and I haven't been freed from a certain temptation despite my humility," then be assured that you haven't humbled yourself enough. Lower your heart further, and then you can confidently expect that this principle will hold true: the Lord will remove the painful plaster as soon as it has removed the proud flesh. As soon as your heart is genuinely humbled, the Lord will assist you. He will either remove the cross or provide something equivalent. This is the consistent pattern of the Lord's dealings. He did the same with Joseph. Although you may think it took a long time for him to be exalted, as he might have thought, that time was not too long. As soon as the Lord had truly humbled him, He promptly exalted him. You can see this in Psalm 105:18-19, where it says, "Whose feet they hurt with fetters: he was laid in iron, until the time that his word came; the word of the Lord tried him: then the King sent, and loosed him, &c." The same pattern held true for Job. During the time his friends were arguing with him, his heart remained unyielding. God Himself had to come and reason with him. Only then did he abhor himself "in dust and ashes." How soon after was he restored, with everything he lost doubled? This has

always been God's consistent course. So, if you humble yourself but remain in a prolonged state of calamity, be certain that something is lacking in your heart, and accept God's dealings with contentment. As in 2 Corinthians 12, Saint Paul was given a thorn in the flesh "lest he should be exalted." If even Saint Paul required humility, who among us does not? Remember this principle: if God's people humble themselves, He will certainly help them, but it will be in due time.

You may wonder how to humble your stubborn hearts. Pride is deeply ingrained and one of the most challenging traits to overcome.

Each person should consider whether they are still plagued by the stubbornness of their hearts. If you find that some calamity continually hangs over you, this indicates that you have not been humbled enough. Note that this doesn't mean you should be brought to an apprehension and fear of hell, but rather, your heart should be lowered further. You may have been genuinely humbled enough to be within the covenant, but not enough for your heart to be in the desired state God intends. To lower your heart further, employ these means.

Firstly, frequently examine your hearts and explore the hidden lusts within. Make it a daily habit to delve into this matter. Each day in life reveals something within our hearts that can serve as a source of further humility. As it was in the wilderness, described in Deuteronomy 8:2, where it says, "Thou shalt remember all the way which the Lord thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness, to humble thee, to prove thee, and to know what was in thy heart," not a single day passes without a godly-wise person discerning something in their heart that can be a source of humility, something they hadn't noticed before—perhaps vainglorious words,

unwarranted silence, cowardice in just causes, worldliness, unruly affections, and more. These will continue to stir, and you will find external actions that reflect these internal matters. When you notice such sparks ascending, remember to look inward at the fire—the furnace within you. These are just the buds; there is a deep root of bitterness within. These are merely ebullitions; there is a spring within. Search every corner of your heart for this sour leaven. So, the first step is to study yourself, for the path to self-humility begins with self-awareness.

Secondly, along with studying yourselves, you must also study the Scriptures. Consider the strictness, holiness, and all that is required therein. Compare these standards with your own ways, applying this level and square to your life. This examination will reveal the crookedness in your conduct. Every morning, use the Scriptures as your mirror, for it will show even the smallest blemishes. This practice will greatly humble us. Keep in mind that there is a sure rule: degrees of humility follow degrees of illumination. As a Christian becomes more enlightened, they become more humble. Therefore, those who are most engrossed in Scripture tend to be the most humbled.

Thirdly, not only should you seek to increase your understanding, but you should also examine your hearts and actions. Strive to remain upright, consistent in a holy course, and diligent in your holy duties. This commitment will serve to increase your humility. Many refrain from holy courses and duties, claiming they are not humble enough. While it is true that humility should be the starting point, you must understand that engaging in a holy course is, in itself, a remarkable means to increase humility. Your vigilance will nurture tenderness, and tenderness will enhance your humility. Those who

are bold in sinning often have hardened hearts. Conversely, those who fear to offend tend to have tender hearts.

Moreover, add diligence in your daily work, for as the wise man says, "The sluggard is wiser in his own conceit than ten men that can give a reason." A sluggard who has nothing to do tends to meddle in other people's affairs instead of minding his own ways and examining his heart. Diligence is a powerful means to humble yourself because idleness tends to lift you up.

Furthermore, it is beneficial to remember past times and sins. You might say, "I hope I am changed now, and I care not about what I have been." However, to humble David, the Lord reminded him of what he had been—taken from the sheepfold, etc. Similarly, with the Jews, the Lord said, "Thy father was an Amorite, and thy mother an Hittite, and I saw thee in thy blood."

Wisely differentiate between the grace within you and yourself as you are. This will help humble you. As Paul said in 2 Corinthians 12:11, "Not I, but the grace of God in me." Suppose God has adorned you with many graces and gifts beyond others. In that case, you must not exalt yourself above them. View yourself as the same person you were naturally. Can a wall claim credit for the beams the Sun casts upon it? The wall remains unchanged. So, if God has shone upon you while leaving others in darkness, are you better of your own accord? Should a pen boast because it has written a beautiful letter? Who created it? Who filled it with ink and guided it? The glory belongs not to the pen but to the writer. Even if God has used you in significant work when others were not chosen, the praise is His, not yours. We do not praise the trumpet but the one who plays it. "Non laudamus tubam, sed tubicinem." Paul may have been a more magnificent trumpet than ten thousand others, but he still said, "I am nothing."

Just as smoke, a dusky and obscure vapor, rises towards the light as if it were superior to pure air, many exalt themselves above their brethren for gifts and outward things that are mere trappings, not distinguishing the true differences between individuals. You are still the same person. We should not be proud, not even of our graces, let alone outward possessions.

Lastly, if the Lord is merciful to the humble, be cautious not to claim those promises for yourself without justification when you are not truly humbled.

But you might say, "I am humbled."

That's good if it's true. However, consider this: Has your humility brought you home? Maybe it has brought you out of Egypt, but has it brought you into Canaan? Has it led you to the City of refuge, to the horns of the Altar, to your father's house? The Prodigal Son changed many places before he truly came home. Many came out of Egypt but never entered Canaan; they died in the Wilderness. Meteors may have enough material in their vapors to carry them above the earth, but not enough to unite them with the element of fire. Therefore, they fall and return to their original state. Are you watchful over all your ways, fearful of offending, considering every step you take, how you hear, pray, work, speak, and spend your time? For this is certain: if a person is truly humbled, it will dry up the fountain of sin, heal their spiritual maladies, and make them cautious in all their ways, fearing to sin. This concludes the discussion of the first condition.

Doct. 6. All performances nothing without seeking God's face.

Now, let's proceed to the next condition: "If my people seek my face." From this, we can observe a vital point:

Without seeking God's face, all efforts in humility, prayers, and other actions are in vain.

This condition is placed among others, so without seeking God's face, the promise does not apply to us. To clarify this point, we must first understand what it means to seek God's face.

Seeking God's face is seeking the LORD Himself, as in the Scriptures, "his face" often signifies His person. For example, in the first Commandment (Exodus 20:2), "Thou shalt have no other gods before my face" means "before me." Therefore, seeking God's face means seeking the LORD Himself. Many, in times of distress, seek the Lord for deliverance; during famine, they seek Him for food and sustenance. But they seek the Lord for what He can do for them, not for His person, His presence, or reconciliation with Him. They seek to the LORD but not the LORD Himself. This is illustrated in Hosea 7:14: "You have not cried to me, says God, when you howled upon your beds. You assemble yourselves for corn and wine and rebel against me."

At that time, they desired Corn and Wine, etc., and sought them from GOD, but not me, the LORD whom they had forsaken. You may seek salvation and deliverance from hell through the strength of natural wisdom, recognizing it as being for your own good. Also, being convinced of the necessity of faith and repentance to escape hell and attain salvation, you may go far in the performance of many duties and be consistent in them for a while. However, in all these actions, you may not seek the Lord's face. In such cases, the Lord does not take notice. Consider a thief arraigned at the bar; he may earnestly cry for his life, but he does not seek the face of the Judge, meaning he does it without love for the Judge, solely out of a love for life. Similarly, one can do much to avoid hell and gain the opposite, which

is life, without seeking the presence of God, and in such cases, GOD does not regard it. You can find this disposition in yourselves and observe it in others. If someone is very attentive to you and performs numerous acts of friendship, but you can say that they don't love you for all of this, that they don't value you, and that their desire for your love and favour is not for your own sake but for their own ends, then you won't care much for what they do. Likewise, the LORD knows the heart and the intentions behind your actions, whether it's communion with His person directly or merely your own well-being. If it's the latter, He does not regard your humility or prayers. The promise, as you can see, is conditional on seeking His face, and this condition distinguishes between the precious and the vile. It is a mark set upon God's people alone. To seek God's face...

We should, therefore, further and more specifically consider what it means to seek God's face or presence. There are three ways to understand it.

Firstly, by examining what is joined with it here: "If they humble themselves and seek my face." By considering the connection between these two, we can understand what it means to seek God's face. There are two types of humility found in people:

The first is prompted by the bitterness and punishment that sin brings with it. However, this kind of humility does not lead to faithful prayers or seeking God's face.

However, there is another kind of humiliation, which includes an additional element: the recognition of the vileness of sin. It occurs when God opens a crevice of light to allow us to see sin not only as something that brings bitterness but as something inherently filthy and abominable. By this light, sin becomes detestable in God's eyes. It's one thing to flee from the sting of a serpent and another to hate

the serpent itself. Likewise, it's different to avoid a wolf because of its cruelty and to hate the wolf itself. Other creatures might dislike the properties of a wolf, but a lamb hates the wolf itself. With this deeper kind of humility comes enlightenment, wherein God reveals His glorious face to us. The radiance of His face helps us see the foulness of sin more clearly. God, through the same Spirit's light that shows us the ugliness of sin, also unveils His own excellencies. This encourages the humbled sinner to seek God's face and grace, in addition to His mercy. However, others either do not see God's face at all or only perceive His angry countenance. Only those whom the Lord calls effectually see His gracious face. He reveals Himself to the truly humble; His secrets are shared with them. The secrets of the Lord belong to such people.

Indeed, servants can see what happens in the house, but there are many things their masters do not reveal to them. Similarly, many come to God's house, hear about GOD and CHRIST, and see as much as God's children do from the outside. However, some secrets are hidden from them and revealed only to the children, the sons and daughters of God. These secrets are called the secrets of the Lord because they are disclosed only to the Saints. Servants may observe what transpires in the house, but there are hidden secrets that are revealed only to the children—God's face and its excellencies are among these. This revelation, like His other secrets, is the work of the Spirit. Just as torches and stars cannot help us see the Sun unless it shines and imparts its light, so all the angels in heaven and the wisdom of humans on earth cannot reveal God's face. Unless God opens the clouds and reveals Himself through His Spirit, it cannot be done. This is why it is called the Spirit of Revelation. Through it, God unveils His secrets to His children when He effectually calls them. They see Him and no one else. We may proclaim doctrines about GOD and CHRIST to all alike, but it is the Lord who distinguishes

between those to whom He reveals Himself and those to whom He does not. What is said, especially of the Jews in 2 Corinthians 3:15-16, applies to all of us. The Lord's face shines as Moses' face did. He imparts knowledge of His glory through the face of Jesus Christ in the ministry of the word every day. However, a veil lies upon everyone's hearts until the Lord calls them, as it did upon the hearts of the Jews. Nevertheless, when they turn to the Lord, the veil is taken away. Until then, God's face cannot be seen, just as Moses' face was hidden. So, who can remove that veil? It is the Spirit of the Lord. Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. When He removes the veil, we behold the Glory of the Lord with an open face. That is, we see the loveliness of His face and the joy of communion with Him. When this light breaks through the clouds, and the Lord grants a glimpse of Himself, we see Him and never cease to seek His face more and more until we find Him. On the other hand, those who do not seek God's face or see it only as angry will flee from the Lord in distress or at the approach of death. They tremble in His presence and have no desire for it. Just as Adam fled from God's presence, so would all do if God's face were not revealed. Therefore, the Spirit of revelation removes the veil and dispels the clouds so that His elect can glimpse His face. The Spirit of adoption, sent into their hearts, reveals God as merciful, full of kindness and love. They see not only His face but His face shining with gracious willingness to receive them. He presents Himself as a loving father ready to welcome them, forgive them, and embrace them. They see God's face, both its excellence and beauty, as well as His love and graciousness toward them. This drives them to seek His presence and reconciliation with Him, and they can find no rest without it. Like Moses, they say, "Lord, we will not move forward without Your presence" (Exodus 34:18). Just as a true suitor desires nothing but the love and presence of the one being pursued, they desire nothing else and can

be content with nothing else except the presence of God and communion with Him, the light of His countenance.

The second aspect of seeking God's face involves seeking the Lord alone, isolated from concerns about punishments and rewards, in His own essence, attributes, holiness, and purity. It means seeking God Himself rather than the things He provides, desiring Him and what is within Him.

However, you may find it challenging to set aside considerations of rewards and punishments. It is an error to believe that you cannot make use of rewards and punishments in your pursuit of God, for several reasons:

Firstly, punishments and the Lord's warnings are appropriate objects of fear. It is lawful to exercise faculties and habits of fear regarding their proper objects. Similarly, rewards are subjects of desire and can be sought after and desired.

Secondly, the Lord Himself uses these motivators—judgments on one side and rewards on the other—in Scripture. Therefore, we are justified in employing them to stir our own hearts, as God has presented them for this very purpose.

To clarify this, I will provide two conclusions regarding the use of rewards and threats:

Conclusion 1: The presentation of and regard for rewards and punishments serve as a good starting point to encourage us to seek the Lord's face. They serve as a valuable introduction. A person who has not yet beheld God's face may begin by contemplating the consequences of hell, leading them to reflect on their own heart and ways and recognize their inherent evil. Similarly, the promise of

heavenly happiness may motivate them to seek God. However, at this stage, they are only at the beginning. Just as a prospective spouse might first consider the financial benefits and honours they would gain through marriage, these initial considerations are good preparations to draw them into a relationship. Yet, as they get to know the person, they may come to value the individual themselves and be content with them even if they had nothing to offer. In the end, they freely consent to the relationship out of genuine love and affection. Similarly, in the pursuit of God, individuals may initially focus on their own misery and the inadequacy of all other remedies, driving them to seek the mighty God as their deliverer from affliction. They recognise that turning to Him will bring them heaven as well. Yet, at this stage, they do not yet consider God's person. Nevertheless, these initial considerations pave the way for God and us to meet and engage with each other. They open our hearts to allow God to approach us, and we become attentive to Him, look upon Him, converse with Him, and admit Him as a suitor. We become acquainted with Him, and as we converse with Him, God reveals Himself. Once we come to know Him in His true essence through the special light mentioned earlier, we love Him for Himself. At that point, we are willing to seek His presence and seek Him as our spiritual spouse, regardless of any other benefits. The match is only made at this stage, and we gaze upon Him in such a way that even if all other advantages were stripped away, we would still love Him and not leave Him for the whole world. If God were to give us all the treasures of the world but withdraw His face, we could not be at peace. Previously, a person might have been content knowing they wouldn't go to hell and having worldly comforts, but now it is different. If God's countenance is clouded or a rift forms between a person and God, they cannot rest until it is reconciled, and they see His face again.

After the marital union is established, punishments and rewards continue to have a second purpose. They are not only useful for bringing us into the relationship but also for confirming our choice. They serve as both an introduction and a support once we have entered into the relationship, strengthening our love for the Lord and solidifying our choice. It's similar to when a married woman thinks about her husband and says, "I live in a well-furnished house, and I have many conveniences. I not only have my husband's companionship, but many additional benefits." Likewise, while the Lord alone is a sufficient reward, such that we would never reconsider our choice even if we had nothing else, the additional blessings we receive with Him enhance our love for Him and reinforce our decision. These blessings are valuable supplements but not the foundational principles. They encourage us when added and motivate us to seek the Lord for Himself, as the primary focus. They are like ciphers added to figures, making the number greater, but if they stand alone, they are insignificant. Although they are not good leaders, they are good followers. They are like a favourable wind that fills the sails and propels the ship forward with greater speed once the rudder is set correctly to steer toward God alone.

The third aspect of seeking God's face involves seeking the Lord's presence in contrast to oneself. A person does this by denying themselves, not pursuing their own interests when seeking the Lord, but wholly surrendering themselves to the Lord. An unregenerate person does not know the Lord in all things and will not prioritise the Lord over themselves. In contrast, a regenerate person who knows the Lord considers all things such as life, liberty, riches, and more as worthless compared to enjoying the Lord. They have set up the Lord as their God in their heart and have no desire to rely on their own resources. Therefore, when the Lord competes with their

own interests, reputation, and so on, they are willing to deny themselves.

However, a common objection arises: How is it possible for a person not to seek their own happiness, safety, and advantage?

This question troubles many and leads them to doubt the sincerity of their faith, even causing doubts in the minds of the devout. I will clarify this issue for the sake of those with upright hearts and to refute those whose hearts are insincere.

The answer revolves around two points:

First, it is true that a person can seek and love themselves, desiring their own happiness. Moreover, all their actions may originate from this desire. They may be motivated to seek the Lord and do what they do with regard to their own good and safety. This is evident for several reasons:

God has commanded it. He instructs us to love our neighbour as ourselves, implying that we must first love ourselves. Therefore, loving oneself involves seeking one's own good.

God commands us not to kill ourselves or harm ourselves, which implies that we must seek our own preservation and well-being. This command not only prohibits self-destruction but also commands self-preservation and the pursuit of our own safety.

It is impossible for a creature not to desire its own happiness; the Lord does not command that which is simply impossible, even for pure nature. It is the nature of everything with an appetite to seek what is good for itself.

Self-love is a creation of God, and therefore not to be uprooted. God instilled it in all of us because it is the nature of all things to do so. "The work of nature is the work of the Author of nature."

Many motives used in Scripture are based on self-love, such as the warning from Christ, "Fear Him who can destroy both body and soul in hell," and the promise of a heavenly kingdom. Scripture addresses people by appealing to this principle and by using arguments derived from self-interest. This is the ear that the Holy Spirit grasps, guiding individuals towards peace. We must not disregard this aspect of ourselves.

The second part of the answer is that, nevertheless, we can and should seek the Lord in opposition to ourselves. This means that when God and our own interests are in conflict, and obeying God would harm us, we must choose God and His commandments over our own interests.

You may wonder how these two ideas can coexist: that a person should make their own good the motivation for their actions, and yet, in their actions, oppose themselves.

Once a person is convinced that even self-destruction is the best way to provide for oneself, and that surrendering oneself, along with one's reputation and life, to God is the path to a better condition, you can see that both concepts align. We only exhort a person to seek God in opposition to themselves when it is in their best interest to do so – not to give themselves up to anything that would immediately harm them. But when doing otherwise would be worse for them, and yielding themselves to God is the way to happiness, then we may encourage them to do so. At such times, a person may be persuaded that their good is more encompassed by God than by themselves. Just as we say an accident's existence depends more on the subject

than on itself, so it is with a creature that has no foundation in itself. Its separation from God is its destruction, while remaining close to God, even in circumstances that seem ruinous, is its happiness and perfection.

For example, when Abraham was about to offer his son, he believed that he and Isaac would not lose but gain by it. He thought, "God has commanded me to do this, and I've never lost by obeying His commandments. God can raise Isaac up again. I've never been a loser by Him, and I'll surely be a loser, and so will my son, if I don't do it." It's indeed impossible for a person to act in this way if they would simply be losers, but when they consider that even though they may be destroyed momentarily, they believe it will ultimately be for their good, and it will indeed be so. Consider a beam of sunlight – to preserve it, it cannot exist on its own; its existence depends on the sun. Remove the sun, and it perishes forever. But if it becomes obscured and cut off for a while, as long as the sun remains, when it shines again, the beam will be renewed. The same principle applies to the creature compared to God. If you want to preserve the creature in itself, it's impossible for it to stand – like a glass without a bottom, it must fall and break. When a person thoroughly considers this, they will readily seek God's face, even at the cost of neglecting themselves.

It's not strange that the best way to make oneself happy is to surrender oneself completely to glorify God. In common experience, consider a grain of corn that has fallen into the ground. If it remains intact, it perishes, but if it dies, it brings forth a hundredfold (1 Cor. 15:36). "That which thou sowest," says the Apostle, "is not quickened except it die." The Apostle speaks of the resurrection, but we can also apply it to the spiritual resurrection of a sinner here. Unless a person is willing to let go of everything they have, expose themselves to whatever the Lord places upon them, and even be destroyed in the

process, they will indeed perish. However, if they die to themselves, they will be quickened and gain an abundance, even in this life. When this concept is fully understood by a person, they will be willing to deny themselves and seek the Lord when they must choose between God's commandment and their own interests. To sum it up, having God alone and seeking His face in this manner is your happiness.

The end of everything is its perfection, and God is the end of the creature. Therefore, attaining God is attaining your perfection and happiness. We receive everything from Him, just as a branch receives everything from its root. Just as the branch can only preserve life by staying closely connected to the root and dies when separated, so we, as long as we cling to and seek the Lord, are preserved. This was the foundation of all the Saints' actions during times of persecution and death. It was the case with Moses and Paul when they expressed a willingness to be cut off from the book of life or to be accursed from Christ, knowing that if it was for God's glory and the good of His Church, it was the best outcome for themselves in the end.

The difference between a carnal person and one to whom God has revealed Himself lies in how they pursue their own happiness. They both love themselves and seek their well-being, but their methods differ. A godly person is so convinced of God's worth that they seek Him, unconcerned about what they may lose to attain Him. In contrast, a carnal person, when told about an invisible God, refuses to trust in the unseen. They rely on what they can see and seek happiness within their own reach. When faced with a choice between themselves and the Lord, they let the Lord go.

However, another question arises: how can these two aspects coexist? How can one seek self-preservation while being willing to

face destruction, as exemplified by Moses and Saint Paul?

The answer lies in understanding that in every regenerated person, there are two aspects of self. Common human nature, shared by all, contains two tendencies: one led by the Spirit towards God, the other by the flesh towards immediate self-interest. These two tendencies create two distinct "selves" within the same person. Scripture acknowledges these two selves. The flesh, representing corruption, is referred to as a person's self, as seen in 2 Corinthians 4:5 and 2 Corinthians 12:2,5. The regenerate part, led by the Spirit, is also called a person's self, as shown in Romans 7. This part is considered more "self" by a godly person than the corrupt self. While the corrupt self is like an unwelcome tenant within, the regenerate self is viewed as the true self.

Now, it becomes clear how self-preservation can coexist with a willingness to face destruction, and how one can seek the Lord in opposition to oneself. A person is bound not to seek what the flesh desires, that is, not to seek the corrupt self. However, they can seek the good of their regenerate self and seek the Lord as well, as the desires of their regenerate self align with God's will. Seeking God's face alone means pursuing His revelation, sequestering Him from considerations of punishment and reward, and seeking Him exclusively, even in opposition to the corrupt self.

To summarize, seeking God's face encompasses three aspects:

1. Having His face revealed and seeing Him as a Father.
2. Seeking Him as distinct from considerations of punishment and reward.
3. Seeking Him alone, even in opposition to one's own desires.

The importance of all these aspects will be clarified with one reason, followed by practical uses.

The reason for seeking God's face is rooted in the holiness of the Lord, as described in Isaiah 6:3. In this passage, one angel cried to another, proclaiming, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of Hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory." This proclamation by the angels coincided with Isaiah the Prophet being sent to deliver a message of judgment to the people, specifically the rejection of the Jews. At the same time, the angels proclaimed God's holiness. Holiness involves setting something apart for the Lord's use and separating it from common use. God's holiness is seen as an appropriation of His actions for His own purposes and glory. He is considered holy when He acts for Himself because if He did not respect Himself, He would not be holy.

Romans 11:33-36 further highlights this concept, where the Apostle speaks of God's unsearchable judgments and unknowable ways. Everything is of Him, through Him, and to Him, and all glory belongs to Him. In essence, God does what He does because He is for Himself, having no cause outside Himself. Therefore, He acts for Himself. This understanding of God's holiness leads to the conclusion that human holiness involves doing all things for God. Since humans have a cause beyond themselves (God), their holiness is expressed when they seek an end greater than themselves, which is the Lord. When, in their recreation, use of wealth, and daily lives, individuals aim for God rather than themselves, they are considered holy.

Holiness is defined by two aspects: purity and dedication to God. Purity reflects God's pure nature, while dedication to God means setting everything apart for Him. Human holiness differs from God's

because humans have a cause beyond themselves, so they must do everything for another end – the Lord. Holiness involves dedicating oneself to the Lord, and it extends to all aspects of life. Just as some actions are inherently holy, like prayer and keeping the Lord's day, others can become holy when performed with the right purpose. For example, even common actions such as recreation, eating, and drinking can become holy when done for the Lord. Moral actions are defined more by their circumstances and end than their substance alone. Therefore, all actions can be made holy when performed with the Lord as the focus. This understanding aligns with Saint Peter's instruction to "be holy in all manner of conversation" (1 Peter 1), which encompasses all aspects of life, including common actions.

In summary, there are two forms of holiness required in every man.

There are two aspects of giving oneself up to the Lord that define a person's holiness. First, it involves offering oneself as a sacrifice to the Lord, akin to what is described in 2 Corinthians 8:5, where individuals "gave themselves up to the Lord." This act of sacrifice signifies consecration to the Lord's use.

The second aspect of holiness is surrendering everything alongside oneself – including one's understanding, will, thoughts, affections, life, liberty, reputation, possessions, and all personal abilities and resources – and dedicating them all to the Lord. By doing so, a person sanctifies the Lord. In essence, the holiness of an individual is exemplified by doing all things solely for the Lord. Therefore, any act, whether it be observing the Sabbath or praying, is rendered meaningless if this holiness is absent from the heart. It is universally agreed that without holiness, no one can see God. However, true holiness is only achieved when it is devoted exclusively to the Lord, excluding both the individual and all created things.

Hence, if all our efforts are in vain unless we seek God's face, it becomes imperative to self-examine whether we are genuinely seeking the Lord for Himself. In the absence of this genuine pursuit of God for Himself, our efforts are futile because we do not place God as the supreme object of our hearts; instead, we pursue something else alongside Him. This can be likened to a marriage where a person marries not out of love for their spouse's character but for their wealth. In such a case, the individual is marrying not the person but their riches.

Furthermore, a failure to seek the Lord for Himself leads to an inability to persevere in seeking Him. If we do not persist in our pursuit, all our labour will be in vain. As seen in Ezekiel 18, a person's previous righteousness will be forgotten if they turn away from God. Similarly, in Hosea 7:16, those who turn to the Lord but not for Himself are like deceitful bows, easily swaying and falling aside. When their goals are achieved, they stop seeking the Lord, revealing that they were not seeking Him but only what they could obtain through Him.

Moreover, if we do not seek the Lord for Himself, we do not truly love Him, which renders all our labour fruitless. God's promises are made to those who love Him. As stated in the Song of Solomon 1, individuals who appear to be doing much for the Lord but do not love Him are likened to harlots rather than true lovers of God. In contrast, those who genuinely love Him find His name as sweet as ointment and love Him for His personal beauty and the sweetness of His love.

In conclusion, holiness entails dedicating oneself exclusively to the Lord, offering all aspects of one's being and possessions solely for His glory. Without this genuine devotion to God, all our efforts,

whether in worship, obedience, or any other endeavour, are in vain, for they do not truly honour God or lead to a deep and abiding relationship with Him.

Once this point is thoroughly understood, it will serve as a message from the King of Kings to all those who are part of the Bridegroom's inner circle. It will pose a fundamental question to each one: Do you truly love Him? Are you genuine virgins or mere harlots? It will compel everyone to reflect on the purpose behind all their actions: Have I truly known the Lord and been in communion with Him? Have I sought God's face in everything I have undertaken?

People may be quick to claim that they do seek the Lord's face. Therefore, I will provide some guidelines to help distinguish and enable individuals to determine whether they are genuinely seeking the Lord.

Firstly, consider the opinion you hold of yourself. Every person who experiences regeneration undergoes a transformation in their self-perception. As Saint Paul noted in Romans 7, "It is no longer I, but sin." Prior to regeneration, sin constituted their entire self. But after regeneration, a new Lord takes residence in the house of their being—the regenerate part. What was once entirely themselves now appears as an intruder, an inmate who should not be there. If you consider the regenerate part as your true self, then you have indeed sought the Lord's presence. The strength of this self lies in its union with the Lord and its pursuit of Him. If you regard the flesh within you as yourself, it is impossible to seek God correctly because God and the flesh are incompatible. A regenerate person thinks, "Let me have God, and whatever I lose—whether it be life or liberty—my true self remains secure." They primarily consider whether a situation leads to the preservation of their true self or not. They are content

and desire the outward person to fare well too. Just as one with clothes on wishes to keep them intact, they would prefer the outward person to be safe. However, even if these outward aspects suffer, they care little, as long as their true self is secure. To them, it is akin to the tearing of clothes. In contrast, an individual who has not experienced regeneration remains as they were at birth, with no new entity dwelling within them. They think, "Certainly, I must not destroy myself. I would maintain a good conscience but not to the extent of self-destruction." It is impossible for a person to allow what they consider themselves to be destroyed. When dishonour, imprisonment, and other trials come, they view these as wounds inflicted upon themselves. In defending and preserving themselves, they let go of God.

The distinction between these two attitudes arises from the different opinions individuals hold about what constitutes themselves.

But how can you determine your own self-perception?

Consider what you desire to excel in. All beings naturally desire to excel in what is intrinsic to their nature. Every creature seeks to build itself up. Therefore, if your desire is to excel in matters pertaining to the outward person, such as knowledge, reputation, wealth, and external comforts, then your focus is on the outward person and flesh as your true self. However, if you seek an inner excellence, caring not for worldly acclaim but striving for the praise of God, the comfort of a clear conscience, and the assurance of salvation, then it is a sign that you regard the inner person as your true self.

Consider where you store your treasure: Do you store it in the regenerate part, consistently working to enrich that aspect of yourself and depositing something into that chest every day? Then you consider that your true self. As the saying goes, "Where your

treasure is, there your heart will be also." When a person is so affected that, even though they face troubles and declines in their worldly possessions and health, as long as they find their regenerate part safe, thriving, and in good standing with God, they are content. It's akin to a person whose house has been broken into; they rush to their chest, where their most valuable possessions lie, and if those are safe, they believe all is well. But if you store your treasure in the outward person, amassing worldly possessions to the point where you would consider yourself ruined without them, then you make that outward self your true self. This was the case with individuals like Haman, Nabal, Achitophel, and all carnal people. Their hearts inevitably sink when external circumstances deteriorate, or they fear the loss of their lives and goods. However, another person is like grapes with wine inside placed in a winepress; even if the skin and husk perish, the wine is preserved. Such is the case with the Saints during persecution; their inner selves remain intact, and they only lose the outer husks. But when a person has nothing within them except flesh and an outward self, then when those perish, everything they have is lost, including themselves. Therefore, it is wise to examine yourself and your self-perception before adversity strikes so that you can determine whether you possess something within you that will not perish but remain safe and sustain you. This examination will also reveal whether you truly seek the Lord's face.

The second rule is to consider what you regard as your ultimate end. This is a point where the differences can be quite subtle because, as we have mentioned, a person may perform many duties, be as diligent as another, and yet lose all their efforts if they do not seek the Lord's presence. The key lies in the purpose you assign to your actions. Even though an action may be good in itself, if the ultimate end is your own satisfaction or if you only use God's glory as a bridge, everything is lost. It's essential to distinguish between the end of the

work itself and the end of the worker. The end of the work itself may be virtuous, even among hypocrites, as long as the action is intrinsically holy and directed towards God's service. However, if the end of the worker is not the Lord but themselves, this difference persists throughout all actions. Two people traveling the same path may have different destinations. In Zechariah 7, which discusses the feasts and fasts of the Jews (both considered holy duties), God says in verses 5-7, "But did you do it for Me?" Similarly, in Hosea 10:1, despite bearing much fruit, Israel is called an empty vine because they produced it for themselves, not for the Lord. The fundamental difference between a carnal person and a regenerate person lies in their motivations. A carnal person, when about to do something, asks, "What good will this bring to me? What profit or credit will I gain from it?" If the answer is none, they set it aside. However, a godly person, insofar as they are godly, asks, "Is this commanded by God? Is it for His glory and advantage?" When you preach the Gospel or study, consider your end: Is it for God? Likewise, examine your end in your trade or any civil action and judge accordingly.

But should a person seek God in everything? Can they not consider themselves at all?

The ultimate end must always be superior to that which leads to it. Thus, the supreme good must be the supreme end. Unless you consider God better than everything else, you do not make Him your ultimate end or your God. Moreover, the ultimate end commands everything, is the most perfect, encompasses all other ends, and is unique to the Lord alone. This cannot be said of any person or creature; hence, God alone should be your ultimate end.

But can't a person make their own happiness their end and do everything for their own improvement?

A person may, and indeed always does so, out of necessity, as previously mentioned. However, there are two ends to consider: the thing itself that a person makes their end, and the benefit or fruit that comes from attaining it. Happiness is the sweetness that follows all ends, much like how a shadow follows a body. Therefore, the question is what you seek happiness from, as that becomes your primary end. Do you think you can make yourself happy through riches and pleasures that you aim at for your own sake? Or do you expect all your happiness to come from the Lord alone? Whatever you look to for happiness is your chief end. If it is from God, then you make God your ultimate end, and your own happiness is merely the fruit that arises from seeking Him.

But can't a person provide for themselves?

Certainly, but in this way: a person's thoughts are mainly occupied with either work or wages. If it's work, you must do it for God alone, as His servant. If it concerns wages (such as matters related to your name or estate), similarly, you should look to God alone for them. All your employment should revolve around doing everything for God and receiving everything from God. If a person were a perfect servant to another person, they would focus solely on their Master in matters of work and take only the wages their Master provides. They would resolve everything in their Master. However, no creature is a perfect servant to another creature; we are servants to God. Therefore, we should do all our work for God and rely on His providence for wages. This provision for oneself is essentially casting oneself upon the Lord. It is not our duty to provide for ourselves; that is the Lord's role. So let us do everything for Him, and it is His responsibility to provide for us, which He will do.

But can't a person have both God and themselves in mind when they act?

In response to this, consider Matthew 6:22-23: "The light of the body is the eye; if therefore the eye be single, the whole body shall be full of light." A single eye focuses on a single subject, one object only. Thus, a person is said to have a single eye when they look to the Lord alone, making nothing else their god. They do not regard riches or anything else as their god. In such a case, their entire life is filled with goodness, and they see where they are heading. But if the eye is evil, which is the opposite of being single (since a rule in interpreting Scripture is to explain phrases by what opposes them), it is a wicked eye. This means that if it is divided, looking partly to God and partly to oneself, it is wicked. As Saint James puts it, such a person is double-minded and unstable in all their ways. When someone has their eye on the world and themselves while also focusing on God, they are like a person torn between two paths, unsure of which to take. They are unstable, wavering in all their actions, shifting from one side (for God) to another (for themselves). Consequently, their entire life is in darkness, their conduct is wicked, as they are off course and lack a clear path. They do not have a proper direction or a clear objective, instead moving aimlessly between different pursuits.

But you may argue that even the holiest person has some self-interest in their actions.

It is one thing when a person has chosen the Lord as their ultimate goal, even if they stumble along the way, make mistakes, and have falls. They may have moments of self-interest, but they have chosen the Lord and continue to follow Him. This is different from someone who is torn between two paths, sometimes choosing one and sometimes the other, like a carnal person.

The main question now is how to determine whether we make the Lord our ultimate goal or not.

These rules can help you with that.

The ultimate goal guides a person's entire life. All other goals only apply to specific actions at particular times because they are specific goals. The ultimate goal commands everything in a person, including all their actions. Therefore, you make the Lord your ultimate goal when you focus on the Lord in all your actions, whether public or private. Whether you are a magistrate or a private individual, whether it's business or recreation, if God is your goal, your focus will always be on the Lord in all respects and relationships. Someone who doesn't make God their ultimate goal may find that they have secret paths of their own, secret motions that differ from and oppose God's will, hidden even from themselves or not recognized at all times. However, the ultimate goal commands all and leaves nothing out, subjecting even the smallest action to itself.

The ultimate goal sets limits for all means but is not limited itself. It dictates how far you should go, but there are no limits set for the goal itself. For example, if health is your goal, it sets limits for all the means you use, such as food, drink, and medicine. You only take what contributes to that goal, and no more. However, there are no limits set for health itself; you can never have too much health. Therefore, consider what sets limits to your course, where you say, "I will go this far and no further." If you make yourself your goal, you will limit your holiness in such a way that you won't lose your friends or your wealth. You will go only so far as to avoid harming yourself because you are your own goal. Therefore, you limit your holiness, stop at a certain point, or give up. But if God is your goal, you will believe that you can never have enough of God and holiness. Even if

your actions of holiness and zeal exceed your reputation and harm your wealth, you won't care because your goal is not to preserve yourself or what belongs to you.

You will know your ultimate goal by the secret sense that accompanies every action you take. This is the difference between humans and other creatures; humans can reflect on their own actions. If you closely examine your actions and ask your heart, "What is my purpose and intention in this action?" there is a secret sense that accompanies the action in your heart that will reveal it. Therefore, consider why you do any given task, why you take it on, and why you invest effort and resources in it. Ask your heart, "Is it for the Lord or for myself?" If that doesn't reveal it to you, examine the circumstances and manner in which you do it. Ask yourself why you preach or pray in a certain way, why you do things in a particular manner, and why you choose one action over another.

If this doesn't clarify it, examine your affections. Consider how you feel or what troubles you about it after the action is completed. Suppose it's a task that, both in substance and manner, was done for the Lord. But after it's done, what do you grieve over? Is it that you've gained some discredit for yourself in its performance? Or that God hasn't received more glory from it? Are your emotions troubled because you've offended God in it, that something has been taken from God in it, or rather that something has been taken from yourself? By examining how your affections are occupied regarding the matter once it's completed, you can discern your ultimate goal.

The fifth point is taken from Philippians 2:21: "For all seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ's." Consider whether you seek your own things or the things of Jesus Christ. This is true whether naturally, as the word is used there, which means doing

something as if it were your own business. Consider whether you seek the things of Christ as naturally as your own, and whether this can be determined by three things.

First, a person willingly undertakes what they do. When someone has their own business to attend to, they do it willingly, with enthusiasm and great concern. But when it's someone else's business, they may do it because they see it must be done and there's a reason for it, but they do it differently. In the same way, the saints willingly take on the Lord's business. You can see this in Saint Paul in Romans 15:20 when he says, "Yea, so have I strived to preach the gospel." The word "strived" in the original Greek is "philotimeomai," which means "I was ambitious." Consider the desires of an ambitious person, who overlooks everything for their advancement; such desires Paul had for preaching the Gospel. He expresses a similar affection in 2 Corinthians 11:28, "Besides the things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches." He asks, "Who is offended, and I burn not?" His affections were so intense and quick that if any soul suffered harm or if Christ lost anything, he was immediately stirred and affected with grief.

Do you do it diligently? When something is to be done for the Lord Jesus, do you do it with all your might? If you do it half-heartedly, you are far from seeking the Lord. Whatever a person does for themselves, as long as they perceive it's for themselves, they will do it diligently and with all their might. We are commanded to love the Lord with all our might, and there's a curse for the opposite. "Cursed is he that doth the work of the Lord negligently" doesn't mean doing the work weakly or with infirmities, for then all the saints would be cursed. Negligence here refers to actions done hypocritically and for other ends. This cold, half-hearted, formal, customary performance of duties, whether it's receiving the Sacrament, engaging in any other

duty, or addressing any matter concerning the Lord, if done with apathy, is a sign that it's not done for the Lord.

Consider whether you do them faithfully, for that's how a person typically handles their own business. No one is unfaithful to themselves. To others, they may perform with only surface dedication, but not for themselves. So, doing something faithfully means not merely completing the task but also caring about its effectiveness and seeing the fruit and results of it.

If you ask how you can discern whether you're doing something faithfully, it can be determined by this:

When a good action is to be done, do you care more about being the one to do it for your own credit, etc., like Diotrephes? Or would you still do it even if your fame were not known? Do you desire to have it done even if someone else does it? Do you think it doesn't matter by whose hand the work progresses?

Secondly, what do you do when there is a separation or distinction between the work of the Lord and your own reputation? Are you still as careful then? When the two are intertwined, it's not known whether you're doing it for your own credit or for God's glory. But there are times when your own interests and the Lord's work will be separated. Consider what you do then. Do you refrain from doing anything because you won't be the first one in the spotlight, or if you won't be seen in it? This is a sign that you're doing it for yourself and not for the Lord. When two men carry a beam into a house, if both strive to go in first, they carry it in a crosswise manner. However, if they are willing to follow one another, it goes in smoothly. Similarly, many great works for both the Church and the State are hindered or carried out inefficiently because people are unwilling to let others take the lead.

Therefore, seriously reflect on these matters and apply them to your hearts. We preach not just for the sake of knowledge alone, as that might only lead to your further condemnation, but to encourage you to take these teachings to heart. Take something to ponder these things, and if you find yourself falling short, do not be discouraged. Instead, strive to make your heart right for the future and seek the Lord alone.

To exhort you to this (which is the next use I make of it) and to motivate you, consider why there's a great reason for seeking the Lord Jesus and not yourself. Think about the ties and obligations you have towards Him: the covenant between you and Him has been established.

First, I ask you, whose servant are you? Shouldn't a servant seek the profit of his master? If a man sees a group of sheep and asks whose sheep they are, and someone tells him they belong to a particular man because he bought and paid for them, hasn't Christ bought you? Besides His initial purchase of you, who provides your wages and takes care of your needs, providing food, drink, and clothing for you? Isn't there a good reason for you to serve Him alone? Therefore, if you are truly His servant (which you are), you wrong the Lord if you do not serve Him.

Again, secondly, I ask you, who is your husband? Is it not the Lord Jesus? If you are His wife, shouldn't you seek His interests? A woman who is unmarried still belongs to herself, but when she is married, she belongs to her husband. When there was no king in Israel, everyone did what they thought was right in their own eyes. If you had no husband, no king, you might act in a similar manner. However, you are not "tui juris" (in your own right); the covenant has already been made, and you are not in a position to choose now.

If you say no, consider that when you were baptized, it was into the name of the Lord, as a vow, which is like an invocation with a curse. If you say yes, but you were young, then since you have come of age, you have not disclaimed it but confirmed it in the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, partaking in it frequently. Therefore, you cannot revoke it. The initial covenant stands, just as marriages contracted in youth remain binding when the parties come of age. He is your husband. Consider that just as adultery is considered worse than fornication, the former being punishable by death among the Jews and the latter by a pecuniary fine, your sins in seeking other lovers are worse than if a heathen had committed the same. One who was circumcised, as Saint Paul says, was obligated to keep the whole Law. Similarly, one who is baptized and has received the Lord's Supper is bound to give themselves to the Lord, as the Lord Christ gave Himself for them, along with everything in them. The Saints of Macedonia did this, as mentioned in 2 Cor. 8:5, where they gave themselves up first to the Lord.

Even if you were not bound in this manner, He still deserves it from you. Both of these points are emphasised by the Apostle in 1 Cor. 1:12-13. He asked, "Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?" Some Corinthians did not seek Christ alone in their profession of faith; one followed Paul, another Apollos, and another Cephas. However, Christ is not divided; He stands alone against them all, and therefore they were to seek Christ alone. The Apostle uses two arguments to support this:

Firstly, they were baptized in the name of Christ, not in the name of Paul or anyone else. Secondly, he asked, "Was Paul crucified for you?" In other words, wasn't it Christ who was crucified for you?

Secondly, consider the significance of the phrase "Crucified for you." We are unable to fathom the height, breadth, and depth of your commitment to Christ. His physical suffering was the least of His afflictions; the anguish of His soul was the essence of His suffering. He said, "My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death," when the weight of His sufferings caused Him to sweat drops of blood on a cold night. Yet, these were just the beginning of His sorrows, which culminated on the cross when He cried out, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" Consider further the fairness of it all. Didn't He do the same for you that He now requires of you? Didn't He empty Himself of eternal glory and happiness, which He could have retained? Didn't He become poor to make you rich? What is it that He asks you to give up? A friend or two and some material wealth? Whereas, He emptied Himself of all His glorious majesty. Is He not on unequal terms with you, or rather, most unequal in His sacrifice? If He calls you to bear the cross for Him, didn't He bear a far heavier cross for you? Therefore, as Christ said, "He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me, and he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me." You must be willing to forsake all for Him to become His disciple.

Lastly, besides all this, consider that it is in your best interest, which is the most compelling argument for most people. If you don't do it, you will be condemned for it. However, if you choose to seek the Lord alone, you will provide abundantly for yourself. If you insist on saving your life, you will lose it. If you try to save your reputation and freedom, you may succeed, but you will end up in hell with your reputation and freedom. It's better to enter heaven without them than to be cast into hell with them. If you are willing to lose all these worldly things, you will gain something far greater. The person who is most willing to suffer for Christ and God's cause is the one who is truly looking out for their own best interests.

Consider Judas, who tried to make himself rich but ended up destroying himself. In contrast, Peter and the others left everything behind and gained happiness. What did Paul achieve but going from one prison to another? How did Abraham save his son? By being willing to offer him up. What brought Moses so much honor, making him the leader of God's people and a great prophet? It was his willingness to reject the honors and pleasures of Egypt. The person who resolves to be content with having no reputation, as long as they can seek and serve the Lord, is on the path to advancement. On the contrary, the one who insists on being somebody in the world is headed for a downfall. Saul's attempt to enrich himself with cattle led to his ruin, and Jeroboam's plots to maintain the kingdom caused him to lose it and undo himself.

It is of great importance to seek God for Himself, and we must be cautious not to forget the Lord in the midst of His mercies. It is a common occurrence that God is hidden from us in His blessings. Instead of being like mirrors and spectacles to help us see Him more clearly, these blessings often become like clouds that obscure our view of His face. However, we must remember that the essence of the covenant is, "I will be their God, and they shall be my people." All blessings come with Him, even Himself. We often forget that we must first have the Lord Himself, and our eyes should be fixed on Him before anything else. In Romans 8, it is stated that with Christ, He will give us all things. Therefore, we must first have Him before anything else. In 1 Corinthians 3, it is said that all things are ours because we belong to Christ and Christ belongs to God. We must first have Him as our husband before we can enjoy the benefits He brings.

It is a common fault to focus on the comforts and privileges that come through Christ without focusing on Christ Himself. For example, when we come to be humbled for our sins, we tend to look

at the promise of forgiveness and think that if we can just believe our sins are forgiven, we have enough. However, we forget Christ in the process. Instead, we should think about how we can obtain forgiveness, who provides it, and who brings it to us. Forgiveness comes with Christ, and once we have Him, we will have His righteousness to clothe us. In 1 Corinthians 1:30, it is stated, "Of him ye are in Christ Jesus, who of God is made to us wisdom, and righteousness, sanctification and redemption." This means that God the Father gives Christ to us, like a father giving his son in marriage, and says, "I will make Him worth this much to you, but you must have Him first." We must first have Him as our husband before we can enjoy the privileges He offers.

In Scripture, the phrases and language used always lead us to focus on His person and urge us to make a covenant with His person. For example, when it is said that "in Him are all the treasures of wisdom," it implies that we must first have Him before we can obtain those treasures. In John 6, we are urged to eat His flesh and drink His blood for eternal life, but before we can benefit from this spiritual nourishment, we must first have Him. There are two distinct conditions a person should consider when transitioning from a state of unregeneration. First, you should consider who Christ and God are as persons and choose them as a father and husband to live and die with. Second, you should consider what you will have with Him, looking upon the benefits themselves as motives to love Him even more, rather than just as bare benefits.

This distinct consideration is often overlooked, but it should be used in the future to help you. Don't just say, "I am in misery, and there is a promise of pardon and adoption." Instead, look first to the Lord Jesus and go to Him. To further convince you of this, consider that you cannot be saved without a holy way of life, which involves

conversing with God and Christ. All conversation is with persons, not just things. Therefore, in a holy life, your main focus is the Lord Himself, opening your heart to Him, seeking His counsel, and finding delight in Him. Conversing with a person involves dealing with them on all occasions. While dealing with duties and privileges, your chief business is with the Lord Himself. You are not just dealing with notions, duties, and your sins, but with the Lord in all of these, using them as means to bring you into His presence and closer to His person. This is how you walk with God, as Enoch did, always focusing on His person, for that is what it means to walk with Him.

Once again, it's crucial for no one to be saved without love for God. This love must not be a love driven by desire (*amor concupiscentiae*) but a love of friendship (*amor amicitiae*). The former is directed towards things, while the latter is focused on persons. Your love should first be directed towards the person of God and then towards the blessings you receive from Him and the duties you are to perform for Him.

But you might wonder, how can we bring our hearts to love God in this way? It seems exceedingly difficult. It's easy to seek the benefits that come through Christ because self-love often drives us to do so. When we need something, we naturally desire to have our needs met. When we're burdened, we eagerly seek relief. This tends to quicken our desires.

So, what can we say to kindle your affections and make you seek the Lord's person? If we had the eloquence of men and angels, it would still be insufficient. Let us, therefore, beseech the Lord to be His own spokesman and reveal Himself to us. There is no other way to set our hearts on seeking His face but by actually seeing Him. Unfortunately,

we cannot make this happen ourselves. However, He often does so while we speak of Him through the ministry of the Word.

In Psalm 9, it is stated that those who know His name will trust in Him, and they will also seek His face. Abraham and Moses sought the Lord Himself because they had seen His face. Moses, in particular, spoke with God face to face. There are two ways to know a person: by report or by sight, by hear-say or by face. All the saints have known Him in some degree through the latter way, and therefore they sought Him, even though Moses had a more direct encounter. Benevolentia, goodwill, can arise from a good report, but amicitia, friendship, arises from seeing and knowing a person. Therefore, you may have a general knowledge of God through hearsay, but you will not seek His face until you have seen Him face to face. In 2 Corinthians 3, it is stated that we see God's face as if in a glass, but the veil must be removed for us to see Him face to face.

Therefore, start by beseeching God and asking Him to reveal His excellence to you through the Spirit of revelation, so that your heart may be stirred up to seek Him. Will the Lord deny you this request if you ask? No, for as Christ says, "No one knows the Father except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal Him." So, go to Christ and beseech Him to reveal Himself and His Father to you.

The reason we do not see God as we could, or only catch glimpses of Him, is that we forget to go to the Son, or if we do, we do not seek earnestly. Moses had to beg earnestly, and so should we. When you have obtained this revelation, you will see wondrous and extraordinary things in Him, things that no eye has seen. There are remarkable things to be found in the Law if your eyes are opened to see them. Open my eyes, as David says in Psalm 119, that I may see the wonderful things in Your Law. How much more wonderful things

can be seen in the Lord when He reveals Himself and opens your eyes?

The Law is but an expression of Him, like a letter that is a portrait of a person's mind. When your eyes are opened to see the Lord Himself, you will see such things in Him that will make you fall in love with Him. Just as the Bride in the Song of Solomon became lovesick when the Lord took away the veil and showed Himself to her, if God were to take any of us into His presence and reveal Himself, we would say, "Now, Lord, we will go with You, we will live and die with You." We would seek Him tirelessly, just as the Bride sought Him from watch to watch, from one ordinance to another. When you lose Him, you would seek Him relentlessly. Moses could not attain this knowledge of God until God revealed Himself to him. Moses would not give up; he would not move until God revealed Himself to him (Exodus 33:13).

We should pray as earnestly as Moses, and when He makes Himself known to us, we will be irresistibly drawn to Him. God does this by leaving an impression of His excellency on the heart. When two people are inseparably linked, it's because they have an impression of each other's excellency in their hearts. This impression remains until it's removed, and nothing can sever the bond between them. Nothing can take away this impression of God's excellency once it's stamped upon the heart. No accident can separate God from the heart once you have seen Him. However, until this impression is formed, separation is easy, and people may turn away from God for any reason. When we are taught by God Himself, we come to know Him in such a way that we seek Him earnestly, and not before.

Furthermore, after God has spoken and revealed Himself, there is something that you also need to do: grow in deeper acquaintance

with Him. This is accomplished partly by speaking to Him frequently and partly by closely observing Him in all His ways. Examine His actions and conduct, and through this, you will see how deserving He is of love.

Consider His very first action, the creation of the world. He could have enjoyed eternal happiness within Himself, yet out of His goodness, He chose to create humans and angels, providing abundantly for them. Furthermore, when all of humanity was lost in one fell swoop, and He could have left us like the fallen angels with no possibility of salvation, out of His love for mankind, He gave His Son for our redemption. If it were just for this love towards our nation, He would be worthy of all love and respect from us, as He was to the Jews when He built them a synagogue out of love for their nation. But He has not loved just one nation. Hasn't He given, manifested, and revealed His Son to you when He has passed by thousands? When, if left to yourself, you would have lost the opportunity for salvation, just as most of humanity does, and would have had a hard heart like millions of others, He has broken your heart and given you Christ, even when you were utterly incapable of believing in Him. Since He brought you to His Son, how many times have you strayed away from Him, and hasn't He always acted as a Shepherd to you, bringing you back? You've played many a slippery trick with Him, yet He has kept you, embraced you, and established the sure mercies of David for you.

Consider His remarkable patience as well. Despite the constant provocations to the glory of His eyes that occur daily, He overlooks them all and spares you. Reflect on whether anyone else would have borne as much as He has. Moreover, consider His generosity, which is added to His patience, His constancy in doing good to you. Though your behaviour towards Him is inconsistent, a continual stream of

His mercy flows towards you. Think further that even if it had been a mere act of His will to do all this, it would still have been remarkable. However, it cost Him dearly to have the opportunity to do it – it cost Him His Son. Then, think about the immense love of His Son, who gave Himself and left all, even though He was equal to the Father in glory, just to be with you. If He had not done this, you would have been lost forever. Reflect on how many times He has stood by you in difficult situations, pleading your case and appeasing His Father on your behalf. Strive to be guided by all these rivers and streams of His goodness towards the vast sea of His personal excellencies. Collect an impression of Him in your minds from all you have heard or seen of Him. The purpose of all these acts of His providence is for people to know Him through them.

Just as when you want one person to know another, you try to commend and describe that person, it is good to do the same for the Lord. Express His excellencies to others frequently and meditate on them yourself. This may win others over to Him, or at the very least, it will invigorate your own love for Him. There are two ways to know things, as I mentioned earlier: one through reports and the other through personal experience. Strive to know Him through experience so that you can say, "I know Him to be like this and that, and therefore I will cleave to Him."

And with all of this, consider the greatness of the One who has done all these things for you: the great God of heaven and earth. This fact places immense value on everything He has done for us. If a great king were to merely acknowledge your existence, how greatly would that be prized! But that the great God should show interest in someone as undeserving as you, with nothing to offer in return—how should this affect you! Moreover, consider what He is capable of doing for you. People often fail to comprehend God in His greatness,

and this is why they do not seek Him. Why do we concern ourselves so much with worldly matters, fearing this person or that person, and thinking a little credit or promotion is of great importance? If only we could truly see God in His greatness, all these worldly concerns would fade away.

Consider how the prophet describes Him in Isaiah 40:15, where he says that all the nations are as nothing to Him, like a few drops from a bucket or dust on the balance. Imagine that all the nations of the world were either for you or against you—wouldn't you think this to be a significant matter? (Much like how we would feel if we had just one nation against us?) Yet, when compared to the Lord, they are as insignificant as dust blown away by His breath. If our eyes were opened to see, as Gehazi's were, the host surrounding Him, and if our eyes were open to see the Lord, we would desire Him alone and seek Him. Then, a person would be prepared for all sorts of changes; no matter where they are placed, they would be content to have God's favor while alive and heaven when they die.

Until a person makes this choice—recognizing that they have many things in the world, but the Lord is their portion and their exceedingly great reward, and that they can live on Him alone—it is as impossible for them to have Him without comfort as it is to have the sun without light. Therefore, no matter what happens to them, they can confidently say that they have lost nothing, they have not been driven from their inheritance and portion, for they have God's presence. This presence will serve as their guidance and protection in difficult times, so they can declare, "The Lord's name is my strong tower," while others seek refuge elsewhere. "Thither fly the righteous, and they are safe." Seek God's presence in times of peace if you wish to have it as your refuge in times of danger.

We can see the benefits of God's presence in Isaiah 4, particularly in the last two verses. "The Lord will create upon every place of Mount Zion, and upon her assemblies a cloud and smoke by day, and the shining of a flaming fire by night." Just as the Israelites had a pillar of fire to guide them at night and a cloudy pillar by day when they left Egypt, God promises His people that He will walk before them and direct their way in all their actions, particularly in difficult situations. God guides them by immediately enlightening their spirits, showing them the safest paths to take. As it is said in 1 Samuel 18:14, "The Lord was with David, and he walked wisely." God directed him and served as his counselor. Meanwhile, the Lord had departed from Saul, and he erred in all his actions. Like the Israelites who would have been lost in the wilderness without their two pillars, Saul was bewildered when the Lord departed from him, like a man lost in a dark night. In contrast, a godly person will hear a voice behind them saying, "This is the way, walk in it." If they were to take another path, they would be at risk of harm. This is a tremendous privilege.

But that's not all the benefit God's presence provides; it also offers protection, as indicated in the following passage from Isaiah: "Upon all the glory shall be a defense, and there shall be a tabernacle for a shadow in the daytime from the heat, and for a place of refuge, and for a covert from the storm and from the rain." Just as the shade provides relief to a weary traveller in the scorching heat of those hot countries, so the Lord's presence is like shade and protection to all His saints. It is a shelter under which they can stand, as if in a dry house, looking out and seeing others caught in a storm. When the Egyptians were struck by hail and perished in it, the Israelites were safe.

And lastly, He will be a refuge to them when they are persecuted by anyone, whether it be by their own sins, which pursue them like an avenger of blood, or by evil men, or by the power and malice of Satan. If they run to Him, He will be their asylum, their sanctuary. This privilege sets the saints apart from others. Consider Mordecai and Haman: both were in distress. Mordecai was persecuted and turned to the Lord in prayer, finding refuge in Him. But Haman had none, especially when he fell out of favor with the king. Similarly, both Peter and Judas fell into sin, but Peter had a refuge to turn to—God, with whom he was previously acquainted. On the other hand, Judas had none, and the storm engulfed him. Saul, preparing to fight the Philistines, had no refuge because God had departed from him, leading him to seek a witch. However, when David faced dire circumstances and the people spoke of stoning him, he had a refuge. He encouraged himself in his God, and that's why you find him repeatedly declaring, "God is my shield and the rock of my defense."

In fair weather, people often don't seek shelter because they believe they don't need it. However, it's wise to prepare for a rainy day. In Revelation 2:5, when the church had fallen from its first love, a threat was made to remove the candlestick. This means not only a threat to the ministry, as indicated in the last verse of the first chapter: "The seven candlesticks you saw are the seven churches." Captivity and removal from a comfortable and safe city to a barren land, where they would face greater hardships, were threatened. This was not because they had completely forsaken God but because they had fallen from their first love, albeit to some degree. So, should we not have cause to fear? And if we do fear, should we not seek the Lord's presence now? Then we can be sure to find Him as a refuge, for wherever you go, He is there. As David says in Psalm 139, "Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I

go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there."

Doct. 7. No interest in promises without turning from evil ways.

Now we have come to the final condition that the Lord requires before He will hear prayers, forgive sins, or heal the land of His people. That condition is this: "If my people turn from their evil ways." From this, you can derive the following doctrine:

Unless a person turns from their evil ways, they have no claim to the promises of the Gospel. This point, like the others, serves a dual purpose. First, it excludes those to whom the promises do not apply. "If you do not turn from your evil ways, your prayers will not be heard." Second, it opens a door of comfort for those who do turn. "Their prayers will be heard."

Now, let's begin with the matter of terror for those outside this condition. In this regard, our first task is to understand what it means to turn from our evil ways. When the Lord attaches all His promises to this condition, it's essential to examine it carefully. To grasp this, we must understand that every person is born facing away from God, with their back turned to Him and their face towards sin and hell. They continue in this direction until they hear God's call to turn, saying, "This is not the way." So, this conversion of the soul is called a turning because it shifts from one object or destination to another, from sin to righteousness and from Satan to God. Since there are many false turnings, and many people who change their course without truly turning, mistakenly thinking they have been converted, we must endeavour to explain what genuine turning is.

There are four ways to discern genuine turning: First, consider the causes and motives that prompt it. Second, examine the terms from which and to which we turn. Third, assess the manner in which we turn. Fourth, observe the effects of turning.

Firstly, for the causes of true turning and the motives that influence a person's heart to turn, you must understand that several things can cause a person to temporarily leave their evil ways. For instance, the fear of imminent affliction may lead someone to turn to God. This is why God often accuses the Jews of turning to Him feignedly and insincerely when they faced trouble but not with their whole hearts. When God punished them, they sought Him and turned from their evil ways, but once delivered, they reverted to their old inclinations. Similarly, Pharaoh, when plagued with a new judgment, would let the Israelites go. Still, as soon as the affliction subsided, he hardened his heart and refused to let them go.

Another cause that can prompt people to turn is the hope of present gain or advantage. This is evident in many who sought Christ: some followed Him for the sake of food, others for their immediate needs, and some in the hope of an earthly kingdom they believed He would establish. However, these individuals eventually abandoned Him. There are many false motives like these, but the only true motives come from the perception of eternal life and eternal death. Conversion is not genuine until a person is motivated by these, for all other motives can be outweighed. But the motives of life and death cannot be surpassed by anything, not even worldly offers or temptations. Therefore, a person has truly turned when the Lord has broadened their perspective to grasp the vastness and magnitude of these two motives. At that point, all other things appear as candles in the sunlight. So, if Satan presents earthly honors and pleasures, the response is simple: "What are these compared to eternal death and

everlasting life?" Sadly, carnal individuals often fail to consider or truly understand the immense vastness and significance of heaven and hell, even though they may speak of them. This lack of understanding leads them to proceed with confidence.

In Mark 16, when Christ sent out His disciples to convert people, He instructed them to use these two arguments: tell everyone that if they believe, they will be saved, but if not, they will be damned. Here, we see that the motives ministers are directed to use, as instructed by Christ, are eternal life and death. When Saint Paul sought to convert Felix, he spoke to him about the coming judgment, which made Felix tremble. Similarly, Christ spoke to the Samaritan woman about the water and spring that lead to eternal life. Therefore, consider whether you have ever had a true apprehension of these motives, for without them, a person cannot be deeply moved. A true apprehension of eternal life and death, if genuine, possesses the following characteristics:

Firstly, it must be an apprehension of them as if they are present. Perhaps a person may have a fleeting thought of eternal life and death, viewing them as distant and remote. However, when these apprehensions are stirred by God, they surround a person and leave them no rest until they turn to God. Just as a carnal person, on their deathbed, is deeply affected by an actual apprehension of hell as a present reality, so during conversion, the apprehension of these realities seizes a person through the work of the Spirit. This apprehension pursues them and places them in a state of distress, making them unable to shake it off until they turn to God. The wise person sees the impending calamity as if it is already present and, therefore, does not delay turning but does so in their youth, health, and strength.

Secondly, it must be a profound, rooted, and unwavering apprehension. At times, a person who will never be saved may be moved by the immediate apprehension of eternal life and death, but it is a fleeting storm. In contrast, in someone who will be saved, it is instilled by the spirit of bondage, leaving an indelible impression that never fades away. They continually remember it, and this is the true apprehension that motivates repentance.

Some may wonder if a person can be moved to turn from their evil ways solely by the apprehension of eternal life and death, without an understanding of sin and grace. When a person has a genuine apprehension of eternal life and death, they come to understand the true nature of sin and grace. Until one knows eternal death, they consider sin trivial and insignificant. Therefore, the wise person says, "They despise their ways." This apprehension helps present sin in its true, terrible form. Similarly, the value of grace is fully grasped when it is perceived as leading to eternal happiness, just as a thread is drawn through a needle.

The second aspect to consider is the terms of turning, as there can be no turning without transitioning from one state to another. True turning entails moving from Satan, the creature, and one's own self towards God. This concept is evident in Acts 26:18, where Saint Paul was tasked with opening their eyes and turning them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God. These are the essential terms of genuine turning and must be carefully noted. If one merely turns from misery to happiness without considering God, it is not a sound conversion. Such a person is still pivoting around their own axis, heading towards the same center as other wicked individuals. Therefore, in a true conversion, these motives are viewed in relation to God. The thought process becomes: "If I follow myself and the creature, they cannot save me. But if I turn to the one who holds the

keys to life and death, I will find eternal happiness in Him. Henceforth, I will forsake Satan and every creature, dedicating myself solely to the Lord." In this way, God becomes the term to which you turn and apply yourself. Hosea 7:16 illustrates this concept: "They return, but not to the Most High." Despite their fasting and prayers, this turning is not towards God. Why? Because they have only turned from misery to seek their own happiness while forgetting the Lord, who alone has the power to deliver and save them. Therefore, their turning was counterfeit, not genuine. Such a turning is unsustainable, like a broken bow.

Thirdly, regarding the manner of turning as expressed in Scripture, it is stated that you must turn to the Lord with all your heart and soul. Although this specific wording is not present here, it is implied: "If my people turn from their evil ways with their whole hearts."

But what does it mean to turn with one's whole heart?

A person is considered to have turned with their whole heart when they are fully enlightened and convinced in their understanding of the evil of a particular thing, leading them to make a complete resolution to forsake it. For example, if someone is on the wrong path, and another person comes along to inform them that they are not on the correct route to their destination, and this message persuades them completely, they will return wholeheartedly – willingly and without reservation. Similarly, in the case of turning to God, it is when a person is fully persuaded that sin is the cause of all misery, and God is the source of happiness, that they turn to God with their whole heart. Turning with anything less than the whole heart is feigned, as mentioned in Jeremiah 3:10: "And yet for all this, her treacherous sister Judah hath not turned unto me with her whole heart, but feignedly, saith the Lord." This feigned turning occurs

when individuals have some motives to move them but not enough. They are not fully convinced, so their turning is incomplete. Therefore, when perfect and full illumination occurs, with a clear understanding that the path they are on leads to misery and the opposite path to happiness, a person turns perfectly and with their whole heart. The Apostle expresses this turning as opening the eyes in Acts 26:18: "To open their eyes and to turn them." This means that everyone continues in their sinful ways until their eyes are opened to see something they hadn't seen before. Often, God intervenes in people's lives, providing them with some light, means, exhortations, and motions toward goodness, or checks for their sinful ways. If these admonitions are effective enough to open their eyes, convincing and persuading them that their current path leads to eternal misery, then they turn willingly.

Conversely, when God does not intend to heal and convert a people, He allows their eyes to remain closed, as in Isaiah 6:10: "Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes, lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their hearts, and convert to be healed." In this passage, we see the progression of conversion: first, the opening of the eyes; second, the opening of the heart; and finally, conversion and healing. The first two stages lead to the last, and if God chooses not to heal, He closes their eyes. In conversion, a person's eyes are opened to see sin as an enemy with a drawn sword and to behold the riches of the inheritance of the Saints, which are beyond the comprehension of natural men's eyes, ears, and hearts. True turning from evil ways occurs only when a person's eyes are opened in this manner. Just as Balaam did not see the Angel with a drawn sword until his eyes were opened, a wicked person does not see the dangers they are heading towards in their sinful path until their eyes are opened. Similarly, when someone begins a new course in life, they

encounter obstacles and dangers that make them cry out, "What shall we do?" God then opens their eyes, allowing them to see that there are more allies with them than adversaries, inspiring them with courage. This newfound encouragement outweighs the opposition, leading them to continue resolutely.

Finally, to understand what true turning to God is, we must consider its effects. A person is considered to have turned when they experience three effects within themselves.

First, he finds that those evil ways of sin and those corruptions that once dwelled in his heart and ruled over it are now evicted from their position, and the contrary grace has become the master of the house. He can declare, as the Apostle does in Romans 7, "It is not I, but sin in me." In other words, sin was previously the master of the house, and what I now identify as myself didn't exist within me at that time. But now the situation has changed, the regenerated part within me is the master, and though sin attempts to intrude and reside there, it is merely a trespasser. Every lust is expelled, and if it sneaks in, it does so through one of these means.

Firstly, it may stealthily enter, like a thief under the cover of night when one is not vigilant and does not notice it. Secondly, it may break in through force, much like rebels exploiting a sudden burst of unfamiliar passion, which renders them incapable of resisting it. However, sin does not dwell there as the master. Instead, it is promptly evicted as soon as the trespasser is discovered or when one regains strength. Therefore, possession is consistently maintained by grace. Just as it is said of peace, "Let the peace of God rule in your hearts," meaning that even if you are inclined to quarrel with your brethren, malice should not dominate, but peace. This holds true for all graces. Thus, examine yourself. How does sin gain access to you?

Does it sneak in like a thief, or does it use force alone? And when it does enter, does it remain in control? If so, you have not truly turned to God. For if you had genuinely turned to God, even if sin crept in surreptitiously, you would not allow it to take possession of the house but would expel it. And if it forcefully broke in, once you regained your strength and the upper hand, you would keep it subdued.

The second effect is that once sin has been expelled, you hate it intensely, similar to how Amnon hated his sister Tamar. Not only did he drive her out and bar the door against her, but he also loathed her even more than he had previously loved her. In the same manner, someone who has turned to God despises sin, genuinely hating it as much as they once loved it. Only the regenerate person truly hates sin. Consider a person who has indulged in a particular sin for a long time, such as drunkenness, promiscuity, or profanity. They may occasionally drive it away and, based on certain reasons or resolutions, bar the door against it, especially when lying on a sickbed or enduring significant affliction, but they do not truly hate it.

You might ask, how can we determine this?

Hatred is relentless and enduring, akin to a person's aversion to toads and serpents, for they will never be persuaded to welcome it again and reconcile with it. Instead, they permanently renounce it. Furthermore, they will not compromise with sin, declaring, "I will only cut back or trim this much," but they will uproot it entirely. Hatred seeks the complete annihilation and eradication of what it despises. Lastly, a person who truly hates sin will loathe all forms of it. Just as sheep hate all types of wolves and doves despise all types of

hawks, so will they detest every kind of sin. Therefore, assess yourself based on these general principles.

The third effect is fighting against sin. The genuineness of one's conversion is evident in their lifelong resistance to sin, similar to how the Israelites were instructed never to seek peace with Amalek but to wage war against them and seek their destruction as long as they lived. Certainly, such a person may be defeated by sin at times, but they will always battle against it. And so shall we, if we are genuinely converted.

Therefore, the distinction lies in the difference between the relapse and backsliding of the wicked and the occasional falling into sin by the godly. A saint never ceases the battle; they never form an alliance with sin. The spirit contends against the flesh (Galatians 5), continually stirring the believer against it. Peace cannot be made where God has sown enmity. You will never say, "I have no choice but to yield to it." You will never give up. This is the characteristic of a truly converted person – to view sin as an enemy. Anything that helps against sin is considered a friend, such as admonitions and reproofs, while anything that assists sin against you is seen as an enemy.

But you may wonder, "If all of this is to be done, I cannot honestly say that I hate sin because it continually clings to me, and I find an inclination to delight in it as before."

It is true that there is something within you, the flesh, to which sin is still appealing, hence the inclination to welcome it as before. However, there is also something within you, a new creation, a new self, your regenerated part, that passionately hates sin. Even the flesh, which nurtures it, detests sin. So take comfort in knowing that

the Spirit within you hates sin while the flesh within you may still take pleasure in it.

If turning to the Lord is a condition upon which all promises are based, then it is essential to examine yourselves for any trace of wickedness. If any form of wickedness is found, whether greater or lesser, you have not been converted; you remain bound by iniquity. (This was the Apostle's expression to Simon Magus in Acts.) You are tied up in it like a prisoner in fetters, a bondsman. When wickedness is present within, it binds the soul to the extent that one is unable to follow the paths of God's commandments. Therefore, scrutinize your past actions, search your heart as meticulously as the search for leaven before the Passover, as if you were searching for your life. Because if any form of wickedness is discovered, it may cost you your life. Conduct a thorough examination, as self-love makes it difficult to detect. This point requires more application than explanation; it pertains more to the heart than the mind. Suppose it is the path of enmity, bearing ill will towards another person, even if they are your enemy. If you persist in this, you are on a path of wickedness. The Lord commands that you should overcome evil with good and love your enemies. Therefore, if you walk in a way of enmity towards others, you are your own worst enemy. Suppose it is the path of evil speaking, which borders on enmity (and hence why I mention it here). In Titus 3:2, it is written, "Speak evil of no man." You must not speak ill of anyone, even if they are genuinely wicked, for as the Apostle says, "You yourselves were such." Therefore, do not do it. If you make a habit of this, seizing any opportunity to speak ill of others, it is a way of wickedness. Speaking ill of someone may be justified for the benefit of the person or when it concerns the glory of God, but never out of envy. Furthermore, suppose it is the path of idleness, to which people of all callings are susceptible. Consider that even if you were free from all other sins but remained idle, you would

be on a path of wickedness. The Apostle speaks against idle individuals, as in 2 Thessalonians 3:10, "For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat." In other words, living in idleness is such a sin that those who engage in it are unworthy to live. This applies even more so to students who have come here to learn the knowledge of God and His true religion, as they were sent with a purpose and a price in their hands. To waste their time idly is, above all other sins, a sin for which they are unworthy to live. According to Saint Paul, you cannot be saved if you persist in this, as it is a path of wickedness. Are you not the Lord's servant? Does He not provide your wages? Suppose idleness is not a sinful path in itself, yet it inevitably leads to sin. "Omnis omissio fundatur in aliquo actu voluntatis affirmativo" – every omission is based on some affirmative act of the will. Therefore, according to 2 Thessalonians 3:11, idle persons are called busybodies, as while they are idle, they engage in other activities, such as socializing, drinking, or perhaps recreational pursuits, which, although lawful in themselves, become unlawful when pursued excessively.

This habit of idleness is common among people, and mispending time is not considered a sin as long as a person has enough to sustain them. However, consider how vehemently the Apostle speaks against such practices in 2 Thessalonians 3, from the sixth to the thirteenth verse. Speaking of the same individuals, he commands, "I command you, brethren, in the Name of the Lord Jesus, that you withdraw yourselves from every brother that walks disorderly," etc. This command is not his alone; it comes from Christ. Furthermore, he states that those who walk idly walk disorderly, meaning they go beyond the limits set for them, such as being diligent in their calling. Therefore, they are like a soldier out of formation, a dislocated limb. The Apostle even adds, "let him not eat," suggesting a punishment

that corresponds to the offence. In other words, nature has taught you this lesson, a rule inherent in nature. You can observe that drones are cast out of hives, and stones, as well as other inanimate objects that remain motionless, do not consume food as animals do. Idleness is a fundamental sin, and it was the sin of Sodom. Solomon frequently addressed and condemned the sluggard. Just as idleness can be a way of wickedness, so too can excessive preoccupation with earthly business. Against such, the Apostle speaks in Philippians 3:19, referring to those who are "minding earthly things," and he adds, "whose end is damnation." Minding implies being content to the point of continuous preoccupation. Instead, people should engage with the world and use it as though they were not using it. They should conduct their affairs as if they were secondary, performing them as though they were not performing them, while reserving the main part of their intentions for higher purposes, such as obtaining grace, etc. Otherwise, they forget the primary reason for their existence in the world: to make their calling and election sure, focusing on what they ought to do but only as a side matter. This fault exists even among God's people to some extent, as can be seen in the example of Martha, who busied herself with many things while Mary devoted herself entirely to listening to Christ preach. On that occasion, Christ taught us that the one who takes more time from their occupation to devote to better things makes the better choice. Pay attention to the reasons Christ provides for Mary's choice. First, because only one thing is necessary, that one essential thing. Many worldly things are necessary for our contentment. "Thou art troubled about many things," He says to Martha, "but this one thing is sufficient." Furthermore, many other things may be dispensed with, but this one thing is absolutely necessary. Lastly, "this one thing shall not be taken from thee"; she will enjoy it forever, and it will accompany her to heaven. In contrast, death will strip Martha of her outward possessions, bringing care and vexation of spirit, as was the

case with Martha, who was "cumbered." Therefore, Mary's choice was the better one, and let us also choose it.

Moreover, Solomon frequently addresses and condemns a particular form of wickedness – the use of a false balance in trade. This refers to any form of unjust dealing in business, selling inferior goods with a deceptive appearance or any other form of dishonesty. Such concealed and unequal gains are an abomination to the Lord, as Solomon states. Are you conducting your business for the benefit of others, or are you harming them and endangering your own soul through unjust dealings? Additionally, if there is any secret form of sin within you, as the Apostle speaks of in 1 Thessalonians 4:4 – "that every one of you should know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honour" – and by "vessel," he means the soul and body, which were created wholly for the Lord to infuse His grace into. Therefore, beware of any form of impurity or uncleanness. The Apostle does not refer to a particular act; instead, if there is any hidden form of uncleanness of any kind within you, you are in a wretched state. For if you had experienced regeneration, would it not resist every form of sin? If you had true sensitivity of conscience, would you not be aware of every way of wickedness, just as tender flesh feels every thorn or the eye detects every speck? But you may argue, "Even the best may fall into these sins." Yes, but they do not make a habit of them. Wicked individuals regularly indulge in sin; you can find them there day after day. However, a godly person never establishes a pattern of sin throughout their life. There are ten thousand paths to one destination, and any path of sin, no matter how singular, leads to damnation. Therefore, if you can't say of every evil way that you have turned away from it, you are not saved.

Just as with the commission of sin, the omission of duties can be equally sinful. Suppose it involves neglecting God's ordinances, such

as hearing the Word. It has become a common practice for some to be absent from these gatherings, openly displaying their profanity to the world, indicating that they are walking in a way of wickedness. Neglecting to fulfill your duties with diligence is just as sinful as committing sins of omission. Even if you do not neglect the duty, performing it negligently is equally sinful. Christ instructs us not only to hear but to "take heed how we hear," meaning that we should listen in such a way that we gain strength from every powerful sermon.

If you do not find your heart softened, which was hard before and unaffected, I may say you have not truly listened. Similarly, in prayer, when prayer does not align your heart, which was previously out of alignment, you have not truly prayed. Remember that not only the substance but also the manner is commanded.

As for the communion of saints, we are instructed not to abandon the fellowship of saints; therefore, it is wickedness to be absent from their company. How can you justify neglecting this command? How can you expect your prayers to be heard and your sins forgiven?

Regarding your speech, it should be edifying, imparting grace to those who listen, providing valuable words like fine silver. Proverbs 10:20 states, "The tongue of the just is as choice silver," and this should always be the case. Your speech should always be gracious, as Colossians 4 advises, not just occasionally but consistently.

So for family duties, look, if there be no way of wickedness there. Ephes. 6. 4. Children and servants ought to be brought up in the nurture of the LORD. This you ought to do to your servants: for when they are delivered to you, you are become as parents to them. Deut. 6. 7.

There is a strict command to rehearse the way of God upon all occasions. Those families wherein nothing is done for the bringing them up in the ways of the Lord, have a way of wickedness in them, and search it out.

I have insisted the longer upon particulars, because it is the spreading of the net that catcheth the fish. Therefore Saint Paul condescends to particulars, whereas he might have contented himself with generals, Rom. 1. 29. as being filled with all unrighteousness. But he adds a catalogue of many particulars; fornication, wickedness, covetousness, malicioiusness, full of envy, murder, debate, &c. So 1 Cor. 6. 9. the Apostle says, Know you not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? that might have been enough in the general, yet he brings in a catalogue of many particulars; Be not deceived, no fornicator, nor drunkard, &c. shall inherit the kingdom of God, as if he should have said, should I stay myself in these general terms, you would be ready to shift it off, therefore I speak it of every particular course of sinning. When a man is to shoot at a multitude of birds, he puts not in one bullet only, but hail shot, so when we are to speak to many people, we are to make application of many particulars. Nathan applied his message in particular in David, and if Ministers should omit it, yet the people should themselves bring generals to particulars in applying the word to themselves at home, and in applying these particulars let them consider the doctrine delivered, that if there be any of these or any other way of wickedness in a man, he cannot be saved.

And though many will be ready to say, we know this already, it is no news to us; yet I fear that if the hearts of men were ransacked and searched, it would be found they believed it not, but that they think they may lie in some little sin, and yet be saved by the mercies of God

in Christ, for if they thought not so, they would not be so bold to lie in sin as they are: therefore doth the Apostle upon this occasion still put in this Caveat, be not deceived, as in Ephes. 5. 6. Let no man deceive you with vain words, because of these things • ommeth the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience, as if he had said; every man is apt to think, that notwithstanding such courses of disobedience he may be saved, therefore take heed says he, such advertisements as these the Apostle doth often use: As 1 Cor. 6. 9. it is as if one should say to a traveler asking him of the way, that at such and such a place there is a by-turning, if you take not heed, if you mark it not, you may be deceived, and go out of your way. Many have lost their ways there. So, be not deceived, saith the Apostle, it is twenty to one you will in this particular. We are ready to think God a God all of mercy, and to see the greatness of God's justice requires spiritual eyes; therefore though you know this, yet consider it: there are many things which we know, and do not know them, we see and do not see them, that is, we do not consider them as we should▪ and the Devil is apt for to delude us, saying, such a small sin may stand with salvation: and therefore it is no wonder, if many err. I may say of that man, that is fully persuaded of this, that to lie in any small sin whatsoever will condemn him, a thousand to one if that man will be turned.

However, let me clarify this further: despite occasional lapses, a person's condition may still be good. It is the persistence in a sinful way that makes it wicked. If you judge someone based on a step or two, you will judge incorrectly. Therefore, it must be a way of wickedness. The reason for this is that a way of wickedness stems from the very root, from the disposition of the heart, which a person will return to, whether it is good or bad. Even though a godly person may be temporarily led astray, they will ultimately return to their former path. Conversely, a wicked person may be constrained for a

portion of their journey by external influences, but consider the course they take when they reach the end of the path, when they have autonomy and freedom of choice.

Because we are discussing matters of salvation and damnation, it is crucial to make precise distinctions. What prompts us to make distinctions in this regard is the fact that a regenerate person may experience many relapses into previously forsaken ways, while wicked individuals may have moments of deviation from their evil ways and may even perform many duties and make substantial progress in obedience to the Law.

The question arises: How can we distinguish between these cases? This serves to unmask the one and provide comfort to the other.

Observe three rules to discern the differences:

1. Concerning the search for sin, an upright-hearted person, if faced with any ambiguous situation in their life, is willing to be fully informed and seeks guidance from the Word of God and wise individuals to determine what is right. When they have doubts, they are eager to resolve them and appreciate those who help them do so. "Lord, try me," as David said, is a sign of the uprightness of one's heart. When the heart is not sound, a person is reluctant to scrutinize their actions fully, as noted in John 3:20-21. This difference is taken from these verses: "Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that their deeds will be exposed. But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light." The righteous desire their deeds to be brought into the light for scrutiny, while the wicked hate the light because they do not want their deeds revealed. This applies to the Pharisees, who were scornful of having their righteousness questioned by Jesus. This quality is

sincerity, as the Apostle calls it, when a person is willing to have all their actions exposed to the light so that any flaws can be detected and rectified. They do not want their deeds to be concealed in dark places like inferior merchandise but brought into the open. Therefore, the upright individual delights most in the company of those who are free from their particular sin. Such individuals appear most attractive to them, and they appreciate a ministry that addresses this specific issue. Everyone is eager to hear evil spoken of their enemy, and sin is their greatest enemy. Thus, David was grateful for Abigail and Nathan for pointing out his fault, while Amaziah and Jeroboam were resentful of the prophets when they rebuked them. Someone who wishes to bring down a building is grateful to those who come with pickaxes, but if they want it to remain standing, they cannot tolerate anyone interfering with it. Similarly, since the strongholds of sin must be dismantled, a godly person appreciates those who help them in this battle. If your conscience questions whether a certain course of action is good, which is ambiguous, and you are reluctant to have it fully examined, it is a sign that you have a deceitful heart and desire to persist in that way. You find it delightful, as in Job 20:12, to keep sin hidden like an ulcer that you do not want anyone to approach. This indicates that you love it and have not turned away from it.

2. There is a significant difference in the foundation and principle of a godly person's abandonment of sin and obedience to the Law compared to an unregenerate person who has not genuinely turned, even though they may make considerable progress in both areas. The upright-hearted person not only experiences momentary convictions and fleeting resolutions to forsake sin but also possesses a law written on their mind that enables them

to resist the law of sin continually. This is what distinguishes them from the unregenerate person. As Romans 7:23 states, "I see a law in my members, warring against the law of my mind." A truly converted person has a dual law: one external, written in Scripture, and another internal, imprinted on their heart. This internal law empowers them to resist sin, whereas the unregenerate person lacks it. Thus, as the Apostle says in 1 Timothy 1:8, "The law is not made for a righteous man," meaning that it is not given to them in the same way as to others. Those without an internal law must be compelled primarily by the external law, whereas the righteous person possesses an inner law that continually opposes the law of sin.

Now, because elucidating what this law of the mind is will greatly contribute to a clearer understanding of this distinction, I will further explain what this law of the mind entails.

It is an inner disposition of holiness that aligns with God's Law, like a picture perfectly matching its prototype in every respect.

It is termed a Law because it commands with authority, compelling the heart to obey what the external Law commands, and conversely, it effectively prohibits sin, possessing the power to do so because it is the very power, virtue, and result of Christ's resurrection. It is the direct work of the Spirit, who is stronger than Satan, the world, and the flesh.

Additionally, it is called a Law because, like a law, it rewards and punishes. It rewards obedience with peace of conscience and joy in the Holy Spirit, and when a person disobeys, it causes sorrow and wounds the heart. This law smote David when he numbered the people and caused Peter to weep bitterly. Furthermore, it is referred to as the law of the mind because, although it sanctifies the entire

being, it predominantly resides in the mind. In a regenerate individual, the Law of the members, which pertains to the body's sinful tendencies, is stronger in the members and weaker in the mind and will. In contrast, this law enlightens the mind with saving, effective knowledge of God and His Law while imprinting all the virtues of grace upon the will.

With this explanation, the difference between a naturally enlightened conscience and this Law of the mind becomes evident through their effects.

The first distinction arises from the phrase itself, the law of the mind, which denotes that it has a different impact on the mind compared to the light of conscience. The knowledge impressed upon the mind by this Law differs from what enters the conscience of a natural person. Although an unregenerate individual may initially know the Law and consent that it is good, a regenerate person possessing this law of the mind goes further. They not only consent that it is good but also that it is good for them. This is the essence of what the Apostle means when he says in verse 15 that he consents to the Law, recognizing its goodness. Therefore, it has the same effect on their mind in terms of recognizing that it is good for them, as indicated in verse 16, which means it is good for them "here and now." This understanding is lacking in the unregenerate person due to a lack of illumination. The Holy Spirit convinces a regenerate person that it is best for them to obey the Law in specific circumstances, and they are able to apply it in all situations by addressing any objections. In contrast, the unregenerate person sees the Law as good in itself but not necessarily good for them in specific circumstances. Just as an envious person may first recognize what is good and then consent that it is excellent but not necessarily good for them, an unregenerate

person may acknowledge that sin is evil in itself but not necessarily evil for them in specific situations.

However, you may object that this implies that the difference between the knowledge of a carnal person and a regenerate person is a matter of degrees rather than a fundamental distinction.

The absence of degrees does, in fact, alter the kind, as in mathematics, where the addition of a degree changes the species and kind of a number.

This law of the mind instills a desire into the soul for what is righteous and against what is evil, as stated in Galatians 5:17. It not only motivates a person towards their duty because of conscience but also imparts an inner inclination towards it. Conversely, it creates a strong inclination within the faculties against sin, not only restraining outward actions but weakening the sinful tendencies through opposing desires. In contrast, the light of conscience, while it may curtail sinful actions, does not affect the underlying sinful habits. Galatians 5:24 mentions that not only are sinful actions restrained but the lusts themselves are crucified, their vitality diminished by opposing desires that permeate every faculty. Nothing can be weakened except by that which opposes it. Therefore, when considering the repression of outward actions, they both align. However, if the reduction of sinful desires is the focus, we may be misled. But when the habit of sin is weakened by a contrary desire, it is due to grace and the law of the mind.

The difference lies in the willingness to perform good and abstain from evil. "To will is present with me," says the Apostle in Romans 7:18, highlighting the provocation of conscience, which may prompt one to do what is good. However, to truly will it, to wholeheartedly desire it with the full determination of the soul, is another matter. An

individual may not be able to say that they do so. In 1 Timothy 1:9, it is mentioned that the Law is not given to a righteous person, implying that they have a law of grace within them that motivates them toward good without the need for external laws. In contrast, the law is given to the unrighteous because they would not do anything good without it. They lack a strong inclination towards what is good and an aversion to evil, as opposed to a regenerate person. Romans 7:15 emphasizes the point that they may hate the evil that the Law forbids and desire what the Law commands, but this does not necessarily mean that they consider it good for them in all circumstances. An envious person may recognize what is good, acknowledge its excellence, but not necessarily consider it good for themselves in specific circumstances. Similarly, an unregenerate individual may view sin as inherently evil but not necessarily as something that is always evil for them.

However, you may object that this implies that the difference between the knowledge of a carnal person and a regenerate person is a matter of degree rather than a fundamental distinction. The absence of degrees indeed alters the kind, just as in mathematics, where the addition of a degree changes the species and kind of a number.

These individuals differ in the power that accompanies the law of the mind in a regenerate person. Where this law of grace is present, there is not only knowledge of what should be done but also the power to carry it out. This law is like a kingdom, and a government is not merely in words but in power, as mentioned in 1 Corinthians 4:20. In 1 John 3:9, it is stated that someone born of God does not sin and cannot sin, but this should be compared with 1 John 1:12, which speaks of those born not of the will of the flesh but of the will of God. The combined meaning of these verses is that a regenerate

person born of God possesses a disposition in harmony with God's will in all things, and this disposition is innate, similar to natural qualities inherent from birth. As a result, they cannot sin in the sense that they cannot help but resist and strive against it, ultimately achieving victory over it. This is because they possess a law within them that directs them towards God's will. Conversely, natural individuals lacking this law are not and cannot be subject to God's Law because the disposition towards sin is natural to them; they are born of the flesh and the will of man. Therefore, this law of grace eventually eradicates all evil and, when good needs to be done, overcomes all obstacles. In contrast, corruption in unregenerate individuals fosters good actions but ultimately leads them back to sin. They may say, "I cannot keep the Sabbath in this way and refrain from such sins; my inclination towards sin is too strong."

The fifth difference can be discerned from the seventh verse: "Not I, but sin," and the last verse: "With my mind, I serve the Law of God, but with the flesh, the law of sin." This law of the mind brings about a change in the person. Can any unregenerate man in the world say, "It is not I, but sin"? If he does anything good, it is solely because of him; if he does anything evil, it is he alone who does it. A regenerate man never sins himself; that is, while he is truly himself, he never succumbs to sin. It is his flesh that sins when he is not truly himself, and it is an unregenerate man who, when he is truly himself, never fully yields to the promptings of grace. In contrast, a regenerate man, whenever he is truly himself, acts in accordance with this inner law. He is never otherwise overcome except by strong temptation, intoxication, or when a mist clouds his vision. "I always serve in my mind the Law of God." Therefore, even if he is overcome, there is a distinction in how he views it. He regards it as a captivity and a bondage worse than that of Egypt. He does not willingly submit to having his ear pierced and serving sin forever. In contrast, another

person views sin as liberty and the Law of God as a restraint. They may take delight in sin for a while but also delight in the Law in the inner man, which is the prevailing, constant, and overcoming delight. So, consider whether there is not another delight contrary to the delight in sin, which, though it may not be apparent when the flesh delights in sin, eventually prevails and overcomes it.

The third rule is to consider the manner in which you resist and fight against sin, and here, four notable differences come to light.

The upright in heart fights against sin with the whole disposition of their heart. All their faculties engage in the battle, as the stars did against Sisera. Firstly, the mind undergoes a change in them; they hold a different opinion about their sin. There is a transformation in their judgment; their mind is renewed. As long as a person's opinion remains correct, their passions, no matter how agitated, will eventually dissipate. While unregenerate, they are, as Colossians 1:21 describes, "enemies in their thoughts or reasonings." However, after conversion, they become friends in their understanding of God's ways, reconciled to them and becoming enemies of sin. The question here is not whether you think sin is evil or not, or if certain things are unlawful. Instead, it is whether something is evil to you, *pro hic & nunc*, at this time and under these circumstances. This is where conscience also comes into play, and it fights against sin. A tender conscience always fears. Proverbs 28:14 tells us, "Whoever hardens his heart falls into trouble," and it is this aspect of conscience that is culpable for this hardness or tenderness. A person with a hardened heart dares to venture upon sin just as they would upon a cannon's mouth. Although they may be temporarily swayed, conscience fights against it. Then there is the will, which also fights against sin by making a firm resolution to keep God's righteous judgments. Lastly, the affections resist sin; 2 Corinthians 12 describes how the Apostle

Paul prayed earnestly and was greatly troubled. Similarly, in Psalm 119:20, David expresses how his soul longs for God's judgments, demonstrating that his affections are stirred. In contrast, in an evil person, all their faculties work together to promote sin. Ephesians 4:18-19 illustrates this: "They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to the hardness of their heart. They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity." Here, you can see all four faculties in an ungodly person working in harmony for sin.

Their thoughts are darkened, and their understanding is inclined towards sin, leading them away from God's ways.

Next is the conscience, which, due to the hardness of their hearts, becomes unfeeling towards sin.

Then, the will plays its part as they willingly commit themselves to sin, resolving to betray their souls to it.

Finally, the affections come into play as they indulge in sin with great eagerness, driven by their wide-ranging desires.

This is the first difference concerning the subject.

The second difference pertains to the object of their struggle, the things they fight against. A carnal person battles against gross evils. For example, consider Herod's inner turmoil when he beheaded John the Baptist. He was troubled about how people would perceive this act and felt remorse for killing someone he knew to be a holy and good man. In contrast, a truly regenerate person, with greater insight, fights against a wider range of things. While another person may only see moral good and evil, a regenerate person recognizes the

spiritual holiness within a duty and pays attention to both the manner and the substance. They contend against even the smallest flaws in their actions. Many carnal individuals in the world criticize strictness, but a regenerate person's main concern is that they cannot be strict enough. Saul of Tarsus, for instance, was a knowledgeable man who understood the Law of Moses thoroughly and was familiar with the Ten Commandments. However, upon experiencing regeneration, he perceived and comprehended them in an entirely new way. He once thought himself alive without the Law, but when the Commandment came, sin revived and became apparent to him as a monstrous evil, which he had previously considered to be insignificant. Similarly, in matters of goodness, when a person's mind undergoes a transformation, they discern the entire will of God, His perfect will (Romans 12:2). Previously, they may have only recognized the main duties and the most obvious sins.

This represents the second difference related to the object.

The third difference relates to the outcome. For a carnal person, the result of their resistance is often "*deteriora sequor*" (I follow what is worse). In contrast, a godly person ultimately pursues what is best and emerges as a conqueror. Despite facing numerous trials, they continue to walk in the Spirit (Romans 8:1) and eventually mortify the deeds of the flesh. In Ephesians 4:17, it is described as walking "after the vanity of their minds," and they ultimately fulfill the lusts of the flesh. This can be compared to Saint Paul's state as depicted in Romans 7 and 2 Corinthians 12. Although he expressed much distress in both passages, he was given sufficient grace to prevent him from succumbing to sinful actions.

However, some of God's children have experienced defeats in specific actions. For instance, David fell into adultery, and Saint Peter denied

his Master. While they may have been defeated in individual actions, their ultimate victory was over their lusts. David's hatred and resilience against his sin are evident in Psalm 51, and he was fortified against it.

4. Another difference lies in the duration of the struggle. In the wicked, it only lasts for a time because the root of their inner conflict has no depth. It's like a beautiful flower growing on a blade of grass, and as a result, it withers quickly. When the combatants within a wicked person fail, the struggle ends. Saul resisted for a while but eventually persecuted David and gave in to his lusts without restraint. Judas was restrained for a long time and stayed among Christ's followers, but his greed eventually overcame him, leading him to betray his Master to the Pharisees. Joash restrained himself for most of his life while his uncle lived, but two years before his uncle's death, he surrendered to evil influences, and the princes paid homage to him, and he yielded. Similarly, Amaziah, after he had defeated the Edomites.

In a regenerate person, the inner struggle continues perpetually. It is an immortal seed that cannot be uprooted. Therefore, the combat endures and intensifies. There was a struggle of fear in Nicodemus when he came to Jesus by night, but he eventually overcame it and boldly spoke up for Christ. Similarly, we see this in Peter, who faced a lifelong struggle, as indicated by Christ's words, "They will carry you where you do not want to go." This inner strife in him never ceased until he met his end in this world.

These are the differences between the relapses of the godly and the wicked, and you should examine yourselves in light of them.

If God's promises are only for those who truly repent, then it follows that if anyone has provoked God's wrath through sin, they cannot expect to make amends through sacrifices, which include prayers and confessions. God demands one thing absolutely: "Except you turn, I will not be merciful." No matter what you do—humble yourself, fast, pray, seek God's face, etc.—God will not be satisfied unless there is genuine repentance. Therefore, do not say, "I have sinned, and I am sorry, and I confess it, but I am unable to stop," and still hope for God's forgiveness. Understand that acknowledging your sin without genuine repentance is futile. God requires more than mere remorse and confession; there must also be a real turning away from your sins. Stopping your sinful actions is not enough; there must be a divorce from your sins. This is why Daniel advised Nebuchadnezzar to "Break off thy sins by righteousness, and thine iniquity by showing mercy to the poor" (Daniel 4:27). Daniel did not just recommend prayer; he also urged Nebuchadnezzar to change his wicked ways and replace them with righteous deeds. This is the counsel God gave to Joshua as well when he was humbling himself and praying. God told him to "Get thee up, take away the accursed thing from among you" (Joshua 7:8). In other words, simply praying and fasting are not enough; what God desires most is that you remove the evil that has provoked His anger. Although this truth is acknowledged, there is a false belief lurking in the hearts of many, thinking that attending church, receiving the sacrament, etc., is sufficient for salvation. They would consider their spiritual state utterly deficient if they neglected these duties altogether. However, if they come to church, give alms, and so on, they believe that all is well. It is crucial to understand that unless you genuinely turn away from all sinful ways, all these acts of worship are in vain.

To convince you of this, consider that the purpose of the Word, conferences, and Sacraments is to turn you from your evil ways.

Therefore, God accepts them only to the extent that they achieve this effect. "You shall keep my ordinances and statutes, that you may walk in my ways, to fear me," says the LORD. This is the ultimate purpose of all ordinances and statutes. So, even if you perform many religious acts, unless your sinful desires are subdued, and you gain victory over the sins most natural to you, all is in vain.

Moreover, consider that those duties in which you trust (as we all tend to do), such as reading good books or confessing your sins, will bring about genuine change if performed correctly. If they do not, it is a sign that they are mere empty rituals and are not accepted by God. Without producing this desired change, what are they but bodily exercises, even if done with some intention of the mind? For the Apostle refers to them as "Bodily exercise, which profiteth little" (1 Timothy 4:8). In Romans 2, a distinction is made between being a Jew in spirit and a Jew in the letter, just as there is a distinction between a right and a false performance of the duties of the Law. One is in the letter, focusing only on the outward aspect of the duty, while the other is in the spirit, regarding both the inward and outward aspects. If these duties are not carried out with an inward change in the spirit that effectively transforms both the heart and life, then the praise may come from men (including yourself and others who may think you are a good Christian), but it is not from God. We are all God's field, and ministers cultivate it through ordinances. Now, what is the purpose of all this cultivation? Is it not to produce fruit? Is it enough for the trees to say, "We have submitted ourselves to all the cultivation, watering, etc., but we are still as barren, or our fruit as bad as before" (Malachi 3:2)? The purpose of Christ's coming is likened to a refiner who purges away impurities. This notion aligns with God's statement in Isaiah 1, where He abhorred the new moons and sacrifices because their silver had turned to dross. Both scriptures illustrate that the ultimate purpose of Christ's coming is to

remove this dross; therefore, if this is not accomplished, all religious performances, including new moons and sacrifices, are in vain. Consequently, unless there is a universal change from evil to all that is good in both object and subject, unless this change takes place within you, you will surely face judgment, and the Lord will not forgive you or heed your cries in heaven, even if you shed many false tears.

If true repentance is the condition upon which God's mercy is suspended, then it follows that good intentions and resolutions alone will not suffice. This is not to say that good intentions are unnecessary; on the contrary, they must precede every person's repentance, and when they are genuine, they lead to a true transformation away from all sinful ways. However, there are also false intentions. True intentions persist and give rise to consistent efforts and results, while false intentions leave us where they found us and quickly wither away. A carnal person possesses enough to breed good intentions, desires, and resolutions, such as natural conscience and desires for preservation and salvation. These two elements combine to generate sincere intentions. However, because this is still flesh, it is unable to bring about thorough change. This is akin to moorland and swampy soil, which produces tall grass that soon withers and decays, providing neither sweetness nor utility. Similarly, conscience, when enlightened to understand one's duty, and self-love, can generate good intentions that appear great and sincere but are ultimately like those described in Deuteronomy 5:29, where the people purposed to keep the Law. However, God laments, "Oh, that there were a heart to fear me!" as if to say that the soil, the ground, is not suitable for these intentions to thrive. Therefore, they will surely wither, as they lack a transformed heart to provide them with roots and nourishment.

Doct. 8. Turning from our evil ways is difficult.

The next point is drawn from the order of the words, with "turning from our evil ways" being the final condition mentioned. This indicates that all the other conditions merely pave the way for this central one. Prayer and humility, like all other duties, serve as preparations for genuine repentance. Just as the ultimate goal of pruning and dressing trees is to bear fruit, and the purpose of plowing and sowing is to yield crops, all other religious duties aim to bring about repentance from evil ways. The ultimate aspect is always the most challenging, as "*omnis difficultas in ipsa summitate*," or "all difficulty is at the very summit, at the utmost pitch and top of the hill." Therefore, since turning from evil ways is the ultimate goal of all other conditions, it is the most demanding. The Prophets consistently emphasize this point, urging people to turn away from evil and to rend their hearts. Then, and only then, will God leave a blessing behind. Given that this is the hinge upon which everything depends and is suspended, it becomes evident that mere intentions and desires will not suffice. While these intentions must precede every person's repentance and, when genuine, lead to a change from all sinful ways, false intentions wither away quickly and are fruitless.

It is undeniably challenging to turn from one's evil ways. This difficulty becomes evident in the case of the Israelites. The Jewish religion was quite demanding; they had to offer numerous sacrifices and observe various feasts, yet they were willing to do all this except turn from their evil ways. They resisted this change when it came to anything else. This difficulty is also apparent in human experience. Even if a person possesses a wicked heart, no amount of affliction, suffering, or near-death experiences will change them. Not even miracles, witnessed firsthand or performed upon them by God, will suffice. For instance, Jeroboam experienced a miracle—he had his

hand withered by a prophet and was warned of the impending loss of his kingdom, yet he remained steadfast in his evil ways. He found sweetness in those sinful practices, which he believed were essential to maintaining his kingdom. Similarly, despite the incredible wonders in Egypt, Pharaoh's heart remained hardened because he believed that keeping the Israelites enslaved was more profitable for him.

The reasons for this difficulty are multifaceted:

Firstly, evil ways are pleasurable and appealing to us, catering to the unique preferences of individuals. In moral philosophy, it is a recognized principle that actions involving pleasure and pain are often the most challenging to navigate. Therefore, the primary purpose of virtue is to guide and regulate these aspects of human life.

Secondly, these evil ways are deeply ingrained in human nature and align with one's natural disposition. Changing the course of one's nature, especially when it is well-established and reinforced by education and custom, can be immensely challenging. Additionally, the influence of Satan further complicates matters. When lusts smolder like sparks beneath embers, Satan is adept at inflaming them. Furthermore, associating with wicked individuals who follow similar courses of action amplifies the difficulty of resisting sinful temptations. Ephesians 2 underscores the power of the world's influences and the ruler of disobedience, who strongly and effectively shape our behaviour. While water may be weak on its own, a vast accumulation of it can exert immense force. Similarly, sin may be weak in isolation, but when compounded by factors like custom, Satan, and peer pressure, it becomes a powerful force that sweeps us along with the crowd.

Lastly, every evil inclination within us is supported by an internal law of our members, making resistance even more challenging. Romans 7:23 discusses how this inner law of sin rebels against the law of the mind, rendering individuals unable to do the good they desire and causing them to do the things they hate. This is because sin operates like a law, commanding obedience with great force. Laws demand and compel obedience; they carry authority and brook no defiance, and so does sin. Therefore, resisting it is difficult. Sin also forbids the performance of good deeds, making them impossible to carry out. In 2 Peter 2:14, this concept is expressed as "eyes full of adultery that cannot cease from sin." Sin, acting as a law, wields both punishment and reward. This aligns with the definition of a law—a mere instruction is not called a law, but when it includes threats, it is regarded as such. Our lusts function as such laws: if we resist them, they threaten us with harm. For example, when Ahab coveted Naboth's vineyard, his unfulfilled desire made him gravely ill, as if seeking vengeance until satisfied. Similarly, Haman's lust led to threats and ultimately, he met his downfall. Sinful desires not only threaten but also promise rewards, such as profit and pleasure, if we obey them.

Both of these aspects demonstrate the difficulty of resisting it.

Furthermore, it is called the "law of the members" for several reasons:

Firstly, it inclines us not just in a moral sense, as when a person is persuaded by reason or motives to do something evil, but because it inclines us physically, like nature inclines us to eat and drink. A law deeply rooted in the soul, if it inclines by way of nature, compels us as weights hang on wheels and set them in motion, whether they

want to move or not. Reason may be challenged and denied, but a strong natural inclination cannot be easily set aside.

Secondly, it reveals itself, though it is seated in the whole person, and is most active in the sensual part. In contrast, the law of the mind is most active in the superior part, although it sanctifies the entire person. In other words, it becomes apparent in the faculties of the mind when they engage in any virtuous action. It is called the "law of the members" because it is observed in the use of our bodily faculties. Just as a person with palsy might not notice it in their hand until they try to use it, and similarly, with gout, soreness, or lameness in the leg, it may go unnoticed until the person attempts to walk. Likewise, a difficulty or impediment in our faculties becomes evident when we attempt to engage in good deeds.

Lastly, this "law of the members" is described as rebelling against the "law of the mind." When we consider its forces in this conflict, we find it challenging to resist and turn away from them.

Firstly, there is a formidable coalition of evil at play—many members, many lusts, and legions of lusts are at war. The word used implies not a single battle but many. These lusts never fail to oppose anything good, casting their votes against it and opposing every good intention. They not only voice their disapproval but provide numerous arguments against it. They are not content with verbal opposition; they actively hinder the spirit when it seeks to do good. This is why they are referred to as "flesh" because they have the nature of dampening the spirit. Just as in the proceedings of men, sometimes Chancery issues an injunction to halt proceedings at Common Law, these lusts often issue prohibitions, obstructing us when we attempt to pray, discuss, and more. It is our role in warfare to block passages, remove bridges, and prevent the enemy from

going where they wish. Similarly, these lusts oppose us in our efforts to do good.

As mentioned in Galatians 5:17, the flesh lusts against the Spirit to the extent that we cannot do what we desire. It not only hinders us from doing good but also propels us toward evil. It not only engages in defensive warfare to protect its territory but also seeks to gain ground and battle like fire against water, striving to overcome grace wherever it begins and assimilate it to itself.

And finally, they are always ready to engage in war. Even if victory is achieved today, these lusts are prepared to attack again tomorrow. A foe you believed you had seen the last of renews its assault, and though you may repel all the motions and assaults the flesh launches against you today, there is such a brood, such a spring of these lusts that tomorrow, new ones will arise and provide fresh reinforcements. It continuously regains strength and starts anew.

All of this considered, it becomes evident that it is exceedingly difficult for unregenerate individuals to begin the process of turning away from their evil ways, and it is equally challenging for regenerate individuals to make progress in turning from their sinful paths.

If turning away from our evil ways and resisting the law of the members is indeed so challenging, then it is crucial to match your efforts to the task at hand; otherwise, success will elude you. If significant effort is required and little effort is expended, then what has been exerted will be in vain.

Therefore, reflect upon the fact that if you have expended little or no effort, the work is still incomplete. If anyone believed this to be an easy undertaking, let it serve as a reminder that the work is far from being accomplished. The blunter the tool, the more force must be

applied. Many remain entrenched in their sins because they have underestimated the difficulty of this task and believed that less effort would suffice. Is it simple to change and redirect the course of nature? Observe it through experience: if someone possesses a natural inclination, even if it is less active at times, it will resurface repeatedly. If you do not exert as much force against it as it brings with it, you are doing nothing to resist it. If someone comes against you with ten thousand, and you only meet them with two thousand, who is likely to emerge victorious? Therefore, you must spare no effort. *Difficilia quae pulchra*: the most excellent things are often the most difficult. Is it easy to construct a temple for the Lord and keep it clean and well-maintained? Consider the effort made by Saint Paul, as detailed in the last three verses of 1 Corinthians 9. "Every man who strives for the mastery is temperate in all things." Therefore, "I keep under my body and bring it into subjection," he says. He likened it to the rigorous training undergone by participants in the Olympian Games who invested significant effort and toil beforehand to prepare themselves for those contests.

Now, let's move on to specific details.

Is it not a challenging task to maintain constant vigilance against a spiritual enemy day and night, to fortify the defences against the relentless assault of the sea of lusts, and to withstand their ceaseless encroachment? Is it not demanding to carry the daily cross without faltering, to hold the cup of prosperity steady without spilling its contents, to ascend the hill of virtuous duties without growing weary, to abstain from the waters of pleasure when we are most thirsty and they are readily available, to move against the crowd without breaking a sweat, to be like an owl among men and bear the shame (as was said of Christ) who went out and suffered outside the gate, enduring reproach, all the while maintaining these efforts

continually? These are by no means simple tasks, and yet they must be undertaken. In this respect, men are like spendthrifts who complain of poverty and their inability to prosper, yet refuse to exert themselves. The sluggard will not withdraw his hand from his bosom, and men exhibit slothfulness in matters pertaining to salvation. To motivate you, consider that this is the primary purpose for which you came into the world. Do you believe that a little time spent on this task will suffice? In Matthew 11:12, it is stated, "The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force." This means that anyone who desires the kingdom of heaven must use force to seize it; violence must be directed towards your unruly appetites and desires. You must subdue them through force. Furthermore, you must exert force in your prayers and other holy duties, wrestle and strive in them, and be fervent in your efforts. Some good deeds require a degree of force. In that passage, Christ illustrates that when the preaching of the Gospel arrived and the beauty of the kingdom was revealed to men, they took it by force. However, who today is so captivated by these privileges, the hope of their calling, and so willing to seize them with force, sparing no effort? Therefore, stir yourselves and recognise the cost involved. This applies even to those who profess the fear of the Lord. Examine the anger and passion you have been subject to; you are still susceptible to them. Look at the lethargy you displayed in prayer; it remains the same. Your old weaknesses persist. You are found in the same condition. The reason is that you perceive a godly path to be an easy one; therefore, you have expended minimal effort in freeing yourself from the bondage of your lusts and growing in grace. Similarly, those outside the faith are not content to invest the cost and effort required to commence repentance; they believe it can be postponed and completed at any time. However, understand this, beloved, it is not so. Consider a man who is accustomed to idleness; is it easy for him to become diligent and industrious in his work?

Likewise, if someone has acquired a bad habit, how difficult it is to prevent them from descending further down the path, to rescue them from the pit of impurity, the allure of wealth, or the seduction of gambling, and so on.

But you might ask, what kind of effort are we required to make? To turn from our evil ways?

Directions could be readily provided. If your desires were sharpened and you were resolute, even that determination would be a means to overcome your evil ways. To assist you, consider these suggestions:

For those who are estranged from the covenant, I address this message first. When you find yourself ensnared by evil ways, do not initially attempt a reformation in specific areas; instead, strive to achieve a general transformation. In medicine, there is a principle that when a person has a particular ailment, the method for curing it is first to restore the entire body to a healthy state, which will, in turn, eradicate the illness. Therefore, humble yourselves, seek God's presence, and do not cease until you obtain some assurance of God's favour and a new Lord reigns in your hearts, a new purpose directs your actions. Until this fundamental transformation occurs, no progress can be made. Therefore, it is futile to attempt dealing with specific issues first. The ultimate purpose is akin to the rudder of a ship or the bridle of a horse; it directs everything. Concentrating solely on specific matters is like pushing a ship by its side when a simple adjustment of the rudder will suffice. Therefore, Rehoboam erred (2 Chronicles 10:14) because his heart was not prepared to seek the Lord, and his failure in that particular regard is attributed to his deficiency in the general sense. In Job 17:9, it is stated, "The righteous also shall hold on his way, and he that hath clean hands shall be stronger and stronger." Once a person's heart has undergone

transformation, they will persevere, but until then, their efforts with regard to specific issues will be in vain. For example, attempting to reform a particular sin is akin to dressing up a thorn; despite all efforts in manuring and pruning, it remains a thorn. Though you pray, fast, and humble yourself, if your nature remains unchanged, your efforts will be in vain. Consider tossing a stone a thousand times; it will fall back down because it remains a stone. However, if it were transformed into a different substance, such as a meteor, it would not return. Therefore, seek a fundamental change in your heart, and change in specific areas will follow suit.

Turn to CHRIST and implore Him to bring about this transformation in you. Put this into practice more often; we acknowledge formally that only the LORD can change us, but this is not often deeply considered. When your nature inclines strongly towards any evil way, to the point where you have almost lost hope of overcoming it, turn to GOD. Consider James 4:5-6: "Do you think that the Scripture says in vain, 'The spirit that is in us lusts after envy'? But He gives more grace." In verse 1, the Apostle had mentioned lusts waging war in their members, and they might have asked how to gain victory over them. True, says the Apostle, it is difficult to overcome, and indeed impossible for human nature. The spirit within us lusts after envy and will continue to do so. However, consider that the Scripture offers more grace than nature can provide. It is not in vain that it says the grace offered therein is capable of healing. Even if the disease is hereditary and beyond nature's cure, it is not beyond the cure of grace. Acts 10:31 states, "Him hath God raised up to be a Prince and a Saviour, to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins." When lusts overpower a man, Christ, as a Prince, steps in and conquers them, for He grants repentance. The purpose of His coming was not only to provide salvation but also to offer repentance. Just as physicians could not cure Naaman, but the Prophet could, and the

disciples could not cast out devils, but Christ could, do not say that it is an inherited lust that has lingered within you for a long time, and you have made many resolutions but cannot overcome it.

Consider a man born blind; he is considered incurable by human means, and all physicians would give up on him, saying he was born blind. Yet, remember that Christ healed those born blind and lame. Paul took this approach in 2 Corinthians 12:8. He had a strange lust he could not conquer, and he besought the Lord to remove it. "For this I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart." Similarly, in Psalm 51:10, when David found the remnants of his old sinful disposition and disease, he turned to GOD for a new heart. When he could not purify his heart, he prayed to the Lord: "Create in me a clean heart." Likewise, in the Gospel, he said, "I beseech thee, help my unbelief." Do not think that all is accomplished when you resolve to overcome your sin. While making a resolution belongs to you, curing it belongs solely to GOD. Therefore, turn to Him, for He has undertaken to circumcise your heart. In Ephesians 3:16, Paul prays that they might be strengthened in the inward man, and then in verse 20, he concludes, "Now to Him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us." It is as though he is saying, "You may find many weaknesses in yourselves, but do as I do for you: turn to the Lord to heal them, and know that He is able to do more than you can imagine, to subdue that lust you thought could never be overcome."

But how will He do it? According to that mighty power that works within us, a power as strong as Christ Himself, for it is the power of His death, the power that raised Him from death to glory. This power is capable of resolving all weaknesses and infusing you with all the graces you need. Do not give up; have faith in the promises of sanctification, just as you have faith in those of justification. Is He

not bound by promise to fulfil these for those who believe, just as He is for the others? Wherever God speaks, faith has an ear to hear and a hand to grasp. As God said to Joshua, "I will conquer those giants for you; I will bring down those walls they say reach up to the heavens. Only be courageous, trust in me, do not be discouraged for any reason, and do not give up." If Joshua had not trusted in the Lord, he would have quickly given up. Therefore, I say to you regarding your lusts, be courageous. No one is courageous except those who place their trust in the LORD. Do not faint or grow weary; just believe that you will overcome, and in the end, you will see them all conquered. A single word from His mouth was enough to calm the raging winds, and it is just as capable of stilling your lusts.

Many may object at this point, saying, "I have striven and prayed for a long time, and I have made great efforts, but I have not gained victory." This objection must be addressed, as it is a common issue, and Satan's aim is to discourage people and make them give up the battle.

First, consider whether your efforts are right. There is a false resistance to sin that the promise does not apply to, so it's no wonder if the promise is not fulfilled. For example:

1. It may be that you are not actually resisting the sin itself but the negative consequences it brings, such as damage to your reputation or health. If these consequences were removed, you might be willing to continue in the sin. This is not genuine striving that will be accepted.
2. Perhaps your resistance is weak, and a feeble denial only makes sin more persistent. Balaam initially denied the messengers, but it was a weak denial, and they sensed his hesitation, which made them more insistent. You may still be willing to engage with sin,

like Eve did, and gradually be drawn into committing it. Such feeble denials are not real resistance, and half-hearted companionship should not be seen as a fight against sin.

3. If your denial is more resolute, consider whether it is only for show, a façade for a good mood. A cowardly enemy surrenders after just one volley of shots, but Satan and our lusts are not like that.
4. Reflect on whether your resistance is only against the most blatant acts of sin and not against the slightest inclinations, hints, or minor temptations surrounding the act. These smaller temptations are of the same nature as the act, though they may not be as extreme. You may resist the major acts but allow the minor ones, engaging in some dalliance with sin.

For example, a drunkard may resolve not to indulge excessively but still sit with old companions and take sips, occasionally getting carried away. Balaam might go with them but speak only what the Lord puts in his mouth.

Similarly, a Levite may refuse to stay all day but can be persuaded to stay for breakfast, then lunch, and ultimately overnight. Such dalliance leads to adultery, and smaller sins can lead to greater ones, much like a small thief entering through a window allows the greater ones to follow. Therefore, if you fail in your resistance in this way, the promise does not apply to you. It's true that it's said, "Resist the Devil, and he will flee from you," but the resistance must be genuine, not like the examples mentioned earlier. That is the first answer.

You can also be deceived regarding victory, both by thinking you have it when you don't and by thinking you don't have it when you do.

First, consider the possibility of thinking you don't have victory when you actually do. For instance, when you find the sin you've been struggling against appearing stronger and more lustful than at other times, you may wrongly conclude that you haven't achieved or won't achieve victory. In reality, sin may be weakening and losing its grip. Conversely, when you believe everything is peaceful, you might be far from victory. Reflect on whether anyone but a regenerated person complains as passionately as the Apostle Paul does in Romans 7, lamenting his inability to do good, or as he does in 2 Corinthians 12 regarding the thorn in the flesh. Do you think anyone but someone with a sincere heart can approach Christ with tears, crying out for help with their unbelief? Can anyone but a broken heart pray as earnestly as David does in Psalm 51, asking for a new and clean heart? This deep sense of sin is evidence of our victory over it.

This complaining is a sign that we are winning the battle against sin. The reason you complain so bitterly against sin is that you are striving against it. Mud at the bottom of water doesn't trouble the water, but when an effort is made to clean the ditch, the mud rises and contaminates it. Yet this is a purging process. When one tries to extinguish a fire by beating it out with a firebrand, the sparks fly most at that moment. When we strive against sin, we feel it most, partly because Satan's manner is to resist and oppose when he is being driven out. It is also the nature of sin to resist when confronted. Additionally, our awareness of sin becomes more acute as our light increases through growing grace and striving against it.

On the other hand, you may think you have victory when you do not. A wound may be covered, but if it is not healed at its core, it will break out again. Sin may be lying dormant when you assume it is dead. Therefore, when turning from your evil ways, you must follow the right procedure. Your repentance must be sincere, and your faith

and assurance must be steadfast. If these preparatory actions are not carried out as they should, and yet you think your sin is defeated, you may be deceived. Just as an error in the first step of digestion is not corrected in the second or third steps, if your repentance has not been sincere, your turning from your evil ways cannot be effective.

To address this objection, consider that you are contending with a continuous source of sin. If it were merely a matter of emptying a cistern or drying up a pond, once the task is done, there would be no further issue. However, you are dealing with a perpetual source of sin, so don't believe that your previous efforts were in vain just because the sin reappears. It's similar to those who pump water out of a ship's hold: even if they remove all the water today, they cannot guarantee it won't return tomorrow. However, ceasing their efforts would ultimately sink the ship. This analogy applies to sin, especially certain sins. Some sins are more accurately described as "the law of the members" because they are rooted in the constitution of our bodies and our natural dispositions. These sins are prone to return regularly.

There is a significant distinction between these sins and the temptations of Satan. Temptations, such as blasphemous thoughts, are like weeds thrown into a garden and can be removed. However, these sins are like weeds that take root in the garden itself. Even if we weed them out, they will grow back. We should not expect or hope to completely eradicate the spring of original sin; the labour is ongoing. Just as we need to sweep our houses clean today and again tomorrow because they will get dirty, the same applies to our hearts. Therefore, do not be surprised if you find yourself continually labouring in this regard.

Consider this as well: God allows certain lusts and weaknesses to persist in order to humble you, just as He dealt with Paul by sending a thorn in the flesh to prevent him from being exalted beyond measure. He allows some grudges to remain even though He cures the Ague, so that we might go in the way of His commandments with a sense of humility, remembering the work of redemption and being aware of His mercy in Christ. He also permits such lusts to haunt us so that we become weary of this world, as Paul did, who desired to be dissolved and be with Christ. It is also so that we might learn to be merciful and charitable toward others, and have compassion for those who share similar weaknesses. Therefore, even if you fall, do not give up the struggle. Satan's goal is to discourage us. Be persistent with God, and in the end, He will grant you victory. As Christ said, if you ask for bread, will He give you a scorpion? If you ask for grace, will He abandon you to your lusts? He will not. God allows His children to strive and ultimately overcome. Jacob wrestled all night until daybreak, and then God granted him victory and blessed him. The Lord permits us to struggle for a long time, but our comfort lies in the promise that if we resist the Devil, he will flee.

Now, when you say, "I can't find it," understand that the promise doesn't mean Satan will completely disappear, or that your lusts will never return. Rather, it means that if you persist, you will have victory in that specific battle. It's like someone telling you to take a remedy for a fever; they don't mean the fever will never return, but that you'll be healed for the time being. So, in that particular battle, you will have victory.

If you still feel haunted and have not overcome, continue to strive with determination. Even if your corruptions seem too strong for you, if you make the effort, the Lord will consider your labour as a victory. You will not be condemned for it. Don't give up; instead,

think this way: if all this effort has gained so little ground against my lusts, where would I be if I had not contended at all? Therefore, I must put in even more effort and row harder so that in the end, I may overcome.

Since this advice is relevant to both the regenerated and unregenerated, I will provide additional rules and guidance on the efforts required to resist sin.

A third rule or means in the effort against evil ways is to strive to take notice of all the ways in which God labours to turn you from your evil ways. Do not let these pass without making an impression for the purpose that God intends. God uses not only His Word but also various other means to turn us, such as His works and many providential events. All of these should be observed. For instance, a great adversity that follows the commission of a sin, a severe illness that stops short of death, the onset of great fears and terrors of conscience due to some committed sin, or the spread of an evil reputation about us. He may also send friends to admonish us or execute judgment upon another for a similar sin in our sight. When God confronts you in some way, as He met Balaam, He expects you to understand something by it. Neglecting His dealings with us is taken ill by God, and it leads to further bondage to our lusts. In Daniel 5:22, there was a judgment on Nebuchadnezzar in the sight of his son Belshazzar, which should have been a means to turn him. However, it was noted that Belshazzar did not humble himself, even though he knew all this. This pattern was seen in Jeroboam's case in 1 Kings 13 when God sent a prophet with signs and wonders to him. Still, Jeroboam persisted in his evil ways. After all this, it is specifically mentioned in verse 23 that Jeroboam did not return from his evil way. In Jeremiah 3:8, Israel was carried into captivity long before Judah. God gave Israel a bill of divorce for her adultery, yet

Judah did not fear. God expected that the judgment on their neighbour should have led them to return. Therefore, consider what the Lord intends through such providential passages. These are like warning signs before the arrival of a great army or cracks before a fall. These are crevices through which the Lord reveals Himself. It should be noted that God draws men through His works as well as His Word, and His works can be taken in vain, just as His Word can. To let them pass without profit is to take His name in vain, for His name encompasses whatever He makes known through His actions. God will not hold guiltless those who misuse His name, and He will utterly destroy such a person. God does not harvest His wheat until it is ripe, and all His dealings with us aim to ripen us. He does not bring the wicked to destruction until they are ripe for it, and every such providential event ripens them. Most people are in one of three conditions. Some take no notice at all of such events, as if God passes by them unseen. This was the case with the Israelites in Deuteronomy 29, even though they had seen great signs and miracles in the wilderness. Others do take notice of them but leave only a slight impression, like a pale colour that does not dye well, and the tint quickly fades. In Mark 6:25, Jesus mentioned that people did not consider the miracle of the loaves because of the hardness of their hearts. They were amazed at His walking on water after witnessing the previous miracle of multiplying loaves. However, their hearts were hardened, and the previous miracle had not left a deep impression on them. On the contrary, consider the jailer's case, where the earthquake and the opening of the prison doors frightened him. This experience did not pass like a dream but left such an impression that it brought him to faith. All such providential events should work similarly with us, and that is the third direction.

The fourth rule is not merely to resist a sin or turn from evil ways but to fill the heart with something better. When lusts are mortified, the

stream of our affections is not dried up but diverted. Therefore, the way is not merely to try to stop the current of a sinful lust but to redirect your heart to something better. Set your heart upon something that is superior. Imagine a crabtree stock that is sour or bitter. The only way to sweeten it is to graft on it a branch of another nature, which will change it and gradually improve its constitution.

You may ask, what should be grafted onto it? I answer, do not pursue it as a moral person but as a Christian. Seek justification and sanctification. It is true that it is beneficial to be deeply humbled for your sin, and you should be. However, this is not the only way to heal it. Your heart must also be strengthened with the assurance of forgiveness for it.

There are two ways to turn the heart away from sin: one is to see the loathsomeness of that from which we turn, and the other is to see the beauty of the contrary object to which we turn. Do not solely focus your efforts on the former but also do something in the latter. The more contrition, the better, but it is not achieved all at once. It is increased by assurance and hope of pardon. When a person begins to have hope, they purify themselves. This applies to all other exercises; hope quickens our efforts. Just as one who is not close to a kingdom does not pursue it, but when they have hope, they begin to exert themselves. Therefore, acquire and increase the hope of the pardon of your sins. The Apostle, in Romans 15:13, prays, "Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace, through believing, etc." From the following words, it is evident that this prayer is meant to strengthen and set them right concerning all their infirmities. He points to being filled with joy and peace through believing as one means. In other words, if your hearts were full of spiritual joy through faith and assurance, your hearts would be purified. Faith is also said to purify the heart, and when the blood of Christ is applied by faith, there is a

virtue that goes with it. Hebrews 9:14 states, "How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal spirit offered up himself to God, purge your consciences from dead works?" In addition to sanctification, focus on that work. In John 17, Christ prayed for the preservation of believers from the evil of the world. How can this be achieved? "Sanctify them through thy truth, thy word is truth." When the heart is filled with grace, the impurities of the world fall off, acting as an antidote against corruption. Therefore, the more truth you get into your heart, the more grace you receive. Grace and truth go hand in hand, and they come through Christ, who is full of both. Therefore, 2 Peter 3:18 advises, "but grow in grace, and in the knowledge of Christ." However, not every truth is suitable for sanctification. The word is the truth that accomplishes it. Moral truths may have various effects on the soul, such as adorning it, but they cannot heal or purify it. Not all water will take soap to cleanse, and the word is that truth which purifies. You should not come to the word as if attending a lecture in philosophy, but as if encountering something that works wonders. The power of God accompanies it. The word does not work on its own, like medicine with inherent virtues. Instead, it is the Lord who sanctifies through the word. To consecrate the heart to God is to sanctify it, and divine truths are the only ones that consecrate the heart to God. Therefore, let us fill our hearts with grace and truth, assurance of justification, and joy in the Holy Ghost. By experiencing something better, the heart will be drawn away from the pleasures of sinful ways. Genuine joy will overshadow all other joys, including the joys of sin.

Stir up the graces that are within you. When we encourage you to seek God's help, we do not mean that you should leave all the work to Him. Some effort is required of you. I am speaking to those who have some beginnings of grace. You must stir up the graces God has given you. This is why Saint Paul says in 1 Timothy 4:15, "neglect not the

gift that was given thee." It is as if he said, "Timothy, you can accomplish much if you consider the abilities you have received—so much spirit, so much liberty, so much regeneration, so much free will towards good." Similarly, to the Church of Philadelphia, he said, "Thou hast a little strength." This is a talent, so use it. Therefore, in Jude 20, he advises, "build up yourselves and cleanse yourselves," among other things.

But you may ask, "How can we do this, given that it is the Lord who works in us both the will and the deed, and we can do nothing without the Spirit?"

Although the Spirit accomplishes this, we are also to be active in this work. Romans 8:13 states, "If you through the Spirit mortify the deeds of the flesh," indicating that while you do it through the Spirit, you are still engaged in the process. We can do things to draw the Spirit nearer to us, just as we can do things to grieve the Spirit and drive Him away. We can please the Spirit by focusing on pure thoughts and grieve Him with cloudy thoughts.

You may wonder, what does it mean to stir up our graces?

Stir up your understanding. Examine yourself for your sinful ways, try to see them clearly, and confess them. This is the way to forsake them, as Proverbs 28:13 suggests. Despise none of your sins, but use the light you have to thoroughly examine every doubt or uncertainty. Investigate even the seemingly minor transgressions, such as idle speech, frivolous conversations, excessive attention to worldly matters, and neglect of your duties.

Use that light to develop reasoning against your sins. Consider your ways, as David did, and ponder the reasons. Make a daily effort to reflect on the reasons that could lead your heart away from sin. For

instance, against unlawful gain, think of it as stealing custom, resulting in the forfeiture of all the rest. Reflect on how ill-gotten wealth is like a coal carried into an eagle's nest with a piece of broiled flesh, which consumes the nest, its young, and itself. Regarding sinful pleasures, consider that they are temporary and will ultimately bring bitterness, causing you to lose the greater joy that far exceeds them. If your sin involves vain glory, remember that all your efforts will be in vain, for that will be your only reward.

After completing these steps, add a third: exercise to overcome it. As Saint Paul advised Timothy, "Exercise thyself to godliness" (1 Timothy 4:15). Contemplate these matters and, if your failure is in doing good, make it a habit to perform the duty. If it involves doing wrong, abstain from it, and this will greatly help you. Just as a child who cannot do without the teat for an hour or two eventually stops seeking it when weaned, you can use this method against your besetting sin. Single out that sin which clings to you more than the others and treat it as David did in Psalm 18, keeping yourself from it.

Finally, observe how your lusts grow within you and how they fight for themselves. The lusts within us are like warring factions, as I mentioned from Romans 7, and Saint James also speaks of this. Saint Peter also alludes to their method of fighting. By observing this, you can learn to resist and thwart them.

Observe when any passion exceeds the boundaries set by Christ, for then it begins to rebel and wage war, much like subjects who rebel against their sovereign when they violate the ruler's laws. For instance, when Rachel insisted on having children and nothing else would satisfy her, it was a warring lust.

Pay attention to their tactics in battle. They employ cunning strategies to occupy the senses, allowing nothing good to enter that

might oppose them. They draw in through the senses anything that can feed and strengthen them, seeking objects that provide sustenance. For instance, when the heart is full of adultery, so are the eyes. They also cut off the supply from the opposing side, causing us to neglect prayer, reading, and other holy duties, just as the Philistines disarmed the Israelites and prevented them from having a blacksmith.

They lure people out of their strongholds with traps, leading them into ambushes. This is similar to how Joshua drew the men of Ai out of their city, or how fishermen drive fish out of their hiding spots in corners of the river and catch them in their nets. Lusts similarly draw us away from the safety of our salvation, our resolutions, our religious practices, and our callings, only to ambush us. They gradually lead us into these traps, just as Peter was gradually drawn into denying his Master. Initially, lusts come upon us with minor skirmishes, not launching full-scale temptations. Lusts don't immediately entice us into committing great sins. We often underestimate their influence and become negligent, allowing them to launch a major assault. Just as David initially looked at Bathsheba, then engaged in conversation with her, and finally acted foolishly, so do lusts progress subtly. Therefore, take heed and be skilful in spiritual warfare, much like the Athenians dealing with neighbouring enemies. Recognize this cunning strategy of lusts and, as Saint Peter advises, abstain from them. Once an affection becomes overpowering, avoid getting entangled with it. If you do, you allow an enemy into your soul that will betray it. Just as David, when he had a strong desire for water fetched by his soldiers, refused to drink it and poured it out on the ground, so should you abstain from such desires or associations if your affections exceed their bounds.

Keep watch as well, for even if you are armed, if you do not watch, your armour will be of no use. Just as Saul was armed but asleep when David came and took his spear, be vigilant. To avoid falling asleep, maintain sobriety and work to weaken the sinful desires within you by taking action. An unexecuted law becomes antiquated and weakens over time, while custom strengthens it. The less you obey these lusts, the weaker they become. When these lusts tempt you to neglect a duty, yielding to them strengthens them, while resisting them weakens their power.

Furthermore, a law loses its strength when it is not feared. Do not fear the threats of sin. When sin threatens that you will lose a friend or face danger, disregard it, and this weakens its force.

If reason fails, use force and strong resolve to resist sinful desires. Overcome these desires with a determined resolution.

Doct. 9. All sins forgiven to the humble that forsake sin.

"And I will be merciful to their sins..."

The following are specific instances in which God will especially hear their prayers.

If they humble themselves and pray, regardless of the magnitude of their sins, God will show them mercy.

The reason why He says He will be merciful to their sins (according to the earlier translation) is to remove all objections. Some might argue that their sins are great, numerous, and frequently repeated. However, all these sins are suitable objects for mercy, which triumphs over them like a mighty sea swallowing up molehills.

To dispel the notion that all their acts of humility, prayers, and new obedience are not required as a fitting satisfaction for their sins, the Lord clarifies that forgiveness is given out of sheer mercy. It is not granted based solely on these actions but is free forgiveness. Some may secretly hold the belief that something must be given or some satisfaction must be made for God to forgive, as if God would not forgive unless they satisfied for themselves, thus balancing their sins. No, it is purely an act of mercy, free forgiveness.

To emphasize the great value of this gift, the pardon of sin, the Lord says, "I will be merciful and forgive them." It's as if He's saying, "Remember that you deserve destruction and cannot pay the smallest debt. But I forgive you out of pure compassion." Therefore, the matter at hand is a gracious promise of mercy and forgiveness, which is the most appealing aspect and should encourage people to turn back to God. It is the proclamation of pardon that must draw in those who have gone astray, while the proclamation of rebellion drives them away. People are more easily swayed by kindness than threats. The Gospel softens hearts and makes people humble themselves.

However, some may argue that the preaching of the Law is not necessary if the Gospel achieves the same purpose. Nevertheless, the preaching of the Law acts as a preparation. In all those brought up in the Church, there is some knowledge of the Law that precedes, but it is the Gospel that softens the heart first. Just as ice can be broken with hot water as well as with hammers, the Gospel has the same effect on the heart as the hammer of the Law and makes the prior knowledge of the Law operative. Thus, the Law and the Gospel cannot exist separately in their true working; they are interdependent. For the perfect work of the Gospel, the knowledge of the Law must precede.

Regardless of a person's sins, if they genuinely humble themselves, repent, and forsake their sins, they will be forgiven.

As a side note, it is essential to understand that the Gospel was preached to the Jews just as fully as it is to us. In this passage, they had the same means of salvation and were promised the same great mercy and forgiveness. The difference lies in the extent to which the mysteries of the Gospel, such as Christ's incarnation, death, and resurrection, were revealed to them. They had the promises of forgiveness just as clearly but lacked knowledge of the underlying foundations and privileges we have through Christ. To support this point, consider Isaiah 1:18: "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow; though they be red as crimson, they shall be as wool." The prophet reassures the people that, despite their grave sins, they can be completely cleansed, as if scarlet were turned as white as snow or crimson as white as wool. The people might have questioned how they could benefit from exhortations to do good deeds when they were such great sinners. To address this doubt, the prophet explains that even the gravest, bloodiest sins (crimson and scarlet being the highest degrees of red) can be wholly forgiven. The Lord invites them to reason together, acknowledging that it requires strong reasoning to persuade them to believe in such complete forgiveness. The Lord then proceeds to provide reasons based on His attributes to affirm this promise.

1. From His truth, the Lord has spoken, and this alone is a compelling argument. Therefore, having made the promise of forgiveness in the previous verse, where He pledged to subdue their iniquities and cast their sins into the depths of the sea, He adds, "You can be sure that God will perform this promise, for not only has He promised it, but He has sworn it, and not recently, but from ancient

times. There is an oath to it, an old oath, one with many witnesses, including Abraham, Jacob, and all the fathers who have come since. Will He not, do you think, be as good as His word?" Acts 10:43 confirms this: "To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name, whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins." This is what Saint Peter proclaimed to Cornelius. Peter stated, "We deliver this from God to you, and it is not just us, the Apostles, saying this, but all the Prophets, including Isaiah, Jeremiah, and all the others, bear witness to this truth." When the Lord has said such things and made an unequivocal promise, He expects you to believe it. Failing to grasp hold of such promises is a greater sin than you may realise. Consider how the Lord argues this in 1 John 5:9-11: "If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater; for this is the witness of God, and he that believeth not God hath made him a liar." In other words, will you not believe? If an honest person were to promise you something, you would believe them. Yet, will you not believe me? It's as if you think that person has more truthfulness than I do. Moreover, by not believing this testimony of His Son, you make the Lord a liar. What is this testimony? As the Apostle repeats, "The Lord hath given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son," meaning that whoever believes in Christ shall have their sins forgiven and receive life. Pardon is what brings life to the condemned traitor.

2. Although the Lord's word is sufficient evidence and greatly aids our faith, knowing that He possesses a merciful and gracious disposition encourages us to approach Him more willingly. Therefore, consider how the Lord expresses His nature to us in Exodus 34:6-7: "The LORD God, merciful, gracious, and longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin." As if He said to Moses, "Would you like to understand the inner disposition of My soul? This is My

nature—to be merciful and gracious, etc." The Lord intended to convey this aspect of His nature to us. Understanding that this is His nature strengthens our faith in His promises, for all His promises flow from this nature and derive their strength from it. He is rich in mercy because it is His nature.

3. Add to this the attribute of His wisdom, which also helps us believe in His mercies. The God who made these promises is exceedingly wise and understands those He deals with. He knows the original corruption within us, the root of all sin, and He knows our weaknesses and what lies in our hearts, just as a maker knows the inner workings of their creation. It is no surprise to Him when we fall into sin. Psalm 78:38-39 reflects this wisdom when it speaks of the Israelites' rebellions despite witnessing the Lord's great works in bringing them out of Egypt. It states that despite their rebellion, He, being full of compassion, did not destroy them but forgave their iniquity. Why? Because He remembered that they were but flesh. One might wonder how the Lord could forgive such a stubborn people who had experienced His power and mercy through great miracles. He did so because He remembered and wisely considered the components that make up their natures; He remembered that they were but flesh. Similarly, Psalm 103:13-14, which mainly consists of promises of forgiveness, cites this as the reason for all: "For he knows our frame; he remembers that we are dust." He knows what we are made of and, therefore, is exceedingly merciful.

4. Now, when you object to the pardon of your sins based on the Lord's justice, which terrifies you and holds you back, know that we can use this very attribute to strengthen our faith in forgiveness. In 1 John 1:9, it is written, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us." This should be the foundation of our comfort. He is both just and faithful. Is He not bound by His promise, and is He not

faithful in keeping His word? Moreover, has He not been satisfied and paid for our sins through Christ? His justice will not allow Him to demand a second payment. Justice demands forgiveness now, while faithfulness pertains to His promises and justice to the ransom paid by Christ's blood, which cleanses us from all our sins.

5. If all these arguments fail to persuade our hearts to believe, the Lord provides another reason for His readiness to pardon, one based on what we know about ourselves. Consider how you deal with your children. Psalm 103:13 says, "Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord them that fear him." If your child, who is your own flesh and blood, offends you a hundred times but humbles themselves and seeks forgiveness, you will pardon them. Will not God, then, do the same when His people humble themselves? We use arguments that God Himself employs, and we set Him and your consciences together to reason through the matter. However, you may object again, suggesting that a child can offend to the point where a father will not or cannot forgive them. This is true, but the psalmist's intention is not to imply that God forgives no more readily than an earthly father. On the contrary, he is saying that if earthly fathers can do this, an infinite Lord God, who is not human but omnipotent, can do even more. His omnipotence is evident in His ability to pardon. This can be compared to Isaiah 55:9, which states, "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts." Even if you cannot forgive and cannot conceive of how certain transgressions could be forgiven, God can forgive them.

A second set of arguments is drawn from the means and instruments through which forgiveness is conveyed. "We are come to Jesus, the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, which speaks better things than the blood of Abel" (Hebrews 12:24). This is

meant to encourage your faith. It's as if the writer is saying, "Consider how loudly Abel's blood cried out, bringing down vengeance upon Cain. Now, how much louder shall the blood of Christ cry out? What can it procure for us?" It speaks better things, namely, for mercy, which God is more inclined to hear than vengeance. This cry is not like Abel's, the blood of an ordinary man; it is the blood of God's own Son. Compare this with Hebrews 9:14: "How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered up himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works?" Just as the writer compared it to Abel's blood, here, he compares it to the blood of bulls and goats used in the Old Law for the outward purification of the flesh. He shows how much more the blood of the Son of God can cleanse our consciences. We cannot fully grasp or express this concept; the writer simply says, "How much more," and he supports it with two reasons. First, the blood of Christ was offered through the eternal Spirit, making it the sacrifice of God Himself, not just a man. Second, it was a sacrifice without blemish.

There are three common objections we make against ourselves because of our sins:

1. We believe our sins are too numerous.
2. We think our sins are too great.
3. We fear that we repeatedly fall into sin.

Now, the sprinkling of the blood of Christ, thus offered, is sufficient to cleanse your consciences from all these sins. In Ezekiel 36:25, it is written, "then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean from all your filthiness, and from all your idols will I cleanse you." Here, the water symbolizes the blood of Christ, which cleanses from sin and filthiness, no matter how many or how great the sins

may be, including filthiness and idolatry. You might say, "But I have fallen into these sins repeatedly." In response, the blood of Christ is compared to a fountain open for sin and uncleanness. It's not a stagnant cistern but a perpetual spring that runs continuously to cleanse us. Just as there is a spring of sin in us that defiles us repeatedly, there is a spring of virtue in His blood that cleanses us, never to run dry.

The final reason comes from the freeness of the covenant God has made with mankind. In Revelation 22:17, there is a general invitation for all to come and drink of the waters of life freely. The covenant's terms are clear: "If any man thirst, let him come to me and drink." There are no other conditions required except coming and thirsting, which go hand in hand. The invitation is free, and this should convince us and help us believe that no matter how great our sins are, if we humble ourselves, they will be forgiven.

Before I apply this to anyone, I must exclude those whom the Lord Himself excludes, or rather, those who exclude themselves. Remember the last letter of His name in Exodus 34:6, "That he will not hold the wicked innocent." If you are a carnal person, you have no part in this children's bread; you are like a dog. 1 Peter 2:22 speaks of those who, like a dog, return to their vomit. In your sickness and distress, did you not make many promises and resolutions against your sinful ways, only to return to them eagerly after your recovery?

Furthermore, you may not have any thirst for these promises; you may care for them no more than your old shoes. These precious promises contain immense value and riches, and none shall obtain them without truly valuing them above all else. If you have never had your heart broken by the apprehension of sin and God's wrath, you

cannot truly thirst for them and thus have no part in this water of life. A person who remains whole-hearted and untroubled by sin throughout their life may hear these promises mentioned but has no part in them.

Hypocrites are also excluded, for their portion is destined for hellfire, and as long as they remain hypocrites, they have no part in these promises. A hypocrite is not willing to abandon holy duties entirely, yet they are not willing to perform them sincerely. They are like eagles soaring high in pretence while keeping their eye on the prey below, ready to swoop down for it when the opportunity arises. They seek preferment, credit, riches, etc., all the while. You may appear righteous in your own eyes and cleanse yourself before Communion or other occasions, but your hypocritical nature remains.

4. Or perhaps you are simply a wicked person.

But you may ask, who are these wicked men? I will provide a description that no one should reject. They are those who hate the Lord. No one should be surprised if they are called wicked when they fall into this category, as it is clearly stated in the second commandment. When we hear this, many will say, "I hope my condition is good, I am not one who hates the Lord." However, many thousands who think well of themselves will be found to hate the Lord when put to the test. To examine yourself in this matter, allow me to ask you a few questions.

1. Do you not hate the law? Do you not wish that the law were less strict and allowed more freedom? Let an unregenerate person examine themselves, and they will likely find a disposition in them that desires the law to permit them to commit certain sins. They view the law as something contrary to them, and their complaint about godly individuals is that their ways are contrary

to theirs, as mentioned in the book of Wisdom. What ways? The ways of the law. Where there is opposition, there is hatred, and if they hate the law, they hate the lawgiver, God, because the law reflects His image.

2. Do you have no great delight in being where the Lord is? Do you lack any pleasure in holy duties except when they have become familiar due to habit and natural conscience? Are you uncomfortable in the company of the saints (for where two or three are gathered in His name, God is among them), and do you feel out of place among them? If they are formal like you, you can tolerate them, but if they are holy, and the holiness of God is evident in them, you do not delight in their presence. You might be able to be among the saints if they remain silent, but if God's presence is apparent, you cannot endure to be there.
3. Do you hate those who resemble the Lord? If you do, you hate the Lord Himself because we test our love for the Lord through our love for the brethren, and the same applies to hatred. Is there an inexplicable dislike for them, even though you may not know why? An antipathy, perhaps, for which you cannot provide a reason? It is because God has put enmity there, and no one can bring about friendship. All the endowments, pleasant interactions, and qualities of the saints will not eliminate the enmity that wicked people feel toward them. David was a poet, a soldier, a man of excellent qualities, wise and brave, yet he faced considerable hatred from others because of his goodness.
4. Do you not desire that there were no God? Could you be content to live forever in this world if you were happy here, and if there were no hell? Could you be content if there were no heaven, no God, and no Judge in the end? If every unregenerate person

examines themselves, they will find this desire within them. Now, if someone wishes for the removal of another, that they were not present, it is a sign of hatred. For that is the nature of hatred: to desire the complete removal of the things that are hated.

5. Do you lie in some known sin? Every person who dwells in a known sin, a sin they are aware of, fears God as a Judge. If someone is a thief, they will fear the Judge. And whoever fears someone, hates them. It is a sign of hatred to desire the utter removal of the one who is feared. Therefore, if you live in some sinful way in which you permit yourself, and you have no qualms about it, you have no part in these promises. Only those who claim a share in the promises are those who have a conscience about all their actions, dare not neglect the least duty, and do not perform them carelessly.

Lastly, consider this: are you not one of the foolish virgins who delay repentance, neglecting to provide oil in time? Do you think you can repent at the last moment, saying, "I will come in before I die"? Are you like the sluggard in the Proverbs, lying securely in the bed of your sin, reluctant to rise, turning on the same hinges, never moving forward? The Lord has declared in Deuteronomy 29 that He will not show mercy to such a person, but His anger will burn against them.

But you might ask, are you preaching damnation to me? Will you leave us in despair? I reply that we preach damnation to you while you persist in such ways to drive you out of yourselves and into Christ. It would be time well spent to make you lose hope in yourselves. But can we have no hope left? None in the state you are in, except the hope of the hypocrite, which will perish with them. If your hope were genuine, it would purify your heart, as Saint John

says. But can I not pray? If you continue in your sins, your sins will drown out your prayers. At the moment of your death, when even the smallest share of these promises would be worth the world, you will be told that you had nothing to do with them. God called upon you at one time, and you refused. Therefore, even if you cry to Him, God will not hear you.

But if there is a broken-hearted sinner who desires to fear the Lord and sincerely serve Him, who has this conviction in their conscience: although they do not do as much good as they would like, they resist all sins and do not allow themselves in any, whether small or great—then I say to you what the Apostle says in 1 Peter 1:13: "Hope fully on the grace brought to you through the revelation of Jesus Christ" (ἐλπίζετε τελείως ἐπὶ τὴν φερομένην ὑμῖν χάριν ἐν ἀποκαλύψει Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ). Do not hope by halves; hope completely. If I had told you to hope in your sanctification, you might have done so imperfectly because your sanctification is imperfect. But since the free grace of God is given to you as a rock to trust and rely upon, hope fully in it. Place all your weight and burden upon it. In Hebrews 6:18, it is said that when God made the covenant of grace, He swore an oath so that we might have strong consolation. This is an argument often forgotten among Christians, and as a result, they lack the strong consolation they could have. Do you consider it a small matter to partially and in any degree take God's oath in vain? God swore that you might have strong consolation, and He wanted it to be so strong that when Satan attacks you, it can be a strong fortress to withstand all assaults. So why is your faith so weak? What are the hindrances?

1. One hindrance is that we are deceived about the covenant. Hasn't the Lord promised to justify the ungodly and commanded us to believe in Him who justifies the ungodly, as

stated in Romans 4:5? Hasn't He asked us to come with empty hands? But you come with a handful of humility, saying that you didn't dare to come before, and now you can come better. The more you hold in your hand, the weaker your grip. A person in danger of drowning cannot grasp a life-saving cable if they hold onto something. An empty hand holds the most securely. If your humility is true, it will empty you of all self-conceit. Therefore, if through humility you have nothing of your own to trust in, you are better suited for mercy. Do not always focus downward on your sins; look up to God. In Hebrews 6, it is said that those who have fled for refuge to the hope laid before us have strong consolation. This hope is not something in ourselves, but like a refuge that we flee to, it is laid out before us, does not arise from within us, and is from above. Our hope is not the thing we hope for or the grace of hope within us but the sure promise of God confirmed by an oath. This is the object of our hope, and it is called our hope because it is our refuge, laid before us, and originates from God's own nature. If we anchor ourselves on this, we will have strong consolation, both for its certainty in not failing us and for its stability in establishing our hearts. But if we flee to anything in ourselves or anchor ourselves in it, we will be tossed by every wave.

2. Our daily infirmities are also a significant hindrance. People often think, "If I had faith, it would purify my heart so that I wouldn't fall into sin as frequently as I do. How can I have such strong consolation while I continue to stumble?" To all sincere-hearted Christians, I say that their infirmities should not weaken their faith and consolation. Instead, they should strive to strengthen their sanctification. Tell yourself that because your sins are greater and more numerous than those of others, you will work harder for sanctification in the future. You will love

more and be more devoted in the time to come. But do not say, "Therefore, I will doubt or despair of God's mercy."

3. Another hindrance to laying hold of the promises of forgiveness is a mistaken belief that one lacks sufficient humility. Some may think they are not humble enough. But if your desire for Christ is so strong that nothing else can satisfy you until you have Him, do not hesitate to lay hold. That is enough; do not dwell on the measure of your humility.

Lastly, it might be that you have not prayed enough for assurance of forgiveness, and that's why you lack it. Here, prayer is mentioned as a condition: "If my people pray, among other things, for forgiveness of their sins and the assurance of it." No amount of argumentation can convince the heart of this assurance; only the spirit of adoption can. Can such a great mercy be obtained without fervent prayer? So, go to God and seek His favour. Even if He delays, continue in prayer. Perhaps the Lord withholds it because He wants you to place a high value on it, which you might not do if you obtained it easily. But do not be discouraged; keep on praying, and in the end, you will receive it abundantly.

Listen, all of you who are upright and sincere in heart, here is your comfort: continue to seek God's face in this way, and all your sins will be as if they had never been committed by you. Just as it is said in Jeremiah 50:20 about the sins of Israel and Judah, "The iniquity of Jacob shall be sought for, and there shall none be found." The same will be true for your sins when they are sought for. Is this not a great and indescribable mercy? A person will be as if they had never sinned, as innocent as Adam was in Paradise.

But you may object and ask, can sins that have been committed cease to have been committed or cease to have been sins?

Answer: It is true that what is done cannot be undone. All the acts remain as things that were once done, and they may be said to have been committed and were thus heinous. When it is said that there shall be none, the meaning is that they shall have no power to harm you. Just as our Saviour said to his Disciples in Luke 10:19, "You shall tread upon serpents and scorpions, and they shall not hurt you," I may say the same of sin – it shall not hurt you because its sting has been taken away by Christ. Or consider it like the fire in Nebuchadnezzar's furnace, which had the power to burn others but could not even singe a hair of the three children because Christ was with them. Thus, those sins which may sting and will sting others to death due to their impenitence shall not harm you but will fall off like the viper from Saint Paul's hand.

Some hold the opinion that God cannot see any sin in His children because, they say, there are none to be seen once a person is in Christ. However, that is not the meaning of the saying that God sees no iniquity in Jacob. The sins are still there, but they are crossed out and cancelled, although the lines may still be visible. These sins cannot be enforced or prosecuted because they are crossed out and cancelled. Like a falling star losing its light bit by bit until it reaches the earth and goes out completely, sins, when they fall from their proper element and sphere, which is an unregenerate heart where they once had dominion, lose their light and influence. Eventually, both the guilt and power of these sins will completely vanish.

I would like to add a caution to this: the Saints must be aware that, despite this, their sins are retained until they actually repent again. The Lord's anger may be kindled against them, and they may feel its effects, which can make their hearts ache. For example, the Lord met Moses and would have killed him in the inn for neglecting the ordinance of circumcision. Moses' sin was not forgiven until he had

humbled himself and corrected his mistake. God was also angry with the Israelites who fled before their enemies until the accursed thing was removed. Similarly, when David sinned in the matter of Uriah, it is said at the end of 2 Samuel 11:27, "The thing that David had done displeased the Lord," and the Lord's wrath, like that of a father, was against him, though not that of an enemy. David was only well-pleasing to God again when he had humbled himself and repented. So, to have strong consolation, examine your hearts and lives, making sure that there is no unrepented wickedness in you before applying all these promises. When you do this, you can find comfort in these promises.

Now, let's address those whom we previously excluded, for the purpose of our preaching is not to shut them out forever. If the Lord will be merciful to our sins when we are humble, there is an open door for those who are outside, an opportunity to exhort them to come in. Come and welcome. God is exceedingly merciful and ready to forgive and receive you. The promises of mercy are what can draw people in. The proclamation of pardon brings the rebels in. What greater motivation can we offer than this: no matter how great your sins may be, with all their circumstances, if you come in humbly, turn to God, and repent, He will be merciful to you. It doesn't matter how great your sins have been; what matters is your humility and your resolve to confess and forsake your sins. Your sins have not exceeded the price that has been paid for them, and God will not only pardon your sins but also leave a blessing behind. If you were to come to any person you have offended in this manner, they might say, "Are you not ashamed to come to me after wronging me like this, to look me in the face and not just ask for forgiveness but also request such a favour from me? How could you have the audacity to do so?" However, the Lord never responds in this way because He is not like a human. As Jeremiah 3:11 says, "Though a man puts away

his wife, and she becomes another man's, he will not receive her again; yet return to me," says God. It is possible for people to commit sins that cannot be forgiven by other people, but God can pardon any sin.

You are aware of the pernicious counsel that Ahithophel gave to Absalom, advising him to go in to his father's wives to create an irreparable rift between his father and him, thinking it would be such an injury that David would never tolerate. Yet, God says, "Return to me." God can pardon any sin. He says, "I will scatter your sins like mist and your iniquity like a cloud."

Some sins are small like mists, and others are more significant and gross like clouds. God's mercy is capable of scattering both. Do not say, "Oh, I would have been a happy person if I hadn't fallen into this or that sin. I would have been forgiven." It is true that concerning the dishonor to God, it would have been better if you hadn't committed it. However, I will say this: concerning obtaining pardon, you can still be happy. If you humble yourself, this sin will not prevent you from happiness. You can be in as good a condition as anyone else whose sins were smaller. Know that when you have come home, God, looking upon you in Christ, is not displeased with all your sins as much as He is pleased with your repentance in and through Christ.

But how can a person be persuaded of God's readiness to forgive?

Consider the passage: "As I live," says the Lord, "I do not desire the death of a sinner, but rather that he turns from his wickedness and lives." God has taken an oath that He delights more in saving than in destroying, and you can believe Him. Consider what Christ used to do in the days of His earthly ministry. He is still as merciful a High Priest as ever. None were more welcome to Him than tax collectors

and prostitutes who came to Him with repentance. He is just as ready to receive us now as He was then.

I have no doubt that Christ is willing, but what about God the Father?

It is certain that He is not willing to have His Son's blood shed in vain. It would be of no effect if sinners like you were not saved. Thus, the blood of Christ is enhanced because it is sprinkled on many for great sins. Do not think, therefore, that God is reluctant to pardon. Psalm 130:3-4 gives us two more arguments to help us understand this. If God were to mark what is done wrong, who could stand? No one would be saved. It is not His will for all humanity to perish, so He will not cast people away entirely for their sins. Moreover, no one else would worship Him. "There is mercy with You, that You may be feared." He intends to have some servants who will fear and worship Him. Shall I go further? God is not only ready to forgive but also desires it. He is even glad at heart when a great sinner comes to Him. This is illustrated in the parables of the lost sheep and the lost coin. How the woman rejoiced upon finding her coin, and the shepherd for his sheep! Similarly, in the parable of the prodigal son, how overjoyed the father was when he heard that his son, who had lived recklessly and squandered his wealth, was returning home. It was to demonstrate that God is deeply affected when a great sinner returns to Him. Furthermore, God not only says, "If you come, I will keep the door open; I will not shut you out," but He also invites, calls, sends His ministers to bring you in, and even entreats, beseeches, commands, and warns.

But you may ask, "Is it possible for me to be forgiven, considering that I have committed so many sins, so great and heinous, and continued in them for so long?"

Yes, it is possible for you. Consider this passage, 1 Corinthians 6:9. It enumerates great sins. "And such were some of you, but now you are washed." You see the kind of people who were forgiven. From this, we can gather that those who are guilty of such sins today can be forgiven just as they were then. "Such were some of you." Whoever you are, it doesn't matter what you have been. What matters is what you will be. Suppose an old prophet or anyone in particular came to you and asked if you would be willing to turn to God now. If you say yes, all your sins will be washed away, and you will become an heir of Heaven. Such an offer would make a person of any integrity relent and say, "Lord, can you be so merciful to me as to forgive me after all this? Lo, Lord, I will come in and turn to you."

I ask you this question: are you willing to forsake all your sins immediately in exchange for assurance of being accepted? If you answer no, are you not deserving of destruction? If you answer yes, is this not great comfort?

But some may say, "If the gates of heaven stand wide open, I can come and be welcome at any time." You vile wretch, daring to entertain such a thought! Don't you know that every refusal of such an offer is so perilous that it might put you in danger of never having a similar opportunity again? If the gates of heaven were always open, why then did God swear in His wrath that some Israelites would never enter His rest? And what is the reason God said that those who were invited to the feast but refused to come would never taste it? The reason is given; it is said that the master of the feast was filled with wrath at the rejection of his offer. This fills a person with indignation, and so does the Lord. It's also because the thing offered is of great value, being the kingdom of heaven and the precious blood of Christ. Therefore, whenever such an offer is made and rejected, God becomes exceedingly angry. With this offer, there comes an axe

and a sword to cut down every tree that does not bear good fruit. Don't say, when you hear of this offer, "I'm glad such a thing exists, and I'll accept it another time, but it's too soon for me now." Consider that the purpose of the coming of the Lord Jesus was not only to save the souls of men. If it were only that, it might indeed have been done at any time, even at the end. But His purpose was also, as Titus 2:14 states, "That He might purify to Himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works," which is a greater purpose than the one mentioned earlier in the verse, "To redeem us from all iniquity, to purchase for Himself a people who would serve Him in their lifetime." Can you think that you, who have served your lusts all your life, will be accepted at death? It's common for you to say that if a man is called at the eleventh hour, he will be received. It's true if you are called for the first time then, and not before, like the thief who was not called before but was accepted then. But what if you have been called before and have not accepted, but have postponed it until death? Your situation will then be exceedingly perilous. Again, I ask you, what makes you resolve to come to God at death? If it's love for Christ, then it should have happened sooner. If it's for yourself, how can such a conversion be accepted?

Now, let's turn to the last words.

"And I will heal their land."

Doct. 10. All calamities from sin.

We have three points that may be observed from these words:

1. That all calamities and troubles proceed from sin; I note this from the order of the words: he first forgives their sins, then heals their land.

2. That if calamities are removed, and sins are not forgiven, they are removed in judgment, not in mercy.
3. That if sin is once forgiven, the calamity will soon be taken away.

For the first point, all calamity comes from sin; troubles from transgression. Sin is the first link in the chain of evils that leads to all the rest, just as grace is in the chain of blessings and comforts. Consider this in all kinds of judgments, which we can categorize into three heads.

1. Temporal calamities, related to worldly matters, all stem from sin, both public and private. What was the reason for Solomon's troubles? The Lord stirred up an adversary against him because he departed from the Lord and set up idolatry. Similarly, the sword did not depart from David's house because of his sin with Bathsheba and the murder of Uriah. Asa, too, faced the Prophet's warning in 2 Chronicles 16, where he was told, "Henceforth you shall have war because you have not rested on the Lord." Many more instances can be cited to illustrate this point.
2. Another type of judgment is spiritual, and it is much more grievous than the former. This occurs when a person is given up to their own lusts and hardness of heart. Such a judgment proceeds from preceding sins, and it follows a certain rule: you never see a person given up to work uncleanness with greediness or to engage in open scandalous sins without the initial rise of such behavior being rooted in their unconscionable relationship with God in secret. As the Apostle Paul says about the Gentiles in Romans 1:20-24, when they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, and God gave them up to vile affections. Similarly, Psalm 81:11-12 explains that when God's people would not listen

and chose not to follow Him, He gave them up to their own heart's lusts, and they walked in their own counsels. In essence, God used all means to call them back, but they continued to refuse, and as a result, He gave them up to their sinful desires. If you see a person given over to a particular lust, with their heart so bound to it that they cannot live without it, understand that this is a judgment upon them for their earlier unfaithfulness and failure to act according to their knowledge.

3. There is a judgment beyond these, which most people do not consider but is the most fearful of all. It is when the Lord forsakes a person and withdraws Himself from them. The loss of God's presence is an immeasurable loss. Imagine someone who has made wealth or honour their god; if that support is taken from them, how their heart sinks within them! Now consider how much worse it is when the true God departs from a person. The God of all comfort, when withdrawn, leaves nothing but a bottomless pit of horror and despair. It is akin to when the sun disappears, and darkness engulfs everything. All comfort is derived, to some degree, from God's presence, even though people may not consciously realise it. When that presence is taken away, only horror and despair remain. When God departed from Saul in 1 Samuel 16, he spiralled into one error after another in his governance until his downfall. The root cause of this was sin; he had rejected the Lord, and thus the Lord rejected him. Similarly, Cain's punishment in Genesis 4 was to be banished from the presence of the Lord, which he deemed an unbearable fate that he could not endure.

When any trouble befalls you, do not get stuck merely on the surface of it; instead, look through and beyond it to discover its deeper cause. Recognise that sin is often at the root of your affliction. While

the immediate cause or instrument may be some external factor—a personal enemy, disgrace, sickness, and so on—ask yourself who allowed these things to happen. Is it not the Lord Himself? And why did He permit them? The ultimate motive for His permission is sin and, conversely, His grace. So, when an adversary arises against you, do not point solely at that individual as the cause of your suffering; rather, acknowledge that the Lord allowed it to occur because of sin. As it is written in 2 Chronicles 12:5, 7, Shishak served as the vessel through which God poured out His wrath, and sickness is but another vessel for the outpouring of His wrath. Correct the common error of seeking the natural causes of your troubles. If it is sickness, do not merely attribute it to a dietary indiscretion or cold, but understand that these are only the natural and immediate causes. Christians should instead look to the supernatural. In the case of a famine in the land of Judah for three years (2 Samuel 21:1), the natural cause was evident—a severe drought. However, David did not stop there; he sought the Lord to discover the reason behind the famine, the sin that caused it. God revealed to him that it was due to Saul's sin and his bloody house, particularly their slaying of the Gibeonites. Wise statesmen, when faced with a conspiracy involving a common person, do not rest until they uncover the masterminds behind the plot. Similarly, when Jacob saw the angels descending and ascending the ladder, he did not focus on the lower rungs but looked to the top of the ladder, where the Lord was sending the angels. So, do not dwell on the immediate and visible causes of your troubles, but seek to discern the hand of the Lord behind them—sending one angel to bring adversity and another to be your saviour. If you wonder how to identify the particular sin responsible for your suffering, pray earnestly and inquire as David did. Ask God to reveal to you the specific sin. Even if you cannot pinpoint it (perhaps it is a long-forgotten or hidden sin), rest assured that sin is the root cause of your affliction. Just as we know that vapours rise invisibly from

the earth but become visible as rainstorms and showers, so too may judgments be apparent while the sins behind them remain hidden. Therefore, learn to see sin in its true colours. Sin is often a hidden and invisible evil, difficult to perceive directly. However, when you observe it clothed in the calamities it produces, you will develop a different perspective. Imagine encountering a person who, wherever they go, spreads mischief, poisoning one, stabbing another, and leaving a trail of villainy. Such a person would be despised and feared. Sin is responsible for all these deeds among us. When sin confronts a person, clad in God's wrath, as it often does in death, it becomes terrifying. Why do we not view it this way at other times? Because we fail to behold it in the fearful consequences that accompany it, as we do when we witness its wrathful manifestations. Sin remains the same at all times, but our perception of it fluctuates, just as the body remains unchanged even though the size of its shadow may vary. What we now consider a minor sin, such as swearing or taking oaths lightly, will one day appear terrible. A sin that seems insignificant in isolation, like the sin committed by Ananias and Sapphira, becomes severe when accompanied by the judgment that befell them as they died at the apostles' feet. Similarly, consider Ahab's oppression of Naboth. You may initially view it as a minor injustice committed by a powerful individual against a poor man. However, when you see it accompanied by Ahab's death and the dogs licking his blood, the sin takes on a much more heinous character. Likewise, Nadab and Abihu's irreverence in offering strange fire.

Learn that if you wish to remove the cross, you must first eliminate the burden of sin. Consider diseases: often, numerous remedies are applied, yet if the root cause of the illness is not addressed, the patient remains unhealed. However, once the cause is removed, the symptoms vanish. Similarly, when faced with adversity, we make

every effort to alleviate it through our own actions, the help of others, or various means, but all in vain if we do not address the underlying cause—sin. As long as sin persists, so will the suffering.

The reason why our lives are marked by various hardships and trials, even amidst periods of peace and prosperity, is because sin is woven into the fabric of our existence. The unevenness in God's dispensation of His mercy towards us is a reflection of the unevenness in our relationship with Him. If you have good health, a stable financial situation, and many friends, do not assume these will guarantee your security. Consider Adam in paradise, Solomon in his glory, and David in his position of strength. Adam quickly fell into misery after sin entered his life. Solomon, too, faced an array of troubles as a result of sin. Even David, at the peak of his success, had to confront the risks to his kingdom brought about by sin and the rebellion of his son. Sin can make a person miserable even in the best circumstances, while grace can bring happiness even in the worst. Saint Paul, with a clear conscience, found contentment in prison, and David, through faith, experienced happiness in Ziklag.

You may wonder why calamities often follow sin, and perhaps you claim not to feel the immediate consequences of your actions. This delayed impact often leads people to continue in sinful ways.

Understand this with caution: sin brings forth death when it is perfected, not before. God waited until Ahab had oppressed Naboth and taken possession before sending a message of death to him. Similarly, Judas continued in his sins while managing the purse in Christ's company. Christ allowed it until Judas had betrayed Him. When sin reaches its full maturity, judgment arrives. There is a set time for judgment, and if the Lord delays execution until then, you have little reason for comfort. Ecclesiastes 8:11-12 says that because

the punishment for evil deeds is not immediately executed, people's hearts are inclined toward doing evil. Therefore, do not deceive yourselves. The sentence has been pronounced, and execution will follow. The sentence and execution are distinct, and sometimes there is a significant gap between them. Therefore, do not flatter yourselves; the sentence has been passed, and execution will come.

To amplify this point, consider the vision of Zacharias in Zechariah 5. After swearing and theft had been committed, Zacharias saw a flying scroll, which represents the curse going over the whole earth for those who steal and swear falsely. The curse may be on the wing long before it seizes its prey. The execution may be deferred, as seen in the parable of the Ephah, which represents the measure of the people's iniquities. The weight of lead is placed on the mouth of the Ephah when their sins are full, signifying that their sins are sealed up, and God remembers them all. Then two women come with wings like the wind, signifying that when their sins are full and sealed up, judgment comes swiftly like the wind, carrying their wickedness into its proper place—a place of misery, just as hell is said to be Judas's own place. Sin may sleep for a long time, like a dormant debt, until it is called for and demanded. It was forty years after Saul's killing of the Gibeonites before execution was carried out. Joab's sin in slaying Abner, which was shedding innocent blood, remained dormant during David's reign until Solomon ascended the throne.

Therefore, do not behave like irresponsible debtors who allow lawsuits to accumulate until they are outlawed, resulting in paying both debts and charges. Your sins are leading to swift damnation, and it does not slumber. It is already in motion and will catch up with you at the end of your journey—your days. Be wise and settle the matter with God early, or else you will not only pay the debt and suffer for the sin itself but also for all the time God patiently gave

you, and you will bear the arrears. Revelation 2 speaks of giving space for repentance, but if repentance does not happen, you will pay for all the time you had to repent.

Doct. 11. If sin be not removed as well as the cross, it is never removed in mercy.

The next point from these words is:

If the calamity is removed, and the sin is not healed, it is never removed in mercy but in judgment.

Here, God first promises to forgive the sin and then to heal the land. Therefore, if He had healed the land without forgiveness, it would not have been an act of mercy.

This is because sin is worse than any adversity. So, if God removes the adversity but leaves the sin behind, it is a sign that the Lord hates you. Just as when a physician takes away the medicine but leaves the disease untreated, it signifies a desperate case or that the physician intends to let the patient perish.

The Lord does nothing in vain. If an affliction does not benefit a person, it must necessarily harm them, for that which does neither good nor harm is in vain. The idols of the heathens were called vanities because they did neither good nor harm. God's actions should not be in vain. Therefore, if an affliction, by not healing the sin, does not benefit a person, it must harm them. You may wonder, "What harm?" It builds you up for Gehenna, leading you toward destruction. Just as if you saw a caustic applied to living flesh, eating away at it but not the dead tissue, you would consider it harmful. Similarly, if you see an affliction working on your living spirit,

causing sorrow but not taking away the sin, you would regard such a cross not as the medicine of a friend but as the wound of an enemy.

You can judge your state and God's love for you by the outcome of your afflictions. All kinds of crosses—sickness, poverty, and so on—affect both the godly and the wicked. The difference lies in the outcome. The same sun shines on all, but it hardens one and softens another. Likewise, the same wind blows on all, but it carries one ship into a safe haven and dashes another against the rocks. Therefore, consider whether your afflictions draw you closer to the Lord or drive you away, like a ship hitting the rocks. It is commonly observed that when medicine does not work, the patient is considered critically ill. In the same way, when afflictions do not work, it is a sign that a person is on the path to destruction. Just as in Matthew 7, when someone does not heed their brother's admonition, they are considered wicked, either trampling on it like a swine or devouring it like a dog. How much more when a person is admonished by God Himself and becomes worse afterward? Every affliction is an admonition from the Lord. In Isaiah 5, when God pruned His vineyard and it did not produce fruit, it was near destruction. Therefore, if you have experienced a severe affliction, and it has now passed, reflect on what good and profit came from it. Did it come from God's providence or not? If it did, there was a purpose and message in it. If you allowed it to pass without recognizing God's hand in it, or even if you did recognize it but were not reformed, God must be greatly provoked. He may allow the tree to stand for a year to see if it bears fruit, but if it does not, He may say, "Cut it down."

There are certain times when the LORD, through affliction, reveals Himself to a person, almost like making appearances, so that one can seek Him, feel His presence, and discern His will. If such opportunities pass by without any positive change, it's not a sign of

healing, like sickness treated with medicine, but rather a sign of impending destruction. It's like a drop of wrath preceding a great storm or a crack foreshadowing the ruin of an entire building. Therefore, in times of distress, don't focus solely on having the cross removed but on dealing with the sin. As James 1 says, "Rejoice when you fall into various trials," indicating that healing from sin is a greater mercy than enduring affliction, even if it is grievous and painful. So, when you bear an affliction, think, "It's best to endure it because God intends good for me through it." Conversely, if you live in prosperity and health, untouched by affliction, while your sins persist and God allows you to thrive in sin, it's a sign that God intends to destroy you, leaving you like a vineyard overgrown with briars and thorns.

Doct. 12. Take away sin, and the cross will depart.

The last doctrine is:

Remove the sin, and the cross will inevitably follow and be removed too, or at least its sting will be taken away, making it as good as no cross at all. The nature of an affliction is not determined by its size but by the weight of its burden. What is a serpent without its sting? What is a large mass if it has no weight? God can shape the heart in such a way that it won't feel the burden of affliction.

1. Afflictions often come as a consequence of sin. While some afflictions are not related to sin but serve for trial, to confirm the Gospel, or for the glory of God, in most cases, they result from sin.
2. God never afflicts us without a purpose for our benefit. As the Apostle says in Hebrews 12, our earthly fathers disciplined us, not always for our profit but often out of passion. However, God

disciplines us for our profit, so that we may share in His holiness and, having ceased from sin, He will then cease to afflict.

You might mention the exception of David's case. His sin was forgiven, as Nathan told him, but the cross was not removed, as his child died, and the sword did not depart from his house.

1. Scandal occurs when the name of God is blasphemed. In such cases, even if He forgives the sin, He may still choose to punish for the sake of His name.
2. God may continue to afflict us when we are not thoroughly humbled. True repentance can exist even when our sinful desires are not fully subdued. God does this to purify the heart further. For instance, David in Psalm 51 lamented about his broken bones because he felt that his heart was not yet fully cleansed. Therefore, he prayed for a clean heart and a right spirit.

This provides a source of comfort. When we face trials, we often believe that we will never be free from them. However, if you can humble your heart and subdue your sinful desires, God will remove the affliction. It is our mistake to assume that our present circumstances will never change. If we are in prosperity, we tend to believe that tomorrow will be the same or even better. Likewise, in times of affliction, we might think that it will persist indefinitely. But remember that if you humble yourself and turn away from your sinful ways, God will remove the calamity. An excellent passage that conveys this is found in 1 Peter 5:6: "Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, and He shall exalt you in due time." When God humbles a person, let that individual also humble themselves, and God will exalt them at the appointed time. God will not delay even for a moment. The same principle applies to future trials that you

may fear due to your sins. If you humble yourselves and turn from your wicked ways, God will show mercy and heal you.

FINIS.

MONERGISM BOOKS

The Golden Scepter Held Forth to the Humble, by John Preston.
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ePub, .mobi & .pdf Editions September 2023. Requests for information should be addressed to: Monergism Books, PO Box 491, West Linn Or 97068